The Power of Research: Exploring Active Older People Participating in Creative Dance – challenging perceptions

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This paper contributes to understanding the power of participating in work-based doctoral research after a fulltime career. It explores ways in which active older people choose to participate in "creative dance" activities and how this may benefit them. It draws upon the first author's experiences in using her leadership, management, presenting and coaching skills creatively, having decided to leave her career as a senior manager and return to dancing and community activities "to see what life will bring". This includes becoming involved with dance performance activities, founding/managing a grassroots dance organisation, advising, networking and participating in projects concerning ageing and creative arts, whilst undertaking a work-based doctorate programme. Adaptable methodological approaches are explored so that uncertain new ad-hoc paid and voluntary work could be incorporated within research processes.

The paper outlines findings about active older people dancing and recommends a way forward on issues concerning ageing; creativity and older people's creative dance becoming mainstream. There is an argument for the social, political and health benefits of dancing for all, especially older adults and the need for more choices so that all ages can lead meaningful purposeful lives. This research challenges the stereotypes of retiring and becoming marginalised, showing positive aspects of entering the next stage of life and later stages of work, using skills and experience in new ways to benefit others as well as oneself.

Keywords: work-based doctorate, transdisciplinarity, ageing, older dancers, challenging perceptions

Introduction

This paper explores my work and research experiences and new opportunities from 2008 until the present. I chose to leave my fulltime career as a Senior Manager, for an international awarding organisation in 2008 because I wanted to return to dance and community activities

whilst I still had energy and good health. I had been involved in these activities earlier in my life. In 2010 I had the opportunity to participate in a work-based doctorate programme.

During my research and in this paper, I am positioned as an older person, older dancer and older research practitioner. It has been prepared by selecting and summarising sections from my work-based doctorate's Final Report and personal reflections on my recent, mainly voluntary, work. As the first author, I drafted a version and Gordon Weller contributed further ideas and gave useful guidance. It explores the use of flexible methodological approaches including adaptable research design, innovative research methods, analytical tools and templates as well as outlining some findings and recommendations. There follows a discussion and conclusions reflecting on ways I am taking my research forward and disseminating ideas and successful practice.

Ways work-based doctorate programmes can be achieved by older adult researchers after their main fulltime careers, as they transition to more flexible, uncertain work activities and new interests are explored. The paper will be of interest to academics, practitioners and decision makers working in the dance sector and other participatory arts and sectors including health and wellbeing; community development, leisure; sports and culture. There are demographic changes in society and new solutions are being sought (Cutler 2009) (Oliver & Kelly 2013) (Organ, K. 2013). As everyone ages, it should be interesting to all, especially as ageism is a 21-century taboo (Gullette 2011) and assumptions need to be challenged. My intention is to inspire and contribute towards understanding adults who have left fulltime careers and enter new opportunities in the next stages of their careers and personal lives; to explore creative dance for older people so contributing to it becoming mainstream and normal for all wish to participate and consider issues concerning ageing and ways sectors need to work together in the future.

Background

The research brought together knowledge and skills from over forty years' work experience and learning during my careers, studies and voluntary community activities. This included teaching in secondary and primary schools and being a dance adult education tutor. In

voluntary capacities, I led the development of local grassroots organisations where I live in London, including some for families and children. I led the successful development of a local Community Arts Centre before returning to my fulltime career in 1987 at the awarding organisation. I managed and led teams of colleagues developing a range of qualifications and learning materials and externally worked with professionals from health, social care, community development and creative arts & crafts sectors. I have well-developed management, leadership, marketing, coaching-mentoring and presentation skills. In the final stage of this career I achieved several higher level professional vocational qualifications in Leadership and Management, Marketing and Coaching. My practice benefitted from this learning and practical research. I was studying in my fifties and had a very interesting busy career. I decided to leave aged 60 years because I wanted to return to dance and community activities, although I did not know what that would mean. It was a risk but worth taking. My intention was to have some paid and voluntary work, pursue dance and other interests and "see what life would bring". I had a pension but did not think I was "retired" or "elderly". I was surprised by the ways I was categorised in the external world. I thought I was an adult getting involved in new activities during the next stage of my career, but found myself classified as "retired", grouped with everyone else no longer in fulltime work aged 50-105+ years.

In June 2009, BBC TV "Imagine" Arts Programme broadcasted a documentary about "The Company of Elders", Sadler's Wells' long established resident over-60s dance company. I attended a complementary workshop. It was challenging and enjoyable and participants, including myself, stayed behind demanding more sessions. Following the programme, there was interest from all over the UK. Ross (2009) thought the demand demonstrated the disappointing levels of promotion and lack of awareness about quality dance opportunities. However, my research found that there were few dance activities specifically aimed at active older people and although more has become available and there is increasing interest, demand and provision remains patchy.

Fortunately, I found suitable dance sessions to attend. I founded a local community choir and a grassroots older people's creative dance organisation called Vivacity (a pseudonym). My

other work included voluntary and some paid committee and seminar work, mentoring and brainstorming activities.

Almost by chance, I became involved in a work-based doctorate programme. I attended a university seminar reporting on a student mentoring project. I attended to learn about the research outcomes and thought I might offer my mentoring skills. After the seminar I was asked if I might consider participating in a DProf programme. Over the summer, I carefully thought about it. It would be a huge challenge; time consuming and my new various work activities were insecure. The vocational qualifications I achieved at work had whetted my appetite for learning and putting new ideas into practice and I knew I enjoyed studying. The prospect of participating in higher academic learning and researching was daunting but exciting. I decided to meet the challenge. I was dancing regularly giving me access to older adults who were choosing to dance. I was involved in local community activities including founding and managing Vivacity, but its funding was insecure so might not continue. I was accepted for the DProf programme and attended the induction event in October 2010.

My DProf, therefore, grew from personal aspirations and interests. I incorporated previous professional skills, knowledge, interests and life experience with new evolving activities. The research period was March 2011 – 2016. It needed to be adaptable, flexible and innovative as it was happening in real time during uncertain political/financial/social times as well as a transition in my own life. I was self-funding and most of my studying and work activities would be on my own.

I was not a beginner dancer but knew my learning styles and physical capabilities were different from younger experienced dancers. I became interested in researching other older people who chose to dance and how this increasing demand could be encouraged and resourced in the future. Ageing populations and longevity issues were increasingly rising up social/political agendas (Sinclair 2015; Ready for Ageing Report, House of Lords, 2013; Harrop, A. and Jopling, K. 2009; UN World Assembly on Aging 2002, 2012). In addition to attending

dance sessions and managing/dancing in Vivacity, I joined a new older people's performance dance company.

My various, mainly voluntary, work activities increased. This included advising, networking and other dance activities including performing in a second older people's dance company. I used these activities to research ways organisations could work collaboratively to face uncertainties and find political and social solutions to face new challenges.

Evolving research design using a variety of research methods.

My methodological approaches adapted over time to support my research activities, analysis and synthesis of evidence and data and writing my research Final Report. I remained flexible and gained increased understanding about research theories and practice and events happening in the real world. A straightforward mixed-methodology research design was insufficient, I had to adapt because varied work activities were increasing adding complexity. My research had strong underpinning structures and had four phases. I was positioned within my research both as an insider and outsider reflective work-based practitioner-researcher (Schon 1983).

Ethical issues

Lunt (2008) suggests ethically responsible professionals rarely refer to religious or professional codes though they act in ways that accord and go beyond them. As a mature, professional woman, I do not usually refer directly to my personal religious and professional codes when working with others. Making explicit my beliefs and values for my work-based doctorate activities were, therefore, challenging. I was influenced by my teaching, leadership and coaching professionalism based on integrity, honesty, autonomy and respect. Warnock's (1998) humanistic ethical stance including defending human rights, seeking peace and justice acknowledging the dignity of all humanity and respecting diversity, complements my Liberal Jewish ethics of social justice, love, compassion, forgiveness and striving to heal the world. (Raynor 2005). Ethical considerations were important throughout my research, directly

impacting on its design and implementation. I critically reflected on my actions and the effects I had on others (Costley et al 2010).

I was an insider researcher returning to dance and community activities where I have lived for many years. I was also an outsider practitioner-researcher, a person from a minority community, living in an area with people from many different cultural and social backgrounds and I was entering new work activities in different settings.

I founded Vivacity before my DProf programme began to enable older adults to have dance opportunities and to bring neighbours from different backgrounds together. My role was founder/manager, dancer and neighbour. I did not want to use it as a "case" or "experiment" focussing on the content and relationships happening during sessions. My other dance activities involved building relationships with peers who became acquaintances and friends. I wished to remain an ordinary participant. I was not an objective researcher-practitioner. I was not willing to compromise newly formed friendships, especially as I wished these relationships to continue after my research ended. I would have felt uncomfortable interpreting and making judgements about behaviour, relationships and everyday occurrences within dance sessions. I was not an objective research fieldworker, making judgements on facilitators' choreography or ways they related to us as older dance participants. The same applied when collaborating with other colleagues with whom I built trusting relationships whilst networking and attending meetings. It was not acceptable to research their social interactions and behaviour. However, I decided it was ethical to use these work and dance experiences to generally inform my research. I made no secret about my work-based doctorate, answering questions whenever anybody showed interest and appreciated their support.

My research and Final Report needed to be believable to my audiences and bring new insights into unfamiliar social experiences (Ellis et al 2010). I was explicit, making transparent my biases as a reflective work-based practitioner. Each interviewee was informed about the research, agreed to participate and were fully informed about the interviewing process, confidentiality, I confirmed anonymity and they signed consent forms. Every effort was made not to influence their answers during interviews. I used my professional coaching skills to put

interviewees at ease. Our conversations flowed easily. I was mindful my research might affect interviewees because they were recalling and reflecting upon previous experiences and present and future aspirations and gave them opportunities to question and comment. Carefully transcribed samples from interviewees' raw data were included rather than soundbites, adding vibrancy, authenticity and clarity to the Final Report .

I interpreted interviewees' transcripts with care, respect and accuracy. Transcripts were stored securely. I spent time learning to use NVivo 10 software to analyse the interviewees' data and interpret it. The research benefitted because using NVivo 10 enabled all the interviewees' raw data to be analysed enabling themes to emerge. All nodes and themes were trackable back to transcripts.

I had meaningful conversations with some dance provider/practitioners. I informed them about my research, and they gave me ideas and guidance. I prepared potential topics and/or questions I wished to cover. They commented and confirmed notes following our conversations.

It was essential to research in ethical ways, be robust, credible and build good relationships. I remained true to my values and no conflicts or ill feelings emerged with peers or colleagues concerning my research activities. My research was incorporated into challenges I faced. The methodological approaches were transparent and the research had credibility and authenticity.

The Four Phases of Research and Activities

The research's four phases involved new work and research which were increasingly reflexive benefitting my practice and informing the research.

Phase 1: March 2011 – March 2012

During this phase I prepared and submitted my research proposal. I created lists of possible research questions but eventually created five initial questions influenced by an academic

paper I found when carrying out a literature search. Stinson's et al (1990) phenomenological research on meanings young women dance students gave to their activities encouraged me to research active older people dancing. I could explore their dance experiences and reasons for participating and ways sessions encourage inclusion. The research could also include conversations with some dance-providers and decision-makers. As well as these phenomenological qualitative interviews I intended to create a quantitative survey built on identified themes from the interviews. This survey could involve larger numbers of dancers and would create statistical data. This was mixed methodology. However, although qualitative interviews remained the first aspect of my research, the quantitative survey was discarded during Phase 3 because I decided it would be too small-scale and not sufficiently resourced to be influential.

My work activities were still ad-hoc and insecure. I continued managing Vivacity. I led two Roundtables for a research organisation "Widening Opportunities in Creative and Performance Arts" in London and Liverpool during June 2011 having responsibility for the administration, liaising and chairing of the events. I chaired them by creating an empathetic listening environment (Kline 2002) encouraging participants to learn by providing space and time to listen to each other in turn and dialogue.

Phase 2: March 2012 – December 2012

My research proposal was accepted, my work activities became more secure and varied. My proposal was selected for display on the university website.

The approved Research Report title was

> "When I'm 64 I want to dance! The influence of creative dance in active older people's lives"

I planned the in-depth phenomenological interviews and selected eleven active older people who lived in London and a SW England city. All were attending regular creative dance sessions. The interviewees were not a representative sample or random. I was not comparing and contrasting responses to prove hypotheses, so they did not have to be similar. Each person had their own voice. Interviewees were chosen purposively (Smith, Flowers, Larkin 2009). I

selected people from different social and economic backgrounds aged 58 – 82 years. I did not want my research to be London-centric. Through the internet, I found dance sessions based in a SW city arts centre that was set up following the BBC "Imagine" television programme. I contacted the organiser who was a professional dance therapist. She selected three participants who attended regularly. I had considered conducting focus groups but decided face-to-face conversational interviews, where individuals expressed their detailed thoughts were preferable. This method used my coaching skills to best advantage. I included two men who were dancing as it was important to research their ideas as well as those of women dancers. My relationships with the interviewees varied, most were people I knew through dance sessions I attended, one was in the dance company I performed in and the three people from SW city were unknown to me until I visited and interviewed them. Table 1 (below) illustrates interviewees' demographic details as they identified themselves.

INSERT TABLE OF NAMES HERE ON ONE PAGE
See Table at end of text below

I created and piloted an "aide-memoire grid" that was supportive during conversations. It was not prescriptive and allowed for flexibility. Each interview was 1-1.5 hours long. In-depth Interviews began in July 2012 and continued for one year. I also learned how to use analytical NVivo 10 software.

By December 2012, my awareness and experiential learning had increased. My research widened as my work and dance activities increased. I was pleased it was openly and honestly reflecting what I was doing, I could foresee it contributing to others' work and research.

Work and dance activities included dancing in "Dancing Voices" a largescale older dancers and music event performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank, London and SAGACITY, an older dancers' festival, a dance festival in a North London borough and a flash mob. I continued to successfully manage well-attended Vivacity sessions. I developed a website and good promotional materials and successfully acquired further funding. I gained a BIGDANCE 2012 grant to organise an intergenerational project and collaborated with the Heads from a local primary learning campus to plan an "International Dance Olympiad" event. Vivacity's dance facilitator was paid to lead school workshops and Vivacity dancers, including myself, volunteered and enjoyed creating dances with pupils. The schools also supplied facilitators, so more children learned a number of diverse dance traditions. An audience of over 500 local children, parents and teachers attended the final lively, successful event.

Phase 3: January 2013 - July 2014.

In January 2013, I devised a question matrix. The central main question was:

'Why do active older people choose to participate in creative dance activities and are there any implications and benefits?'

There were four axes: Individuals, dance, community/national levels, change and images. Eighteen sub questions clustered within the axes. This question matrix remained an underpinning tool guiding my research.

I became involved in more work and dance activities including writing articles for some professional magazines, networking with people involved in different arts activities and sectors and joining a local dance forum. Vivacity continued to develop; we were being asked to perform locally. I joined another performance dance company and participated in a intergenerational dance project. Work activities included advising, networking and boundary spanning (Williams 2002, 2010), and I gave a presentation to the London Intergenerational Network. By attending and/or presenting at relevant seminars and forums, I was learning more, participating in joint-working and collaborating with others, as well as promoting older people's dance. I attended the first meeting of the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP)/Age Action Alliance (AAA) older people and creative arts working group in March 2014 where I contributed ideas, dialoguing with people from large arts organisations. I felt confident because I had expertise about ageing and arts from my desktop research, experience, and various seminars and conferences I was attending. I was invited to co-chair this group in July 2014.

Phase 4: September 2014 – February 2016.

During this final phase I continued dancing and work activities. I realised my research and interests were at the crest of a growing wave of interest. A new social phenomenon: older people dancing, a growing community of older dancers, were emerging and increasing interest in the ageing population. My work included being asked to give presentations about my research at the first TEDx Tottenham conference and continuing to co-chair DWP/AAA creative arts and older people group. The company I danced with performed at the Sadler's Wells first Elixir Festival. A conference about older dancers complemented the festival. This indicated that older adults' dance activities were being taken more seriously.

In central London, conferences and seminars were held giving new insights about ways government departments and large organisations from different sectors were exploring collaborating and working together. For example: The "Public Wisdom" conference (2015) about the ageing population, built environment and the Arts; and Centre for Positive Ageing "Redefining Ageing" Conference (2014). An industry-wide dance conference "The Future: New Ideas, New Inspirations" (2015) indicated new collaborations were happening within the dance world. My ideas were connecting with related ideas in wider academic and political/social contexts (Murray 2011). This reflexivity enhanced and informed my research and work practice. I was experiencing transformational learning. As an autonomous thinker, my new work was affecting my thoughts and feelings and changing my points of view (Mezirow 1997).

Although there was no agreed terminology for "active older people" or "active older people's creative dance" and little research directly about them, there were lots of research topics related to them and I needed to research these but not become overwhelmed. I learned about Transdisciplinarity (Gibbs and Maguire 2015, Nicolescu 2008) and recognised that this approach would enable me to research the complexities of the challenge I had set myself. I realised my understanding about ageing, social participation and creative dance were now different from when I set out. I had to capture the boundaries for my research.

It took longer than expected to interweave and pull the aspects of the research together, but some important innovative developments were aligning. My ideas were triangulating with realities happening in the outside world. Issues about active older people were now being addressed within social gerontology and Sadler's Wells Elixir Festival and Conference addressed issues concerning older people's dance as an expressive artform.

My theoretical understanding as well as my practical work experience was increasing. For example, I participated in a workshop where health professionals and young choreographers attended. Some delegates were surprised older people could easily get up from the floor and move around in space proficiently, with expression. Professionals' perceptions and negative stereotypes about "the elderly" were challenged. Older people's dance did not only have to be fun, gentle repetitive exercises.

Analysis using a case study approach with Transdisciplinarity.

I experienced strong concept threshold blocks (Mewburn 2012). It was suggested by my academic consultant that a case study approach might be useful. I researched this and found that an exploratory case study (Yin 2014) would enable me to pull together all my varied data analysis and evidence. I produced a protocol that helped me to reflect on my research achievements so far. This exploratory case study approach enabled transdisciplinarity to be incorporated. I could interweave across and through different academic disciplines and work sectors. I wanted to include new work and dance activities but also set boundaries. For example, there was growing interest about dance and dementia, obesity and Parkinson's (and other clusters and combinations) but these went beyond the boundaries of creative, contemporary dance for healthy active older people.

The research methods became: Phenomenological in-depth interviews with older dancers; interpreting data from conversations with some leading practitioners and decision-makers; narrative, reflective journals, auto-ethnography from my work practice and interests; and desk-top research including on-line research as well as books and journals.

The external world was changing. I wanted my research to reflect what was happening and include what I was involved in. This reflexive approach with transdisciplinarity made my research dynamic, relevant and kept me motivated and engaged in what became a long, analytic, interpretative process.
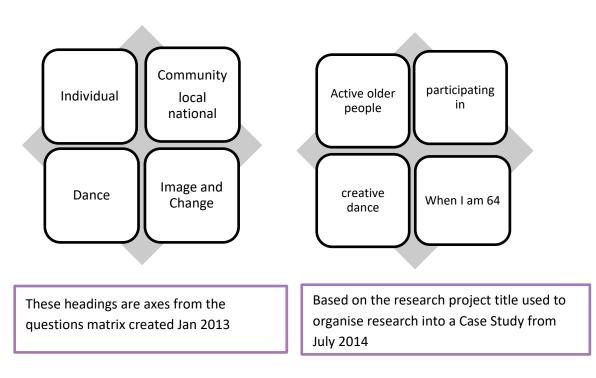
Increasingly, intertwining topics had to be honed and prioritised. The solution was staring at me. The axes headings from January 2013 questions matrix were directly related to each section of the research project title: Individuals to active older people; Dance to creative dance, local/national to participating; Image and change to When I am 64. This was a Eureka moment.   See Figure 1 below.

The research title could underpin and structure the whole research project and act as another underpinning structural tool, complementing my other models, tools, tables and matrixes. This insight assisted analysing and writing up my report; enabling me to think in new ways to analyse and synthesise data and evidence and structure the writing-up of the Final Report.

Figure 1

FROM   **TO**

Individual	Community local national
Dance	Image and Change

Active older people	participating in
creative dance	When I am 64

These headings are axes from the questions matrix created Jan 2013

Based on the research project title used to organise research into a Case Study from July 2014

A final tweak was required; it was useful to focus my research by amending "When I'm 64" to "challenging perceptions" which better incorporated "images and change" and rightly enabled more than baby-boomers to be included. The case study research project title and the final DProf report title therefore became:

"Active Older People Participating in Creative Dance – Challenging Perceptions"

The underpinning main question from the research question matrix created earlier as included in Phase 3 above continued.

I needed time to incubate and think through ideas at deep levels. This involved analysis, interpretation, honing and merging topics so that a coherent report could be written up.

I created a main template and completed a separate one for six main themes: Active older people; Dance; Community participation (local, national, international); Challenging perceptions; Work based experience; and Connectedness, spirituality, creativity. This enabled topics and themes from interviews coded using NVivo 10 or gathered over time from other evidence data and research (inductive/ deductive) to be entered onto relevant templates for further analysis, interpretation and synthesis. I collated and honed down the topics further, keeping in mind the new research project title.

The next step was to create a final matrix. I knew it would be impossible to include all the themes listed in the six templates. Most were relevant, interesting and/or important, but I had to create boundaries, considering what was most useful and directly relevant to meet my aims, to be the best contribution and influence those interested in ageing and active older people's dance as well as the university word-count It was impossible to include everything; for example, the topics about Relationships and Friendships were important and emerged from the research data and themes. I decided further research could be carried out by others as this is such a huge, important area for research in its own right and my own reservations about researching Friendships (See Ethical Issues) .

I had many ideas from my past, intermingling with new evidence and data I captured through my research. A final two-dimensional matrix enabled my analysis and interpretation to proceed and made writing up manageable. Bazeley (2013) suggests a researcher becomes a theory builder, identifying and making sense of all the patterns and relationships from their data and experience. The completed templates demonstrated how themes linked back to my research questions, and tools I had devised. The final matrix enabled the highest priority topics to be identified for inclusion in the Final Report. The findings, discussion, recommendations, looking forward and conclusions could now be written up with confidence and authority to produce a coherent, fit-for-purpose DProf report.

It is worth noting that writing transdisciplinary work-based research is challenging. The complexity and clustering of the topics and my work activities needed to be tackled head-on rather than playing safe and concentrating just on my original research design. Gibbs (2015), citing Maguire's research on 50 professional doctorates in one institution, found frequently the methodology used did not capture the richness of problems. Candidates used qualitative approaches and lacked critical realism. They were not using transdisciplinary approaches and were playing safe with qualitative research. This links directly with Silverman's (2007, 2012) complaints about researchers only using qualitative interviews. These concerns align with my own experience of producing a doctoral report. I wanted to adapt my methodological approaches and research design so that my report critically reflected my experiences and research activities that happened in real time and not just concentrate on data and findings from qualitative interviews.

During 2016, I submitted my research report, had a successful viva and then worked on my conditions. I continued to synthesise, hone, refine and cross-reference my report. I graduated in December 2017, awarded my doctorate in February 2018 and was delighted and surprised to win the university's Ken Goulding prize for Excellence in August 2018.

Summary of some benefits and implications of active older people becoming involved in creative dance.

One of the main reasons I left fulltime work was to return to dancing. For me, it is a life enhancing activity that I enjoyed, I wanted it to be part of my life again. I knew my life would benefit from my dancing. I wanted to research why other active older people were choosing to dance at this stage of their lives. All interviewees were regular participants attending sessions whenever they could. Although they came from different backgrounds and had different lifestyles, all considered dance sessions added quality to their lives. Benefits included increased body awareness and better physical health. It did not matter what you wore or how you looked, (unlike when visiting a gym) and a welcoming, non-judgemental environment was appreciated. Dance tasks encourage participants to explore ideas in new ways and this is challenging and enjoyable, helping to develop better memory. Some participants welcomed opportunities to be creative, expressive, imaginative and these new experiences enabled them to become more confident and increased self-esteem. Everyone enjoyed dancing to a range of music. Sessions were friendly, bringing people together from different backgrounds who were sharing a common interest. They danced together and often stayed for refreshments afterwards encouraging friendships to develop naturally. Whilst enjoying socialising they found they had other interests and issues in common. Dancing enable feelings of freedom, joy and connectedness to emerge. It can be thrilling, enabling participants to forget other issues in their lives. It is a chance to live "in the moment".

Spirituality is developed through relationships and creativity and this encourages increased peace, harmony and wellbeing (King 2009). Several interviewees mentioned dancing encouraged the integration of mind, body, emotions and spirituality and this enhanced their health and wellbeing and they felt more connected to others.

Some interviewees enjoyed opportunities to perform, attending different sessions, workshops and projects whilst others preferred the process of dancing and did not wish to perform.

Interviewees' dance capabilities developed by attending regular sessions designed for them rather than for young dancers. However, some interviewees also enjoyed participating in intergenerational activities.

Some interviewees had danced when they were younger whilst for others it was a new experience. They enjoyed the challenge and were learning more as well as experiencing benefits. For most, it was a surprise to be involved in dance activities at this stage of their lives. They appreciated dance facilitators/artists who were choosing to work with them. Regular dance sessions gave structure to their week and encouraged them to see their lives in different ways. This helped decision-making about what else they wanted to do. They saw dance as a life-enhancing activity and wanted to integrate it into their lives with other activities such as caring for grandchildren, travelling, paid work and volunteering. Facilitators needed to be participant-centred, aware of the dancers' physical and cognitive capabilities and let go of their preconceived assumptions about older people. Older dancers were like other adults. Each person has different capabilities and needs. Good sessions included fun, laughs and joy. Several interviewees mentioned they welcomed not having to memorise precise set sequences. However, others enjoyed the challenge of learning choreographed sequences and working towards performances where they needed to perform group pieces precisely.

We are living in an ageist society where to be older often means becoming more marginalised. There is not yet sufficient terminology to describe different cohorts of people in the second stage of life (Cohen 2005). Older people need choices. Fortunately, there are growing demands for older adults' dance and an emerging community of older dancers; more dance festivals and more intergenerational opportunities. Also, increased awareness that dance can be positive and encourages social participation, friendship, better health and wellbeing, creativity and meaning and contributes to the cultural wellbeing of communities.

The Recommendations

The Final Report came together in original, interesting ways. It reflected what I had achieved and ways my research was conducted. There were 15 findings and 10 recommendations that were directly cross-referenced to research data analysis. The recommendations and ways to look forward flowed coherently from my findings, the social/political context and the aims, objectives and goals of my research.

The following recommendations flowed directly from the findings.

1. Continue to actively challenge ageism.

Ageism affects everyone and is now actively being challenged. New perceptions and attitudes about the second half of life are needed. Retirement, as previously experienced is disappearing and there are new expectations emerging from active older people themselves and from decision/policymakers. Cohen (2000, 2005) suggests present decisions are being created based on research statistics that no longer reflect the capabilities and aspirations of many people who previously were classified as one cohort called "retired" or "old age pensioners". Positive, realistic terminology and images are required so individuals' aspirations and capabilities as well as their needs and limitations are acknowledged. Inequalities and power relations need to be addressed so that younger and older people can be hopeful and realistic about their future lives. Ageism must continue to be challenged.

2. As other cohorts, active older people should be respected as individuals with preferences, different lifestyles, responsibilities and needs.

Older people are not a single cohort. Everyone should be part of society and not be marginalised or isolated and many contribute to society. Each person has their own narrative, history and aspirations. Large and small-scale research need to explore the experiences and knowledge of older people and not treat them as a single group.

3. *"Active older people's creative dance" should become a mainstream dance activity.*

All kinds of dance need to be encouraged. It should be commonplace for different dance activities to be accessible, affordable and safe. Provision needs to be offered across the UK. Creative dance benefits the whole person. It is enjoyable, encourages artistic expression, creativity and dancing with others, as well as being a physical activity. It can be a choice for active older people. More dance facilitators will require training and career development including leadership and facilitation skills, awareness of their own internalised stereotyping and limiting assumptions concerning the ageing body and active older people's dance capabilities. Dance sessions should be welcoming, where creative activities are encouraged, participants feel secure, relaxed and respected and can use their energy, emotions and ideas in different ways. Older dancers can develop their dancing capabilities over time if there are opportunities to attend regular sessions.

4. *Dance should be taken seriously by decision/policymakers and strategic planners because it can contribute to arts and culture, health and wellbeing in later life.*

Dance is life enhancing, benefits individuals and society and should be available for children and adults throughout their lives. It can be a cost-effective way of keeping people active, healthy and participating in their communities especially as it enables people to pursue a common interest, develop friendships and increases understanding between people from different backgrounds.

5. *Different sections of the dance world should continue collaborating and working together to develop a stronger voice*

Dance needs to be taken seriously within the cultural life of nations and communities. This involves more joined-up thinking and blurring of previous demarcations, boundary spanning with colleagues from different factions within the dance world and with people from other sectors and different organisations such as health and wellbeing, sports and leisure, arts and

culture. This requires trust, goodwill, new ways of communicating, resources and support, changing attitudes and breaking down unnecessary barriers.

6. *More age-friendly environments need to be created.*

More age friendly physical, social and cultural environments need development. Planners, policy/decision-makers, artists and others can provide all ages with safe, accessible environments where they can participate in the life of their communities/neighbourhoods. The Age Friendly City Movement in the UK encourages inclusive cultures and respect for different lifestyles. Unnecessary barriers such as age limits, lack of provision or ageist attitudes prevent older people getting involved. Accessible venues and spaces, transport and affordable activities are needed for this to happen. My research showed that "active older people's creative dance" can contribute whether age/peer specific or intergenerational. The same applies for other participatory arts, sports and leisure activities. Working and volunteering activities are important for some older people. Local authorities, other policy-makers and funders need to recognise the importance of community spaces and cultural facilities to support community and voluntary groups providing cultural and arts activities with and for older people, their families and communities. Innovative ways to bring people purposefully together can be created at this time of rapid change and less resources.

7. *Independent dance-artists and grassroots organisations offering dance need support and recognition including access to funding and other resources.*

Dance activities should be incorporated into overall neighbourhood, regional and national development strategic plans for culture and leisure, health and wellbeing, regeneration and age friendly environments. Collaborations for mutual benefit should be encouraged, including ways larger organisations can cascade information and resources down to smaller, grassroots organisations. Small, independent dance organisations and independent dance-artists might benefit from working in collaboration with other arts organisations and community centres, especially when applying for funding so their work becomes sustainable.

8. **Boundary spanning skills and joined-up thinking benefit different organisations to meet 21st century challenges.**

More training and practical experience is required for those working in large and small organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors including arts and community organisations and academic institutions. Representatives from various organisations need to communicate and dialogue with others to find new ways to problem-solve, learn and share ideas. Trust, respect, encouragement, support and diverse ideas are needed. Different perspectives and ideas can be recognised and exist together rather than there being a right or wrong way. This will encourage more innovation, transdisciplinarity and new solutions.

9. Older people's dance and performance can contribute towards challenging perceptions.

Dance challenges perceptions and stereotypes that everyone has internalised or have seen in the media as we still live in an ageist society. This did change to some extent during my research as more older people were seen in films and on television leading normal lives. There are increasing opportunities for older people to dance publicly. "Active older people's creative dance" is a way to challenge ageism and decline. All bodies age and move differently during the life-course. Older people's bodies do not have to be invisible. They can be expressive, interesting and artistic. My research showed that often younger people are inspired by older people's creative dance; it gives them hope for their futures. Intergenerational activities can be mutually beneficial, promoting understanding, friendships and social cohesion. However, when older people want to develop their dance capabilities many prefer dancing in sessions specifically devised for them. Choices are needed and a wide range of dance styles available. If older people are seen actively involved in their communities, this also challenges perceptions because they are included, not marginalised or invisible.

10. Dance encourages connectedness and spirituality in its widest sense; bringing people together.

Policy/decision makers should recognise dance contributes to society; giving feelings of joy, freedom, friendship and empathy, providing opportunities for better health, wellbeing and cultural activities. Different dance activities can bring meaning and purpose to people's lives, encouraging social participation and audiences. Dance keeps children and adults of all ages active and engaged. Dance is an art form and a good social and economic investment contributing to creating a better world.

Discussion

When I began the DProf programme, I was in awe of academia, but I became more realistic. I was on a sharp learning curve, initially lacking the knowledge and confidence to know what I was supposed to be doing. My confidence increased as I spent time learning about research methodology, determined to carry out transparent work-based research that had firm structures and boundaries. My own voice and confidence strengthened as a researcher, an older dancer, older learner and boundary spanner.

Participating in my DProf was worthwhile although sometimes difficult and demanding. I was adaptable, open to ideas and brought my research to life, incorporating knowledge from desktop research, the voices of other active older dancers, illustrations and my work practice. I was analytical and creative, experimenting with ways to communicate effectively. Most of the time I was writing and studying alone. This was difficult for me as I am a "people-person" who enjoys sharing, arguing and analysing face-to-face with others. I enjoyed successfully interviewing older dancers and having conversations with leading practitioners/decision-makers. I experienced optimum Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002) when totally absorbed in learning through texts and reports and analysing and interpreting all the data and evidence and writing up and editing my Report. This brought me much satisfaction and enjoyment. As does my dancing with others.

My research processes showed it was possible to scope widely, sometimes deeply depending on the topic. What I was directly researching had no agreed, established terminology when I began my research but new practices and interest in active older people and older people's creative dance increased over time. What started as personal interests began rising up social and political agendas.

New knowledge and solutions emerged by clustering, interpreting, synthesising theories and ideas, weaving around and through different disciplines, reports and practice. Carrying out research with transdisciplinarity was demanding, especially as topics came together gradually. The process could not be rushed. I remained focussed and motivated even when it

seemed there was no end in sight. I experimented with ways to draft, re-draft and hone ideas. Knowledge could be interpreted and synthesised in different clusters, enabling findings and recommendations to be created. My exploratory case study approach pulled aspects of my research together. Finally, my report became coherent and showed that a time-consuming, complex creative work-based research report could be fit-for-purpose if iterative as well as linear pathways were used and underpinned by effective analytical tools and frameworks.

I made enough time to seek-out and learn about potential research methodological approaches, selecting the most useful and not being afraid to discard those that were no longer applicable. This enabled a unique robust research design to emerge. It was important to remain open-minded and not presume outcomes too quickly. Sound decisions about what was applicable and beneficial emerged gradually. Findings and recommendations could then be identified. I experimented and juxtaposed ideas, edited, honed using different perspectives. It was important to take risks and not panic when difficulties arose. I worked with uncertainties achieving creative results that can make useful, realistic contributions.

I spent increasing amounts of time on research activities. There was a dilemma, I could not spread my myself too thinly. I recognised my work activities and research impacted on each other reflexively. I reflected and captured what were priorities and important for my research, work and life generally. I made boundaries about the activities I would become involved in, enabling my time and energy to be used effectively. I was increasingly busy and made sure I did not become overwhelmed. Bannerman (2009) suggests there is an "emergent premise" to creative work that often involves "recognition" the collision of the rational and the intuitive. He argues artists rely on their intuitive processes whilst working, and it has importance in everyday life. This was an interesting theory for understanding my writing process, bringing analysis and interpretations together. Writing the Final Report was definitely a creative process as well as an analytical one. I relied upon intuition, previous and current knowledge and new learning. I could have remained safe and stuck to the original mixed-methodological approach but I wanted my work-based research to include my work-based activities and be a trustworthy contribution.

Contributions to Practice

Multidisciplinary topics included ageing, dance, participating in and promoting positive images of older people, connectedness and joy, community development at local and national levels. My ideas were triangulating with reality. My theoretical understanding as well as my work experience grew. I became a confident, authoritative researcher, an older dancer as well as advising and networking with others. Professionals' perceptions and negative stereotypes about "the elderly" were being challenged. My research was timely. Government and policy makers were thinking of new ways to deal with changes in society including ways to address an ageing population and social issues such as loneliness, obesity, and health issues such as dementia, fall prevention and Parkinson's. The benefits and links between health, arts and wellbeing were being recognised. More art activities, including dance being an art-form, for all ages are being considered more seriously. New collaborations between people from different sectors and academic disciplines are being encouraged. These and other social and political issues influenced my research. Many active older people want to dance as they enjoyed dancing when they were younger, for others they dreamt about dancing when young and now have time to dance or it is a totally new interest. Media is having to readjust stereotypes and negative images of older people and popular television programmes involving dance are raising its profile and increasing demand for more dance activities.

After I was awarded my DProf, I decided it was unlikely I would become a fulltime academic studying alone and spending huge amounts of time in front of a computer. However, I wanted to share my research knowledge and my growing authority and make positive contributions. I am continuing to "see what life brings" and added a new perspective "take each day as it comes and live life to the full!".

The Power of Research

Since gaining my DProf, work, dancing activities and life generally are interesting and busy. I have continued to attend Vivacity dance sessions, (I handed over the management and organisation to the young dance-artist, in the final stages of writing up my report). I continue to be in the performance dance company. I have been a presenter at two conference roundtables about older people and dancing, giving me opportunities to inspire and

encourage dance facilitators and lecturers to confidently offer dance sessions for older people, inform them about the benefits of dance when it is incorporated into everyone's lives, especially older people's. I have written articles about my DProf findings and recommendations in several professional magazines. I became a volunteer advisor for Age UK London Project "Age Allies", supporting the Project Manager creating and delivering workshops for organisations. This project has worked across London to facilitate positive change and attitudes to age and ageing including encouraging organisations to become more age friendly. My recent dance performances have included performing in some videos which are now on You-Tube showing ways older people can dance in expressive and meaningful ways and these have surprised younger people, so challenging perceptions about the capabilities of older people. I have played a key role in the local Dance Forum and liaised with a local Public Health Commissioner and encouraged members of the forum to work together for mutual benefit.

I was delighted to be invited to be the plenary speaker at the Post-graduate Summer Research Conference 2019 at Middlesex University. The theme was "Power of Research – community and the impact of disruptive ideas" My presentation was well received by students and academic staff. It included ways I had worked since leaving my fulltime career and how this was similar to the ways younger people starting on their careers might work in the future as career/work patterns change; my work activities during my research and afterwards, ways using interdisciplinary approaches benefits research activity and brings coherence to create new knowledge. I outlined ways my research included disruptive ideas about ageing and dance activities for active older people indicating that increasingly they should not be marginalised or invisible. At the end of my presentation I invited everyone to dance. I gave them a simple dance task framework and lively music was played and the presentation finished with high energy and joy!

Conclusions

Had I a different mindset when I left fulltime work, my life would have been influenced by my thinking such as I was retired and should take life easy, look forward to gardening, participating in a little volunteering and gentle exercise, perhaps travel, have fun and look

forward to grandchildren. This was the stereotype in 2008 and still exists! There is increased awareness and new opportunities, but a great deal more needs to be done. Many active older people are challenging perceptions of what it means to be older in the 21st century. Decision/policy makers are realising they need to consult older people about issues and provision that affect them. Individuals will benefit if they gain knowledge and skills, remain independent and lead healthier lives; many want to continue working and contribute in different ways. We are social beings and friendships and connectedness are important. Dance activities, when accessible, enable individuals to be culturally involved, remain healthier and society and communities benefit.

Research and practice going forward

The doctorate programme was a huge challenge. It has given me confidence to speak with authority about active older people dancing and ageing. Since leaving fulltime work I have successfully taken my previous knowledge and work practice in new directions that I could not have imagined when I began. Through my DProf programme I had opportunities to learn about interesting, relevant topics. I stayed on track, even though the research activities took longer than expected. I remained calm and determined. My inner self never doubted that I could learn from others' theories and ideas and apply them. There were blocks along the way when I thought I could not continue but I successfully achieved my DProf and now confidently share my new knowledge and expertise.

I have become an older dancer rather than an adult wanting to return to dancing and successfully achieved a diverse range of work activities through participating in interesting projects and working groups. My positive work collaborations have been appreciated by others and I am delighted that Vivacity and the Community Choir continue to flourish. I enjoyed participating in university seminars and conferences and appreciated learning from academic staff and fellow students.

I have shown work-based doctorates can be achieved by people who are working alone with limited resources at a late career stage where work itself is uncertain and they have busy lives with differing responsibilities. As an older person, I succeeded in taming the complexities of

my work-based doctorate, being creative, committed and adaptable. At times, I wondered if I had made a huge mistake and should have stuck to my initial design. I have no regrets because the results have gone far beyond my expectations and I am proud of my work-based research and gaining a doctorate. My DProf programme was a transformational experience and has benefitted others as well as myself. I created a wide ranging, interesting research Final Report that met academic requirements and hopefully will contribute to others' work in the future.

My Report is an example to others who want to challenge themselves to carry out transdisciplinary work-based research. I steered my research through all its complexities. The eventual design was a multi-methodological, multidisciplinary/transdisciplinary exploratory case study with strong underpinning structures. A meaningful, informative, robust Final Report was created. Others will need to create their own research designs to produce their unique doctorates that benefit others as well as themselves.

I am now proceeding through another personal transition because when I was finalising my research submission in 2016, I became a grandparent and I love this new role. This wonderful experience with the completion of my research report ended my academic experience with heightened joy, new aspirations and hope for the future.

Sharing ideas

I will continue to "see what life brings" and hope to disseminate my new knowledge, continue dancing and prioritise competing priorities and share my passion and enthusiasm. I want to use my skills, expertise and time to best effect. There will be new priorities between family, dancing, work activities, disseminating my research, travelling, interests and volunteering. This reflects findings from my DProf research and what I learned about ageing in the 21st century.

I benefitted from participating in doctoral higher learning and carrying out work-based research. I feel confident sharing my research Report with others, accepting they may have different views from mine. I will continue the final stage of my professional journey boundary

spanning, networking, learning and dancing for as long as I can. I recognise there are global and national issues affecting the future and some of them are negative. I am aware that others, whatever their age, are not as fortunate as I am. Support, encouragement and resources to meet their circumstances need to be addressed. The only hope is that everyone of goodwill can lead positive meaningful lives for themselves, their families, communities and future generations.

More Dance! Towards peace and a better world!

I welcome readers to gain further insights into my research by reading my full research Report

Http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/23514

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Table 1 Interviewees (Self-Defined)

No		G	Age	Ethnicity/ Background	Present Location	Work Present/past	Status	Education qualifications
1		F	72	White Anglo-Saxon Protestant From USA	North London (urban)	Part-time psychotherapist. Previously family psychologist	Married Mother Grandparent	HE and Professional qualifications
2		F	65	White Caucasian Ukrainian extraction, Jewish	Home Counties (Town)	Retired Developing new art business. Previously property solicitor, secretary in law firms	Single following divorce Mother grandparent	O levels Left school at 16, later HE and professional qualification
3		F	65	British English with mixed background	East London (suburban)	Retired Previously: Civil servant Nurse	Married Mother Cared for older relatives	College Professional qualifications
4		F	79	White Caucasian, English	Outskirts SW city (rural)	Early career "Librarian" and sales in a retail chain. Left paid work on marriage	Married	Left grammar school at 16
5		M	67	White Anglo-Saxon	South London (urban)	Retired but occasionally doing IT and website work. Previously: telecoms, mime artist, kitchen fitter	Married Father Grandparent	GCE standard Vocational qualification and OU courses.
6		F	82	White Roman Catholic, British-Italian	North London (urban)	Retired Before marriage: waitress in family business. No paid work after marriage	Widow Mother Grandparent	Basic education evacuee during WW2.
7		F	66	British White, middle class Anglo-Saxon	Recently moved from SW town to SW city centre	Having gap year Previously nurse, university lecturer Been therapist for a few years	Widow Mother Grandparent	HE and professional qualifications
8		M	75	Chinese from Singapore, now Londoner	North London (urban)	Head of after-school education franchise Previously: engineer	Father Married	Polytechnic engineering, maths
9		F	63	Black Jamaican British	North London (Suburban)	Retired from prison service - health care assistant & phlebotomist. Previously: part-time jobs including care assistant, school cleaner, playgroup worker, factory-work, sewing machinist	Married Mother Grandparent Foster carer	Basic education and vocational training
10		F	64	White European	SW city within city walls and edge of countryside	Retired Previously NHS civil servant, front desk work, Now working part-time from previously fulltime	Single	Secondary education
11		F	58	Turkish Cypriot	North London Borough (urban)	Pt-time school breakfast club organiser/special needs assistant. Previously: child-minder, sewing machinist Worked on family farm prior to marriage.	Married Mother Grandmother	Basic education Left school at twelve