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A Youth Performing Arts Experience: The Active Ingredients of a Natural High

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ABSTRACT

Although much research attention has been given to the outcomes of participation in positive youth activities, there have been very few investigations into the processes which occur within these settings. Stage Challenge is a dance, drama and design competition experienced annually by 16,000 New Zealand (NZ) youth (aged 9–19 years) across 14 locations nationwide. Each year, this event continues to gain momentum, attesting to its popularity with young people and its established role as a positive youth activity within NZ.

To explore students' experiential processes during Stage Challenge, I employed a multiple case study design and ethnographic research methods to track five demographically diverse teams as they prepared for, and competed in separate Stage Challenge competitions ($N = 423$). Participant observation was used for all teams and additional data was collected through questionnaires (three teams), focus groups (one team), and semi-structured interviews (one team).

The thesis proposes seven psychological concepts that encapsulated students' Stage Challenge experience: autonomy, integrity, belonging, accomplishment, identity, emotions and flow. These are presented as a conceptual framework, derived from a literature review, my previous research of a single Stage Challenge team, and the current five case studies.

The two most critical factors impacting on participants' experience of the seven concepts during the practice period were choice of theme and style of choreography, which were (not always successfully) driven by teachers or student leaders. Lack of positive feedback from teachers and leaders was also a feature of practice periods. Conversely, all seven concepts were intensely and positively experienced and celebrated at the performance day, which was consistently the highlight for students and the lens through which they evaluated the overall experience. Contrary to current motivational theory, students particularly embraced Stage Challenge's competitive orientation and the lure of external rewards.

Because of the dearth of process research in youth activities, this thesis also trials and evaluates a range of methods to capture students' lived experiences, using a variety of observational techniques and data collection measures to investigate if, and how participants were growing, learning and developing as a result of Stage Challenge.

DEDICATION

For my Mum and Dad who both passed away while I was working on this project. I am so grateful to be part of a family that has song and dance at its heart.

Also, for Mela Bella, who was born in 2009 with Mobius Syndrome. Her determination and courage inspire me. Keep dancing, little one.

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My much loved children, their partners, my grandies and extended whanau, who are all so supportive of me and who energise me as they sing and dance their way through life. My special thanks to Jonny who was my ever-willing taxi driver and kept those "just checking on you, Mum" phone calls coming.

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Above all, to the students and teachers of the five Stage Challenge teams in this project, who welcomed me into their schools, shared their stories with me, and allowed me the privilege of watching their Stage Challenge journeys unfold. Without you, there would be no story. Thank you SO much. You all rock!

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PREFACE

We live as we love.

We love as we live.

Life is a dance.

Everybody knows.

I come from a large family that has music at its core. My paternal grandfather played the piano for the silent movies and my maternal great-grandfather was an internationally acclaimed church organist. My niece is a successful jazz composer and musician in New York who won the 2012 NZ Silver Scroll award and my twelve year-old granddaughter has already written and recorded her own music. We all play musical instruments and community music-making is central to our family gatherings. The piano is the hub of the household, and there is always someone tinkering on it or people gathered round it. We sing a lot, not professionally, but as a way of being and communicating. In fact, we often sing when other people would talk. I was a young adult before I realised that all families do not behave in this way and that for some people, a visit to our rowdy, musical household might be quite daunting. We are an extrovert, gregarious bunch with scant regard for musical discipline and performance perfection. We simply love to make music. Forty years on, I still associate music with joy and community, and although I play several instruments, my preferred settings are informal, unsophisticated jam sessions with friends and family. Musical theatre is my entertainment of choice.

Music-related activities have also played a prominent role in my professional career. Although I completed all my music exams, I lacked the self-discipline or talent to pursue music as a fulltime career. Instead, I entered mainstream secondary teaching and assisted with extracurricular music activities, producing and directing musicals and training choirs and cultural groups. I then moved to the primary sector where, with a guitar slung over my shoulder, I had the freedom to incorporate music and dance into daily classroom activities. Throughout, I maintained a philosophy that music-related activities should be inclusive and accessible and resisted excluding children from choirs or musicals on the grounds that they “could not sing” or lacked a sense of rhythm – often to the chagrin of the pure-music specialists. At the same time, I strongly advocated musical extension and solo performance opportunities for artistically talented children believing that, in many cases, these can be incorporated into mainstream performing arts activities to the benefit of all participants. I also believe that, where possible, school music activities should involve the wider community and each year during my primary teaching career, I devoted a term to writing and producing a home-grown musical based on local themes that involved students’ families and local organisations as co-producers and performers. This led to a Teachers’ College appointment

where, as a lecturer, I emphasised the value of music as a tool for teaching language and reading as well as for promoting a sense of belonging within the school environment.

In 2004, I was asked by a friend to assist with supervision of her school team at Stage Challenge, an annual dramatic dance competition for NZ adolescents. Until that point, I knew virtually nothing about the event and was intrigued by what I observed: the scale of the event; the calibre of student performances; the organisational logistics; and the positive energy that persisted among competitors throughout the 16-hour performance day. This experience coincided with my growing interest in positive psychology and its relevance to youth performing arts activities. Inspired by this, I undertook a Master's degree, examining the Stage Challenge experience from the participants' perspective (Trayes, 2006; Trayes, Harré, & Overall, 2012). The longitudinal mixed-methodology study focused on the six-month preparation and performance experience of a girls' Stage Challenge team which was both enlightening and rewarding and whetted my appetite for a wider investigation of this popular event. The current study is a continuation of my initial research and aims to further explore how and why Stage Challenge works as a positive developmental context for young people. Concurrently, I have maintained my involvement with Stage Challenge as a liaison teacher and producer.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will describe Stage Challenge (SC) and summarise my previous research, prior to presenting the objectives of this study. I will then position the study within a positive psychology framework and more specifically as a positive youth activity with a performing arts focus. Next, I will review the literature that will underscore the conceptual framework and describe its theoretical relevance to SC. Finally, I will present the conceptual framework that underpins my data analysis and interpretation and will provide the structure for the descriptions of my studies.

What is Stage Challenge?

The following information has been sourced from the Stage Challenge® website (Stage Challenge® Foundation New Zealand), student and teacher SC information packs, personal communications with SC executive staff, the end-of-season TV special and my own observations as a teacher, SC producer and researcher.

Stage Challenge is a dance-drama competition for New Zealand (NZ) students aged nine to nineteen years. It is promoted by organisers as the largest youth performing arts event in the country. The event originated in 1980 in Sydney, Australia, as a small-scale drama competition for high schools, sponsored by the New South Wales Arts Council. A Sydney radio station soon took over the event and, inspired by the new music video phenomenon, converted it to a dance-drama competition, the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge. In 1988, the NSW Health Department saw the potential of using the event to deliver an anti-smoking message to youth. An executive director was appointed and the small drama competition became a professional organization involving students, teachers, community groups, businesses and sponsors. In 1995, the Federal and State Governments of Australia took up the funding and, by 2004, the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge was the number one youth cultural event in Australia. In the same year, the Junior Rock Eisteddfod Challenge for primary school children was launched. Meanwhile, the competition expanded offshore to NZ (1993), UK (1995), USA (2001), Germany (2003), and, more recently to South Africa, Japan and Dubai. By 2005, under the international umbrella of Global Rock Challenge, events were held in 50 locations worldwide, involving more than one million young people.

In NZ the event is called Stage Challenge®. It is managed by the Stage Challenge® Foundation, a non-profit organization founded in 2002 which relies on funding from corporate sponsors, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Youth Development. In 2011, the NZ event

attracted more than 16,000 students from 174 schools, spread over 19 live shows in 12 locations, with an audience of 25,000, a sizeable increase since its 1993 NZ debut when just 2000 students from 20 schools took part. Originally for older children, in 2006 a junior version of SC, J Rock, was launched, making the event also accessible to primary (elementary) school students.

SC has three main objectives. First, it offers students a group performing arts activity where they can “express their creativity through music”. It is promoted as “a dance, drama and design spectacular where the students are the stars” and is offered as an alternative for youth who may not be attracted to academic and sporting activities.

Second, SC is a health promotion tool where students are encouraged to experience the “natural high” of performing in an alcohol, drug and smoke-free environment. For the younger contestants, the focus is on preventing childhood obesity. In the only major study on Global Rock Challenge to date, Grunstein, Bauman and Nutbeam (2001) compared the impact of the health message on Australian students in schools which had taken part in the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge with a control group of students from non-participating schools. They found that participation in the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge had a positive effect on students’ resiliency, which was reflected in a lower incidence of drug and alcohol use and a lower intention to smoke and binge drink, compared to non-participating students. The researchers also concluded that participation in the event had a positive spin-off for school attendance, discipline and social climate.

Third, SC seeks to foster the acquisition of life skills including social and cognitive skills such as leadership, time management and teamwork, personality development and career opportunities in the performing arts.

The students’ objective in SC is to produce an original dance-drama routine, five to eight minutes in length, set to a medley of commercially available music. Teams can comprise up to 100 on-stage dancers and 40 support crew. In most cases, students base their routine around a social or environmental issue, a significant event, a literary work or a famous person. Earlier SC competitions were dominated by girls, most of whom were traditionally dance trained. Now, teams present with a balance of genders and a wide range of dance styles that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the competitors. Costumes, sets and lighting tend to be elaborate and sophisticated. Teams compete before a judging panel in a one-off regional competition held in a high-profile venue, with winning schools automatically gaining a place in the national television final. Awards are given to the top three regional place-getters in addition to awards of excellence for design, performance and production elements. Schools can

also submit written applications for awards related to student achievement, initiative and environmental and social awareness, while the back-stage crew are eligible for technical awards. Finally, students vote on performance day for the school that best embodies the spirit of SC. All schools receive a participation plaque, with a gold CD for the winning team.

Strict rules govern the funds a team can allocate to its production in an effort to prevent well-resourced schools having an advantage over less privileged schools. Schools are also encouraged to share their resources and knowledge via an online buddy system. Competitors are expected to abide by the health message promoted by the event, that is, to be 100% drug alcohol and smoke-free during practices and on the performance day.

The performance day is a special feature of SC. Students arrive at the competition venue (usually the biggest performance venue in the region) in the early morning and as well as rehearsing their routines, getting dressed and made-up, and finalizing their lighting plans and video recordings, they also socialize with other schools, attend workshops, take part in spontaneous competitions, watch other teams rehearse and join in community dance sessions. Most schools have specially designed t shirts and pre-rehearsed team chants with which they attempt to out-shout each other. It is a long, noisy and action-packed day with many components, of which the actual performance is just one, albeit significant, part.

SC is a large-scale event which impacts strongly on the school calendar and schools approach it in a variety of ways. In most cases, the activity tends to be extra-curricular and student-driven. Students choose the theme, choreograph the dance, audition the hopefuls, oversee the practices, fund raise, and design the lighting, sets and costumes. Alternatively, some schools offer SC as a time-tabled drama option and here teams may be as small as 15, or up to 140 if the activity is offered across several year levels. Single-sex schools or community groups may combine to produce a joint entry. Supplementary assistance with resources and training from the wider community is permissible and varies according to team circumstances.

Although each school's demographics and type of preparation experience may differ across NZ, all teams work to the same competition guidelines and all are exposed to the same performance day experience. Thus SC offers a unique opportunity for a multi-site study of a youth performing arts activity.

My previous SC research

My Master's thesis was the starting point for this investigation and effectively became the pilot study of this project. This study centred on a girls' team ($N = 103$) as they prepared for and competed in the 2005 Stage Challenge (see Trayes, Harré & Overall, 2012). Using a mixed

methodology approach, I tracked team members over a six-month period to investigate how they experienced the activity, as well as the benefits and challenges of participation and what motivated them to re-enlist in subsequent competitions. To get regular snapshots of the entire group's experience at different stages of the event, I measured four dimensions that previous research has established as important human motivators and of likely relevance to a youth performing arts context: *emotions, flow, togetherness* and *integrity*. In particular, I was guided by self-determination theory (Ryan, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2002) which posits that belonging, competence and autonomy are fundamental psychological needs; by identity project research (Harré, 2007; Harré & Bullen, 2010) which links relatedness, competence and integrity to personal project commitment in adolescence; by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 1997) studies on optimal experience and flow; and finally, by my many years of practice and observation in the youth performing arts domain.

Repeated measures questionnaires assessed the four dimensions at nine time points during the practice period, as well as after the first public performance, and retrospectively, two weeks after the competition. Students were also questioned about their reaction to the result, their desire to repeat the experience and their intention to re-enlist. Additionally, I drew on my observational notes, a student graffiti board at performance day, leaders' diaries and students' responses to open-ended questions on the retrospective questionnaire.

The study took an interesting turn when the school, which had a history of finishing in the top three schools for the region, did unexpectedly badly in the competition with more than 80% of students expressing moderate to strong disappointment at the outcome on the retrospective questionnaire. Despite this, the study's findings indicated that for these girls, SC was a consistently positive emotional experience, provided flow opportunities and promoted a sense of togetherness and integrity. These ratings all peaked at the public performance. Nervousness and boredom were the highest-rated negative emotional experiences. In regression analyses, integrity at both the practices and overall was the most significant positive predictor of intention to repeat the experience, while frustration at practices was the only negative predictor. The highlights of the experience, as described by the girls, were the opportunities for social interaction, the performance day package, being on stage, their sense of pride and achievement, feelings of togetherness, skills acquisition, and the act of dancing. Negative aspects of the experience were the practices, peer conflict, stress and nervousness, boredom, inability to master routines and the low placing in the competition. When asked what they would miss most, students' responses again emphasized the social interaction that the practices and performance day facilitated. To a lesser extent, they also indicated they would miss having a project to work towards, the pre-performance sense of anticipation, the

performance day itself and dancing with friends. Regression analyses showed that their desire to repeat the experience was associated with a range of social and emotional factors, especially those associated with a sense of challenge, belonging, pride and integrity.

However, this study did have limitations. First, it centred on one single-sex team from a well-resourced school. Findings could therefore not be generalised to other SC competitors, for example, male or mixed gender teams, first-time entrants, and rural or poorly resourced teams. Second, the target school had a long-term successful connection with SC so it was hard to determine whether pre-existing attitudes influenced the study's strongly positive findings. Third, students self-selected into the activity making it likely that students were favourably disposed to SC prior to entry. Additionally, practice measures were based on quantitative sampling at eleven separate time points using predetermined variables. While these provided a valuable picture of practice behaviours and identified predictor variables, I was not convinced the findings portrayed the holistic nature of practice experience in sufficient detail or adequately reflected the students' voice (cf. Barnett's (2006) study of American cheer leaders). Furthermore, due to logistical challenges, I was unable to get a performance day measure, relying instead on a graffiti board which produced exuberant, but rather random commentary.

Finally, on a personal note, I was closely involved with this particular team as a liaison teacher and producer. Although I took numerous steps to avoid compromised data (for example, student surveys were anonymous and administered by a colleague), I was also aware that I was very close to the action and at times diverted from my research focus because of the demands of being a producer. I was therefore keen to investigate SC from a more detached perspective. With these limitations in mind, the current study aimed to further investigate the SC experience with a wider and more diverse sample of teams.

Overview of the current study

The current study spanned a four year period, during which I closely monitored the experiences of five SC teams as well as attending 20 performance days throughout NZ. Schools were selected to represent a cross-section of SC entrants in terms of team composition and preparation procedure. Using a multiple case study design and guided by the techniques of ethnographic research, each team was tracked from their first practice until their competition performance, then revisited two weeks after the event. Consistent with my previous research, my focus was on participants' *processual* experiences of SC. Observation, questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data during the practice periods, performance day and retrospectively. I also drew on documentation from the SC Foundation,

media releases and the television special. My status as an observer took many forms, from complete detachment to full participant observation, depending on the research context. Often this was not determined until my first day in the field and changed several times during a project. As a result, each study took me down different and often unexpected pathways, all with unique opportunities and challenges which will be outlined in the ensuing chapters.

My research objectives were:

1. To identify and understand the processes which contribute to positive developmental experiences in SC.
2. To obtain participants' phenomenological descriptions of these experiences.
3. To build a conceptual framework of a positive performing arts experience for youth.
4. To identify appropriate and effective data collection strategies for a youth performing arts context.

First, though, I will position the study within the psychology discipline and review the current literature on positive youth activities.

Context of this study

This study is positioned within positive psychology which focuses on “valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). More recently, Seligman (2011) coined the acronym PERMA (positive emotions, engagement or flow, relationships, meaning or purpose, and accomplishment) to encompass the categories which positive psychologists believe most contribute to life satisfaction and well-being. The goal of positive psychology is to achieve a scientific understanding of individual and group factors that nurture these five categories and enhance thriving or flourishing in individuals, families and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). My previous study indicated that SC delivered valued subjective experiences to the students which were akin to the PERMA categories and therefore merited further investigation as a positively functioning organisation. In this expanded sample of teams, I uphold the positive psychology tradition which uses rigorous scientific methods to investigate positive institutions and draws on them as models that support thriving individuals and communities.

SC similarly fits the definition of a positive youth activity, namely an activity that focuses on developing strengths in individuals, rather than merely addressing deficits and needs (Brustad

& Parker, 2005). It could also be labelled a developmental activity because it promotes personal growth and skill development as opposed to intervention or prevention (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Additionally, it meets the criteria for a structured youth activity in which participation occurs within a framework of constraints, rules and goals (Larson, 2000). In this case, the activity is designed and administered by a non-profit organisation whose objective is to provide a young people with a “school and life highlight” culminating in a “night of true inspiration and entertainment displaying NZ youth at their very best” (SC Foundation).

My starting point, then, when embarking on this study, was to examine the literature on structured youth activities, positive youth activities and talent activities.

Positive youth activities

It is well-established that positive youth activities can provide a powerful context in which young people develop the competencies necessary for successful adolescent development (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Hektner, 2001; Larson, 2000; Raymore, Barber, Eccles, & Godbey, 1999). Opportunities afforded by these activities include the development of social, physical and cognitive skills, being a member of a socially recognized and valued group and contributing to its well-being, establishing social capital by developing a network of supportive peers and adults, and experiencing and coping with challenges (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). Additionally, these activities have been found to facilitate identity exploration, initiative and emotional competencies (Dworkin et al., 2003; Fredricks, Alfeld-Liro, Hruda, Eccles, Patrick, & Ryan, 2002), autonomy and concentration (Hektner, 2001), leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution and school spirit (Larson, 2000). They also allow youth to express their energy in socially acceptable ways by supporting them to be agents of their own development (Larson, 2011).

School-based activities have additional benefits. They offer leisure opportunities that may not be otherwise available to young people, especially in the sports and arts. In particular, they strengthen students’ links with peers, teachers and the wider community, foster school-sanctioned values, and encourage young people to associate more confidently with peers beyond the classroom and home (Darling et al., 2005). Moreover, school activities enable students to pursue interests and talents alongside friends, something that is not always possible outside school (Patrick, Ryan, Alfeld-Liro, Fredricks, Hruda, & Eccles, 1999). Participation in school-based activities has further been associated with higher grades, higher academic aspirations, a more positive attitude towards school (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005),

lower dropout rates (McNeal, 1995) and improved relationships across ethnic groups (Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999).

However, despite these encouraging findings, Guest and Schneider (2003) note that some social contexts in youth activities can have a detrimental influence on participants. In their study of American high school students, for example, they found that sports participation can negatively affect grades and academic ambitions, particularly in high-class schools where athletic success was identified with lack of commitment to academic pursuits. Other negative experiences include the increased stress or anxiety that may come with competition, disappointment over poor performance or defeat, time management challenges, poor adult role modelling by organizers or coaches, interpersonal conflict with adults or peers, difficulties with team dynamics, the promotion of inappropriate social norms, and physical and financial challenges (Fredricks et al., 2002; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).

The above summary suggests that researchers have a good understanding of the outcomes associated with participation in youth activities, particularly the dimensions which contribute to positive youth development and well-being. We also have knowledge of the challenges and costs. At this point, though, we are still far less informed about the organisational structures which facilitate these outcomes and the developmental processes experienced by participants within these activities (Larson, 2011). Indeed, despite repeated calls for rigorous processual research, this remains a largely unexplored area.

Youth performing arts activities

This research deficit is especially apparent in the performing arts domain (Fredricks et al, 2002; Quedsted & Duda, 2010). In a systematic review of the performing arts literature (1994 – 2004), Daykin, Orme, Salmon, McEachren and Brain (2008) sourced 3670 articles, and scrutinized 85 full text papers which met their relevance criteria, that is, dance, drama or music interventions for youth between 11 and 18 years within extra-curricular educational or community settings. After methodological thresholds were applied, only 15 papers (six qualitative and nine quantitative, including one mixed methodology) were considered to be “high quality empirical research” (p. 262) and although all 15 studies were situated in drama contexts, few generalised conclusions were possible because the methodological approaches and target populations were so diverse (Daykin et al., 2008). The authors thus cited the need for research which adopts innovative methodological approaches and investigates the activity from the perspective of the adolescent participant.

We do know that, on the plus side, performing arts activities can offer young people an emotionally diverse (Larson & Brown, 2007; Sinclair, 1997) and socially intensive experience

(Daykin et al., 2008), as well as provide the physical and artistic challenges that promote positive development. Notably, participants in these settings often report a special sense of closeness among peers which seems to be linked to the communal creative process (Woods, 1993), resulting in “an intimacy and fellowship” that transcends regular friendships (Patrick et al., 1999, p. 751). Dance and drama activities, in particular, break down social barriers as participants move “into character”, assuming on-stage individual and group identities with their own special culture. They also provide young people with a chance for self-reflection as they experiment with new social roles and social skills (Gullotta & Plant, 2000). Performing for an audience is another gratifying component of these activities because they connect performers to a wider community and provide opportunities for demonstrating skills, facing challenges and experiencing a sense of connection, pride, contribution and empowerment with fellow performers (Bailey & Davidson, 2005).

However, performing arts activities also have potential downsides. For example, they often involve a competitive selection process which is not only stressful for all participants, but can have long-term negative consequences for those who do not make the grade (Barnett, 2006). Similarly, musical productions often centre on a small nucleus of talented performers who consistently take lead roles while the others sit on the edge of the stage to make up the numbers and quickly lose interest (Woods, 1993). Another challenge for participants is performance anxiety which manifests in excessive physiological arousal and negative self-beliefs, especially about making mistakes, both of which can compromise performance quality (Abel & Larkin, 1990). As noted by Bailey and Davidson (2005), this is reflected in much of the literature which continues to focus on the elitist and expert model of the arts, examining individuals and performance excellence rather than groups and participation experiences.

Performing arts studies involving large groups are particularly hard to come by. Sinclair (1997) investigated the emotional correlates of co-operative performance in a school stage performance using self-report diaries, tracking students between the final rehearsal and actual performance. More recently, Larson and Brown (2007) used grounded theory to report on the emotional development of youth within a high school theatre programme, concluding that the real-life emotional “hot spots” which are so characteristic of preparation for a live performance, provided adolescents with an invaluable experiential learning opportunity. These two studies, however, seem to stand alone in the literature about collective performing arts experiences for young people.

Whatever the group size or activity-type, youth activities need the right structure to be effective and attractive to young people (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). In an early grounded theory study exploring the process of initiative development in youth activities, Larson (2000)

suggested that participants prefer programmes that are youth-led, with the motivation and direction coming from youth themselves; participants prefer to operate within “real-world” constraints and, on completion of the activity, to be “authentically evaluated”; and activities should ideally occur over an extended period which involves planning, practice and some form of presentation on completion (Larson, 2000). Moreover, the baseline requirements of the task should not contain large individual differences and be open-ended enough to allow for a variety of interpretations. It should also result in an “identifiable product” that can be assessed by evaluators who have the appropriate experience, ability and expertise, and who work against clearly defined criteria (Amabile, 1996). These parameters are all pertinent to a performing arts context.

I will now turn my attention more directly to SC and examine the literature that has potential theoretical and empirical relevance to a school-based dance activity with a competitive orientation. Firstly, I will examine the key elements of the SC experience.

Key elements of Stage Challenge

I refer to the key elements of SC as those aspects of the activity that are non-negotiable for competitors: that is, the routine must be based on a musical soundtrack, it involves a competitive public performance and it is a team activity. Each of these elements will now be considered.

Music and dance

First and foremost, SC is perceived by participants as a dance activity although it must be noted that without music there would be no dance, so any discussion of dance will inevitably include a music component. Dance belongs to the category of temporal and performative arts which also includes singing, playing instruments, expressive gesture and movement (Dissanayake, 2009). More specifically, dance is “intentional non-verbal behaviour that expresses, through the dynamic patterns of special movements in space, a heightened felt sense of self and/or environment” (Bond, 2009, p. 404). Alternatively, it has been described as a “worldwide human activity that integrates the co-ordination of intentional body movements performed in synchronisation with rhythmical stimuli, usually together with other individuals” (Quiroga Murcia, Kreutz, Clift, & Bongard, 2010, p. 149). Not mentioned in the above definitions, however, is the well-established association between dance and psychological well-being (Quested & Duda, 2010; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010) and this is of particular interest in this study.

Dance research that is relevant to SC has mostly been undertaken in specialised settings with emphasis on its therapeutic benefits, for example, with sensory-impaired children (Bond, 2009), the aged (Hui, Tsan-keung Chui, & Woo, 2009; Van Zandt & Lorenzen, 1985), mental health patients (Schmais, 1985), Parkinson's sufferers (Hackney & Earhart, 2010) and cancer patients (Ho, 2005). In each case, findings support the positive impact of dance on participants' physical, psychological and emotional health, with researchers citing the importance of a physically and psychologically balanced body to holistic well-being (Ho, 2005).

In non-clinical settings, researchers have investigated dance experiences among adult recreational dance class students (Connor, 2000; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010), young vocational dance students (Quested & Duda, 2010), youth recreational dance students (Fensham & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008), pre-adolescent at-home dancers (Baker, 2002), night club "ravers" (Brabazon, 2002), rock dancers (Hendin & Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), American school dance teams and cheerleaders (Barnett, 2006; Blackman, Hunter, Hillyer, & Harrison, 1988) and competitive ballet dancers (Morris, 2008). Across all settings, the findings are similar: the act of dancing has physical, emotional, social and psychological benefits for participants which, in turn, impact positively on their well-being. I will briefly touch on these benefits.

Physical benefits of dance

At the most basic level, dance is a form of high intensity physical exercise (Blackman, Hunter, Hillyer, & Harrison, 1988; Walker, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2010). In the above studies, the most mentioned physical benefits associated with dancing were increased fitness and body tone. Dancers also reported improved balance, posture, flexibility, coordination and bodily awareness as well as support with physical impairments and reduced pain (Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010), increased mobility and lower limb endurance (Hui, Tsan-keung Chui, & Woo, 2009), higher physical energy and muscular control (Gardner et al., 2008), weight loss (Connor, 2000), increased aerobic functioning and strength, and decreased body fat (Blackman, et al., 1988). Along with improved body function, participants developed respect for physical activity, admiration for those with dance expertise and an appreciation that dancing allowed them to "identify both their own progression in physical accomplishment as well as their sense of progression in relation to a larger whole of the experience of dancing" (Gardner et al., 2008, p. 704). Finally, because dancing is a tactile activity, dancers reported a greater awareness of their own physicality and increased comfort with others' physical proximity (Gardner, et al., 2008). A heart-warming finding in a study of elderly dancers found that the opportunity to touch and hold hands during dancing provided the tactile contact that many lacked after the death of partners or friends (Connor, 2000). The only studies which reported negative physical

outcomes (e.g., injury or physical exhaustion: see Quested & Duda, 2010) concern vocational dancers for whom dancing is a full-time, rather than recreational, activity.

In today's world, where young people are increasingly seduced by solitary and passive forms of leisure activity, there is an increasing need to find physical activities which entice young people off the couch. As a fitness tool, it appears that dancing has a number of intrinsic rewards which may make it more appealing to young people than a purely instrumental "workout" that is geared to fitness criteria (Connor, 2000; Gardner et al., 2008; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010).

Emotional benefits of dance

Dance is not only physically energising, it also stimulates our emotions (Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010). This is actually true of many types of physical activity but research suggests that when exercise is accompanied by music, it also activates the brain's "pleasure circuits", resulting in elevated moods and emotional fulfilment (Hills & Argyle, 1998). This has been variously called "aesthetic stimulation", "e-motion" or simply "musical emotion" (Dissanayake, 2009). Indeed, Juslin and Slobada (2001) maintain that "some sort of emotional response is the main reason behind most people's engagement with music" (p. 3).

Recreational dancers in a large study ($N = 475$) by Quiroga Murcia et al. (2010), reported a range of long-lasting emotional benefits associated with their dance class experiences including being happy, elated and proud; relaxed, calm and refreshed; and energetic, animated and alert. Furthermore, the rhythmic nature of dance both evoked and provided an outlet for their emotions, especially release from tension and stress. A number of participants also reported feeling erotic and sexy. In her research with pre-adolescent girls, Baker (2002) suggests that dancing may be a safe way for young people to "play at being sexual" (p. 19).

The expression and regulation of emotions is an especially salient issue for young people whose daily existence seems to be punctuated by "emotional hot spots" and psychological "disorder" (Larson, 2011). We do know that adolescents, especially females, use music for emotional regulation and support, to stimulate creativity and to reduce boredom, stress and loneliness (Hargreaves & North, 1999; North, Hargreaves & O'Neill, 2000). We also know that, like adults, their emotional response is mediated by music type and social context. For example, adolescents report that hard-rock and heavy metal music, with its heavy beat, loud amplification and confrontational lyrics is the most emotionally and psychologically engaging of genres, especially when shared with friends, because it gives them a feeling of power and control (Thompson & Larson, 1995). *Moving* to music can be even more emotionally engaging because, for young people, dance tends to be a group activity. Moving to a common beat has a

“feel-good” factor, described by McNeill (1995) as “muscular bonding” (p. 2), “entrainment” (Dissanayake, 2009), or “interactional synchrony” (Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009) and, in its most intense form (such as religious rituals), this can lead to euphoric, trance-like states (McNeill, 1995). Moreover, the act of keeping in time requires concentrated recall and anticipation of the music as it unfolds and this, in turn, sharpens our focus and heightens emotional response (Dissanayake, 2009).

Social benefits of dance

Baumeister and Leary (1995) assert that the need to belong to a social group is a fundamental human motivation and my previous research revealed that the opportunities SC provided for socialisation were considered the most valued and most missed aspect of the experience. This is not surprising because, as Miell (2006) asserts, “Creative musical activity is fundamentally and necessarily social” (p. 147), with almost all dance experiences occurring with people we know well or, through the shared dance experience, come to know well (Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010, p. 160). Bond (2009) refers to these groups as “aesthetic communities” (p. 401). More than that, because dance is non-verbal and limitless in its variety of styles and movements, it is socially accessible to all people regardless of age, ability or culture (Bond, 2009).

Dance participants, whether in clinical or non-clinical settings, report two key social benefits. First, dance-based gatherings allow people to share an activity with like-minded people, to maintain, strengthen and establish friendships and to socialise across age groups (Schmais, 1985). In this sense, it is similar to many leisure activities. However, it seems that when we connect to a common rhythmic beat, especially strong feelings of togetherness and affiliation are elicited, interest is engaged, group cohesion strengthens and communication is intensified (Dissanayake, 2009; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010; Woods, 1993). Moreover, “movements repeated often enough in the same location and context... acquire communal meaning and ...pass from the private world of experience into the public world of shared meanings” (Moore & Yamamoto, 1988, p. 105). Dancers also become more confident with social intimacy which they can repeatedly rehearse “in semi-public, structured and playful situations”, because of the spontaneous, tactile and interactive nature of dance (Gardner et al., p. 707).

Second, because so much of dance is embedded in culture, ritual or tradition, it widens participants’ social worlds and unites people of many backgrounds by enhancing their intergenerational and cultural awareness through non-verbal means (Connor, 2000; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010). Dancing literally puts people in step with each other (Schmais, 1985).

Psychological benefits of dance

Lastly, there are a number of psychological benefits which are consistently reported by recreational dancers. First, as they become more active and physically self-aware, dancers report increased self-esteem, independence and autonomy (Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010). Encouragingly, young people also report less preoccupation and inhibition with their body image because dancing engages them physically with others rather than in relation to an ideal self or mirror (Bond, 2009). Second, dancers also report improved cognitive functioning, especially in concentration and creativity. Dancing in a structured context is especially mentally challenging because coordinating your movements, either alone or with others, requires focus, skill, memory, anticipation and imagination. Third, many dancers claim that the repetitive and reassuring rhythms of the dance and the powerful emotions evoked by music transport them beyond the physical realm. As Dissanayake (2009) asserts, “Bodies swayed to music result in minds freed of existential anxieties, firmed by convictions and bonded with their fellows in common cause” (p. 542).

In summary, dance is a multidimensional activity that has the potential to contribute positively to several aspects of well-being. It is physically energetic without being perceived as “real” exercise, emotionally and spiritually uplifting because of the compelling nature of synchronised music and movement, as well as cognitively, culturally and creatively challenging. Even more, it tends to take place in contexts that are warm and friendly and conducive to positive social interactions.

The Reluctant Dancer

The above findings are derived from dancers who self-selected into a variety of dance activities and, given their positive endorsement, you would expect that everyone would be beating a trail to the dance floor. This is certainly not the case!

Lovatt (2010), a British dance psychologist, explored the phenomenon of the “reluctant dancer” in an article amusingly titled “Dance? I’d rather have my fingernails pulled out!” (Psychology Today). From the results of an extensive online survey, he suggests that the reason many people, especially males, will not or do not dance, is because they feel self-conscious about their perceived lack of ability and because they fear being negatively judged or ridiculed by others. Considering that all young children spontaneously sing and dance, it appears that dance reluctance results from social influences, most probably from being told at some point that “you have no sense of rhythm” or simply that “you can’t dance”. It is also possible that reluctant dancers, especially males, move in social circles where dance has low status as an attractive leisure activity. In NZ, for example, a 2004 study found that dance is the

second most popular activity, after netball, among females, aged 12-17 years, whereas, for males, it is definitely a minority pursuit. For both NZ males and females, their expressed level of interest in dance did not manifest in actual participation (for females, 47% interest, but 23% participation; males 27% interest, 12% participation), suggesting that there is room for greater provision of dance-related activities by youth activity organisers (Richards, Reeder, & Darling, 2004).

The issue of the reluctant dancer is relevant to this study because, in one of my target schools, SC participation was obligatory and the team contained a number of students who had no dance experience and were decidedly reluctant to be involved. For these unwilling dancers, their SC experience had the potential to be anything but positive and they were of special interest in the study.

Public performance

The second key element of SC is public performance, in this case a grand, one-off event at the largest available venue in the region before an audience of up to 2500 paying guests and 1500 competing peers.

According to Sinclair (1997), in a youth setting, a performance paradigm has three key effects on participants. First, it engenders heightened emotions over and above the emotions that music-related activities already stimulate. As participants prepare for a public performance, both positive and negative emotional responses tend to become more extreme, especially when the performance is imminent (Larson & Brown, 2007; Sinclair, 1997). This was confirmed in my previous study where students' positive emotions and nervousness all peaked at the dress rehearsal (Trayes et al., 2012). It is also reflected in adolescent sports literature where Sagar and Stoeber (2009) found that university students were emotionally challenged in sports competitions because it exposed them to their own and others' evaluations, resulting in extremes of pride and elation after a good outcome, or shame and embarrassment if things went wrong. Second, public performance puts high cognitive demands on participants, especially creatively and mentally. This includes the challenge of conceptualising and designing routines, memorising lines or dance steps and conveying a message to the audience, as Bailey and Davidson (2005) found in their studies examining the effects of group singing and performance in a variety of contexts. Finally, in events like SC, where the team is the unit of performance, there is a strong emphasis on group action and collective goals which, depending on team dynamics, can be both a bonus and a challenge. On the positive side, most performers report enjoyment from being in authentic venues, celebrating their performances with other enthusiasts, sharing what they have learned, being

part of a tightly-knit, loyal community, feeling the adrenalin rush of being on-stage and receiving recognition and praise (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Pitts, 2004; Sinclair, 1997). On the downside, they can be overcome by anxiety and nerves due to perceptions of their own ability (or lack of), fear of audience response and fellow-performers' reactions and (where applicable) judges' evaluations (Sinclair, 1997). Of note, some gender differences have been found in pre-performance response. For example, males exhibit more pronounced physiological symptoms (e.g., raised blood pressure), more anxiety about performing in front of others, being evaluated by others, letting the group down and their lack of skill, whereas females report greater subjective anxiety and are more worried about personal appearance and audience acceptance (Abel & Larkin, 1990; Clift, Hancox, Staricoff, & Whitmore, 2008). Interestingly, the authors jointly surmise that both genders may well feel the same anxiety, but have been socialised to manifest it in different ways. This is something I would have the opportunity to observe by working in co-educational schools.

Most performance-directed literature tends to concentrate on the correlates of successful or unsuccessful performance rather than the meaning generated from performance participation (Bailey & Davidson, 2005) and it is the latter which interests me in this study. In particular, there is very little literature about the effects of performance participation for those with minimal experience or training which was the case for three of my target schools (Bailey & Davidson, 2005). Based on my many previous observations of performance days, I expected that the on-stage performance component would play a significant part in students' SC experience. I was especially interested in whether the pressure of performance will undermine the experience for the inexperienced and the reluctant dancers.

Competition

SC is not only a public performance; it is also a competition in which teams are pitted against each other and evaluated by a panel of judges. Thus, both schools that do well, and those that do not, receive very public recognition.

Debate has long raged about the pros and cons of competition for young people both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. This is especially salient for adolescents with their developing awareness of social comparison, for whom competitive contexts can be very threatening (Austin, 1991; Füllöp, 2002). Supporters of competition argue that it is an integral part of social life and that youth need opportunities to work within the implicit and explicit rules of a competition, to compete constructively and to appropriately handle the emotional consequences of the competition outcome (Füllöp, 2002). Other researchers (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1979; Kohn, 1987) see competition as a negative force which pits peer against peer,

discourages cooperation and decreases motivation because of the stress, anxiety and exhaustion associated with it. Recent research, however, leans in favour of competition, while stressing that coaches, teachers, parents *and* competitors need to be aware of the negative implications of an obsessively competitive attitude or environment (Skinner & Brewer, 2004). It also debunks the claim of anti-competition researchers who suggest that, by not being a winner, you are automatically a loser (Füllöp, 2002). Researchers (e.g., Cumming, Smoll, Smith & Grossbard, 2007) now tend to uphold a developmental model which posits that success is not only about individual statistics and team standings but is also linked to effort, development of skills and social opportunities.

I was unable to locate any literature that explores team dance competitions for adolescents. In lieu, I looked to sports-centred research because, like sport, SC is a physically strenuous activity that is competitive and team-based. Organised competitive sports are believed to allow adolescents to demonstrate their physical ability (a highly prized attribute among youth), to compare their ability to that of peers, and to be evaluated by significant people (Smoll & Smith, 1991). Moreover, young people seem to be drawn to challenging situations that require competence, and the win-lose nature of a competition is a factor which motivates their participation (Füllöp, 2002). Austin (1991) suggests that competitive settings are most beneficial when students can perform on multiple occasions and at multiple venues, are supported by teachers, family and peers, and receive both instructional feedback and numerical indicators of their performance.

Conversely, difficulties for young people can surface when participants want to “win at all costs” or have this expectation placed on them by coaches, teachers or parents. Furthermore, in the aftermath of a competition, a disappointing result can deter participants from continuing with the activity. Additionally, while research indicates that stress in manageable amounts has positive facilitative components in competitions (Skinner & Brewer, 2004), the negative effects include avoidance or dropout, lowered enjoyment, burnout, illness susceptibility, disrupted eating habits, sleep disturbance, increased risk of injury (Smoll & Smith, 1991), poor self-perception, vulnerability and lack of attachment to the team (Wankel, Mummery, Stephens, & Craig, 1993). Lane, Terry and Karageorghis (1995) argue that, by identifying the elements of competition that provoke anxiety responses, we will not only clarify the optimal competitive environment but also foster the development of stress management techniques and coaching styles that support this.

Like public performance, gender differences have also been observed in competitive contexts. For example, based on her own and others’ research on competition in educational settings, Füllöp (2002) found that boys tend to take competition more seriously, apply more physical

aggression and openly revel in the joy of competing and winning. Girls, on the other hand, are more inclined to integrate their competitive strivings with desire for social acceptance, behave in a more pro-social manner and are more ambiguous about victory (“fear of success”). Barnett (2006) also noted this in her American cheerleaders’ study, where girls who were successful in their auditions were reluctant to celebrate too enthusiastically in deference to the unsuccessful auditionees. Again, this may not be because girls like competition less than boys, but rather that each gender has been socially conditioned to manifest their attitude to competition differently (Füllöp, 2002).

Given the large number of students in SC, it would seem that the competitive aspect is not a barrier to entry. However, this study included teams which, because of their composition and inexperience, were very much the underdogs and likely to finish well down in the rankings. I was curious about their attitudes to competition and how the competitive result would impact on their experience.

Team event

Most structured youth activities are group-based because they are designed to cater for large numbers of participants, often in a team context. SC is unusual in that team sizes are flexible, sometimes very large, and less often, very small. For example, a large secondary school may bring 140 students to performance day, while a remote rural primary school may fit their entire team into a 10-seater mini-bus. Despite this, on performance day, all teams compete against each on an equal basis, with no provision made for their differing sizes and composition.

Youth sports literature asserts that youth grow physically, emotionally and socially through the peer interactions that occur in teams and presumably this applies to other contexts. Growth experiences include learning to cooperate and communicate with team members and team leaders to achieve a group goal, developing friendships, self-discipline, conflict resolution, taking directions, problem solving, critical thinking and learning patience and persistence (Yan & McCullagh, 2004). Team membership also helps youth to understand the healthy aspects of competition, respect the achievements of others, learn to give and take feedback, cope with their own disappointments and empathise with others’ failures (Dworkin et al., 2003). In some instances, membership of a cohesive team can help mitigate competition anxiety (Eys, Hardy, Carron, & Beauchamp, 2003).

Within the performing arts, successful team creativity is characterised by considerable shared knowledge and a mutual respect for others’ styles and preferences (Miell, 2006). Furthermore, the exhilaration of sharing one’s skills with fellow-performers and with the audience is

believed to be one of the most empowering aspects of public performance (Connor, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Conversely, the demands of collective preparation and performance often test students' interpersonal relationships with peers and authority figures (Sinclair, 1997), described by John-Steiner (2000) as "joint purpose...strained by conflicting feelings" (p. 91). SC is an especially challenging environment because of the sheer size of teams (up to 140 compared with a sports team of perhaps 15) and the wide age range and ability level of team members. Additionally, most NZ teams have youth leaders at the helm.

Being part of a team was therefore expected to be a strong feature of SC and contribute significantly to students' sense of belonging. It was also expected to be a source of negative emotions as students confront a task which is highly dependent on mutual collaboration and cooperation.

Summary

In summary, SC has four key elements (music and dance, public performance, competition, and team) which underlie its social context. Each element has the potential, individually or collectively, to offer growth opportunities that contribute to positive development and well-being. Of critical importance, though, is how they are perceived, experienced and assimilated by the youth participants (Fredricks et al, 2002), for, as Petitpas et al. (2005) assert, the difference between an effective or non-effective activity has "less to do with the playing...and more to do with the philosophy of the...organisation, quality of coaching...and participants' individual experiences" (p. 63). In this case, a mandatory, highly public, competitive performing arts experience could be a young person's worst nightmare (especially for a reluctant dancer). At best, it could be a personal highlight which sets the stage for a performing arts career.

To examine these individual and collective experiences in more detail, I focused on seven dimensions that I believe encapsulate the developmental processes experienced by SC competitors. I grouped these dimensions under the broad category of growth and well-being experiences.

Growth and well-being experiences

I propose that during SC participation, students can potentially experience seven dimensions which foster psychological growth and a sense of well-being. These dimensions are: belonging, autonomy, integrity, accomplishment, identity, emotional intensity and flow, all of which have theoretical and empirical links to youth activities, as described above.

When choosing these dimensions to study SC, I was informed by my previous research and by my observations of young performing artists with whom I have worked over many years. I was also influenced by self-determination theory (SDT: Deci & Ryan, 2000) which posits that competence, autonomy and relatedness are innate psychological needs and behaviour motivations that are essential for psychological well-being and growth and for sustained and healthy motivation in activities. Self-determination theory has previously been used to investigate a variety of physical activity settings including youth gymnasts (Gagné, Ryan & Bargmann, 2003) and recreational dancers (Quested & Duda, 2010). It was also relevant to my previous research (see Trayes et al., 2012) which found a positive relationship between students' sense of integrity and desire to repeat SC. Likewise, the seven dimensions reflect the PERMA factors (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments) which positive psychology sees as vital components for flourishing individuals and communities (Seligman, 2011).

To establish a working definition of growth and well-being experiences, I looked to Harré and Bullen's (2010) recent research which examines well-being "orientations" in youth, namely "*cognitive and emotional experiences that are of considerable interest to people and direct further action*" (p. 236). Dworkin et al's (2003) definition of "growth experiences", namely "*experiences that teach you something or expand you in some way, that give you new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of interacting with others*" also felt appropriate (p. 18).

In this study, then, I define growth and well-being experiences as *developmental experiences that evolve during SC, particularly those that are of considerable interest to students, increase their knowledge base or expand them in some way, giving them new skills or new ways of interacting with others*. I should note here, however, that the boundaries between these growth and well-being experiences are somewhat arbitrary and, at times, the following discussion about them may overlap.

Each of the seven dimensions and their theoretical relevance to this study will now be considered.

Belonging

Belonging (or relatedness) is one of our basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) and fundamental human motivations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and its absence is one of the strongest indicators of ill-being (Seligman, 2011). Indeed, as Seligman asserts, if we think of all the most positive experiences in our lives, chances are they will have occurred with others.

The need to belong is particularly salient for adolescents who crave strong peer attachments as they seek independence from significant authority figures in their lives (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001). Because structured youth activities occur with others of similar interests and abilities and at regular time intervals, membership can enhance one's chance of inclusion in groups and relationships (Fredricks et al., 2002; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010), facilitate feelings of belonging (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006), improve social skills and confidence in peer relationships, foster a deeper understanding of peers, bolster enjoyment of, and commitment to activities, particularly in school environments (Dworkin et al., 2003; Patrick et al., 1999), and provide a social support system, especially for females (Allen, 2003). Young people consistently report that involvement in youth activities also enables them to make new friends, spend extended periods with existing friends and broaden their horizons by interacting with peers beyond their usual network. More than that, these connections are often characterised by a special sense of intimacy, loyalty and fellowship (Dworkin et al., 2003; Patrick et al., 1999). Conversely, an activity that interferes with peer relationships, or does not satisfy affiliation needs, may result in diminished motivation, poor performance, alienation (Osterman, 2000), loneliness (Sletta, Valas, & Skaalvik, 1996) and ultimately, disengagement from the activity (Patrick et al., 1999).

Belonging manifests in a particularly intense form on special occasions such as festivals or rituals (Turner, 1974). This is known as "communitas" and typically emerges when individuals step out of daily life into a world where social connections develop spontaneously and temporarily (Arnould & Price, 1993). A communitas experience tends to be profound and intimate and, because of its emotional intensity, is easily recalled but difficult to describe, sometimes even magical and life-changing (Arnould & Price, 1993). It also tends to be fleeting and context specific, featuring powerful but non-enduring social connections (Kyle & Chick, 2002), unlike the traditional concept of belonging which depends on frequent, positively affective interactions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In many ways, it is emotionally similar to flow (to be discussed below) except that it is a function of an extraordinary collective event rather than a high-challenge, peak performance situation (Arnould & Price, 1993). As well as during rituals, communitas has been reported in other leisure activities including white-water rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993), masters sports tournaments (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007), wilderness adventures (Sharpe, 2005), summer camps (Kyle & Chick, 2002) psychedelic raves (Trammachi, 2000) and collective music making (Dissanayake, 2009). To my knowledge, it has not been applied to dance competitions or to adolescent collective experiences. The notion of communitas does, however, resonate with what I have observed at the SC performance day where competitors share an action-packed, emotionally-charged venue in close proximity with hundreds of other young performers whom they may never meet again.

Most research on youth belonging centres on its association with various motivational, behavioural or performance outcomes, with less attention being given to the incidence and quality of belonging between peers as it manifests in various social contexts (Osterman, 2000). In particular, research is needed to uncover the “peer knowledge and messages” that adolescents attribute to relationships formed during youth activity participation (Dworkin et al., 2003). As already indicated, SC has, in its basic package, many ingredients that foster belonging, especially the psychologically bonding aspect of collective dance performance and the opportunities it provides for establishing and enhancing friendships. To address this gap in the literature, I will seek to identify aspects of SC that enhance or detract from students’ sense of belonging. Boys’ reports will be of special interest because research suggests that they are less likely than girls to experience a sense of belonging in schools (Osterman, 2000).

In this study, the term “belonging” will be defined as *students’ sense of connection to, and love and care from their SC team and the wider SC community.*

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to “*regulating one’s own behaviour and experience and governing the initiation and direction of action*” (Ryan, 1989, p. 209). This is a pertinent dimension for youth because at the same time as they are craving belonging and acceptance among their peers, they are also seeking increased independence (separation) and autonomy (authentic self-expression) from parents and other authority figures in their life (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001). In an apt metaphor, Roser and Lau (2002) compare this to a jazz musician’s struggle to blend an individual solo with the collective sound of a band. In fact, while belonging and autonomy appear to be at odds with each other, they are actually distinct psychological needs which reinforce and support each other and, ideally, adolescents need environments that foster both (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Ryan, 1995).

Structured youth activities are contexts that can offer numerous opportunities for adolescents to be agents of their own development and as a result, gain experience with goal setting, problem solving, and self-discipline (Dworkin et al., 2003). Within the performing arts domain, however, an adult-driven approach tends to be the norm because of the specialised skills required and the tight time frames associated with conspicuous performance. With this approach, young people can acquire technical knowledge and skills, and extend their talents. Nevertheless, too much adult direction may compromise their sense of ownership, stifle creativity, and hinder authentic learning opportunities (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005). Conversely, in youth-driven contexts, students tend to be more invested in the results of their labour, and enjoy the empowerment that goes with being agents of their own development.

They also develop leadership, planning, communication and teamwork skills (Larson, 2011). However, without an adult guiding hand, there is also the potential for inter-peer conflict and ineffective decision-making, again leading to possible disengagement (Larson et al., 2005).

SC is the exception to the trend for adult-driven performing arts activities, because its underlying philosophy is “for youth, by youth”. Indeed, according to SC Foundation data, 85% of entries are youth-driven with the only organisational expectation of adults being that the entry is overseen by a liaison teacher and vetted by the Principal prior to the public performance. Realistically, though, the degree to which each school’s entry is youth or adult-driven depends on the age and experience of the students and the leadership structure within the team, with most schools positioned towards the middle of the adult-youth continuum.

In a study that compared two youth-driven and two adult-driven activities (including a musical theatre programme), Larson et al. (2005) found that both formats provided distinct, but beneficial developmental experiences with positive outcomes not so much contingent on the degree of adult input, but rather the *quality* of adult guidance and its compatibility with the context. Within the context, situational factors (e.g., the programme goal) and human factors (the personality of the leaders, and age and prior experience of participants) had the most influence on the degree of adult or youth input. They concluded that, ideally, the relationship between youth and adults should be fluid and open to on-going transparent negotiation between all parties (Sullivan & Larson, 2011).

Adult guidance is related to the notion of autonomy support for youth, a dimension which has received considerable research attention (e.g., Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Battistich, Solomon, & Schaps, 1997; Wentzel, 1997). According to Quested & Duda (2010), autonomy support within a school context is demonstrated when a leader “readily involves others in decisions, reduces pressures, takes his or her perspective, and provides opportunities for choice” (p. 41). In these situations, students report higher needs satisfaction, more autonomous reasons for engagement and more positive emotional, cognitive and behavioural consequences (Osterman, 2000). They are also more creative on tasks requiring conceptual understanding (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). On the other hand, autonomy control (the opposite of autonomy support) occurs when key figures are controlling, pressuring or authoritarian (Gagné et al., 2003). Of interest in this study, therefore, were students’ perceptions of autonomy support in the various SC settings, especially those instances where students embraced and thrived on autonomy and, equally importantly, where they were given autonomy, but struggled.

Also linked to autonomy is the notion of motivation, which self-determination theory positions along the autonomy continuum and which has been shown to impact on both performance and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). At one extreme is external regulation, the most controlling and least autonomous form of motivation, where activities are performed to obtain rewards, or to avoid sanction or punishment. Indeed, the highly competitive nature of SC is at risk of promoting this type of motivational climate, which, in a worst case scenario, can stifle feelings of joy, enthusiasm and interest and, instead, foster anxiety, boredom and alienation (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). Of relevance here, Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt (1984) found that in an artistic context, children whose self-control was limited produced significantly fewer creative paintings than those who received autonomy support.

At the other end of the continuum are highly autonomous, intrinsically motivated activities, undertaken for their inherent satisfaction, enjoyment, interest or challenge. In sports and exercise environments, intrinsically motivated activities have been associated with persistence and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000), enjoyment and readiness to initiate exercise (Markland, 1999) practice attendance (Gagné et al., 2003) and intentions to persist (Goudas et al., 1995).

The current study included two student-driven teams, and three adult-driven novice teams. This allowed me to observe both youth and adult-driven approaches and investigate the extent to which these influenced students' experiences. Here, though, it should be noted that the term "youth-driven" is a relative and subjective concept, with Ryan and Deci (2002) arguing that "even when actions are influenced by outside sources... [the critical factor is whether individuals *feel*] both initiative and value with regard to them" (p. 8). In SC, then, it was expected that students' sense of autonomy would be underpinned by their *perceptions* of self-direction, rather than their *absolute* level of agency. I must also acknowledge that there is a subtle semantic difference between *youth-led* and *youth-driven* activities, the former suggesting youth management and the latter, youth as initiators. Because both situations are possible in SC, I will use the terms interchangeably, expecting that the nuanced meaning will be clear from the accompanying descriptive narrative.

Integrity

Closely related to autonomy is integrity, that is, *the sense of being true to oneself* (Harré & Bullen, 2010). Integrity has strong similarities to Eccles' concept of "attainment value", a construct that measures the extent to which a task is in alignment with an individual's current or desired self-schema (Eccles, 1987; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Thus, while the concept of autonomy suggests self-regulation and choice, integrity has an added "value" component whereby an activity also fits with individuals' values and belief systems, giving a sense of

purpose to the project (Harré & Bullen, 2010). Indeed, Ryan and Deci (2002) assert that even if people attain their desired goals, psychological well-being cannot be assured if the end result involves compromising their values system.

Research studies have shown the importance of integrity-related concepts to activity persistence (e.g., Fredricks et al., 2002), including Harré and Bullen who found that integrity predicted commitment to a wide variety of activities in a study of NZ youth. Likewise, Trayer et al. (2012) found that integrity at both practices and post-performance was the only significant positive predictor of intention to repeat the experience.

Music and dance settings have been empirically verified as one of the most powerful routes of self-expression for young people (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984) and the fact that so many students annually self-select into SC and then return for repeat experiences, suggests that the event has high integrity value as both a social context and an activity-type. Unlike many performing arts activities (such as school musicals, choirs or orchestras) where teachers choose the performance material, SC contestants begin with a blank canvas and a very open-ended set of performance criteria. On to this, students are able to lay their music, their theme, their choreography and their dancers depending, of course, on the extent to which their leaders give them the freedom to do so. Over the years, I have seen students boldly tackle the issues of eating disorders, homosexuality, cosmetic surgery and drug addiction set against soundtracks that represent their voice. In this study, I was particularly interested in how students expressed their values and beliefs both through their routine and more generally through their practice and performance behaviour. I define integrity as *the extent to which SC reflects students' values, beliefs and ways of "being" in the world.*

Accomplishments

Accomplishment is the term I will use to describe students' achievements in SC, specifically *the awards they receive, the skills they gain and their areas of personal development.* Given the vast differences in age, personality, experience and preparation approaches, it was expected that what constituted an "accomplishment" in SC would vary from person to person, and group to group. For some students it may relate to physical or technical skills, such as mastering dance steps or designing a lighting plan. For others, it may centre on external rewards such as receiving category prizes or finishing in the top three on performance day. Yet others may be looking have leadership experience (or at least the kudos that goes with it). Larson (2011) describes these various skills as "competencies for agency", that is, "abilities to organise and regulate actions over time to work toward a long-term goal, as an individual or with others, in complex real-world contexts" (p. 318). He asserts that these abilities are critical for successful

transition into the adult world with all its challenges and complexities, and important to both individual and collective well-being. Larson's definition dovetails into self-determination theory's notion of competency, a basic psychological need, and defined as feeling effective in interacting with both internal and external environments (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2006).

Whatever the goals, Niemiec & Ryan (2009) suggest that competence among young people can best be fostered by offering optimally challenging learning activities that students can both understand and master. At the same time they should be given appropriate tools for the task and feedback which emphasises effectiveness rather than evaluation. In turn, adolescents' perception of being good at their task motivates their commitment and boosts their self-confidence, especially for those who have not been previously successful in academic or other social domains. In addition, receiving positive feedback from peers, family members, coaches and teachers validates abilities, strengthens motivation to strive, and enhances activity enjoyment. External recognition, such as making a team, beating others or receiving awards also support feelings of competence. In a NZ study, Harré and Bullen (2010) found that "life" projects, such as SC, were perceived to generate more competence than classroom projects. Conversely, perceived lack of skill can lead to activity withdrawal (Fredricks et al., 2002).

Within SC, the wide range of age and experience levels, and the varying achievement objectives among team members could be potentially problematic as leaders grapple with extending talented individuals to maintain their challenge level and interest, while ensuring that less experienced or less capable students are equally involved and valued, an on-going issue in youth activities (Fredricks et al., 2002). Moreover, Petitpas et al. (2005) maintain that many of the coaches or leaders of youth activities are untrained volunteers, or have a narrow skills base, resulting in few programmes which successfully teach physical and technical skills concurrently with social, personal and life skills. Those that do are worthy of close research attention.

In this study, I was especially interested in those accomplishments which were not linked to the competition result. That being said, there is no doubt that the competition goal does dominate the practice period, so I was equally interested in how the result impacted on students' experience, especially for those teams that did not place highly in the competition rankings.

Emotions

Emotions in this study refer to *students' experience and regulation of positive and negative affective states*, that is, the extent to which they felt active, enthusiastic and alert as opposed to frustrated, lonely or bored. Within competitive environments, much of the previous research

has focused on the impact of negative emotions on performers' behaviour, for example pre-performance anxiety (e.g., Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996). Conversely, Skinner and Brewer (2004) argue that positive emotions fulfil important adaptive functions by tempering stress and supporting coping strategies in competitive situations. Typically, in challenging situations, such as sports competitions or academic exams, participants report both positive and negative emotions prior to the event, but predominantly positive emotions (especially enjoyment) during the event. In these instances, positive emotions are associated with perceptions of competence, peak performance and social opportunities. Positive emotions are also believed to facilitate team performance by enhancing members' willingness to work collectively, a vital component for effective performance (Skinner & Brewer).

In my previous study, I assessed emotions as a dependent variable, measuring the occurrence of five positive and five negative emotions at set time points during students' SC experience. However, as Larson (2011) points out, measures such as these "capture just one limited part of a more complex elephant" and there is "much about adolescents' interaction with a complex world that we do not know how to measure with linear variables" (p. 330). Therefore, to gain a richer and deeper understanding of students' emotional experiences in this study, I drew more heavily on students' personal reports to establish a closer link between specific emotions and experiences and to represent those moments in their own language. Additionally, by maintaining an on-going presence at rehearsals, meetings and performances, I was in a position to observe facial expressions, body language and spontaneous commentary associated with these emotions.

However, identifying emotions and their triggers is only part of the puzzle. Of equal importance is the understanding of how young people manage these emotions and, as noted above, a high-stakes dance performance can provoke emotions at extremes ends of the positive and negative scale. Regulating these emotions is crucial for effective performance, team harmony and achievement of goals because, if left unchecked, they can derail attention and cause huge group disruption (Larson, 2011). Thus, young people need to develop the competencies to constructively manage a maelstrom of emotions, from anxiety, anger and stress to excitement, pride and inspiration, particularly in a performance paradigm.

This study, then, focussed not only on the types of emotions students experienced but also the manner in which they regulated them, particularly on performance day which was expected to produce emotional extremes.

Flow

Flow is *the subjective psychological state we experience when totally absorbed in a challenging activity for which we have the necessary skills* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997). Flow experiences have common dimensions: a high level of challenge matched by a high skill level; clearly defined tasks and goals; explicit and unambiguous feedback; total focus; a loss of self-consciousness; distorted sense of time; the merging of action and awareness; and on completion of the task, a sense of optimal experience which, because of flow's addictive quality, stimulates a desire to repeat the experience and to seek even greater challenges. Interestingly, a sense of optimal experience may only occur after a task is completed because a complex, challenging task can be all-consuming and even stressful while being undertaken. Equally importantly, a flow experience is intrinsically rewarding or "autotelic" with in-built goals and the activity perceived as worth doing for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Thus, although flow experiences do not come easily, Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) still rate them "among the most enjoyable moments of being alive" (p. 29). Conversely, if the challenge level is too low, boredom or apathy may predominate. Adolescents, in particular, are drawn to challenging activities that allow them to demonstrate their skills (Fredricks et al., 2002) and if young people can be educated to incorporate them into their lives, the quality of their everyday experiences and their long-term well-being will be enhanced (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Creative environments seem particularly conducive to generating flow and this is probably a key factor in the appeal of music and dance (see Byrne, MacDonald, & Carlton, 2003; Custodero, 1998, 2002; Delle Fave, & Massimini, 1988; Dissanayake, 2009; Martin & Cutler, 2002; O'Neill, 1999; Sheridan & Byrne, 2002). Within a dance environment, the sustained repetitive actions can produce flow-like states which Dissanayake (2009) describe as "transcending the ordinary self and attaining altered forms of consciousness" (p. 540). In this respect, it is strongly reminiscent of the *communitas* experience, as mentioned above. Flow is especially salient in a performance context which tends to be the peak moment of a performing arts activity. For example, Martin and Cutler (2002) found that American drama students who had experienced a fulfilling on-stage experience all reported some degree of flow regardless of age, gender and performance expertise.

Although flow is an individual subjective response, it has more recently (although rarely) been applied to group settings in both the sports and arts (see Berliner, 1999; Jimerson, 1999; Sawyer, 2003). In this context, flow is an emergent property of the whole group and refers to the "interactional synchrony" that occurs when a team "clicks" as a collective unit, something unpredictable and relatively rare (Sawyer, 2003, p. 157). Here, flow is characterised by a sense

of emotional empathy or unselfconscious awareness where individuals fully attend to the group while also contributing as an individual (Sawyer). Interestingly, individuals can be in flow, but this does not always translate into group flow and group flow can occur, but not be experienced by every individual, although it is highly likely that group flow facilitates individual flow. Consequently flow is difficult to empirically capture except through reports retrospectively assessing the interactional dynamics of group members during performance (Sawyer).

SC has strong flow potential: it is music and dance based, it involves a challenging, skills-intensive task with clear rules, extended intense engagement and unambiguous performance goals. It is also a highly valued intrinsic activity, as indicated by the students in my previous research who enthused over the experience despite doing badly in the competition. In keeping with other flow research (e.g., Martin & Cutler, 2002), these students reported their highest flow ratings at the public performance. It is expected, therefore, that if students in this study produce a successful routine and perform it to the best of their ability, they will report flow-related behaviours. This may not be the case, however, for the reluctant or inexperienced dancers for whom the challenge may be beyond their skill level. In these cases, students may experience anxiety (because of perceived lack of skills) or boredom (from disengagement).

Identity

The above dimensions all feed into the notion of identity, a “coherent sense of self – a sense of wholeness, vitality and integrity” (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 3). As youth negotiate their passage to independence, a stable identity is viewed as a key developmental asset (Search Institute, 2004) and is widely viewed as a vital psychosocial task for adolescents as they become aware of, and grapple with the myriad of physical, psychological and social changes confronting them at this life stage (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1993). According to Erikson, positive identity development (as opposed to role confusion) evolves out of *a collaborative process between a person and his or her context that brings together past, present and future perceptions to form a self-determined, cohesive sense of self*. In a similar vein, Schwartz (2005) asserts that a stable sense of identity “provides an anchor in a sea of possibilities and allows one to define oneself as something in particular” (p. 294). However he also notes that, despite adolescence being the time when identity begins to gain significance for youth, research on identity formation in adolescent populations is scarce and is mostly based on samples of university students or emerging adults.

While identity does not feature as a key dimension in self-determination theory or in positive psychology’s PERMA, participation in youth activities can play a large part in adolescent’s

emerging personal and social identity (Barnett, 2006). For example, these activities can be a primary source of “reflective” material as young people seek to establish who they are and seek independence from their home and classroom environments (Dworkin et al., 2003). Indeed, Fredricks et al.’s (2002) interpretative model places identity (reciprocally influenced by social context and psychological factors) at the core of the decision-making process when youth are deciding whether to invest in an activity. Hence, as they trial various activities, young people experiment with different social roles or identities, experience their benefits and costs and, through trial and error, identify their talents, abilities, thresholds and limitations (Darling et al., 2003; Dworkin et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999). If an activity resonates with who they are, adolescents may see this new identity as a personal strength and possibly central to their current (and future) identity; if not, they are likely to withdraw from the activity (Fredricks et al., 2002). In this way, identity is linked to both personal competency (“this is something I am good at”) and membership of a social group (“I am an important and valued member of this group”).

A music and drama environment like SC can be especially challenging as students are also required to assume and present on-stage persona that might be quite different to their real-life identities, often with intriguing consequences. However, as with the other dimensions, we do not have wide-ranging research which examines how young people use these experiences in an “active process of identity work” (Dworkin et al., 2003, p. 18).

Summary

In summary, there is a wealth of literature about structured youth activities. However, for the most part, the focus is on outcomes with a deficit of theory and research regarding specific processes and experiences that occur *within* these settings, particularly in the performing arts. This, study, then, takes up the challenge to move beyond single-point measures and examine the developmental processes of young people as they move through the practice and performance cycle of a performing arts experience. Using an ethnographic observational approach to track participants for the duration of the event, I hoped to not only tap into the students’ conscious and articulated evaluations of their SC experience, but also to immerse myself in their world in order to add to our in-depth knowledge about young peoples’ participation in youth activities. Specifically, I looked to address three key deficits in the youth activity literature: to investigate a performing arts context; to concentrate on the processes and real-time experiences rather than the outcomes; and to develop a creative, but rigorous methodological approach to examine this challenging youth setting.

Conceptual framework for the study

I will now take the rather unconventional step of presenting the conceptual framework that was, in reality, not finalised until the completion of this project. The conceptual framework was developed against model building guidelines proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and was initially informed by my experience as a performer and producer, my previous research, the literature review and the categories posited by positive psychology as being important for personal growth and well-being. In a cyclical, inductive and iterative process that Creswell (1998) suggests is integral to qualitative inquiry, the framework was systematically modified as I progressively analysed and interpreted the data from my field notes and supplementary data from each of the five studies. At the completion of my time in the field, the complete data set was again analysed and interpreted, culminating in the conceptual framework (Figure 1; see also Appendix D for the original framework that was the starting point for the final version).

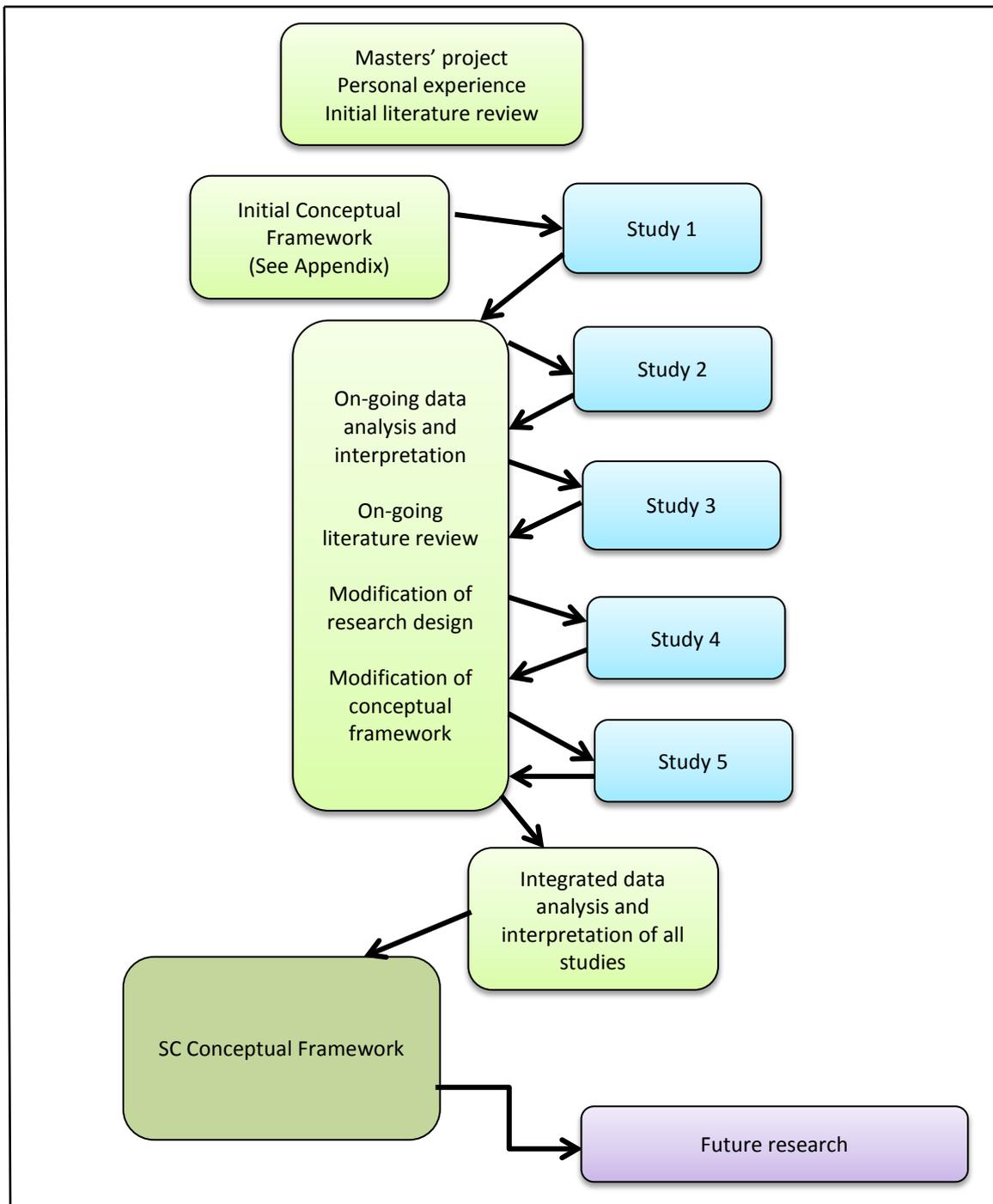


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Pathway

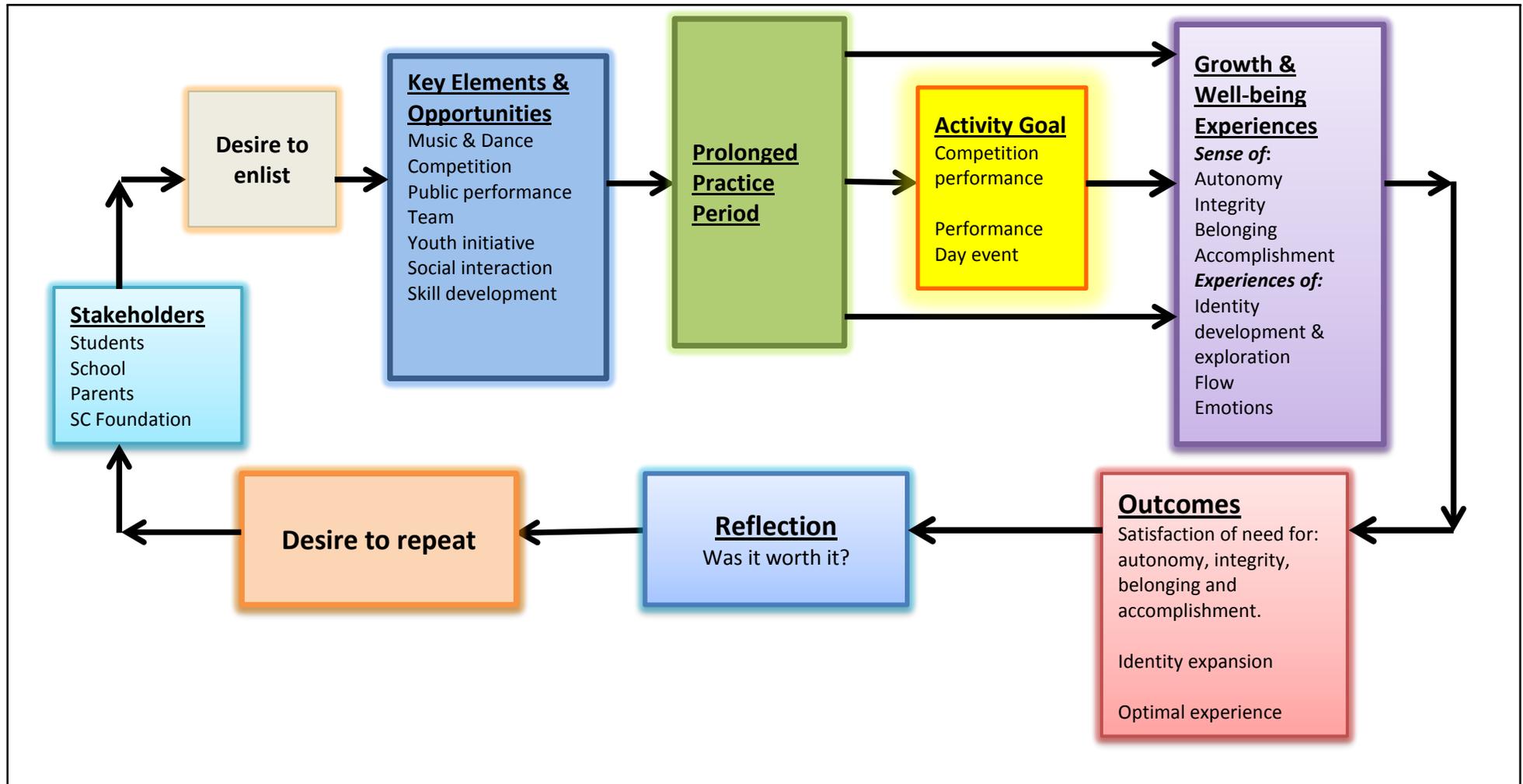


Figure 2. Stage Challenge Conceptual Framework

Overview of the framework

As illustrated in the framework, I propose that SC has four levels of stakeholders: student participants, the school and teachers, parents or caregivers, and the SC Foundation. My focus in this study is the students. When evaluating SC as a potential activity, students are confronted with two sets of considerations: first, are they attracted to the *key elements* which are “givens”, namely that SC is a music and dance activity which is team-based and youth-centred, culminating in a competitive public performance; and second, are they drawn to the potential *opportunities* that SC may offer youth, particularly the chance to socialise on a large scale and to acquire and develop skills. Once enlisted in the activity, students undergo a *prolonged practice period*. This culminates in the *activity goal* which for SC participants is a competitive public performance encompassed in a day-long event. If the practice period and performance day are positively experienced, both settings should foster growth and well-being amongst participants, including a sense of autonomy, integrity, belonging and accomplishment as well as identity development and exploration opportunities, and experiences of emotional intensity and flow. This in turn promotes the positive *outcomes* outlined in the preceding literature review, including the satisfaction of our need for autonomy, belonging and competence along with identity expansion and optimal experience. Post-activity, students undergo a time of *reflection* before deciding whether or not to *re-enlist* in the activity. The framework is circular reflecting an underlying premise that a positively experienced youth activity will engender a desire to re-enlist in that or similar activities.

This framework will provide the structure for the five case study narratives, presented in Chapters 3 – 7.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a background to SC and described how my previous research set the scene for the current study. I then positioned this project within the positive psychology discipline and drew from literature on positive youth development, especially the sports and performing arts domains. Next, I reviewed the literature on music and dance, public performance, competition and team activities which represent the key elements of SC. The final aspect of the literature review centred on those constructs associated with growth and well-being experiences, namely, belonging, autonomy, integrity, accomplishments, identity, emotions and flow. I concluded by proposing a conceptual framework which will underpin my up-coming data analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 2 METHOD

In 1988, Larson tracked high school students' developmental experiences as they undertook an extended investigation of a self-selected topic which culminated in a lengthy written dissertation. He likened this process to a traditional adolescent rite of passage or identity quest arguing that significant incidents such as these should be examined through the progression of subjective experiences because "it is the *phenomenological sequence from beginning to middle to end* that creates their unique meaning" (p. 270). He also suggested that "it might be useful to examine and compare the sequences of personal transformation associated with other deep adolescent involvements such as participation in plays, sports experiences and musical involvements" (Larson, 1988, p. 281).

In 2000, Larson again stated that "a key to conceptualising structured youth activities as developmental contexts is *identifying the processes* that occur in them" (p. 179), asserting that this should take the form of longitudinal descriptive research in conjunction with youth professionals, that "follows the same individuals over time in order to develop models of change processes" (p. 180).

In the intervening years, these calls continued to surface. For example, Dworkin et al. (2003) pointed out the need to use "a *range of methods, diverse samples, and different designs*" to explore the developmental process within youth activities to inform programme structures and leader training (p. 25).

Eleven years on, Larson's research cry has had limited response and he continues to assert the need for "*naturalistic research* and interpretative analysis of the variety and structure of challenging situations that youth encounter...[using] *diverse research tools*, including rigorous quantitative, qualitative, experimental, ethnographic, interpretive, and mixed methods research to seek a more complete picture of the different systems contributing to positive youth development and how they interrelate" (Larson, 2011, pp. 329–30). In particular, researchers are urged to move beyond correlational links and rely less heavily on variable-oriented models that assess the frequency, correlate, or consequences of involvement in individual activity settings (Hansen et al., 2003; Larson, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005). Not only is this critical to science based-practice and programme design, but also to stimulate government and corporate funding for non-academic youth activities (Dworkin et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

This project, then, attempts to close some gaps identified by Larson and others in youth activity research by examining several SC settings from a variety of perspectives, outlining the subjective experiences of the participants and the underlying processes that inform them by drawing on multi-dimensional, flexible measurement methods, adapted to the demands of individual contexts. First, though, I outline the methodological principles which influenced my choice of research design and data collection techniques.

Methodological principles

My research approach was influenced by three core principles drawn from my existing knowledge of school-based performing arts contexts and my strong beliefs about the function and obligations of a researcher. These principles underscored how I sought access to each school and my methodological approach within each setting.

First, I was committed to representing students' SC experience as accurately and comprehensively as possible. As Gottlieb (2006) asserts, a document, "based on long-term involvement in a community and fluency in the local [vernacular] should allow the reader to virtually taste the flavours of the local cuisine and smell the sea breezes" (p. 51) or in this case, the hairspray, the sweaty adolescent bodies and the billowing clouds from the on-stage smoke machines. This includes entering into participants' system of activities and attending closely to their categories and meanings rather than imposing my own descriptions and interpretations on their experiences (Emerson, 1988).

Second, as an ex-teacher, I was mindful of the pressures schools face in maximising student opportunities and the potential inconvenience an outsider-researcher might cause. I was therefore committed to living by each school's values and adhering to its routines. Likewise, I was well aware of the stress of performance deadlines and the intrinsic value of the creative process and did not want to compromise either with intrusive data collection methods.

Third, I was influenced by the principles of community psychology, namely to enhance participants' quality of life through collaborative research and action, to use indigenous resources and to foster a sense of community in the research setting (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001). This derived from my belief that, although the SC organization strives to be inclusive and supportive of all schools, in reality the competition is not a level playing field. Assembling a quality entry is a huge commitment and large, well-resourced schools situated close to the performance venue have a considerable financial and logistic advantage. Consequently they field regular entries and gain in confidence and experience, while remote or poorly resourced schools are reluctant to enter because of cost and fear of failure. Thus, two of my target schools were selected because of their low decile ranking and because they had not

previously competed in SC. Decile rankings, ranging from one to ten, are based on the socio-economic status of the surrounding community, with schools of decile ratings 8-10 having the most socio-economic advantage, and 1-3 decile schools having the least. Thus, my initial proposal to first-time SC schools stated that, in return for research access, I was happy to assist their SC endeavour in whatever way was useful and appropriate. My hope was that by supporting their novice entry, they would gain the confidence to re-enlist for future events. With the more experienced schools, I simply offered to share their workload should they desire it.

Overriding all these principles was the hope that my participants' SC experience would be enhanced by my presence in the setting and that, for both of us this project would be creative and fun.

Research design

My objective was to closely track five different SC teams at four different SC competitions between 2007 and 2011. Given that I was not completely sure about my researcher status until I entered each school setting, I needed a research design that was flexible enough to accommodate unexpected changes, but specific enough to be scientifically rigorous.

To define my research design, I began by examining the methodological literature on case studies, ethnography, field work and participant observation, mindful that they should not be used as "catch-all labels" that are bereft of methodological criteria (Wolcott, 2008). Ultimately my methodological approach was interdisciplinary, drawing on both case study and ethnographic inquiry strategies which I will now outline.

Case study

Creswell (2013) describes case study inquiry as a qualitative approach where the researcher explores "a real-life, contemporary bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes" (p. 97). Case studies are characterised by their detailed level of description and intention to generate an in-depth understanding of the research question. Collective case studies explore the same issue over multiple sites or investigate multiple perspectives of the same issue (Yin, 2009). These criteria fit my project which centres on five teams engaged in an activity bound by common rules, goals and time frames.

Ethnography

Ethnographic research bears many similarities to case study inquiry although, instead of focusing on an issue or activity, it examines the shared beliefs, ideas, values and language of a culture-sharing group and its patterns of social organisation (Creswell, 2103). It is usually driven by a theoretical concept(s) and requires extensive and prolonged immersion in the setting. The main methods of data collection are participant observation and formal or informal interviews. The end result is an ethnographic document which combines the emic perspective of the participants with the etic perspective of the researcher to convey a cultural interpretation of the group (Creswell, 2013). These criteria also resonate with my study which is underscored by a theoretical framework and involved extensive time in the field.

As I negotiated the methodological maze, I was also mindful of Emerson's (1988) warning that, in current times, field researchers too often undertake "minimal, superficial and short-term participation" and, when engaging in field work, "long-term and intimate involvement in the routine everyday worlds of others is a methodological sine qua non" (p. 71). I was concerned, therefore, that because each SC programme only had a three to six month life-span and limited weekly time slots, my research did not meet the purist definition of fieldwork no matter how much I aspired to "intimate involvement" in each setting.

Ultimately, rather than becoming bogged down in semantics, I adopted a research design that was "infused with elements of an ethnographical approach", without purporting to be "ethnography" per se, a term Wolcott (2008) argues should be the exclusive preserve of researchers whose end result is an ethnographic report (p. 189). That being said, by charting my methodological journey, this project also entered auto-ethnographic territory, which Chang (2008) defines as the documentation of a researcher's lived experiences within a specific cultural context. I further warmed to the phrase *meadow work*, a term affectionately (and possibly patronisingly) applied by anthropologists to researchers in other disciplines who do not meet Emerson's "sine qua non" of "going native". In this case, though, amongst the lights, music and make-up, it was more like *stage work*!

When it came to reporting my findings, though, it seemed more appropriate to follow the case study format where, after a chronological presentation of data, a researcher concludes by presenting a theoretical model and making more general assertions based on the individual case studies (Stake, 1995).

The end result then was case study design which used ethnographic data collection techniques to produce a collective case study document. This encompassed a systematic but flexible data collection strategy, developed in response to participants' best interests and evolving

situational occurrences, in order to examine the processual experiences of this youth performing arts activity. To fit the context and capture the iterative research process, I called this *stage work*.

Setting up the study

This was primarily an observational study, and from the outset, I discovered that studies like these are not easy. The first problem surfaced when I submitted my research proposal. Because I intended to gather quantifiable data to supplement my observations, I was challenged as to why I was not using a control group, preferably a non-SC school. Now that I am more confident of my own judgment, I can see that I should have stood my ground. A control group in this context would have made no difference to the scientific credibility of the study, mainly because there are too many other confounding variables in a school setting. However, I coalesced and then struggled to find a practical and meaningful way to incorporate a control group into the project. The feasibility of setting this up was daunting (involving the recruitment of at least one other school) until I was reassured by my supervisor that a control group was effectively a white elephant. But this issue distracted me and I wasted valuable time getting my first study underway.

I had similar difficulties when seeking ethics approval. Although my unit of focus was the group rather than the individual, the Ethics Committee had reservations because observational studies, especially those involving minors, were now being closely scrutinised. They required that all students (and their parents, if they were under 16) consented to be observed, even though they were preparing for a public performance. I was thus faced with the dilemma that if a single student (or parent) declined to give consent, it would be virtually impossible to observe the remainder of the group. Fortunately, all students and SC teachers agreed to participate, but it took three submissions to the Ethic Committee before they were happy with my proposal. This also took up precious time and, in fact, made the difference between being able to run a pilot study or not.

Gaining access

My aim was to investigate a broad spectrum of SC teams, including co-ed and single-sex, experienced and inexperienced, senior and junior, and rural and urban teams, to get as wide a perspective of the SC experience as possible. Prior to each study, I decided on my desired demographic criteria and, using previous SC records and local knowledge, I identified schools which matched my research requirements and were within driving distance of my home or workplace (I live and work in different locations). I then approached Principals by email describing my background, previous experience of SC, research objectives and proposed

research design. I also indicated I would provide a financial contribution to the school SC fund in return for a team's research participation (to be discussed with them in person). In every case, the first school I approached accepted my proposal, subject to the approval of their SC teachers, who then contacted me to set up preliminary meetings.

At the preliminary meetings with teachers, I fully disclosed the purpose of my research as stated in the research objectives. I explained that I would like to observe students' practice and performance sessions and would be recording extensive field notes including verbatim comments, or approximations of them, to capture students' (anonymous) first-hand accounts of their experiences. I further explained that I was keen to investigate students' remembered experiences of SC as soon as possible after the competition performance. I was aware, however, that after a large-scale event, schools are anxious to return to normal classroom programmes and that retrospective data collection may not be welcome or practical. It was agreed, therefore, that we would jointly assess the feasibility of retrospective data collection options towards the end of the practice period.

We also agreed on a tentative format for my observation protocol, including how often I would attend, where I would position myself at the site and my contact person at the school. I undertook to email the contact teacher on Sunday nights to inform them of my upcoming visits for the week. In all cases, the teacher in charge (TIC) was my contact person for the study.

Prior to my first visit, teachers informed students that a university researcher would be in the school to observe their SC experience and to record their "SC journey". Teachers emphasised that I was interested in the team, not individuals and would respect their anonymity. On my first visit (usually the team's first SC meeting), I introduced myself to students and distributed information and consent forms, including forms for parents of those students under 16. Those students who joined the teams later in the practice period, such as the back stage crew, were given information and consent forms at the time of their enlistment. All consented to participate. Likewise, the Principal and all teachers who were involved with the team were given information and consent forms and all consented to participate (see Appendix. A).

In my Master's research, I paid the school SC fund for each completed questionnaire and diary entry. In this project, I instead supplied each team member with a performance day t-shirt to thank them for their research participation. T-shirts are not compulsory attire but most teams wear them as their off-stage "uniform" on competition day. They are usually designed by the students and feature the school's name, competition date, and the by-line of their performance theme. They are not only important as team identifiers, but also as a memento of their SC participation. However, for some students the cost of the t-shirt, over and above the entry fee

and transport, is prohibitive. By supplying t-shirts, I felt I was giving something back to students in a way that upheld community psychology principles and was not linked to providing data.

Data collection methods

Observation

Observation was my default data collection method in this study and the only technique I used to obtain real-time data. It is defined as “a systematic method of data collection that relies on a researcher’s ability to gather data through the senses within real-world contexts” (O’Leary, 2005, p. 125). More simply, Gottlieb (2006) refers to observation as “advanced hanging out”, an anthropological phrase which, for me, resonated with my adolescent population. Its main advantage is the generation of substantial data with little or no time delay between the occurrence and recording of behaviours.

Observation, as a data collection technique, can take various forms depending on the degree of contact a researcher desires (or is permitted to have) with the target population. This can be represented as a continuum with complete detachment (e.g., covert observation behind a one-way mirror) at one extreme and full participant observation (living for an extended period as an integral member of the observed population) at the other. Each stance has its advantages and challenges. According to O’Leary (2005), detached observation, where researchers are a non-integral and unobtrusive part of a target community is appropriate in the exploratory stages of a project when researchers are establishing background information prior to the adoption of a more rigid and detailed approach. Once rapport with a community is established, a detached observational stance can then facilitate access to a wide range of material and allow freedom to react to participants’ initiatives (Dallos, 2006). On the negative side, detached observation can be compromised by researchers’ attention diversion and is emotionally demanding to sustain. In particular, researchers can feel marginalised from their own social settings which are essential for affirming personal identities (Dyer, 2006). Conversely, full participant observation can net rich, meaningful data and a much closer insight into participants’ lives, but a researcher runs the risk of being subsumed by his or her role in the community, producing biased data or existing in a state of constant exhaustion (O’Leary, 2005).

While most projects lean towards a particular observational stance, it is not unusual for a researcher’s position on the continuum to slide in either direction depending on the status of the research process and the evolving relationship between observer and those observed (O’Leary, 2005). For clarification, I have situated the five observed teams in this study on an

observational continuum (Figure 3). As I describe each team in later chapters, I will be more specific about the observation process used in each study and my rationale for its choice.

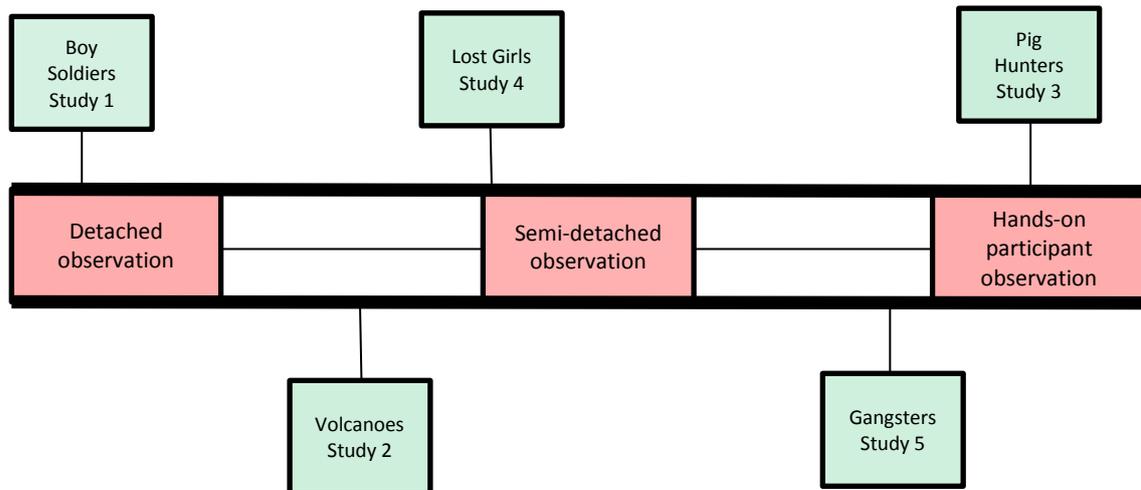


Figure 3. Position of each study along observation continuum.

My observation data was recorded exclusively as hand-written field notes. I chose not to use audio, photographic or video recording devices to minimise interruption to the creative process, to preserve participant anonymity and to avoid students and teachers feeling they were under surveillance. Wherever possible, I recorded observations in real time. On many occasions, however, it did not feel appropriate to take live notes, for example, when students were being reprimanded or having a bad day. At these times, I wrote copious notes in my car immediately after each observation period. Over time, I developed a systematic set of shorthand codes which enabled me to record observations very quickly, including students' direct speech which tended to be based on predictable vocabulary and language sequences. For example, "I loved watching other schools' performances" was recorded as "I)) w—osp". Because I could not always hear what students were saying, I also relied heavily on their non-verbal behaviour (facial expressions, body language) and interactional dynamics for further insight into their behaviour.

My field notes (I will use the terms observational notes and field notes interchangeably) took a semi-structured form with each double A4 page of the field book divided into four sections: (a) *description* of the setting and what occurred during each observation; (b) student behaviours that mapped on to the *conceptual framework*; (c) *emerging themes* and *additional insights* which needed further clarification or would be carried over into the next study; and (d) *reflections* (see Appendix B: Layout of A4 Field Notebook). The reflections component was critical because, in these types of settings, researchers are constantly challenged by the sheer inadequacy of their sense organs and can never be sure whether their records have been affected by selective memory, selective observation and interpretation, personal bias and role

conflict (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Thus, my reflections included references to my background, experience and personality, as well as the highlights and challenges I experienced in the field. Essentially, as Patton (2002) suggests, they were a type of “audit trail”, providing a visible account of the research process, particularly where personal bias may have been an issue.

After each day in the field (often before I left the school car park or at a café on the way home), I reread and expanded my field notes. In the early stages, much of this centred on deciphering illegible scrawls, which did improve as I developed a more efficient shorthand system. At this point, I also added memos in the margins to alert me to emerging themes or points of interest, and additional descriptive content that I had not had time to record in the field. Each evening, I transcribed the observational notes in their original form to my computer. This process often provoked memories and awarenesses that were not salient when note-taking. I also revisited my notes the following morning when I was fresher, and at this point often added further descriptive commentary. This helped to direct my focus for the upcoming day’s observations. The same process was applied to the observational notes from every study.

Supplementary data collection methods

As Patton (2002) noted, observation alone is not enough to adequately capture people’s feeling, intentions or the meanings they attach to situations. Moreover, a key research objective was to obtain students’ phenomenological descriptions of their SC experience. Thus, to supplement my observational notes, I also used questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. My decision on which of the three methods to use in each setting was determined by students’ age levels and the co-operation of the school. Each method placed particular demands on the school, and some were more feasible than others, depending on the way each school operated and the time they were prepared to allocate to this. For example, individual interviews required a constant flow of students in and out of the classroom, whereas a questionnaire required a certain degree of written fluency on the part of the students. All supplementary measures were administered retrospectively, no later than two weeks after the competition event, which allowed me to tap into students’ first hand descriptions without interrupting their real-time experience. Wherever possible, I gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, which Gottlieb (2006) suggests, “should be harnessed to work together, as well-paired as couples on a dance floor” (p. 48).

As noted, I tracked five teams whose SC experiences will be documented as five separate case studies: Case Study 1 (*Boy Soldiers*); Case Study 2 (*Volcanoes*); Case Study 3 (*Pig Hunters*); Case Study 4 (*Lost Girls*); and Case study 5 (*Gangsters*).

I will now describe the supplementary data collection methods used in each of the studies. Note that Case Study 2 (*Volcanoes*) was the only study where supplementary data collection methods were *not* used.

Retrospective Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used for Case Study 1 (*Boy Soldiers*), Case Study 3 (*Pig Hunters*) and Case Study 4 (Lost Girls).

It was modelled on the follow-up questionnaire of my previous research (Trayes et al., 2012). As well as gathering demographic data, it contained both qualitative and quantitative measures. Note that the content of the questionnaire and the wording of some questions varied slightly between the three schools as will be elaborated.

Demographic data

In this section, students gave their age, year level, gender, team role, number of previous SC experiences, and details of any previous performing arts experience.

Qualitative measures

The questionnaire included six open-ended questions asking students to describe the best and worst aspects of the practice period, the best and worst aspects of performance day, what skills they had learnt and what they had learnt about themselves as people during SC. Students were also given space at the end of each questionnaire to add any further comments if they wished to do so.

As I observed each team, themes emerged which were specific to that context. To explore them in more detail, I supplemented each questionnaire with additional open-ended questions relevant to that setting. For example, the *Pig Hunters* lived a long distance from the performance venue, so they were asked about travel logistics. The team-specific questions will be described within each case study.

Quantitative measures

The quantitative measures gathered information about: positive and negative emotions; flow; belonging; integrity; reaction to result; and future intentions. Again, because each setting differed, the specific *questions* used to evaluate each measure were sometimes modified or supplemented to suit the context. Any modifications or additions to the default questionnaire will be described as I present each case study.

The above dimensions in the default questionnaire were assessed as follows:

Positive and negative emotions: Students were given a checklist of five positive and five negative emotions to retrospectively evaluate the emotional aspect of their SC experience. Seven items (excited, proud, enthusiastic, interested, inspired, ashamed, and nervous) were derived from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), which has demonstrated reliability for measuring emotions over extended time periods (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and in youth physical activity settings (Crocker, 1997). Three additional items (bored, frustrated and lonely) were included because of their likely relevance to the SC setting which can feature long periods of inactivity and repetition of routines.

Flow: To assess their on-stage performance, students were asked to retrospectively rate their flow experiences using the nine-dimension Flow State Scale (FSS: Jackson & Eklund, 2002; Jackson & Marsh, 1996). Thus, flow experiences were assessed according to coping ability (“it was challenging, but I think I was good enough to cope”), feedback (“it was clear to me that I was doing well”), concentration (“it was very easy to keep my mind on what I was meant to be doing”), loss of self-consciousness (“I was not worried about what others may have been thinking of me”), time distortion (“my sense of time seemed to change when I was on-stage”), automatic responses (“I knew my part so well, my movements were automatic”), clear expectations (“I knew exactly what my teachers and my team expected of me”), and control (“I felt in control of what I was doing on stage”). A statement relating to optimal experience was also included (“SC left me feeling great”). Students used a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 4 to rate their flow experiences (0 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*).

Belonging: To assess students’ sense of belonging during practices, two positively worded statements from Harré and Bullen’s (2010) Personal Projects questionnaire were used: “SC gave me a sense of togetherness with my school team”, and “I think I will remain friends with the people I did SC with” (0 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*). For parsimony, only the first of the two statements was used to assess the performance experience.

Integrity: Similarly, two positively worded statements from Harré and Bullen’s (2010) questionnaire were used to assess practice integrity: “SC was really ‘me’”, and “I felt like I could be “myself” at SC” (0 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*). Again, only the former statement was used to assess the performance.

Reaction to result: To assess the importance of the competition result, students responded to the statement, “I was disappointed that we did not get placed in the top three schools” (0 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*).

Future intentions: Finally, to investigate the level of their engagement with SC, students were about their desire to repeat the current experience (“If you could go back to the start of the year and repeat this experience, would you do SC all over again?”), their wish to engage in further SC experiences (“I would like to do SC again in the future”), and their intention to pursue other performing arts activities (I would like to do more performing arts activities in the future”) (0 = *no*; 2 = *maybe*; 4 = *yes*).

Semi-structured individual interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used for Case Study 5 (*Gangsters*).

In keeping with my commitment not to interrupt students’ creative processes, I tended not to conduct informal interviews in the field although I was always happy to engage with students if they initiated the contact. In this case study, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews in the three days immediately after the competition. (Occasionally, students arrived to be interviewed in groups of two or three and, when this happened, I interviewed them as a group, rather than sending them back to class).

Prior to each interview, I explained to students that I would be taking extensive notes and that all identifying characteristics would be removed so that no data could be traced back to them. I used a standardised sheet which allowed me to quickly note students’ demographic details. I then asked them the six qualitative questions from the default questionnaire: the best and worst aspects of the practices, best and worst aspects of performance day, skills they had learnt and what they had learnt about themselves. I noted these responses as they spoke. I followed these questions with a less structured discussion where I encouraged students to speak more generally about their SC experience and probed more deeply into incidents that were specific to individuals, for example, what it was like to be part of the back stage crew. All interview notes were hand-written and, as much as possible, I recorded their comments verbatim. If students made a particularly pertinent remark that I was unable to record in its entirety, I would say, “That was so interesting. I’d love to include your comment in my story. Would you mind repeating that?” which ensured I captured their complete description. In keeping with the questionnaire, I finished each interview by asking students whether they would like to repeat the year again and whether they would enlist in future SCs. Finally students were asked to use one word to describe their overall experience.

Before I left the school each day, I reread my interview notes, checking them for legibility and sense, and in the margins, added memos to alert me to emerging themes or points of interest, and descriptive content that I had not had time to record during the interviews.

Focus groups

Focus groups were used for Case Study 3 (*Pig Hunters*).

The *Pig Hunters* was my main study in the project. Because I was able to administer individual questionnaires, it seemed superfluous (and time-consuming for both me and the school) to also conduct individual interviews. The school did, however, allow me to conduct focus groups on the two days after the competition. Focus groups have several advantages over other data collection methods: they resemble the social context of participants; they are cost and time-effective; the interactions between members can stimulate discussion; they provide an easy method of assessing shared and divergent views; and they are enjoyable for both participants and facilitators. However, because of the numbers involved, the content may be limited, members may under or over-contribute, anonymity is not assured and sensitive issues are less likely to be tabled (Patton, 2002).

With this team, I conducted eight focus groups which corresponded to the four year levels, and separated by gender (these divisions also matched their on-stage dance groups). One week later, I also conducted a focus group with the SC teachers.

To conduct the student focus groups, I used a story telling format (see Harré & Bullen, 2010). First, I gathered the students together and explained that I was interested in what SC had meant to them. They were then asked to find a quiet space and spend 5 minutes writing key words or phrases about their SC experience (both positive and negative) using the provided paper and pencils. Students then regrouped and took turns to recount their SC experience, either spontaneously or by reading out the comments from their brainstorm sheet. They were not allowed to interrupt each other or interject. I took comprehensive hand-written notes as they talked recording their verbatim comments or close approximations of them. At the end, under my guidance, students brainstormed to get a consensus group experience which I recorded on the whiteboard and photographed for my field notes. Students also handed in their anonymous brainstorm notes which became part of my data set.

For the teachers' focus group, I used a less structured format with discussion centring on the benefits and challenges of SC participation for students and the wider school community.

As with the other qualitative data, I reread the notes before I left the school each day, to check them for legibility, sense and to add memos and descriptive comments.

Supplementary documentation

In addition to my observational notes, and data from the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups, I also sourced publically available information, including SC documentation and archival data, students' on-stage announcements on performance day and the SC Facebook page. This material was used to inform the grand discussion which is presented at the end of the five case studies.

Thus, the complete data set comprised observational notes from all teams, students' qualitative and quantitative responses on the questionnaire for three teams, students' interview commentary for one team, students' focus group commentary for one team, students' on-stage performance day commentary for all teams, and SC documentation and archival data.

Analysing the data

One of the challenges of field work is the proliferation of data that is produced and how to impose order upon it (Le Compte & Schensul, 2010). This study was no exception. In total, I tracked 423 students, made 145 visits to schools for practices or meetings, attended 20 performance days, and produced 1,932 pages of field notes. I also collected questionnaires from 173 students, conducted 70 semi-structured individual interviews and ran nine focus groups, involving 53 students. On top of this I accessed a wealth of electronic and archival documentation. To compound matters, this was an unusual project because I adopted a range of data collection strategies that were not consistent across each study.

My research objectives required two different analytical strategies. Both were equally important. To construct the conceptual framework, I adopted a top-down approach using thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) that was centred on the dimensions of my preliminary conceptual framework (as outlined in Chapter 1). Conversely, to identify the processes that contribute to positive youth experiences and to capture students' phenomenological descriptions of them, I adopted a bottom-up approach which was more akin to grounded theory analysis. Here, the emphasis is on emergent themes and inductive and iterative analysis. This approach recommends the initial coding of data according to broad categories and becoming progressively more focused as a pattern emerges (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike, grounded theory, though, this data was not used to create a theoretical model, but rather to refine the preliminary framework with which I entered the study. Overriding the top-down and bottom-up approaches, was my commitment to a case study design, which is dependent on rich description and anecdotal commentary (Cresswell, 2013).

Field notes

Once transcribed on to computer, field notes were color-coded into the four broad categories that corresponded to my field book format (description, conceptual framework dimensions, emerging themes and reflections). Separate computer files were created for each of these four categories. Within each of these files, sub-categories were created as more specific themes emerged during the re-reading of the data. The process was particularly intense for the conceptual framework file, as I fine-tuned the dimensions to be included in the final version. In each of the four files, I had a separate section for direct quotations (either my own or the students) that best represented that category or sub-category. All quotations were tagged with the age and gender of the student. These direct quotes became an essential part of my case study narratives.

This process was applied to the field notes for each case study. Once I had completed the five case studies, all five data sets were combined and the above process was repeated to enable cross-case comparisons.

Analysing the supplementary data

Questionnaires

To begin, I created a separate computer file for each open-ended question and the students' responses to each question were transcribed to that file.

The data analysis then had two phases. Firstly, I examined the responses to each question and identified emerging categories for that question. For each question, I also kept a separate file of quotations that best represented the key question, or the sub-categories emerging from that question. Where relevant, I counted the prevalence of responses to a category, although the broad spectrum of answers and the overlap between themes meant this was not often possible or productive.

The second phase replicated the process used for my observational notes. I re-read the full set of transcribed responses and colour coded them into the field note categories, that is, description, conceptual framework, and emerging themes. (The reflection category was not relevant for student responses). I created separate files for these broad categories and again, these were further analysed for sub-categories, and representative quotations were tagged.

At the end of the study, the questionnaire transcripts from all three teams were re-read and the two phase process was repeated to permit cross-case comparisons.

Focus groups

For the focus groups, my complete set of hand written notes for each session were transcribed to computer. Students' brainstorm notes for each session were also transcribed in their original format. This data set also underwent two phases of analysis. First, the transcriptions were categorised according to the broad themes that emerged during the group discussion. Likewise, the students' brainstorm sheets were transcribed verbatim and analysed for emerging themes. Where relevant, sub-categories were also identified and prevalence of responses recorded. Representative quotations for each category were also filed.

Following this, both transcriptions were re-read and colour coded according to the broader field note categories (description, conceptual framework, and emerging themes). As above, these were further analysed for sub-categories, and representative quotations were tagged.

Interviews

Each student had a separate interview sheet, on which I recorded their commentary as they spoke. These became my interview data set. To analyse these, I first created a separate computer file for each of the six questions that were common to all interviews and students' responses to each question were transcribed to that file. These responses were analysed for emerging themes, and sub-categories of those themes. Next, I transcribed each student's free-flowing commentary into individual student files. Each file was similarly analysed for themes and emerging categories and representative quotations identified.

I then re-read all the transcripts and coded them according to the broader field note categories (description, conceptual framework, and emerging themes). As above, these were further analysed for sub-categories, and representative quotations were tagged.

SC documentation, archival data and students' on-stage and Facebook commentary.

This material was only sourced for direct quotations that reflected the emerging themes in this study.

Quantitative measures

Quantitative measures were derived from the questionnaire, which was only administered to three of the five teams. They were specifically gathered to provide frequency data or to give an indication of the strength of student responses. The flow, belonging and integrity measures

were analysed to obtain means and standard deviations and will be reported as such. The emotions and future intentions measures will be reported in terms of the frequency of respondents in each response category.

Creating a narrative

Having reduced the experience of five teams and 423 students to codes and categories, it was important that the holistic and progressive nature of their SC experience was not lost in the reporting of results. I therefore adopted a narrative case study format to present each team's story, incorporating anecdotal commentary from my field notes and students' phenomenological descriptions. I will be using the first person, in recognition of the fact that I was closely involved with the students in this project. Indeed, as Davies (2012) notes, the story would not be complete if the data was presented without acknowledgement of my input. The reflective component of each chapter will be more free-flowing and I will use the first person to discuss my researcher experience

Reporting structure

The following chapters will present each team's journey in the order that that I observed them. I will also describe my "stage work" experience. An overview of the five schools including their demographic details and the data collection methods of each study is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.
Summary of School and Team Demographics, and Data Collection Methods used in each Study.

Team name ¹	Boy Soldiers	Volcanoes	Pig Hunters	Lost Girls	Gangsters
School type &² Year range	State secondary Yrs 9-13	2 x State secondary Yrs 9-13	Area school Yrs 1-13	Integrated State intermediate and secondary (Catholic) Yrs 7-13	Co-ed State intermediate Yrs 7-8
Decile rank³ of school	7	7	4	10	6
Location of school	Town	Town	Rural	City	Town
Predominant Ethnic composition of school⁴	68% NZ Europ. 18% Maori 8% Asian 6% Pasifika	Boys: same as Boy Soldiers Girls: 75% NZ Europ. 12% Maori 6% Asian 2% Pasifika	82 % NZ Europ. 17% Maori	70% NZ Europ. 7% Asian 5% Maori 4% Pasifika 4% Mid. East 3% W.Europ.	73% NZ Europ. 20% Maori 4% Asian 3% Pasifika
Number in team	21	104	86	110	102
Gender of team	Boys	Boys (<i>n</i> = 41) & Girls (<i>n</i> = 63)	Boys (<i>n</i> = 39) & Girls (<i>n</i> = 47)	Girls	Boys (<i>n</i> = 40) & Girls (<i>n</i> = 62)
Age range of team members	14 yrs	12-18 yrs	10-15 yrs	10-18 yrs	10-13 yrs
Year levels of⁵ students in team	Year 10	Years 9-13	Years 7-10	Years 7-13	Years 7 & 8
Leadership of team	Teacher-led	Student-led	Teacher-led	Student-led	Teacher-led
Awards received for SC performance	Spirit of SC 5 perf.awards	3 rd place 3 perf. awards	Spirit of SC 2 perf. awards 2 social awards	3 perf. awards	1 perf. award 1 social award
No. of days in the field	30	18	48	33	16
My observational stance	Detached	Semi-detached	Hands-on	Semi-detached	Hands-on
Supplementary measures	Questionnaire <i>n</i> = 18	Nil	Questionnaire <i>n</i> = 54 Focus groups <i>n</i> = 53	Questionnaire <i>n</i> = 101	Interviews <i>n</i> = 70
Pages of field notes	154	120	238	270	150

Notes.

1. Fictitious team names, based on theme choice.
2. State schools are predominantly government funded. Secondary schools cater for 11-18 year olds (Year levels 9-13); intermediate schools for 10-12 year olds (Year levels 7 & 8); area schools are state schools in rural or isolated areas, catering for 5 -18 year olds (Year levels 1-13).
3. School socio-economic ranking reflecting average family background of students, with 10 being the highest. Derived from NZ Ministry of Education statistics, 2012.
4. Derived from NZ Ministry of Education statistics, 2012.
5. Year 7 = 10-12 year olds; Year 8 = 11-13 year olds; Year 9 = 12-14 year olds; Year 10 = 13-15 year olds; Year 11 = 14-16 year olds; Year 12 = 15-17 year olds; Year 13 = 16-18 year olds.

Each chapter will be structured as follows:

1. Background to study

This section will set the scene giving attention to factors that may have had an intervening influence on the team's experience. I will describe the school setting, provide team demographics and outline students' selection path into SC. Next the theme of the routine will be described, followed by a brief overview of students' practice period and performance day experiences, including the awards received at the competition. In this section, all material will be derived my observational notes. All students' names will be fictionalised to preserve their anonymity.

2. Method

Here, I will describe the data collection methods for each study and my rationale for their choice. I will define my observational stance including its potential advantages and pitfalls. I will also describe any supplementary data collection methods used.

3. Key elements and opportunities

This section will report on *the extent to which the key elements and opportunities of a "typical" SC experience were present* for each team. By "typical", I mean those elements which are non-negotiable in SC (music and dance, competition, public performance and team) but may receive different levels of emphasis, depending on the setting. I will also briefly consider the opportunities for youth initiative and social interaction although these will be discussed in greater depth in the chapter, as will skills development. The material in this section will again be derived exclusively from my observational notes.

4. Growth and well-being experiences

This is the heart of each chapter, describing the *developmental experiences that evolve during SC that are of considerable interest to students, which teach them something or expand them in some way, giving them new skills, attitudes, or new ways of interacting with others*. Here, I will systematically discuss the growth and well-being dimensions proposed in the conceptual framework, namely autonomy, integrity, belonging, accomplishment, identity development and exploration, emotions and flow. In this section, I will draw on both my observational notes and the supplementary data sources (questionnaires, interviews and focus groups).

5. Food for thought

In this section, I will present any *emerging ideas or insights that might be worthy of further consideration* but do not map exactly on to the conceptual framework. Included here will be commentary about perceived gender-specific behaviour which does not form part of the framework but did feature in my observations.

6. The experience summarised

Here, each team's experience will be briefly recapped.

7. Reflections

I will end each case study with a reflective section. Here I will focus more directly on my own researcher experiences undertaking a brief consideration of the *data collection methods used and self-reflections about the highlights and dilemmas in the field*, especially potential areas of bias. The material will be derived exclusively from my field notes and because it is ethnographic in style will be presented in first person narrative format.

Grand discussion

After presenting the five case studies, the combined findings will be amalgamated into a grand discussion outlining the common features of students' SC experience and those unique to each team. The concluding chapter will also summarise my personal research journey, investigate the effectiveness of my research methods and revisit the conceptual framework.

I now turn to the first case study, the Boy Soldiers.

CHAPTER 3 THE BOY SOLDIERS

Imagine you have been beaten up. Shut your eyes. Feel your bodies. Now imagine you have to shoot someone you love. Name that person. Do it now.

(Teacher)

1. Background to study

My priority in this study was to track a team that was demographically different from my Master's research, preferably co-ed or male, small town-based and with a mid-range decile ranking. At my first meeting with the teachers, I discovered this school had planned two SC entries for the year: a senior entry in conjunction with the neighbouring girls' college and a Year 10 boys' entry. I was offered access to both teams. While the senior team was originally intended to be the key study, its random and scattered practice schedule made continuous, in-depth observation impractical (to be explained in the next chapter). Fortuitously, the Year 10 team also met my research criteria, the teacher was supportive of my project and, although small in size, this team became my primary study for the year.

1.1 The school

According to the school website, this college is one of the oldest boys' schools in NZ, with a roll of approximately 1000, including 150 boarders. The ethnic composition is predominantly NZ European (68%), with Maori (18%), Asian (8%), and Pasifika (6%). The decile 7 school is well-resourced, with historic buildings set in beautiful grounds. The Headmaster told me the school prided itself on adherence to "old-fashioned values and firm, but fair discipline". The school hall (where numerous SC practices took place) is vast, two-tiered and decorated with sports photos dating back 150 years. While the college offers a wide range of extra and co-curricular activities, the Headmaster acknowledged that it still struggles to rise above being labelled a "rugby school". Every second year, the boys and girls colleges combine to produce a joint SC senior entry as well as entering separate boys' and girls' Year 10 teams.

1.2 The team

The team comprised a complete class of Year 10 boys ($N = 21$), all aged 14, who self-selected into a half-year dance-drama option class which offered SC as its focal point. (Other choices included art, PE extension, music, cooking and accounting). One boy had previously participated in SC and two had performed in local youth theatre productions. The rest had no performing arts experience, although all had existing knowledge of SC because of the school's

long association with the event. The teacher was a young, second-year, female drama specialist who had not previously trained a SC team.

1.3 Theme

The theme of their routine centred on the true story of Benny, a Ugandan child, kidnapped by the military to serve as a boy soldier. The story began with Benny and his friends playing happily in their village. Their games are interrupted by soldiers who abduct the children and take them to a military training camp where they are groomed by anti-government forces to become rebel soldiers. Once trained, the boy soldiers return to their villages, massacre their families and plunder their homes. The story ends with scenes of grieving families and a heartfelt plea to stop child trafficking and violence.

1.4 Preparation period

Classes were part of the regular school programme. The 55-minute lessons were held four times a week from February to May (45 in all). Lessons occurred in the performance suite, a 12 by eight metre room with wooden floors and ragged central carpet square. The only furniture was a teacher's desk and a white board on the front wall. Nearer the competition, lessons moved into the hall which more closely replicated an authentic performance setting.

Each lesson followed a similar format. Prior to class, the well-organised teacher listed the planned activities on the white board, which students read on arrival. After settling the boys, she led a series of stretches and warm-up activities followed by varied drama exercises. Most activities were done in groups of three or four but as the routine took shape, boys progressively worked as a team unit. There was no written work. At the end of each lesson, teacher and students discussed what they had learned and boys were encouraged to identify their personal strengths and areas for improvement. Because the teacher was not dance-trained, she occasionally brought in specialists who took one-off classes in martial arts and contemporary dance. During these lessons, the teacher joined the class as "one of the boys". For the final three weeks, the boys worked exclusively on their SC routine, mostly in the hall, including performing to the school assembly (800 boys). They later had a dress rehearsal and technical rehearsal in the hall, with no audience. On the day before the competition, the boys received their final instructions in class, the teacher videoed and critiqued their performance and they were then given free time to relax after their hard work.

1.5 Performance day

Students arrived independently at the venue (a large sports stadium) by 8 am and were directed to their dressing room, in this case a makeshift area in the foyer separated by a

temporary wall and lined with plastic sheeting to limit damage from food and cosmetics. A school was already rehearsing on stage. Because this was a first-time SC experience for most of them, they were wide-eyed at the size of the venue, the loud music and the scale of the event, exclaiming loudly and asking questions. Apart from three on-stage rehearsals and two production meetings, students' time was their own. During the long day, students joined in a variety of activities initiated by the SC crew, including mass dance sessions and foyer competitions (karaoke, blind dates and find the mystery person). They also socialised with other competitors, ate and drank fast food, and watched rival teams rehearse.

Before dinner, students went into "lock down" and were confined to their dressing room space while the venue was readied for the performance. A slight glitch occurred when two of the boys, fooling around, collided heavily with each other resulting in two broken teeth, a head injury and a hospital admission. Consequently, the team went on stage minus two performers. However, they rose to the challenge and I watched from the audience as they delivered a slick, emotionally compelling performance which was loudly applauded by the 1600-strong audience of family, teachers and screaming peers.

Because of their small team size and minimal set, this team was never going to be in the winning three. Nevertheless, they received five awards of excellence for performance skill, soundtrack, drama, concept, and social awareness. They also received the student-voted Spirit of SC award for the most popular school. Students left the venue just before midnight.

2. Method

2.1 Detached observation

My priority in this first study was to be free from teaching and production responsibilities to concentrate on focussed observation. I particularly wanted to test the applicability of my conceptual framework, clarify my research objectives and hone my observation skills. I therefore requested permission to "sit in" on lessons as a detached or non-participant observer. My initial observation corresponded with the Boy Soldiers' first class and the procedure remained fairly predictable for the whole programme. The boys arrived noisily, pushing their way through the narrow door, tossing their bags and shoes into an untidy pile in the back corner. Each lesson I sat, shoeless, on the very cold floor hunched up against these bags with my notebook and pen, trying to look inconspicuous. Initially the boys looked at me curiously but, after the first lesson, they generally ignored me. Later, some said, "Hi Miss" on entering the room, but no-one engaged in conversation with me. The teacher, honouring my request to remain detached, entered and left the classroom without acknowledging me and this continued for the entire observation period. My detached stance enabled me to take

extensive notes and, wherever possible, I recorded student commentary verbatim. However, I tended not to take notes when the teacher was reprimanding individuals or when I sensed it would be embarrassing for them.

In all, I observed 30 of the 45 lessons, the at-school performance, dress rehearsal, technical rehearsal and the performance day, producing 154 A4 pages of handwritten field notes.

2.2 Supplementary measures

2.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered two weeks after the competition on a day designated by the teacher to all boys ($n=18$) who were at class (three were absent). The teacher and I were both on hand to assist with any interpretative difficulties. As noted in the previous chapter, I modified or supplemented the default questionnaire to suit each context. I will now outline the changes for this study.

Qualitative data

Because this was a school drama class, I asked students why they had self-selected into this option and whether the experience had matched their expectations. Additionally, because they were novice drama students, they were also asked to describe the easiest and hardest aspects of the experience. At the end of the questionnaire, I asked them what they would miss most about SC now that it was over.

Quantitative data

Emotions: Students were asked to report on their emotional responses at two points on the questionnaire: first, “looking back on your PRACTICES” and second, “looking back on your PERFORMANCE on the night”. The five positive and five negative emotions items were arranged into a checklist. Students rated how often they experienced each emotion on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 4 (0 = *not at all*; 2 = *sometimes*; and 4 = *a lot*).

Flow: As with emotions, I measured students’ flow responses to both practices and the performance on the questionnaire. To assess the practice experience, I used five items from the nine-dimension Flow State Scale (FSS: Jackson and Marsh, 1996; Jackson and Eklund, 2002). These five statements pertained to challenge-skills balance (*It was challenging, but I think I was good enough to cope with it*), feedback (*It was clear to me that I was doing well*), focus (*It was very easy to keep my mind on what I was meant to be doing*), lack of self-consciousness (*I was not worried about what others may have been thinking about me*) and optimal experience (*The SC experience left me feeling great*). The purpose of this measure was

not to confirm or deny the presence of flow, but rather to determine whether conditions existed during the practice period that may have been *conducive* to flow experiences.

To assess their on-stage experience, I used all nine dimensions from the FSS, thus adding time distortion (*My sense of time seemed to change when I was on-stage*), merging of action and awareness (*I knew my part so well that my movements were automatic*), clear expectations and goals (*I knew exactly what my teacher and my team expected of me*), and control (*I felt in control of what I was doing on stage*). Students used a five-point Likert-type scale (0 = *not at all true*; 2 = *sometimes true*; and 4 = *completely true*) to rate the degree to which they experienced each flow dimension.

Students' flow and emotions responses will both be reported as mean scores.

3. Key elements and opportunities.

The extent to which the key elements and opportunities of a "typical" SC experience were present for this team.

3.1 Music and dance

From my experience, dance (and by association, music) is a key feature of most SC experiences but, in this case, it was not an integral part of this team's practice period. Rather, this was principally a drama class, supplemented intermittently with rhythmic movement and body percussion work. There were occasional exceptions. For example, in the fourth week, a visiting female contemporary dance instructor was brought in to integrate a basic dance sequence into the routine, but the boys struggled to master the steps and the teacher abandoned this idea, reverting again to drama-focussed lessons. Later, a male instructor had more success when he taught martial arts movements to backing music. In reality, it was not until the complete performance routine was finalised and character roles assigned (week 7), that the boys' movements were synchronised to the soundtrack. At this point, their movements became more rhythmic, and marching, clapping and pulsing scenes were added to the routine. This experience, then, was certainly not grounded in dance.

3.2 Competition

For this team, the preparation period was not competition-centred. Rather, it was an extended period of classroom instruction culminating in public performance. If anything, it had the feel of a teacher preparing a class for an external examination. While the teacher frequently mentioned the term "challenge", I never heard her use the word "competition".

3.3 Public performance

In contrast, public performance was emphasised from the outset. At the first lesson, the teacher stressed that their goal was to prepare for a high-profile public performance, during which they would convey a social message to the audience. She was also explicit that a poor performance would reflect badly on her and she did not want to be embarrassed by boys who “got up there and acted like idiots”. To prepare for this, boys were expected to frequently demonstrate dramatic vignettes in class and to act as models when the teacher demonstrated new tasks. In week ten, the lessons shifted to the school hall and each run-through was conducted under quasi-performance conditions. The teacher also regularly videoed their practices and she and the boys critiqued them at the end of lessons. The boys’ biggest performance challenge was their display at a school assembly in front of 800 peers, mainly because they were unsure how their mates would react to them doing “girl stuff”.

3.4 Team

This was very much a team-based experience. From the outset, all tasks were carried out collectively, initially in groups of two or three, but increasingly as half-class or full-class groups. There were no solo roles in the routine, with the on-stage performers assigned to one of three equal-sized and equally contributing groups.

3.5 Youth initiative

It was also a teacher-directed experience, although boys did contribute a little to the music soundtrack and costume design. However, the teacher selected the theme, led the practices and master-minded the choreography. Each lesson plan was prescribed and while students were expected to create movement or dramatic sequences during group work, it was always done under the scrutiny of the teacher and any off-task behaviour was quickly reined in. Likewise, any student ideas tended to be in response to teacher questioning rather than being spontaneous or youth-initiated. The only exception was when the teacher abdicated her supervisor role to senior students on performance day.

3.6 Social interaction

Within class, the tight lesson structure of the lessons did not allow much time for informal socialising. In fact, the teacher was quick to shut down casual conversations even during independent group work. However, as the practice period progressed, boys increasingly interacted with each other, exchanging news when they got the chance. Conversely, they took full advantage of the performance day to socialise with the senior team from their school that

was competing at the same event and to mix with the other schools. In particular, many of the boys chatted with female competitors from other schools.

4. Growth and well-being experiences

Developmental experiences that evolve during SC, particularly those that are of considerable interest to students, increase their knowledge base or expand them in some way, giving them new skills or new ways of interacting with others.

Unless otherwise stated, all boys' comments in this section have been derived from their open-ended comments on the questionnaire.

4.1 Autonomy

The extent to which students regulate their own behaviour and experience, and govern the initiation and direction of their action during SC.

Given the teacher-directed nature of the preparation period, it is not surprising that student autonomy was not a key feature of this team's experience. The lessons were tightly structured and controlled and, because this was a time-tabled class, it seemed this what the boys expected. They arrived, glanced at the lesson plan on the whiteboard and then waited for the teacher's instructions.

Conversely, from an observational perspective, autonomy support (i.e., assisting students to regulate their behaviour and generate their own experiences) was a striking aspect of the boys' preparation process. In this case, the teacher's priority was supporting the boys to work without constant supervision and direction, to regulate their unruly behaviour and to work as a collective unit. As she explained at the first lesson:

Most of you have never been on stage before. And I can tell by the way you just came into the room that you have a lot to learn about self-control and respect for other people. This is very important when you are performers, especially when you are performing as a team. Over the next 12 weeks, my mission is to shape you into a functional performance unit. This means you will have to put your egos aside and start thinking like a team. You'll also need to work hard on performance techniques so that you can get out on that stage alone. Because, believe me, I'll be nowhere in sight!

From the first day, the teacher put these principles into practice. She established and maintained non-negotiable classroom rules (no shoes, be on time, keep off the walls) and predictable routines which encouraged focus and self-discipline. Unruly boys were named on the white board; a second offence earned a cross beside the name; a third, and the boy was sent from the room to the Deans' office (all managed with non-verbal gestures so that the teacher never interrupted a lesson to deal with a troublesome student). She repeatedly

emphasised, “Unless you learn to control your behaviour as individuals, you’ll never be able to function as a team”.

Second, she demonstrated and demanded respect among students and towards her (“no put downs” and “make eye contact when speaking to someone”) by adopting a zero-tolerance approach to derogatory comments and insisting that boys be supportive of one another. One of her catch phrases was, “We see people not as they are but as *we* are”. For example, when Michael sniggered at Ricky’s remark:

T: I take that as a put down. Apologise to Ricky, then go write 3 positive things about him on a scrap of paper. Show them to me, then carry them with you in your pocket for the rest of the lesson.

Michael: Ok Miss. Sorry, Miss. Sorry, Ricky.

T: Ok. And instead of saying sorry next time, just don’t do it again. When you are on-stage, you need to know you are pulling together, not setting each other up for failure.

Third, she promoted collaborative behaviour and many of her teaching strategies deliberately fostered this. For example, she began every lesson with team building exercises, and finished classes with team “fun” games. She drew attention to behaviour that enhanced team cohesion (“Group A, the way you worked together to come up with that idea was awesome”). Furthermore, her comments were punctuated by team-centred remarks, for example, “Part of being a group is a corporate responsibility”, which was also in poster form on the class notice board. If a boy complained about another class member, her response was inevitably something like, “I’m not interested in individual issues in this class. We are a team. If you want to discuss your problem further, make an office appointment with me”.

Fourth, each task had clear goals which the teacher consistently referenced to boy soldiers, thus keeping the performance theme at the forefront of the experience (“Today, we are working on levels. This will make us look more interesting on stage. It will also show the difference in power between the three groups in our story. By the end of this lesson, I hope you will be able to...”). At the end of each lesson, the boys critiqued their own behaviour and gave each other feedback on how their “performances” had gone and what they needed to practise more.

Fifth, by having numerous performance opportunities during class, boys began to connect with the notion of authentic performance. When they struggled with new concepts, she took to the stage with them. She modelled courteous audience behaviour (“You do not talk while others are performing. That’s incredibly rude” or, “When they have finished, it is ok to give feedback, but be careful with your choice of language”). By week four, when the teacher asked boys to

demonstrate a movement, most readily volunteered whereas at the beginning they had to be cajoled into doing so. Moreover, when sent off to do exercises in groups, boys began to initiate ideas, rather than waiting for the teacher to come by and kick-start them. By week six, the more competent students were actively requesting less teacher support, for example:

Harry: Hey Miss. Can we do it this time, without you counting?

T: Sure, but make your corners sharp and don't lose your focus.

However, as soon as their focus or self-discipline slipped, she quickly resumed control.

Once lessons were moved to the hall for the final four weeks, the teacher had to go back to basics as boys adjusted to a new space with a new set of rules ("No, you *can't* touch the pipe organ"; "Those curtains are worth thousands of dollars. *Leave them alone*"; "No, the hall *is not* a football field that you charge up and down on"). Indeed, my field notes were peppered with remonstrative remarks that this focussed teacher dispensed lesson after lesson. Gradually, though, the boys settled down, and by week 11, I noted:

The boys have really hooked into the music now. As soon as they hear the soundtrack, they go into character. I see them in small groups or individually going over and over their moves, counting the beats out loud to themselves, absorbed in their own roles. The music has focused them. It was interesting to see Kevin return to class today after 3 weeks' absence. When he tried to mock their concentration, they told him to "bugger off" because they needed to hear the music. Shows how far they have come.

The teacher's quest to enhance the boys' self-responsible behaviour was put to the test on performance day when, an hour before the performance, she had two injured, profusely bleeding boys to deal with. The boys now had to get themselves on-stage, minus two performers, without her at their side. They also had to reconfigure their stage positions to accommodate the missing boys without rehearsing it in advance. They did this without a hitch. As I later recorded, "This teacher did a fantastic job and the boys were a credit her and to themselves".

According to the boys' questionnaire comments, without exception, they, too, were delighted with their competition performance and were proud of their ability to work as an independent team unit. As Matt enthused:

I was blown away by what we did. I thought it would be a total mess because it was a group of boys trying to dance together. I mean, we were actually bloody hopeless when we started. But I found out that boys can cooperate and perform a dance in front of 1000s of people and not stuff up. It turned out to be awesome and it was such a great night.

4.2 Integrity

The extent to which SC reflects students' values, beliefs and ways of "being" in the world

Initially, this dance-drama class was not a comfortable place for most of the boys, very few of whom had previous performing arts experience. At our preliminary meeting, the teacher described them as "mostly low academic achievers with chequered discipline records who chose this class because they thought it would be the easy option with no bookwork". Indeed, according to their questionnaire comments, most boys had expected to be greeted at the first lesson with a ready-made hip hop routine. They had certainly not expected to be working on repetitive drama exercises set to a soundtrack of classical music. In fact, one of the teacher's initial statements to them was, "This experience is going to put you right out of your comfort zone", and it surely did.

The teacher's first mission was to support boys to set aside their preconception that lyrical or character dancing was "not for boys" and this was no easy task. In the first few weeks, it was fascinating to observe the fluctuations in the boys' focus and level of compliance in relation to their comfort level with the teacher-directed tasks. Some activities, especially the ice breaker and warm-up games, and anything that required throwing, catching or physical strength immediately resonated with them and the whole class participated energetically and enthusiastically. Conversely, the contemporary dance lessons were met with derisive comments ("Jeez Miss, why do we have to do this girly stuff") and the teacher never managed to really get compliance with this. Most noticeably, any activities that involved gentle or flowing movements, or overt emotional expression, seemed challenging and embarrassing. Their common response was, "This is *so* boring" and they tended to make the minimum physical effort, casting smirking looks at the few students who did. The teacher had to work hard to combat this. Despite their protests, I did note that boys learnt moves more quickly and with less reluctance when they were linked to music and that the Maori and Pasifika students, who tended to be the least confident with drama, became more animated and confident when supported by a music soundtrack.

At the same time as the teacher encouraged boys to set aside their gender-based preconceptions about dance, she also emphasised that this was not just a performance, but a "performance with a substantial message, a performance with integrity". As she said, "You are not only dancing about Benny, you are also dancing *for* Benny." Thus, as the lessons progressed, most activities were referenced to Benny and the plight of the "Invisible Children" of Africa. For example, when the Capoeira (martial arts) instructor visited and led the boys (and their teacher) through a strenuous workout involving attack and defence moves, I noted:

The boys were spellbound by this lesson. The instructor was a young, extremely fit man to whom they immediately related. He kept the boys moving non-stop for 50 minutes. They were dripping with sweat (poooh!). Leaping, combatting, falling, all with an emphasis on self-discipline and control. If a boy even whispered to his mate, he was told to sit out for 5 minutes. He had them eating out of the palm of his hand. Half way through the lesson, he began to talk about Benny, asking the boys how *they* would feel if solders came crashing into the classroom using Capoeira-like moves to abduct them. He then made the boys repeat the sequences. The effect was quite chilling. Suddenly, they understood the significance of their routine.

These Capoeira movements were later incorporated into the kidnapping sequence in the routine. Additionally, the teacher showed DVDs or read articles which highlighted the theme and gradually these experiences were woven into a coherent theatre piece. To further authenticate students' experience, the teacher acquired African bracelets from the Invisible Children organisation which boys sold to fellow pupils to fundraise for Ugandan children. The boys wore these "Benny bracelets" every day. At their school performance, the boys showed a DVD and gave an oral presentation about Benny. At the teacher's instigation and after considerable in-class debate, the boys also decided to collectively have their heads shaved in the playground during a lunch-time to raise funds for Benny and to assist them to go into character for the SC performance. The head-shaving was attended by the local media and a group photo of the shaven boys appeared on the front page the following day. Their change in attitude to the routine after this event was palpable. I recorded:

The boys have finally stopped doing battle with the teacher about the act of dancing and have bought into the experience. They spent today reflecting on their school performance and they sounded like seasoned professionals. Students were leaping to their feet as they spoke and demonstrating how moves could be improved. They haven't even mentioned their bald heads which look very white to me! They are also bursting with ideas about what else they can do for the Invisible Children, how they can raise more money and get more publicity for their cause. They talk about Benny as if he is one of them. I wanted to jump up and cheer!

Thus, this skilled teacher subtly, but progressively increased the integrity value of the experience by using dance-type movements that were relevant and appropriate for 14 year-old boys and by linking the theme to a boy of their age who needed their advocacy.

On the questionnaire, two weeks after performance day, boys rated their sense of integrity during SC, using a five point Likert-type scale (0 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*). Both integrity items for the practice experience were rated highly: SC was really "me" ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.81$) and "I felt like I could be myself at SC practices" ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.70$). Their integrity rating for the performance experience was similarly high: SC was really "me" ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.75$). Their scores thus reinforced my observations that the majority of boys felt that both the preparation period and performance resonated with "who they are".

4.3 Belonging

Students' sense of connection to, and love and care from their SC team and the wider SC community.

At the end of my first week of observations, I described the *Boy Soldiers* as,

...an amorphous bunch that has yet to become a group or community. They all look a bit uncomfortable in their own skins and with each other. Some know each other, but mostly they are linked only by their option choice. They certainly don't seem to have any concept that SC is all about teamwork.

To address this, the teacher consistently maintained classroom rules based on mutual co-operation and respect. She designed exercises that relied on group cohesion to achieve a result and acknowledged students who demonstrated positive team behaviour. It was a slow and painstaking journey for both the teacher and students with many challenging incidents as exemplified in week 5. I recorded:

Today students were given a trust task in threes, where blindfolded students had to fall backwards, relying on a partner to catch them, and then push them forwards, into the arms of the other partner. Students did not take this seriously, laughing loudly and letting each other crash (quite dangerously) to the ground. The teacher was furious with them. Saying nothing, she gathered the boys in a tight circle round her, tied the blindfold on herself and, without warning, launched herself forwards and backwards at the surrounding boys in the expectation they would catch her. "Shit, she's game!" I thought. But the mood became immediately quiet and sombre. The teacher kept throwing herself backwards in every direction and the boys did not drop her once. Still wearing the blindfold, she explained: "I trusted you to catch me, and you did. But you didn't even trust your own friends. How can you be a trustworthy team on stage if you can't even trust each other in the classroom? Get into pairs and try it again".

It was a powerful teaching moment and one of many very effective demonstrations of teamwork by the teacher. To further model this, she often joined the student ranks as a fellow pupil ("I'll be one of you guys today"), participating in the strenuous martial arts sessions and engaging in vigorous physical contact with the boys (even though she was smaller than all of them), always upholding pro-team behaviour and self-control.

Encouragingly, some examples of belonging were evident after a few lessons. By week 3, boys began to greet each other by name as they arrived, contribute to class discussion without put-downs and work collaboratively on dramatic movement in small groups. When they managed to complete an error-free sequence, they high-fived and bashed each other vigorously on the backs. As I noted, "Nothing gentle about this lot!" In the ten-minute debrief at the end of each lesson, students often referred to their team contribution as a personal strength. For example, "I'm finding I can work well with people that I don't normally mix with. I'm quite enjoying it

and I feel quite proud about that". By the last two weeks, when all lessons were effectively performance rehearsals, the class was finally functioning as a cohesive unit and I noted:

The teacher is no longer promoting pro-team behaviour because she actually has a "team". Finally now, she can turn her attention to technical issues and is fine-tuning each boy's individual performance skills and stage presence. Even better, when she does this, it does not compromise the coherence of the group.

There were, though, three boys who persistently struggled with the team dynamic: Marty, was cooperative, but always seemed uncomfortable with dramatic performance and remained on the fringe during group work, his head lowered and his eyes furtively watching the others. The teacher spoke encouraging words to him but did not force him to join in, and the rest of the team seemed to accept his intermittent participation; of more concern was Ricky, who was keen but never accepted by the boys. When told to form groups, he roamed the room while students deliberately and consistently excluded him by turning their backs on him. Eventually the teacher would place him in a group, but again the boys would collectively ostracise him. Usually he made up his own moves and performed alongside the others, rather than with them. This was mitigated when the class began to operate as a full team unit, but even on the performance day, Ricky remained separate from the team and sat on his own for most of the time; and finally Kevin, who had three weeks' off school for health reasons, struggled to re-integrate into the team after they had become a performance unit in his absence. For several lessons he was disruptive and uncooperative and disparaging of his "mates" who, he claimed, had become "teacher's pussies". Gradually and reluctantly he up-skilled and, with a few days to spare, finally became a productive team member.

As noted, the short lessons and strict classroom discipline did not permit much informal interaction between boys. At the performance day, however, it was quite the opposite. When describing the best aspects of performance day on the questionnaire, the most-mentioned feature was the opportunities for socialising. They were excited to have a whole day off school and the chance to meet new people and make new mates. One boy commented that he enjoyed "hanging out and kicking with the class for the day". More than half the class relished meeting girls because, as one boy wryly noted, "there's not much chance for that at this blokes' school". For nearly all the students, the worst aspect of the day was going home because, as they remarked, they didn't want the fun to end.

In sum, although initially a disparate bunch, they were moulded by the teacher into an effective performance unit and, when asked on the questionnaire to describe "*what new skills have you learnt?*" most indicated team work. Moreover, many of their comments were framed in the teacher's vernacular, with students using terms like "teamship" and "corporate

responsibility". At the same time, the majority of boys also acknowledged that teamship is hard-earned. As one boy noted, "The hardest thing of all was working with others who joke and piss-arse around, like, drop you on the ground and stuff."

However, from my detached position, it was difficult to ascertain whether this strong sense of teamship translated into feelings of belonging, with only one boy acknowledging on the questionnaire, "The best thing about SC was becoming friends with the people I did it with". Nevertheless, as with integrity, the quantitative measures for belonging did indicate that boys did feel a sense of connection with their team mates. Both belonging items for the practice experience were rated highly (five point Likert-type scale, 0 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*): "SC practices gave me a sense of togetherness with my school team" ($M = 3.33, SD = 0.77$) and "I think I will remain friends with the people I did SC with" ($M = 3.28, SD = 0.75$). The boys also rated the belonging item for their performance experience highly: "The SC performance gave me a sense of togetherness with my school team" ($M = 3.28, SD = 0.75$).

4.4 Accomplishments

Awards received knowledge and skills gained, and areas of personal development during SC.

Awards

Given the size of the boys' on-stage team (only 19 performers after the demise of the "head butters"), they did extremely well to collect five awards of excellence, especially since all the opposition teams had 80-plus members. The teacher was elated when results were announced, jumping up and down and rushing to hug the boys. The boys were also pleased but fairly low-key in their reactions, grinning and shrugging their shoulders. Two were so busy talking to girls in a rival team that they did not even look up as the results were announced.

Two weeks after the event, they seemed accepting of their result and in response to the questionnaire statement, "*I was disappointed we didn't get placed in the top three schools*", five boys indicated "not at all", seven, "a little bit", and four, "partly true". Only two were completely disappointed.

Knowledge and skills

One of the teacher's key objectives was to equip the boys with performance skills and the five awards of excellence were tangible proof that she succeeded. In my field notes, I listed more than 30 dramatic art or performance strategies that she imparted to the boys during practices, including characterisation, emotional expression, mime, stomp, use of music cues, working to rhythms, stage use, lighting design, colour palettes and Capoeira.

On the questionnaire, students' qualitative comments regarding skills they had learnt likewise centred on performance skills, with boys reporting that they learnt to "change emotions for different scenes", "move in time to the music", "do the cartwheel", "listen to instructions", "keep a straight face", and "just stand still". However, many also commented on how long it took them to perfect the routine. For example, "Everything was quite hard, but I found that once we had practised lots, it got heaps easier. Just learning step by step and taking it a tiny bit farther each time to try and get it perfect". A few boys also voiced their appreciation of the teacher's input, with one boy enthusing, "The teacher was awesome. She taught us heaps". Indeed, it was noteworthy how many times the boys referenced the teacher in their comments, for example, "I learnt how to get on with the job and just do my bit exactly how [Ms X] wanted it to be".

The teacher was also keen to expand the boys' world knowledge and she used a wide range of supplementary material to bring Benny's story to life, culminating in the poignant head-shaving event. Fundraising activities also put the boys in direct contact with the Invisible Children Association. Several boys noted that they had learnt about boy soldiers, with one boy stating on the questionnaire, "I've learnt not to take life for granted because there are a lot less fortunate kids out there that need help. I had no idea that things like boy soldiers existed".

However, by far the most cited skill on the questionnaire was boys' increased awareness of teamwork (or teamship, as many of them called it), with the majority of students making comments like, "I learnt how to interact with people", "We learned to work together in time", "I learned to share the load" and "We learned to have fun performing as a group".

The boys were also asked whether the experience matched their expectations and, despite their dance reluctance in the classroom, the majority of boys expressed disappointment that they had not learnt more dance skills. Several boys indicated they had expected hip hop or break dancing to be a central part of the tuition process. As one boy commented, "I joined up because I like performing and I thought there would be more full-on dance training and after-school workouts. But there wasn't and that's cool".

Finally, I asked boys to describe the easiest aspect of the experience. Here, most boys referred to the activities involving vigorous physical movement as experienced in the Capoeira lesson and the warm-up games. Despite their novice status, performing on-stage was also "easy" for most of the boys, again suggesting that they had been well-prepared by their teacher.

Personal development

Throughout, the teacher kept insisting that “competent performance does not come without self-control”. Over the long practice period, I observed boys become increasingly settled and focussed, engaging with the practical activities and employing fewer diversionary tactics such as hiding behind the stage curtain or surreptitiously prodding a classmate. It was encouraging to see this reflected in their response to the question, “What did you learn about yourself during SC?” Here, the boys noted that they had learned control, trust, focus, confidence, respect (“not only of the teacher but of my fellow students”), co-operation, interaction and time management, all terms which had been used by the teacher and apparently internalised by the boys.

At the same time, they all noted that pre-performance nerves were one of the most difficult aspects of the overall experience, including the stress of waiting back-stage in the “poky little room” and “being stacked up against bigger, older teams”. Nevertheless, nearly all the boys also commented on their sense of achievement at having “survived” on-stage before a large crowd, something they had doubted their ability to do. As one boy said, “I learned I could perform a dance in front of thousands and not muck up” and another, “I found out I don’t have to be shy and stage-frightened if I don’t want to be”.

4.5 Identity

The collaborative process between students and the SC context to foster a self-determined, cohesive sense of self.

Although most of the boys had some existing knowledge of SC from observing previous teams at school assemblies, it appeared that, initially, very few understood the full implications of their enlistment in the drama option. Indeed, from my early observations and the teacher’s comments, their understanding of what constituted a SC performer (for them, a hip hop dancer) and the teacher’s notion (an actor, using rhythmic movements to convey a story) were very divergent. They were not used to being without their desks and had little previous experience of stagecraft or public performance. Small wonder then, that the teacher’s starting point was to work on self-control and team work.

My field notes indicated that boys adopted performer identities in various ways and with varying degrees of commitment during the practice period. Harry, for example, despite being a novice performer, was immediately comfortable with this new role, demonstrating this by tackling each task enthusiastically, taking the lead in groups and volunteering creative suggestions in the sharing circle. He identified with being both a performer and a leader in this context. David, on the other hand, persistently questioned the teacher’s authority, talking back

to her and challenging her instructions during group work. Conversely, when he went into stage character, he was chillingly convincing as a guerrilla soldier; his eyes were narrow and glazed and he manhandled the other boys to the point of being violent. Marty never really became a performer and stood out as a “reluctant dancer”, even on performance day. His movements remained half-hearted and he inevitably sidled to a back corner in the classroom whenever dance activities began. Slowly, though, most boys began to engage more energetically and enthusiastically with the routine, leaping to their feet after instructions were given and concentrating more on their own movements than those of their peers. By week five, encouragingly, the teacher was focussing less on discipline and more on drama techniques, reflecting the boys’ internalisation of performer identities.

Not only were the boys trialling a variety of performing arts identities for the first time (actor, dancer, performer, SC competitor) but they were also assigned character roles (child soldier, adult soldier or African villager) which required them to adopt and portray an identity that was far removed from their own experience. For many, this multi-faceted identity experience was difficult because it involved unfamiliar, challenging roles explored in a very public arena. Again, the teacher employed many techniques to emotionally connect the boys with their stage characters. For me, the most noteworthy example was when students were flippantly enacting the massacre scene, collapsing in giggles as they dragged each other across the room and emitting Kung Fu grunts when they “murdered” family members. The teacher became more and more exasperated, eventually yelling at them, “It’s time you boys grew up! This *is not* a play-station game! Do you *really* think Benny would have behaved like this?” Finally, to help them hook into character, she lined the boys up at the front of the room, waited until they were composed and then asked them to name the most special person in their life. Most said, “My Mum”. She then asked them to imagine they had a machine gun and to role-play the murder of that person while shouting out their names. They repeated this again and again until the teacher was satisfied they had connected with the horror of the scenario. As I recorded, “This is confrontational stuff”. While I did ponder on the appropriateness of this teaching strategy in my field notes, there was no doubt that the authenticity of their on-stage identities changed dramatically after this.

As the routine became more cohesive, group identity (SC team) also became more salient. This was boosted when students shaved their heads, particularly when the teacher also had her shoulder-length hair lopped (“If you guys raise enough money, I’ll get my head shaved too”) and from team coverage in the media. Students learned a further life-lesson about identity when three boys deferred from shaving their heads (“Hey Miss, I don’t want to be a baldie”). While this could have threatened team solidarity, the teacher affirmed their right to maintain

their right to “be hairy” without it compromising their group status. Interestingly, on performance day, the hairy boys arrived – with shaved heads!

Amusingly, two days after the head shaving, one boy arrived at class with an intricate design shaved into his hair. From then on, the boys began to create extravagant shaved-head designs (Maori motifs, geometric patterns, text message abbreviations) and, on arrival at lessons, there was much mirth and swagger as they tried to one-up each other with the most outrageous creations. Normally this would not have been permissible in the school, but the teacher negotiated an amnesty on hairstyles “in the interest of art” until the SC performance. This was one of the few instances of boys truly putting their own stamp on the experience and ironically, while it had very little to do with their actual SC performance, it did reinforce their identity in the school as “the SC team”. Ironically, the group gained more kudos and recognition when they shaved their heads than when they performed, not so much because of their altruistic motives but because, according to Sam, “my friend said that us guys are lucky to be in a cool option where we’re allowed to do things like this”.

At the same time, three sub-groups, which corresponded to the on-stage character groups, developed within the class. The teacher referred to them as the blue, orange or black groups, because of the colour of their boiler suit costumes, and students soon took on these names when discussing the routine. As the performance approached, the boys increasingly identified with these on-stage groups and began to self-critique in these configurations, often without teacher direction.

Nevertheless, group identity was also a fragile thing when the psychological “safety” of the performance suite was breached, for example when lessons ran over time and the boys’ friends congregated outside the windows to watch. The students then lost concentration and often sabotaged the lesson by acting the fool, suggesting that while being a performer was acceptable in class, it was not an identity that sat easily with them outside the confines of the drama suite.

This was further exemplified by their apprehension before the school assembly performance, when they unanimously expressed concern to the teacher that their peers would mock their “gay” routine. Notably, during their performance, supervising staff members paced the aisles with their backs to the stage, showing no interest in the performance. Even worse, after the performance, the Deputy Principal, who was running the assembly, made no mention of their effort and immediately began to read the weekend rugby results. I noted, “This was a total snub and completely invalidated their efforts. I felt really bad for the boys and especially for the teacher”. As Malen remarked when they returned to class:

How slack was that? If ya don't do rugby, they think ya suck in this place. Did ya see those dickhead teachers? They didn't even look at us the whole time. Didn't even give us a clap at the end. I never want to go back on that stage again.

In fact, several boys on the questionnaire commented that performing to the school assembly was one of the worst aspects of the experience because, as one boy explained, "at school you know everybody and they mock you, but at the competition it's like they're all strangers". I suspect at this point, many of the boys were seriously questioning whether this was an identity role that had value for them

Their group identity really kicked in at the performance day when their "play acting" transformed into genuine public performance. The boys were assigned their own dressing room, wore their team t-shirts and saw their team name on the programme. Each of these seemed to reinforce the boys' awareness of the group and its function and cement their identity as a performer. When commenting on whether SC had been as he expected, one boy noted:

It was way more real and serious than I expected. Staying there all day made it feel like the real deal specially with all the rehearsals and the smoke and the lights and everyone cheering. I thought we'd be home at 4 o'clock like school. I couldn't believe how big the audience was and we were actually up there doing our thing. It was much more scary than I expected but way more fun too. It was awesome.

Their sense of group identity was further validated by the awards and audience feedback which was loud, vocal and positive, confirming their competency as performers and the social acceptability of their group. Furthermore, they were proud that they were able to communicate a social message to the audience through their on-stage personae. Even better, they saw large contingents of male dancers in the other teams who performed all the dance styles they had previously been so derogatory about. One boy on the questionnaire declared, "I found out that boys actually *can* dance, even the ballet stuff and I couldn't believe what awesome dancers they were. I wish we could have danced like them and had all those cool costumes". Another stated, "I've learnt that I love performing in public. I've discovered I'm an attention seeker!" Three boys noted that the experience showed them "that I can't dance" but they were still keen to participate again, illustrating that the activity resonated with their identity while acknowledging the limits of their skills. All boys reported that "the performance" or "being on stage" was the best thing about both the overall experience and the performance day.

Overall, thanks to skilled teaching and a successful performance day, these boys not only developed into (mostly) compliant and engaged students, but also adopted new identities as SC competitors. This was reinforced on the questionnaire, with all boys indicating they would

definitely like to repeat the experience, and all but one wanting to do SC in the future. However, only eight of the boys indicated they would definitely be pursuing other performing arts activities in the future, suggesting that it was the SC package that had become their identity project, rather than performing arts in general.

4.6 Flow

The subjective psychological state experienced when totally absorbed in a challenging activity and having the necessary skills to accomplish it.

One of the key requisites for a flow experience is that it involves a challenging task and several of the boys on the questionnaire indicated that their main reason for enlisting was to try something new that would push them out of their “comfort zone”. This was indeed the case and it took many lessons before boys overcame their reluctance to portray expression through movement and perform in front of others. Consequently, flow moments (from my observations) did not prevail during practices except on three occasions. First, in week six, after abandoning efforts to teach the boys contemporary dance steps, the teacher devised a 90 second “stomp” routine (stamp, clap, slap sequences set to a percussion accompaniment) to represent soldiers marching. This was complex and the sequential interactive pattern meant that if anyone made a mistake, the whole group lost the rhythm and they all had to begin again. After four days, and dozens of attempts, they still hadn’t mastered it. I recorded:

Initially, whenever someone made a mistake, the others would piss-take and jostle them. Then, one by one, they started to get caught up in the sequence and became increasingly exasperated by boys who lost concentration and mucked up. Finally, by the fourth day, a tipping point was reached when the mood of the majority became collectively serious and focussed. I could see them counting the steps under their breath and concentrating hard. Suddenly it became very important to NOT make a mistake and, on the fifth day, they ultimately nailed it. They were STOKED. They cheered, high-fived and whooped and the teacher was pleased. This was probably their first truly successful moment.

A similar moment occurred with “waking the dead”, a segment of the routine that required them to form a circle around the dead people, arms around each other’s shoulders, moving their bodies up and down in unison to gentle classical music, while the “murdered” villagers rose up as spirits. I noted:

The boys love the “waking the dead” scene where they form a close-knit pulsing group to raise up the spirits of their families. The combined impact of the music and the sequential ripple effect of their body movements seem to draw the boys into the emotion of the piece and even though the rest of the routine is ragged and random, every time they get to this part, they become completely absorbed into it. It is vigorous with powerful unified movements and they are totally in touch with the music and with each other. I don’t think they even realise they are dancing! They want to do it over and over again. It’s lovely to watch and I can feel the energy of the emotion.

Finally, when the entire routine had been taught and students began to rehearse it as a continuous and complete sequence, another flow moment seemed to occur (week 10). As their recall became automatic and the storyline became clearer, they moved deeper and deeper into character. I commented:

It's interesting to see the boys' focus intensify about four minutes into the routine. It seems to be the combined impact of the music and the solemnity of the execution scene. It is especially obvious with Neil, who is usually chirpy and cheeky with a constant grin on his face, but with the (imaginary) gun in his hand, he suddenly morphs into a cold blooded guerrilla soldier. It is quite poignant and chilling and like them, I get lost in the story.

Thus, although I did not take flow measures during practices, in these three incidents, I observed evidence of challenge-skills balance, a clear understanding of the task at hand, total focus, unselfconsciousness, the merging of action and awareness, a clear understanding they had done well, and afterwards a sense of optimal experience as they celebrated their accomplishments. In fact, the only flow dimension I was not able to observe was time distortion.

For the performance itself, I had to rely on boys' questionnaire descriptions to infer the presence of flow. When asked to use one word to describe SC, the predominant adjective was "awesome" (but also "cool", "great", "wicked", "exciting", "best ever") which equates with the notion of optimal experience. When commenting on the best aspects of SC, ten boys used the word "fun" and eight said they "loved it". Others referred to the distortion of time during the performance ("it was over so quick"), feedback from the audience ("I wanted the applause to go on forever. It was mint!"), meeting challenges ("it was a good feeling achieving our goals") and the pull of new challenges ("I can't wait to do it again for many years to come"). The language used and the content of the boys' commentary certainly imply the presence of flow. Interestingly, the boys did not overtly link the performance buzz to the act of dancing or music, but rather to the mastering of a personal challenge and the thrill of live feedback from the audience.

On the questionnaire, students responded to five statements from the short Flow State Scale to retrospectively assess their flow responses during the practice period, and all nine statements to assess their on-stage experience. The mean scores are presented in Figure 4. Contrary to my previous research, the boys' ratings were remarkably consistent for both the practice period and the actual performance and indeed their sense of optimal experience was marginally higher for the practice period. This may well reflect the high quality of the teacher's instruction and the students' appreciation of it. Additionally, the teacher's emphasis on self-discipline and clearly defined performance behaviour may possibly explain the higher means for clear goals

and self-control during the performance experience. Most notably, all nine dimensions were above average for the performance, although admittedly the sample size is very small.

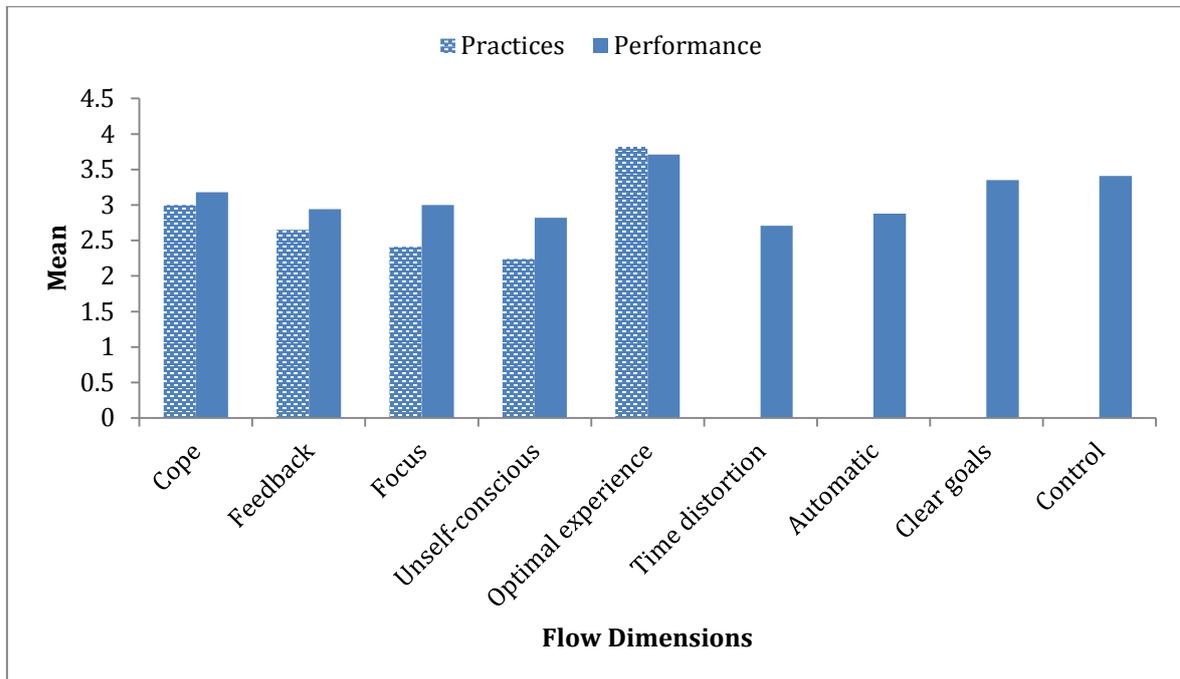


Figure 4. Mean ratings for each flow dimension for practice period (five dimensions only) and on-stage performance (0 = not at all true; 4 = completely true) ($n = 18$).

4.7 Emotions

Students' experience and regulation of their positive and negative affective states.

From my observer position, apart from minor incidents, the boys' emotional experience appeared relatively calm and consistent throughout. There was little opportunity for informal interaction during lessons and this seemed to preclude emotional outbursts, both positive and negative. I therefore had to rely heavily on body language to get some indication of boys' feelings. For example, I have no doubt that Ricky felt anxious and lonely when he was ostracised and his brooding face, hunched shoulders and shifty eyes reflected this. He did not, however, overtly seek support for this. Likewise, I came to recognise that boys covered up nervousness or embarrassment with facetious remarks, complaints about being bored, or with physical jostling. The only time they were really open about their emotions was just before their school performance when they collectively expressed their nervousness about performing before peers, and afterwards, their indignation at being snubbed. However, the teacher tended to brush aside boys' comments about their feelings and instead concentrated on the technical aspects of their performance. In a similar vein, the day before the performance, which tends to be a cause for celebration and pre-performance hype, the lesson was low-key, skills-focussed and controlled. As I recorded:

I came bouncing into class on the last day with a box of personalised t-shirts that were hot off the press. This is usually a BIG moment - a celebration of the end of the practice journey and an affirmation of their team identity. In most schools, the kids are allowed to wear them for the whole day. However, the teacher intercepted me at the door, grabbed the box off me and said, "Oh no, it'll be chaotic if we give them out now". I felt really deflated, partly because I had spent hours procuring them, but more because the boys were being cheated of a really special moment. Instead they were issued at the venue the next day because the teacher said she did not trust the boys to look after them overnight. It was almost as if the teacher was too scared to let them do anything spontaneous in case their behaviour spiralled out of control. The boys did not know any different, but I found it hard to observe.

The boys were similarly contained during performance day. They did not have a school chant and when they asked the teacher if they could perform the school Haka (a traditional Maori battle chant), the teacher told them it was not appropriate unless they won. When waiting in the wings prior to their on-stage performance, they became very subdued and still; when they exited the stage they were flushed and grinning, but not over-excited. They were quick to return to the dressing room, rip off their boiler suits and get back to the auditorium. It thus appeared that the teacher had done a good job of shaping them into an effective performance unit, including teaching them emotional self-control (apart from the irony of losing two performers to hospital after a display of physical exuberance).

On the questionnaire, boys rated the extent to which they experienced five positive and five negative emotions during the practice period and during the performance (see Figure 5). Like flow, the two periods were rated very similarly, with the performance scores slightly higher, except for boredom and frustration which were rated more highly during practices and nervousness which was higher during the performance. Positive emotions received much higher ratings than negative emotions, suggesting that the teacher's tight lesson structure and strict disciplinary control did not seem to negatively impact on boys' positive perception of the practice experience. In fact, it may have enhanced it because these boys certainly did not experience the emotional roller coaster that can occur when students are at the helm, as demonstrated in my previous study. Moreover, the *Boy Soldiers* were subjected to many life lessons about regulating emotions both on and off-stage which they not only put into practice at the performance but were able to articulate on the questionnaire. There were occasions, however, when I did wonder if their creative spirits would have benefited from more opportunities for emotional spontaneity and free choice.

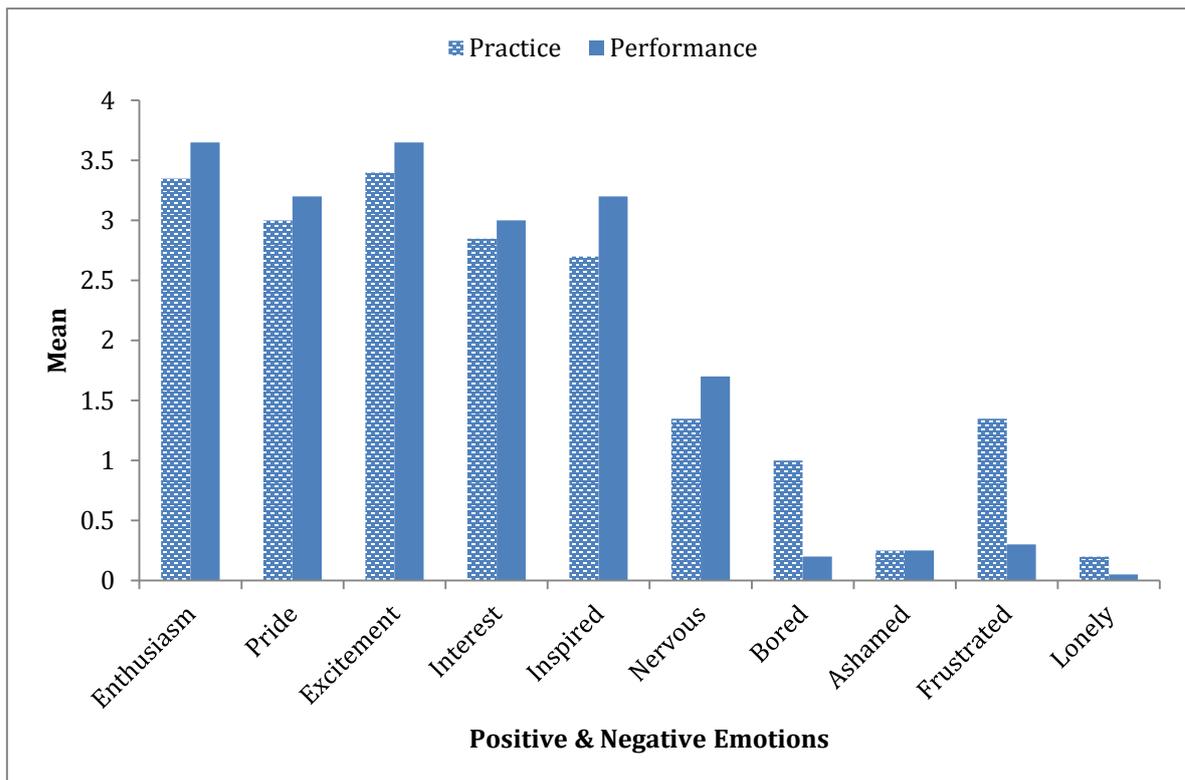


Figure 5. Mean emotions for practice period and performance day (0 = not at all; 4 = a lot) ($n = 18$).

5. Food for thought

Emerging ideas or insights worthy of further consideration

5.1 Feedback

Despite the teacher's instructional skills, I was intrigued at how sparing she was in praising the boys both individually and collectively, especially when they had completed an error-free routine or developed an original idea for a drama exercise. She was vigilant about appropriate audience behaviour and encouraged boys to self-critique or give constructive criticism to others, but she very rarely did so herself. It is possible that in her effort to keep these boys on a tight rein, the teacher was reluctant to let down her guard. Furthermore, it may not have been her personal style to burst forth with accolades. Nevertheless, it was very apparent that when boys received positive feedback, they were visibly proud, smiling and nodding their heads in acknowledgement, and made more effort to please her. When the teacher indexed her feedback to specific behaviour, boys were especially responsive. When boys received negative feedback from peers, or apathy (e.g., from school staff in assembly), their confidence was noticeably shaken and I was intrigued that the teacher did not dwell on these incidents or suggests strategies to cope with them.

5.2 Gender specific behaviour

I recorded two types of behaviour that were possibly gender specific, although this was only speculative. First, I noticed that when the boys were out of their comfort zone with an activity, they became very physical with each other, pushing and shoving, play fighting and making derogatory remarks to each other. They feigned disinterest and used avoidance tactics like hiding behind the curtain or asking to go to the toilet. They also verbally mocked the few boys who did engage in the activity with real commitment. As they gained confidence, however, this happened less often and their behaviour became more focused and self-controlled.

Second, the boys also related more comfortably to visiting male instructors or guests and their behaviour remained consistent during these lessons. They listened intently, followed instructions and tried hard at the designated activities. If women visited, however, especially younger women (e.g., the contemporary dance tutor), they lost focus and reverted to boisterous, physical, attention-seeking actions (tripping each other up, farting and laughing loudly). The exception was with their teacher, whom Matt referred to as “one of us, Miss. You’re like one of the boys”. In fact, the only awkward moment with her was in the falling circle when they needed to wrap their arms around her upper body as she fell. While they were visibly uncomfortable about such intimate physical contact, they were even more scared of dropping her, so catch her they did, while sharing embarrassed glances, blushing and shuffling into a corner as soon as their turn was over.

Third, as mentioned in other parts of this chapter, boys were reluctant to talk about their emotions in the sharing circles or when brainstorming before a drama exercise. Similarly, when I asked a few boys whether they were nervous before going on-stage, they just grunted or gave a terse “yes” and then averted their eyes. Likewise, they had difficulty connecting with the emotions of their stage character unless they had considerable teacher support. Similarly, their answers on the questionnaire were rather perfunctory with only three boys really adding an emotional quality to their responses.

6. Summary of Boy Soldiers’ experience

The *Boy Soldiers’* SC journey was predominantly positive. From my observations, its stand-out feature was the skilled leadership of the teacher and her support of the boys to regulate their behaviour, gain performance skills and work as a team. Moreover, because practices were closely overseen by the teacher, there was minimal peer conflict, very little down time (no boredom or frustration) and strict adherence to short and long-term goals. Although students did not have an autonomous experience in the sense that they drove the creation of the routine, it was definitely an autonomy-supportive experience with teacher input that was

appropriate for the age and experience of the students and the end-goal. According to the questionnaire, all boys indicated that the performance day was a highlight, although interestingly their emotions, integrity and belonging ratings were remarkably similar for both practices and performance. They also commented on the authenticity and seriousness of the performance day and how they loved seeing other schools perform.

There were, however, some dimensions on the conceptual framework that did not feature in this team experience. First, pure dance was missing. I suspect this was largely because the teacher was a drama specialist, new to SC and not confident with choreography and dance. Second, there was little opportunity for student initiative, creative input or leadership. Consequently, it took some time for the class activities to have integrity value for the boys, although the teacher worked hard to address this. They had expected fun hip-hop lessons and instead got theatre skills. Third, praise and positive reinforcement was sparse, which may have comprised both progress and the flow potential of activities as both competence and flow are contingent on regular and explicit feedback. But, despite a dearth of music and dance and limited opportunities for initiative, the *Boy Soldiers* experienced a stimulating learning environment where skills and life knowledge were imparted by a caring adult, their attitudes and values were challenged and they learnt new ways of interacting with others.

7. Reflections

My thoughts about data collection methods used and the highlights and challenges experienced within this setting.

Data collection

Detached observation

Although I had spent many years “observing” students as a classroom teacher, my observation experience as a researcher was limited. Moreover, although I was au fait with the literature, I started the study at the beginning of the school year and did not have the luxury of time to pilot my technique. It was full-on from the first day, and my training came from on-the-spot trial and error. It was challenging. In week 4, I wrote:

I am just SO confused. I thought this would be easy. Nothing seems to fit my research categories. Some days I write pages, then look at them and think none of this is any use. Then I try another approach, like, ok today I'll focus on the quiet kids. Then one of the bad guys does something outrageous and the next thing I'm recording pages about that. Music and dance were my main focus and there's NONE of that in my notes at all. I love watching these lessons but not at all sure I'm getting any data.

I also fretted that I never *talked* with either the boys or the teacher. Most talking in class was done by the teacher and when the boys did speak up or answer questions, usually reticently,

they would see me begin to write, and then look embarrassed and stop talking. Consequently, I tended to avoid taking notes during teacher-pupil exchanges and relied heavily on cues from body language and facial expressions, something we do instinctively in the real world but is much more challenging in a research context, where we are usually observing strangers. As I noted:

I've been panicking because I'm not getting any WORDS from these boys. It's all teacher talk. How am I going to capture their phenomenological experiences if they never talk to her, let alone to me? It's taken me some time to realise that body language and facial expressions speak volumes. Trouble is, it's so hard to write down the incident, the people, and the body language while the boys watch me. It's even harder to remember it all and record it later. Have to keep remembering what the books say. USE ALL YOUR SENSES!

However, I was gratified to find my presence did not seem to negatively impact on the boys' creative processes. In fact, after the first few days, they seemed to get on with the practical activities and ignore me. Conversely, I was conscious that my attendance may have been very intimidating for the young teacher and, despite my insistence that I was observing the students, not her, she may have felt obliged to be extra vigilant with lesson planning and classroom control. I know I would have, if had I been in her position.

I was also concerned that my field notes were too description-oriented and reflection-heavy, rather than noting students' behaviours, although I suspected this was partly due to my detached stance and inexperience. At this early stage in the project, I may also have been insufficiently clear about what I was observing.

Overall, I was reasonably satisfied that the detached observational approach was an adequate starting point to test the conceptual framework but deficient in terms of generating rich phenomenological description.

Questionnaire

Extracting verbal or written information from 14 year-old boys was difficult for the teacher. It may have been due to their self-consciousness or lethargy or, simply that they did not have the words to describe the technicalities of performance or the intensity of their emotions. This same reticence was also apparent on the retrospective questionnaire where I observed the boys carefully considering the quantitative ratings and readily ticking the appropriate boxes, but skimming over, or ignoring, the qualitative responses. Only three made an effort to write more than a few words in response to the open-ended questions. This was in stark contrast to the girls in my previous research who were very expressive both orally and verbally. It was clear I needed to find a data collection method that sat more comfortably with young adolescent males.

In addition, the two week gap between the end of SC and the administration of the questionnaire was too long; two or three days after the event would have been preferable. Unfortunately, by the time I got back to the school, the boys had moved on to a theatre sports module and had already completed a questionnaire for the SC organisation, so they really did not want to revisit the event. Furthermore, last period on Friday afternoon is definitely *not* a good time for questionnaire completion (or any kind of teaching). Nevertheless, despite the boys' minimal responses to the open-ended questions, the quantitative data provided useful supplementary information about their practice and performance emotions, as well as their flow states, integrity and belonging.

I would also have liked to conduct unstructured interviews post-competition with both the boys and the teacher in a more informal setting with fewer distractions. However, I sensed by the end of term that the teacher was exhausted and it was just not appropriate to ask for anything more from her.

Highlights and challenges

The highlight of this study was observing a skilled teacher support novice drama students to become confident performers and acquire valuable life skills. After my ninth observation I recorded:

I find myself really looking forward to this class. I can slip in and out without anyone taking much notice of me. It is really very exciting to watch this slightly gawky bunch developing into a cohesive group.

At the same time, I observed many useful teaching techniques (especially warm-up exercises and ice-breaker games) which I will find really useful when working with other performing arts groups.

However, I also experienced numerous challenges, frustrations and dilemmas. These were partly due to the restrictions of the setting, but also, I suspect, to my inexperience as an observer. They centred on communication difficulties, ethical dilemmas, selective observation, role conflict, and social isolation.

Communication

Despite communicating by email with the teacher each Sunday night, keeping track of this class was not easy, and often I arrived to find a lesson had been cancelled or relocated. I felt embarrassed interrupting other staff members to ask for more information and, given the short lessons, if I did eventually find the class, the lesson was nearly finished by the time I got there. And if I did enter the room late, it was disruptive to the lesson. I was also not pre-

informed about two potentially significant data collection opportunities (the head-shaving and the class debrief on the morning after the SC competition). Had I been a resident ethnographer, I would have been closer to the action, but unfortunately, it seems that an off-site researcher is often the last to be informed of up-coming events. Nevertheless, I fully understood how busy the teacher was and I had, after all, committed to working within her routines.

Ethical dilemma

I experienced a troubling ethical dilemma when observing the subtle but consistent ostracism of Ricky, as described earlier. The teacher appeared to be unaware of it, but Ricky often glanced appealingly in my direction, well aware that I was observing the dynamics and, I suspect, either looking for moral support or willing me to intervene. I worried for him and glared at the protagonists, hoping it would shame them into desisting. It did not. Worse, they seemed to enjoy my disapproval, casting smirks in my direction and nudging each other, probably sensing that I was not going to take action. I still feel bad about it. It was an unpleasant example of both observer effects (the observed watching the observer) and an ethical dilemma. My (feeble) self-justification for my inaction was my detached relationship with the teacher, the fear my interference would offend her and, even more, that the bullying would increase if I intervened.

Selective observation

When re-reading my notes, I noticed that I tended to make snap judgments about students that were not always correct. For example, at first Kevin was uncooperative and surly, complaining that “this exercise is boring. It sucks” and I regularly recorded this negativity in field notes. Over time, however, I realised that what he actually meant was, “I feel like a fool because I don’t know how to do this” and his downcast eyes and hunched shoulders reflected this. I had been too quick to attribute his negative behaviour to boredom.

I also realised how easily I became fixated on individual students, especially the natural leaders, the likable rogues, the talented performers and those who bucked the system. As an extrovert myself, I found I was drawn to other extroverts and had to take care not to overlook the compliant, passive students or the collective group. As I noted, “It’s damn hard to watch a *whole* group, even when there’s only 21 in it”.

My other fixation was positive reinforcement which, according to my (probably biased) standards, was lacking in this classroom and I frequently alluded to this in my notes. I worried that this teacher did not praise these boys enough and when they did well, it was all I could do

not to call out, "Well, I thought you were great!" Likewise, I found it equally difficult to leave the class without complimenting the teacher on a good lesson. As time went on, I did nod or grin at the boys after they had done well and they began to glance my way for confirmation, which may have compromised my detachment, but my need to reinforce them overruled this.

Role conflict

As an ex-trainer of teachers, I became fascinated by this young teacher's innovative techniques and, when reviewing my notes, was struck by how preoccupied I was with her teaching, rather than the boys' behaviour. As I recorded:

Role conflict has definitely been a problem for me. Too often I am still reacting like a teacher, not a researcher. This may have been because I came into this study as a novice observer and am still learning to focus on my research objectives or maybe it's 'once a teacher, always a teacher'. Although, I guess my teaching knowledge does enable me to pick up details that a non-teacher could miss. Maybe it's not such a bad thing, but I need to watch it.

Although I was determined to remain detached and unobtrusive, this conflicted with the teacher in me and my methodological principles of wanting to add value to my participants' experience. For example, when I saw the boys grappling with unfamiliar tasks, all my teaching instincts were to leap in and support them. It was extremely difficult to remain detached. In fact, it felt downright rude at times! I felt equally uncomfortable when the teacher gave the boys' incorrect information about what would happen on performance day and I did not feel able to contradict this.

Social isolation

From the mid-point in this study, I found complete detachment (and being a virtual persona non-grata in the group) increasingly disconcerting and lonely. After my initial delight at being free from teaching responsibilities, I became progressively more uncomfortable at being ignored by the teacher who entered and left the class without acknowledging me and whom I had naïvely tagged as a potential informant. This was especially apparent on performance day when I was hoping to be caught up in the group buzz but I was more like a fly on the wall. As I commented:

I know I said I wanted to be detached, but shit, I hadn't expected it to be like this. Is the teacher pissed off with me? I guess when I said detached, I meant the boys, NOT the teacher too, and probably didn't make this clear at the beginning. I really would like to talk to her about her lessons, how she thinks the boys are doing, but I sense that she is SO busy and preoccupied this would be a hassle. I don't want to rock the boat and compromise the study so I'll say nothing, but jeez, this just isn't me. I'm a social animal and a talker!

In fact, at the end of term, I *was* invited back to the class where the boys presented me with cards, a gift and team t-shirt thanking me for my support, which was an unexpected surprise. I also came to understand that the teacher had religiously adhered to my detachment request and had never intended to isolate me. She had simply been acting in a professional manner in response to my initial instructions. Nevertheless, after this study, I came to the conclusion that, for me, social psychology is about being social, and complete detachment does not suit my personality style. I summed this up:

From a research perspective, it would have been nice to report that the detached stance was a good choice. Unfortunately, it did not turn out this way. For dozens of lessons, I sat on the cold floor at the back of the room, occasionally shuffling to another corner if I was in the way. The worst day was the Capoeira lesson where I shuffled on my bum from corner to corner trying to avoid being kicked by flying feet. All I wanted to do was join in! I took copious notes about the lesson structure and activities, and added my interpretations of how I thought the boys were feeling and responding. Occasionally, one of the boys would give me a nod as they entered or left the room but mostly, they ignored me. I don't like non-communication. It felt very blah, almost threatening. I almost felt like I was being punished for doing something wrong and I didn't know why! A bemusing feature is that I have subsequently come across boys from the class when I have been out locally. Not once have they acknowledged me. Either they are very shy, or socially inept, or I was so effective in my detachment that they don't even remember me! I definitely find that rather disconcerting – to be part of a group for several months and be treated like a ghost!

I definitely needed to have a hard think about my data collection techniques.

In the meantime, I was concurrently observing the Volcanoes whose practices were taking place out of school hours. It is their story that follows.

CHAPTER 4 THE VOLCANOES

I just LOVE seeing that smug smile on the girls' faces when they hook up with a boy and come into a rehearsal holding hands. It's like HA, I've got me a man and now I'm a couple. And the boys look all kinda sheepish, cos they're proud they've got the gal but they also know they could get a hard time from their mates.

(Teacher)

1. Background to study

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this team came from two schools: the *Boy Soldiers'* college and from the neighbouring girls' college.

1.1 The schools

The boys' college was described in the previous chapter. The girls' college is 120 years old, with 1100 students including 150 boarders. It has a decile 7 rating with 65% of students of NZ European ethnicity, Maori (15%), Asian (5%) and Pasifika (2%). As the college website indicates, the arts play a strong part in the school, with their showpiece being the student-driven Arts week which offers "fun art activities for all students". This college is within walking distance of the boys' college and senior students move between schools for specialist curriculum subjects, such as photography and graphics. In addition to sharing academic resources, the colleges join forces for the annual senior dance, drama festivals, musical productions, and, on alternate years, an extracurricular SC entry. The teacher in charge (TIC) of SC at the boys' college was my contact person.

1.2 The team

Students entered this team through variety of routes. The TIC told me that while the goal was to field equal numbers of boys and girls, there was usually an over-supply of girls. To address the gender imbalance, the girls were required to audition and were "culled" in dance trials conducted by the female student leaders, while the TIC accepted all boys who volunteered. She did, however, screen boys for dance ability and assigned non-dance roles to those who were not sufficiently proficient. In addition, student leaders recruited male Maori students for ethnic-specific roles and male and female drama students for the non-dance roles.

The team comprised 88 onstage performers (60 girls, 28 boys) and 16 backstage crew (3 girls and 13 boys, including a female stage crew director). Thus, despite attempts to counter this, the team was predominantly female with approximately 75% from Year 13 (16-18 years) and the remainder 15 years and over.

1.3 Theme

The theme centred on a true event in NZ history when a volcanic eruption buried a village, killing hundreds and obliterating significant landmarks. The story began with a Maori prophet predicting a catastrophic event to a waka crew. Contemporary dancers depicted the pink and white colours of the surrounding landscape while tourists admired the scenery. Peasants worked the land to a rap soundtrack. The climax of the routine was the volcanic eruption depicted by vigorous hip hop dancing, a cartwheeling gymnast, and vivid yellows, oranges and reds on the set and costumes. The dancers were then encased on-stage in a huge piece of grey stretch fabric to represent the ash burial. The piece finished with ballet dancers in grey expressing their grief. Finally, the Maori prophet reappears to a sole survivor and delivers a message of hope.

1.4 Preparation period

The first planning meeting took place in February, 15 weeks out from performance day. Here, the theme was mooted and production roles were allocated. At a second meeting two weeks later, the theme was confirmed and the lead female choreographer then spent two weeks selecting music, creating the routine and training four dance leaders. Practices for all dancers, led by the female leaders, began 11 weeks out at the girls' college on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school, and Sunday afternoons. Dancers practiced in one of four performance groups (contemporary, hip-hop, ballet and rap).

Six weeks out, the practices transferred to the stage in the boys' college hall. This was the first time the boys (apart from 19 male dancers) and girls had met as a team. It was also the first time students had worked to the complete soundtrack. At this point, it was discovered that the track exceeded the eight-minute time limit, resulting in one group having their on-stage time reduced.

Full rehearsals for dancers continued on Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons in the hall until five days out, when the dress rehearsal took place. At this stage, the routine was far from finished.

The technical rehearsal took place the following evening and began with the backstage crew attempting to carry the very cumbersome, awkwardly shaped set on-stage in the regulatory four minutes. The cast then had several run-throughs in costume with the smoke and lights in operation. This was the first time students had experienced the complete routine. At one of the run-throughs the boys dropped the female gymnast after tossing her in the air during the eruption scene. She got up hobbling, in tears, and the boys apologised profusely.

The next day, the team performed to the boys' school assembly, a full house of students and staff. The same night, a final rehearsal was held to fix last-minute problems. After several low-key run-throughs, final instructions, the issuing of costumes and team t-shirts, students left the practice early.

1.5 Performance day

The *Volcanoes* had a challenging performance day because the venue was being renovated and their dressing room was a makeshift tent in the outside courtyard. It was a bitter winter's day and there was no floor covering. However, students spent most of the day inside the auditorium where I observed them participating in the competition activities, socialising with other schools and completing three rehearsals before lunch. I also noticed several male-female couples who had paired up during the preparation period who were very physically engrossed with each other.

I watched the evening performance from the auditorium with a group of invited guests. Each routine was greeted by loud cheering, screaming and chanting from the 1600-strong audience. The *Volcanoes* performed with focus and commitment and produced, in my opinion, their best-ever routine. The audience were momentarily silent when it finished, as if it had been moving and provocative. They were placed third, with five category awards.

2. Method

2.1 Detached observation

As with the Boy Soldiers, my intention was to track the *Volcanoes* as a detached observer. My observations took place in the large school hall where I had an extensive view of both the on-stage practices and off-stage interactions between team members. On occasions, students would come and chat to me and I was able to ask them informal questions. Unlike the previous study where I had little communication with the teacher, the TIC of this team maintained a ready dialogue with me about students' progress and the challenges associated with manning a SC entry. She became a key informant.

In all, I attended three planning meetings, 12 practice sessions, the dress and technical rehearsals, the school performance and the performance day. I took 120 pages of A4 field notes. I took as many notes as possible on-site and expanded them at home immediately after each practice or meeting.

2.2 Supplementary measures

I was keen to administer the same questionnaire as the *Boy Soldiers* to this team. However, with students scattered between two venues (and from at least 20 different form classes) and senior exams commencing immediately after SC, it was simply not feasible. This data from this study, then, was derived exclusively from my field notes.

3. Key elements and opportunities

The extent to which the key elements and opportunities of a “typical” SC experience were present for this team.

3.1 Music and dance

For the Volcanoes, music and dance were an integral part of their preparation period. As usually happens with SC teams, the practice period began in dance sub-groups that worked independently of each other using individual soundtracks (30-90 seconds long) chosen by the choreographers. In keeping with most dance contexts, students were taught in segments of eight beats which they repeated until memorised and perfected, then added the next eight beats and so on. The ballet and contemporary dancers were disciplined in their practice style, choreographing their whole segment in advance and learning their moves quickly. Conversely, the hip hop and rap groups were more spontaneous and disorganised, with routines evolving over time. The complete soundtrack was not finalised until three weeks before the competition and it was only then that the dance groups linked their segments to form a cohesive routine. A slightly unusual feature of this team’s routine was the lack of a full cast finale. This was the TIC’s suggestion, her rationale being, “Finales have become ho hum. Everybody does them. Unless we come up with a point of difference, we haven’t got a hope of winning”.

3.2 Competition

This team appeared to be far more focussed on winning than the *Boy Soldiers* and the desire to win drove their theme choice, choreography and their practice behaviour. In particular, they had never yet won a regional competition and they were very keen to do so.

At the leaders’ first meeting, discussion centred on the choice of a “winning theme”, for example:

Steve: We could do something to win, but would we enjoy it? [Pause]... yeah, we’re in this to win it.

Tim: Yeah definitely.

Sue: We'd rather work hard and win. Last time, we wanted to have fun. But we ended up being a bit of a joke. We once had a reputation as a serious threat but now that's gone.

Katie: Yeah, but if we get too serious, how do we stop kids dropping out? Most of them aren't here to win. They just want to get dressed up and have fun.

Moreover, the teacher seemed to encourage a competitive orientation, suggesting, "Maybe you should consider having a smaller group of people who all have the same drive to win." Similarly, when discussing theme choice, she advocated, "What you need is something original and powerful. That will give you a better chance of winning." After the meeting, the TIC did concede to me that she used to be a competitive dancer and because of this, winning was important to her.

Only one female student of the nine present offered a different perspective, challenging:

Why do we keep talking about winning? What we have to do is choose a theme and deliver it in a way that *deserves* to win. It's no good grumbling about [X] and [Y] schools always winning and how unfair it is. Truth is, the last few years we haven't been up to it. I think we've just got to get used to the fact that we're the academic school on the block and we're never going to compete with the extravaganzas of [X] and [Y].

The desire to win often surfaced during practices. For example, at the last moment, students inserted a number of eye catching gymnastics moves into the routine in the hope that it would net them higher marks from the judges. They also deliberately included Maori characters "to add a multicultural flavour". They often compared their routine to their two main rival schools and even talked about sending a "spy" to some of their practices to "get the inside story on what they're doing". This, then, was a team that wanted to win.

3.3 Public performance

Many of the girls were familiar with public performance because they were dance trained, had previously performed in SC and school musicals or were members of the local youth theatre group. The majority of the boys, however, were selected because they were from the boarding school, lived on-site and were strong-bodied rugby players. They were not used to public performing arts performances.

As with the *Boy Soldiers*, the *Volcanoes* gave five public performances: the school assembly, three performance day rehearsals and the performance itself. Their most challenging performance was in front of the school assembly because the boys were afraid "our mates will give us stick for dancing like gays" and the girls in their revealing costumes were "scared that the boys will perve at our bodies".

3.4 Team activity

In SC terms, this was an average-sized team. This team was particularly interesting because although SC has many co-ed teams, the partnering of two single sex schools is more unusual.

3.5 Youth initiative

The *Volcanoes* were a student-driven team. The student leadership team comprised eight girls and two boys, with no one in an executive role and in the final two weeks, a Year 13 girl was brought on as stage manager to co-ordinate the performance day logistics. The students had creative and administrative control. However, the TIC usually dropped by during practices to check on progress and make suggestions.

3.6 Social interaction

The social context of SC was very important for the *Volcanoes*. In fact, according to the TIC, in these colleges, the social opportunities offered by the activity were a bigger draw card than the dancing. And indeed, as the TIC forewarned, the boy-girl dynamics were a significant (and definitely entertaining) aspect of the whole experience and I found it difficult to avoid being completely absorbed by them!

4. Growth and well-being experiences

Developmental experiences that evolve during SC, particularly those that are of considerable interest to students, increase their knowledge base or expand them in some way, giving them new skills or new ways of interacting with others.

4.1 Autonomy

The extent to which students regulate their own behaviour and experience, and govern the initiation and direction of their action during SC.

For the *Volcanoes*, despite the expectation (*and* perception) by both the TIC and students that this was to be a youth-driven activity, a number of issues concerning the extent of their respective roles did surface which created challenges for both parties. These centred on theme choice, practice management and organisational issues. As an example, I describe here the meeting where students brainstormed about the theme choice, one of the critical decisions in SC. Present were ten student leaders, the TIC and me. After the meeting, I recorded:

This was a tricky meeting. There was no appointed chairperson and the discussion was rather directionless. The boys made a few good suggestions but the girls weren't ready to hear them. After 10 minutes, the TIC took the chair, saying "I'm sorry but I'm going to take this meeting over or we'll be here all night". She then tabled the volcano idea and overtly steered their choice in that direction ("This will give you heaps of options with choreography and set colours"; "This

is powerful and original”). Students were unenthusiastic about the idea and had never heard of the historical event but no one could come up with anything better. The TIC said, “Right that’s settled then. Now I’ve got to dash to another meeting. Let me know when you’ve sorted out the story line,” and the students were left sitting there. No one said much and they began packing up their gear. The early buzz of the meeting and the sense of anticipation had completely evaporated. The volcano theme was adopted by default.

It should be noted that the TIC in no way intended to disenfranchise the students and afterwards pondered to me about the extent of her involvement: “Gosh, do you think I took over that meeting? I just want them to do something worthwhile and the truth is, it’s really hard for me to let go of the strings.” The upshot was that although students had complete autonomy to create the routine, it was based on the TIC’s idea and despite intensive research, they struggled to conceptualise it. Ten weeks into the preparation process, I observed:

This story has never really got off the ground. From the outset, students have grappled to adapt their preferred dance styles to the theme, deliver convincing characterisation and design relevant and workable costumes and sets. For example, the kids have choreographed a segment of peasant dancing, not exactly a NZ phenomenon. The TIC keeps asking, “What’s the point of the peasants?” and no one can come up with an answer. So although the story was the teacher’s idea, the kids have been left to their own devices to make it work and they can’t. They’re struggling and I feel a bit sorry for them.

This pattern of student autonomy interspersed with teacher directives tended to be the norm for the preparation process. Mostly, students drove the process but every so often, the TIC would step in and make quick decisions on the students’ behalf because, with deadlines looming, decisions did indeed need to be made. While this ensured progress, it generally did not involve consultation nor provide students with choices and hence, learning opportunities. Encouragingly, students did not seem to resent the TIC’s input; rather, they appeared relieved that the problem was being taken out of their hands and were generally ready to defer to her suggestions. I noted:

I think what I am seeing may be a reflection of the TIC’s style. She is keen, enthusiastic, supportive and well-respected but there are no clear boundaries about where student and teacher roles start and finish. What seems to be happening is the TIC makes the important decisions, and then the students are left to action them. Although they are great dancers, they have not yet got the skills to put the TIC’s decisions into practice. And despite the TIC’s assertion at the start that she did not want a prominent role, by her own admission, she is reluctant to let go the ropes. Maybe, being a high calibre dancer herself, it is difficult to sit back and let the kids cock it up.

This was, then, a team where autonomy was granted to students, but there were many incidents where, with appropriate autonomy support, students could have worked through problems and gained insights which would have made the process much less fraught as well as providing them with carry-over skills for the subsequent entries.

This was especially evident with the lead female dancers who could well have used the teacher's expertise as they grappled to integrate their solo roles into the routine. These girls were extremely capable, trained dancers who excelled in the group sequences. However, they also had to perform (self-appointed) cameo roles which carried the story line and provided the transitions between group segments. Despite their expertise, these dancers seemed daunted by the prospect of performing in front of other group members and two weeks out, they had neither prepared their sequences nor made any effort to publicly perform them. When tackled by the increasingly frustrated TIC, they employed numerous avoidance tactics: "I've just got to give my group another run-through" (even though their group was step-perfect); "I'll be there in a minute" (and disappearing backstage); "I'll have it done by tomorrow," or "I'll just walk through it today. Don't worry, I promise I'll have it ready for the competition". It was not until the last week that these girls began to dance solo and even then, the dancer who performed the critical final 20 seconds had yet to fine-tune her piece. In exasperation, the TIC said, "You need to completely commit to this role NOW or hand it over to someone else". The girl then half-heartedly shuffled through her paces.

This was definitely a situation where early support from the teacher, based on her own knowledge of solo dance roles, could have mitigated the girls' anxiety and made practices more productive for the rest of the cast.

Overall, though, students mounted this production on their own and I suspect the moments where their autonomy was usurped, or was at least not enhanced, were probably much more obvious to me as an observer, than it was to either the TIC or them.

4.2 Integrity

The extent to which SC reflects students' values, beliefs and ways of "being" in the world

There is no doubt that SC had integrity value as a social context for these students, even if the dance aspect did not sit comfortably with many of the add-on boys. As the TIC pointed out:

SC is the highlight of these kids' social calendar. Because they go to single sex schools, this is where they score partners. Relationships break up over SC. If girls have to choose between SC and an existing relationship, they'll choose SC because that's where they think the social action is. Same goes for the boys, especially the boarders. Chances are this is where they'll pick up their partner for the school ball. It's huge.

The extent of this really emerged when practices were moved to the boys' college and for the first time, the girls' dance teams integrated their routines with the rugby boys. Here, I noticed that the girls had abandoned their generic gym gear in favour of sophisticated street clothing, their hair was creatively styled and most wore makeup. Most girls also had iPods and were

clutching cell phones which they had tucked into their bras so they could dance and text at the same time. As the TIC wryly remarked, “the girls are unashamedly strutting their stuff”. It was hugely entertaining and I noted:

This is better than the on-stage performance! These girls are something else! There’s exaggerated exclaiming, hugging and air kissing, all with dramatic body movements and facial expressions. They are in all their finery, much of it patently unsuitable for dancing – tight little shorts, boots and low, low-cut tops! Corrr! The air is thick with perfumed girly smells. They are huddled in groups in apparent deep conversation with each other all the while texting, texting, texting, and simultaneously casting covert glances at the boys who are hugging the perimeter of the room. They are in their element!

Not only was it a valuable social networking site, but in this relatively small regional town, SC was held in high esteem by all the secondary schools and the wider community. For example, leading up to the event the local newspaper ran articles about the competing schools and published double page colour spreads of each team the day after the performance.

The performance routine itself did, however, cause them many dilemmas as students tried to put their own stamp on it. The heart of the problem was that they were never really comfortable with the theme: they did not choose it; it was an historical event which they could not bring into their own world; to gain points, they presented it from a Maori perspective even though the team was predominantly Pakeha; they did not do enough research (for example, having dancing “peasants” who are completely foreign to a NZ context); and they choreographed dance moves to match their talent rather than to portray authentic characters. They also used existing costumes from the wardrobe department which bore no relation to the characters, for example, the peasants wore skimpy green Lycra costumes that were very revealing and unattractive, something the girls constantly complained about.

A particularly awkward moment arose when the TIC recruited a group of senior Maori students to paddle a waka (Māori war canoe) across the stage. As I recorded:

These boys came at the cajoling of the TIC and were reluctant from the outset, complaining about being taken away from their sports games and ignoring instructions. During the first run-through, the cardboard waka they were carrying collapsed and the watching students erupted with laughter. The Maori boys were angry. They dropped the waka, and walked off stage. They then left the practice en masse with one of them shouting out, “Don’t insult us by using us as token Maoris paddling a fake waka” and refused to attend rehearsals until the waka prop was more authentic. In the end, they did not use a waka at all because they were unable to devise one that stayed together and was acceptable to the Māori boys.

In contrast, there was a wonderfully authentic moment at the technical rehearsal when the Maori “prophet” made his first appearance in the cast. He was a senior student who had high status in the school as a prefect and a winner of Maori speech contests. Once he became a

member of the cast, students deferred to his authority and it seemed that they now realised that anything that was not their best would have been disrespectful to James. (This will be discussed in more detail below).

Overall, though, the students did have an uphill battle with authentic characterisation and performance, thanks to the difficult theme choice. This was especially apparent on performance night when the two winning schools had quirky, fun routines which had the audience stamping and clapping along in time to the music.

4.3 Belonging

Students' sense of connection to, and love and care from their SC team and the wider SC community.

For the *Volcanoes*, the fragmented team structure, dual-school dynamics, lack of a supreme leader and poorly organised practices did compromise team unity, especially in the early stages of the preparation. However, there were small group close knit groups, for example the ballet and contemporary dancers, who gathered in corners of the hall and were content to rehearse separately from the others. There were also small friendship groups amongst the girls who always greeted each other effusively and spent most of their off-stage time comparing text messages. Likewise, the rugby boys huddled together. Overall, though, there was very little integration between sub-groups and I noted that at the early combined rehearsals, for some of the boys, "this SC experience looks like a damn lonely affair."

As a performance group, the team also took some time to function as a collective unit. Four weeks out, I observed:

There's still a considerable lack of cohesion between the respective dance groups which means rehearsals consist of higgledy piggledy segments with no one, including the leaders, quite sure what it all means or how to fit it together. Students are sticking to their small peer groups and at the end of the rehearsal they just pack up and stroll out the door. No one acknowledges each other much or exchanges farewells.

With two weeks to go, little had changed and the team continued to struggle both on and off stage. I again noted:

This team does not appear to have a leader who is king pin. Every sub-group is doing their own thing. Leaders are very much dance soloists who don't engage much with their crews. They are strong in performance, but not so hot at building a sense of togetherness.

There was also on-going friction between the peasants and the eruption group with the former complaining that their role was under-rated, the dance steps too easy, their stage time too

short and their costumes too revealing and difficult to dance in. Many of this group were sulking in small groups around the hall and openly bad-mouthing the other team members.

Over time, though, most of the boys in the cast did find their feet and began to mingle more comfortably with the girls. For example, Steve proved to be a highly competent dancer and he gradually assumed a more active leadership role. In the final week, when students were critiquing the video of their performance, it was Steve who spontaneously controlled the video and talked the team through technical issues such as positioning, facial expressions and staying in character.

A similar situation occurred with Phil, the sound technician. At their first meeting, he played through the completed soundtrack to the girls who took little notice and talked right through it (these sound tracks take many hours and considerable skill to compile). He looked very crestfallen. The girls also berated him when he discovered that the soundtrack was too long and some of their stage time would be cut (“That sooo sucks. Now we’ve got to change all our routine *and* we have less time on stage”). When it came to the technical rehearsal, however, Phil assumed control, timing the routine, explaining the technical equipment (“learn to love the smoke”), showing concern for their welfare (“does anyone have asthma or epilepsy”), and controlling the lights. As I noted:

All this made the stage very glamorous and suddenly Phil was the girls’ best friend as they consulted him about what special effects would make their hair and costumes most eye-catching! He was very patient with them and his behaviour was in stark contrast to the girls’ excited chatter, squeals and “Oh my god, reeeeeaaaly?” He seemed to enjoy the attention and was not at all begrudging of their previous inconsiderate behaviour.

This, then, was a team where feelings of togetherness developed spasmodically in sub-groups and it was not until this technical rehearsal where the special effects, insertion of cameo parts and the presence of the Māori prophet unified the routine, that I had a real sense of whole team togetherness. This was a definitive turning point and from then on, after each run-through, students began to congregate en masse in front of the stage and applaud each dance group if they performed well. The team further bonded before the school assembly performance where their mutual nervousness and fear of being ridiculed brought them closer as a unit.

I suspect that had the routine included a full cast finale (vetoed by the TIC), a sense of belonging may have been salient earlier in the experience because this would have required full-cast practices from the beginning. Instead, each group either rehearsed on stage or in separate parts of the hall, thus missing the opportunity to dance as a collective group.

Behind the scenes, though, more intimate boy-girl dynamics were on-going and by the end of the practice period, several couples had formed and, as I drove to rehearsals, I saw them walking hand in hand, cuddled up on park benches or exchanging kisses in discrete corners.

Thus, for this team, SC did provide a valuable opportunity for socialising, especially between sexes. This not only enabled students to meet romantic and/or school ball partners but also provided opportunities for cross-gender problem solving, dancing and performing. Even more, students were in close physical, almost intimate contact and had to negotiate appropriate ways of dealing with this. This was also apparent on performance day where girls and boys had to dress and undress in the same tent and do each other's hair and make-up.

While girls appeared to have the initial social advantage because of their superior dance skills and greater social confidence, they did appear to treat the boys more equitably later in the experience and give them credit for their contributions. In turn, the boys became more socially confident both on and off the stage.

However, although the *Volcanoes'* performance was technically sophisticated and emotionally compelling, it was comprised of small group sequences which, to me, reflected the somewhat fragmented nature of the whole experience for these students. Once the competition was over, except for the newly formed couples, boys and girls appeared to retreat back to their respective colleges and the team was no more.

4.4. Accomplishments

Awards received, knowledge and skills gained, and areas of personal development during SC.

Awards

The team came third (as they had done in several previous competitions) and gained numerous performance awards which recognised the technical difficulty of their routine. Nevertheless, students were disappointed and frustrated with the outcome, gathering in small groups to vent their emotions. They felt they deserved second place and that the judges had been seduced by the "same-old formula of [X] and [Y] schools" who had consistently been awarded the top two places for the last seven years. The TIC expressed similar sentiments, noting that the winning schools used "slick but undemanding" moves, while the *Volcanoes* were penalised because of the technical difficulty of their routine. There was a general sentiment among the team that no matter what they did, the cards were stacked against them. Students were also indignant that the winning school had "plagiarised" moves from YouTube and they planned an official protest (which did not eventuate). One week later, according to the TIC, disappointment at the result was still prevalent, but senior school exams had begun

and students were now engrossed in them. On the positive side, the TIC also reported that the students “were awesome in terms of behaviour on performance day with a pristine clean up in their tent and a lovely thank you gift for me.” She also believed students were not so upset at coming third, but at the judges whom they felt had not done a competent job.

Knowledge and skills

Because of the technical difficulty of the routine, students did acquire considerable competence in dance and performance skills and gain experience in goal setting, problem solving, conflict resolution and teamwork. For the most part though, these skills were acquired “on the run” and were situation-dependent, unlike the *Boy Soldiers* whose teacher planned each lesson around a specific skill set. To illustrate this, I turn again to a rehearsal example, where four boys and four girls had to conceptualise the key moment in the story, the burying of a village in volcanic ash.

I recorded:

When the four boys entered the hall, the girls were (yet again!) practising their moves. The TIC directed the boys across the room and, heads down, with pink faces, they shuffled towards the girls who carried on dancing, completely ignoring them. The boys, who were strong Year 13s, fidgeted on the spot with hunched shoulders, hands in pockets and said nothing. After a few minutes, one girl sauntered over to them and with no introduction, said, “Ok, so this is what you’ve gotta do”. She briefly described the lift move and assigned each boy to a girl on a height basis. The lift involved each girl standing on a chair behind a boy, facing his back. He then raised his arms above his head and the girl fell forward on to them. It was a complex move that involved catching the girls under their arms around the upper part of their bodies then carrying them around the stage. The girls were scantily clad, some bra-less and preoccupied with how to appear most flattering on stage (“Will this reveal too much of my cleavage?” [With much giggling and whispering to each other behind hands]). The boys were way out of their comfort zone, both socially and technically, and apart from the lift itself, received little direction or feedback from the girls. And yet, they were expected to virtually wrap their hands around the girls’ chests. They seemed utterly bewildered by it all and it was difficult not to intervene. Finally one of the boys took the initiative and began to ask questions and make tentative suggestions in gruff, short sentences. The other boys took the lead from this and gradually the discomfort between boys and girls diminished and they began to make some progress.

This was a really awkward scenario, both socially and technically, but without any outside help, these eight students managed to solve a multi-tiered, complex problem: all students had the social challenge of interaction with strangers of the opposite sex; the boys had to overcome their physical embarrassment (and probably sexual response) at observing and intimately touching skimpily clad, attractive girls; as pairs they had to experiment with workable lifting strategies that enabled them to drape the rest of the cast with a large piece of stretch fabric; the girls had to choreograph dance moves for the non-dancing boys and help them to master them; they then had to transfer these moves to the stage, which involved the boys precariously

carrying the girls over large, high pieces of set; finally, both boys and girls had to cope with the school performance where the girls were worried about their revealing costumes and the boys, that their rugby mates would “take the piss”. It took ten days or so but, by the dress rehearsal, these eight students had faced and conquered a raft of challenges: physical (strength, balance, co-ordination), social (dialogue, physical proximity with the opposite sex), problem solving (lifting, carrying, integration of dance moves), technical (dance moves, props management, on-stage performance) and team work (working in pairs, conflict resolution, negotiation), all the while managing their changing emotions including embarrassment, boredom, nervousness and many more. This type of scenario was played out dozens of times in pairs, small groups and en masse, mostly without adult input, and the students’ final performance was testimony to their skill in addressing and conquering the many challenges they encountered during their journey.

As they worked their way through the various challenges, however, I did notice however that, like the *Boy Soldiers*, feedback was not a strong feature of this team’s experience, possibly because student leaders lacked the awareness or skill to deliver it. For example, I observed the small dance groups practising repeatedly, with no feedback from leaders as to what they were doing well and what needed improving. Once the whole group began to work as a unit, it was again lacking. Occasionally, a leader would mutter, “yeah that was cool...” but these comments were never indexed to anything specific. The TIC did give feedback when she was present but it tended to be fleeting and ignored by the cast as soon as she left the room. If there were problems to solve, leaders tended to huddle together, devise a solution, then say, “Ok, what you guys have got to do is....” without ever explaining to the cast what the original issue was. In all, there was hardly any feedback until the judges’ decision on performance day. As such, I suspect that many of the skills acquired during the experience were not consciously processed or appreciated by the students because, without overt feedback or praise, they were simply not aware that the acquisition had taken place. I noted:

Imagine if the lifters and their girls had been held up as an example of what can be accomplished by cooperative and collaborative team work. What they did was quite special and they got no feedback, let alone praise. Instead, at the final rehearsal, in front of the whole cast, the gymnast was singled out by the teacher as an example of someone with heaps of talent but no confidence. I think it was supposed to be a “wake-up” call, but the poor girl looked like she was going to burst into tears. I felt for her.

However, the TIC *did* congratulate the back stage crew at the technical rehearsal when they managed to lug the heavy sets on stage. The rest of the cast applauded their efforts and they looked chuffed, went pink, hung their heads and shuffled their feet. On the whole, though, the closer students got to the performance, the less reinforcement they received, which ironically was probably when it was most needed.

4.5 Identity

The collaborative process between students and the SC context to foster a self-determined, cohesive sense of self.

Because of the school's long association with SC, students already identified with being a SC team members. As a girl remarked to me, "SC is something all the cool kids do", although not all students would have identified as being dancers. Nevertheless, having enlisted, students did explore or expand various identities related to a performing arts context; for example, the dancers attempted unfamiliar dance styles, the tech boy moved into the realm of lighting and sound and the rugby-mad boarders could now define themselves as SC competitors. In particular, the student leaders, who entered the activity as dancers, explored the roles of choreographer, producer and practice manager and although they were strongly challenged during the practice period, relished the status assigned to student leaders on performance day. After the competition, I remarked:

I don't think the leaders had any idea what they let themselves in for when they signed up for the role. They knew it would be about choreography, teaching dance and being a soloist. I suspect the add-ons like practice management, HR, conflict resolution, fund raising, etc., were just distant considerations. They have effectively become event managers, an identity they had never expected to assume. By the same token, I loved watching them on performance day, giving orders, TV interviews, scurrying off to leaders' meetings and accepting awards on-stage. They deserved the glory and they revelled in it.

However, it was at the dance level that students' identity statements were most apparent. For example, there were noticeable divisions between performance groups and even from my outsider stance, it was clear that students' alignment with (or consignment to) a particular group signalled where an individual slotted into the team pecking order. For example, the eruption group were the most capable and aggressive dancers and the most socially confident. They had the longest time on stage, the most special effects and the most eye-catching costumes. The leaders were also in this group. To one side were the ballet and contemporary dancers who were quieter and more conservative but confident of their ability and the contribution they were making. For example, they were unfazed by the audience's sniggers at the assembly performance. At the lower end of the dance spectrum were the peasants whose routine seemed to be little valued by the leaders and they suffered regular revisions to their routine, time-cuts and costume malfunctions. During practice, one night, four peasants sat by me, very upset about the way they were being treated by the "suck leaders". When I suggested they address these concerns with the leaders, one girl replied scathingly:

You've gotta be kidding. They wouldn't listen to us. We're the lowest of the low. We're lucky they even let us in, in the first place. We'd probably get dumped from the team if we complained. Nah, better to say nothing. I'd rather be a peasant than nothing at all.

These identities were reinforced by audience reactions at the school assembly. For example, the watching boys became restless during the contemporary routine and sniggered at the peasants whereas they stomped and shouted during the hip hop sequences. Additionally, as seems to happen in SC, the groups became identified with their on-stage role: the waka crew, the ash girls, the peasants or the back stage crew and they were addressed by these titles (“ash girls on stage now, please”). Students did struggle, however, to identify with their on-stage characters for reasons that have already been explained.

Off stage, identity shifts were also taking place. Most notably, there were several students whose status changed from single to “couple” during the preparation and performance period. The TIC felt this was strongly motivated by the impending school ball for which students preferred to have a prearranged partner.

The group identity, however, was slow to become established and it was not until the technical rehearsal that students seemed to identify with their performance group. In many ways, it resembled the *Boy Soldiers’* defining moment. Many factors contributed this shift from individual to group identity. First, the presence of James, the Maori prophet impacted significantly on group behaviour. I recorded:

This boy has real presence and mana. He walked on to the stage, took his position then stood silently and went into himself. It was almost as if he brought spirituality to the stage and brought the rest of the cast along with him. It was amazing to see him perform his routine with dignity and without embarrassment. He was playing out something that had real integrity value for him, recreating an action he has done many times before in other settings. As he took the stage, the whole hall fell silent. Even better, the waka crew, who had been treating their part like a comedy role up to now, responded to his mood and, as he sounded the conch, they “paddled” the waka across the stage with real focus.

With the inclusion of the prophet and the waka crew, the routine now had a beginning and an end, linking all the dance sequences. The set, although still being painted, was in place, the cast was in full costume, the gymnast performed her impressive tumbling stunts which depicted airborne volcanic rocks and the smoke, lights and sound effects were inserted. It was compelling viewing and I noted:

The atmosphere has transformed from last night. I feel very excited for the kids. There’s a tangible new energy, lightning of mood and a commitment to the performance. The smoke especially added a mystique and sense of anonymity. Suddenly the music made sense because it was finally in context and the performance looked convincing, even the peasants. The contrast between the sad and happy characters is now evident; the rather disorganised chaos of the eruption is showing promise and the ballet girls back-dropping the waka is magic. Mighty late in the piece, but better late than never!

This was a transformational identity moment and from this point on, cast members appeared to make the transition from individual dancers to team performers.

Unfortunately, their identity as “the school that always comes third” was also confirmed on performance day and as one student vented in the auditorium:

This happens every year. What’s the point of doing it again cos we’ll never beat those other schools. We are by far the best dancers. Our moves were really difficult and we got no credit for that. The other just do the same old crap and the judges are totally sucked in by it. What the fuck are we doing wrong?

4.6. Flow

The subjective psychological state experienced when totally absorbed in a challenging activity and having the necessary skills to accomplish it.

Without a questionnaire, I had to rely on intuition to assess the flow quality of the *Volcanoes*’ experience and two weeks out, I recorded, “All I can say about flow is that up to now, in my presence, it hasn’t happened – and given the chaos, there’s no surprise there!”

The school assembly, their first public performance, was a potential flow moment but it was an anxious situation with students nervous about a cynical audience response. This was reflected in their agitated behaviour in the wings (excessive concern about their costumes, making mistakes and the presence of peers in the audience) and their visible embarrassment and sidelong glances at each other if they missed a beat on-stage. From my spot in the hall, their performance lacked conviction and energy.

Conversely, the technical rehearsal had all the hallmarks of flow: students had mastered the routine (their skills were up to the challenge), they ran through it uninterrupted (which required concentrated focus), they were in full costume (which inhibits self-consciousness) and judging by their excited expressions at the end, knew they had done well (positive feedback and optimal experience). As I later noted:

You don’t really need a questionnaire to know that this was a flow moment. Their faces were flushed and shining with sweat, they were breathing heavily, their eyes were wide and alert and they had an expectant expression on their faces as they waited for audience feedback. There was a second’s pause while the audience processed what they had witnessed and this added to the tension. From the students’ faces, it was clear that *they* knew they have done well and were waiting for the audience to confirm this. When we all clapped and cheered, their faces broke into grins and they took big inwards breath of relief and exhaled slowly as their shoulders relaxed, nodding slightly to indicate that, yes, the audience had got it right too. Only then, did group members exchange confirmatory glance. Once off-stage, their self-composure disintegrated and they broke into excited chatter, group hugs, high fives and “oh my god, did you see...?” recaps which lasted for several minutes.

At the competition performance, they delivered an impressive routine and the audience responded enthusiastically. Students were excited when they exited the stage, hugging each other and jumping up and down. Their disappointing placing (announced one hour later) did dampen this though, and caused leaders to seriously question whether to re-enlist against what they perceived were impossible odds (their perceived skills did not match the challenge).

4.7 Emotions

Students' experience and regulation of their positive and negative affective states.

Like flow, I also had to rely on body language, facial expression and informal conversations to assess students' emotions. Amusingly, in the initial stages for many students, emotions appeared to be stimulated more by the presence of members of the opposite sex, than by music, dance or performance. As I noted:

Until the tech rehearsal, the kids' stage presence was relatively colourless, while their social behaviour positively sparkled! In the week before the competition, this energy was fortunately transferred to the stage, but overall, positive emotions were definitely linked more to socialising than performing. Excitement, enthusiasm and interest, especially amongst the girls, were very apparent.

In keeping with my previous research (Trayes et al., 2012), boredom was again a key negative emotion predominantly due to the "over-rehearsing" that took place, that is, the continued practicing of long-perfected group routines at the behest of the student leaders. In turn, group-members, although remarkably co-operative and patient, became increasingly apathetic as demonstrated by their "flat" facial expressions and half-hearted body movements. I overheard one student complain:

We are just doing endless runs. We never have any time to go back and correct what's wrong. We just keep bashing through the same routines. It all seems a bit pointless.

Frustration, too, was relevant and usually provoked by disorganised rehearsals, perceived inequities (the peasants), teacher criticism and above all, the competition result. Although, I did not hear it verbalised, I suspect loneliness could have been experienced by some of the boys until they established their position in the team. Nervousness (of the stomach turning, sweaty palms variety) was most apparent before the school assembly performance whereas on competition day students used phrases like "adrenalin rush" and "I'm terrified but I can't wait to get on stage" to describe their nerves. Students regularly used the word "embarrassed" or "embarrassing" to describe their feelings if they made a mistake, were worried about audience reaction or doubted their ability level. In the same vein they reported "lacking confidence", "not being on top of their game", "scared of all the people screaming corrections", "feeling down" and "worried that I don't I deserve to be in the team". The TIC also reported

some bitchiness on the part of the girls towards the tech boy who compiled the CD, and some in-fighting between student leaders but she did not intervene and it was never apparent at rehearsals. Finally, students also had to learn to cope with disappointment, in the peasants' case when their time slot was cut and for the whole team when they "only came third".

In this study, I also became aware of the "deadline effect", namely the change in rehearsal behaviour which seemed to occur about two weeks out from the public performance. This was marked by increased practice attendance, less downtime at rehearsals, a shift from self-absorption to group considerations and commitment to the routine. It was also when emotions intensified and outbursts were more likely between leaders, within groups and between the TIC and students. These instances were usually characterised by leaders shouting, crying, storming out of the room or threatening to abandon their role and seemed to be triggered by a seemingly insignificant event which was the "last straw" in a series of challenges, often involving unruly or inattentive cast members. The meltdown moments here occurred twice; firstly when the back stage crew came on set for the first time and were joking and laughing while the cast tried to practise. In frustration, the TIC yelled, "We wouldn't behave like this at your rugby match, so don't you behave like this at our dance rehearsal. Now get your acts together, or get out." In this case, the meltdown was justified and the boys responded immediately.

The second, more volatile, meltdown occurred after the very successful technical rehearsal when the students were excited and celebratory, especially after completing three near-perfect run through. The TIC, who had already taught a full day and was still in the school at 10pm, was now trying to fine-tune things but the kids were too buzzed up to listen. All of a sudden, she said to me, "I've had enough. I am about to do a sulk. They won't listen to me." After shouting at the students for repeated errors and undisciplined behaviour, she then singled out one girl as an example of someone with ability but who lacks confidence. The girl blushed and looked crestfallen, running back stage in tears. The TIC left the Hall without turning back.

Fortunately, though, the performance day, apart from the cold tent and the disappointing result, appeared to be emotionally positive and the TIC reported that the kids "had a ball" catching up with friends from other schools, watching rehearsals and dancing in the mosh pit.

5. Food for thought

Emerging ideas or insights that are worthy of further consideration

5.1 Feedback

I was again struck by how little feedback and positive reinforcement was also dispensed by both the leaders and the TIC, a phenomenon I had observed with the *Boy Soldiers*. As I noted:

I am struck by how little verbal encouragement these kids get. The leaders do not give it to their groups even though the kids uncomplainingly repeat their routines over and over. The leaders don't give it to each other. The dancers don't give it to the back stage crew and vice versa. And there was nothing from the staff at assembly where their performance was virtually ignored and the staff looked totally bored. The TIC is also sparing in her praise. After the tech rehearsal, which I thought was amazing, she just said, "Hmmm, well that was a BIT better". I wanted to jump up and yell, "THAT WAS BLOODY FANTASTIC!" I'm starting to wonder whether it's something peculiar to me. All the same, if we don't tell kids they are doing well and we think they are amazing, how are they supposed to know it?

5.2 Gender specific behaviour

Within this team, there seemed to be some inequality between the boys and girls in terms of group status. The TIC alluded to this prior to the first planning meeting, complaining that the girls tend to "use" the boys' school by dominating the decision making, claiming the choreography rights, all the while expecting the boys to "do all the grunt work, paint the set, provide all the resources but get none of the glory". She further maintained that, as trained dancers, the girls considered themselves the "upper" members of the team "riding slipshod over the boys with their advanced skills and more powerful personalities".

This inequality was especially apparent at the planning meetings, where all girls except one were consistently dismissive of the boys' contributions regarding theme choice. In a typical example, Steve made a valid and imaginative suggestion and proposed how it could be conceptualised. Indeed, it was only the boys who had come prepared with ideas. The eight girls immediately shook their heads, waving their hands away and exchanging long-suffering glances. I recorded:

Poor Steve. He's trying hard to get some direction in the discussion but the girls are all talking to each other, at each other and over each other. They rubbish his suggestions, then realise sheepishly they may have been a bit harsh, and throw a patronising comment at him like, "oh, that was a reeeally good idea, but..." They have no interest in a controlled discussion and are very hard to keep in line. There's a lot of eye-rolling, sniggering and loud sighing. I wonder if they are showing off for the two boys here. Steve is having real trouble gaining credibility, but is persisting and has actually managed to make a few suggestions which the girls took note of. Tim, however, has made several aborted attempts to be heard ("How about we..." "What do you think of..."). He never even got to finish a sentence. He's finally given up and is saying nothing. It's hard to watch.

Susie, a choreographer further demonstrated her scepticism about the boys' place in the team, saying:

I think we've got to be careful how many boys we let in. We can't let too many guys in cos they always piss-take and that's not fair when there are so many passionate girls like us who will have to be stood down. Let's face it. The guys are only after one thing, and it's not dancing.

This attitude was also unwittingly encouraged by the TIC who tended to give the girls more feedback and reinforcement than the boys. For example, at the end of the meeting, the TIC addressed the girls about their duties for next week. Steve then asked:

But shouldn't the boys have some tasks to do to?

TIC: No, it's ok. I'll handle the boys' auditions. It's better that way.

After the second meeting, I recorded:

The girls seem to have placed themselves in all the star roles and are doing the choreography. They are making decisions on where to put the boys on the basis of their physical strength, like "Oh he can be a tree and that way he can be close to lift the props off the stage". I am watching Tim and Steve's faces and it's really quite upsetting to see them so disempowered.

Over time these differences became less marked. However, the boys still had to work hard to have their voices heard in meetings.

6. Summary of Volcanoes' experience

In terms of the key elements (music and dance, public performance, competition, team and youth initiative), this was a fairly typical SC experience and based on my observations and commentary from the TIC and students, positive growth experiences did occur during the preparation and performance day processes. Most noticeably, there were ample opportunities for healthy boy-girl socialisation, ranging from shared dance experiences to safe physical touching and romantic partnering. Students also gained a wider understanding of an important historical event, learnt new dance skills, met deadlines, and delivered an effective public performance. Both the technical rehearsal and competition performance had all the outward signs of a flow experience.

Positive identity experiences seemed mixed. The ballet girls and volcano hip hoppers were cohesive units who took pride in their routines, their costumes and their soundtracks. Likewise, the Maori prophet brought his identity as a respected senior student and Maori leader to his stage role and students and audience responded to this. Unfortunately, the peasants seemed disenfranchised from the beginning, they tended not to congregate as a group and that segment of the performance never really gelled. Even their title, the "peasants" did not fit with the story line or their costume and dance styles. The group identity, although salient on performance day, was compromised by the theme choice which never resonated with the cast and required them to assume stage roles that were difficult to characterise. This

was exacerbated by the cast being derived from two different colleges and disconnecting as a unit immediately after the event.

Students' autonomy experiences were also confused. Despite the activity being initially handed over to them, the TIC selected the theme, made many administrative decisions and chaired meetings. As such, teacher and student roles were often blurred and in the ensuing disorganisation, the TIC tended to adopt an autonomy control stance rather than supporting students to work independently.

Without a questionnaire, it was difficult to determine the intrinsic rewards experienced by the students. They certainly seemed to enjoy the performance day. Nevertheless, two weeks after the competition, the TIC reported by email that, although students had loved the performance day, they were still "miffed" about the result and were contemplating the futility of launching a future entry when "all the cards seemed to be stacked against them".

7. Reflections

My thoughts about data collection methods used and the highlights and challenges experienced within this setting.

Data collection

This was more how I imagined detached observation would be. I sat reasonably unobtrusively in the hall, but my presence was acknowledged and the TIC was generous with her time. I felt far more relaxed and less alone. In fact, detached observation was probably the only method I could have used, given the random organisational structure and multi-site practice locations. My field notes produced a sizeable quantity of rich, contextual data based on the *Volcanoes'* overt behaviour at both the practices and performance day. In particular, it provided a bird's eye view of boy-girl dynamics and autonomy enhancing and inhibiting behaviours, both of which would have been compromised by closer involvement on my part. I again felt reassured that as long as I was sensitive about when and where I took notes, students were comfortable with my presence and did not alter their behaviour because of it.

Nevertheless, I still had a number of areas which were problematic. First, my notes still reflected some personal preoccupations, especially my interest in the technicalities of production (I wrote 20 pages about this) and my fixation with positive reinforcement. I also became somewhat mesmerised by the boy-girl dynamics which distracted me from the big picture occurring around me. In future, I had to be more aware of multiple perspectives. Again, I felt my current notes were again too description-oriented and reflection-heavy.

I still had problems with recording notes. Although the hall was vast, temporary visitors to the practices (parents or passing teachers) noticed I was alone and thought I needed company. Often they stayed beside me for a long time. This did provide useful insights into the unfolding situation, but I was also very rarely able to record without interruption. When I did write, students often tried to read over my shoulder and made comments about what they could see. If there had been an incident, student would say, “Hey Miss, you’re not going to write this down, are you?” This meant I had to save writing until I got home, not much fun after a long evening in a freezing school hall.

Furthermore, once stage lighting was being used, the hall was so dark I could not even see my note book, let alone the words I was writing. This was the same during the competition performances. I contemplated using a torch or headlamp, but this would have illuminated my presence even more. Thus, recording in real time continued to be a challenge.

Added to this, the sub-groups often practised in several parts of the school simultaneously and it was difficult to know how to best observe – remain in one spot and focus on a single group or dash from space to space? Neither stance was ideal, but it did feel less intrusive to stay put.

It was also clear that without a retrospective questionnaire or interviews, my observations provided a very one-sided picture of the experience and no feedback about their performance day activities (except via the TIC). In fairness, though, this was a supplementary study and it *did* give me observation mileage and an additional site to trial the conceptual framework.

Highlights and challenges

Despite the short duration of my time with this team, compared to the *Boy Soldiers*, I felt a great deal of empathy for these kids as they struggled to get the routine to performance standard and I got a real thrill from seeing them finally transition into a working unit.

I also came to realise that, although this was not a well-organised group, their struggles provided a wealth of information, especially concerning the vital function of autonomy support in youth performing arts. I had to stop fixating on the struggles and look for the meanings *behind* them. Likewise, I never tired of watching the socialising rituals between boys and girls which, for me, almost upstaged the actual SC routine. It was endlessly fascinating to observe this age-old behaviour but it did distract me from the big picture.

In the latter part of the period, most observations involved repeatedly watching the routine. This became incredibly boring and I had to steel myself to leave my warm fire to attend yet another evening rehearsal, especially if I had observed the *Boy Soldiers* that same day. Being

bored, cold and tired is not conducive to productive field notes. Looking back, I should have gone equipped with food, a book light and hot water bottle.

I also paid dearly (literally) for not defining my research boundaries clearly enough at the outset. For example, I got burnt when students added a further 16 (non-contributing) members to the team three days out from the competition and asked me for more money for their t-shirts (not cheap). This was not in the spirit of my original offer but I did not have the heart to say no. I definitely needed to tighten up my research contract negotiations, especially in the money area.

As I got to know the TIC better, it became more and more difficult to retain my detached stance because she came to view me as teaching colleague, friend and visiting “expert”. This put me on the spot on several occasions. For example, after one mistake-riddled practice, the TIC was very critical of the students’ performance which was not well-received by them. She then said, “Well, if you don’t believe me, listen to Jan. She travels NZ looking at SC so she’s an expert on SC. If you won’t listen to me, at least listen to her.” At this point the students, already smarting from the TIC’s feedback, looked resentfully at me and as I later recorded:

I knew if I said nothing I would upset the TIC and if I said something, I’d upset the students. I tried to turn it into a positive by complimenting them on how much progress they had made. However, the TIC impatiently interjected, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, we *know* that. I want you to talk about the BAD bits”. Yikes. I made some comment about timing issues which was really just a repeat of her words, and the kids looked pissed off and the TIC looked pissed off too because I hadn’t been more forthcoming in my support of her.

In fact, a key challenge for me in this study was the TIC, as I concluded in my field notes:

She is delightful and inclusive but she has come to view me as part of her support team. So much for being detached! I suspect she feels quite alone and is glad of another friendly face. I can totally relate to this because being a producer is lonely work. At the same time, it does feel nice to be recognised and acknowledged, unlike my other situation. From the beginning the TIC deferred to me and sought my advice, often in front to of the students citing my supposed expertise. It is difficult not to be drawn into this and I feel churlish if I hang back. But I am also embarrassed to be asked to offer opinions on the students’ performances because I feel it is not my place. Really hard to get the balance right of being interested, concerned, and supportive but not get drawn into the point of being expected to commit.

Nevertheless, I was again pleased that my conceptual framework was standing up to practical scrutiny. I now needed to position myself in a research setting that allowed me a greater participant role. The Pig Hunters study permitted me to do just that...and more!

CHAPTER 5 THE PIG HUNTERS

What are you thinking of, Miss? That's not how pig hunts end. There's no way you're gonna get us dancing round in girlie gear like ponces. We'd never be able to show our faces again.
(Year 10 boy)

1. Background to study

This school was targeted because it represented a new demographic. It was rural, low decile, co-educational and was located a long distance from the venue. More importantly, it had never been previously involved in SC.

1.1 The school

The *Pig Hunters* came from an area school (Years 1-13), situated in a rural district 75km from the nearest town. The school is located in the main street, which also has a general store, bar-café, one-room museum and a memorial hall. The community shares the school's library and swimming pool. There is no cell phone reception within 20km of the school.

The school has a roll of 240, predominantly from farming and forestry families. It is ranked decile four and the ethnic composition is approximately 82% NZ European and 18% Maori. Five of the 14 staff members have long family associations with the school or attended the school themselves. In the last decade, the school roll has dropped because of the downturn in the local forestry industry and the Principal reported considerable economic hardship among many school families.

The school is strongly sport-oriented with all the pictures, brag books and news clips in the school lobby reflecting sporting achievements. The senior students have a respected reputation at the regional winter sports tournament. Although the school has a drama teacher and presents an annual lip synch competition and a home-grown musical, according to the Principal the performing arts are under-represented in school activities. She was therefore keen to accept my research proposal to mentor the school through a SC entry in return for research access and viewed participation in SC as a way of redressing the curriculum imbalance as well as an opportunity to up-skill teachers and students. The Dean of Years 7-10 was the teacher in charge (TIC) and my contact person in the school.

1.2 The team

According to school records, 75% of students travelled by bus to school and had farm duties before and after school. SC practices for this team, therefore, could only take place in class

time. To accommodate this, SC was incorporated into the drama/life recreation curriculum with practices occurring during normal class sessions and because of this, participation in SC was compulsory for all Year 7-10 students. From a theoretical perspective, this was exciting because a limitation of many youth activity studies is that students tend to self-select into programmes thus compromising the generalizability of findings. However, I was also nervous because I do not feel comfortable with compulsory participation, especially for the boys who, according to the Principal, were mostly rugged outdoor enthusiasts with little experience of the arts. Ironically, Year 11-13 students were the most keen to participate, but because the Principal felt they were already fully committed with the winter sports tournament, they were excluded. However, she was happy for them to act in a support capacity nearer the performance day.

The original team was comprised of Year 7-10 students ($n = 83$) aged 10 -15 years. Included in the team was a low-functioning autistic boy with no speech capability and many physical limitations. Ultimately, the on-stage team dwindled to 62 students with attrition due to illness or injury (3), family funeral (1), school transfer (1), parental religious objections (3), withdrawal by staff for bad behaviour (3) and withdrawal at parents' request (7). Reflecting its small-town roots, the team also contained 12 family groups, with seven families having three members in the team and five having two. Only seven members of the team had any previous performing arts experience apart from the lip synch competition and school musical and 83% of the team had never heard of SC.

1.3 Theme

The theme, pig hunting, was selected by the students to highlight the environmental destruction caused by wild pigs to their farms and animals, specifically the giant weta and giant land snail, two endangered NZ species. The story began with an idyllic rural morning scene as farmers and their dogs moved among their lambs. The mood changed when they were unexpectedly attacked by wild pigs who were rebuffed by the farm dogs. The scene then switched to the forest where insects, butterflies and birds mingled freely. Again, they were attacked, this time by a large group of wild boars causing widespread destruction and carnage. After a blackout, ruggedly dressed hunters appeared with their tracking devices and hunting dogs. The dogs tracked down and bailed up the pigs and the hunters then slit the pigs' throats with knives. Calm returned to the land and the forest creatures re-emerged. The story finished with a full cast finale depicting a town barbecue (pork, of course) as residents celebrated the removal of the "animals of mass destruction" (a school saying).

1.4 Preparation period

In signing up for SC, the Principal and TIC had specific objectives that we discussed at the preliminary planning meeting: to address the deficit of arts experience in the school; to produce an authentic and meaningful routine; to teach students the basics about drama production; to get raw material for the end-of-year school musical; to build students' self-confidence; to support students to overcome their "country bumpkin mentality"; to "put our town on the map, because most people have never heard of us"; and most of all, to have fun. It was agreed that the school would drive the theme, content and choreography, while I would undertake team administration and logistics, run workshops for students and staff and oversee the soundtrack. This would hopefully allow me to be immersed in the students' experience but still be detached enough to accumulate rich data.

Students were first introduced to the concept of SC at the end of the previous year when I visited the school at the TIC's request. My job was "to get the kids enthusiastic about participating" (TIC). At a group meeting in the school library, the TIC informed students of the school's intention to field a team and I followed up with more specific information about the event as well as showing them DVDs of other schools' routines.

From the start of the following year, we took students through a 15 week preparation period during which practices occurred twice weekly within their class groups. In the final three weeks, full team rehearsals were held in the gym. Timetabling logistics meant that most preparation work took place in gender-segregated class groups that corresponded to their on-stage groups. Each class group was further divided into boys and girls dance groups, making a total of eight performance groups characterising farmers, farm animals, farm dogs, pig dogs, forest creatures and hunters. All but ten students portrayed animal roles. Most practices took place in classrooms among the school desks and as there was no sound system, music was played on a lap top computer.

Once full team sessions began in the gym, students missed sport and PE two afternoons per week to attend rehearsals. At this stage the finale was constructed and the various parts combined to make a coherent routine. For the final week, senior student volunteers came on board as back stage crew, hair and make-up artists, lighting and sound directors and performance day presenters.

A special feature of this preparation period was the interest shown in the team by the wider community members who often dropped by to watch practices on their way to the school library. The team was also tracked by local media, including the local newspaper, the regional paper and the Global Rock organisation. Students were photographed and interviewed for

both papers and a Global Rock film crew was sent to follow the school for a day as a feature item in the national SC television special.

1.5 Performance day

Rural schools have extra challenges on performance day because of their remoteness from the competition venue and this differentiated the Pig Hunters' performance day experience from the other schools in the study. Here, many students lived long distances from the school and parents delivered them to the school by 5.30 a.m. (in -3°C) where they caught buses for the two-hour trip to the SC event. Additionally, staff members had to transport sets, costumes and home-cooked food which they packed the previous day in borrowed horse floats, cleaned out by the students in school time.

Students rarely came to town and only three had been to the SC venue before. Even having cell phone reception was a novelty. Nevertheless, they were made welcome by SC staff and the other schools, and quickly became involved in all the activities on offer, especially the team chant-offs. Because of their limited budget, they could not afford take-away food, so staff and family members provided huge quantities of home-baking and cooked a barbecue for the team outside the main door of the venue. In the tradition of SC, they brought a gift for the other competing teams, in this case a hand-made card and a large pot of honey from a local apiary. Students were cheered enthusiastically by other schools during their rehearsals and performed well in the competition. A large contingent of family supporters travelled north for the performance.

At this venue, students were assigned individual dressing rooms, rather than sharing a mass space. The Pig Hunters were placed closest to the stage with a team of similarly aged students in the adjoining room. Although noisy, this gave them ample opportunity to socialise, even during the lock-down periods. An additional bonus was that they could clearly see back-stage from their dressing room which gave them a close-up view of the technical aspects of stagecraft. Even better, all the other teams had to file through their dressing room to get to their pre-performance positions, facilitating many pre and post-performance interchanges between teams.

The team received an award of excellence for visual presentation, the environmental awareness and community spirit awards and the Spirit of SC award for the most popular school. At the end of performance day, about 11pm, students again loaded into buses for the long ride home where they were met by parents at 1 a.m. then driven to their homes, up to a further hour away. The next day, many students were expected to help with milking at 4.30

a.m. then catch buses to school at 7.30 a.m. because this was their only means of transport. There was nothing soft about these kids!

2. Method

2.1 Participant Observation

In this study, I adopted a participant observer role moving between full participation and semi-detached participation on the observational continuum. This enabled me to literally rub shoulders with the students, sharing in their conversations and working with them on the performance routine. The documented disadvantages of this method, however, are the risk of losing control over the research process, being consumed by a participant role and having inadequate opportunities or energy to record comprehensive field notes (Dallos, 2006). Indeed, this proved to be the case when my proposed role as a mentor and administrative support person unexpectedly morphed into a full-on producer-choreographer on my first day in the field (to be discussed later in the chapter). I subsequently attended four classroom lessons a day to train students, led the massed rehearsals for the last three weeks, attended staff meetings to mentor teachers involved in SC, compiled the soundtrack and sourced make up and costumes.

In all, over a 15 week period, I did 48 round trips (250km) from home, sometimes five days a week, in total more than 6500 kms. On one occasion, I did the round trip twice in one day. Writing up field notes was challenging because of lack of time and privacy on-site. After each school visit, I stopped in a park 20kms from the school and jotted down key features of the day's experience which I expanded into full-hand notes at 6am the next morning when my head was clearer. In all, I wrote 238 A4 pages of field notes.

2.2 Supplementary measures

I supplemented my observational notes with student self-reports derived from post-performance focus group sessions and a questionnaire. I also conducted a post-performance focus group with staff members to gain their perception of how SC had impacted on the students. Finally, I drew on material from students' public blogs and the TV special feature about the schools' participation as a first-time SC team.

2.2.1 Focus groups

Two days after SC, I conducted eight 55-minute focus groups during class time in the school library. Students were grouped by year level and gender, reflecting the practice group structure. In total, 53 students (30 boys and 23 girls) participated in the focus groups

comprising those students who participated in SC and were present at school that day, specifically Year 7 girls ($n = 10$), Year 7 boys ($n = 6$), Year 8 girls ($n = 6$), Year 8 boys ($n = 7$), Year 9 girls ($n = 7$), Year 9 boys ($n = 6$), Year 10 girls ($n = 7$) and Year 10 boys ($n = 4$). Because the whole trip to town was such a novelty for these students, the main purpose of the focus groups was to capture their reaction to performance day as soon as possible after the event (in previous studies, this was delayed for up to 2 weeks because of schools' reluctance to have interruptions too soon after SC). I also hoped the group format would encourage discussion and spark ideas between students, as well as guide any potential modifications to the questionnaire.

As noted in the method chapter, I adopted a story telling format, where students first recorded their impromptu thoughts about the performance day in silence. For this part, I supplied lollipops which effectively prevented them from talking during the five minute reflection period (it's difficult to talk with a mouth full of lollipop). They then gathered in a circle to share their experiences or to read from their list. I took extensive notes while they spoke wherever possible recording comments verbatim. To finish, we compiled an overview of their group experience on the whiteboard which I photographed for my notes. On leaving, students handed in their anonymous reflections to me and these notes were an invaluable record of their focus group commentary.

One week after the competition, I also invited staff members to attend a group meeting with me (whether or not they had been directly involved in SC). While my focus was on their perceptions of the students' experience, I elected to have an open forum so that the discussion would not be pre-empted by my agenda. Seven staff members attended, including the Principal, Deputy Principal, TIC, and three key SC teachers. Those teachers who had not already signed consent forms did so here. At this meeting, I asked them about the impact of SC on the school and the students, and from there the discussion flowed freely for 90 minutes, while I took notes.

2.2.2 Questionnaire

I administered the questionnaire two weeks after performance day (see Appendix C). This was completed by 54 of the 62 on-stage performers in class time under my supervision. Five students were absent from school and the special needs boy was unable to complete it, even with caregiver support. The qualitative data of two Year 10 boys was not included because they answered every question with "not telling". I also administered the questionnaire to 15 backstage crew (from Years 12 and 13), but because they were not part of the preparation period, I only used their qualitative comments about the performance day in my analysis.

While the key dimensions to be assessed were similar to the Boy Soldiers' questionnaire, the content and language was modified to reflect the Pig Hunters' context. In this, I was guided by my observations at practices and the students' focus group commentary. Essentially, the questionnaire was designed to sequentially "lead" students back through their SC journey, with questions centring on significant moments of their experience, for example, *Think back to last year when we had our first meeting about SC*, and *Now, think back to when you first walked into the venue*. The questionnaire gathered:

Demographic information

This included students' year level, age, gender, mode of transport to school (to enable comparison with city schools), details of previous performing arts experience, and pre-existing knowledge of SC.

It also assessed:

Emotions

This was a modification of the *Boy Soldier* format because I was interested in which emotions predominated at multiple points in the experience. Students were therefore asked to *retrospectively* identify emotions experienced at six different time points: the first meeting informing them of the school's intention to participate in SC; the dress rehearsal, one day before the competition; arrival at the SC venue; waiting in the wings prior to the performance; immediately after they came off stage; and two weeks after the event, looking back on the overall experience. The checklist contained 12 words, including six emotions from the previous questionnaire (*excited, enthusiastic, proud, nervous, bored, and frustrated*). However, I substituted *curious* for "interested", because students used this word a lot during focus group discussions. I also included *annoyed* and *reluctant*, given that this team contained students who had been coerced into participating. Finally, I included *challenged* to encompass the flow dimension in the study and *neutral* for students who did not have strong feelings in either direction about the experience. Because I was sceptical about the accuracy of rating emotions retrospectively, especially for six time points, I instead asked students to circle three words from each check list that best described how they felt at that time point, thus giving me an insight into frequency of emotional experience rather than intensity.

To qualify the emotional frequency data, I included open-ended questions about the best and worst aspects of the preparation period and the performance day. I also asked students to describe their feelings after the dress rehearsal, when they were en route to the venue and on

entering the auditorium because, based on previous studies, I expected these moments to be emotionally intense.

Integrity

Autonomy was not directly assessed on this questionnaire because, as an adult-driven team, this was not expected to be a strong feature of students' experience. However, given the strong relevance of the theme to adolescents, I anticipated integrity to be an important factor. Therefore, I therefore included two open-ended questions about the students' retrospective reaction to the theme, (a) before practices began (*At this stage, how did you feel about the theme that the school chose. Try to give a reason for your answer*) and (b) after the performance (*By the time the performance day came around, how were you feeling about the pig hunter theme? Had your feelings changed from when we first started practising? Try to give a reason for your answer*).

To determine whether participation had added value to school and community life, students were asked two open-ended questions: *Do you think the school has benefited from being involved in SC? If so, how?*; and *Has SC been bad for the school in any way? If so, in what way?* Students were also asked *How much do you think the school's participation has influenced other peoples' awareness and knowledge of your community?*, responding on a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = not at all; 4 = a great deal). Finally, students rated the extent SC allowed them to be themselves using a single statement from Harré's (2007) identity project questionnaire, *Did you feel that SC allowed you to "be yourself"?* (0 = not at all; 4 = a great deal).

Flow

All nine dimensions of flow were used to assess the on-stage performance experience (Flow State Scale: Jackson & Marsh, 1996). The statements were modified to reflect the SC context and age of the students. For two dimensions (challenge-skills balance and time distortion) I broke the complex statements into two simple statements. Thus, students responded to: *I found it very challenging performing on-stage*, followed by *I was confident I had the skills to perform really well* (each rated separately); and *My time on stage seemed really, really short*, followed by *My time on stage seemed really, really long* (each rated separately). To further assess students' performance response, I asked them which was their most preferred time on-stage (out of the three rehearsals and the actual performance) and the reason for their answer. At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked to use one word to describe SC, which I expected would indicate the extent to which they classified it as an optimal experience. I also scanned students' open-ended comments for language that reflected flow, particularly in their focus group descriptions of their on-stage experience and counted their prevalence.

Accomplishments

To assess their response to the result, students were asked to rate their reaction on a continuum from “very disappointed” to “over the moon”. The rating terms were derived from language I had heard students use in the focus groups. They were also given an opportunity to add any open-ended comments about the result. Additionally, I asked students about their reaction to competitions in general, giving them three response options: “I don’t like competitions”, “not sure” and “competition makes it more exciting”.

Next, they were asked, *How proud did you feel of your school at the end of the night?* and *How proud did you feel of yourself at the end of the night?* (0 = “not at all proud”; 4 = “extremely proud”). Finally, students were asked open-ended questions about the skills they had gained and what they had learnt about themselves during SC.

Identity

Because the issue of “country bumpkin” versus “city kids” identity dominated staff and student discussion around SC, I concentrated on this aspect on the questionnaire. I therefore asked two open-ended questions pertaining to students’ expectations of how they would be treated by the city kids and how they were actually treated.

Belonging

Aspects of belonging were implicit in many of the open-ended questions, for example, students’ degree of acceptance by other schools. To supplement this, students were also asked to rate their sense of belonging with their own team members and with other schools, using two questions from Harré’s (2007) identity projects questionnaire: *How much did you feel a sense of belonging with the other members of your team* and *How much did you feel a sense of belonging with the other school teams* (0 = “not at all”; 4 = “a great deal”).

Future intentions

Lastly, students were asked whether they would like to repeat this year’s experience and whether they would re-enlist in future SCs, if it was *voluntary*. They rated their answers on a response scale from definitely not to definitely yes.

2.2.3 Student blogs

In conjunction with their English programme, Year 9 students were expected to keep blogs of their SC journey (along with other current life events). These blogs were on an open website which was accessible to the general public and I scanned these for additional information.

3. Key elements and opportunities

The extent to which the key elements and opportunities of a “typical” SC experience were present for this team.

3.1 Music and dance

The *Pig Hunters*’ experience was based around music and dance. The soundtrack was compiled exclusively from NZ music chosen by the students and which reflected the NZ theme. Until the soundtrack was finalised, the teachers and I used a selection of random NZ songs to train students to move rhythmically and to react emotionally to music. In the initial stages, each lesson finished with the Dave Dobbyn track, *Slice of Heaven*, where boys’ and girls’ teams tried to out-perform each other in a dance-off. This involved spontaneous improvisation and group rivalry and students often requested this activity. Once it was finalised, students were also provided with individual copies of the soundtrack so that they could practise their parts in their free time. I often saw the girls practising their moves during lunchtimes, but the boys limited their practices to class sessions.

Despite the large number of reluctant dancers during the preparation period, the students did participate without inhibition in the mass dance sessions on performance day. They especially enjoyed their chant/cheerleading routine which was devised the day before the competition. Most noticeably, the Year 7 girls found a corner in the auditorium where they formed their own little dance group and danced non-stop all day to the other schools’ soundtracks.

3.2 Competition

At the beginning, the school had very little idea of what SC entailed and looked to me for guidance about how much we should emphasise the competitive aspect. My preferred approach was to provide a fun-filled, positive first experience rather than focusing on winning but, knowing the school’s competitive orientation in sports, I was happy to follow the school’s lead. After discussion, we mutually agreed that it was unrealistic to expect the team to do well on their first attempt and to treat this entry as a “taster, to see if it works for the kids at this school” (TIC). Consequently, the notion of competition was not strongly conveyed to students and it was only at the performance day that they were exposed to the strong inter-school rivalry which is a feature of SC.

3.3 Public performance

The practice period was designed to give students as much public performance exposure as possible. They were given regular opportunities to perform segments to other class groups, the staff, and to members of the public, including representatives from the local media. Even

so, they were somewhat overwhelmed when they arrived at the venue and were confronted with the scale and sophistication of the other schools' routines. In particular, they were worried that their routine was not as polished or complex as the school that was rehearsing as they entered the auditorium.

The team had three on-stage rehearsals. The first was tentative and unconvincing. In the second and third rehearsals, other schools recognised their music, then danced along with them and cheered them on and this boosted their confidence. Their competition performance was effective and well-received.

3.4 Team activity

The *Pig Hunters* were a medium-sized SC team. However, the in-class practice structure prevented full team rehearsals until the last three weeks which meant this was not a "typical" preparation period. In fact, it was not until massed practices began and the finale was constructed, that the team became the salient unit. However, because this was a small, closely-knit school, team members already had well-established relationships with each other. Team-based dance, though, was an unfamiliar activity and most of the final practices were devoted to moulding the team into a cohesive performance unit.

3.5 Youth initiative

Because this team was new to SC and comprised younger students, it was adult-driven. I took on the key production role and the TIC managed the practice logistics. Eight other staff members took on supporting roles with costume, make-up, sets, fundraising and food. A staff member was assigned to look after the special needs boy. However, students were involved as much as possible in the decision-making process. A core group of twelve students volunteered to brainstorm the theme and devise the story line, supported by the TIC. There was also a team vote for the title of the routine. Within class groups, students contributed ideas for the soundtrack and used previous SC DVDs to get ideas for colours, dress, dance and props, assisted by the sewing teacher. Year 9 and 10 girls sketched costume designs and attempted to choreograph segments of their dance. Senior students helped the art and woodwork teachers build and paint sets and formulate the lighting plan. In reality, though, at the school's request, the bulk of the production and administration responsibilities were undertaken by me.

3.6 Social interaction

Students already interacted closely in this school so SC did not really provide new opportunities to develop or extend new social connections during the practice period. It did, however, provide a new context and style of socialising both at school and on performance

day. For example, en route to the venue on performance day, students were able to get cell phone reception and spent much of the bus journey interacting with each other by text even though they were only metres apart. At the venue, students were exposed to a new social context on a grand scale, where they were able to mingle with peers from different settings in a party atmosphere unlike most of them had ever experienced before.

4. Growth and well-being experiences

Developmental experiences that evolve during SC, particularly those that are of considerable interest to students, increase their knowledge base, or expand them in some way, giving them new skills or new ways of interacting with others.

4.1 Autonomy

The extent to which students regulate their own behaviour and experience, and govern the initiation and direction of action during SC.

Although SC encourages student autonomy, this must be weighed against the age and experience of the performers and, in this case, it would have been unrealistic to expect young students to take ownership of a process that was completely foreign to them. However, because of my existing knowledge of the event, I was often able to anticipate those areas where students (and staff) could be successfully given some degree of autonomy. Despite this, autonomy-related statements did not feature in students' focus groups, questionnaire reports or my field notes. There was one exception and this involved a senior student who told me he had previous lighting experience and because I was over-committed, I unreservedly handed the lighting director role over to him. As I noted:

I got that wrong. Turns out he didn't know too much and I should have checked. He missed vital cues on the night which did affect the performance. More frustratingly, he was keen and had I taken more interest, he could have learnt so much from this experience. He felt he had let the team down and I felt I had let him down. Bad case of inadequate autonomy support on my part.

4.2 Integrity

The extent to which SC reflects students' values, beliefs and ways of "being" in the world.

Integrity, on the other hand played a significant part in students' experience. As noted, the school was keen to produce a meaningful routine based on an authentic theme and pig hunting was certainly an activity that the students had experienced first-hand. In fact, all but two of the 24 Year 10 students (including the girls) said they regularly pig-hunted and had "stuck" a pig (to stick a pig means slitting its throat with a knife rather than shooting it, which is considered the easy option and more damaging to the meat). When the TIC asked for a show of support in favour of a pig hunting theme at the first meeting, approximately 80% of students raised their

hands. Likewise on the questionnaire, more than half the students, in their open-ended comments, were in favour of the theme because it clearly reflected their lifestyles and they were proud that it had never been previously portrayed in SC. As one boy at the preliminary meeting said, "It's high time we showed the townies what we're made of down here". Nevertheless, the theme choice was not universally popular. On the questionnaire, several girls opposed it because it was, as one noted, "too much of a boys' thing" and "meant we can't dress up like pretty dancers". Several others suggested it was "OK, but we could have done much better". One Year 9 boy was philosophically opposed to killing animals and, although co-operative, was a very reluctant participant. In fact, he struggled throughout the experience to reconcile his values with those of his team mates ("I am against pig hunting because it is a blood sport. It's not me"). Thus, the theme did not have integrity value for all students.

Because of my complete ignorance about pig hunting, I relied heavily on students' input to develop an authentic routine. This involved many compromises between my wish to produce a visually effective, competitive and inclusive routine and their need to depict a genuine pig hunt. Each practice session, they confronted me about this. For example, they wanted to have real guns and knives on-stage ("But, Miss, we just keep them in our bedrooms at home. What's the difference? Can you imagine how our mates would mock us if we used guns from the \$2 shop? "). They were indignant when I choreographed the killing scene with five pigs, twenty dogs and six hunters (for visual impact and to involve large numbers of students), arguing, "But, Miss, why would we kill all those pigs? That just doesn't make sense. We can only eat one at a time, so why kill more?" The boys refused to dance in time to the music ("But we don't *dance* when we go on pig hunts. How gay is that!"), and insisted on wearing their authentic hunting jackets and muddy boots instead of stage costumes ("If we've gotta do this, at least we can look like the real deal"). My biggest insult to their integrity occurred when I suggested the final scene include a spoof ballet scene with pig angels in tutus (depicted by the boys), something I felt would be appreciated by the city audience and provide some light relief after the violence of the pig hunt. The boys were aghast. In one of my many despairing diary entries, I wrote:

I totally see where they're coming from and I want to let them take control of the stage moves. But I also know when they get to the venue and see the other schools' routines, they might feel embarrassed if they don't have something that looks vaguely like a dance. I'm also really worried about the graphic violence they want to depict. Slitting pigs' throats is a natural thing for them to do and they seem genuinely unaware that townies or the judges might respond negatively to this. Or maybe they are making a statement about themselves. Meantime, I am trying to teach them that they can maintain their integrity even though there might be 8 pigs, 8 dogs and 8 hunters on stage. Each night I go home and try to conceive more dance moves that satisfy both of us. Then I go back and they moan cos I've changed things round again. Aaaargh.

Ultimately, I accommodated all their requests concerning choreography and content and they compromised with on-stage performer numbers after lengthy debates between us concerning the tension between reality and art and the need to give everyone adequate stage time. And, to be honest, the pig ballet was really not a great idea on my part!

The students maintained their country character on performance day. While most schools wore artistic, fashionable t-shirts, they wore bright red tops with a wild pig on the back. Their “good luck” gifts reflected their community cottage industries. Their home-cooked on-site food was in sharp contrast to the other schools who mostly ordered a mass take-away delivery. I wondered whether the *Pig Hunters* felt self-conscious about their “no frills” approach in comparison to other schools but, on the contrary, a number stated during focus groups that they felt sorry for the city schools because, as a young Year 7 boy remarked, “they only had takeaways and junk while we had all the yummy home-cooked stuff”. In fact, when asked about the best aspects of performance day on the questionnaire, for more than half the students, the home-grown food was a highlight, with one boy noting, “The yummy American hotdogs were delicious and kept us going”. After performance day, I recorded,

I totally admire these kids. They stuck doggedly to what they believed in. For them, it was more important to deliver an honest portrayal of their lifestyle than a sophisticated performance piece and they did exactly that (although admittedly, they had no idea what a sophisticated performance looked like til they got there). The audience was a bit shocked about the throat-slitting scene (there was a rather sharp intake of breath from the auditorium) and one judge made a rather cynical remark (“You’ve put me off bacon for life”) but many people commented that it was an easy story to follow, had a good message and was true to the kids. Best of all, their families loved it which seemed to really matter to the kids.

In the post-performance focus groups, much of the discussion centred on the impact of the theme. Many students commented that their parents had approved of the theme choice and felt the routine was realistically constructed. Several students also agreed that it was effective because of its “uniqueness” and, as a Year 13 girl reported, “It showed the townies what happens in our neck of the woods”. Conversely, one Year 9 girl opposed the theme because “instead of making us *part* of the SC community, it emphasised how different we are”.

On the questionnaire, when asked about their attitude to the theme *after* they had performed, students’ views had not changed although a few of the earlier detractors conceded that it had worked out better than they expected because it emphasised their individuality. A Year 10 girl reported, “My feelings changed cos I saw how the people loved it so then I thought it was cool too.” A Year 9 boy conceded, “It’s still not my favourite idea, but have to admit it did work on the night”. In terms of value to the school, the majority of students believed it enhanced the school’s reputation because it suited the town, showed the audience what they enjoyed doing

and reflected NZ rural life. Only one student mentioned the significance of the environmental message behind the theme.

When asked on the questionnaire to respond to the statement, *Did you feel SC allowed you to be yourself?*, students indicated on the 0 - 4 scale that the activity had above average integrity value ($M= 2.70$, $SD = 1.35$). Interestingly, of the 21 students who indicated that SC allowed them to be themselves “a great deal”, 17 were female, suggesting that, despite the enjoyable performance day, it was the girls who felt most comfortable with SC.

4.3 Belonging

Students' sense of connection to, and love and care from their SC team and the wider SC community.

This team entered the preparation period with a well-established sense of community. They were also inclusive of newcomers and I immediately felt part of school life. The school was small and close-knit and there were seamless on-site transitions between primary, intermediate and secondary levels. Moreover, the majority of students travelled to and from school together by bus, there were several family groups within the team and the wider community was involved and supportive. During recess and lunchtimes, students of all ages and both genders converged on the sports field to have large scale games of touch rugby or netball. Once they were muddy, it was hard to differentiate between boys and girls who both dispensed regular outbursts of colourful language.

However, the necessary small group practices for SC were not conducive to team solidarity and it was not until we joined together for the finale practices that there was any real sense of team togetherness. After the first run-through, I noted:

The finale is going well. It has quickly built up a sense of teamship and given them a better idea of what SC is all about. They have had their first sensation of massed, unified performance and seem to love it. They keep saying, “Please can we do it again”?

To ensure everyone had equal status on the team, we elected to have no lead roles. Additionally, in an attempt to boost team morale and engagement, we gave awards (SC posters and paraphernalia) to the most committed and energetic on-stage groups at each rehearsal. To judge this, we commandeered assorted visitors who dropped by to observe the practices. This seemed to encourage most students and they would frequently huddle in small groups to strategize about how to win the next award. Team belonging was further strengthened by the publication of a full page colour photograph of the *Pig Hunters* on the front page of the local paper, three days before the competition. Finally, the distribution of team t-shirts after the

dress rehearsal further cemented their sense of teamship, with students permitted to wear their bright red t-shirts in class for the rest of the day.

Despite their strong community spirit at the local level, students were, however, very apprehensive about whether they would be welcomed into the wider SC community. Although they were “really looking forward to hanging out with the other kids on performance day” (TIC), they were not at all certain that their country status would render them acceptable to the “city kids”. On the questionnaire, I asked them open-ended questions about how they were feeling on the bus en route to the venue, and how they had expected to be treated by the other schools. In response, a minority of students expected to be treated “normally” or “helpfully”, and a few boys wrote that they already had friends at competing schools, which they were looking forward to seeing. Conversely, more than a third of students worried about being patronised or excluded by the “townies” and regarded as “hillbillies”, “country bumpkins” or “hippies”. A few students expected to be ignored and seven anticipated being ridiculed because their performance was “too basic”. One Year 10 boy even expected to be treated “like scum” and a Year 7 boy nervously stated, “I just hoped the townies wouldn’t pick any fights with me”.

According to my performance day observations, students’ fears appeared unfounded. Because they were a new school, the SC crew went out of their way to welcome them on arrival. I also saw fellow competitors greet them and ask about their bus trip and the meaning of the pigs on their t-shirts. Students were tentative at the first massed dance session in the auditorium, preferring to stay in their seat while the others danced in the aisles but, at the mid-afternoon session, they were dancing along with the other schools. Rival competitors were also very encouraging about the *Pig Hunters’* routine, reinforcing this by dancing along and cheering them on during rehearsals.

In the focus groups, students made many comments about the socialisation opportunities offered on performance day including catching up with friends from other schools and meeting new people. A Year 8 girl reported, “I met my friend from kindergarten there. That was so cool because she introduced me to her friends and they all made me feel welcome, and now I’ve got heaps of new friends”. A Year 10 girl remarked, “It was so great to be with other schools. We just don’t get the chance to see others down where we live”. Above all, students reported how much they appreciated being included and encouraged by the other schools. A Year 10 girl wrote, “It was cool to talk with the others. They asked questions. They were really nice people and they thought we were cool. They told us that. I never thought they’d treat us so good.”

Later on the questionnaire, I again asked students whether they were surprised at how the other schools reacted to them. Several students said they expected to be treated well and they

were. As a Year 9 boy said, "Why wouldn't they be nice? NZ kids are all cool". More than half the students, however, *were* surprised at how "nice", "friendly", "kind", "supportive" and "thoughtful" the other schools were, noting that they encouraged them, wished them good luck and even hugged them. A Year 7 girl wrote, "They even treated us as equals!!!!" while a Year 10 boy reported, "I was expecting them to say, "Aaawww look at them queer kids that come from down the line, but they were really, really nice and even wanted to get to know us". A Year 10 girl remarked, "At last we are part of the SC family. Yeehaaa!"

In the focus groups, several students mentioned that the SC had enhanced a sense of belonging within the school. A Year 7 boy pointed out, "It brought students closer together. The Year 7s are usually left out. The older kids know us now and we have shown we deserve to be included next year." A Year 9 boy commented, "I liked practices because we could mix with rest of school during class time which never usually happens".

Lastly, when asked on the questionnaire to rate their sense of belonging for the overall experience on a 0 - 4 scale, students reported a moderate degree of belonging with both their team ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.10.$) and the SC community ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.11$).

4.4 Accomplishments

Awards received, knowledge and skills gained, and areas of personal development during SC.

Awards

The Pig Hunters got four awards, three for social contribution and one for performance skill. Like all schools, they were also awarded a team plaque and individual participation certificates. I sat in the auditorium with the team and as each result was announced, they leapt out of their seats and burst into the school chant, which provoked other schools to retaliate with their chants. Afterwards, the Principal, staff and family members came into the dressing room to congratulate them and students were still screaming out their chants and leaping up and down in a chaotic sort of dance. As I noted, "It was a very satisfying moment for all of us, although I felt very sorry for the other school in our dressing room that did not get any awards. They watched our hijinks in a very subdued fashion."

In the focus groups, the awards were also a central feature of the discussion. Students expressed pleasure at the number and type of awards they received, especially since it was their first entry. They were especially pleased with the Spirit of SC award because "it showed we were the most popular school". Students further commented on the satisfaction of seeing the routine come together in the end and that the awards proved that all their hard work had paid off. Amusingly, many students had no idea what they had won relative to the other

schools, indicated by remarks like, “We got some environmental awards or something”; “We did SO well to come sixth” (there were only *six* teams in their division)! “I can’t believe we came fourth...awesome for our first time”. While a few students commented that the awards did not matter because it was more important to have fun, the majority felt they were important because they showed how the team rated against the other schools.

In all focus groups, discussion spontaneously turned to how their next entry could be improved. The predominant feeling was that there should be more dancing and better costumes. As I wryly commented later, “I love the way these reluctant dancers are now telling me we should have had more dancing! Guess they just had to find this out for themselves”. Students also enthusiastically debated whether the first-placed school deserved to win. I recorded, “I’m really pleased about this. It shows they are now thinking critically about the technicalities of performance after seeing the other schools in action”.

On the questionnaire, I asked them to rate their reaction to the result. Using a response scale from “very disappointed” to “over the moon”, fourteen students were “over the moon”, 22 were very pleased, 15 were unsure and three were a little disappointed. In their open-ended remarks about the result, a third of students reiterated how unconditionally pleased they were, for example, “I felt better than over the moon!” A few students were pleased but qualified their remarks, such as, “It was great, but I felt a little uncomfortable seeing other schools get so much more than us”; “I thought we should have come third but my Dad said we deserved to come first”. Several others commented that they had no expectations of doing well, so awards did not feature in their thinking, for example, “I never thought we’d get anything cos the other schools were so good’.

To explore this further, I asked students to rate their degree of self-pride and team pride on a 0–4 scale. They rated both measures highly, with team-pride ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.88$) being slightly stronger than self-pride ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.30$). I also questioned students about the competitive aspect of SC on a 3-point continuum. All but ten of the students said they wanted a competition format, eight were unsure and two recorded a dislike for competitions.

Knowledge and skills

Students were less explicit about skills they may have acquired during their experience. On the questionnaire, more than half the students did not respond to the open-ended question about any new skills they had gained. Those that did cited dance or acting skills, on-stage performance and team work. Conversely, in my field notes, I listed an array of skills which I believed students had attained including dance, choreography, costume and set design, lighting, characterisation, public performance, co-hosting, public speaking, hair and makeup

designs, media liaison, blogging, back stage protocol, soundtrack compilation, photography, video direction, audience behaviour and teamwork. On many occasions, I elaborated on this in my notes. For example:

One of the TIC's objectives for students was to increase their awareness of the performing arts, especially the logistics of performance. I therefore showed students a variety of routines from the Global Rock website that had similar themes and students were instructed to watch for colours, set design, dance moves, etc. This gave them specific examples to critique and an idea of the standard they should be aspiring to (Week 2).

I am getting great pleasure from seeing their dance skills develop and personalities shine through. There are some lovely little dancers amongst them. Year 10 girls are now beginning to contribute their own suggestions – and they are much more realistic than when we began (Week 4).

Today I took Allan and Janine to the recording studios to cut the performance CD, a 240 km round trip. The TIC chose them because they both have a strong interest in music. The kids were really shy and awkward on the drive down and I had to do all the talking. On the way back, they never stopped! The studio experience was fantastic. We had to do a lot of fiddling with the sound track because we had so many sound effects, and timing and rhythm was difficult. Both the kids were fascinated by it although they tended to watch rather than contribute. Janine later told me she loves music, does some performance singing and is trying to write her own songs. She would like a career in music and said this has definitely made her more determined to do so. Allan also said he would like to do more work with the technical side of music, although he hates performing (Week 9).

Today, the local paper visited and interviewed the students and took photographs of them performing. We assigned four Year 10 kids to provide in-depth interview material. They spent an hour with the reporter and they later remarked that she made them really think hard about what SC meant to them (Week 12).

Thus, there were many opportunities for students to up-skill even though they may not have been aware of this. Moreover, any students who showed a particular interest in an aspect of the routine (for example, set or costume design) were given time out of class to work with the relevant teachers. At the same time, I ran workshops for the staff covering areas such as drama and dance tuition, set design and construction, costume and lighting, stage production and performance logistics, event management and administration, music, make up, OSH and backstage requirements, media liaison and fundraising. My hope was that, in subsequent entries, these skills could be transferred to the students.

In the focus groups, students also demonstrated that they now had a greater understanding about what live performance entails. For example, the Year 7 girls initiated a heated discussion about whether future Year 7 students should be included in SC (they were already projecting themselves as Year 8s). I was able to record this verbatim.

Katie: Do ya think Year 7s should be in it next year?

Sophie: Nah.

Sally: I say yes cos WE got to do it. Although Year 7s ARE very immature

Isabel: I say no, because they are, like, MENTAL.

Shannon: But they SHOULD have the same chances as us.

Sunhil: ...the same chances as us.

Bonny: No they are not ready for it, and it would be hard to work with them. Some of US were not ready for it.

Molly: Yes, Year 7s can perform well.

Pam: No, they are stupid.

Chantelle: No, they are silly and manic.

Katie: But some of them are good. Maybe there should be auditions and interviews. That way only the keen good ones will get in.

[I later noted: the fact that they were talking about students the same age as themselves was completely lost on them. How ironic].

Likewise, during the focus groups, the boys gave considerable thought to how the practice period could be managed to avoid the girls dominating rehearsals, suggesting that SC should be voluntary for boys. The Year 10 boys felt most strongly about this, stating that voluntary participation would give them a “choice about whether to put up with the bossy sheilas”, and that only girls should have to audition because “then only the ones who really dance get in, and it’ll keep out all the others who think they can dance, but can’t”.

There was also lively discussion around future themes referenced to what they had seen on performance day (“Well, we know much better now what we need to do to win”). The TIC later told me she had suggested another environmental theme for their next entry, “but they ‘pooed’ that and said *they* would get back to *me*”, indicating that students now felt they had the knowledge to assume some of the decision making.

Personal development

Students were more specific during focus groups when describing how SC had impacted on their personal development. The majority of students commented on their newly-discovered ability to conquer nerves and perform in front of a large audience. To a lesser extent, students talked of gaining self-confidence, learning patience and self-control and having increased self-belief or self-trust. As a Year 7 boy said, “I now know I can do anything if I put my mind to it”.

4.5 Identity

The collaborative process between a person and the SC context to foster a self-determined, cohesive sense of self.

Identity issues centred around two areas in this study: firstly, students' exploration of their identities as performers, specifically dancers; and secondly; the positioning of their "country" identity within a city context. For many students, both aspects were challenging and, at times, confrontational. Each will be separately discussed.

Performer identities

Demographic data on the questionnaire revealed that the performing arts, especially dance, were not a part of most students' experience. Their lack of knowledge was very apparent after the preliminary meeting. As I recorded:

I don't know if I did the right thing showing them sophisticated SC routines. The girls seemed to think that they are going to be instantly transformed into highly skilled dancers in beautiful costumes performing something that is a combination of a Royal New Zealand Ballet production and a state-of-the-art music video. I'm afraid I have given them highly inflated expectations of how their dance identity will manifest. On the other hand, the boys were mostly horrified by what awaited them and were adamant that dancing is exclusively for girls. They are not at all keen to venture into this territory.

These attitudes prevailed for most of the preparation period. The girls seemed keen to "be dancers", tending to engage more quickly during lessons, attempting to devise basic dance moves and practise independently in their spare time. However, they were also very frustrated at being characterised as animals which did not equate with their vision of a dancer identity, complete with flowing, beautiful costumes and lyrical dance moves. A Year 10 girl complained to me at practices, "Jeez, Miss, my first time as a dancer and I end up being a giant snail. That totally sucks". Conversely, the majority of boys needed cajoling and humouring, as well as daily confidence-building exercises and on-going negotiation about what they were prepared to do as a "dancer". This was especially true of the Year 10 boys, who never stopped negotiating with me about their dancer roles ("OK, Miss, I'll *walk* across the stage, maybe even bounce a bit, but *don't* expect me to do any of that dance stuff"). The few boys who did engage had to contend with ribbing from their mates ("What's up with you, bro? You turning into a gay boy or something?"). Boys also resented sacrificing sports and PE time for SC practices, often complaining during rehearsals that sport was far more important than "dance stuff". In fact, the only times the boys were completely uninhibited and enthusiastic was when practising the killing scene, which had a martial arts focus, and when we had our daily dance-offs between boys and girls which often became very vocal and competitive.

Nevertheless, there were a number of key moments when I observed tangible shifts or transformations in students' identity development as dancers and performers. First, three weeks out, when we began our combined practice sessions in the gym and the routine became a coherent whole, culminating in the energetic finale. I noted:

I'm so relieved. They finally look like they are getting it. Suddenly it's not a chore that the school has forced them into. It's like, oh this is what SC is about. I could possibly even get into this.

It was still some time, however, before the Year 8 and 10 boys participated with enthusiasm, and one boy continued to stand at the back of the stage refusing to move, while the others danced around his stationery body.

The second turning point came after both the local paper and regional paper featured the school on their front pages. Students seemed bemused that the wider community might be interested in them ("Haven't they got anything better to write about?"), but also excited when they saw themselves portrayed publicly in full costume and in dance-mode. I noted:

On Friday afternoon, the TIC came bursting into practice with a whole pile of newspapers and the kids grabbed copies and spread them all over the gym floor. There were squeals of delight when they saw themselves in print and they teased each other about the expressions on their faces and their body positions. But, hey, without realising it, they were starting to talk like dancers, even the reluctant boys.

Another significant identity transformation moment came as we entered the final week of preparation. I had been worried that the finale lacked punch and, as an addition to the routine, the Year 10 boys reluctantly agreed to be portrayed as male piggy models who swaggered through the barbecue scene. I recorded:

I asked Tim, one of the class clowns and natural leaders to meet with me at lunchtime to plan a sequence. He agreed to demonstrate the moves to the others at practice and we worked on some alternative approaches. I was very grateful to him because he was prepared to stick his neck out for me in front of his mates. At the practice that afternoon, I explained to the kids what we were trying to do and why, and Tim demonstrated his male model moves with exaggerated effeminate behaviour. He was hilarious and the kids roared with laughter while Tim did a dramatic bow. When I asked for more volunteers, two more Year 10 boys strutted their best female model stuff, encouraged by the rest of the team who cheered and wolf-whistled. Next thing, most of the boys wanted to be pig models and all of a sudden I had a team of very camp-looking dancers! How ironic!!

This seemed to be a real tipping point for the reluctant boys and as I recorded, "It appeared that if it was acceptable for the 'cool boys', it was acceptable for the masses ... and my job has now become a whole lot easier."

There was, though, still the dilemma of the boys in the pig hunt scene, who steadfastly resisted doing anything except to shuffle across the stage with stoic, embarrassed expressions on their faces. I noted:

These boys just couldn't get into it. They didn't want to dance and even when given simple acting movements, they did not feel comfortable as performers. Their scene was the climax of the performance and I just didn't want them to look bad...not for me, but for them. They were not interested in separate practices ("Waste of time, Miss") and came late to rehearsals. In desperation, I kept reworking their sequence which got them even more confused. Finally, I had to accept that this part of the routine was going to be pretty blah.

But thankfully, on performance day, when they saw the other schools, especially the over-the-top boy dancers in high performance mode, they suddenly did an about-face. They seemed to figure it was ok, in fact more than ok, to be a boy and dance and if they didn't lift their game, they were going to look a bit weak on stage. They watched the rival boys going over and over their moves in the auditorium and outside the venue at lunch time, then came sheepishly to me and asked if they could do something to "straighten out their suck routine". For an hour, they tweaked it with only minor input from me. They were really pumped. One boy said, "I just want to get on stage and show the townies what real men we are". Another boy who had a very small part asked if he could insert an impromptu solo in the finale which he did. On the night, these boys stole the show. I couldn't believe they were the same kids. They swaggered out of the wings in their hunting gear and slit their pigs throats while eyeballing the audience as if to say, "Take that!" It was not something I would have done, but hey, this is who they are and they owned it.

Country bumpkin identities

As noted, one of the schools' objectives was to help students rise above their country bumpkin mentality, although, as the TIC stated, "It's more about them *accepting* this identity, because the reality is, that's what they *are*, so lets' make them proud of it!" However, despite their fears that their "country kid" status would negatively differentiate them from other schools, they remained determined to give the townies a snapshot of their life style even if it compromised the effectiveness of the performance. Thus, they saw SC as an opportunity to make an identity statement about their status as county folk and gaining social acceptance was secondary to this. This was exemplified by the four student presenters who were interviewed on-stage by the MC after the performance:

MC: Why did you choose this unique theme?

Kassie: We wanted to do something different from everyone else and....

Tim: ...that's what we do! Call up our mates in the weekend and say, "Do ya feel like a bit of a hunt? (Roar of laughter from the audience).

MC: Ha ha. In the cities, kids say, "Come and play Play Station", in the country it's, "Let's go shoot a pig". And what were the challenges of your first time entry?

Sharon: Well, we live on farms, so we weren't able to practice after school and.....

Billy: [interrupting] ...and we don't have any bloody money!!! [The audience erupted into laughter and the students grinned at them].

This was in stark contrast to many of the more experienced schools who spoke earnestly and with sophistication about the technical difficulties of performance, the challenges of team work and the psychological benefits of participation. Interestingly, the *Pig Hunters'* strong identity statement did not seem to be a conscious act; it just did not occur to them to be anything other than they were. Amusingly, not only were they welcomed by the other students, but the city girls seemed to be very "taken" with the country boys in their hunting gear. I commented:

This is SO funny. After the three rehearsals, and all their gory portrayals, the pig hunter boys suddenly had a cluster of girls around them asking about hunting and guns and whether they REALLY killed pigs like that. The boys regaled the city girls with graphic hunting stories and the girls squealed and squirmed, but kept asking for more. Not only were these country bumpkins equals, they were actually being treated as HEROES by the city girls! They lapped it up. Not what they had expected at all, but it's so good for them. I just couldn't stop grinning as I watched these interactions.

Students were also proud of their t-shirts and, when commenting on the questionnaire about how they were treated by the city kids, several reported that the red colour made them stand out in the crowd and the pig illustration sparked lots of interest. A Year 8 girl wrote:

I stayed in town for the whole weekend after SC. I wore my red t shirt everywhere and people in the street kept saying "Congratulations, we loved your item". I felt so good and proud to be from down country cos everyone knows us now.

I asked students on the questionnaire whether they believed their participation in SC had increased other people's knowledge of their school and their community. In their open-ended responses, most students believed that their SC presence had put their "town on the map" and had given others a snapshot of the people who live there and what they like doing. A Year 10 girl summed up many of the questionnaire comments when she wrote:

We thought we weren't as good as them, but we were just the same. We showed them we can be competitive and party with the best of them, even though we can't afford flash costumes or fancy food. We even taught them lots about country life and I reckon we've put our town on the map. We'll never be called hippies again.

On the questionnaire, students' desire to repeat the experience and intention to re-enlist responses gave some indication of the extent to which being a SC performer had resonated with their sense of identity and it did appear that, despite their initial reluctance, this was an experience that ultimately sat comfortably with the majority of team members. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, the majority of students indicated they definitely wanted to repeat the experience and to re-enlist for future SCs (see Figure 6). Every girl indicated "definitely yes" to

both statements, suggesting that they may have integrated “being a dancer” into their schema more than the boys.

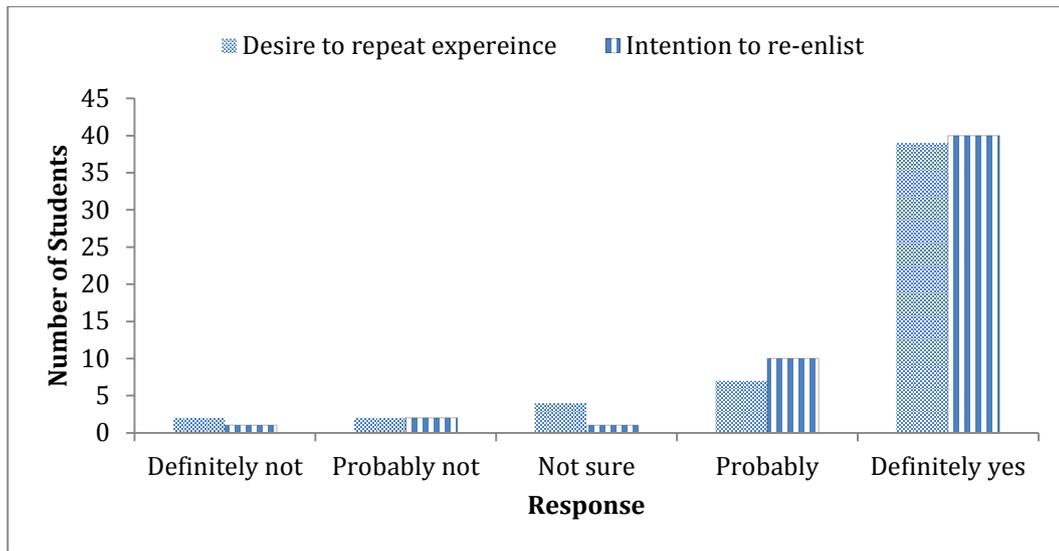


Figure 6. Students' Questionnaire Responses about Desire to Repeat SC Experience and Intention to Re-enlist ($n = 54$).

During focus groups, students' comments also indicated they had now had a clearer understanding of how being a dancer might fit into their future life. This varied from an expressed desire to pursue a career in the arts, (“Me and my friend have decided to go to acting school together when we leave school”), to an awareness of their dance talent, (“I've found out I'm a good dancer and want to keep doing it”) or an enjoyment of performing, (“I love being on stage in front of lots of people. Count me in for next year!”). A heavy-set Year 9 girl commented, “I'd always believed dancing was not for big girls like me, but now I know people of all shapes and sizes can do it. I was actually one of the best dancers in the team, I reckon.” At the other end of the spectrum, students noted they now knew they could *not* dance, were uncoordinated, or found performing embarrassing. In the middle ground were students who enjoyed the experience, but next time would only participate if the theme was to their liking, or if they could be back stage or in technical support. Interestingly, the TIC did report that when viewing a video of their competition performance, many girls were “rather chastened to see how ‘big’ they looked on stage”. She reassured them that it was the effect of the wide angle lens which added 10kg to a person!

I was also able to talk individually to the anti-blood-sport boy at the end of the focus group session. He reiterated his dilemma about the theme, explaining that even if he had taken a back stage role, it still meant compromising his principles. However, he also did not want to be isolated from the rest of the school and miss out on the performance day. I asked him what he

would do if faced with future dilemmas like this. He shrugged and replied. "I guess I'll just have to decide when it happens. Every situation's different." As I noted, "A wise young man."

4.6 Flow

The subjective psychological state experienced when totally absorbed in a challenging activity and having the necessary skills to accomplish it.

This was certainly a challenging experience for the *Pig Hunters*. They had little experience of dancing and no knowledge of what a completed routine should actually look like. Consequently, from an observational perspective, the practice period did not appear to net any noticeable flow moments. Even on the morning of the competition, we were still modifying the routine and many students were still mastering their dance moves. Not surprisingly, then, their anxiety mounted at the venue when they observed other schools' rehearsing and witnessed the scale and sophistication of their routines, accentuated by the fact that a rival school had used some of the same songs in their soundtrack. One of the youngest team members rushed up to me, saying. "Miss, they've copied our songs. How can they do that? Will we be kicked out?" A succession of students expressed concern that "our dance moves are too cheesy" and "we're going to look gay on-stage", suggesting that, in their eyes, their skills were not up to the challenge. They, therefore, began their first rehearsal mid-morning very tentatively, their eyes anxiously watching their competitors' reactions in the audience. Unexpectedly, however, the student audience warmed to their routine. As I recorded:

Our rather funky NZ soundtrack seemed to strike a chord with the other schools and they stopped what they were doing to observe our second rehearsal. Moreover, because our dance moves were so basic, they were easy to follow. To my amazement, while our kids were performing on stage, the rest of the audience began to copy their moves in the auditorium and dance and sing along with them. The look on our kids' faces was priceless. They were wide-eyed with delight. The harder they danced, the harder the other kids copied them. It was the perfect form of feedback, like, hey, we think you guys are ok and we want to learn your dance. By their third rehearsal, even more schools had joined in and the *Pig Hunters* had virtually the whole auditorium dancing along with them. It was one of those unpredictable magic moments. Seemed to me that flow was happening all over the place! The kids came off stage absolutely thrilled. "Hey, Miss, did you see that. They loved us. They EVEN danced with us". None of them had realised that the reason they were so easy to mimic was because their dance moves were so cheesy and simple!

As a consequence, students took to the stage for their competition performance feeling confident that they had the audience on their side and, although they were extremely nervous, their focus group comments suggested that their on-stage experience reflected several flow dimensions. For example, half the students reported feeling scared or nervous prior to going on stage, but that they overcame their anxiety and enjoyed the experience (i.e., their skills were sufficient for the challenge). A Year 8 girl commented,

When I first found out about it I thought, uh oh, this is gonna be scary and what if I muck up...and when we finally got on stage it wasn't at all scary. We all just let our hair down and had such a good time.

Twelve students during focus groups reported being inspired by audience feedback, which included support from rival schools during rehearsals and from family and friends on the night ("I had a great feeling on stage at rehearsals, hearing people cheering and seeing them dancing to our routine. That was so cool. I felt famous and that was really, really cool"). Nine students noted that these feelings were heightened and their self-consciousness reduced because the audience was a dark, anonymous "mass". A Year 10 girl remarked, "I was scared cos me Mam was in the audience, but it turned out it was so dark, I couldn't even see her. After that I wasn't nervous at all". Seven others mentioned the transformational effect of costumes, make-up and lighting. Four students commented on how their sense of time was distorted on-stage, for example, "Our performance seemed to be really short even though it wasn't". Eight students said that although they hated the make-up or their costumes malfunctioned, once on-stage, they became so engrossed in the routine that these ceased to be an issue, indicating a state of absorption in the performance. A Year 10 girl encapsulated this flow-state noting:

I didn't like my wings. They looked stupid and got in the way. But I was so pumped up on stage I didn't notice. There was only the excitement and the adrenalin. I felt happy. I was aware of the heat and the beat. I was sweating. And my nerves just vanished away.

In all, 41 of the 53 focus group participants indicated that SC was a positive emotional experience, using 305 positive descriptive words in total on the brainstorm sheets and in their verbal discussion including fun (mentioned 71 times), awesome (42), great (38), cool (24), exciting (18) and amazing (18). Two students mentioned feeling "pumped" on-stage and having "adrenaline rushing through my veins", another that he was "so excited he could not stop laughing for 20 minutes after the performance". This was reinforced by a teacher who told me, "I thought we would have a bus load of exhausted teenagers on the way home, but they were wide awake and as high as kites."

Additionally, a flow sensation stimulates a desire to repeat the experience and 24 focus group students, unprompted, expressed this, for example, "I so, so, so can't wait to do it again next year".

Students reported similar responses on the questionnaire, with 39 students describing the competition performance as a highlight due to the live audience, presence of family and friends, the atmosphere (cheering, clapping, lights, costumes) and the confidence they felt after delivering three well-received rehearsals. Conversely, four reluctant dancers also said the

performance was the best part because it meant they could “do it, get it over with and get home.” The flow state, then, did not appear to affect every performer.

Students also quantitatively rated their flow experiences on the questionnaire. Figure 7 shows the mean scores for each flow dimension, indicating that the most noteworthy flow characteristics of the competition performance (as indicated by above average ratings) were a distorted sense of time (it seemed very short), a clear sense of the task’s goals, the merging of action and awareness, clear feedback, total focus and lack of self-consciousness. The “awesome” post-performance feeling, denoting optimal experience, received the highest ranking indicating that most students thoroughly enjoyed their on-stage moments.

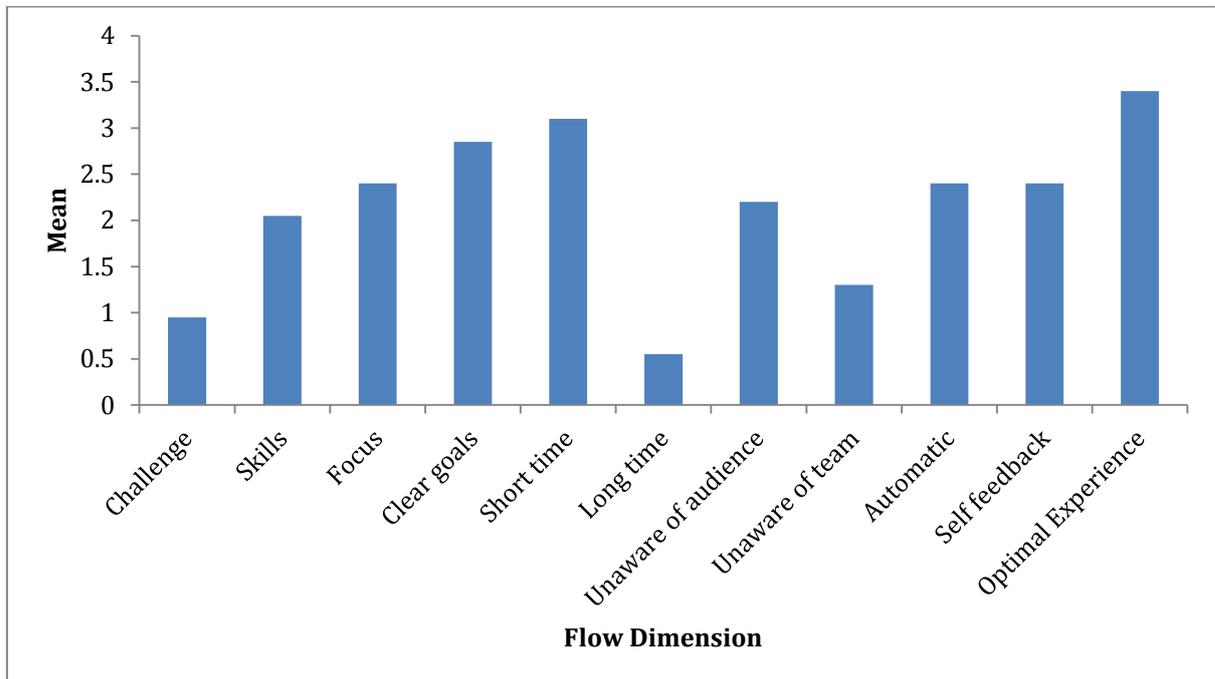


Figure 7. Mean Scores for Flow Dimensions experienced during Competition Performance ($n = 54$).

4.7 Emotions

Students’ experience and regulation of their positive and negative affective states.

To get a feel for emotional trends during the entire experience, I asked students to think back to six significant moments during their SC experience: the preliminary meeting, the dress rehearsal, arriving at the venue, waiting in the wings pre-performance, exiting the stage post-performance and looking back overall. For each situation, I gave the students a checklist of 12 emotions and asked them to circle the three that were most pertinent to that moment (see Figure 8). In discussing these findings, I supplement them with students’ qualitative remarks

derived from my observational notes, focus groups comments and students' open-ended remarks on the questionnaire.

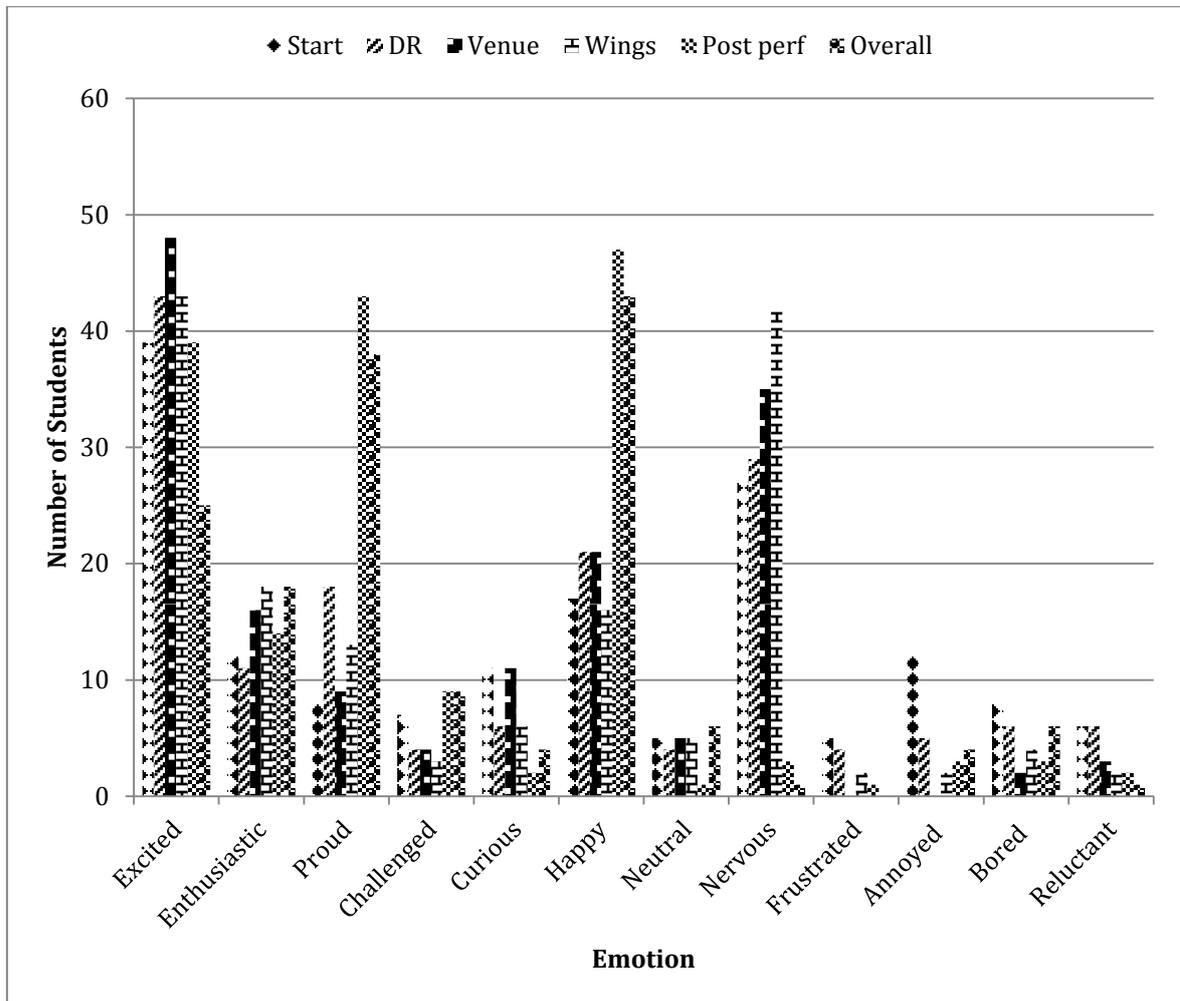


Figure 8. Number of Students circling each Emotion for the each of six significant time points in SC, assessed retrospectively ($n = 54$).

The results indicate that at the preliminary meeting, the majority of students were both excited and nervous at the prospect of participating in SC. In my field notes, I recorded that at the preliminary meeting to introduce the SC concept, most students, especially the girls, reacted positively to their proposed participation with verbal exclamations of pleasure, clapping and cheering, followed by numerous questions about costumes, dance styles and what would happen on performance day. However, several students were also apprehensive about participating and, during question time, a number of students asked whether participation was compulsory (“Do we HAVE to do this?” or “I don’t want to perform in front of a big crowd”). Others were afraid that they lacked the experience or talent (“We never do this kind of stuff here. We’ll look stupid against the other schools”). Most noticeably, the Year 8 and 10 boys seemed annoyed at the news and appeared openly resistant, slouching in their chairs,

turning their backs to the screen and making audible derogatory marks amongst themselves (“Dancing sucks, it’s for girls and pussies”).

Despite these initial misgivings, I observed that emotional extremes did not seem to be a feature of the preparation period apart from some minor conflict among the girls (described later). I speculated that this was because practices occurred as normal classroom lessons with a tightly structured format which did not allow much downtime for spontaneous student interaction. Six weeks into the practice period, I remarked,

Well, I’m not seeing much boredom or frustration. I guess that’s because this is an adult-driven process and lessons are structured to avoid this happening. There’s a slight degree of apprehension with students needing lots of reassurance about costume and dance moves, but that’s understandable seeing they don’t know what they’re in for. There’s the reluctant Year 8 and 10 boys who are often disinterested and wary, and occasionally defiant. When students are not fully occupied, they can become distracted, disruptive and boisterous. When they are learning new moves, the boys in particular often appear embarrassed and tentative and mock each other or giggle. On the positive side, most are interested, enthusiastic and cooperative although I’ve yet to see any indication of pride or inspiration.

When asked about the best and worst aspects of the practice period on the questionnaire, students reported being most enthusiastic about missing Maths and English, doing music and dance activities, being with friends, creating costumes, and the massed team practices, especially the finale. At the same time, they expressed boredom and frustration with repeated practising and changing instructions, missing sport and PE and other students’ bad behaviour, for example the bossy girls, inattentive people and bickering amongst the Year 10 girls.

The dress rehearsal at school on the day before SC (in full costume and in front of a large audience of students and family) showed little difference in students’ choice of circled emotions on the checklist, possibly because this was one of many opportunities students were required to perform in front of others. Even so, excitement and nervousness were still the most frequently reported emotions at this point.

Because I did not travel on the bus with them to the venue, I asked students open-ended questions on the questionnaire about how they felt en route to the competition and specifically, how they anticipated being treated by the other competitors. Again, nervous and excited were frequently used words in their responses, but they also expressed considerable trepidation about their pending reception from city schools.

When assessing how they felt on arrival at the venue, 48 of the 54 students circled “excited” on the emotions checklist and in response to the open-ended question regarding their feeling on entering the venue, more than half the students expressed excitement at being a part of SC with comments like, “FINALLY we are part of this big event. Never thought we’d get the

chance”: “Wow, this is finally it! I just could not wait to get out of the bus”; and “Holy moley, look at all the people. This is NOTHING like I expected”. Several students during focus groups referred to being pumped or experiencing an adrenaline rush on entering the building, described by a Year 9 girl, “like having a wall of sound and light washed over us”. As a Year 13 girl noted, “It was like walking into a giant playpen that had been set up with magical food, clothes and music. I wanted to stay there forever”. The majority of students during focus groups also alluded to feeling nervous or scared, attributing this to the size of the venue, seeing how good the other teams were, and fear about “mucking up on stage”.

As I watched them in the auditorium, I noticed students becoming increasingly excited and nervous as the performance loomed. According to their questionnaire comments about the best aspects of performance day, the girls’ excitement was related to preparing for the performance, especially having their hair and make-up done (“It was so nice for us farm girls to be made to look so pretty”), while the boys enjoyed the food, meeting girls and leading the chants. I noticed that three of the most reluctant Year 10 boys became self-appointed cheer leaders and undertook a deafening day-long chant-off with the school in the neighbouring dressing room which added to the sense of excitement. One Year 10 boy commented that the chant was the best aspect for him (“Our chant was cool and having a chant-off with another school, that was so cool”). Additionally, several students commented on being both intimidated and inspired when watching other schools’ performances, which were also a “best aspect” feature.

These reciprocal feelings of excitement and nerves peaked as students waited in the wings to perform and, as seen in Figure 8, students circled “excited” and “nervous” with equal frequency on the checklist for this pre-performance moment. In a focus group, a Year 8 girl declared, “my nerves were building and I couldn’t stop thinking about it”. However, several students on the questionnaire also commented that one of the best aspects of performance day was having three rehearsals which allowed them to enjoy the final performance without feeling so nervous. Unexpectedly, their biggest confidence boost came during their second and third rehearsals when the competing schools danced along with their routine and the majority of students during focus groups claimed this quashed their nervousness and meant the rehearsals were as exciting as the competition performance. A few students also mentioned the support they received from the backstage crew, “It was great fun hiding behind the sets waiting to go on, and being encouraged by the back stage crew who told us to take big breaths, to have a cool performance, and to do our best”.

Eight minutes later, as they left the stage, “happy”, “proud” and “excited” were the most circled emotions, and with only three students now circling “nervous”, this suggested that they were well satisfied with their performance and had enjoyed their time on stage.

When looking back on the experience overall, happiness and pride were the most frequently cited emotions, followed by excitement and enthusiasm. Negative emotions were reported more often at the beginning than during and after the experience. While nervousness featured strongly on both the emotions checklist and on the open-ended comments, and during the focus group discussion, from my observations, it did not seem to derail the positive nature of the experience.

5. Food for thought

Emerging ideas or insights that are worthy of further consideration

5.1 Challenges for remote schools

As noted in the first chapter, remote schools face added challenges when mobilising a SC entry and this study enabled me to witness these difficulties first-hand. First, because the competition venues are distant, travel costs to attend performances are prohibitive and remote schools simply never get exposure to SC competitions. Thus, this team had unrealistic expectations about the performance level of a SC entry. As the TIC said, “We always pull off the school musical in three weeks. We’ll do SC no sweat”. This proved to be a major understatement and many of the challenges I faced during the preparation period hinged around the school’s lack of comprehension of performance deadlines and the scale of the competition they were about to enter.

Second, the majority of staff and students lived on farms and went home to after-school responsibilities, unlike city dwellers who tend to have more flexibility with practice times and domestic duties as well as parents who available to ferry children to and from extra-curricular activities. This necessitated class-time practices which did address the performing arts deficit in the curriculum, but was also extremely disruptive to the daily teaching programme, particularly for senior students.

Third, although the SC organisation is extremely supportive of first-time schools, providing information packs, phone back-up and on-line resources, these tend to be geared towards people with a high level of existing knowledge as evidenced by their technical language and award-winning performance examples. For a school with limited knowledge and very few resources, these were rather intimidating, as I discovered when using the SC kits with this team. Instead of being inspired, students were daunted by the sophisticated routines,

glamorous costumes and complex themes and I had to work hard to counteract the negative effects of the early DVD examples I used. The “country bumpkin mentality” or “we can’t foot it with the big guys so we won’t even try” (phrases regularly used by both staff and students) was palpable throughout the preparation period and, without support, this attitude could have been a significant barrier to entry. In fact, it is little wonder that schools like these tend to put SC in the “too-hard” pile even though they are the first to concede that their students want and need to broaden their horizons.

My focus group session with staff members was invaluable for highlighting these issues. Teachers commented that they now knew what to expect in terms of logistics and stage routines; they had established their own reputation and traditions as a SC school e.g., the honey pot gifts which “set a new standard for originality” (TIC); they had gathered a basic set of performing arts resources (set, make-up, costumes); and they had a set of awards to display in their foyer. They had also acquired new skills and the school had received considerable media exposure and positive parental feedback and support. They did, however, also comment on the negative impact it had on the school timetable and the difficulty of making it accessible to senior students because of their academic and sporting commitments.

In particular, staff noted the value of the experience for the boys with the Principal commenting that she was “flabbergasted by the boys’ self-confidence and how well they did for their first time”. They also commented how pleased they were that “the kids took it all in their stride”, that both boys and girls got something from the experience and that it enabled them to see the students in a different light. They were especially delighted at the composure of the younger students. As the Deputy Principal remarked, “We thought the little kids were the stars on the night”. She also believed SC had opened the students’ eyes to “opportunities they never knew existed” and showed that they could work as a team.

In sum, all SC members at the focus group were supportive of SC and were keen to take part again in the future. As the Principal stated, “We’ve got the SC bug”.

5.2 Gender differences

In this study, I again observed gender differences as students eased their way into the practice period. From the beginning, most of the girls “bought into” the SC concept, brimming with ideas for themes and seemingly undaunted by (or unaware of) their lack of dance experience as they independently devised simple routines. They did, however, need on-going support with emotional regulation both individually and in groups, whereas the boys either got on with the job or did not do it at all. With the girls’ groups, I often observed intergroup conflict, mood swings (for example, girls refusing to talk to each other), preoccupation with physical

appearance and a demand for autonomy followed by frustration with me when things did not go right. For example, at their request, I gave Year 9 and 10 girls some music with which to work independently on their dance moves and they returned one hour later in tears, angry because, as one girl complained, "You've given us different music to what we're used to and now we are all confused." It took some time to move them forward by showing them other SC routines as exemplars. After four weeks, I recorded:

The girls focus a lot on their individual beauty, appearance and costumes. "I am having a little butterfly drawn on my cheek..."; "I am having hair extensions especially for SC"; "Don't like those wings. Couldn't possibly wear THEM". They also have quite unrealistic expectations about the star quality of their roles and get tearful when these are not realised for example, "I really thought I would have been more important than this". Already some intergroup rivalry between girls is appearing, e.g., the older girls have choreographed a piece that blatantly excludes the Year 7s and 8 girls, placing them on their knees at the back corner of the stage with a few feeble arm movements. ("Like bloody dogs!" according to an indignant Esther). There is dissent between the butterflies and birds as to who has the most stage time and the Year 8s have been assigned the parts of the "butt-ugly" forest creatures (lizards, etc). And meanwhile, the boys keep playing their rugby!

Later, the TIC suggested we give the girls more stage-time to appease them and because they were so keen. As I recorded:

While I am happy to give the girls more time on-stage, it does trouble me that when girls throw paddies we tend to give in to their demands which reinforces their meltdowns whereas when the boys show displeasure by being silly or acting aggressively, we withdraw their privileges and remove them from the routine, which actually makes them worse. Maybe we should have higher expectations of the boys and see if they rise to the occasion. Or maybe, get the girls sorted really quickly and hope they drag the boys along with them. It's hard work.

Unlike the girls, the boys, apart from one very keen Year 8 boy, were initially unenthusiastic about this activity. At my introductory meeting with them, most were grudgingly polite but reticent about contributing to the discussion. Once practices started, the boys were often disruptive during practices, participating with minimum effort, claiming boredom and disinterest and clowning around. With teachers in absentia, boys came late to class, gave false names during roll call and challenged my authority. The older boys were often flirtatious, making innuendoes and asking for my email address and Facebook page. Many of my early lessons involved gaining their confidence using icebreaker games and non-music activities. It took a fair degree of cajoling to persuade them to move even minimally to music. They responded best to fighting and killing scenarios accompanied by heavy metal music, while I stood on a chair beating time with a tambourine as they knocked each other and the furniture to the ground. I noted:

These boys seem to need much less subtle management than girls. Clear instructions, clear expectations, and clear consequences. They are not the slightest bit interested in costumes. As one

said, "Why would we dress up to be a pig hunter? We'll just wear our normal clothes, otherwise we won't look REAL". It's tough because SC has been foisted on them and I understand their hesitancy. Trouble is, I have both boys and girls at the same time and the girls are so demanding of my attention that the boys often get pushed aside. Then they play up again.

While the girls' learning process was iterative, emotional and needed constant negotiation, the boys tended to move forward in bursts that were strongly related to their sense of competence and control. For example, when we began to construct the pig killing scene and the boys realised I had no idea how to conceptualise it, they became more interested and supportive. They seemed to enjoy my lack of knowledge and frequently made fun of my unworkable suggestions, for example a frustrated Year 10 boy said to me, "Jeez, Miss, what planet were you born on?" Similarly, once the finale took shape and they became part of the mass sequence, they lifted their game again.

The Year 10 boys were the most resistant. One boy refused to actively participate but, when given the opportunity, did not want to withdraw. We compromised by absenting him from the small group routines and placing him in the back row of the finale where he maintained his non-participatory stance even during the performance! As I later bemused, "It's no mean feat to stand on-stage with more than 50 gyrating kids and hardly move a muscle. Got to hand it to him. He was true to his values!"

6. Summary of Pig Hunters' experience

For most *Pig Hunters*, then, SC was an emotionally positive experience as indicated by the majority desire to repeat the experience and re-enlist for future events. The fact that more students wanted to re-enlist rather than repeat may suggest that there were aspects of the preparation period which were not ideal, such as the fragmented practice structure, "cheesy" choreography and compulsory participation. However, these irritations do seem to have been mitigated by the performance day activities which offered even the most reluctant dancers alternative ways to express themselves, such as the chant-offs. There were, however, several students who were ambivalent about the experience because of their discomfort with dance and/or public performance and, in one case, a philosophical objection to the theme.

What students lacked in autonomous experiences, they gained in skill and psychological development, for example performance expertise and self-confidence. The stand-out features of this team's experience were its integrity value, SC's function as an identity statement and the unique nature of their flow experience. Thanks to the students' insistence that their theme be portrayed with authenticity, they delivered a public performance which reflected their lifestyle and their personalities and enhanced their sense of self. This was acknowledged by both the student and adult audiences on performance day who celebrated their uniqueness by

joining in their routines, cheering them on and wanting to learn more about them as people. This, in turn, gave the *Pig Hunters* feedback which enhanced their on-stage confidence, allowing them to become absorbed in the performance and enjoy the buzz that results from overcoming a challenging situation.

Nervousness did feature strongly, even during the practice period, probably because of students' double-edged apprehension about their novice status and their country bumpkin identity. We tried to mitigate this by being realistic about their competition chances ("Don't be daunted by the other schools. We are in this to get experience"), targeting specific competition goals that the team could potentially win (most popular school, environmental awareness, student achievement awards), providing many performance opportunities at school, describing what to expect on competition day and having a large number of adult support staff at the venue. Students were constantly reassured that being nervous was normal and in fact enhanced their stage presence. Fortunately, in their final analysis, students seemed to accept this, with a Year 8 girl summing it up in response to the question about the worst aspect of SC:

I was nervous heaps of the time, even right at the start of the practices. I hated that. But hey, the reason it was so exciting was cos I got over my nerves, so it was worth it in the end. Yep it sure was!!!!!!

7. Reflections

My thoughts about data collection methods used and the highlights and challenges experienced within this setting.

Data collection

This was my most satisfying study so far, in terms of data collection. As a full participant observer, I was able to get very close to the action and gather data unobtrusively. In fact, I was so involved in the production role that staff and students alike seemed to forget I was a researcher. Unfortunately, on many occasions so did I, although I was gratified and somewhat surprised to find that when I came to analyse and interpret my field notes, there was a wealth of useful information. Most notably, I found that the mixed method approach of participant observation, focus groups and questionnaire achieved a data saturation point and that the student blogs and TV documentary did not yield any new information.

While I was rarely able to record observations in real time, note taking and memo-jotting in the park on the way home worked well, and writing up full notes the next morning was an effective way of generating current data without it being tainted by the tiredness, frustration and anxiety of my producer role. The descriptive and reflective sections continued to predominate over theoretical commentary and emerging themes. Again, I devoted huge space

to production issues, most of which were not used in this chapter, but will be hugely useful later in applied settings.

The focus groups enabled me, for the first time, to capture the after-buzz of the performance day which was enhanced by students' interactions as they recalled key moments of the day. It also allowed me to pose group-specific questions, such as "Do you think SC should include Year 7s? (to the Year 7s) and "Do you think we should have made SC compulsory?" (to the boys). Having single-sex groups was also beneficial because it prevented the between-gender dynamics which were often a feature of classroom behaviour, particularly the boys guffawing at the girls' comments and the girls shouting back at them to "Shuddup". It also allowed the boys to openly express their frustration at the girls' perceived domination of the activity. Additionally, their focus group commentary gave me direction on how to frame the questionnaire in a way that was relevant to the students' experience and in their vernacular.

I chose not to use a recording device in focus groups to avoid inhibiting student conversation. However, given that my research dimensions are now fairly established, I could have devised a checklist which would have made recording their comments much easier. For example, students used the word "fun" 180 times! I should have had a tick box for that alone to save me counting back through my notes. Nevertheless, by now I had established a very effective shorthand system and as long as I returned to my notes soon after they had been recorded, I was able to expand them into full-hand transcripts very easily. If anything was illegible, I left it out.

While acknowledging the limits of retrospective responses, the questionnaire was especially useful in capturing an overview of the whole experience. The sequential format assisted students to think back on events in the order they occurred. They seemed to respond well to circling words, rather than ranking dimensions. In fact, even those boys who refused to answer any open-ended questions still circled given words.

The emotions measures worked particularly well in illustrating the trend of the group mood over six time points, albeit retrospectively (see Figure 8). It also revealed the complex nature of human emotions and I was intrigued by the seemingly contradictory combinations that some students circled to describe a time-point, for example nervous, enthusiastic and bored (waiting in the wings), or excited, nervous and neutral (after coming off stage). I had two reservations about the words in the checklist: firstly, *annoyed*, which a few students circled as a post-performance emotion. Without explanation, I was not sure whether they were annoyed because they did not want their time on stage to end or annoyed because they did not enjoy it. Second, the word *challenged* did not strike a chord, with very few students circling the word on

the emotions ratings, but conversely indicating they were challenged on the flow scale. Moreover, many of their open-ended remarks implied that the on-stage performance in particular was challenging for them. Perhaps this is a word which is not relevant to young adolescents because, in contrast, the older back stage crew (16 -18 year olds) used the word frequently in their comments.

For the Year 7s and 8s, the questionnaire was too long to be completed in a class lesson. It also appeared too long for their concentration span with a number of students not attempting the latter open-ended questions, while continuing to circle the multiple choice options. Again, students had already completed the SC organisation's questionnaire, so they were not enthralled with being confronted with a second one. As I have previously found, the girls were more verbally effusive than the boys writing detailed and descriptive remarks whereas the boys wrote in bullet points or gave single word answers. As a group, the Year 10 boys resisted completing the questionnaire with two sabotaging it by writing "dunno" and "not telling" in every answer space and the rest making very little effort to attempt the open-ended questions. Thus, finding assessment methods that appeal to young adolescent boys remained an on-going challenge.

Finally, it is essential that I acknowledge the confounding effect of my role in this teams' experience. Without wishing to blow my own trumpet, there is no doubt that, without support, the students' experience may have proceeded down a different path. While I take no credit as a producer (and even less as a choreographer), I offered many strategies which assisted the *Pig Hunters* to gain credibility in the SC family without compromising their integrity. For example, by designing and providing bright red, uniquely decorated t shirts, we ensured they were well-dressed which appeared to boost their sense of inclusion and equality. We also worked hard on an original and energetic chant which was conceptualised by the reluctant dancers and they were briefed on how to use it to great effect on performance day. This gave them a social advantage over other schools who had not prepared chants. We deliberately worked towards the awards we thought we had a chance of winning, such as the Spirit of SC award, by bringing along original gifts for other schools. Finally, I used my connection with the SC organisation to ensure they were warmly received by the crew on performance day. It was this same connection that brought the TV crew to the school and gave them national publicity.

While this input from me sat very comfortably with my methodological principles, I also acknowledge that, without these slightly contrived "wins", the students may well have had a less rewarding first-time SC experience.

Highlights and challenges

This was a study that had mutual benefits for both me and the participants and was thus more in synch with my methodological principles than the two previous studies. For the school, it became a community project that introduced students, staff, parents and the wider community to SC and confirmed they were more than capable of competing with city schools. By delegating the producer role to me, they were also released from creative responsibilities, administrative hassles and fund raising duties. Moreover, staff and students were up-skilled, the arts were given a boost in the school and they gained core material for the end of year musical.

From my perspective, I was welcomed into a research setting where my support was genuinely needed and appreciated. As I summarised in my notes:

Ultimately, I came away from this study feeling very gratified at being an active participant in this team's SC journey. It was great to walk in the school gate, have the kids rush up, say hello, ask questions and make suggestions. I loved watching them buy into the routine, gain confidence and developing a working relationship with each other and me. The staff members were also AMAZING, fully involved, always asking about my research, how I was feeling, being appreciative and never complaining about the added workload. The TIC was endlessly efficient, supportive, buzzy and super-fun to be around. I learnt so much from her about rural life, the economies of farming and especially pig hunting. The local shopkeepers knew me by name and offered encouraging words about what a great opportunity it was for the school. I made a point of buying my grocery supplies from them even though they were much more expensive than the city stores. From the beginning, I felt like a contributing member to the team and the wider community. An added bonus was the stunning drive to and from the school which lifted my spirits and enabled me to mull things over en route. I was very sad to leave when it was over.

An added bonus was the feedback I received from staff which indicated that they had also gained something from the experience. One staff member, who became an invaluable assistant, critic and supporter, wrote in a card:

I really appreciate the way you have kept it low key and got your values right. It is more important that kids learn something and have fun rather than focus on perfection and winning. I have enjoyed working with you and have learnt a lot about using music to teach drama like the importance of action and reaction [a skill we practised many times with the boys]..."

My input was also acknowledged in the event programme, students' focus groups and questionnaires, which validated my methodological approach. An added honour was a school assembly where I was presented with a replica of the team photograph from the local paper (framed and engraved by the woodwork teacher), a hamper of homemade produce (made by several teachers and parents) and a whole side of frozen wild pork! I was quite overcome.

However, I should also note that on the last day, I received a reality check about my perceived "welcome" presence in the school when I commented to a young teacher about how supportive

and uncomplaining the staff had been. She promptly replied, "Believe me, they've complained alright, you just haven't *heard* it." This certainly put me in my place and alerted me to being wary of being overly complacent about the extent of my contribution to the community.

There were numerous other challenges and dilemmas.

External pressures

In this study, I strongly felt the tension between my research and non-research lives. Despite being a full participant observer, I was never fully immersed in the research community and never fully detached from my other life as a student, family and community member, as reflected in my field notes:

The first few weeks of this study have been a mess. The school did not want to start until week 3, exactly when I had a university presentation to give [in another city]. I am trying to write a journal article with my supervisor [in another city]. In my home town, I was summoned for jury duty and decided I could squeeze this in before the study started. Horrors! I found myself as Foreperson on a rape trial which overran its allotted time by 10 days. This mucked up both my time frame and my head space because it was enormously intense and disturbing. I could not contact anyone by day and could not clear my mind at night. Added to this my father is dying [in another city] and I am making regular flights to be with him. My new granddaughter is in hospital, my son is getting married and I am selling my house. It's a constant battle to get my priorities right.

Had I been a resident ethnographer, I might have hunkered down and been more resistant to external demands. I would have also avoided moving back and forth between several worlds which was both mentally distracting and physically demanding.

Communication

This school had no cell phone reception and the TIC "did not do emails" or answer her home phone. Keeping in touch with her was difficult and I felt embarrassed about the number of messages I left her. Moreover, pre-arranged plans were often re-arranged and on one frustrating day I noted, "I never know what is expected of me until I get there and then a *lot* is expected of me." For example, my first meeting with three key staff turned out to be a motivational speech for 80 students and had I been pre-warned I would have approached it quite differently. On eight occasions, I drove the 200km round trip to find classes had been cancelled because of school photos, visiting performers, class trips, immunisations, school camp and sports exchanges but no one had informed me. I was also asked by the TIC to compile the music soundtrack which took many hours, only to then find she had already done it herself. In frustration, I recorded, "Jeeez. I have been awake for nights worrying about this. Seems I need not have bothered".

Role conflict

In my previous studies, I grappled with teacher-researcher conflict in terms of observation focus. Here, as noted above, my proposed observational/mentor role morphed from day one into a full-scale producer-director role. From then on, I was immersed in production and my research role was subsumed both physically and intellectually, particularly during the preparation period. As soon as staff members established I was a trained teacher with a performing arts background, they viewed me as a visiting specialist and handed much of the team responsibility over to me even though I encouraged them to take an active role. Most frustratingly, most teachers stopped attending classes (*not* part our agreement), leaving me to manage the students on my own. As I remarked after two weeks,

I'm not at all sure if this is what I want, but it's how it has become. Should I request that teachers stay in class? I DID say I would do it on their terms. May be I was too loose about this. I so often do this. Now I've not only got all the choreography and music to worry about, but also class discipline and administration. I still don't know how the timetable works, which kids I can trust and what individual staff agendas are. Aaaaarghhh!! But don't want to complain about it, because they are so friendly, interested and supportive of me.

The ambiguous perception of my role by staff resulted in several awkward situations, exemplified by a lesson when my junior class was relocated to the senior students' common room because of a timetable clash. The seniors had left their cell phones lined up on the window sill (in the hope of getting some reception) and unbeknown to me, the juniors commandeered them, leaving lewd messages on them. The seniors were justifiably furious with the juniors *and* with me. I felt bad and probably should have used this moment to insist that I needed classroom teachers in the room for support. As usual, I said nothing and accepted the seniors' criticism.

Role conflict issues continued to challenge me until performance day, when the team took to the stage for their competition performance. At this point I seemed to kick back immediately into researcher mode:

All of a sudden it was show time and the SC staff took the team back stage. This was it! I was full of a cold and SO tired that I was punch drunk. I just felt like I had got them there and was completely blasé about what happened next. My job was done and I could feel myself moving back into researcher mode. Despite being the producer, I watched their performance with real detachment and could feel all my theoretical dimensions take centre stage again. How strange!

Insufficient skills for my hands-on role

While I have production experience, I am definitely *not* a choreographer and this turned out to be the school's main expectation of me. I was completely out of my depth and the choreography issue became all-consuming for me. I spent hours at home compiling dance

moves and modifying the soundtrack when I should have been writing field notes. I regularly lost sleep trying to keep ahead of the next day's lessons. I also felt an enormous sense of responsibility to the school and students to produce something that worked for them and reflected who they were. More than 20 pages of my field notes centred on my angst about choreography, for example:

GULP!!! This has become far more of a hands-on role than I had anticipated. I feel SO accountable to the kids to help them produce a credible and creditable first time entry in a region where I know the standard is very high. I am NOT a choreographer and don't know if I have the skills to deliver this. They trust me and I'm terrified of letting them down. I'm haunted by the TIC's comments about not making them look like country bumpkins. But I'll also need to be really firm and well-planned to avoid this becoming a HUGE producing/directing responsibility for me with no time or energy left to research.

Personal conflict with autonomy control versus autonomy support

Wherever possible, I encouraged staff and students to take the initiative. However, with their lack of experience, they made many decisions which were very difficult to conceptualise. For example, their chosen music was funky and very relevant to the theme, but not appropriate music for dancing. In sum, I effectively had all the production responsibility with no control over the key elements of theme, costume, music and set design. I agonised about the quality of the routine and how to improve it without compromising their sense of ownership (I was intrigued to later read how many times I used the word "agonise" in this study!). I recorded:

I keep reminding myself that it's important to allow staff and students to come on board in their own time and for me to be aware that this is not the only thing that they have on their plate, compared to me who is living and breathing the bloody thing. Once we get the core item done, hopefully I will be able to hand it over to them more.

Recording challenges

This continued to be a dilemma for me. My hands-on role precluded taking notes in class, although I occasionally had gaps between modules. In reality, I had very little privacy and the friendly nature of the staff meant there was always someone who was keen to talk. After school, I faced a long drive home, my head spinning with dance moves as I listened to the soundtrack in the car. My field notes reflect an on-going tension between observations and production notes with the two often merging. Physically and emotionally, I was tired, so tired...the whole time!

Ethical issues

I faced three ethical dilemmas in this study. First, the TIC was an addicted smoker which meant our planning meetings took place in the car park outside the school boundary (smoking is not permitted in NZ schools). After week two, I recorded:

We go out during breaks, with her clutching a tin can ash tray, and squat between parked cars while she puffs on her fag and I tried to balance notes on my knee. It's physically awkward to write and freezing cold! Worse, SC is a health-promotion event where students pledge to be smoke-free for the duration, so having a smoker TIC is not a good look. I have to wear this one. It's not my place to tell her otherwise.

Second, a teacher at the school wrote an article for the local paper about SC and my involvement which was very flattering. She kindly showed it to me before sending it for publication. Here, I noticed she had uplifted large chunks of material directly from the SC website and I felt nervous about the extent of the plagiarism. However, she was clearly unaware of the protocol regarding acknowledgement of source material and I felt awkward about commenting on it without sounding patronising. In the end, I tentatively suggested she acknowledged the website, "In case you have inadvertently borrowed some of their material". She did this (sort of!)

Third, as noted, Year 9 students kept public on-line blogs about their SC journey. Part of their assignment was to set up links, for example to the SC website. Unfortunately, as I was browsing one boy's diary, I discovered he had set up links to a hard-core pornography site that included graphic paedophilic acts and bestiality. I fretted for several days about whether to ignore or report this. Finally, I commented casually about it to the TIC after self-justifying that other students could also access the link, that issues like this should be addressed early and that, had it been my son, I would have appreciated being told. Later that day, I saw the boy (in tears) with his parents outside the Principal's office. I felt ghastly for them and felt that I had overstepped my role. I still do not know if I was identified as the whistle-blower but, thankfully, he was permitted to keep doing SC.

Self-revelations

My continuing inability to set boundaries when I enter the field (aggravated by my reluctance to say no to anyone or anything) put undue pressure on me and at times compromised the integrity of the research process. Although taking on the production role was probably unavoidable, I still tended to allow staff and students to make important decisions about issues I had to implement, especially with practice timetabling, dance groupings and theme conceptualisation. As I noted:

Throughout, my standard modus operandi was to be enthusiastic and accommodating while trying to modify their ideas into workable processes without offending or disempowering anyone. This made it easy for them, but VERY hard for me.

I also got very easily knocked sideways by negative criticism, for example, by the young teacher's comments, and immediately assumed this feedback represented the majority view. I then worked even harder to avoid disruption to the school, all the while putting a heavier

workload on myself. I clearly needed to develop a thicker skin because, in a full participant role, it was inevitable that some people would not come on board or resent my presence.

Finally, I was somewhat mortified at what a “city chick” I was. Although I have travelled extensively, I discovered I had little understanding about authentic NZ rural life and some of my earlier suggestions for the routine were ignorant and (in hindsight) plain embarrassing. I was enormously grateful to the students for their patience in leading me through the realities of pig hunting and showing me why it is such a big part of their lives. Over time, I became very protective of the students and the need to represent their story with integrity to the wider community. I bristled with indignation when a female judge remarked that their portrayal “was enough to put her off bacon for life” and adopted a rather flippant approach in her critique, although it fortunately did not seem to upset the students.

Overall, though, I left this study feeling that participant observation was more in keeping with my personality and preferred research stance. I also felt gratified that although I was often under pressure as a producer, the school and students reported significant benefits from the experience and, in many ways, this was more important to me.

In my next study, then, my aim was to pull back again and adopt more of an observer participant role. In other words, to set some boundaries!

CHAPTER 6 THE LOST GIRLS

As a girls' school, we need to work on things that reflect our values and empower us as women. Prostitution was not the answer!

(Year 13 dancer)

1. Background to study

For this study, I elected to return to the school of my Master's study. I wanted a city-based youth-led team and in this school the teachers were prepared to support me with data collection without expecting my hands-on involvement, an attractive proposition after the *Pig Hunters'* study.

1.1 The school

This team came from a decile 10 Catholic girls' school, situated in an upper middle class suburb in NZ's largest city. The ethnic composition was predominantly European (70%), with a small number of Maori (5%), Pasifika (4%), Asian (7%) and Middle-Eastern (4%) students. The school is recognised for its successful academic results and cultural and sporting prowess. A key feature of the school is its commitment to core Christian values which underscore both the teaching programme and behavioural expectations of staff and pupils. The school is well resourced with a large hall, new gym and a dance studio. It has a long history with SC, competing every second year and producing a school musical on alternate years. This was the school's seventh SC entry.

1.2 The team

The team comprised 88 on-stage dancers and 22 support crew ($n = 110$). I elected to include both dancers and non-dancers in this sample because, unlike the previous teams, all girls were involved from the outset and were expected to attend rehearsals, planning meetings and the performance day. Students applied for entry to the team via a sophisticated student-run audition process which has been traditionally used for all their SCs. Priority was given to senior students with junior members only making the team if they had outstanding dance talent. This year's audition attracted three times more dancers than there were places. Back stage and technical crews were made up of senior student volunteers.

The majority of team members came from the senior school: Year 13 (51 students), Year 12 (7), Year 11 (9), Year 10 (17), Year 9 (22), Year 8 (1) and Year 7(3). Students' ages ranged from 11 – 18. One girl had a prosthetic leg but was a full member of the dance team. The on-stage team had all received formal training in dance, drama, musical theatre or aerobics, many since

they were three years old. More than half the team had previously competed in SC. This, then, was not a novice team.

1.3 Theme

The theme centred on a teenage girl who had missed the last bus home after a night out with friends and found herself stranded in an undesirable part of a city. She sees a side of life that is unfamiliar and frightening, coming into contact with prostitutes, drug dealers and homeless people. As she tries to find her way home, a group of homeless people try to steal her bag and she is rescued by visitors to the nightclubs in the street. Dawn comes and she finally catches a bus home. As she gets on the bus, an identically dressed teenager gets off, and the cycle begins again.

1.4 Preparation period

Students had 16 weeks to prepare for the competition. Practices were held twice weekly after school until the last month, when additional practices were held in the weekends. At the start of each session, students gathered as a whole group either in the gym or hall for leadership announcements, administrative tasks and team building exercises, then students broke into their four dance groups (prostitutes, druggies, homeless and street people) to learn their routines under the tutelage of student choreographers. At the end of each practice, students re-congregated en masse in the hall and each dance team demonstrated what they had learned to the whole group. For the last three weeks, students practised as a complete unit, first linking all the segments together and structuring the finale, then integrating the lead character's role. In the last week, students concentrated on performance techniques, perfecting their stage positioning, character portrayals and synchronised movements. There were a number of problems with the routine, which necessitated last minute changes to roles and choreography.

In keeping with school tradition, the dress rehearsal was held the day before the competition where it was vetted by the Principal and witnessed by peers, staff and family. Afterwards, students received their t-shirts and learnt a chant which had been composed by the leaders. A party atmosphere prevailed, signalling the end of a long, intensive preparation period.

1.5 Performance day

On performance day, students met at the school at 7 am dressed in black and shocking pink team t-shirts. Leaders gave a final pep talk and then distributed bright pink ribbons which were used to adorn bodies and hair. Each student also received a goody bag of sweets and an individualised note from the leaders thanking them for their participation in the team. They then boarded buses for the 30 minute ride to the venue, screeching out hymns en route!

At the central city venue, more than a thousand students shared one huge dressing room, the size of a football field. Each school's area was defined by masking tape strips on the carpet and a line of chairs, which enabled students to mingle freely with other competitors and watch their performance preparations. Because the *Lost Girls* were very familiar with performance days, they quickly set up their space at the venue and immediately began to perform their chants which sparked retaliatory chants from rival schools.

Due to the size of the venue (2200 seats), students were collected well ahead of time for their performance, necessitating a long period of silent waiting in the corridors back stage. During the night, students watched other teams' competition performances and the award ceremony on a big screen in the dressing room because there were no spare seats in the auditorium. When each team left and returned to the dressing room for performances, the other schools made a snaking human archway through which the competitors tunnelled.

The *Lost Girls* won three awards of excellence for performance skill, costume and set design. They did not place in the three top schools. This was the school's worst ever result. They headed home in private cars at 11.30pm.

2. Method

2.1 Observer participant

For the *Lost Girls*, I situated myself as a semi-detached observer (or observer participant) on the observation continuum. Here, the researcher joins a group as a detached, but empathetic observer while remaining reactive to the group dynamics, hopefully allowing access to a wide range of material without the pressures of full participation. Disadvantages can include access limitations and a sense of marginality from never having full membership status which, in turn, can make the observer vulnerable to the influence of one-sided information (Dallos, 2006). The school was very accommodating of this stance and I was able to undertake extended periods of observation, coming and going at will to a welcoming environment where I was given the freedom of the school. I attended leaders' meetings, small and large group practices, the technical and dress rehearsals and accompanied the team throughout their performance day. On occasions, the teacher in charge (TIC) asked me to address students on practical issues, such as theme choice and stage production. The TIC, who was not experienced in the performing arts, also used me as sounding board, conveying suggestions to the students without acknowledging my input, a situation which enabled me to support students while retaining a reasonably detached research role. Conveniently, the gym (where most practices took place) had an upstairs glassed-in viewing platform from which I could unobtrusively

observe team dynamics when I did not want to sit amongst the students. In all, I attended 33 practices, plus the public performances and generated 270 pages of A4 field notes.

2.2 Supplementary data collection measures

2.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered two weeks after the competition to all team members who were present on the day of administration ($n = 101$), although only those who were on-stage or back-stage during the performance completed the nine-dimension flow scale ($n = 85$). It was distributed by the TIC to classroom teachers who allowed their students to complete it during form time. To ensure anonymity, each questionnaire had an attached post-it note with the student's name on it. Students removed these then resubmitted the completed questionnaire to the form teacher, who forwarded it to the TIC and then on to me. This procedure minimised post-performance disruption to the school and allowed students to record their responses with comparative anonymity.

The RQ replicated the format of the *Pig Hunters'* questionnaire with some minor modifications. These were:

Emotions

In this study, students were asked to retrospectively report emotions experienced at *five* separate time points during their SC experience: on selection; the dress rehearsal; waiting in the wings prior to the performance; immediately after they came off stage; and, looking back on the overall experience two weeks after the event. I deleted "reluctant", an emotion used in the *Pig Hunters'* RQ, because it did not seem relevant to this self-selected team. In lieu, I added the emotion, "anxious", because I had observed students in this team struggling with performance deadlines. I chose to have no limit on the number of emotions students could circle because the *Pig Hunters'* study revealed the unusual combination of emotions students report at a given time and, this time, I did not want to restrict their selection.

Identity

Because students in this sample were experienced dancers and were also very articulate, I used the opportunity to explore their dance identity. The question was simply worded: *Why do you like to dance? We would really like to know.* I was less interested in why they enlisted for SC rather than why they simply liked to dance, a little-researched area among youth.

Finally, I added an open-ended question asking them if there was anything they would want to change about the experience.

3. Key elements and opportunities

The extent to which the key elements and opportunities of a “typical” SC experience were present for this team.

3.1 Music and dance

This school is renown in SC for its sophisticated choreography and dance execution, confirmed by its numerous awards in previous competitions. Unsurprisingly then, students in this team had an experience steeped in music and dance. In a single practice session, students often repeated their dances 20 or 30 times while leaders critiqued them and experimented with stage positions. In fact, students did little else but dance. In a break from tradition, the lead character was a non-dancer who conveyed the narrative through dramatic movement and several students played non-dancer character roles to add depth to the crowd scenes. These were integrated in the last few weeks of practice.

3.2 Competition

The competitive aspect of SC was a draw card for this team. Four years before, the school had placed first in the regional final and second in NZ. However, in their most recent entry, they finished a disappointing sixth in the region. This time they were determined to mount a winning entry and this dominated their decision making, particularly theme choice, dancer selection and training. Strategically, they pinned their hopes on out-performing other schools with sophisticated dance skills delivered within a tightly disciplined performance. As students leaders kept reiterating, “We’re in it to win it”.

3.3 Public performance

Because the team comprised experienced dancers, public performance was not a daunting prospect for most of them. Even their audition process involved a public performance. Reflecting this, their practice sessions were marked by an attention to detail and a consciousness of how the routine would appear to an audience. Prior to the performances day, their only public performance was the dress rehearsal in front of school supporters. On performance day, from my observations, students approached the three on-stage rehearsals and the competition performance with a professional attitude and remarkable composure.

3.4 Team activity

This was a moderately large, close-knit team that reflected the dynamics of the wider school community. Every practice began with a whole-group meeting where administrative details were discussed and the value of teamship promoted in a manner that reflected the regular

school assemblies. Practices also finished with a team gathering, performance demonstrations and a pep talk from the leaders. Girls' birthdays were celebrated and individual contributions to the team's preparations were acknowledged. Throughout, the collective unit was salient, both at practices and at the performance day.

3.5 Youth initiative

This team was primarily youth-driven and youth-led. It was overseen by a Year 13 executive producer, assisted by a large team of Year 13 student leaders. The TIC, with the support of several other teachers, acted in a supervisory and advisory capacity, keeping a watching eye on progress and occasionally making suggestions.

3.6 Social interaction

Socialising was a strong feature of this team's experience. There were many pre-existing friendship groups among the girls, especially the senior students. Where possible, students were assigned to dance groups that corresponded with their social networks. Because team members came from seven different year levels, social interaction also occurred across many age groups. Non-team members frequently dropped by to watch practices and join in conversations.

On performance day, students created their own spaces within their designated area, sharing food, playing games and helping each other get ready. However, although they watched the other teams with interest, most did not actively socialise with surrounding schools, seeming content to remain within their existing school friendship groups.

4. Growth and well-being experiences

Developmental experiences that evolve during SC, particularly those that are of considerable interest to students, increase their knowledge base or expand them in some way, giving them new skills or new ways of interacting with others.

Unless otherwise stated, all direct quotations in this section are derived from students' open-ended comments on the questionnaire.

4.1 Autonomy

The extent to which students regulate their own behaviour and experience, and govern the initiation and direction of action during SC.

The teams in this school have traditionally operated without a lot of adult support. As a Year 12 commented during the preliminary meeting, "SC is our chance to show parents and teachers what we are truly capable of without their help." Unfortunately for this team,

students' and teachers' expectations of what constituted an autonomous experience did not always gel and tension between autonomy support (students' self-direction with support from teachers) and autonomy control (regulation by teachers) regularly underscored the practice period.

The problem seemed to begin when senior students were not given the opportunity to apply for the executive producer role. This broke from school tradition because, in previous teams, students applied for the role and were interviewed by senior staff. However, after a succession of leaders who had been strong in dance but short on management skills, the TIC made the decision to unilaterally appoint a girl who had proven leadership ability, but no performing arts experience. This was perceived by students as a significant breach of protocol by the TIC as well as a vote of no confidence in their ability to autonomously manage the production process. Worse still, in their eyes, the new appointee had never done SC, which was a further indication of the TIC's lack of faith in their credentials. Senior students showed their disapproval by ostracising the new producer at the first planning meeting and the TIC later found her crying in a toilet booth. The beleaguered student producer then tried to appease the senior team members by taking on all Year 13 volunteers as leaders. This resulted in an over-supply of leaders, many of whom assigned themselves jobs without consultation with the producer. The end result was a leadership team that was unwieldy in size and structure and made up of students who lacked the skills to mount a large scale production. As I noted, "Hmmm, not a good start. Watch this space."

Student leaders continued to show their resentment at the following meeting where the theme was to be decided. When the TIC greeted them enthusiastically, they responded with off-hand comments and did not engage in conversation with her. I recorded:

It's almost as if the students are making a stand because of the producer appointment. It's like, you didn't give us a fair go, so now we'll show you we don't need you. So please just leave us alone.

This mood prevailed throughout the meeting. As I noted:

27 students turned up on Saturday – quite a big number when trying to get consensus. The leaders had given some thought to the theme and proposed an in-group, out-group idea based on Edward Scissorhands. When it was pointed out that this idea had been done by last year's winning school, students reluctantly broke into groups to brainstorm another angle. Three hours later they were no further ahead. The TIC and drama teacher circulated amongst the groups, but students stone-walled them, stopped talking when they approached and were sceptical or argued against any of their suggestions. The TIC eventually closed the meeting and told them to come up with a theme within a week.

In the following weeks, in defiance of the TIC's instructions, students proceeded to choreograph a routine even though they had yet to settle on a theme. In an effort to give students a sense of direction, the TIC brought in an outside dance instructor for a one-off session and the students worked cooperatively with her ... then reverted to their original plans as soon as she left.

As the practice period progressed, I subsequently recorded fifteen examples of offers of technical or moral support from adults, including planning assistance, lighting advice and fundraising proposals. All were politely declined by the students. Ironically, when it suited them, students seemed to abandon their autonomous stand, handing over quite important duties to the TIC, for example selling tickets to the performance or arranging transportation of the set because, as one said to her, "We are just SO overloaded with leadership responsibilities". Similarly, the TIC, who regularly asserted that she was "leaving it up to them, cos that's what they want", found it difficult to stand in the wings and do nothing, especially when practices were being poorly managed, choreography was incomplete and administrative tasks had been ignored. As I noted:

There's an uneasy dynamic going on here. The kids want, and even demand, autonomy, but they're quick to opt out when the going gets tough. The TIC wants to give them autonomy, while taking quite a hands-on support role. But, in reality, she is very involved and quite quick to intervene when troubles surface.

Problems really surfaced when massed rehearsals began because, although each dance group had been well-trained, there was no one who assumed overall control of the routine. With one week to go, the TIC, after repeated warnings to students that the routine was disjointed and at times inappropriate, pulled rank and removed a number of people from the cast and from leadership roles. She also brought in the drama teacher to give them character training. Students did not appreciate this. I recorded:

This was not a pleasant place to be today. The leadership team were sullen and resentful. While they did not overtly defy the TIC, they gathered in groups and turned their backs on her. They kept saying, "But, why?" to all her proposals. Their friends gathered round them in a show of solidarity tucking their arms into each other. I got the feeling that they knew their routine was out of control, but they were not prepared to lose face and admit it. The rest of the cast sat silently, watching the interchanges, not sure where their loyalties lay.

Ultimately, the show went on-stage pretty much as the leaders had conceived it. The TIC later remarked in the dressing room, "Well, we tried, but at the end of the day, this is about their journey and if they want to do it their way, so be it. It's their night, after all."

As noted, the team did not score well. However, at no time did I see the leaders take responsibility for this, mostly blaming the judges' narrow-minded attitude to their "out-there"

theme. However, when asked on the RQ about the worst aspects of the experience, many of the rank and file dancers specified the leaders' management style. Team members were especially critical of poorly organised practices, inappropriate choice of theme, unilateral decision making and leaders' preoccupation with, and loyalty to their own friends, rather than the group.

To me, it appeared that the leaders claimed management roles (and the autonomy that they believed went with it) as a matter of historical principle with little understanding of its implications and responsibilities. Moreover, they consistently rejected outside support, even when in trouble, and were resistant to well-intended suggestions, especially about choreography. As one choreographer noted in the "any extra comments?" section of the RQ:

Creativity is a personal thing. I got the job and people should have had faith in my talent. The only reason we did not do well is because other people (not mentioning any names!) kept interfering at the last moment which completely mucked up our original ideas.

At the same time, when the going got tough, students were quick to abdicate responsibility, trusting that the TIC would pick up the pieces – which she inevitably did. Overall, while students could justifiably claim they "did it on their own", their rejection of autonomy support may have compromised both the result and the learning value of their experience. In answer to what she would like to have changed, a frustrated aspiring producer complained:

So much for this being run by us students. We weren't even consulted about the leadership roles. This is not how we've always done it. It sucks. What about the dreams I have had for years to be a producer, huh? Didn't even get a look in. It's about time the teachers in this school had more faith in us.

4.2 Integrity

The extent to which SC reflects students' values, beliefs and ways of "being" in the world.

SC was a valued activity in this school as indicated by its repeated entries in the competition, the over-subscription of audition hopefuls and the large number of Year 13 students vying for leadership roles. In fact, the TIC remarked that the executive producer of SC "actually has more kudos in this school than the Head Girl". SC t-shirts were also highly coveted especially those of the student leaders which had their name and leadership title in bold letters on the back. Even non-dancers sought ways to be involved, either as character actors or support crew. When asked on the RQ to comment on whether they thought being in SC was good for the school, nearly all students indicated that it was desirable as a vehicle for social networking across age levels and with other schools, for show-casing their school's dance talent and competitive spirit, for gaining leadership experience, and as a proven "fun" activity. Nevertheless, theme

choice did prove to be problematic from both an integrity and identity perspective. Why was this?

Primarily, students had immense difficulty establishing a theme that sat comfortably with their values. Each suggestion at the early planning meeting was greeted with remarks from students like, "That's *not* the message we want to put out there"; "Schools like ours should *not* be portraying that"; "That is *SO* not us". However, when challenged by the TIC to work with ideas that were meaningful to them, they were unable to generate suggestions. Consequently, they went on to "contrive" a theme around their pre-established choreography, a less than an ideal approach. Ironically, in the light of their integrity objections, their main characters were prostitutes, druggies and pimps – not the kind of people they valued or identified with at all!

The upshot was a theme that never sat comfortably with many of the girls. When asked on the RQ about how they initially felt about the theme, opinion was divided: the majority of senior students were in favour, commenting that it conveyed a strong message, was intense and unique and had the potential for creative choreography. As the lead choreographer pointed out on the RQ, "It was a fantastic theme. I thought of it!" Another Year 13 noted, "It was in-depth, well-thought out, relevant, realistic, and we were inspired by it." One girl even boldly remarked, "We felt it was our duty to inform others about the darker side of city life". The rank and file members of the cast were less convinced, reporting that although the theme had potential, they also believed the story line was beyond the grasp of the younger students and it was possibly "a tad cliché". Several girls noted that, despite their doubts, they had "trust in the leaders to work it out". Finally, the younger students were mostly uncomfortable with the theme choice with responses like, "It was not right for people from our background"; "I felt weird and awkward because I am only 11 and it was an adult theme"; "It did not have a good message and made no sense"; "I was worried I would seem promiscuous (sic)".

Later, students were asked on the RQ whether, in hindsight, the theme was good for the team (open-ended question). Students' qualitative remarks continued to reflect a lack of consensus with the detractors commenting that their storyline "did not go down well with my friends and family in the audience" and was "way too raunchy and risky coming from a Catholic girls' school". The more philosophical students took the approach that although the theme was possibly inappropriate, people had made too much of it. For example, a Year 10 girl breezily remarked, "OK, so it was a bit out there for a Catholic school, but hey, it gave the other schools a laugh and after all this is about entertainment, not being precious". They did indicate however, that their background did not equip them to portray the story authentically and that the audience would have struggled to understand their message. At the other end of the

spectrum, an optimistic Year 11 student noted, “It was a brilliant theme – something all ages could relate to and it was our duty to deal with this often-ignored topic”.

When asked an open-ended question about whether there was anything they would change about the overall experience, 40% of girls wrote, “the theme”. Similarly, when asked if they thought SC had been bad for the school in any way, many students noted that the theme reflected badly on the school, for example “it left others with the impression that we enjoy being prostitutes, something we should have considered before we put ourselves out there like sluts” and “it made the school look materialistic and shallow”.

Only one Year 13 girl referenced her discussion to factors other than the theme, complaining that:

I don't want to sound a smartarse, but I have just spent four years at a dance school in Europe. I got so slacked off at how the SC leaders at this school did not take a professional approach to the practices and how much time was wasted. It seemed like everyone was more interested in hanging out with friends when they should have been hard out practising. I can't believe they thought they would win. No one had any work ethic and no one was interested in really thinking or behaving like dancers. I just found the whole thing reeeeeally frustrating and wouldn't do it again unless we had a professional in charge. I would have liked to help but they would have just laughed me out of the room. This is so NOT how a dance production should be.

Overall, though, it seems that theme choice had the most negative impact on the integrity value of the experience for these girls. This was reinforced by the fact that while 68% of students indicated they would definitely re-enlist for SC, only 37% definitely wanted to repeat the current experience suggesting that although SC, the event, still resonated with their values, they were less convinced about the integrity of their experience, especially those who were cast as prostitutes.

Finally on the questionnaire, students were asked to rate the extent that SC allowed them to “be myself” on a 0–4 scale ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.10$), which was admittedly above average, but well below the mean rating of 3.44 which students from the same school (who also performed poorly) assigned to integrity in my previous study.

4.3 Belonging

Students' sense of connection to, and love and care from their SC team and the wider SC community.

The *Lost Girls* came from a school which promotes sense of community and respect and care for others. These values are stated in the school charter, repeated every morning in the school prayer and prominently displayed in each classroom. Moreover, the school prospectus states, “Once a *** (name of school) girl, always a *** girl”. This ethos was exemplified by students’

arrival at practices in large friendship groups, their physical expressions of affection towards each other and their willingness to help each other learn dance moves. In particular, students were consistently patient with endless repetitions of their routines and the long periods of inactivity when choreographers were puzzling over the routine. When asked on the RQ to describe the best aspects of their practice period, nearly all girls referenced friendship opportunities, including having fun, dancing together, sharing lunches, socialising across age groups and working co-operatively on a creative project. Students also indicated that they enjoyed re-grouping at the end of every practice to view each other's progress, while leaders reported that SC provided a context that strengthened Year 13 relationships in a way that academic groupings could not. When describing the best overall aspects of the experience on the RQ, more students mentioned aspects of belonging as a highlight (57%) than the actual performance (43%). Of note, nearly all students referred to "us" or "our team" or "our school" when responding to questions, indicating that even when speaking as individuals, they framed their answers in collective terms.

However, as mentioned above, there was also some disconnection between the student leaders and the rest of the group which did impact on group solidarity. When describing the worst aspects of the experience on the RQ, more than a third of students felt team spirit was comprised by conflict among leaders, poor communication, practice mismanagement and inadequate support for junior dancers and the support crew. The costume designer commented, "I got fed up with the lack of communication from the stropky choreographers. It left me feeling totally disconnected from the project". Members of the back stage crew also indicated that they felt like inferior members of the team ("Because we weren't dancers, they made no effort to talk to us, even though without us they couldn't have gone on stage").

In the main, though, the collective unit remained strong and most girls qualified their negative remarks on the RQ about the worst aspects of the experience with disclaimers such as, "it was a pain standing round in the cold hall when I wasn't even needed, but if it meant I could be part of the team, I was happy to put up with it".

The performance day experience intensified links between team members with the majority of students commenting on the RQ that the highlight of performance day was the "special bond" they felt with each other, their pride in their school and the unifying effect of the chants. They also enjoyed the dance party sessions and competition activities in the main auditorium. However, I did observe that the team remained fairly self-contained within their own dressing room space and although interested in other schools' preparation procedures and performances, did not go out of their way to interact with them. On the RQ, only ten students mentioned socialising with other schools as a highlight, using terms like "communicating with"

or “mixing with” rather than “making new friends”, a phrase consistently used by students in the other studies. I surmised this was partly because the size of their team meant there were enough social opportunities within their group to negate the need to move beyond this unit. Additionally, they appeared a little intimidated by the raucous and unrestrained behaviour of the multicultural schools with their spontaneous sasa and krumping (dance battle) sessions. As a Year 9 girl noted, “Me and my friends really wanted to join in with the Poly [Polynesian] school next to us but we thought they wouldn’t want to mix with white middle class kids like us”. Another Year 11 girl reported in the “Any other comments?” question that the *Lost Girls’* reticence may have been interpreted as “stand-offish” by the other schools, explaining that “We didn’t really have the confidence to do that street dancing stuff and would have looked like idiots”. In the same section, a Year 13 girl acknowledged that they could have made more effort to mix with other schools because “we probably appeared a little ‘blond’ and insular by sticking with our own mob”. Conversely, one girl described that the worst aspect of SC is “the pressure to be the friendliest school because it is all so fake” proposing that the Spirit of SC award should be scrapped from the competition.

The team also made an unwitting faux pas on-stage which may not have endeared them to other schools. As I later recorded:

After each performance four student “presenters” meet the MC on-stage to talk about their performance. (This is not judged – it is really a time-filler to allow the stage to be prepared for the next performance). The conversation went:

MC: So how did you prepare for your performance?

Student: (very brightly and enthusiastically) We-eeelll. You see, we had to get into character, so sometimes we used to go and lay out on the cold concrete cos that’s what homeless people do and our area is too well-off to have any homeless people so we just had to pretend. It was soooooooooo uncomfortable.

This was followed by an embarrassed shuffle from the audience and the girl kept bubbling on blissfully unaware of the insensitivity of her remark. CRINGE!!!!!!

The girls may have further alienated themselves when they became impatient with the jubilant celebrations of the other schools in the dressing room during the awards ceremony, telling fellow competitors to “shuddup, cos we can’t hear the results”. This attracted some patronising looks and “poor loser” comments from rival schools and one girl reported in the “worst aspect” question that after the performance, a Facebook joke page was set up, entitled, “I don’t scream during SC awards ceremonies. Guess what school I’m from” which attracted a large number of “likes” before it was removed.

Several *Lost Girls* further reported that one of the worst aspects of the experience was feeling they had let the school down by getting so few awards. They were worried about whether they

would be negatively judged because of this, indicating their sense of connection to, and responsibility towards the wider school community. They also expressed the need to remain unified in the face of criticism. After acknowledging the weakness of the leadership team as a worst aspect of the experience, a Year 10 girl commented on the RQ:

This year our leaders didn't exactly inspire confidence. Truth is, we actually didn't have much belief in them at all. But our school is known for its team spirit and it's our job to stick together, so that's what we did. When we bombed out in the competition, it was our turn to support the leaders because they did their best for us and it wouldn't have been fair to desert them when they needed us.

Unsurprisingly then, on the questionnaire, the majority of students rated team sense of belonging ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.97$) more highly than sense of belonging to the SC community ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.03$).

4.4 Accomplishments

Awards received, knowledge and skills gained, and areas of personal development during SC.

Awards

The team got three performance awards out of a possible nine. They did not finish in the top three, and received no technical or written awards which was an unexpectedly bad result given their past history and conviction they had delivered a quality routine. In fact, they returned to the dressing room post-performance jumping up and down, hugging each other and telling the TIC how well they had done. Two hours later, I watched them as they stood in front of the big screen with eleven other teams, waiting for the awards to be announced. I recorded:

The Lost Girls were still buzzing after their performance and gathered confidently in front of the huge screen at the front of the dressing room. As each award of excellence was announced and their school was not named, the girls got quieter and quieter and slowly retreated to the back of the group exchanging anxious glances and placing their arms around each other. Some schools got eight of nine individual awards and it was clear these teams were going to be the top three. When the overall rankings were announced, the three winning schools leapt in the air, hugged each other, screamed and cheered and burst into their chants. The Lost Girls looked gutted. They did not congratulate the others and instead went back to their space and began packing up their gear. Even the teachers did not say anything to them. Most did not even stay to tidy up the room and the teachers let them go, doing the clean-up themselves.

In my previous study with a team from this school, students were slightly disappointed, but philosophical about their result, rationalising that the judges had failed to grasp the concept of their routine. This was not the case here. Instead, when asked to rate their reaction to the result, 24% were very disappointed, 64 % were moderately disappointed, 9% were quite pleased and 5% were very pleased. No one was "over the moon", the highest possible rating. In

their qualitative remarks, more than a third of the girls said the results were the worst aspect of performance day, with students bemoaning that they had done “all that work for nothing”, that the “awards did not match their expectations” and that they had the “indignity of the double whammy: no placing and only three awards of excellence”. Several senior students felt they had let the team down. Numerous girls commented that it had been humiliating to watch the other schools’ celebrations and a few expressed frustrations that the jubilant screaming from the other schools was “poor taste” because it was difficult to hear the judges’ comments and “was inconsiderate of our hurt feelings”. Bucking the trend, one Year 13 student did offer her congratulations to the winning schools on the questionnaire. When asked if there was anything they wanted to change about the overall experience, more than a third of students on the questionnaire wrote, “the result”. Nevertheless, despite their disappointment, when given three choices on the questionnaire, students voted overwhelmingly in favour of the competitive format of SC, with 91% of girls rating that competition makes the event more exciting, 8% not sure and only one girl rating a preference for an award-free day. Moreover, their pride appeared to have remained intact with the majority of students expressing above average levels of self-pride ($M = 2.71, SD = 0.88$) and team pride ($M = 2.68, SD = 1.05$).

Skills and knowledge

Students were explicit and articulate about skills and knowledge gained during SC using technical language and often listing four or more examples, such as:

I learnt about socialising, especially meeting new people. I learnt to put myself into character and to dance as a role by understanding the feelings of my character. And I had to learn at speed, then force myself to practise at home (Year 10 girl).

On the questionnaire, when asked to describe the skills they had learnt, more than half the girls reported gaining knowledge in performance skills, new dance moves, acting techniques, choreography, spatial awareness and characterisation, suggesting that this was first and foremost a dance experience. It also reflected the teaching skill of the student dance leaders. Many students indicated an increased awareness of the organisation and hard work required to mount a large-scale production. They also reported learning about teamwork, especially the logistical and emotional challenges associated with large group dynamics, unfamiliar people and a wide age range; gaining social skills, particularly meeting and working with new people; and, for the seniors, leadership skills such as communication, mediation, time management, organisation, appropriate use of emails, attending to deadlines and large-group directing and choreography. Intriguingly, these claims contrasted with my observations, which noted that student leaders “consistently struggled to meet deadlines, manage practices and complete choreography in the allotted time frames”!

Personal development

Students were equally articulate when describing what they had learnt about themselves during SC, with the majority referring to learning self-restraint and self-discipline, such as listening, patience, tolerance and coping with criticism. A Year 13 girl commented, "I learnt to work hard even though I was pissed off at not getting a main role". Many girls also reported gaining confidence, overcoming fear, learning to function under pressure and maintaining optimism under challenging circumstances. As a young Year 7 girl remarked, "You have to keep positive even when things do not always go as planned". Finally, 24 % said that they learnt the value of commitment and dedication, exemplified by remarks such as, "Although the practices were a drag, I also learnt that practice makes perfect".

4.5 Identity

The collaborative process between students and the SC context to foster a self-determined, cohesive sense of self.

Students entered this experience with three well-established identities: dancers, Catholic College girls, and respected SC contestants. When asked about their previous experience on the questionnaire, they tended to define themselves as "jazz ballet dancer", "musical theatre performer", "soloist" and so on. Indeed, dancer experience was a pre-requisite for the on-stage team. Moreover, they identified with being "expert" performers, with one student noting, "Our school has reputation for producing star dancers in SC. We expect to do well and other schools expect us to do well". Most notably, group identity was salient from the outset with students seeing their team selection as a chance to represent the school and as confirmation of their dance ability.

These identities came through strongly in theme discussions with many suggestions vetoed as being inconsistent with their "white, middle class Catholic school background", a term they frequently applied to themselves. Conversation was punctuated with comments such as, "What would other schools think of us if we did that?", "That would SO not suit our dance style", and "Hmmm, it's an alright idea, but honestly, we'd have to wear frumpy clothes and I actually like to look good on stage". Indeed, as I later noted, virtually all discussion centred on "What will people think?" and "How will I look?"

Their preparation period behaviour reflected these statements. Students came to practices trendily dressed and worked tirelessly on perfecting their routines. Throughout, leaders stressed synchronised, mistake-free performances and the need to restore the school's winning reputation. They spent many hours debating costume styles. When staff members expressed reservations about the "risqué" theme and characterisation, leaders promised to

work even harder on the dance moves. (“You’ve got to understand, Miss, it’s only a dance”). As I noted:

These kids are fantastic dancers, but they are making no effort to understand the identities of their characters. They seem to think if they dance perfectly, this will make a perfect performance. When the TIC asked how them how prostitutes behave, the choreographer replied, “How would I know, I’ve never been one, but I know how they dress because I’ve watched *Pretty Woman!*” Nevertheless, the TIC also commented to me, “It’s a bit worrying how convincing they really are in their prostitute roles!”

Thus, students completed their preparation period feeling well-rehearsed, well-costumed and confident their routine would score well. Two days out, the majority feeling, as expressed by a leader at dress rehearsal, was “although it’s been a scramble at the end, we think our performance is first class and we will do ourselves and our school proud”.

I observed that the *Lost Girls* were equally confident after their three on-stage rehearsals with other schools congratulating them on their sophisticated choreography which reinforced their belief they were on target for another winning performance. However, as I recorded:

Things began to unravel after their on-stage performance. Their costumes were definitely provocative, revealing, and actually a bit inappropriate. Their dance moves were definitely on the edge of risqué too. This was noticed by the other schools and the *Lost Girls* suddenly found themselves being judged by their stage identities rather than their real-life identities. This was very confrontational for them and something they were quite unprepared for.

When describing the worst aspect of the performance day, students reported on the questionnaire that other competitors had called them “sluts” and “made mean comments” to them after their competition performance. Even worse, the school gained very few awards, so they could not take solace in victory. Several students also remarked in the “any other comments?” section that the costumes “made us look like sluts and naive middle class school kids”. Another girl fretted, “We were not only losers. We were SLUT losers. I just wanted to cry.” In fact, the word “slut” was mentioned 56 times on the questionnaire, suggesting it had been internalised by team members in the two weeks after the performance. Moreover, students noted on the questionnaire that they were concerned about how their stage identities would appear to friends and family in the audience and what the school community would say. Interestingly, not one student referred to her individual reputation, expressing concern instead for the school or their family’s reputation after their ill-conceived, losing performance. When asked on the questionnaire if there was anything they would change, one girl asserted, “Don’t have prostitutes!” Despite this, students drew strength from their group status and the benefits of “being a SC girl” seemed to outweighed the temporary indignity of being a “loser” or a “slut” as indicated by the intention of the majority to repeat the experience. Unsurprisingly, they were, less keen about repeating the previous year (see Figure 9).

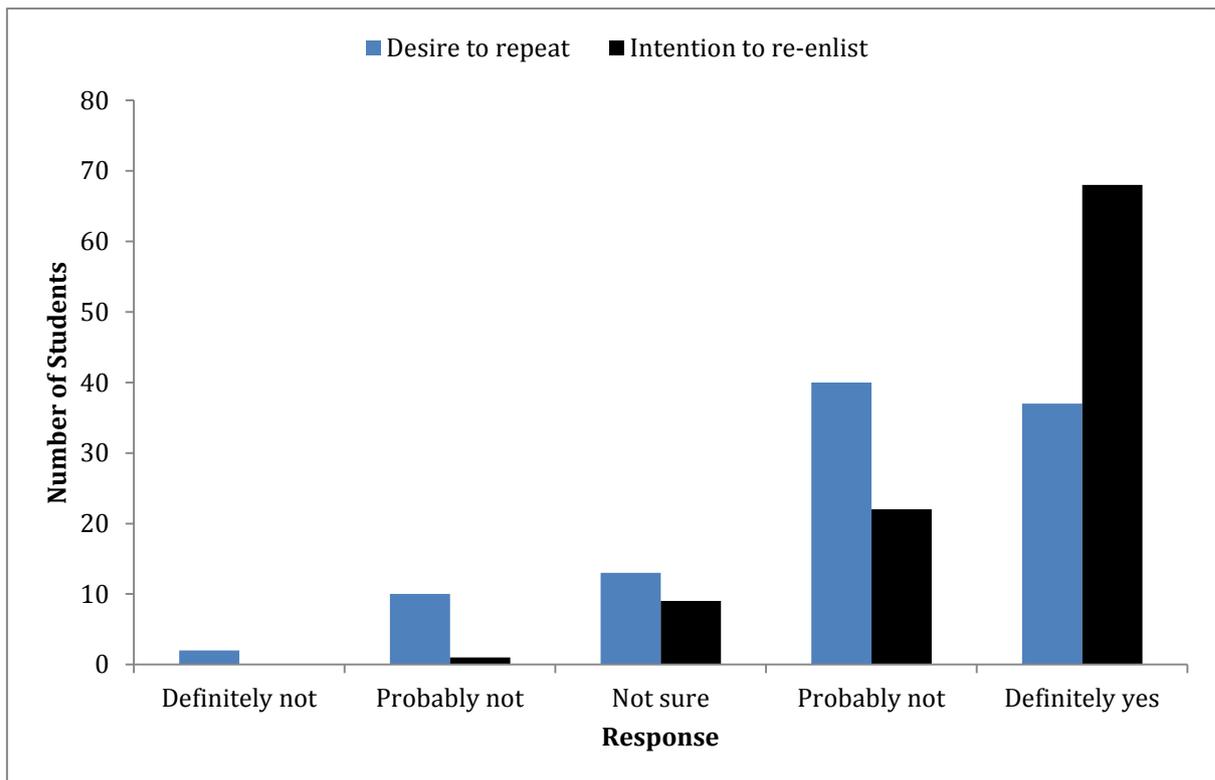


Figure 9. No. of students desiring to repeat the experience, and intending to re-enlist for future SCs ($n = 101$).

4.6 Flow

The subjective psychological state experienced when totally absorbed in a challenging activity and having the necessary skills to accomplish it.

Despite the skill of the dancers, it seemed that conceptual issues with the routine did compromise the flow potential of the practice period for this team. Moreover, on the RQ a number of students complained that the worst aspect of the practice period was the unchallenging choreography, for example, “The dances were far too easy and I spent a lot of the practices being plain bored”, which does not bode well for a flow experience. Even the dress rehearsal which is often associated with flow moments, seemed to me to lack energy and inspiration, and was described by the lead choreographer as “flat and blah in many places” after the final run-through.

Thus, flow really only featured on performance day for this team. When asked on the RQ to rate their preferred on-stage experience on performance day (from a choice of the three rehearsals and the actual performance), 95% students said the actual performance. In their qualitative reasons for this answer, student indicated that the competition performance was preferable because of the live audience (“I felt the audience connect with us, and we connected back with them”), the presence of family and friends (“I wanted to do my best to show them how good we really are”), the atmosphere and energy (“It was our time to shine and we just

sparkled”), the costumes, lighting and make-up (“It was so much easier to go into character with my costume on”) and most of all, because this was the “one that counted” and was the “culmination of all our hours of hard work”.

To further assess their flow experience, students rated their on-stage performance on the nine dimension Flow State Scale. As seen in Figure 10, seven flow dimensions had an above average mean score: skill level, total focus, clear understanding of goals, distorted time, lack of self-consciousness, merged action and awareness, clear feedback and optimal experience. While this suggests the on-stage performance provided flow moments, of interest is the low mean score for challenge level which suggests that students did not perceive the task was especially difficult (or that they had an over-rated notion of their skill level relative to the challenge). Given that a key feature of flow is a task that offers a perfect blend of high skill and high challenge, it is possible that the Lost Girls did have an optimal on-stage performance but may not have truly been “in flow”.

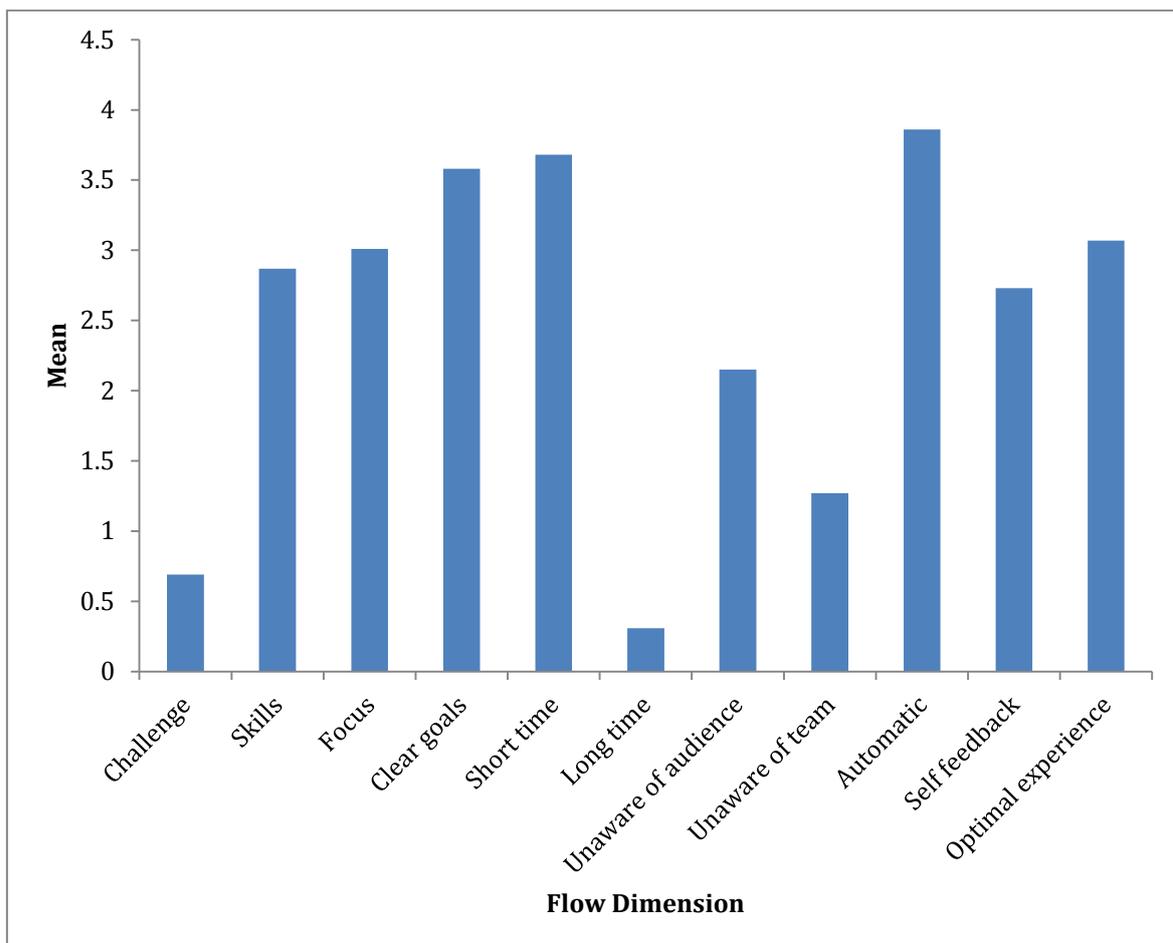


Figure 10. Mean ratings of each flow dimension for on-stage performers ($n = 85$).

4.7 Emotions

Students' experience and regulation of their positive and negative affective states.

The *Lost Girls'* experience started positively with feelings of excitement, happiness and enthusiasm being the most circled items on the emotions checklist when students remembered back to being selected for the team (see Figure 11). Excitement remained the most circled item at the dress rehearsal but was now matched by nervousness. In their open-ended comments on the questionnaire describing their feelings at the dress rehearsal, students reported a range of emotions from adrenaline rushes (“nervous and pumped”), anticipation (“I had high expectations because I had so much fun in previous years”), and curiosity (“It’s my first time and I’ve heard so much about what a fun day it is”), to anxiety (“We needed more time and I was worried that we weren’t good enough”), frustration (“I got so pissed off with the dances being constantly changed, even at the dress rehearsal”) and boredom (“I was so over it. I just couldn’t be bothered any more”). Waiting in the wings, nervousness and excitement predictably prevailed, replaced eight minutes later by pride and happiness based on the belief that their performance “was pretty near flawless”. Looking back on the overall event, feelings of pride and happiness were reported with the same frequency as post-performance. However, while excitement and enthusiasm dropped to their lowest levels of all five time-points, frustration and annoyance had reached their highest levels, presumably influenced by the disappointing result. Interestingly, 25 students also reported feeling “neutral” about the overall experience which suggests a degree of apathy and resignation among a quarter of the participants.

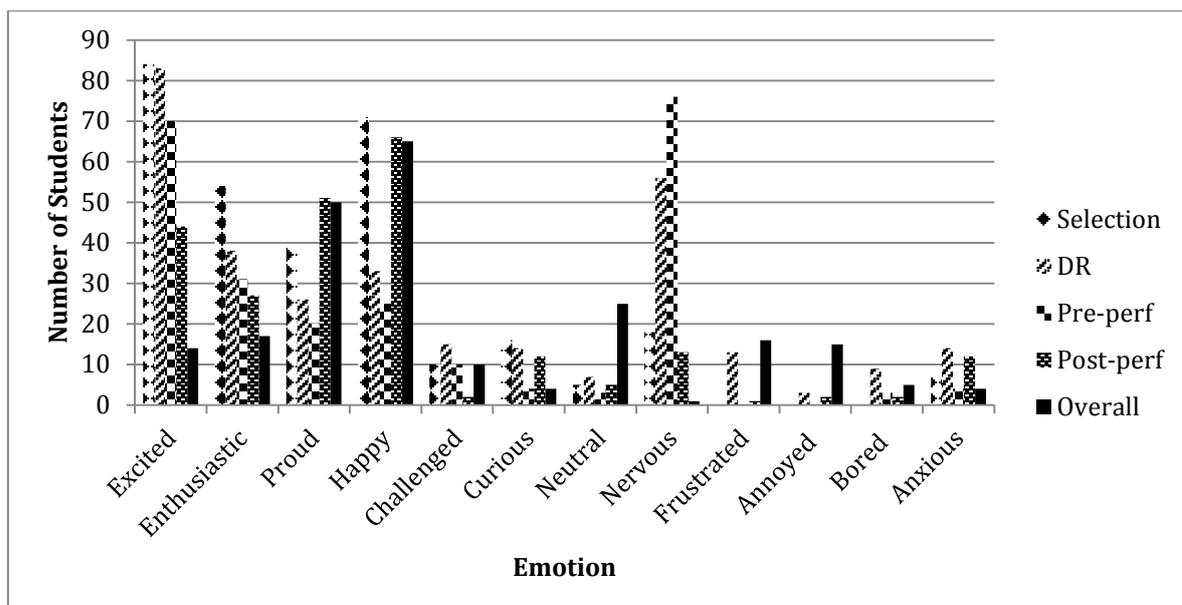


Figure 11. Numbers of students reporting each emotion (retrospectively) at five time points during SC ($n = 85$).

Students in this team faced several emotional challenges and most issues appeared to be situated within, or because of the leadership team. For example, the students with leadership aspirations had to cope with disappointment after discovering they would not have the opportunity to apply for the executive producer role; the large leadership group meant consensus decision-making was difficult and meetings were conflictual with students' loyalties divided between friends and the team; and the choreographers had to contend with criticism, role deletions and last minute changes by the TIC.

In the main, though, students worked through these issues independently, either within friendship groups, or with the executive producer facilitating inter-student negotiations. When incidents became too challenging (especially peer conflict), students occasionally came to the TIC individually or in small groups to vent their emotions and seek advice. For example, when a senior student was in tears at not getting the lead choreographer role, the TIC consoled her, but also firmly pointed out that, "There is no place for tears here. We have got heaps to do and there will be lots of opportunities for you to come into your own as planning gets underway". On several other occasions, the TIC addressed either the leadership group or the whole team when she became aware of "simmering issues" around peer conflict or stage production. Here, she would outline the problem as she saw it, suggest solutions, then give them the option of solving it over a given time period. If this failed, she reserved the right to make a decision on their behalf. Throughout, she stressed that this was a team activity and that "petty personal issues do not belong in this culture", often adding "and I'm too old and tired for them... and I've heard them all before", which usually made the students laugh. In this way she prevented small incidents from getting out of hand, guided their emotional response but did not take control of it.

Above all, the biggest emotional challenge for students came on performance night, described on the RQ by a Year 13 girl as being "publicly and tragically humiliated and having no redeeming features whatsoever. I mean, we couldn't even say it was the judges' fault. We just basically sucked". Students then had to contend with the knowledge they had produced a "sub-standard routine", witness the euphoria of the winning schools, face their friends and family and front up at school the next day "where no amount of sugar-coating could compensate for the poor result" (TIC). The TIC reported that students elected not to have the traditional debrief meeting the day after the event and she left them alone to work through their emotions. Two weeks later, she remarked to me, "And what do you know, they're already planning the next one!"

5. Food for thought

Emerging ideas or insights that are worthy of further consideration

5.1 Why dance?

Students were asked this question at the beginning of the RQ, in the hope that their answers would not be coloured by the negative aspects of their SC experience. Their answers were articulate, insightful and multi-faceted, illustrating their depth of dance experience and their understanding of what motivates them to pursue this activity. Their answers to this question alone transcribed into 17 A4 pages of typed notes. This was in marked contrast to the *Pig Hunter* boys' taciturn responses.

Students' reasons as to why they liked to dance fell into seven categories: physical conditioning; performance opportunities; identity statement; skill development; social contact; love of music; and emotional uplift and self-expression.

First, students reported that dancing gets them fit, enhances strength and flexibility, keeps them healthy and uses up their excess energy. One student said, "I can't stand still. Dancing is good for me. It's a fun way to get loose and exercise". A number of girls mentioned that although it was exercise, it didn't feel like exercise because it was so much fun. Others enjoyed it being competitive, but without the stress that accompanies competitive sport.

Second, students commented that because most dancing is performance-based, it enables them to show off their skills, portray a character and enjoy feedback from a live audience. A Year 10 student remarked, "The feeling when people are watching you is amazing. It brings joy to other people and myself". Another commented, "It's fun getting into the mind-set of a character then portraying it to someone else".

Third, dance was an identity statement for many of the girls ("It's who I am. It's part of my life. It's my passion. I can't imagine not dancing"). Another girl said, "It's so pretty and feminine and lovely to watch. It's a beautiful thing and I'm proud to be a dancer. This is how I want people to see me." A Year 11 student simply said, "I do it because I know I'm good at it."

Fourth, students saw it as a challenging activity which entailed the on-going acquisition of new skills. ("I can develop different techniques with how to move my body"; "Every dance I learn new things"). They also reported a sense of satisfaction and pride after mastering a difficult routine ("It's so rewarding when you finally get a new move sussed").

Fifth, they relished the social contact that group dancing promotes. They saw it as a “fun way to socialise” and a means of meeting new people and exercising with friends. They also cited the satisfaction of moving in time with others and participating in group performance.

Sixth, several students made the connection between music and dance, something that students from previous studies have not done. For example, “I really enjoy music and I play an instrument, so I think that’s got a lot to do with my love of dancing.” A junior student said, “I love the feeling of music and flowing to its rhythms”.

Finally, girls spoke consistently about the emotional uplift they get from dancing, especially seeing it as a vehicle for self-expression and stress relief. For them dance was fun, exciting, happy, beautiful, easy, carefree, relaxing and satisfying. They saw it as a means of “getting away from everyday life” and “a release from life’s pressures”. It enabled them to express their emotions without words (“Through dancing I can express myself in a different way. I can show my emotions and portray how and what I feel”). A senior girl used a quote from Billy Elliot, the musical: “It makes me feel free like electricity. I kinda feel like a bird. Yeah, I kinda feel like a bird”.

Unsurprisingly, many girls’ remarks resonated with the flow dimensions. Students referred to the merging of action and awareness: “It’s so rewarding when you have learnt a dance. Once you know it, you don’t have to think about what move goes next. It just flows and it’s really fun”; “I lose myself in music and “I’m not conscious of the moves. It’s a stress relief”. They also mentioned a state of total absorption: “I get a feeling of release where nothing else matters. I like the introspectiveness of it and the way I need to completely focus on my body and how it moves. I don’t think we do this often enough in our lives”. Some comments reflected challenge-skills congruence: “When you’re good at something, you enjoy it. I know I can be anyone on stage.” Finally, students referred to a lack of self-consciousness; “I just love to dance. I can go crazy to the beat of the music without worrying about what anyone else thinks”.

In truth, I feel that deconstructing students’ comments into categories does not do them justice. It takes away the emotion and continuity behind their words, in the same way that breaking a dance into steps takes away the flow of the dance. Nevertheless, their comments do provide insight into young girls’ emotional experience while dancing in a way that cannot be captured on a Likert scale.

5.2 Gender specific behaviour

I have previously noted girls’ propensity to talk over the boys in co-ed teams. This time there were no boys, but there was still a lot of talk. In planning meetings, it was the norm for several

girls to talk simultaneously and for the meeting facilitator to continue talking over a number of other conversations without appealing for silence. In practices, the leaders would demand silence of the students while maintaining lively conversations among themselves. In downtimes, animated conversations between groups with expressive and dramatic body movements were the norm. As I noted, “My overriding memory of this team is the talk. They never stopped! It was lovely to watch their interaction, but, my gosh, it slowed down progress.”

Second, as I observed with the girls in the *Volcanoes*, students were hardly ever detached from their phones. Where possible, they danced with them tucked in their clothes. If not, they rushed to their bags between sequences to check their messages, often sharing the details with their friends. Even the leaders gave directions from the front with their phones in their hands, sometimes texting at the same time as they gave directions to the group. As the TIC said, “It’s ridiculous, but it’s their gig, and this is how their world functions. If leaders want to address it, it’s up to them.”

Third, students were very conscious of their appearance. As they danced during practices, they adjusted their clothes and fiddled with the hair. When they checked their phone messages, they often brushed their hair or applied lip gloss at the same time, only to mess it up again once they began to dance. They did not do this, however, once the final rehearsals began.

Finally, girls were very physically expressive. They kissed and hugged each other on arrival and departure from practice. When they were not dancing, they regularly stroked each other’s hair and bodies and exchanged clothing. This was especially noticeable on performance day when students dressed and made-up each other in groups, creating elaborate face designs and hair styles, then photographing each other with their phones. Sometimes as many as six girls would be working on one person and they seemed to jointly revel in the physical touch and the freedom of artistic expression. If a student was upset or unwell, others would embrace her or stroke her body. When not dancing, students also walked around arm in arm or sat leaning against each other, back to back.

In sum, they were a very tactile, emotionally expressive and talkative group. However, without a comparative male group, it could not be ascertained whether this was a function of their gender or simply their strong team bond (or both).

6. Summary of Lost Girls’ experience

This was probably not the school’s most rewarding SC experience. Several senior students, some of whom had been in four previous events, commented that it was “the worst SC they

had ever done". The team struggled with conceptualising a theme which neither reflected their identity nor represented their values. This in turn had negative spin offs in terms of practice quality and feedback from other schools and the judges. They also had to rise above the disappointment of defeat and endure negative feedback from rival competitors, a possibly new experience for this hitherto confident and high-performing school. As one of the choreographers noted on the RQ, "We rushed into an idea with too little thought, and then battled all the way to make it work".

Additionally, the team was under the stewardship of an inexperienced producer and a large leadership group who never really got to grips with what their roles entailed. They also deferred from accepting support, either because they did not believe it was necessary or because it undermined their position as leaders. One of the senior students later remarked on the RQ, "We now know that good dancer does not necessarily equal good leader."

On the upside, students enjoyed an extended dance experience with a tightly knit group of peers across seven year levels. They gained new skills and reported many areas of personal growth. They loved their times on-stage especially the competition performance. In the end, students generally accepted that they worked to the wrong formula in this entry and were not convinced they would want to re-run the year. However, they remained keen to re-enlist in future competitions.

7. Reflections

My thoughts about data collection methods used and the highlights and challenges experienced within this setting.

This was a dream study from a logistical perspective. There were no problems with access, observation logistics or data collection. Students and staff were consistently approachable and generous with their time when completing the RQ. It was also a relief to be free from production responsibilities although I confess to finding it difficult to stand by while students dug themselves into some mighty big holes.

The only real challenge was my close connection with the TIC (a long-time friend) which meant that a lot of my information about the students was filtered through her. Being a SC liaison TIC is a time-consuming and challenging role, and I was often the sounding board for her frustrations. Many of my notes echoed her emotions and on many occasions I had to make later adjustments to my comments so that they reflected my sentiments and not hers. I also noticed that if the students were out of sorts with her, they tended to be wary of me as well, bracketing us as joint adversaries.

There is no doubt that semi-detached participant observation did not get me as close to the action as participant observation. However, it did leave me free to record in privacy and mitigated the stress and accountability that goes with a hands-on role. It was also an appropriate measurement tool at this stage of the study because my observations were becoming more focused and I no longer needed to be in the heart of the action. In particular, I found I was becoming more aware of non-verbal cues, especially facial expressions and eye movements.

The questionnaire format worked well with this demographic. The girls seem especially receptive to qualitative questions and their responses were eloquent and insightful (although again, the youngest students found it too long and did not get to the final questions). Students not only answered questions accurately, but they also gave detailed reasons for their answers and suggested solutions to problems, for example:

The whole day was amazing. The way it is run works really well and the staff are awesome. We didn't do so well, but this happens, and the winning girls deserve to be congratulated. I think we need to do more as a group to meet new people rather than stick with the people we know. Next time, we need a more defined leaders' team to reduce stress and bitchy arguments. And definitely another theme!

These students would have made ideal interview or focus group candidates, but they could afford no more time out of class and I sensed that they were keen to move on. Moreover, I suspect their questionnaire comments were so comprehensive that I would not have gathered much that was new. Overall, then, this was a productive and satisfying study.

CHAPTER 7 THE GANGSTERS

Finally, when they had sufficient confidence, we darkened the hall, put a dim blue and red spot light on them and they danced their complete duo while the rest of the cast watched.

It was quite something. Even the cool kids were silent.

(Field notes)

1. Background to study

This study eventuated when a local intermediate school approached me for advice about their first-time SC entry. I was happy to help and was given consent to observe practices and to interview a selection of students after the competition.

1.1 The school

The co-educational school is situated in a NZ regional town. It has a roll of 390 and a decile six ranking. It caters for Years 7–8 students of predominantly NZ European ethnicity (73%), but also Maori (20%), Asian (4%) and Pasifika (3%). The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, encouraging competition and celebrating success. To address the problem of under-achieving Maori students, the school has established a bi-lingual unit with the aim of confirming and strengthening students' cultural sense of identity and belonging. Entry to this class is by selection and students wear a separate uniform. The school has a large hall, but is poorly resourced for the performing arts with no specialist rooms or drama teacher.

1.2 The team

Students self-selected into this team via the school's talent programme, a Friday afternoon activity that operated in the first ten weeks of the school year. "Talents", as it was called, aimed to extend students' learning through their gifts and talents and included options such as languages, design, photography, animals, culture and the arts. SC was offered as the dance/drama/music option and was selected by nearly one third of the school population. All students were accepted, regardless of their performing arts experience.

The team comprised 83 on-stage dancers and 19 support crew ($n= 102$) with approximately equal numbers of Years 7s and 8s. There were 62 girls and 40 boys. One of the girl dancers had Down's syndrome and was accompanied to practices by her Teacher Aide. The on-stage dance team was made up of three sub-groups: gang members (hip hop), angels (contemporary dancers, or "tempries" as the students called them) and good morning kids (character roles).

Students self-selected into the sub-groups according to their dance preference and perceived ability. Any students who did not want to perform joined the back stage crew.

The ethnic composition of the team was approximately 40% Maori and Pasifika, and 60% European, hence the Maori and Pasifika students were over-represented relative to whole school population. There were three Asian students. The dance sub-groups tended to be ethnic-specific; the hip hoppers were predominantly Maori and Pasifika students from the bi-lingual unit while the contemporary angels were exclusively European females. The lead boy (of Maori ethnicity) was a hip hop expert and the lead girl (Japanese) was an untrained contemporary dancer.

Although the *Gangsters* were first time SC entrants, they had an interesting cross section of dance experience. A small number had classical dance training and they made up the angels group. Most of the hip hop group had previous break dance tuition or were part of the school's Kapa Haka (Maori performance) group. For many of the hip hoppers, dancing was their preferred leisure activity and they frequently krumped (engaged in dance battles) on street corners during weekends. The good morning kids were novice dancers. All three groups were on-stage for the finale.

1.3 Theme

The theme was inspired by the school motto, a Maori saying about making the right life choices. It also resonated with the SC motto of "Your life, you decide". The story began with a brother and sister walking to school. The boy is attracted to a gathering of gang members who are dance battling on a street corner. His sister tries to distract him but he is drawn to their music and eventually joins in the dancing. He accepts a ride in their car which crashes, killing all passengers. The story moves to a death scene where the sister grieves and the angels offer her solace. The routine ends with a large finale urging young people to stand up for their rights.

1.4 Preparation period

Although "Talents" ran for ten weeks, the formal SC preparations occurred over a three week period, which was a remarkably short preparation time. It was effectively a SC "boot camp" where both teachers and students were released from class to prepare for the competition. In the first two weeks, students worked intensively in their three sub-groups, returning to class when not needed. In the third week, the whole cast practised together. While the dance students rehearsed, the back stage crew worked with staff members on set and costumes. They also worked the sound system and ran errands. Because of their low budget, students

used their school uniforms as their basic costume and added accessories like hats and wrist bands for effect. A male teacher did the lighting. On the afternoon before the concert, students gave a series of performances to class groups from the rest of the school. They were also issued with their t-shirts and composed and practised a school chant.

1.5 Performance day

Most students lived close to the venue (a large sports stadium) and made their own way there by 8 a.m., dressed in their distinctive royal blue t-shirts. This was a relatively small regional event, with only eight competing schools, but the day followed the usual format of production meetings, rehearsals, competitions, singing, dancing and socialising. The *Gangsters* were initially daunted by the size of the venue and the more senior competitors, seeking reassurance from the teachers and remaining close to their dressing room area. However, within an hour they were mixing confidently with the other schools. They also participated enthusiastically in the day's activities, winning several of the informal competitions, including a \$100 prize from the local bank, a scavenger hunt and the karaoke contest. These results were announced over the p.a. system and inspired students to break into loud renditions of their chant. Because of the strong hip hop culture in this region, SC had also organised hip hop workshops in the foyer which were well patronised by the *Gangsters*, although some of the ensuing dance battles between rival schools became so heated that organisers had to vet who entered the dance circles.

The team had three on-stage rehearsals, gaining in confidence with each run-through as evidenced by the growing smiles on their faces and the rising energy of their dance moves. From my vantage point in the wings, their competition performance was their best ever routine. They won two awards, one for performance skill and another for social awareness. There was plenty of spare seating in the venue so students were seated in the stadium for the evening performances and were able to view the other schools' competition routines.

2. Method

2.1 Participant observation

My initial expectation was that I would be a support person for the staff, which would enable me to be hands-on but still allow time for observations. However, like the *Pig Hunters*, my subordinate role quickly morphed into a production role. The difference here was that by the time I entered this setting, the theme had already been decided, the soundtrack recorded and the choreography half-completed. Even better, there was a network of five committed teachers who sought advice but wished to retain control, thus releasing me from the pressure of full-on

production duties. Because the practice period was so concentrated, I elected to concentrate on my production role during the day and record field notes in the evenings. I hoped this would avoid the role-conflict dilemma of previous studies. In all, I was at the school for 16 full days (including weekends), supervised the dress rehearsal and stayed with the team throughout the performance day. I also accompanied the team back stage during the performance, enabling the supervising teachers to watch the routine from the auditorium. From this three week observation, I generated 150 pages of field notes.

2.2 Supplementary data collection methods

Interviews

After the event, I chose to interview students rather than administer the questionnaire. My rationale was that the questionnaire had proved too long for younger students in previous studies and, after three weeks of disrupted lessons, interviews would be less intrusive on the classroom programme. I was also finding that students' questionnaire responses were becoming predictable and I hoped that the interview format would net more detail.

Interviews took place over three days immediately after SC in an empty office assigned to me by the school. Unfortunately, three days was not sufficient time to interview the full team, but this was all that the school could spare. As requested by staff, I began by interviewing SC students from Room 1 and then worked through each class in numerical order, thus assuring a random sample of team members. As each student returned to class, they sent another student to me. Students did not always arrive individually, with some coming in pairs, twos, threes, fours and even a five and rather than send them back, I interviewed them in these configurations. Interviews lasted between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on the student(s).

For the first six interviews, I used a semi-structured format with a pre-printed checklist based on the content of the questionnaire. However, I found the students were stilted or passive in their responses and seemed disconcerted by my checklist. I therefore relaxed the semi-structured format, allowing students more direction in the discussion, occasionally asking probing questions or seeking clarification. I did, however, ask all students about their previous dance experience, their reaction to the result and whether they would like to do future SCs. I also asked them whether they would prefer a display event to a competition. Additionally, I asked individual-specific questions, for example, "How did you learn to be such a fantastic dancer?" or "I noticed you working hard behind the screen. How did it feel to watch the performance from back stage?" Finally, I asked students to choose one word to describe SC. I did not use video or audio recorders, choosing to take handwritten notes using the shorthand that had now become a well-established part of my recording process. When especially

original or insightful comments were made, I asked students to repeat them so that I could record them verbatim.

In all, I interviewed 70 students who made up 71% of the total team. The interview sample consisted of 55 girls and 15 boys (66% European, 24% Maori, 6 % Pasifika and 4% Asian). There was one 10 year old and five 13 year olds, with equal numbers of 11 and 12 year olds. The sample included sixteen back stage crew. It had an over-representation of girls, because many of the boys were away at a sports tournament during the interview period.

At the end of each day, I reread the interview notes, clarified and expanded them, then transcribed them to my computer. Student comments were used to add their “voice” to this chapter. They were also categorised and coded using the same strategies that were applied to the observational notes, and then incorporated into the complete qualitative data set for the final analysis.

All student comments in the chapter have been derived from the interviews.

3. Key elements and opportunities

The extent to which the key elements and opportunities of a “typical” SC experience were present for this team.

3.1 Music and dance

The *Gangsters'* preparation period was grounded in dance and music, with students working hard to learn dance moves and perfect the routine in the short preparation period. A special feature of this team's routine was a freestyle segment during the gang initiation scene. Here, individual hip hoppers showcased their specialty moves which were spontaneous and changed for every run-through. The dance component was particularly intense for the two lead characters, Ben and Arla, who were on-stage throughout the routine and carried the storyline. I worked for many hours with them, often in private, developing their moves and training them to work as a duo.

Likewise, on performance day, most students engaged enthusiastically with the impromptu music activities, especially the hip hoppers who spent considerable time krumping in the foyer and were declared informal “winners” of the inter-school dance battles by the workshop organiser. The girls were particularly aggressive in their dance battle styles, physically jostling their opponents and staring them down until they were eventually subdued by the dance instructors. One talented boy *Gangster* was even invited to join a national dance company by the visiting hip hop instructor. Non-hip hoppers, however, preferred the mosh pit sessions inside the auditorium. Conversely, a few of the younger students found the loud music a little

overwhelming and made themselves a base high up on the tiered seating where they watched but did not join in. When it came to the chants, though, the *Gangsters* joined together as a team to out-shout the other schools until many lost their voices.

3.2. Competition

The *Gangsters* attended a school where competition was promoted and successful results acknowledged. The Principal was actively seeking to lift the school's standing in the community after a number of poor Education Review Office reports and saw success in external competitions as a means of doing this. Indeed, when I initially asked the TIC how I could best support the school, she replied, "We need to know what we have to do to win SC". They were especially keen to beat a rival intermediate school against whom they often competed on the sports field. In reality, like the *Pig Hunters*, they had little understanding of the strength of the rival schools, two of whom had consistently finished in the NZ top ten. A challenging feature of my role, then, was to support staff and students to produce a credible entry while creating awareness that winning was highly unlikely given their limited resources and experience. I did not want to dampen their enthusiasm nor curb their competitive spirit, but I also did want them to be unrealistically hopeful. After discussion with the staff, we agreed to emphasise to students that this was an orientation experience and their goal was to watch and learn from other schools, in preparation for future events.

3.3 Public performance

For about half the cast, this was their first ever experience of public performance. Many of the bilingual unit students, however, had considerable performance experience as part of the school's Kapa Haka (Maori performance) group who were the reigning South Island champions. Several of these students also enjoyed street performing with their hip hop buddies. In addition, approximately a third of students had also given public performances with their dance classes or with the local youth theatre company.

3.4 Team activity

This was a moderately large, but not disparate team. The three dance groups remained physically and socially separate for much of the preparation period and, even in the finale practices, students seemed reluctant to function collectively off-stage. Above all, there appeared to be a cultural divide between the bilingual students and the rest of the cast, with two sets of behavioural rules and expectations in play. Most noticeably, some of the hip hoppers would not perform their dances in front of other students during practices, claiming that it would be "culturally inappropriate" to do so. Thus, while the angels diligently and

systematically practised their moves in one corner of the hall, the hip hoppers came and went in a random manner. By dress rehearsal day, however, a more unified team structure was apparent and although students tended to remain in their sub-groups during performance day, their on-stage performance had all the hallmarks of a cohesive team unit.

3.5 Youth initiative

This team was primarily adult-driven but wherever possible, students were encouraged to contribute ideas and practical support. Realistically though, the tight time frame did not allow for extensive youth initiative. Overall, the *Gangsters* were led by two TICs who divided the administrative and production responsibilities between them. Several other staff members took on specific roles such as set construction and design, costume and make-up. None of the teachers had previously been involved in SC.

3.6 Social interaction

The short preparation period and the in-school practice schedules meant that students came to the hall to dance, and if they were not dancing, they were sent back to class. This, combined with the cultural divisions between dance groups, meant that large-scale social interaction was not a strong feature of this team. Nevertheless, students did move freely and comfortably among the other schools on performance day and appeared to enjoy the wider social opportunities that the day-long event afforded them.

4. Growth and well-being experiences

Developmental experiences that evolve during SC that are of considerable interest to students, which teach them something or expand them in some way, giving them new skills, attitudes, or new ways of interacting with others.

In this section, unless otherwise indicated, *all* student comments are derived from the interviews.

4.1 Autonomy

The extent to which students regulate their own behaviour and experience, and govern the initiation and direction of action during SC.

From an autonomy perspective, this was an interesting study because none of the teachers had first-hand experience of SC and much of my support was directed towards them rather than the students. This was not unlike the *Pig Hunters*, the difference being that here, the teachers and I pre-established clear guidelines about the extent and nature of my input, prior to my engagement with the students. After a frank discussion, we jointly agreed on our commitment

to give the students a “fun time”, to extend the school’s involvement in community activities and to produce a competitive, although not necessarily winning routine. We then developed a structure whereby I remained in the background as much as possible, concurrently supporting teachers to direct the activity and suggesting areas where the students could use their initiative or take control.

To save time, the TICs generated the theme and story line while students selected the music and dance styles. An outside choreographer attended initial practices to help students create dance moves, but failed to turn up for the last two weeks. The music compilation, and the hip hop and finale choreography were undertaken by Kaila, a Year 8 bilingual student with considerable hip hop experience and Lana, a trained ballet dancer, also from Year 8, who created the tempries routine. Students also worked the sound system during practices, painted and decorated sets under the guidance of the woodwork teacher, worked with the lighting director, took costume measurements and ran errands.

I did the supplementary choreography, acquired make up and costume material and worked with small groups, the solo roles and the finale scene to bring it up to performance standard. On occasions, I worked directly with the teachers, at other times with the students. Towards the end, I oversaw all rehearsals, wherever possible modelling teaching or performance behaviour before handing it back to the teachers or students. For example, Kaila and Lana independently created the dance moves in the finale scene (an impressive effort for 12 year olds), but had difficulty pulling the pieces together. I worked with them on this and then led some massed rehearsals, concentrating on characterisation and modelling the tuition process to the teachers. The TICs then resumed control, ultimately handing it back to Kaila and Lana who supervised the remaining practice sessions. In this way, students maintained ownership of their choreography and teachers gained production and technical skills, without their autonomy being undermined by an outsider. Conversely, the adult lighting director was very nervous about his role (despite having considerable local repertory experience) and I gave him close support to develop a lighting plan. I also assigned three students to work alongside him and they were able to watch the lighting scheme develop and to sit in the lighting box on the night.

A feature of this team was the willingness of both staff and students to seek out and accept advice, then act upon my suggestions. Both teachers and students were generous with expressions of appreciation towards me, indicating that their sense of autonomy was not threatened by my input. For example, as I left the hall after practice sessions, they invariably thanked me for my help or commented on their learning experiences, for example, “I really learnt a lot today, thanks”. It was also gratifying to observe teachers using their initiative, for

example when I offered to help with make-up designs, the TIC replied, “Thanks, but I think we’d rather do that ourselves”. This gave me valuable feedback about the appropriateness (or not) of my involvement.

In sum, this was a working example of autonomy support from me on a variety of levels, from the top-down (with the teachers) and the bottom-up (with Arla and Ben), and while I was probably the central figure, my input was structured in such a way that both students and teachers gained knowledge, skills and experience without my usurping the process, or being usurped by it. Even better, the students ultimately took more control and with greater effect than I observed in the both the *Volcanoes* and *Lost Girls*, who were more senior and supposedly student-driven.

4.2 Integrity

The extent to which SC reflects students’ values, beliefs and ways of “being” in the world.

Although none of the students had done SC before, many said they were familiar with the event and self-selected into it because the TIC “did a good job of promoting it at the assembly”, “it sounded like fun” or “was all about dancing”. According to the TIC, this was an activity that “pushed their buttons”, reflected in its overwhelming popularity as a talents choice compared to the other options.

The theme also had integrity value because it was based on their school motto and current school-wide unit of work, although I observed that students did have initial difficulty connecting with the storyline. We addressed this by dedicating the performance to three young ex-pupils who had recently died in car accidents. We put their photos up on the wall and students were encouraged to think of them and their families when they danced. A Year 8 temprie girl remarked that the photos “made me think about the importance of our message” and a Year 7 hip hop boy noted that he liked the “idea that we were representing someone who died and were dancing for *them*”. A Year 8 hip hop boy felt that the routine “really made me think about making good choices in the future” and “how important it is to have a message with meaning”, noting that, “without a good concept, the dance won’t work. Ours was very deep so it was great.” Furthermore, 11 students commented that it was satisfying to belong to a school that delivered thought-provoking messages.

Students’ dance routines also reflected their life styles and values. The hip hop group were especially interesting, in that their dance routine was an authentic expression of their leisure behaviour, but they struggled with the TIC who did not have authority status in their eyes, either as a dancer, a teacher, or a member of their ethnic group. They demonstrated this by

ignoring her instructions, leaving practices without permission and deferring instead to their home room teacher who regularly dropped by to watch their progress but was not part of the SC teaching team. It was not until the interviews, when some of the star hip hoppers gave me an informative and colourful description of the local dance culture that I fully understood what their choreography represented to them. It also explained their indignation and resentment when I suggested changes to the krumping scene (Kaila walked off the set and did not talk to me for two days). At the time, I had no idea how much I was tampering with their depiction of their world.

For most students, though, through judicious choice of theme, music and choreography, this SC experience was high in integrity value. However, there were about 20 dancers who self-selected into the hip hop group because they “liked the more vigorous dance style” (Year 7 girl), rather than being genuine members of the dance culture that it represented. According to the bona fide hip hoppers, these “whiteys” not only lacked authenticity because, as an indignant hip hop boy reported, they were “the wrong colour and had never street battled”, but they also compromised the integrity of the street dance routine because “they moved their bodies all wrong and did not have the right mojo”. Indeed, a Year 7 girl recognised that she did not have credibility as a hip hopper, commenting that,

I definitely want to do it again, but I would be much more careful about what job I sign up for. If the dance group doesn't feel right for you, or if they don't think you are right for them, it can be a bit miserable.

Inevitably, these integrity issues also impacted on students' sense of belonging.

4.3 Belonging

Students' sense of connection to, and love and care from their SC team and the wider SC community.

As noted, this was not close-knit team, although students practised hard to pull together an effective team routine. However, from my observer perspective, the preparation period was marked by subtle divisions between groups and tangible tension within the hip hop sub-group. Fortunately, with the pressure of deadlines, there was very little down time in practices and several potentially volatile situations never gained traction.

Despite this, students' interview comments revealed that SC had promoted belonging on several levels within and beyond the school. Many students commented that it had facilitated links between class levels, for example, a shy Year 8 temprie dancer noted, “When I was a Year 7 last year we were SO scared of the Year 8s, but this year the Year 7s talk to us all the time.

They are not even scared of us now". Another quiet Year 7 girl, who had remained on the fringe throughout the practice period, told me,

I've been really struggling with settling into intermediate school. It's so different after primary where I felt so safe and I knew my teacher really well. But SC gave me a place in the school and it took my mind off all the hard school work and I feel a lot closer to people after doing it. I'm much more comfortable in the school now.

More than half the students mentioned that they had got to know team members better by sharing a common experience and enjoyed the satisfaction of pulling together as a group, for example, "It was a good bonding exercise. We worked together to show the community we've got lots of talent" (Year 8 boy). A number of students commented that it was good to be part of an activity that was inclusive of both genders ("boy and girl-friendly") and had an open-entry policy. For the Down's syndrome student, according to her teacher, it was the highlight of her time at intermediate school. With help from her Teacher Aide, she told me, "I was so excited because I did a lot of effort and I am a good dancer and I was part of the big group. My Mum was so excited and happy with me". Students also revealed that they felt SC had broken down the barriers between teachers and students, for example, "We saw the teachers in a different light. They were more like friends and we found out they *can* be relaxed" (Year 8 girl).

Additionally, the majority of students commented that SC had created links to the wider community, for example, Lana remarked, "Our school really needed to break out and get involved with other schools. For too long we've just been doing our own thing in our own boundaries". A Year 8 hip hopper described how SC had created a connection with his family: "My bros and sisters came. I so wanted to show them how I felt and I wanted them to feel it too. I was able to and they loved it. I'm glad I could share it with them". As always, students commented on new friendships made and old friendships reignited at performance day. Finally, a Year 8 boy noted, "SC involved people in a way that sports can't. All the other schools got to see what we can do and now we're part of the SC family".

The most heart-warming interview comments came from two students who had been very reserved and tentative for much of the practice period. One was a Year 7 back stage girl, who declared:

I loved being back stage. I felt so involved with the team. I just wanted to dance along hiding behind my screen. Even though my part was so tiny, I moved the screen at just the right time and I felt proud because I was part of the team and had not let them down. They mightn't have noticed, but I did.

I had an enlightening conversation during an interview with a Year 7 hip hop girl who was not part of the hard-core dance group. When asked whether SC had been good for the school, she reported:

Student: SC has broken down the barriers between the cool and uncool kids.

Me: How do you know when a kid is cool?

Student: They just are. I don't want to be racist or anything but they are mostly Maori from the [bilingual] class. And they feel a lot more confident than us uncool kids. Like, I had a friend who ditched me and now she is a cool kid. They just ignore us and they won't let us go in a lot of the playground areas. But Kaila, who's head of the cool kids, she treated us OK at rehearsals.

Me: How do you feel about not being a cool kid?

Student: It's real hard, eh. The teachers say if you don't co-operate you're out of SC. But the cool kids didn't and they never got kicked out. It's like the teachers are scared of them too. Like they own this school and we don't belong here. But at least in SC the cool kids got to know us and co-operate with us. I'm not so scared of them now and they even say hello to me in the playground. Actually I don't want to be one of them but it's real nice that they say hello to me now. I don't feel so isolated.

Nevertheless, for the non-credible hip hoppers, there were difficult moments during practices and their faces often reflected their discomfort about where to physically situate themselves and how to behave both during the dancing and between scenes. As I recorded after one long practice:

I feel concerned for the kids who are not from the bilingual unit who are being quite deliberately ostracised within this hip hop group. Kaila has blatantly placed them in the back two rows, where it is hard to see the instructors and they are learning their moves by hovering on the fringes and observing the "experts". No one is giving them specific tuition. It's almost like, you don't deserve to be in this group, so you don't deserve to learn the steps. When the dancing stops these "outsider"s scurry to the side-lines and sit in groups of two or three watching nervously. When I mentioned this to a teacher, she said that this also happens in the wider school community where the students from the bilingual unit function as a separate, but powerful entity and can be quite intimidating. These students (who held the key dance roles) often wandered off in the middle of routines without warning and were frequently absent from practices. They also assigned all the main character roles to their friends rather than selecting those with the best dance ability. Unfortunately for the students who did not belong to this select group, they innocently signed up for a dance experience and found themselves in the middle of something that has an agenda far bigger than SC. I wish I could help them more.

In the privacy of the interviews, the tempries expressed frustration at the "randomness" of the hip hoppers' practice behaviour, particularly their defiance of authority and their refusal to dance "except when it suited them". As a Year 8 girl noted, "There's the team, and then there's *them*". I was, however, surprised at how accepting they were of this, sensing this was part of the school culture, with both teachers and students reluctant to make a stand against the bilingual group despite their often non-conformist behaviour.

Belonging, then, was not a given in this team.

4.4 Accomplishments

Awards received, knowledge and skills gained, and areas of personal development during SC.

Awards

The *Gangsters* got two awards of excellence which, despite their initial winning aspirations, pleased students because, as many pointed out, “It was our first year and we didn’t expect to win” (Year 7 boy). The general consensus was “we pulled out all our moves at the right time and overall we did pretty well” (Year 8 girl). A back-stage Year 7 student enthused:

I was blown away with how good our team was because they were all so energetic. They did their best performance ever. The costumes and make up stood out and made it seem so much better. The stage was literally shaking.

They did acknowledge, however, that to be competitive in the future, they would really have to step up their game. An angel girl wisely noted, “It’s a huge stepping stone to be as good as the other schools. It’s such a big package you have to pull together. And it’s a mental thing too. You just have to work out how to do it.”

Knowledge and skills

When asked during interviews, expanded dance skills were the most reported learning experience of SC. However, several students demonstrated a deeper level of learning that went beyond the acquisition technical skills. For example, Lana, the choreographer, commented:

SC exposed me to a different range of music and dance styles. Ballet is very one dimensional and we just ended up with the stereotype of a ballet dancer in white tops, flowing skirts and hair in buns. I can now see all sorts of other possibilities with styles of dance and dress. I found it was hard to work with dancers of different ability levels. I needed to have extra classes for the slower ones. Oh, and I’ve just realised I should have had easier dance moves for them and challenged the good dancers more.

Other students mentioned that SC had extended or rekindled their interest in the arts. A Year 8 temprie dancer said:

It’s made me a lot more open to dancing. I used to dance when I was little cos my mum made me. But I really didn’t like it. Now I’ve gone back to my old dance studio. I had my first lesson last week and it felt really good.

Additionally, students reported increased knowledge about stage production which they attributed to first-hand experience of performing at a large venue and from watching other schools’ performances (“I learnt such a lot about big productions and everything that goes into them”). They demonstrated their new-found understanding by offering me a comprehensive

list of suggestions for “our next year’s entry” including: performance elements (“we need less cheesy dance moves”, “a longer, more sophisticated routine”, “better props, costumes and sets”, “a better thought-out theme”, “better music” and a “more energetic stage presence”); improved practice management (“more practices”, “less last-minute changes”, “push us harder and expect more of us”, “workshops for inexperienced dancers”); and strategic planning (“we should research the opposition more”, “we need more exposure to outside events like this” and “we need a fairer selection process so that only skilled and well-behaved dancers get in”). A Year 8 temprie girl summed it up, saying:

I thought we did really well for our first time, but actually our routine was bland compared with the colleges. It was too simple, our costumes were unsophisticated and we didn’t have enough energy on-stage. We’ve learnt it’s a big package but now that we’ve seen what it takes, I reckon us kids could be left to do it our way in the future.

Students also reported gaining social skills through mixing with a wider range of peers both at school and at the performance day “party”. More than half the students referred to developing teamwork skills, for example, “I had to learn to be adaptable and that it wasn’t just about me”. Again, they were impressed by the large team routines of the colleges. A Year 8 girl remarked, “I couldn’t get over all the group bonding they had”. Others noted how much fun the bigger teams seemed to be having. Ben, the lead boy, gladdened my heart when he remarked, “Next time we just gotta let go of all this cool and uncool kids’ stuff and all dance to the same beat. Those big schools were awesome and they had millions in their teams”.

Finally, a number of students felt SC had increased skills on a school-wide basis (“It was time we tried something different apart from sports. It is good for the school to learn new things”). They also noted it provided opportunities for the talented dancers in the school and allowed people to “realise their potential”.

Personal development

Increased confidence both on-stage and in the wider community was the most reported area of personal development. For example, a young Year 7 girl stated:

I’m really shy. I usually miss out on lots of things outside the classroom. I’m more confident about getting out there now. I mean, I was terrified of going on stage, and now all I want to do is get up there and do it again.

A young good morning girl announced, “My personality has changed a little bit. I was in a shell before. I’m now more playful after being a good morning girl, and I’m finding it easier to make new friends”.

Students also commented they had overcome their fear of making mistakes, for example, “It doesn’t matter if you get it wrong. You just have to face challenges and learn from them”. A novice temprie dancer remarked, “I thought I was a terrible dancer but I have learnt you don’t have to be born with talent. You can learn!”

Students were especially nervous about the school performances, and were gratified at their peers’ encouragement. A Year 7 boy commented:

I was scared about performing in front of me [sic] mates. I thought they would only see the bad bits because that’s what mates do when you see them every day. I was really surprised how much they supported us.

Interestingly, a number of students commented on the personal development they had perceived in fellow team members, such as Hone, a hip hopper who was almost evicted from the team for beating up another boy in the playground. One of his Year 8 friends remarked,

You know, he finds it real hard to keep out of trouble. But he was chosen cos he was a good dancer and it helped him a lot. He did a good job and afterwards he was so tired and proud, he couldn’t stop talking. I think he might keep out of trouble more now.

According to my observations, students also learnt about tolerance, although none expressed this directly during the interviews. However, a lovely narrative wove through my field notes which encapsulated this. As I summarised,

The two leads, Arla and Ben came from different sides of the fence. She was an untrained lyrical dancer, Japanese, quiet, conscientious and high achieving. Ben was Maori, bilingual unit, a hard-out talented street dancer. They played a brother and sister in the routine. Until SC, they had never spoken to each other, but now they were together on-stage for the whole routine, including an intense one-minute dance duo in which she grieves his death and raises him from the dead. They had been left to make up their own moves but had made very little progress. In essence they symbolised the division between the sub-groups in this team. Over the 2 week period, I worked constantly with these two, often in isolation from the others who watched with a mix of interest and scepticism. Several of the hip hoppers gave Ben a hard time for dancing with a temprie girl. Overall, we kept the integrity of their respective dance styles but worked hard on their emotional connection, especially the portrayal of sibling love and grief. Finally, when they had sufficient confidence, we darkened the hall, put a dim blue and red spot light on them and they danced their complete parts while the rest of the cast watched. It was quite something. Even the cool kids were silent. When they finished, there was a long pause, then the whole team cheered and clapped them. Arla and Ben were flushed and sweating. Then he spontaneously turned to her and gave her a quick hug. It was a very moving moment which had a few of the staff members (and me) dabbing their eyes.

In eight minutes, these two dancers gave everyone in the room a lesson in putting aside individual differences and working as one.

4.5 Identity

The collaborative process between students and the SC context to foster a self-determined, cohesive sense of self.

With this team, the identities of the three dance groups were salient. These groups reflected their class placement in the school, along with their status as a dancer (or non-dancer), their friendship circles and their leisure pursuits. Thus, the hip hoppers were predominantly from the bilingual class and their dance battle routine replicated their playground and after-school activities. On performance night their sequence was recognised as such and loudly applauded by the audience. As I noted, “These kids don’t have to worry about acting. This is just an on-stage demonstration of their life.” The hip hoppers were again in their element on performance day challenging other schools to impromptu dance battles in the foyer whenever music of the right genre came over the sound system.

Likewise, the angels devised a structured, but moving routine that reflected their classical training and they practised it conscientiously and repeatedly in the manner of a dance studio ballet class. I pondered about this:

These angels are so fascinating. In the midst of the noise and chaos of the krumpers, the ballet girls are a haven of calm. They can’t even use their music because the hip hoppers have commandeered the sound system. They have very little floor space because that’s been taken over too. But they don’t complain and have calmly put their bags in a square in the corner and created their own space. Then they just seem to close their ears and eyes to the fracas around them and, under Lana’s direction, they count their way through their sequence over and over and over again. It is just how they are.

A different dance identity emerged with the good morning kids and my original brief was to “create something that works for them cos they really can’t dance” (TIC). They were mostly Year 7s who had only been at the school a few weeks and, compared to the senior bi-lingual students, were quite immature, as indicated by their frisky behaviour and chasing games (“like little puppies”, I commented). I therefore worked with them to develop a montage of moves that reflected their behaviour en route to school each morning (farewelling parents, greeting each other, text messaging, riding bikes, etc.) and these were put to music. Using moves that matched their real-life identities enabled them to memorise the routine quickly and reduced their performance anxiety.

The performance group identity finally became salient on dress rehearsal day. As I have observed with other teams, the pressure of performing in front of the rest of the school seemed to pull the team together, temporarily over-riding sub-group issues. The tension further dissipated with the issue of cobalt blue team t-shirts, boldly decorated with the white school logo and motto, plus a huge supply blue Lycra ribbons with which students decorated

their bodies and clothing. It was fascinating to watch students each put their own statement on their clothing by knotting, tying, rolling and wrapping pieces of ribbon together. A teacher took photos, exclaiming, "Look at you guys! You look amazing!" Photos were taken and I recorded:

Suddenly the whole became bigger than the parts as students strutted out of the hall in team colours while the rest of the school looked curiously on. It's amazing how dressing them all in the same uniform has broken down the barriers between each of the dance groups. Even the backstage kids are now part of the group. Finally, they are a SC team.

Students also expanded or modified their identities through their SC participation. For example, several of Kaila's friends remarked that she had changed her leadership style. One of her friends assessed it well, explaining:

Kaila used to be a bad bugger. She is the boss of our gang. We always done [sic] what she told us. But here, she was the dance leader, eh, and she made up all the moves and was even the boss of the whole practice sometimes. And she done it real good. She wasn't even so stroppy. Yeah. I reckon even the teachers couldn't believe how good she done. Maybe she might be a good boss now, eh.

[Unfortunately, Kaila, was absent from school for all the interview days, so I was unable to get her take on this].

Ben, the die-hard hip hopper, also showed a willingness to explore new identity roles:

I thought hip hop was the only way to go. I really knew nothing about tempries. I thought we were getting it all wrong having that in it but it turned out mean. When I saw the tempries in their white clothes with the white light and smoke, it made me feel all kinda soft inside and I realised that their dance was special too. Maybe I might try some new dance styles sometime.

In fact, many students commented that SC had sowed the seeds of future identity projects. A talented hip hopper declared, "This has helped me live up to my dream of being a professional dancer. It showed people what I can do and I was just amping up there". Similarly, many of the back stage crew expressed a desire to be front of stage after watching from the wings: "It was like having a front row seat from the back...I was so jealous cos I wished I had danced. Now I want to become a dancer and learn how to not get stage fright." Others commented that they had been inspired to explore new performing arts roles, for example, a Year 7 good morning boy told me, "I've started taking drum lessons and I've just restrung my guitar so I can start playing it".

Encouragingly, students indicated they believed SC had also impacted positively on the school's identity, suggesting it "shows we are more out there in the world and not crammed in to our own little space like before", "we are a lot better at things than everyone thought. We've got serious talent" and "it gave our school good publicity cos we were in the papers". Several students felt it would attract new enrolments to the school. As one Year 8 girl noted, "Now I am

going to enrol for a different college next year, cos I want one that does SC. That's what people will be saying about our school". Lastly, students expressed a stronger sense of identity *with* their school, especially after performing the chants, for example, "We loved shouting our chants to each other. It made the school motto have a meaning for us and it helped people match us with our school". It was rewarding, post-performance, to see the school promoting itself as a "SC school" on their website with a large photo of the *Gangsters* gracing the home page. Moreover, all 70 students interviewed said they definitely wanted to do SC again.

4.6 Flow

The subjective psychological state experienced when totally absorbed in a challenging activity and having the necessary skills to accomplish it.

The compressed practice schedule did not appear to produce any tangible flow moments, except for the above-described duo between Arla and Ben. In contrast, I watched the foyer dance battles at the venue between the *Gangsters* and rival schools which had all the hallmarks of flow as students attempted to out-dance each other using challenging, well-practiced dance moves. They were completely absorbed in their own routine despite being surrounded by cheering peers; their movements seemed automatic; they knew they were doing well because of the shouts and applause from their peers; and they appeared to love every moment of it, judging from their eagerness to jump back into the circle as soon as there was a space. Flow, then, was present in places other than the main stage.

Students were also elated by their on-stage experience and used the usual descriptors, with "fun", "amazing" and "awesome" being the preferred words. I watched the performance from the wings and it definitely seemed to have a special energy and buzz. They came off-stage flushed, excited and breathless. However, only three students referred specifically to flow dimensions in their interview comments, for example, a young good morning girl (with a very insignificant role) remarked, "It was so nerve racking on stage but then I got into it. It was fun and exciting and the time just whizzed by. I just wanted to do it all over again". However, one student's on-stage experience stood out for me as a classic example of being confronted with, and overcoming a significant challenge. I recorded:

We stood outside the stage in the freezing cold car park for 10 minutes waiting to go on stage. Tasha, a wee Year 7 girl who had a very minor part, was SO nervous that she was sobbing. She kept saying she couldn't do it and wanted me to get her Mum. Finally she vomited behind a parked car just before rushing on stage for the opening scene, still dabbing her mouth. Eight minutes later she came off stage screaming with delight and did cartwheels across the car park (nearly got herself run over in the process), saying, "Please can I do it again. Pleeeeease. Pleeeeease".

As I noted, "I guess that's what you call flow!"

4.7 Emotions

Students' experience and regulation of their positive and negative affective states

Despite the pressure of the compressed time frame, students' emotional responses were remarkably contained during the practice period and did not exhibit the highs and lows that are often part of large scale productions like SC. Practice periods were well-supervised and students were sent back to class unless purposefully occupied, so there was little opportunity for boredom. If there were peer conflict issues, they were generally defused by teachers before they escalated into unpleasant incidents, although there *was* an on-going undercurrent of wariness from the "uncool" kids towards the "cool" kids. A few times, teachers bellowed loudly when students were inattentive and on one unfortunate occasion, the TIC berated five late-comers, shy little girls who had not been given notice of the practice by a relieving teacher. The blushing, tearful girls were held up as examples of "students who did not appreciate the teachers' hard work". As I later noted, "I felt really uncomfortable observing that. It wasn't their fault. I know the teacher is tired, but I just wanted to give them a cuddle".

Students were apprehensive about performing to the other classes but were encouraged by the positive feedback. (Admittedly, I had secretly visited the other classes prior to the performance, telling them that the *Gangsters* were very nervous and that it was acceptable to scream and shout and cheer, which they duly did!).

After a tentative start, students took the performance day in their stride. As I recorded:

I am so impressed with these low decile kids. They do not have much, and they don't expect much. I thought they might feel like underdogs because they performed in their school uniforms, but they were so excited about their face paint, they didn't seem to notice. Once they found their feet with the hip hop dancing, they were completely at home, enthusiastic, alert and interested in everything going on around them. They participated in EVERYTHING. And although they were nervous about their performance, they got on stage without a fuss, performed really well, and bounced off stage to continue socialising. Calm, capable and non-dramatic. What a treat!

5. Food for thought

Emerging ideas or insights that are worthy of further consideration

5.1 Competition: is it a good thing?

The interview format allowed me to explore students' attitude to competition in more depth. I asked all students how they felt about competitive events and whether SC would be better as a display event, rather than competition. No one was completely opposed to competition, although three students were unsure. The remaining 67 students surprised me with their

strong opinions and insightful answers about the benefits of competition. They gave a number of reasons.

First, students stated that a competition gave them something to strive for, making them practise with more commitment and energy. For example, a Year 8 girl said, "Competition makes it more of a challenge. You work harder to be better than the other schools. You feel good when you achieve. The prize is an inspiration." Another noted, "Without competition, it's just a display. You're not pushing yourself or trying to get anything out of it. Competition gives you something to dance for – not just participate, but compete."

Second, competition was more emotionally exciting. A Year 7 girl remarked, "If you're trying to outdo schools with your music and dance moves, it makes the event bigger and better. If there's no competition we wouldn't be so enthusiastic." A Year 8 boy claimed he was actually less nervous because "when it's a competition, everyone concentrates on the result, but in a display everyone concentrates on *you*. In a competition I get hyped up, in a display I just get freaked out."

Third, students liked getting prizes ("It's fun having a competition where you get awards and prizes"). A Year 8 boy voiced his irritation with adult platitudes about winning:

The worst thing an adult can say is, "We don't mind what place you come because you are all winners". What do they think we are? Babies or something? Course we want to win. And course we want prizes. And if we don't, that's fine too. But don't pretend we're winners when we're not.

Another boy commented:

I liked the way the prizes were arranged. You could get performance awards or you could go for social awards or both. And if you won something you knew you did real well. I was in a speech competition once when they gave first prize and the rest of us were ALL runners up. How stupid is that. I never knew if I came second or fourth or sixth. We all just got chocolate bars. What's the point of competing if you don't know where you come or how much you've got to improve for the next time?

Fourth, it gave them a reference point with which to compare their routine ("You're competing against other schools to show how good *your* school is"). Far from being daunted, most students were surprised and delighted with how competitive their routine was ("seeing other schools made me realise how well *we* did, cos the other schools' performances were gob smacking!"). It also encouraged them to view other schools' performances more discerningly, for example, "It makes you judge other schools more carefully when you watch them. You get new ideas and you see how the competition works. It makes you realise how good *we can* be". Most students liked the level playing field where everyone was judged by the same rules and

entry was open to all students regardless of their ability or experience. However, six students disagreed, suggesting there should be a separate section for intermediate schools or first time schools “to make it fairer because college students have more experience, ability and more time for practices”. Three students commented that it is hard to be competitive without a big budget, which was problematic for schools like theirs, and two believed that the awards structure with its top three placings may discourage the less capable teams. Most accepted though, that junior entries should be viewed as an apprenticeship to groom them for future participation.

Fifth, it provided an outlet for people who identified with being competitive. A Year 8 boy stated, “I am a competitive person. I like competition and SC let me put that into practice”. A Year 8 hip hop girl commented:

We don't have enough competition at our school even though the Principal reckons we're a competitive school. I like competing – not just *doing* things like dancing. We try harder to get prizes if we know what we are going for.

Students also felt competition was important for talented and gifted individuals, noting that it allowed them to compare their ability with other talented performers and “give them a chance to shine and be recognised. They could say, hey I'm the best at this. I came first...”

Finally, students believed entering a competition made a public statement about their school's value system. A Year 7 boy explained:

It tells everyone that we are a competitive school and that we like competing in events. A competitive school is a good school. It means everyone is doing their best. If we win SC, it tells everyone that we are strong in dance and it makes people want to come to our school.

Intriguingly, students bracketed the informal foyer competitions with their commentary about the performance competition. A Year 7 girl stated, “The dance battles gave everyone an opportunity. We won them *all!*” The lead boy said, “I loved the dance battles. They wouldn't feel the same without competition”. Students also referred to the chants-offs between schools which also added to the competitive spirit (“The chants were really good natured, even though they turned into fierce battles. They were hard-out but they were also friendly and fun”). Another Year 8 girl mentioned, “Even though it was a competition, there was no booing, only cheering, which boosted my confidence.”

Nevertheless, despite the overwhelming support for competition, more than half the students were adamant that having fun was more important than extrinsic rewards. A Year 7 boy summed it up, “We did a good job and put everything into it. It's about fun. Winning would be the jackpot. It doesn't matter if you don't win but if you do win you feel more good (sic)”. Most

of all, students appreciated that in SC, competition was balanced with fair play, as illustrated by this Year 8 boy,

We are always competing against [the local intermediate] and it can sometimes get over the top. But not with SC. It was kinda disappointing not to win but at least we know what to do next time so it was worth it in the end.

Amusingly, a Year 7 girl even asked me to give a message to SC: “Could you please tell them to be careful not to let it get too competitive because at the moment there is no name calling or put downs and that’s the good thing about it.”

In this setting then, the competitive format appeared to be strongly endorsed by the participants.

6. Summary of the Gangsters’ experience

This compressed SC experience was well-managed by staff who were both open to outside advice and prepared to hand over the key responsibilities of music selection and choreography to students, despite their minimal knowledge about SC. By selecting a theme that was relevant to the school teaching programme, the SC philosophy and to the students themselves, the choreographers were able to conceptualise a routine that had high integrity value, showcasing their dance talents and making a statement about their social and cultural identities. Moreover, because staff and students were realistic about their competition chances, they were proud of the few awards they received and instead focussed on the orientation aspect of the experience, namely to check out what other schools were doing and to learn from what they saw. While the short preparation period limited the breadth of learning opportunities, students were nevertheless spared the roller-coaster emotional ride of some teams thanks to the constant presence of staff and the lack of downtime during rehearsals. Additionally, because the TICs were released from classroom teaching duties, they could devote themselves more fully to the team and were mostly laid back in their approach, which students appreciated.

The growing connection between Ben and Arla both symbolised and modelled the breaking down of barriers between factions within the team and the wider school community, and while I suspect this was a short-term context-specific phenomenon, it was nevertheless rewarding to observe how music and dance can unify a community. For many of the team, it may well have been their first experience of viewing performers in flow. Likewise, the on-stage performance was a first for many and, if not a flow moment, was definitely fun-filled, exciting and confidence-boosting.

Team belonging was a little more fragile, given that the majority of hip hoppers came into SC with a strong existing sense of belonging and cultural identity linked to their membership in the bilingual class. This prevailed during their SC experience and, although the whole team came together on performance day, this group of students tended to remain separate from the rest of the team, and were, to some extent, a law unto themselves. Unfortunately, some of the non-accredited hip hoppers were intimidated by their behaviour and this may have compromised the positive nature of their preparation period. However, as one student pointed out, "We're used to it, cos it happens everywhere in the school, so it's not as if it was a surprise or anything". Encouragingly, most students reported a stronger sense of connection to the school after SC.

In all, this was a condensed, but well-structured experience which connected the school to the wider community, at the same time educating staff and students about what SC entails and preparing them for future events. While the team was not a strongly cohesive social unit, students did have an experience that resonated with their various cultural and social identities and was high in integrity value.

7. Reflections

My thoughts about data collection methods used and the highlights and challenges experienced within this setting.

Data collection

Observation

For the first time in this project, my observational notes took second place to the interview data. My notes were largely descriptive, recording what happened at each practice, production notes and memos of tasks to do. They tended towards an applied focus rather than being theoretically or empirically driven. Moreover, I was finding that the same issues were consistently surfacing, suggesting that I may have been nearing data saturation point.

Interviews

Conversely, the interviews provided rich data although, logistically, they did always go entirely to plan. For example, I had just begun my first interview when a team of painters arrived to paint the room. It took nearly an hour to arrange for them to paint elsewhere. A precious hour lost.

I had also not expected students to arrive in groups but, having got them there, I was reluctant to send them back to class or have them waiting outside the door, creating havoc in the

corridor. The advantage of the group interviews was that students bounced ideas off each other, were generally more talkative and I got through a greater number of interviewees. The downside was that they tended to net less detail and were inclined to go off on tangents. Without a recording device, I also had to work very hard to write everything down. Overall though, given their ages, I was impressed with students' depth of thought and their willingness to share ideas or challenge my statements. They also unwittingly triangulated many of my observations in their commentary about staff or other team members. For example, Lana said, "I loved seeing Annie come on as a dancer. Did you notice how much she improved? You know, she's never danced in her life before?"

In the early interviews, I found that students became side-tracked when asked to define their ethnicity ("What's ethnicity? Never heard of that?" or "I don't know, Miss. I think my Dad's Tongan"; and, "I went to Vietnam last year. Does that make me part-Vietnamese?") Students claimed to be part-French, Italian, Burmese, Scandinavian, Niuean and many more. I stopped asking this question. It also alerted me to the fact that, with younger children at least, reports regarding their ethnicity on written questionnaires may not be accurate.

As noted, when I abandoned the semi-structured format, students' conversations became more spontaneous and I was able to take notes more freely. In fact, the more I wrote, the more enthusiastic the students became about expressing their ideas. I think it may have made them feel important! Wherever relevant, I indexed the discussion to person-specific events that I had recorded in my field notes, for example, "I noticed you sat by yourself a lot at practices. Did you find you were a bit lonely sometimes?" or "You seemed to have trouble concentrating at practices. Do you find this happens in class too?" Their answers were not only illuminating, but also highlighted the dangers of reliance on a single data collection method. Thus, the "lonely" girl laughed at my comment and explained that she sat on her own when her friends were absent because she couldn't be bothered talking to anyone else. The "unfocused" girl (whom I had labelled disruptive in my notes) explained she had a learning difficulty and could not retain information, covering up her embarrassment by giggling and making jokes. Not only did I realise how easily students can be misjudged, but in two interviews I probably got more relevant information from these students than in a five-page questionnaire.

I also interviewed Kitty, the Down's syndrome student, with her Teacher Aide in attendance. Kitty created a poem (see below) and painting about SC which was later posted on the SC website, much to her delight. During the interview, I accessed the Global Rock website and she was able to watch other schools' routines and point out what she liked most. This was very rewarding.

Most notably, these interviews expanded my understanding of the students' world. For example, Ben provided a fascinating ten minute dissertation about the regions' hip hop culture that was completely new, but enormously useful to me. In particular, interviews mitigated the problems of comprehension and writing speed difficulties that I had observed for younger students and most boys on the questionnaire. Students were certainly more enthusiastic about talking than writing. The only challenge was the disruption caused to school routines with students coming and going for interviews. In this instance, I was very lucky to even have three days.

Highlights and challenges

As a researcher, this was my favourite study. I was able to set boundaries about my involvement. It was intense, but short term and it did not consume my life. Moreover, I was in my preferred position of working directly with the students, while providing autonomy support to the staff without the peripheral responsibilities of sound tracks, choreography and discipline. The TICs were open to suggestions, realistic about their goals and keen to give students a positive first experience of SC. I believe we achieved this. Even better, the school had a flexible attitude to the preparation period that facilitated the creation of large-scale production in a very short time, a format which could well be adopted by other schools. It was also a pleasure to work with students who were not preoccupied with appearance and who just immersed themselves in the experience. Students were especially thrilled with the t-shirts, as many came from low income families, and could not have afforded to buy them ("Jeez, Miss, can we *really* keep them? How awesome is that!"). I was touched when the staff put on a special morning tea for me and gave me flowers and a framed photo of the team.

It was a really great way to finish my time in the field and I finish with Kitty's poem which took her three hours to write and which sums it all up.

Make-up done. Music loud and strong.

Pump my heart out and dance.

Costumes black, sprinkled with blue and yellow.

Flashing lights on my t-shirt.

Audience cheer me.

I am happy and scared.

Postscript

Three months after SC I was invited back to the school to see an evening concert showcasing the school's Term 3 work, including drama and film displays, speech contest winners, and a

selection of musical performances. The stand-out act was the Kapa Haka group, comprised of all the SC “cool kids” and accompanied on guitar by their home room teacher. Their performance was breath-taking in its level of skill and variety. Most impressive to me was their precision, immaculate appearance and self-discipline, in sharp contrast to their SC practice demeanour. As I recorded,

It was like seeing a whole different set of people. Their sceptical and slightly casual approach to the SC team had been replaced by a tight, controlled performance, marked by deference to their leader and an obvious respect for his authority. They remained completely focused throughout their performance and their team work was superb. I’m so glad I saw them in a new light. It would have been so easy to judge them only on their SC behaviour whereas, in the Kapa Haka group, I saw them perform routines that utterly represented who they are and what they stand for. I only saw such a small part of that when I was a researcher. I should never forget that.

CHAPTER 8

THE PERFORMANCE DAY PACKAGE

This is the day when you are the stars, and it's your turn to shine.

SC Stage Manager

I will devote this chapter to a brief description of the performance day, which was a vital part of the students' SC experience.

Each year the SC crew go on the road, starting in the lower South Island in April, working their way to the top of the North Island via 14 towns and cities to bring SC to the various regions. In the smaller venues, there is only one performance day. In NZ's biggest city, the event runs for five days with up to 15 schools competing each night. Every day runs to the same formula, the only difference being the layout of the venue. Thus, students who have competed in more than one SC know how the day will unfold.

For all five teams in this study, this was a magical day. In *every* supplementary self-report measure, students mentioned the performance day (or the performance itself) as the best feature of SC, regardless of the competition result. To describe it, they used words like "fantasmagorical", "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" and "stupiferous" as well as the more mainstream "awesome" "amazing" and "cool". Most of these words were prefaced with adverbs, "really, reeeeeally, reeeeeally" or "so, sooo, SOOOOO", accompanied by strings of exclamation marks, hearts and stars. These adjectives all went into my "flow file" because of their association with emotional intensity and optimal experience, both features of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 1997).

So, what made this day so special? Here, I draw on students' commentary and my observations of a least 20 performance days throughout NZ between 2005 and 2012, where I have spent full days in the auditoriums, dressing rooms, the production office, in the wings and back-stage.

When students from the five teams reached the venue, all dressed in their distinctive t-shirts, team belonging intensified and their identity as representatives of their school and community became salient. Students were signed in by the SC crew and the novice schools were welcomed as newcomers to the competition. Students were directed to their allocated dressing room space and began to decorate it with school banners and team paraphernalia. They also distributed their "good luck" gifts and cards to the other teams. As each new school arrived, the chants began, each team trying to upstage each other with their noise and accompanying dance moves. Meantime, on the stage, schools were already rehearsing, so students were

literally confronted with a “wall of light and sound”, as described by a young *Pig Hunter*. This assault on the senses was quite overwhelming for some of the younger students. A Year 11 *Lost Girl* wrote, “It was like going to the Olympics. You’ve been practising on your own for so long. Then you put on your uniform and march into the stadium and suddenly you become your team, your school, your community. The music was playing and it was like, ‘let the games begin’. I was blown away.” There was little time now for inter-peer conflict or individual agendas; each team had three intense rehearsals and a performance for which to prepare.

At the venue, students fell under the jurisdiction of the SC crew and their supervising teachers were subtly, but firmly, relegated to bystander roles by the SC staff. The unspoken assumption was that students owned the routine and were responsible for its delivery. All instructions were conveyed directly to them and I observed teachers being gently rebuffed by staff when they asked questions on their students’ behalf. A Year 9 boy commented on the questionnaire, “It was good because the teachers were OUR servants for a change. We were like Hollywood stars. I quite liked that”.

Not only were students treated as authority figures, but the SC staff amusingly placed teachers in subordinate roles. For example, teachers were summoned on-stage to participate in a dance-off, complete with flashing lights, smoke and head-bashing music, to determine the order of performances. (I know from personal experience that this is not a favourite part of the day for teachers). Students screamed and laughed loudly at their teachers’ (sometimes feeble) dance efforts, egging them on and calling out their names. I later heard one *Gangster* boy in the dressing room scathingly comment, “The teachers looked SO weird on stage. They can’t dance to save themselves. And *our* teacher is one of the worst. How embarrassing!” After months of being critiqued by teachers, the students were now in the judgement seat.

Students also had the run of the venue, apart from a few off-limit areas. They could go wherever they wanted, as long as they remained inside. Throughout the day there were numerous informal activities and competitions which students had the option of entering. As I wandered around the venues, I observed little pockets of students in the strangest places, under stairwells, behind sofas and high on the tiered seating, identifiable only by their team t-shirts.

In addition to having the freedom of the venue, students could also put their stamp on it. Within the dressing room, they created their own nooks with blankets, pillows, games, food and bags. They wore pyjamas, ugg boots, fairy dresses, animal suits, whatever they chose, the more outrageous the better. As I recorded, “The place looked like one huge adolescent bedroom – *before* Mum has given the order to tidy it up...or else”. They were allowed to use

phones, scream their heads off and dance in the aisles. The SC crew members were young and funky and the dance music was current. It was easy to see why students perceived it as *their* day and those who had been worried about negative peer reaction at being in the SC team at school, now found themselves in a setting that was tailor-made for them. As a wee Year 7 girl from the *Gangsters*, said in her interview,

I was just blown [sic] away. I kept waiting for the teachers to tell us to shut up or people to tell us to sit down and stop running round. In the end, me and my friends realised we could do anything we wanted. We didn't even have to get permission so we just danced in the aisles all day. It was awesome fun. We were the bosses for the day.

In a similar vein, I commented in my notes,

I can always tell who the new schools are on performance days. They enter the dressing room tentatively and their teachers herd them into position, giving them instructions about where to put their gear and telling them to sit down quietly. They look askance at the noisier schools that are already beginning to shout and cheer. The same happens at production meetings where the old hats leap out of their sets to dance in the aisles of the auditorium. The new kids remain obediently in the seats with a few brave souls standing up to dance while casting sidelong glances at their bemused teachers, expecting to be told off. Then they realise that it's ok to scream and shout, the louder the better. They gradually escape from their seats and the liberated look on their faces when they realise the teachers' authority does not count for much here is wonderful.

Not only did team belonging intensify but, in their shared dressing room, students now became part of the wider SC community. Indeed, the only thing that separated most teams was a strip of masking tape on the floor, so although each team was immersed in their own preparation procedures, there was also a sense of being on a shared mission. Interspersed with performance preparations were two compulsory production meetings where teams gathered in the auditorium for performance instructions. Here, the music blared, each school's name was shouted out and students were encouraged by the young stage manager to "make some noise". The lights were dimmed, smoke machines billowed, and students leapt out of their seats to dance. Between dances, students were given details of the night's competition and reminded by the SC crew that they were a community, to show love and respect for each other, and to abide by fair play rules, even though they were competitors.

Within this setting, positive emotions abounded. These were partly self-generated, emanating from the anticipation of the performance and the excitement of being with so many other students in a seemingly unsupervised setting. They were also whipped up by the SC crew at the production meetings where students were exhorted to make more noise, to dance harder and to show their pride in the school. Nevertheless, students' heightened emotions were also carefully regulated and when the staff sensed they were getting too excited, they stilled the music. Students also had two compulsory lock-down periods when they were confined to

dressing rooms. The lock-downs served two functions: to ready the venue for the performance and to give the students quiet time. Although students complained that this was boring and restrictive in their retrospective remarks, their emotions would probably have got out of control without it.

One of the most mentioned features of performance day was students' enjoyment from watching of other schools' routines. During the day, they were free to wander into the auditorium to watch other schools rehearse and to dance along to their music. It was effectively an all-day concert which they could view at will. As well as being entertaining, watching the other schools rehearse had several spin-off benefits for students, as they reported afterwards on the supplementary measures: it enabled them to get a sneak preview of their competitors and hence be realistic about their own chances in the competition; they got ideas for future routines; it reduced their nervousness; and it gave them inspiration because they understood how much effort it had taken other schools to get to this point. Students also reported that having three rehearsals and receiving encouragement from the SC crew and student audience reduced their nerves. A *Pig Hunter* girl declared, "The SC guys took all the fear out of it for me." The *Pig Hunters* got the ultimate confidence booster when other schools danced along with their routine during rehearsals.

However, the day was not just about having a wild party. Student leaders attended planning meetings, the back stage crew worked with the technical staff, student video directors planned film angles with professional cameramen, the lighting directors finalised the lighting plan, and the leaders gave media interviews. These were all high-level learning experiences. Student leaders also worked tirelessly to prepare their teams for the performance. As I recorded, "They worked damn hard and they learned heaps".

As an observer, the most fascinating aspect of performance day was the number of identity transformations the students underwent. They arrived as team members, identified by their school t-shirts. At the production meetings, camouflaged by the lights and smoke, they became one big, screaming, "aesthetic community" united by music and dance (Bond, 2006). They were a SC family. By mid-afternoon, however, as they got into costume, these identities were subsumed by stage identities and the dressing room became a crazy mix of characters and colour. It was difficult to distinguish genders, ethnicities and even schools. There was intimate physical contact as they painted each other's faces and bodies, created elaborate, outlandish hairstyles and donned costumes – all without any privacy. As I recorded:

It was incredible to watch all these kids, both boys and girls, getting dressed and undressed in front of each other, touching each other, with no obvious sign of embarrassment. There was a small space in the toilets where students could dress in private, but very few students bothered

to use it. They were just so busy getting ready that they didn't seem to have time for all the dramatics that I observed during practices.

Now their energy was controlled and focused as they physically and emotionally connected with their on-stage characters, going over their dance steps, checking their make-up and sitting in small groups talking quietly. In effect, they were thinking and behaving like performing artists: making important decisions without adult input; using their imagination to create crucial aspects of the performance (costume and make-up); taking risks (experimenting with lighting, going on-stage alone); and involved in a collaborative effort as they performed the skills, techniques and practices of the stage (Holloway and LeCompte (2001).

Students' ultimate autonomous act was the competition performance. They were collected by the SC crew (no teachers allowed) and as each team left and returned to the dressing room, the other teams made a tunnel with their hands and teams were cheered and back-slapped as they went through it. Teams then had a long wait in the wings. No one could talk and each student had to deal with the tension in their own way. They were about to face a 1000-strong, live audience, three judges, and there were no second chances if something went wrong.

For the performances, I could only watch and imagine what each team was feeling. In all the hundreds of performances I have observed, I have never seen a bad one. Each item was introduced by the team's student co-host. Students then entered the stage, nervous and excited, took their positions, and the curtain went up. The music blasted and the stage was bathed in light. The audience was a black mass. Their energy levels were high. They were flushed, sweating and wide-eyed. They were breathing hard (except for the conscientious objector!). When they finished, the parochial audiences screamed and shouted out their names. Students then had to exit the stage quietly while four team members went front of stage to speak about their routine and hear the judges' feedback. They could make no noise until they re-entered the dressing room.

At this point, all five teams did exactly the same thing. They burst through the dressing room doors, they jumped, they screamed, they hugged and congratulated each other. They were relieved, happy, excited and proud. This was their optimal moment. They had met their challenge.

Excitement levels in the dressing rooms remained high, as each team came and went. In the 20 minute break between the end of the competition and the awards ceremony, emotions reached fever pitch. Students were still on a post-performance high, and the chants started up again at full strength. Everyone was still in their costumes and it was a mass of colour and noise. The

room smelt of hairspray and sweat. Team members mingled freely and students exchanged performance stories.

Then it was time for the awards and students gathered round the big screen (or, if there was room, took seats in the auditorium). Key members of each team assembled on the stage to hear the results and collect awards. Many were nervously holding hands and cuddled up to each other. In some dressing rooms, students agreed not to clap or shout so that the commentary could be heard. Instead, they raised their hands in the air and wiggled their fingers to indicate applause. The awards of excellence were awarded first, then the social awards and finally the top three.

The three younger teams were delighted with the prizes they received and celebrated with chants and screams. The *Lost Girls* and *Volcanoes* were disappointed, subdued and a little tearful as I have already described. However, no team went home empty handed. They all had certificates of participation, a school plaque, awards of excellence and a hot-off-the press DVD of their performance. They had also received positive feedback from the audience, praise from the judges, the SC crew, their family and their peers.

By 11pm, students were exhausted and ready to be taken home. It had been a long day.

Nevertheless, the day was not without its difficulties. When asked about the worst aspects of performance day, students universally complained about the lock downs, tiredness, waiting around, feeling unwell, the food, peer conflict, pre-performance nerves and logistical problems with costume and set. The *Lost Girls* had some particularly unpleasant moments related to their “prostitute” status. Both the senior teams had to contend with lower than expected results, made worse by watching the jubilation of the winning teams.

They were, however, consistent about the positive aspects of the day. In all teams, students in their remarks on the supplementary measures enjoyed socialising on a grand scale, watching other schools perform, the foyer competitions, the party atmosphere, the authenticity of the experience, getting dressed and made-up, winning prizes, having a day off school, having the freedom of the venue, and above all, being on-stage. They also spoke of overcoming their fears, showcasing their team and school talent, bringing their hard work to fruition and delivering a social message. Finally, many students alluded to being part of the SC “family”. Most significantly, the non-self-selecting *Pig Hunters*, despite their initial misgivings, reported the same experiences.

CHAPTER 9 THE FINALE

Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art...the exercise is partly commiseration, partly celebration, but always intellectualisation, a conveying, a creating of meaning.

(Stake, 1995, p.136)

This chapter will be divided into two sections. The first will draw on the five case study narratives to give an overview of students' SC experience. The second section will examine my researcher experience, assessing the overall effectiveness of my data collection strategies and my reflections about life as a stage-worker.

To recap, the purpose of this research was to:

1. Identify and understand the processes which contribute to positive developmental experiences in SC.
2. Obtain students' phenomenological descriptions of these experiences.
3. Construct a conceptual framework of a positive youth performing arts experience.
4. Identify appropriate and effective data collection strategies for a youth performing arts context.

To conduct this investigation, I employed a collective case study design and ethnographic field research methods to track five demographically different teams as they prepared for, and competed in, separate SC competitions. Although observation was the principal data collection method, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were also used to obtain students' evaluations of their experience and to ensure their perspective was represented. The end result was five case studies, each one depicting a different SC experience. As I constructed these narratives, I refined the conceptual framework, all the while assessing its applicability to SC. For ease of reference, the framework is reproduced in Figure 12.

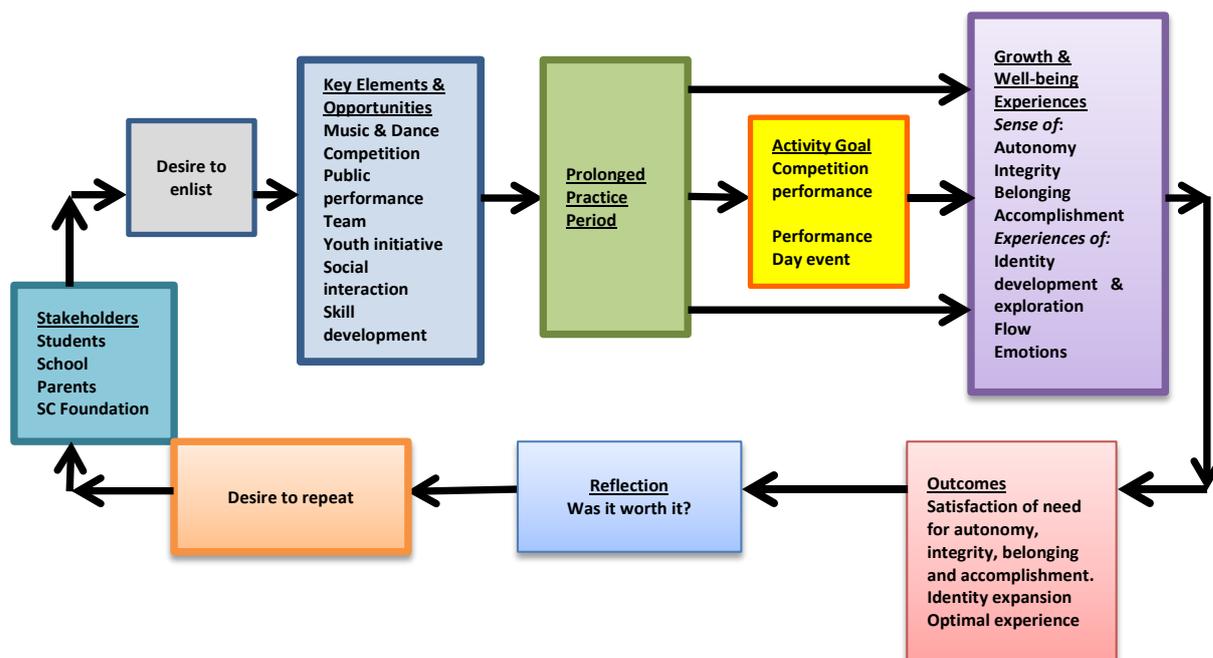


Figure 12. Stage Challenge Conceptual Framework

As illustrated in the framework, SC has four levels of stakeholders. This study, however, is focused directly on the students. When considering SC as a potential activity, students are confronted with two sets of considerations: first, are they attracted by the non-negotiable *key elements* of SC, namely that it is a music and dance activity culminating in a competitive public performance, it is team-based, and it is youth-centred; and second, do the potential *opportunities* that SC offers have appeal, particularly the chance to socialise on a large scale and to acquire and develop skills? Once enlisted in the activity, students undergo a *prolonged practice period*. This culminates in the *activity goal* which, for SC participants, is the competitive public performance, delivered within the context of an all-day event. If the practice period and performance day are positively experienced, both settings should foster psychological growth and well-being, including a sense of autonomy, integrity, belonging and accomplishment, opportunities for identity development and exploration, and experiences of emotional intensity and flow. This, in turn, promotes positive psychological *outcomes* (not measured in this study). Post-performance, students undergo a time of *reflection* before deciding whether or not to *re-enlist* in the activity. The framework is circular, reflecting an underlying premise that a positively experienced youth activity will engender a desire to re-enlist in SC or similar activities.

This conceptual framework provided the structure for the five case study narratives and will underscore the ensuing discussion. I hope to show how the insights gained from my process apply not only to this context, but offer lessons for those working in other youth performing arts, and structured leisure activity settings.

I now present a cross-case discussion of the students' practice period and performance day experiences. In doing so, I keep in mind my first two research objectives: to identify and understand the processes which contribute to positive developmental experiences in SC; and to obtain students' phenomenological descriptions of these experiences. At the end of the discussion, I will link these experiences back to the conceptual framework.

The Stage Challenge experience

The teams

The five teams in this study presented with a broad range of demographics: small and large, junior and senior, novice and experienced, single sex and mixed gender, city and country, and with varying ethnicities. Their preparation period varied from a short-term, within-school pressure cooker, to prolonged extra-curricular marathons involving after-school, weekend and evening sessions. Teams also varied as to the extent SC was student or adult-driven. Most interestingly, the sample included a team who did not self-select into the event, an unusual scenario for SC and also a rarity in youth structured activity research.

But first, a quick reminder of the teams in this study.

The *Boy Soldiers* ($N = 21$) came from a traditional, sports-oriented boys' college and, in this setting, SC was delivered as a formally taught option subject with little opportunity for student creativity or spontaneous behaviour. The low status of this team within the school culture was reinforced at the school assembly when staff gave more recognition to the rugby results than the boys' routine. For these boys, SC was a regular class lesson, albeit without desks and writing utensils.

The student-driven *Volcanoes* ($N = 88$) had quite a different experience. Although the two contributing schools had a history of co-operative extra-curricular activities, each brought their own expectations to the SC setting. On the one hand, the girls were eager to overcome their long-standing bridesmaid status in the competition and were determined to mount a winning entry. They unilaterally assumed the leadership roles and creative responsibility. Conversely, many of the boys enlisted for social reasons, especially to get a partner for the school ball. Overseeing it all was a female teacher, who taught at the boys' school, but who was also a competitive ex-dancer with a penchant for technical perfection. There were, then, a lot of conflicting agendas. The end result was a fragmented practice period, and a poorly conceived, but technically impressive, routine that did not score well. On the upside, many students scored partners for the ball!

The *Pig Hunters* ($N = 83$) were quite unique. Inexperienced, nature-loving and no-frills, they were newcomers to SC as a result of my offer to mentor them through the process. Their teachers and wider community took a caring interest in their youth and worried that they lacked confidence in the wider social context. They hoped participation in SC might mitigate this, and the whole community pitched in to get the students to the regional competition. However, while the Principal was excited about the school's participation, many of the students were less convinced. Throughout, they were realistic about their competition chance and their relativity to other schools socially and technically.

The *Lost Girls* ($N = 110$) were, to some extent, gridlocked by their school culture where SC was traditionally viewed as a high-status, student-driven activity. They had an established audition process, a long-serving teacher, and an expectation that the routine would be conceptualised and developed by the Year 13 leadership team. They also had a strong sense of their identity as Catholic girls, talented dancers and winning SC performers. In effect, they were working to the same formula that had brought them glory some years before, even though it had failed to bring them success in recent competitions. This made for a challenging experience.

And finally, there were the novice *Gangsters* ($N = 83$), whose teacher-driven practice experience was marked by a determination to positively showcase the school, and also by the dominance of the bilingual (Maori and English) group. This sub-group was largely responsible for the choreography, and their behaviour (both positive and negative) influenced the practice sessions.

Over a four year period, I separately tracked each of these teams through their varied experiences. I will now consider the common and unique features of these experiences.

The practice period

Firstly, why did students enlist for the event and what were they hoping it would provide for them? Despite their varying demographics, it was apparent from both my observations and students reports on supplementary measures (the questionnaire, interviews or focus groups), that there were many commonalities across the groups in their reasons for enlisting. These were consistent with the findings of other youth activity research (e.g., Fredricks, et al., 2002). They wanted to learn new skills or advance their existing skills; they wanted a new challenge; and they wanted to be with other young people. Additionally, they wanted to dance. Many had heard positive reports about SC and wanted to try it for themselves and, for the *Gangsters*, it was well promoted at a school assembly. However, for the *Pig Hunters*, who did not self-select, the above-mentioned factors were a deterrent: the boys, especially, did *not* want to dance, nor were they interested in learning – they enjoyed team activities on the sports field, but *not* the

stage; they were intimidated by the prospect of a public dance competition; and they were fearful about interacting with peers from a different social setting. Thus, the key elements and opportunities of SC were both a draw card and a barrier, depending on whether students self-selected into the event or were compelled to participate.

Once enlisted, across all teams, students primarily enjoyed the social opportunities that practices offered, although social interaction tended to be more extensive and informal within the mixed-age group, extra-curricular teams. Social benefits included becoming closer to existing friends, making new friends, dancing with friends, socialising across gender and year levels, and having a regular activity to share with friends. Many students also commented that they enjoyed getting to know their teachers better, noting that they saw them in a new light outside of the classroom. For the *Volcanoes*, SC provided an opportunity for boys and girls to meet romantic partners, which was not possible in their single-sex schools. Younger students especially enjoyed socialising with senior students, something that tends not to happen on the sports field or in the classroom, where age levels are more restricted. Conversely, older students took pride in being role models for the younger students. Again, these findings are supported by other youth activity research which has found that opportunities for social interaction are one of the most commonly reported benefits of youth activity participation (e.g., Patrick, et al., 1999; Fredricks, et al., 2002; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006). Moreover, as a result of these interactions, many students reported they were now more socially confident when interacting with peers interactions and were more secure about their standing in the wider school community. Even more, as Miell (2006) also noted, the fundamentally social nature of the shared dance experience seemed to promote a particularly deep level of social interaction and negotiation between students, as illustrated by the *Volcanoes'* lifting challenge, the poignant dance duo between Ben and Arla of the *Gangsters* and the finale sequences in four of the five teams.

Not only did students enjoy social interactions on many levels, they also described an increased awareness of the benefits and challenges of teamwork. Many students mentioned early tensions within teams and their subsequent pleasure at collaboratively finding a solution. This was especially apparent with the *Boy Soldiers*, whose teacher concentrated on the collective nature of a group performing arts experience and successfully moulded a disparate group of boys into a cohesive performance unit. Most boys from this team commented that this was one of the most rewarding aspects of their experience. However, in the youth-driven teams, although students worked reasonably successfully at the small group level, they inevitably struggled when it came to incorporating the smaller sequences into the whole routine. At this point, all teams needed substantial adult support. Unfortunately, this was often

when the supervising adults had run out of patience and energy and tensions ran high. Student leaders and teachers therefore need to be aware that cameo solo roles should be choreographed and inserted into the routine early in the practice period rather than in the last few weeks. Not only does this help the general cast to understand the complete routine but it also avoids the last-minute panic and performance-avoidance by lead dancers that was a feature in all but one of these studies. Likewise, the finale sequence should be prepared and practiced earlier rather than later. Finale routines, in all instances seemed to lift the collective spirit and promote a stronger sense of teamship

Despite the intensive and positive social interaction, there were many moments of interpersonal conflict, and these tended to be more prevalent in the student-driven teams. There was friction between individual students, between dance sub-groups, and between dancers and non-dancers. At worst, these involved blatant ostracism of individuals, such as Ricky in the *Boy Soldiers*, who tried in vain to find a group to accept him during the in-class drama activities, and the *Lost Girls'* exclusion of the teacher-appointed executive producer. Equally unpleasant was the intolerant attitude of the bilingual kids to the "whiteys" in the *Gangster* hip hop group, demonstrated by their refusal to teach them the dance moves because the whiteys lacked credibility as hip hoppers. Less serious incidents included verbal spats between student leaders, leaders yelling at dancers, disagreements between leaders and teachers over theme choice and choreography, and older students' frustration when younger students were slow to learn dance moves. As Hansen and Larson (2007) also found, student leaders, with their greater levels of responsibility and sense of investment in the activity, tended to have more negative experiences, and this was certainly the case with the two student-led teams here.

Teachers were not immune to emotional outbursts either and these usually manifested as shouted exchanges when teachers ran out of patience with unfocused students or with leaders who had failed to meet deadlines. These outbursts tended to be sharp and swift and often served to snap students out of an unproductive behaviour cycle, for example the *Boy Soldiers'* tomfoolery during the massacre scene. Fortunately, none of the above-mentioned instances of interpersonal conflict, although unpleasant, appeared to consume the preparation process or mar the final routine. Indeed, most incidents were short-lived and tended to simmer rather than gain traction. In one interesting exchange, a *Lost Girls'* leader actually asked the teacher to "throw a tantrum because it's the only way we'll get the kids to listen." Encouragingly, as Dworkin et al. (2003) similarly noted, positive outcomes often resulted from these moments of conflict and, in the most gratifying instance of this, (Ben and Arla in the *Gangsters*), the intergroup tension within the team was both played out and, to some extent, resolved through

the on-stage routine. Here, two students from diverse social, ethnic, academic and dance backgrounds worked through their differences, in the face of considerable put-downs from peers, to perform a poignant duo expressing their love towards each other. This was a testimony to the power of music and dance to unite people through non-verbal means (Connor, 2000; Quiroga, et al., 2010). Nevertheless, it seems that all student leaders (and indeed novice SC teachers) would benefit from a workshop (or access to online resources) prior to the start of the practice period which outlined techniques for conducting practice sessions, training strategies for large groups of mixed ability, conflict resolution, meeting facilitation and working with deadlines. It would also be useful if they received guidance about managing their own psychological and physical well-being, given that most SC leaders are simultaneously juggling academic deadlines, other extra-curricular commitments and after-school jobs, not to mention the roller coaster emotional ride that is characteristic of adolescents.

Interestingly, despite the varying interpersonal hiccups, the teams experienced remarkably predictable emotional journeys. With the exception of the reluctant *Pig Hunters*, most students appeared to begin their journey with a moderate to high degree of excitement, interest, enthusiasm and anticipation. Many also commented that they were a little anxious about being up to the task, and were nervous about the spectre of public performance. From my observations and the students' retrospective reports on the supplementary measures, emotions were less extreme during the middle (and longest) part of the practice period which was when students knuckled down to the hard grind of learning moves, interspersed with non-productive down time while student or teachers struggled to pull the routine together. Too often, this was when leaders were ill-prepared for practices, or had not yet developed the next segment of the routine, resorting instead to endless repetitions of already-mastered moves. It was here that students reported being bored, tired and frustrated, although they also surprised me with their willingness to comply, reinforcing McNeill's (1995) assertion that there is something mysteriously and intrinsically satisfying about repetitive group drills. That being said, there are many simple techniques which could enliven the protracted middle portion of the practice period and here again, student leaders would benefit from tuition about teaching strategies from experts in the field.

As the performance day loomed, students reported increased excitement and enthusiasm as well as increased nervousness. It was here that the worst emotional outbursts tended to occur as students and teachers became tired and stressed, and attention became focused on small and often trivial matters. This emotional trajectory seems to be part and parcel of a performing arts cycle or, indeed, any protracted goal-oriented project (see also, Holloway & LeCompte,

2001; Larson & Brown, 2007; Larson & Walker, 2006. Moreover, as Larson and Brown suggest, this trajectory replicates many real-life situations and the advantage of emotionally intense experiences like SC is that they give young people an opportunity to experience the ebbs and flows of life in the safety of a supportive environment. A fascinating example of emotional tension that emerged across all teams was the friction between the dance sub-groups. This seemed to derive from a cast “pecking order”, with the hip hop groups in each team enjoying higher status and having more dance time on-stage (a much valued commodity in this high-level performance context). It appeared that hip hop and its related break-dance styles were perceived as the most socially acceptable dance forms amongst this age group, probably because they feature so strongly in adolescent music videos. Hip hop is also often considered the most difficult dance style to perform, so membership in this group was an indication of dance expertise. Thus, the student leaders, best dancers, and the “cool kids” were situated in this group, often to the frustration of the other groups who felt that they had been short-changed with choreography, stage time and costumes. At the bottom of the ladder were the back stage crew members, who consistently complained of being treated as inferior because they did not dance. Off to one side, were the classical groups who tended to operate as self-disciplined, independent units, seemingly unmoved by the tensions between the other sub-groups. Probably the most disenfranchised students were those without dance experience, and they tended to be given the “bit” parts that were not choreographed until the last minute. These students spent a lot of time doing very little and tended to be ignored by the main body of dancers. I was intrigued at how little adult leaders intervened to quell these tensions, or indeed seemed to notice them at all. This is yet another issue which should be addressed by leaders prior to the practice period rather than after an incident occurs. In particular, leaders need strategies on how to conduct fair auditions, select dance groups, manage inter-group rivalry, remain neutral, resist pressure from friends for favoured roles, and act as the “go-between” for staff and students. By no means an easy job without training!

Identity development and expansion occurred at the individual, sub-group and full group level, despite some of the sub-groups also being a source of inter-peer conflict. On the supplementary measures, individual students described how they had transitioned from non-dancer to dancer, shy (or nervous) person to confident person, non-compliant to well-behaved student, dancer to choreographer, non-performer to performer and many more. At the group level, students assumed new social identities related to their dance sub-groups and later, to the whole performance group. The *Lost Girls*, especially, emphasised the salience of team membership with group bonding sessions and by gathering en masse at the start and end of every practice. Across all teams, the salience of the group identity seemed to be linked to the coherence of the routine and the three schools with whole-cast finale sequences certainly

functioned more collectively as a performance unit. While it is understandable that experienced schools are looking to create innovative and award-winning dances, it seemed that finale-less routines did seem to lack the buzz-factor for both students and the audience and I would encourage schools to think hard about not including them.

Finale or not, my observations suggested that all teams had a transformative identity moment when their performance identity superseded their individual identities. This was invariably linked to the successful completion of the whole routine or a significant segment of it (the waking of the dead segment for the *Boy Soldiers*, the technical rehearsal for the *Volcanoes*, the introduction of the final sequence for the *Pig Hunters*, the dress rehearsal for the *Lost Girls* and the school performances for the *Gangsters*). These identity transformations at the group level were both rare and precious and, when they did occur, it was clear they were rewarding for teachers and students alike. It was when the students “got it”, when they let go of their individual agendas, when their hard work had paid off and when, I suspect, flow moments were most likely to occur. At one such time, I heard a teacher exclaim, “And *now* you’ve got a show”, double entendre intended. As an observer, I loved these moments. They were even better, when I was the producer. Sadly, there is little chance of them occurring during poorly organised practices or when tensions are running high between leaders and cast.

At the same time as students explored their real-life identities, they also explored the identities of their characters. Some also explored their own identities *through* their characters. This was fascinating to observe. For example, the *Boy Soldiers* gained real empathy for the child soldiers of Uganda and, with teacher support, were able to link their real-life and stage identities together; the *Pig Hunters* reflected closely on what it meant to be a hunter in order to create an authentic portrayal of their lifestyle (and to straighten out my misguided choreography); and the *Gangsters* gained insight into different dance styles and the people who perform them. Conversely, by choosing implausible themes, there was so much dissonance between the real-life and stage identities for both the *Volcanoes* and *Lost Girls* that neither of their routines transformed into a convincing performance piece.

As they assembled their routines, students extended their knowledge and skills. Through their themes, the *Boy Soldiers* and *Volcanoes* learnt about the worlds of others; alternatively, the *Pig Hunters* and *Gangsters* used their routine to bring others into their worlds. Unfortunately, the *Lost Girls* literally became lost in their attempt to portray an unfamiliar and unrealistic world, which was, in itself, a learning experience – indeed, one girl wrote on her list of skills acquired during SC, “I learned how to be a prostitute”, (hopefully, a tongue-in-cheek comment). Additionally, all students gained an in-depth understanding of the on and off-stage mechanics of a large-scale production and an appreciation for the hard work that is required to mount a

competitive routine. In future studies it would be worthwhile to follow up SC competitors, particularly the leaders, to investigate whether they made further use of the skills they gained through SC.

Students also acquired an “an artistic tool kit”, containing a range of performance skills, techniques and practices for the stage (Holloway and LeCompte, 2001, p.400). As Larson et al. (2005) also found, the teacher-driven teams (*Boy Soldiers*, *Pig Hunters* and *Gangsters*) received more specific technical instruction than the student-driven teams. This was especially true for the *Boy Soldiers* who were fortunate to experience a four-month drama intensive with a highly trained teacher. Conversely, the youth-driven *Volcanoes* and *Gangsters* had the benefit of creative and administrative autonomy, but tended to acquire their technical skills “on the run”. This created its own challenges, but en route they did learn about time and people management, conflict resolution, leadership, and planning and problem-solving.

I did notice, however, that in the three adult-driven teams, students’ skills were often under-utilised by teachers or leaders. For example, most students had a wide knowledge of music and dance styles and a remarkably creative flair for costume, make up and set design. It must be remembered that with the proliferation of music channels on TV, series such as *Glee*, *American Idol*, and the *X-factor* and movies like *Fame*, *High School Musical* and *Perfect Pitch*, young people are now spoilt for choice when seeking exemplars of music and dance performances. Added to that, the SC website features all the performances of the last five years, from which student can draw inspiration. Often, teachers (myself included) did not adequately tap into students’ creative potential because of time pressures or failure to engage sufficiently with students and this was reflected in many of the students’ post-experience comments that indicated their input had often been overlooked.

That being said, as noted, there were numerous tasks that were too challenging for students across all teams, even those with previous SC experience. In particular, students struggled with the transition from small group practices to full-cast workouts. This included the finale sequence, transitions between scenes, and the integration of solo roles, both choreographically and strategically (the “big picture stuff”, as I called it). In these instances, leaders inevitably “parked” these challenges, then scrambled to pull something together as deadlines loomed and teachers necessarily intervened to get the routine on track. In reality, given the team sizes and complexity of the routines, it was not surprising that students struggled with this part of the process and, at this point, they would have benefitted from expert support, either from the teacher or from an outsider with performing arts experience (not always a feasible option, especially for remote schools). Likewise, while student leaders were extremely capable at teaching dance moves to small groups, they were less effective at the practical aspects of large

group management, such as gaining attention, imparting instructions or messages, controlling wayward behaviour and resolving peer conflict. They also grappled with catering for a wide range of dance ability levels, different learning styles and keeping all cast members productively occupied. It was very apparent that teams with greater adult supervision had better organised practices although students may have acquired fewer life skills as a result. Interestingly, teachers tended to intervene in the areas where students needed minimum guidance (for example, choreography and costume design) and leave them to manage the issues of practice management, nerves and peer conflict on their own. From my observations, the reverse should have occurred. A notable example of this was when the *Boy Soldiers* were upset at being ignored by staff after their assembly performance and, instead of addressing their distress, the teacher proceeded to critique the technical aspects of their performance.

Furthermore, although students acquired a wide range of skills, I was also perplexed at the minimal amount of positive reinforcement and praise that was dispensed by both teachers and students leaders towards the cast (with the exception of the *Lost Girls*). While this was understandable for the student leaders who had no official teacher training, I was concerned at the number of teaching opportunities (and potential feel-good moments) that were lost when students were not reinforced for accomplishing specific goals, or simply for general good behaviour and hard work. This was especially obvious in the middle section of the practice period when students were enduring many repetitions of the routine, without being given focal points to work on. Even the *Boy Soldiers*, who met their lesson objectives most days, were rarely praised for achieving any of them. They were, however, taught how to critique their peers and to be critiqued by them, which became an integral part of their toolkit. The most glaring example of non-praise was after the assembly performances of the *Boy Soldiers* and *Volcanoes*, where they were not even thanked for their performance, let alone positively reinforced. However, apart from the last instance, lack of praise did not seem to deter the students, and I surmised that positive reinforcement was possibly a fixation of mine. All the same, research in the youth sport context does advocate that, after a successful performance, praise, rather than informational feedback is more valued by young people; conversely, when errors are made, informational feedback is more appreciated than criticism (Amorose & Smith, 2003). This was not a pattern of behaviour that was consistently displayed by either adult or student leaders with the SC teams and is yet another aspect that would be well-addressed in pre-practice workshops.

Theme choice was challenging for teams and the decision-making process around this seemed to set the tone for the rest of the practice period. It became very apparent that a poor theme choice had the potential to underscore the integrity value of the whole experience. For

example, both the *Lost Girls* and the *Volcanoes* got off to bad a start at their theme planning meetings, where students were unable to reach a consensus and teachers intervened. Consequently, as noted above, their chosen themes never really resonated with them and were difficult to translate into a convincing theatre piece. Larson (1988), likewise, found that topic selection was problematic for students doing an extended writing project and that some students were never able work successfully with their chosen subject which negatively hampered their progress. In a positive example, the *Pig Hunters* brainstormed the theme under teacher supervision and teachers chose the best two; all students then voted (anonymously) for one of them; and finally, they had a school-wide competition to decide on a title. This was an excellent example of a teacher-directed process which left students with the impression that the decision was consensual. Theme choice was most successful when it was relevant to students' lives and values (for example, pig hunting or street dancing). Conversely, theme choice based on extrinsic goals, such as gaining competition points or up-staging the opposition (as happened with the *Volcanoes*) led to on-going problems with conceptualisation and student disengagement with the routine. As noted by Deci and Ryan (2000), activities that are intrinsically motivated are most associated with persistence and well-being, and the problematic nature of extrinsic goals was well-illustrated by the *Volcanoes'* struggle to work with themes and choreography that were primarily selected to impress the judges. It is also reflective of classroom research by Faircloth (2009) which found that students were most engaged with topics that were central and meaningful to them, emanated from their backgrounds, families, and culture, and were an expression of their life stories. In addition, these topics became even more relevant when explored collaboratively with peers. Unfortunately, this was not the case for either the *Lost Girls* or *Volcanoes*.

Additionally, teams differed greatly as to how much they were teacher or student-driven. Sometimes, teams had key areas that were youth-led (for example, the hip hop routine in the *Gangsters*), but as a whole, the activity was teacher-driven. Alternatively, as in the *Volcanoes*, the teacher handed most of the responsibility over to the students, then periodically intervened, making sweeping changes without consulting students at all. In another variation, the *Lost Girls* were youth-driven, but when the going got tough, students were quick to call in the teacher, even when they could have been self-sufficient. Ultimately, I concluded that it was unrealistic to definitively position each team on the student-led, teacher-led continuum. Instead, the critical issue was how much the students' *perceptions* about the degree of youth initiative they experienced within the activity, actually matched their expectations *and* their ability levels. Thus, the *Boy Soldiers* never expected to be self-directed and seemed well satisfied with their experience. Conversely, the *Volcanoes* and *Lost Girls* had high expectations of self-direction but, in both cases, had key moments where the teachers abruptly assumed

control, resulting in uncertainty and resentment. For the *Lost Girls*, particularly, a fall-out with the teacher over the appointment of the executive producer carried over to an on-going distrust of the teacher, even though their relationship was open and friendly in other settings. For the *Pig Hunters* and *Gangsters*, initiative considerations were salient at both the teacher and student level. The *Pig Hunters*' teachers handed control over to me while the *Gangsters*' teachers wanted to maintain control, albeit under my guidance. In both cases, we attempted to give students as much autonomy as possible depending on their skill and interest levels.

Larson, Walker and Pearce (2005), in their study comparing two youth-led and two-adult led activities, likewise found that the two approaches were not mutually exclusive and youth activities may successfully incorporate both, depending on the context and the personalities and abilities of the adults and the youth. Moreover, as Camino (2005) pointed out, it makes no sense for an adult to withhold potentially useful information, especially in a highly technical field like the performing arts, just so that students can be autonomous and in this respect, my detached stance in earlier studies was somewhat naïve. What both researchers stress, is that there should be initial and on-going "consistent, transparent and intentional" discussion between adults and youth about the nature of the partnership (Larson, et al., p. 71). When this does not occur, youth can feel aggrieved and confused (Camino, 2000), and this was clearly illustrated with the two student-led teams in this study. Conversely, this contractual discussion did occur between the *Gangsters*' teachers and me and both parties benefited from the collaboration.

A further interesting feature within some teams was the emergence of natural leaders, independent of the formal leadership structure. These were students who instinctively assumed control in small group contexts, were able to see the "big picture" from the outset, and had the strength of character to make decisions for the benefit of the routine even though they may have been at odds with the majority view. For example, Harry, in the *Boy Soldiers*, immediately bought into the routine and catalysed group tasks while the others dithered; Steve, in the *Volcanoes*, gently assumed control as the practices progressed, despite being overruled by the girls in the early planning meetings; in the *Pig Hunters*, Tim put his reputation on the line when agreeing to be a piggy model on my behalf, and subsequently dragged his mates into revamping their choreography at the last-minute on performance day; and Ben and Arla in the *Gangsters* role modelled dance synchronicity and focus, as well as demonstrating that supposedly conflicting dance styles and personalities can co-exist. Often these students did not initially have designated leadership roles and watching them grow as individuals was one of the more rewarding aspects of this research. My favourite example was *Gangster*, Kaila, who had hitherto been tagged as a school trouble maker, but ultimately choreographed and

managed her team's practices for most of the final week. It was a treat to see the shock on teachers' faces as they passed by the hall. Conversely, the *Lost Girls* leaders stuck doggedly together, with no one assuming ultimate control although, as I noted, "It would have been a brave girl who stepped out on her own with this lot". Interestingly, on the anonymous questionnaires, the *Lost Girls* were quick to criticise the leadership team (including the leaders themselves) suggesting that they were aware of the problem, but may not have had the skills or courage to address it.

No team was immune to the reluctant dancer syndrome. In the first chapter, I suggested that reluctant dancers tended to be males who feared ridicule if they took to the dance floor. In this study, the reluctant dancer syndrome was apparent across all teams and genders. With both the *Volcanoes* and the *Lost Girls*, the solo girl leads persistently avoided dancing in front of the rest of the cast and procrastinated with the choreography, which was confusing for core dancers (who needed to see the complete routine to get their cues) and exasperating for teachers. In the *Pig Hunters*, the rugged bush boys were understandably resistant to something so removed from their comfort zone. Secondly, all teams were reluctant about their at-school performances, fearing they would be negatively and publicly evaluated by familiar peers. This behaviour was also noted by Dworkin, et al (2006) in their study about negative experiences in youth activities.

Pleasingly, in most cases, students' fears about public ridicule were unfounded although, as mentioned earlier, in an unfortunate display of adult negative role modelling, both the *Boy Soldiers* and *Volcanoes* were effectively snubbed by the male staff members during the assembly performances. On the upside, the confidence boost students gained from surviving the at-school performances seemed to alleviate much of the performance day trepidation. Nevertheless, it appeared to me that all teams would have benefited from more performance opportunities prior to being thrust upon the stage for the school performance. The *Lost Girls* did effectively simulate a performance setting by regrouping at the end of every practice to demonstrate their day's achievements and, as a result, they tended to be more comfortable with public performance. Similarly, the *Boy Soldiers* consistently demonstrated their group work to the class and gained confidence by doing this. In contrast, the reluctant solo leads in the *Volcanoes* shunned public performance and the more they delayed it, the harder it became to take to the stage. In these cases, teacher intervention was required to get them dancing.

I also noticed that, without adult support, students tended to get very agitated before these school performances. Despite this, no teams were given tuition on how to cope with pre-performance nerves (guilty again, by me), mostly because both teachers and students were too busy perfecting their routines. This would have been a valuable opportunity to teach stress

management techniques, as suggested by Trotter and Endler (1999) who maintain that, in a socially evaluated context, adolescents' fears can be alleviated by de-emphasising perfection, using relaxation techniques and stressing the fun value of the moment.

With only five teams in this study, I am hesitant to generalise about gender specific behaviour. I did, however, note that, in mixed teams, the dance aspect of the experience was consistently driven by the girls, who tended not to include the boys in the creative process. In fact, in all teams, there seemed to be an underlying perception that girls had more dance knowledge and expertise than boys. Thus, the female teacher of the all-male *Boy Soldiers'* did not consult the boys for their input; the *Volcano* girls were dismissive of the boys' suggestions; the *Pig Hunter* girls attempted basic choreography, whereas the boys shunned it; and the *Gangster* girls devised the hip hop routine even though there were several talented boys within the team. Girls also lead the practice sessions. In the co-ed teams, the girls' dominance in this area appeared to be unwittingly supported by teachers who encouraged them to take leadership roles, while down-playing the boys' capabilities. However, this may only be a reflection of the teams in this study and indeed, in 2011, an all-boy, student-led team won the NZ final. Nevertheless, I did feel that the boys in this study got short-changed from a creative perspective. On the positive side, SC did provide a vehicle for female leadership in a high status environment, something that Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) argue is vitally important, because this is the developmental stage when societal pressures may induce girls to give up leadership aspirations. As such, they stress the need for youth programmes that "empower and re-voice adolescent girls" and SC certainly did this (p. 217).

Secondly, in this context, I noticed that girls and boys interacted socially in very different ways. Boys were more restrained, greeting each other with nods of the head, occasional hugs and complicated hand-shakes. When embarrassed, they resorted to verbal put-downs, blushing or physical jostling with each other. They tended to stand together in small groups, hands in pockets, when they were not practising. The girls, on the other hand, were verbally effusive, kissed and hugged, and admired each other's clothing. In the early planning meetings, the girls were very preoccupied with stage make-up and costumes. In the downtimes, they lounged over each other, did each other's hair and talked non-stop. They were rarely far removed from their cell phones which they checked constantly for messages. When critiqued, they were inclined to justify their behaviour, become tearful or sulky and occasionally storm out of the room, looking to their friends for support. The girls were, however, the driving force behind practice organisation and conceptualisation of the routine. The challenge in these situations was to draw on the best aspects of both genders, at the same time making each aware of the

impact of their less desirable behaviour on the other. None of the teams quite managed this, but it is obviously an extremely difficult balancing act!

In summary

When considering all the team's practice periods, it became clear that, above all, students' experiences were impacted by the behaviour of the teachers and leaders. If practices were well-structured, and students were purposefully occupied, and were contributing to the creative process, things went smoothly. If leaders or teachers were disorganised or controlling, all seven growth and well-being dimensions were compromised.

So, could teachers or student leaders have improved the value of these students' experiences? In many small ways, yes, and one of the flow-on activities from this thesis will be to create resources that support teachers and leaders with the preparation period.

But first, it is important to understand that with teams of this size, coupled with the emotive nature of the performing arts, especially in a competitive context, there are going to be lots of challenges. These will be magnified if the teachers or student leaders are not experienced in the performing arts, or have not previously been in control of large groups of students. This will be the case with the majority of SC settings. So, how can these challenges be minimised?

In addition to the various suggestions made above regarding pre-season leadership training and practice administration, there were two key factors which, I believe, made the difference between a good and not-so-good SC practice period for the students in this study. These were theme choice and choreography. If these aspects were well-managed, many practice hiccups were avoided. If not, students struggled to attain the growth and well-being dimensions.

Let's consider each, in turn.

Firstly, as discussed above, theme choice was critical to the integrity value of the SC experience. If the theme was relevant to the students' reality, interested them, ignited their passion, and contained a message they wanted to share (with each other, and with their audience), students engaged with the routine. If the theme was appropriate, students identified with the story and the characters in it, were able to express their values through the story, and felt a sense of ownership of the routine. This was intensified if they perceived they had some input into the theme choice. When choosing the theme, teams could well have followed the *Pig Hunter's* example, where the choice was the product of a healthy collaboration between staff and students. (I have also seen students run a school-wide competition to select a theme, thus giving the wider school community a vested interest in the team). A poor theme

choice compromised identity experiences (as with the prostitutes) and students' sense of control over the choreography. While there was conflict over students' right to choose the theme in the student-driven teams, ultimately, it appeared the issue was not *who* chose the theme, but whether students perceived that the choice had been made democratically, and with their reality at the forefront. Theme choice was thus central to the autonomy, integrity, and identity value of the SC practice period experience.

The second critical issue at practices was choreography. This was the domain of the teachers or leaders and most trouble spots in the practices could be traced back to choreography – lack of choreography, irrelevant choreography, non-inclusive choreography or inappropriate choreography. Too often, the practices began without the choreography being sufficiently prepared (guilty, again). Consequently, students' early levels of engagement diminished, and boredom and frustration set in. This was not conducive to experiencing flow.

Students also lost interest if they did not relate to the choreography or it did not legitimately represent who they were. For example, the *Boy Soldiers* did not relate to the contemporary dance teacher, but when they were taught martial arts moves, they danced their hearts out. Likewise, the *Pig Hunters* did not co-operate until the routine contained authentic pig-sticking choreography.

For younger teams, particularly, practices were more effective when they were built around large group routines which were more inclusive and seemed to have more flow potential. Unfortunately, the *Pig Hunters*, in attempt to accommodate class groupings, ended up with a mish-mash of small groups which was a nightmare to choreograph and undermined the collective nature of the experience. There is much to be said for including massed finale sequences to foster team belonging and, although it did not happen with these teams, it can be helpful to learn these massed sequences first, rather than last. As seen with all five teams, as soon as students began dancing as a group, they began to bond as a team (physically, socially and emotionally), experienced a sense of accomplishment as they mastered the moves, and assumed a performer identity.

Within the sub-groups, choreography was also the means through which students expressed their identities. This had both advantages and challenges. As noted, it was an empowering experience for the hip hoppers, but on the flip side, it also led to feelings of exclusion and inadequacy for the less experienced dancers and back stage crew. This, in turn, impacted on their sense of belonging and accomplishment. While it was difficult to avoid the pecking order between sub-groups, in all teams, there were under-utilised students who reported feeling disenfranchised, frustrated and bored. In a nutshell, if the choreography did not engage or

challenge students, regardless of their experience and dance style, practices risked derailing. Conversely, appropriate choreography in SC promoted belonging, identity, flow, positive emotions and a sense of accomplishment.

A well-conceived theme and creative, inclusive choreography would have made for a heady SC practice experience. None of the teams in the study quite pulled it off, although some, like the *Boy Soldiers*, came close. Why did it not happen?

In truth, it was because none of the leadership teams, both adult and student were quite up to the task, particularly when it came to the full range of skills required to drive a performing arts experience. Thus, in the *Lost Girls* and the *Volcanoes*, the student leaders had the dance skills, but not the people or strategic skills. With the *Pig Hunters*, I had the production skills, but was hopeless with choreography. With the *Boy Soldiers*, the teacher had drama skills, but no dance. Ironically, the most effective practice period, in terms of leadership, was the short-term *Gangster* experience where the teachers, students and I pooled our skills and defied the odds by getting a routine to stage in three weeks flat.

This is by no means a criticism of either teachers or leaders. It must be stressed here that, although the teachers' level of involvement and style of interaction were not always ideal, all of them were dedicated youth professionals who appeared to have the best interests of the students at heart. For most teachers, their SC duties had been undertaken on top of a full teaching load and high-level management responsibilities and their combined degree of commitment to the students was huge. Likewise, while it is easy to be critical of the student leaders, it must also be remembered that they, too, were juggling SC responsibilities with the demands of school work, other activity commitments and part-time jobs. SC leadership is effectively event management on a large scale and none of the students had been trained for this.

Another reality is that very few schools have trained dance teachers on the staff and very few students have had event management or dance teacher training, hence the need for a professional workshop prior to embarking on the activity which supports them to maximise the experience for participants. For both teachers and students, the conceptual framework would be a useful tool at workshops and during the pre-planning meetings to guide discussion about their entry *prior* to the practice period, rather than on the run.

In sum, all practice periods were a bit fraught. How much did this matter?

The fizz factor

In my notes, I used the analogy of a bottle of sparkling grape juice. The practice period represented the time when the contents of the bottle were fermenting. Each fermentation process was slightly different, depending on what ingredients went into the bottle and the nature of the desired end-product. However, by the last week of preparation, when students had a taste of on-stage performance at the school dress rehearsals, and were issued with their team t-shirts, the contents of the bottle were beginning to fizz and the students seemed to sense this. During the performance day, the bottle was given a mighty big shake.

The performance day has been described thoroughly in the previous chapter and it is not difficult to see why it appealed to students. When viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework, it seemed to deliver an integrated version of the growth and well-being dimensions, in a particularly intense form. This day had all the characteristics of a *communitas* experience (see Arnould & Price, 1993; Turner, 1974). It was intense, short-term, and centred on a one-off event. It permitted boundless socialising and spontaneous friendships evolved as students interacted, exchanging phone numbers and photographing each other on phones. Likewise, the massed dance sessions (more than 1000 students in the bigger venues) had the characteristics of shared flow, which can evolve from *communitas* or “hot group” experiences (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). A feature of both *communitas* and flow are that they are difficult to describe and indeed, although students cited the performance day as a highlight, they did struggle to articulate why this was so. “What was good about it?” I’d ask. “Ooooh, everything,” was the common reply. “I just didn’t want it to end.” They had equal difficulty describing their on-stage performance.

It was also the day when students took control of their routine and, well-conceived theme or not, delivered it to the world on a stage normally frequented by national ballet companies and symphony orchestras. This cemented their identities as performers and validated the significance of their routine. Along with this came a sense of accomplishment and pride, enhanced by the fact that they were simultaneously surrounded by hundreds of others who had also worked towards, and accomplished a similar goal. As one teacher in the dressing room commented, “It’s like a bloody big mutual admiration society in here.”

In sum, the performance day, with all its trimmings, overrode the highs and lows of the practice period and delivered a 16-hour fancy-dress party where students were treated like stars and it was their turn to shine. It was a package of growth and well-being experiences, gift-wrapped in thumping music, dancing, bright lights, smoke and on-stage performances, served up in the company of hundreds of like-minded peers. If the theme was not great, if the

choreography was bland, if the leaders had not done so well, on performance day this did not seem to matter. It was when the cork flew off the bottle.

On performance day I sat beside a *Pig Hunters'* teacher while she filled out a SC questionnaire seeking teacher opinions. As she wrote, she remarked, "This sounds ridiculous, but I'm having trouble finding anything negative to say about SC". This by no means implies that all students' experiences were positive. Many were challenging, and a few even appeared emotionally damaging, especially during the practice period. The strength of SC, however, is that, despite these ups and downs, thanks to a well-conceived and superbly constructed performance day, students ended the experience with a positive after-taste, regardless of the competition result. Consequently, this seemed to put all the challenges into perspective, making the whole experience worthwhile.

When student reflected on their experience, they filtered it through their performance day memories, and even though some aspects of the overall experience had not been ideal, 97% of students surveyed, wanted to do SC again. When asked to describe the experience in one word, students' most preferred word was "fun"; between them, 404 students used the word "fun", 1706 times.

The final defining moment for all teams occurred the day after the competition, when they saw the professional DVD of their performance. This was the first time they had authentically viewed their routine as a complete on-stage performance piece. As one TIC said, "It brought tears to my eyes, seeing the routine with all the lights and costumes and make-up, and watching their faces as they realised what they had produced. They could not believe it and they cried too!"

Growth and well-being experiences of this intensity do not just happen, despite our innate tendency to seek them out and, over many years, SC has fine-tuned an event which maximises the potential for them to occur. Looking through the lens of the empirical studies and theoretical models presented in Chapter 1, what then are SC's key structural features? More specifically, to what extent do the study's findings endorse self-determination theory (SDT), and flow theory which are underpinned by the notion that the value of an activity is in its inherent challenges and learning opportunities, rather than from external incentives, such as awards or social desirability. In this light, let's consider SC's key features.

First, SC has a "one-size-fits-all", inclusive team structure which facilitates entry for all students, regardless of age, gender, experience, ethnicity and resources. As noted, three of the five teams had students with significant physical or mental disabilities. At the other end of the spectrum, each team had gifted performers. Furthermore, SC teams accommodate large

numbers, reducing the need to limit participant numbers via auditions, something that inevitably happens in school musicals, choirs or orchestras. With its flexible approach to team size, there is room for a variety of sub-groups, giving students a choice as to where they can best be positioned. There are also opportunities for leadership roles and off-stage roles, hence students who cannot or do not want to dance need not be excluded. Similarly, very young students can dance side by side with seniors and talented students alongside raw novices. As Patrick et al. (1999) note, too often, talented youngsters are compelled to pursue their skills in isolation, because there is not enough challenge in school-based activities to cater for their ability level – not the case in this context. SC's strength, therefore, is its inclusivity and the opportunities it provides for belonging at multiple levels, both during the practice period and on performance day and this was the most frequently cited attraction of SC. It was epitomised by the *communitas*-type performance day where feelings of belonging with fellow team members and the wider SC community peaked.

Second, SC is centred on music and dance, an activity which has considerable attraction for young people as physical exercise, as a means of emotional release and as an identity statement. This was clearly articulated by the *Lost Girls* on their questionnaires and, from my viewpoint, the SC experience had all the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and psychological benefits previously described by dance researchers. In particular, the whole group practices, the finale sequences, the mosh pit dance sessions and the competition performance were “fizz factor” moments. This resonates with flow theory which maintains that the performing arts can promote optimal experiences, especially when the activity is shared with other people. To my knowledge, this is the first youth study involving competitive dance teams, as opposed to individual or elite performers. Furthermore, it is one of the few studies to date that has explored the concept of group flow and attempted to identify its characteristics.

Third, as the name suggests, SC has high expectations of its competitors' skill and performance levels and flow experiences only occur in high-challenge contexts. Cleverly, SC's flexible team structure allows students to create their own optimal challenge levels, depending on their expertise and experience, thus increasing the potential for flow to occur in all groups, despite the varying team demographics. Larson (2000) suggested that youth prefer activities that require an extended preparation period, occur in real-world settings and are authentically evaluated. SC complies with all these criteria. In particular, the deliberate choice of high-profile venues for the performance days, coupled with very specific rules and guidelines, emphasises the professional tone of the competition and legitimises students' performances.

Fourth, unlike many youth performing arts activities, SC tends to be youth-driven although, for younger students, adults are often at the helm and this seemed to be the preferred option for the three junior teams in this study. However, students at all levels embraced the opportunity to take charge of the soundtrack, choreography, costuming and make-up. Youth-driven activities, such as SC, are synonymous with identity development, integrity and autonomy.

Fifth, SC is centred on a competition format, culminating in a stringently evaluated public performance. This does, however, put it at odds with SDT theory which maintains that externally imposed rewards can undermine the intrinsic value of an experience by reducing students' sense of volition or self-determination. Not so in SC, where students appeared to relish this aspect of the activity. Across all five teams, practice periods were punctuated by a preoccupation with winning ("we're in it to win it"), an emphasis on perfection, very little effectual feedback by either teachers or student leaders, stress with deadlines, pointless repetitions of already perfect routines, non-democratic decision making, and intergroup rivalry and conflict – all the ingredients that SDT lists as wreaking havoc with intrinsic motivation. Even more, in a prime example of autonomy control, the *Pig Hunters* were *compelled* to enter the event by their Principal. To cap it all off, not one of the teams finished in the top three, nor did they get many technical awards. Even worse, the *Lost Girls* got a hard time from the other competitors. But, in spite of this, students unanimously gave SC glowing ratings on their various retrospective reports, and vowed they would return again next year. Most were already planning their next year's entry in the bus on the way home from the event. This raises interesting questions in terms of SDT theory about the part the competition goal played in the students' experience.

A possible explanation offered by SDT is that extrinsic motivation sits on a continuum, with external regulation (minimal autonomy) at one end and integration (a degree of self-determination, where the external goal is considered acceptable) at the other. Hence, in the SC context, students may have integrated the concept of the competition goal, understanding its meaning and assimilating it into their values system, despite the pressure, the boredom and the stress that went with it. In SDT terms, the competition factor, then, while not intrinsically motivating, was at least it was at the positive end of the extrinsic continuum. An example of this integration process occurred with the *Pig Hunters* who were resistant to dancing on-stage throughout the preparation period. However, when they finally reached the venue and observed other teams in action, they suddenly understood how it all worked and rushed to me with suggestions about how they could improve their routine, spending all lunchtime pulling it together. Within a couple of hours, they had made the quantum leap from external regulation

to self-determined behaviour, which translated into an effective, autonomous stage performance.

However, on the strength of hundreds of observational hours in the field and an equal volume of student commentary, I would argue that the winning goal was much more than an integrated extrinsic motivator for these students. On the contrary, more than any other factor, the competition was the strongest *intrinsic* motivator for students in SC, both in their commitment to the activity and as a draw card for re-enlistment. There is no doubt that belonging or relatedness aspects were reported by students as the most enjoyable features of SC overall. Likewise, their accomplishments or competence gave them great pride. But it was the challenge of the competition that spurred them on, even though it may have caused them some grief during the process. This “grief” did *not* demotivate them, nor did a bad result deter them from coming back for another go. Quite the opposite – it made them all the more determined to do so. Moreover, when asked to elaborate on this, students were articulate and specific about the benefits of competition for themselves as individuals, team members and for their schools. This is a point of divergence from SDT. Why might this be?

This study was certainly unusual in terms of the prolonged time I spent in the field observing students work towards a competition goal and this may have netted different findings to those currently generated from SDT studies in the laboratory or those that use more specific psychometric measures of intrinsic motivation in the field. This project, on the other hand, used a holistic approach to capture the competition process from the students’ perspective. Perhaps it is only through rigorous and extensive processual research, that the meaning young people attach to external rewards such as winning first prize can truly be unpacked.

Likewise, most SDT studies have been carried out with individuals or small teams. It is possible that competing in a large team reduces the negative impact of competition and instead, the external goal serves to unify the group and to lessen the fear of performing on-stage. Moreover, if the goal is not attained, or if they crash and burn, the support group members then give to each other mitigates the disappointment of defeat and encourages them to try harder next time.

It may also be that in the media-saturated world inhabited by youth, programmes like American Idol, the X Factor, You’ve Got Talent, and Dancing with the Stars, to name but a few, may have changed the attitudes of young people towards competition and the part it plays in the performing arts. The contestants in these television shows routinely face fierce rivalry, humiliating criticism from the judges and public evictions from the show. And yet, year after year, hundreds of thousands of young people line up willingly, including those with very little

talent, knowing they will be subjected to the very sort of behaviour that, according to SDT, causes lack of commitment and disengagement. For the SC students, just like their television counterparts, it seemed that the competition *was* the optimal challenge and it was worth aiming for this, even if they only had the slimmest chance of winning.

It was also very apparent that, for most of the practice period, many of the flow and SDT dimensions were absent. This was also at odds with the notion that intrinsic motivation and sustained commitment are dependent on the presence of belonging, competence and autonomy. In fact, students were often under-challenged and bored, teams did not gel as a group and some struggled with the mismatch of theme and their sense of self. Why, then, did they sum up the experience with such enthusiasm? Interestingly, it seemed that it was not necessary for all seven growth and well-being components to be consistently present for students to sustain their interest, enjoyment and commitment. In fact, during practices, teams only had two or three moments when all dimensions lined up, and these were inevitably when they either mastered all or part of the routine for the first time, at the dress rehearsal, and when team t shirts were issued. Each time this occurred, I went through my checklist, and, yes, all seven dimensions were present. I called these “gweeb” moments, using the growth and well-being acronym. Amazingly, it seemed that even a fleeting gweeb moment was sufficient to renew enthusiasm, solidify teamship and belonging, reinforce a sense of competence, enhance positive emotions and spark a desire improve the routine. It appears then, that like flow, gweeb moments were relatively rare and special for SC students, and it was this surprise factor that made them so distinct. As I noted, “the odd gweeb moment goes a long way”. Inevitably, after experiencing them, students had alert, sparkling eyes, were breathing deeply, often seating and afterwards applauded themselves, high-fived or hugged and looked for affirmation from leaders or teachers. The important thing for those in charge is to acknowledge and celebrate gweeb moments when they happen, give credit to the students for their occurrence, supply positive, informational feedback and to use them as benchmarks for the next part of the activity process. Too often, with deadlines looming and stress levels running high, gweeb moments were given little credence by teachers and student leaders, who tended to treat them with relief or an “it’s about time you got it right” attitude, rather than maximising their potential to enhance the intrinsic value of students’ experience.

Finally, SC and the Global Rock organisation, must be given credit for delivering a performance day where, although the competition is salient and the winners are feted, at the same time they turn on a day-long party, during which they employ numerous techniques to de-stress performers (ample rehearsals, positive feedback, a multi-tiered reward structure, support for new schools, informal foyer competitions and the opportunity to watch and learn from other

schools' performances). In doing so, they take the fear out of appearing on stage, they make every routine look good by using sophisticated sound and lighting technology and students leave the venue secure in the knowledge that they have produced their best-ever routine. For the students, this was heady, addictive stuff. Not surprising, then, that they want more.

Overall, then, the SC package is conducive to promoting autonomy, integrity, belonging, accomplishment, identity, emotional intensity and flow. This is delivered through its dance and music component, its inclusive structure, its challenging performance goal, its competitive orientation and its professionally delivered performance day party. Even though each team's practice periods had their ups and downs, when viewed in its entirety, nearly all students agreed that SC delivers the types of experiences that they crave: to be with friends, to exercise self-direction, to act in accordance with their sense of self and their values, to learn new things, to succeed, and to have fun. Big time.

In this second section, I will consider my researcher experience from a methodological and reflexive perspective.

The researcher experience

The most fertile source of insight is hindsight.

Wayne Dyer

When I began this study, my aim, as stated in Chapter 2, was to address a deficit in the research literature regarding adolescents' positive developmental experiences during youth activity participation. In particular, I was responding to Larson's (2011) call "for naturalistic research and interpretative analysis of the variety and structure of challenging situations that youth encounter ...to seek a more complete picture of the different systems contributing to positive youth development and how they interrelate" (p.2329-2330). To be honest, I was baffled as to why this was such an under-researched field. I therefore had a fourth, research objective: to identify appropriate and effective data collection strategies for a school-based youth performing arts context. I accompanied this objective with methodological research principles, whereby I pledged to document students' experiences as genuinely as possible and to live by each school's values and routines. Oh, the wisdom of hindsight! I now know why there is so little process research.

What I have ultimately produced is a document which, from the perspective of psychological theory, invites readers to become involved in, and engage with five teams of SC students during their preparation and performance day experiences. I have brought my own opinions and experiences to it, and I hope the readers will bring theirs. It is certainly not a linear

account. En route, I adopted a range of data collection techniques, nearly always dictated by the setting. I will now briefly consider each of these.

Observation

Observation was my default measurement method for the practice period and I stand by that most effective means of capturing this dynamic and multi-sensory setting, with its unpredictable time frames and large numbers of students on the move. Each team operated within a context that had to be slowly experienced and absorbed over a protracted period. Prolonged exposure was especially important for me, because of my familiarity with the setting which inclined me towards selective observation, most notably when watching other teachers in action.

As previously indicated, my preferred stance was semi-detached observation (*Lost Girls*), which allowed me to be both a participant and an observer. I achieved this in only one study. In the others, I was either too detached (*Boy Soldiers* or *Volcanoes*), which distanced me from the students and led to feelings of loneliness and isolation, as well as insecurities about my lack of rich data. Alternatively, I was too involved (*Pig Hunters*) and became completely subsumed and overwhelmed by my participant role. In this situation, I was swamped with rich data but had no time to write it down. The *Gangsters* was the most rewarding study, because it matched both my research objectives and my methodological principles. Unfortunately it was only three weeks in duration. However, the reality was, my stance was dictated by the demands of the setting and I had to abide by that.

Although I fretted about the adequacy of my field notes, I was gratified to find that, looking back, I captured a wealth of information. In fact, after five studies I was swamped with data. The difficulty in a school setting was finding the time and the privacy to record notes. In practical terms, I need not have divided my field notebook into four sections (description, conceptual framework themes, emerging themes and reflections). This was distracting and I became preoccupied with trying to give each section equal weighting. Instead, it would have been better to record everything I could see and hear in the moment, and to divide my notes into the four sections at the first transcription phase. Interestingly, when it came to writing the final version of this thesis, I returned to my original field notes for inspiration, because they seemed so much more real than the sterile-looking computer transcripts. When I looked at my expletives, scribbles and production memos, the settings again came to life.

My fears about interrupting the creative process were unfounded. However, students did not go out of their way to engage with me during practice sessions, except for the *Pig Hunters* –and they wanted to engage all the time. Hence, I was mostly limited to recording “overheard”

conversations, something I did not feel particularly comfortable doing. Mostly, though, the students and teachers took very little notice of me when I was in recording mode.

Above all, I struggled with the sheer expanse of what I had to observe, especially as I was approaching this study from both a thematic and a phenomenological perspective. My dilemma, then, was trying to look for the big picture themes of the conceptual framework, as well as monitoring individual students. It was hard to do both, as this example from my field notes illustrates:

We had the first dress rehearsal for the Pig Hunters today. It was a big moment and there were lots of locals watching the kids in the gym. And there in the back row was my conscientious objector, who refuses to pull out, but also refuses to move a muscle on-stage. So while the others all danced, he just stood there, not moving, with a surly look on his face. When they danced off the stage, he just casually walked, giving me the evil eye on the way. It didn't really worry me. More, I was fascinated by his intransigence and the strength of character it must have taken to do this. I guess I kind of admired his stand, although I wasn't going to let him know that. Anyway, the dress rehearsal went off well. And I hadn't seen a bloody thing because I was so fixated on the C.O. I didn't watch the whole group, nor did I glance at the audience. I was furious with myself. I had missed the big moment of the whole practice period!

This scenario was often repeated. It surfaced again at the data analysis phase when I was trying to marry macro and micro themes without losing the essence of the participants' story. Equally frustrating was trying to separate the data into definitive growth and well-being dimensions, given that well-being such a holistic construct. This was an on-going challenge and I often felt I was losing track of the students' voice as I fragmented the data. Furthermore, with two teams, I was both *researching* the setting and *managing* the setting in a way that maximised students' experiences. This was far more than just mingling with participants. I was to some extent controlling their experiences (hopefully positively). This felt a little contradictory. On many occasions, I put students' needs before mine, which compromised my data collection opportunities. It did, however, enable me to get very close to the action.

I had also not taken into consideration how important it is to match observational stance with researcher personality (at least in my case). I do not recall reading anything in the observation literature about this. For me, detached observation was not a comfortable place to be. There is also very little in the observational literature which prepares the observer for the emotional challenges of prolonged field work – the loneliness, the tiredness, the ambiguous situations, the ethical dilemmas, the internal politics and the cultural divide that often exists between researcher and participants (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2006). Too often, I grappled with methodological issues and the needs of the participants, at the expense of my own well-being.

So, would I use participant observation again in this setting? Yes, I would, and certainly, for the performance day, it would not have been realistic to use anything else. There is no doubt, however, that the richness of the data was majorly enhanced by triangulating my observations with supplementary material derived directly from the students themselves.

Supplementary data collection methods

The retrospective measures were invaluable in getting the students' perspective of SC. They added many new layers to the data, they captured the students' vernacular, and they enabled me to explore emerging themes, such as students' attitude to competition, and to dance. It was especially rewarding to interact more closely with individuals rather than to observe them in a large group setting. They also cast light on attitudes and behaviours that I had misinterpreted.

Again, my choice of methods was determined by the setting. The questionnaire worked well for the older *Lost Girls* who seemed to genuinely enjoy reflecting on their experience in a written form. They provided some wonderful commentary, especially about their reasons for dancing and their frustration with theme choice and student leaders. Conversely, the questionnaire was too long for the Year 7 and 8 students and not well received by the Year 9 and 10 boys who were much more receptive to completing the quantitative measures. In future questionnaires, I would not include quantitative measures about emotions, flow, belonging and integrity because, although they gave indications of trends, I am not convinced that they would yield any new data. I would, however, retain ordinal measures about competition (preference for competition or display event), reaction to the result, and attitude to theme choice.

The focus groups gave me an insight into the students' post-performance buzz, but even with the structured format, students were hard to control and I struggled to physically record all their dialogue by hand. Next time, I would use an audio recorder. Girls, especially, talk very fast, talk over each other and become easily side-tracked; conversely, the boys seemed reluctant to express their feelings in front of their mates.

The semi-structured interviews were my preferred supplementary data collection method. Unfortunately this was the least convenient for the schools and I was only able to use them for the *Gangsters*. The downside of interviews was the length of time they took which did not worry me, but was an inconvenience to teachers when students were withdrawn from lessons, often in the midst of an important teaching topic. The upside was that students were so pleased to be out of class, they did not want to stop talking! I could have easily spent 30 minutes with each student. Moreover, as noted, I was able to focus on incidents specific to them from the practice period, and without their peers beside them, they were far more forthcoming

about their feelings, especially the boys. Not only did I gain insights into individual students, but I was also amazed at the depth of thought demonstrated by 11 and 12 year olds.

Overall, the novelty of my research method lies in combining an ethnographic approach to data collection with psychological theory. Indeed, while researchers in this field have conducted a wealth of interviews or focus groups, these are usually supplemented by a small number of real-time observations. I have reversed this trend, by immersing myself in the students' SC journeys, and in some cases driving their experiences from the front. My aim was for the reader to "see" and "smell" the students' experience and to want to explore it further. The variety of observational stances enabled me to see the group experience from multiple perspectives, both detached and hands-on. This was well supplemented by students' retrospective accounts, including both qualitative and quantitative data, which enabled me to tap into individual responses, thus ensuring that the students' voice was also heard. The case study format permitted each team's story to be told, while the conceptual framework facilitated cross-case analysis.

Moreover, this study tracked five demographically different teams who competed in the same competition (although not on the same day). This enabled me to investigate how much students' experiences (especially their remembered experiences) were attributable to *the activity* in contrast to most studies which compare students' experiences across *different* activities. With the inclusion of the *Pig Hunters*, the study also addressed the problem of self-selection effects which compromises much youth activity research, in that it is difficult to deduce how much the success of a programme is due to the people who enlist.

I acknowledge my confounding role in the *Pig Hunters'* and *Gangsters'* experience. The reality is that, had I not been available to help, I would not have had research access; and having entered the setting, I drew on my existing knowledge of SC to maximise both the teachers' and students' experience. It would have been unethical to do otherwise. Although I was also unable to use standardised observational protocols or supplementary data collection methods across all teams, due to the restrictions within the school setting, I do not think this made a difference to the overall findings. In fact, it gave me additional insights into the process at hand.

The study did not feature a winning school, although I would have liked one of the teams to win! However, the fact that SC was viewed so positively by non-winning schools does support my findings that students were not purely motivated by external goals.

To sum up, in a perfect world, my preferred data collection method would be semi-detached participant observation which would enable me to be an integral part of the group, followed by post-performance, semi-structured individual interviews (this time with a recording device).

For senior students, I would also be happy to use a questionnaire. In reality, it is particularly hard to get access to schools, especially for prolonged periods, and the strength of my study design was that I was given unlimited access to five schools, and that in itself is a rarity.

Researcher reflections

This project was an identity quest for me, a rite of passage as a researcher, very much like the students' identity quests as performers. It involved many iterations and changes of direction as I struggled to synchronise my separate roles as teacher, producer and researcher. At the same time, I attempted to retain the integrity of my research process by acting in accordance with my methodological principles.

Throughout the prolonged preparation period, I, too, experienced the satisfaction and the thwarting of the seven growth and well-being dimensions, or gweebs, as I called them. I was at my happiest and most productive when I was in control of the research process, had an observer role which matched my personality and my principles, was confident that I was accurately recording events, was included by students and teachers, and was absorbed in my work. These moments were rare. There were certainly times when I was bored, especially when I was in a detached observer role, with two studies on the go at once. I also fretted about my lack of skills as an observer, as a writer, as a choreographer. At these times, my notes were peppered with exclamations, expletives and self-doubts and I would then beat myself up about how self-centred my reflections were. In fact, I experienced all the dilemmas that the observational literature warned me about, and which I described at the end of each chapter.

But yes, there were times when I was absorbed in the research process and it felt wonderful. Marshall (2001) aptly describes the characteristics of engaged inquiry:

I feel physically alert and multi-sensing, I breathe fully, I think/feel, I am agile as I move within and between inner and outer arcs of attention; I find/experience ways of speaking which both question and openly pursue. And when I have been thus engaged for a while, I may rest back and notice that I am thoroughly tired, almost immobilised... (p. 442).

I could relate to that.

I worried about my emphasis on self-reflection. Sometimes, reflections were two thirds of my day's recordings. As Marshall (2001) notes, pages of self-noticing and self-presumption all seem "so trite" and "self-punishing" (p.434). Admittedly, when revisiting them, there were many insights nuanced within my ravings. It also drew my attention to aspects of my personality that I did not much like and that was confrontational. It was interesting that the

more time I spent in the field, the less I reflected about the process, and the more I just got on and did it.

I did experience worrying ethical dilemmas that did not sit comfortably with me including blatant ostracism of students, a smoking teacher in a smoke-free competition and pornography on a young boy's blog page. However, I was gratified that the *Pig Hunters* and *Gangsters* had great SC experiences, although it was not easy being both a researcher and producer. These schools have both subsequently competed again. I feel like I had a hand in that.

In the process, I have discovered more about more about my identity as a psychologist, as a researcher, as a producer and as a writer. The production of this thesis has paralleled the students' stage production, with its emotional highs and lows, and I can totally relate to their struggle to pull all the bits together to make a coherent whole.

So, where to from here?

The value of this research is the practical insights it provides for SC teachers and students, and for the SC organisation. Already, during this research process, I have assisted SC with funding applications, run workshops for SC teachers, spoken at SC awards ceremonies, and accompanied sponsors and politicians to SC events. I also intend to test the conceptual framework in other youth performing arts settings, particularly those that have a less inclusive setting, such as a school musical or orchestra. In a simplified form, I see the framework being used by activity organisers, teachers or student leaders as a planning tool, a mid-point checklist and for retrospective evaluations.

On the back of this research, there is scope for manuals or online resources to be produced for teachers and students of SC teams, with practical suggestions that will support them to deliver SC in a manner that promotes the growth and well-being dimensions at practices. In these manuals, particular attention should be given to theme choice, choreography and leadership behaviour. First time and rural schools also have specific needs.

In the light of the discrepancy between SDT theory and the role of competition in SC, there is a need for further investigation of competitive team environments both in and beyond the performing arts context. In particular, researchers need to identify the characteristics of competitive team contexts in which young people thrive and are motivated to engage *because* of the competition goal rather than in spite of it.

This study also created a baseline for examining group flow and identified some of its characteristics. While this is a challenging area to research, the notion of a group "in flow" has

exciting implications in terms of community well-being and optimal experience. In particular, how can activity organisers and event managers maximise the potential for group flow to occur?

In methodological terms, it is surprising how little use is made of systematic, on-going observation in psychological studies and I hope that this example may inspire researchers to incorporate it into their projects. At the same time, as psychologists we need to draw on the experiences of our fellow anthropologists and ethnographers in order to prepare ourselves for the emotional challenges we may confront in the field.

Finally, I suggest that the conceptual model (or modifications of it) may be applicable to non-performing arts activities and indeed in any situation where the group is salient – on the sports field, in the work place and within families.

Conclusion

This thesis presented a framework which outlines seven psychological concepts that are suggested to underpin the SC experience for youth participants: autonomy, integrity, belonging, accomplishment, identity, emotions and flow. The framework was derived from a literature review, my previous research of a Stage Challenge team, and the case studies of five demographically different teams as they prepared for, and competed in separate SC competitions.

To construct the framework and explore the processes by which students' experienced SC, I employed a case study design and ethnographic field research methods to track the five teams through their practice period and performance day experiences. Participant observation was used for all teams. Additional data was collected by questionnaires, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. As I tracked each team, I trialled a number of different observational methods and supplementary measures to investigate if, and how, participants were growing, learning and developing as a result of SC.

Students' practice period experiences varied as to the extent they were positively experienced. The most critical factors in their experience of the seven psychological dimensions during practice period were theme choice and choreography, both of which were most impacted by teacher or student leader behaviour. Interestingly, the event's strong appeal to youth lies in its competitive format, a feature relished by the students and at odds with both self-determination theory and a current trend that de-emphasises competition in many school and extra-curricular settings.

The performance day was an intense experience which was almost consistently the highlight for students. This was akin to a *communitas* experience where students enjoyed a day-long event that delivered a concentrated potpourri of the seven psychological dimensions within the context of a giant fancy dress party.

For all students this was a heady combination and, no matter what the result, they finished their SC experience on a high – a natural high.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Information Sheet

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Faculty of Science



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The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

To: Students of xxxxxx

A youth performing arts experience

Participant information sheet

My name is Jan Trayes and I am a PhD student at the University of Auckland. For the next four months I will be working with your school on a research project, "A youth performing arts experience". The project is supervised by Niki Harré, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Auckland. The purpose of this research is to write the story of your school's Stage Challenge team by observing and documenting your group's experiences as you prepare for and perform in the regional competition. I am really looking forward to watching your team in action, and hope that what I learn from watching you can be passed on to other schools.

I would like to observe your team as you prepare for the Stage Challenge competition. To do this I will attend approximately your practices, the dress rehearsal and the final performance and take notes of what is going on. I will not be taking photos or video footage because I do not want to distract you from your work. In my notes, I will not identify any of you by name or write anything about you that may allow you to be identified, as the focus of my study is on the whole team, rather than individuals. The notes I take will be used in my reports about your team. This may include my doctoral thesis, research articles and public releases that are published in newspapers or magazines. Your name will not be used in any of my reports. No one at school will be able to see my original notes even if they ask me. I must also stress that this study is not intended to judge your team's behaviour or ability. It is simply to tell your story. To show my thanks for your participation, I will pay for the performance day t-shirts of every team member.

I know that sometimes groups don't work out well and people end up disagreeing and saying or doing things they regret. If that happens with your group, and you are ever worried about how you might come across in my notes or if you have any other concerns, I am always happy to talk with you. If you are under 16 years of age, I will also be mailing an information sheet about this study to your parents or caregiver, and I will be asking you to address an envelope to them.

I'll store all the information I get for three years in hard copy form and indefinitely on my computers at the university or at home. I want to keep the information in case it is useful for further studies.

If you have any questions or concerns at all, please get in touch with me or Niki. Our contact details are at the end of this sheet, or you are welcome to talk to me when I am at your school. We'd be more than happy to answer all your questions. The Principal and Stage Challenge teachers of your school will receive a summary of the research findings and a copy of your story by March 2013. You are welcome to a summary of the research findings as well if you contact us before March 2013.

To contact Jan Traves: Department of Psychology, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, j.traves@auckland.ac.nz or ph 021 405177.

To contact Niki Harré: Department of Psychology, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Ph. 3737599 ext. 88512, n.harre@auckland.ac.nz.

The Head of the Psychology Department is Associate Professor Fred Seymour: Department of Psychology, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Ph 3737599 ext 88414, f.seymour@auckland.ac.nz.

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 3737599 ext 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE
ON foryears fromto..... Reference Number

Appendix B: Layout of A4 Field Notebook

<p><u>Description</u> Page 1</p> <p>Date, time, place. School demographics Team demographics Theme Practice structure Performance day structure</p>	<p><u>Emerging themes</u> Page 2</p> <p>New or developing themes Unexpected circumstances</p>
<p><u>Conceptual framework</u></p> <p>Presence of key elements, growth experiences and well-being indicators as proposed in the conceptual framework.</p>	<p><u>Reflections</u></p> <p>Highlights of study Challenges encountered Self-reflections Effectiveness of data collection techniques</p>

Appendix C: Questionnaires

THE BOY SOLDIERS STAGE CHALLENGE QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a questionnaire about your Stage Challenge experience. I will be writing a report about it for my university study. You do not need to put your name on it because all my reports will be about the team, not individuals. Please think back carefully over the whole time and answer the questions as carefully as you can.

1. What was your role in Stage Challenge?

2. Why did you decide to take this dance –drama option class?

3. Was it like you it expected it to be?

4. What new skills have you learnt from taking this class?

5. What have you learnt about YOURSELF after taking this class?

6. What were the most difficult things for you during SC?

7. What were the easiest things for you during SC?

Looking back on your practices, please circle the number in the column that best shows how often you had each feeling.

	Not at all	A little bit	Sometimes	Quite a lot	A lot
Nervous	0	1	2	3	4
Enthusiastic	0	1	2	3	4
Bored	0	1	2	3	4
Proud	0	1	2	3	4
Lonely	0	1	2	3	4
Excited	0	1	2	3	4
Ashamed	0	1	2	3	4
Interested	0	1	2	3	4
Frustrated	0	1	2	3	4
Inspired	0	1	2	3	4

Looking back on your practices, please circle the answer that best matches how you felt during PRACTICES.

1. It was challenging, but I think I was good enough to cope.

0 1 2 3 4

Not at all true

Sometimes true

Completely true

2. It was clear to me that I was doing well.

0 1 2 3 4

Not at all true

Sometimes true

Completely true

3. It was very easy to keep my mind on what I was meant to be doing.

0 1 2 3 4

Not at all true

Sometimes true

Completely true

4. I was not worried about what others may have been thinking of me

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Sometimes true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

5. The Stage Challenge practices left me feeling great.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Sometimes true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

6. Stage Challenge gave me a sense of togetherness with my school team.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Sometimes true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

7. Stage Challenge was really “me”.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Sometimes true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

8. I think I will remain friends with the people I did Stage Challenge with.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Sometimes true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

9. I felt like I could be myself at Stage Challenge.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Sometimes true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

10. It was a disappointment to me that we didn’t get placed in the top three schools.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>Not at all true</i>		<i>Partly true</i>		<i>Completely true</i>

Now, looking back to your **PERFORMANCE** on the night, please circle the number in the column that best shows how often you had each feeling.

	Not at all	A little bit	Sometimes	Quite a lot	A lot
Nervous	0	1	2	3	4
Enthusiastic	0	1	2	3	4
Bored	0	1	2	3	4
Proud	0	1	2	3	4
Lonely	0	1	2	3	4
Excited	0	1	2	3	4
Ashamed	0	1	2	3	4
Interested	0	1	2	3	4
Frustrated	0	1	2	3	4
Inspired	0	1	2	3	4

Again, Looking back to your **PERFORMANCE**, please circle the answer that best matches how you felt during **PRACTICES**.

1. It was challenging, but I think I was good enough to cope.

0 1 2 3 4
Not at all true *Sometimes true* *Completely true*

2. It was clear to me that I was doing well.

0 1 2 3 4
Not at all true *Sometimes true* *Completely true*

3. It was very easy to keep my mind on what I was meant to be doing.

0 1 2 3 4
Not at all true *Sometimes true* *Completely true*

12. What were the best things about the performance day?

13. What were the worst things about performance day?

14. What will you miss most about Stage Challenge now that it is over?

And finally.....

15. If you could go back to the start of the year and repeat this experience, would you do Stage Challenge all over again? (Please circle one answer).

0	1	2	3	4
<i>No</i>		<i>Maybe</i>		<i>Yes</i>

16. I would like to do Stage Challenge again in the future.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>No</i>		<i>Maybe</i>		<i>Yes</i>

17. I would like to do more drama or performing arts activities in the future.

0	1	2	3	4
<i>No</i>		<i>Maybe</i>		<i>Yes</i>

And thank you SO much for letting me watch you prepare for your Stage Challenge competition. You guys are awesome!!!!

21. At this stage, how did you feel about the theme that the school chose? Try to give a reason(s) for your answer.

22. What things did you enjoy the MOST about the practice period leading up to the show?

23. What things did you enjoy the LEAST about the practice period leading up to the show?

Now think back to when we had the dress rehearsal AT SCHOOL on the day before the show.

24. How were you feeling about being part of the Stage Challenge team at this point? (Circle THREE words from the list that describe how you felt).

Excited Nervous Enthusiastic Annoyed Proud Frustrated
Challenged Curious Bored Reluctant Neutral Happy

25. Any other comments about your experiences or feeling on the day before the show?

Now I would like you to think about the actual Performance Day, and the events leading up to your actual performance.

26. What time did you get up to get ready for the day? _____

27. What time did you leave home? _____

28. What was your first reaction when you arrived at the venue?

Excited Nervous Enthusiastic Annoyed Proud Frustrated
Challenged Curious Bored Reluctant Neutral Happy

29. Any other comments about your first reaction on arrival at the venue?

30. This was the first time that the Pig Hunters had taken part in Stage Challenge with mostly city schools. How were you feeling on the bus trip to the venue? How were you expecting to be treated by the 'city kids'?

31. Were you surprised by the way you were treated by the other schools? In what way?

Could you now think about the whole performance day as a whole.

32. What things did you enjoy MOST about the day?

33. What things did you enjoy LEAST about the day?

34. At the venue, the team was on stage four times (three rehearsals, and the actual performance). Which time on stage did you enjoy the most? (Please circle one).

Rehearsal 1 Rehearsal 2 Rehearsal 3 The actual performance

35. Why did you enjoy this time on stage the most?

Now, thinking about the actual performance in front of the live audience.

36. Just before you went on stage, waiting in the wings, how were you feeling? (Circle THREE words that best describe how you felt)

Excited Nervous Enthusiastic Annoyed Proud Frustrated
Challenged Curious Bored Reluctant Neutral Happy

The following questions concern how you felt while you were actually performing. Please circle ONE answer for each question.

37. I found it very challenging performing on stage.

Not at all A little bit Not sure Quite a lot A lot

38. I was confident that I had the skills to perform really well.

Not at all A little bit Not sure Quite a lot A lot

39. I was totally focussed on my performance, and nothing was distracting me.

Not at all A little bit Not sure Quite a lot A lot

40. I knew exactly what was expected of me on stage.

Not at all A little bit Not sure Quite a lot A lot

41. My time on stage seemed really short compared to other schools.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

42. My time on stage seemed to go really, really slowly.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

43. I was not even conscious of the audience because I was concentrating so hard.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

44. I was not aware of the other people on the stage with me, only aware of myself.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

45. I knew my routine so well, I did not even have to think about what I was doing. It was automatic.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

46. At the end, I knew I had performed really well.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

47. When I came off stage, I felt AWESOME!

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

48. So, when you finally came off the stage, circle THREE words from the list that best describe how you felt.

Excited *Nervous* *Enthusiastic* *Annoyed* *Proud* *Frustrated*

Challenged *Curious* *Bored* *Reluctant* *Neutral* *Happy*

Now, think about the award ceremony. The Pig Hunters got four prizes: the environmental awareness award; the community spirit award; the visual enhancement award (for looking colourful and attractive on stage); and the Spirit of Stage Challenge award for the most popular team.

49. How did you feel about the teams' result? (please circle one answer)

Very disappointed *Slightly disappointed* *Quite pleased* *Very pleased* *Over the moon*

50. Any other comments about the result?

51. Stage Challenge is a competition. Do you think it would be more fun if it was just a social event, with no awards at the end of it? (Please circle one answer).

Yes, I don't like competitions *Not sure* *No, the competition makes it more exciting.*

52. Now that you know what Stage Challenge involves, would you repeat these last few months all over again, if you could? (Please circle one answer).

Definitely not *Probably not* *Not sure* *Possibly* *Definitely yes*

53. If your school did Stage Challenge next year or in future years and you had a CHOICE whether to participate or not, would you take part? (Please circle one answer).

Definitely not *Probably not* *Not sure* *Possibly* *Definitely yes*

54. Looking back, do you think our theme was a good one for the school? (Please circle one answer).

Definitely not *Probably not* *Not sure* *Possibly* *Definitely yes*

55. Now that it is all over, how do you feel about the WHOLE experience? (Circle THREE words that best describe how you feel)

Excited *Nervous* *Enthusiastic* *Annoyed* *Proud* *Frustrated*

Challenged *Curious* *Bored* *Reluctant* *Neutral* *Happy*

56. What new skills did you learn by doing Stage Challenge?

57. What did you learn about yourself during Stage Challenge?

58. Do you think the school has benefited from being involved in Stage Challenge? If so, how?

59. Has Stage Challenge been bad for the school in any way? If so, in what way?

60. How much do you think the school's participation has influenced other people's awareness and knowledge of your community?

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A great deal*

Nearly there!

61. How proud did you feel of your school at the end of the night? (please circle)

Not at all proud *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite proud* *Extremely proud*

62. How proud did you feel of YOURSELF at the end of the night? (please circle)

Not at all proud *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite proud* *Extremely proud*

63. Did you feel that Stage Challenge allowed you to “be yourself”?

Not at all

A little bit

Not sure

Quite a lot

A great deal

And finally.....

64. How much did you feel a sense of belonging or togetherness with the other members of the Pig Hunters team?

Not at all

A little bit

Not sure

Quite a lot

A great deal

65. And how much did you feel a sense of belonging or togetherness with the members of the other Stage Challenge teams?

Not at all

A little bit

Not sure

Quite a lot

A great deal

66. If you could choose ONE word to describe your Stage Challenge experience, what would it be?

Thank you SO much for taking the time to do this. I hope it has made you think more deeply about your Stage Challenge experience and what you got out of it. You have all been fantastic.

GO the Pig Hunters!!!!!!!!!!

THE LOST GIRLS STAGE CHALLENGE QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a questionnaire about your Stage Challenge experience. I will be writing a report about it for my university study. You do not need to put your name on it because all my reports will be about the team, not individuals. Please think back carefully over the whole time and answer the questions as carefully as you can.

First of all, some back ground questions about you.

- 1. What year level at school are you? 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 (please circle)
- 2. How old are you? 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 (please circle)
- 3. What was your role in Stage Challenge (e.g. homeless person or backstage crew)? If you had more than one role, please list all the roles.)

- 4. How many previous SC have you competed in (apart from this one)_____
- 5. Apart from Stage Challenge, how much dance or drama experience have you had? (Please circle one answer)

None A little bit Quite a lot Heaps

- 6. Describe any previous experience you have had?

- 7. Why do you like to dance? Think hard about this one! I would really like to know!

Now I want you to think back to when you began our Stage Challenge preparations.

- 8. When you *first* found out that Year 7-10 students were expected to take part in Stage Challenge 2009, how did you feel? (Circle the words from the list that best describe how you felt).

Excited Nervous Enthusiastic Annoyed Proud Frustrated
Challenged Curious Bored Anxious Neutral Happy

- 9. At this stage, how did you feel about the theme that the school chose? Try to give a reason(s) for your answer.

- 10. What things did you enjoy the MOST about the practice period leading up to the show?

11. What things did you enjoy the LEAST about the practice period leading up to the show?

Now think back to when you had the dress rehearsal at school two days before the day before the show.

12. How were you feeling about being part of the Stage Challenge team at this point? (Circle the words from the list that best describe how you felt).

Excited *Nervous* *Enthusiastic* *Annoyed* *Proud* *Frustrated*
Challenged *Curious* *Bored* *Anxious* *Neutral* *Happy*

13. Any other comments about your experiences or feeling two days before the show?

Now I would like you to think about the actual Performance Day, and the events leading up to your actual performance.

14. What things did you enjoy MOST about the day?

15. What things did you enjoy LEAST about the day?

16. At the Trafalgar Centre, the team was on stage four times (three rehearsals, and the actual performance). Which time on stage did you enjoy the most? (Please circle one).

Rehearsal 1 *Rehearsal 2* *Rehearsal 3* *The actual performance*

17. Why did you enjoy this time on stage the most?

18. By the time the performance day came around, how were you now feeling about the pig hunting theme that the school had chosen? Had your feelings changed from when we first started practising? Try to give a reason(s) for your answer.

Now, thinking about the actual performance in front of the live audience.

19. Just before you went on stage, waiting in the wings, how were you feeling? (Circle THREE words that best describe how you felt)

Excited *Nervous* *Enthusiastic* *Annoyed* *Proud* *Frustrated*
Challenged *Curious* *Bored* *Reluctant* *Neutral* *Happy*

The following questions concern how you felt while you were actually performing. Please circle ONE answer for each question.

20. I found it very challenging performing on stage.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

21. I was confident that I had the skills to perform really well.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

22. I was totally focussed on my performance, and nothing was distracting me.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

23. I knew exactly what was expected of me on stage.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

24. My time on stage seemed really short compared to other schools.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

25. My time on stage seemed to go really, really slowly.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

26. I was not even conscious of the audience because I was concentrating so hard.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

27. I was not aware of the other people on the stage with me, only aware of myself.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

28. I knew my routine so well, I did not even have to think about what I was doing. It was automatic.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

29. At the end, I knew I had performed really well.

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

30. When I came off stage, I felt AWESOME!

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A lot*

31. So, when you finally came off the stage, circle THREE words from the list that best describe how you felt.

Excited *Nervous* *Enthusiastic* *Annoyed* *Proud* *Frustrated*
Challenged *Curious* *Bored* *Reluctant* *Neutral* *Happy*

Now, think about the award ceremony. The Lost Girls got three awards of excellence.

32. How did you feel about the result? (please circle one answer)

Very disappointed *Slightly disappointed* *Quite pleased* *Very pleased* *Over the moon*

33. Any other comments about the result?

34. Stage Challenge is a competition. Do you think it would be more fun if it was just a social event, with no awards at the end of it? (Please circle one answer).

Yes, I don't like competitions *Not sure* *No, the competition makes it more exciting.*

35. Now that Stage Challenge has finished for the year, would you repeat these last few month again, if you could? (Please circle one answer).

Definitely not *Probably not* *Not sure* *Possibly* *Definitely yes*

36. If your school does Stage Challenge next year or in future years, would you take part in it again, assuming you were still a student at the school? (Please circle one answer).

Definitely not *Probably not* *Not sure* *Possibly* *Definitely yes*

37. Looking back, do you think our theme was a good one for the school? (Please circle one answer).

Definitely not *Probably not* *Not sure* *Possibly* *Definitely yes*

38. Why or why not?

39. Now that it is all over, how do you feel about the WHOLE experience? (Circle THREE words that best describe how you feel)

Excited *Nervous* *Enthusiastic* *Annoyed* *Proud* *Frustrated*
Challenged *Curious* *Bored* *Reluctant* *Neutral* *Happy*

40. What new skills did you learn by doing Stage Challenge?

41. What did you learn about yourself during Stage Challenge?

Do you think being in SC is good for the school? If so, how?

42. Has Stage Challenge been bad for the school in any way? If so, in what way?

Nearly there!

43. How proud did you feel of your school at the end of the night? (please circle)

Not at all proud *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite proud* *Extremely proud*

44. How proud did you feel of YOURSELF at the end of the night? (please circle)

Not at all proud *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite proud* *Extremely proud*

45. Did you feel that Stage Challenge allowed you to “be yourself”?

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A great deal*

And finally.....

46. How much did you feel a sense of belonging or togetherness with the other members of your school team?

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A great deal*

47. And how much did you feel a sense of belonging or togetherness with the members of the other Stage Challenge teams?

Not at all *A little bit* *Not sure* *Quite a lot* *A great deal*

48. Overall, what were the best things about the WHOLE experience?

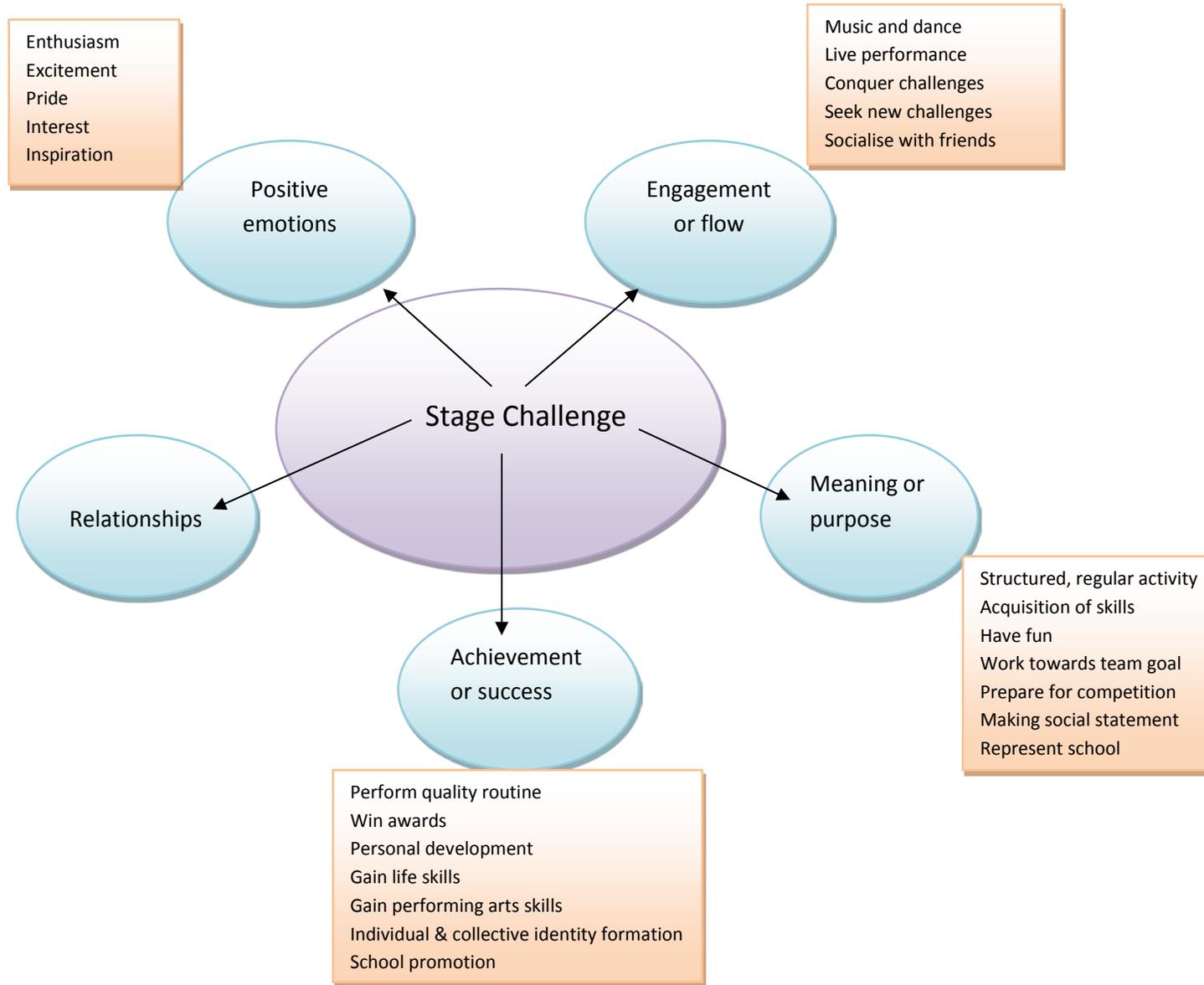
49. Overall, what were the worst things about the WHOLE experience?

50. Is there anything you would change about this last experience?

51. If you could choose ONE word to describe your Stage Challenge experience, what would it be?

Thank you SO much for taking the time to do this. I hope it has made you think more deeply about your Stage Challenge experience and what you got out of it. You ROCK!!!!

Appendix D: Stage Challenge: Working Conceptual Framework (2)



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