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**ELLEN STEINMÜLLER**

# **Lives Transformed Through Dance**

**A Theoretical Foundation of  
the Dance United Methodology**

# Lives Transformed Through Dance

## A Theoretical Foundation of the Dance United Methodology

Inaugural-Dissertation  
zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie  
der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

vorgelegt von  
Ellen Steinmüller  
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Ellen Steinmüller

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Ellen Steinmüller



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Dedicated to  
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*No man is an island,  
Entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
John Donne*

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# I Introduction

*All dances make a statement and begin with the question, what do I want to say in this dance? In much the same way, the qualitative researcher begins with a similar question: What do I want to know in this study? (Janesick, 1994, p. 210).*

My doctoral research views dance, particularly contemporary dance, as a powerful catalyst for personal and social transformative change. From this perspective, I scholarly examine the Methodology<sup>1</sup> of Dance United as a unique case of community dance practice in the social inclusion<sup>2</sup> sector. As a framework of practice, it engages vulnerable and socially excluded populations such as at-risk youth, people in the criminal justice system, and individuals experiencing mental health conditions in intensive, performance-led contemporary dance programmes. By bridging artistic and social practices, it fosters artistic innovation while instigating processes of personal development and social empowerment. Over time, the company's distinct way of working has been captured in a written framework of key features and principles. Numerous studies have documented and evidenced the positive and often life-changing outcomes of the work (Dance United, 2014c; Miles & Strauss, 2008; Optimity Advisors, 2016; van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 70-72). Despite this extensive evidence of impact, the Methodology as a framework of practice has never been empirically investigated or analysed to establish a theoretical foundation of its core concepts.

1 The term "Methodology" used in this context is understood as a set of methods constituting a framework of practice. This is in line with Dance United's use of the term for internal and external communications (see V.1). To avoid confusion with the research methodology applied, the term is capitalised when describing the specific approach employed by Dance United.

2 The term "social inclusion" used in this context is understood through its socio-political application in the United Kingdom, specifically within the Labour government welfare reforms from 1997 onwards. For a comprehensive summary of these policies as a whole, see Powell (2000). Chapter III provides a detailed definition of the term.

My doctoral thesis endeavours to close this research gap by identifying the core concepts of the Methodology and establishing their dynamic interrelationships in a theoretical model. By linking this to relevant existing theories, I achieve the envisaged theoretical foundation of the approach. My research not only strengthens the Methodology and its practical application but also provides an exploratory contribution to theory development in community dance, validating its potential as a catalyst for personal and social transformation.

The following chapter provides an introductory overview of my doctoral study. Firstly, I discuss its foundational background and context, followed by the research problem and gap it addresses along with the research aims, objectives and questions it sets. I conclude with its significance and relevance, as well as its limitations (see I.1). Secondly, I outline my personal perspective and motivation for conducting this research (see I.2). I have worked for the company for several years, gaining considerable experience of the Methodology in action. This has not only shaped my understanding of the approach but also fundamentally influenced my professional identity and biography.

## 1 Overview

All of my professional practice is underpinned by a foundational conviction about the transformative power of dance. It fuelled my performance work as a contemporary dancer, motivated my training and practice as a dance movement psychotherapist, and brought me to becoming a community dance artist and choreographer. Throughout my career path, I have been privileged to support a multitude of learning journeys towards the realisation of potential, lighting sparks of confidence and sowing seeds of self-belief through my passion for dance. The opportunity to accompany individuals throughout processes of self-discovery and self-realisation remains a constant source of professional inspiration and fulfilment for me. As I have previously reflected (Steinmüller, 2023, p. 76), nowhere have I witnessed this transformative potential of dance more fully realised in embodied action than in my work with the pioneering organisation Dance United.

Though formerly established in 2000, Dance United's roots extend back to the mid-1990s, when a collaborative performance project with 120 street and working children brought together its founding members: Andrew Coggins, a TV producer; Royston Maldoom, a British dance artist and choreographer; and his colleague Mags Byrne, a dancer, choreographer, and teacher (Maldoom, 2010, pp. 211-231). In its early years, the work of the company concentrated on international projects, initiatives to foster community cohesion in Northern Ireland, and programmes within the criminal justice system in England. What began as project-based work in prisons gradually developed into more sustained provisions for young people on parole, resulting in the launch of the Academy Programme in Bradford in 2005, which subsequently extended to Winchester and London. In later years, the company further broadened its activities to include the mental health sector. Despite its proven success rate and track record evidenced by evaluations and research (see IV.2), Dance United ceased operations in 2014 due to funding challenges.

Motivated by substantial impact evaluation on the Academy Programme (Miles & Strauss, 2008), the organisation formalised its approach into the Dance United Methodology as written documents, with an aim to acquire essential funding, as well as to build networks, partnerships, and training for artists. The Methodology encompasses a catalogue of specific proactive strategies and key features, guiding the artistic development, planning, and delivery process. Although not unique or necessarily novel, in its entirety it describes a specific and pioneering approach of engaging marginalised and vulnerable populations in a process of intensive contemporary dance training and performance, realising the company's core aim "to advance dance as a tool for personal development and social change" (Dance United, 2003, p. 3).

Throughout their operations, Dance United consistently engaged in evaluations of the effects of their work on participants, social context, and even its wider socio-economic impact (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 70-72). Despite the substantial body of evidence supporting the approach's effectiveness, the company never conducted a thorough scholarly examination to establish a theoretical foundation of the Methodology. This lack of theoretical underpinning is mirrored within

the wider sector of community dance. Although substantial effort to develop comprehensive professional frameworks, standards, and qualifications of practice is evident within community dance practice in the UK (Bartlett, 2006; Bartlett & Stenton, 2008, 2009; Craddock & Willmore, 2011; Leatherdale & Stenton, 2024), the professional field generally lacks a theory base. As Sheppard and Broughton (2020) identified in their recent systematic literature review on applications within the health and wellbeing sector, “the current body of literature lacks clear theoretical bases and consistent methodological approaches” (p. 15). Due to its written formalisation and robust research base, the Dance United Methodology offers such a consistent framework of practice and thus a unique opportunity to examine and develop possible theoretical underpinnings.

Consequently, the primary aim of my doctoral research study is to establish a theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology. In order to accomplish this, I pursue the following objectives. Firstly, I unveil implicit values, principles, and key characteristics of the Dance United Methodology, explicitly identifying its core concepts using data from both its written formalisation and expert interviews with relevant stakeholders. Secondly, by analysing the interrelationships of the core concepts, I develop a theoretical model that is subsequently related to existing relevant theory. I achieve this through applying a robust qualitative research process embedded in the overall research design of a case study. This enables me to present a thorough theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology, providing an explorative contribution to community dance theory in general and its practice in the social inclusion sector in particular.

In close relation to my research aims and objectives, my research process is guided by the following questions. My primary research question concerns the overall purpose and asks: what is the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology? My secondary research questions align with my underlying goals. In asking what the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology are and how the core concepts relate to each other, I achieve a heuristic approximation of theoretically conceptualising this specific approach. The question of what meaningful links exist between the core concepts of the Dance United Method-

ology and relevant existing theory allows me to embed this conceptualisation in its theoretical situatedness.

Especially in light of the overt lack of a coherent theory base in community dance, my doctoral research constitutes a vital contribution to the field. While Dance United's work has been robustly documented and evaluated for its impact, my research addresses the gap of a missing comprehensive theoretical analysis. By identifying, conceptualising, and theoretically embedding the core concepts that define the Methodology, I strengthen the approach and inform its practical applications. I contribute to the broader field of community dance by developing a theoretical foundation of a successful and impactful way of working, which potentially serves as a framework for future studies and professional practice development in the sector, particularly in the social inclusion context. Through my examination of Dance United's Methodology, I bridge practical dance provisions and academic theory, enriching both areas and fostering a closer exchange between the two.

Although my research holds considerable potential to make the above contributions, it is important to also acknowledge its limitations. While centring my research on the specific case of the Dance United Methodology provides depth to my analysis, it may limit the generalisability and transferability of my findings to the wide, diverse and complex field of community dance practices. This, in turn, may constrain the breadth of my theoretical contributions to the field. Additionally, the mostly retrospective<sup>3</sup> and subjective nature of my data affects the objectivity of my findings. This potential introduction of bias is further heightened by my professional involvement with the company. I endeavour to address these concerns through academic rigour by applying a robust research design and process, acknowledging the boundaries of my research, situating my findings within the specific context of Dance United, and ensuring transparency by reflecting on how my personal perspective and involvement may shape the findings.

<sup>3</sup> Since Dance United ceased its operations in 2014, I rely mostly on historical data and documentation. Apart from Helen Linsell, the Artistic Director of Dance United Yorkshire, and the founding members Royston Maldoom and Mags Byrne, who discuss their current practical implementation of the approach, all interviewees rely on their memories of their experiences with the work.

After providing a foundational understanding of my research process, including my personal epistemological position, in this chapter, I proceed to outline my research methodology in Chapter II, comprised of three sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter provides a thorough description and extensive rationale for employing a case study design. The second sub-chapter offers a comprehensive overview of each step of the research process. I conclude this discussion with the third sub-chapter, outlining the applied data validation strategies and ethical considerations.

Chapter III contextualises the unique case of Dance United within the practice context of community dance in the United Kingdom. As the work of Dance United specifically serves marginalised and vulnerable populations, I focus this discussion on practice within the social inclusion sector, with a particular emphasis on existing methods and principles of best practice. This not only situates my case within its practice field but also establishes the appropriate context and reference point for my research.

Chapter IV provides a comprehensive account of the work of Dance United. By describing of the company's historical development alongside the evolution of its engagement with evaluation and research, I extensively define the specificities of the case as the object of my research and thus define the distinct boundaries around my case.

In Chapter V, I present the results of my empirical research process. As I work within the epistemological premise of constructivism, it is vital to first establish a working definition of the Dance United Methodology. I proceed by separately presenting my findings regarding the core concepts of the Methodology from the document data and the interview data.

Chapter VI is concerned with establishing a theoretical foundation for the Methodology. To achieve this, I first integrate my findings from documents and interviews into a holistic understanding of each core concept. I then develop a theoretical model of the Methodology in its entirety by setting these into dynamic relation with each other. Building relationships between my theoretical model and relevant existing theory constitutes the final step in providing a theoretical foundation for the approach.

Chapter VII discusses my findings as contributions to theory and practice, relating them to a tentative exploration of wider applications beyond the boundaries of my case to community dance, particularly within the social inclusion sector. My doctoral thesis concludes with Chapter VIII, which discusses the limitations of my research endeavour and provides an outlook for recommended future and next steps.

## 2 Personal Perspective and Motivation

To ensure transparency and increase the objectivity of my findings, it is vital to reflectively outline my personal epistemological position towards the Methodology and my professional experience of its practice. Informed by my background as an artist, educator, and therapist, I engage with the Dance United Methodology through a unique interdisciplinary lens, which both reflects and guides my theoretical orientation towards the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 85). Working for Dance United had a profound impact on my professional biography and identity, shaping my perspective on dance as a catalyst for personal development, growth, and change. As Janesick notes, “because of our point of view, we construct and frame a question for inquiry” (1994, p. 210). I recognise that this connection with the work inevitably informs the way I approach my research endeavour. In the following, I thus transparently acknowledge how my academic perspective and prior professional experiences may influence my research questions, the framing of my inquiry, and the interpretation of my data.

Prior to joining Dance United, my professional biography encompassed training and performance as a contemporary dancer, academic study in pedagogics and psychology, and qualification and practise of dance movement therapy. Throughout my dance training from 2001 to 2002 at the Laban Centre London, my understanding of contemporary dance practice was considerably expanded beyond the professional training and performance context. Imbued with Rudolf Laban’s unique philosophical and theoretical framework based on his fundamental principle of making dance accessible to all (Laban, 1975, 1980), my training sparked a profound interest in the therapeutic and educational applications of dance as a catalyst for personal growth and devel-

opment. My studies in pedagogics and psychology at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich provided the robust academic foundation I required to further pursue this newly found professional interest. With a particular focus on aesthetic experiences within education, I connected my passion for the arts with a theoretical understanding of its application within learning and growth. Further bridging theory and practice, I completed a two-year Master's degree in Dance Movement Therapy at Goldsmiths College, University of London, in 2006. My academic learning, with a focus on psychodynamic theories combined with practical experiences through placements, provided a rich and comprehensive understanding of the psychotherapeutic applications of dance as a tool for healing. I subsequently practised as a dance movement therapist as well as a teacher of dance from 2006 to 2010, primarily focusing on the work with vulnerable and marginalised young people in educational and communal settings in urban London. My training, studies, and professional practice provided a robust theoretical and practical foundation to understand dance within its educational and therapeutic applications as an intra- and interpersonal catalyst for learning, healing, and development. Moreover, having grown up in a privileged, predominantly white rural context, my professional experiences in London profoundly expanded my cultural and social understanding of the lived realities of inequality and marginalisation. Without this formative learning, my ability to sensitively engage with this approach and, in turn, my research endeavour would have been limited.

I came across the work of Dance United throughout my training as a dance movement therapist in 2005, when I watched the acclaimed documentary *Rhythm Is It* on Royston Maldoom's large-scale performance project in collaboration with the Berlin Philharmonics. I not only felt deeply inspired by the film but also strongly called to this practice, intuitively knowing that this was what I wanted to do. As a professionally trained dancer and performer, I profoundly missed the artistic dimension within my therapeutic practice, and I saw a unique opportunity to unite the art of dance with my therapeutic expertise in the work I witnessed in the documentary. My inquiry into the project brought me to the work of Dance United in the UK and constituted the start of my journey towards working with the company.

In 2010, I joined Dance United as a dance artist trainee and received extensive on-the-job training over the course of six months. In my role as a trainee, I assisted the three dance artists in the studio and supported the participants in their engagement with dance training and rehearsal. I did not actively deliver on the projects but took on a supporting role, initially much like a participant observer. As part of the multidisciplinary team, I regularly joined daily team meetings as well as dance team planning. Throughout my training across two cohorts, I was mentored by the dance director and managed by the director of artists' development and training. I reflected on my learning of the Methodology in a learning journal as well as in regular meetings with both my mentor and my manager.

My learning throughout my training was marked by recognising the specific differences but also the similarities between the two distinct approaches. Whereas dance movement therapy utilises dance as a tool to facilitate psychotherapeutic processes, the Methodology positions the intrinsic value of the art of dance at the centre of the work. Within this context, I encountered considerable tension between my therapeutic expertise and collegial reservations about my ability to implement the company's high artistic standards. Despite evident therapeutic impact on participants—such as increased self-esteem, improved self-regulation and enhanced social engagement—I was regularly reminded that “this is not therapy”. Additionally, in stark contrast to thorough therapeutic assessments of clients' history and backgrounds, the Methodology encourages dance artists to actively avoid knowing participants' biographies. Although I initially had considerable reservations about this methodological principle due to concerns about safety and safeguarding, I soon recognised that this enabled dance artists to maintain a focused training and rehearsal process in the dance studio—remaining clear of personal issues and engaging with participants authentically in their role as dancers within a dance company. As a common ground, I recognised that both dance movement therapy and the Methodology emphasised providing a safe space with clear boundaries and transparent structures, although they appeared to employ slightly different strategies and methods to achieve this.

Once I had completed my training, I became a dance artist within the multidisciplinary team of the Academy in London (London Academy) and, as such, delivered three cohorts from autumn 2011 to summer 2012 alongside the dance director and a second dance artist. As a dance artist, I actively delivered all dance-related aspects of the Academy Programme, including the three-week performance project, preparing participants to teach workshops in primary schools, and mentoring them in developing their own choreographic work. I also became increasingly involved in the creation of the company's repertoire and in the extensive planning process before and during project delivery.

Throughout this phase of working with the company, I not only expanded my insights and gained practical experience in the active delivery of the Methodology but also became more adept in understanding the artistic vision underlying the approach. As an active part of the multidisciplinary team, I experienced how the collective expertise and integrated approach between pastoral care and artistic integrity provided the necessary holistic support for participants to thrive. With the entire team united in their commitment to the principles of the work, I came to appreciate the immense integrity of the approach, permeating all aspects of the Academy Programme. Being involved in both planning and delivery, I gained greater awareness of its immense complexity and multidimensional nature, as it required a continuous balance between artistic objectives, group dynamics, and individual progression at all times.

After two years with the company, I was promoted to the role of Dance Director. My first assignment in this role involved co-directing a project at the Wessex Dance Academy in Winchester. Delivering the work according to the Methodology in a different context, alongside a new team, and for a different constituency further broadened and consolidated my learning. Subsequently, I returned to London Academy, where the current Dance Director gradually handed over her role to me as she prepared for maternity leave. As Dance Director, I led on the delivery of the final cohorts before the company's closure in July 2014. During this period, the company pursued new collaborations and format changes to adapt to shifts in the funding landscape. I experienced this as a precarious balance between protecting the integ-

rity of the dance delivery process and incorporating new aspects into the programme. After the final performance of the London Academy in July 2014, I oversaw and managed the closure process alongside the Director of Safeguarding and Learning. This was an immensely challenging time, as I was still deeply convinced of the work's value and its irrefutable impact on the people, I had worked with during my time at Dance United.

Stepping into the role of Dance Director and taking on new responsibilities such as managing and scheduling the overall delivery process, liaising about production aspects for performances, and monitoring individual progress of participants in collaboration with the support team, provided valuable insights into the wider context of the Methodology. I became increasingly aware of the surrounding components of the work, including strategic development, funding landscapes, and socio-political context. Negotiating the above changes in the provision was an immense challenge. For the first time, I felt the Methodology was at risk of being compromised by externally imposed expectations and requirements, such as recruitment numbers and staff-to-participant ratios. These experiences yielded considerable learning about upholding the boundaries and preserving the integrity of the Methodology, while adapting to the evolving demands of each project. I came to realise the essential importance of upholding both the artistic integrity of the work and the immense care, commitment, and consideration for every participant in order to ensure the transformative impact of the approach.

In addition to my role as Dance Director at the London Academy, I became involved in developing a new strand of work in the mental health sector. With my expertise as a dance movement therapist, I contributed to the conception of the pilot project and advised on the idiosyncrasies of working with this client group through dance. While I had to balance my responsibilities as Dance Director, the strategic development in collaboration with partners was furthered by my colleagues. However, I remained closely involved in the choreographic development with Dam Van Huynh, the first Dance United associated artist, and the preparations for the pilot project. This process included delivering taster sessions to potential participants in the community, pro-

viding introductory workshops to members of staff within the different Early Intervention Mental Health teams, trialling the new choreography with dance students, and recruiting role models to work alongside participants as part of the dance company. In autumn 2013, I co-directed the mental health pilot project together with Carly Annable-Coop, a long-standing Dance United Dance Director, and alongside Dam Van Huynh as Choreographer. Upon its completion, I remained involved in the continued development of this new area of Dance United's work, contributing to the evaluation process and co-leading training and rehearsals of the subsequently established Adult Performance Company.

Through this experience, I gained valuable insights into adapting the Methodology to a mental health context. Although the work adhered to the general principles of a Dance United project—with an intensive performance-led rehearsal process delivered to high artistic standards—there were notable adjustments to support this client group appropriately. Training sessions and guidance from senior clinicians highlighted the need to address concerns about the intensity and goal-oriented nature of the project. In response, we extended the process by a week to provide a gentler lead-in and further alleviated pressure by opting for a studio-sharing format with a smaller audience and reduced production demands. Compared to the Academy Programme, the delivery pace was intentionally slowed to allow participants more time to process information. Despite these adjustments, I observed the integrity of the Dance United Methodology in action. While upholding the company's artistic ambition, the holistic support, clarity of structure and boundaries, and the care and respect with which participants were approached remained intact as fundamental principles.

After the company's closure, we were motivated by our shared belief in the approach and gathered under the guidance of Andrew Coggins as the Dance United Artists. This informal cooperative served as a supportive framework for developing two strands of work. The Alchemy Project became a key initiative for advancing work in mental health. As Dance Director, I contributed to its strategic development, participated in the artistic development of new repertoire, and co-delivered two projects for this constituency, both culminating in successful performances. Although the project ultimately did not continue beyond

these two iterations, its positive impact was assessed and evidenced through external evaluations (Optimity Advisors, 2016). The second strand of work I was involved in was the Avanti Project. Led by my former mentor Michelle Bynoe as Project Director, this initiative piloted a four-week performance project for marginalised young people accessing Early Help Services within Kent County Council. It included strategic development with local partners and artistic development in collaboration with Christ Church University of Canterbury. Subsequently, the work of the Avanti Project featured a weekly performance company and other outreach provisions, concluding with one-week intensive summer schools in 2017. This was my last engagement before moving back to Munich in autumn 2017.

This final phase of working with the Dance United Methodology in various contexts and with a wide range of constituencies further consolidated my wholehearted belief in the value of this work. While numerous evaluations had evidenced its impact, they appeared to be insufficient to fully advocate for this approach. This motivated me to explore a different pathway to achieving recognition for the work and paved the way for developing a theoretical foundation to preserve its legacy.

The work of Dance United and the Methodology remains deeply ingrained in my professional identity. Having previously worked with marginalised and vulnerable young people in London as a dance movement therapist, I was acutely aware of the immense challenges involved in engaging populations often leading extremely chaotic lives and facing a multitude of adverse experiences. I had witnessed gang crime, domestic violence, substance abuse, severe poverty, and deprivation and experienced first-hand the immense effort, care, passion, commitment, and resources required to instigate impactful change for this client group. Against this backdrop, the work of Dance United was particularly impressive. The changes and transformations I was privileged to witness were deeply humbling and defy simple explanation in exact terms. How do you assess the journey of the “young offender” who arrived at the project with a short attention span and low frustration tolerance level, only to fight through a 20-minute choreography with wholehearted concentration and commitment? Or the “mental health patient” who could neither hold eye contact nor sustain a conversa-

tion, yet stood confidently in the spotlight, dancing the opening solo at a packed theatre in central London? I was often deeply touched by the bravery and courage of the people I had the privilege to work with, fighting through adverse life situations to realise their unseen potential and own their inherent worth. To this day, I feel immensely privileged to have been part of the pioneering and visionary work of this company. These experiences solidified my belief in the transformative power of dance and its potential for social change, a conviction I now carry into my doctoral research. Through this research, I endeavour to honour the legacy of Dance United and contribute to the preservation of this specific Methodology.

## II Dance United as a unique Case of Community Dance Practice

The primary aim of my doctoral research study is to establish a theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology. To accomplish this, I pursue the objectives of identifying the core concepts of the Methodology, developing a theoretical model, and relating it to existing relevant theory. Closely related to these aims and objectives, my research process is guided by the primary research question: What is the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology? I address this through my secondary research questions: What are the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology? How do the core concepts relate to each other? What are meaningful links between the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology and relevant existing theory? The outlined research methodology is designed to answer these questions and, in turn, realise my aim and objectives.

This process is shaped and informed by my epistemological position, rooted in constructivism. The constructivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions between individuals and their social environment. In contrast to positivist approaches, which seek to uncover objective and external truths, constructivism posits that knowledge derives from subjective experience and interactional meaning-making. It is therefore socially constructed and context-dependent, with multiple co-existing realities shaped by individual perspectives (Creswell, 2014, pp. 7-9). Constructivist epistemology aligns with the nature of the Dance United Methodology as a socially constructed practice, systematically developed through the personal interpretation and practical application of its practitioners. This perspective is explicitly reflected in the introductory paragraph of the first and primary written document:

The idea that in the same way that one and one makes two, a list describing Dance United's methodological approach would guarantee anyone following it, the very same results is misguided. The fear is that it will

be used without flexibility rather than as a guide. Ultimately the success of the work that Dance United does and has done in the past is down to the dance artists we employ and their passion, personalities and unyielding commitment to their art form (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1).<sup>4</sup>

The Methodology is not a rigid, prescriptive catalogue of methods, but an approach that evolves through the unique interpretation and application of individual artists. This emphasis on the subjective experiences of those involved, as well as the recognition of my personal background shaping the research process, makes constructivism an appropriate epistemological position for understanding the theoretical foundations of the Methodology.

From this epistemological standpoint, I apply a robust qualitative research methodology grounded in a case study approach. A qualitative approach is justified, as my research aim is to develop a theoretical foundation for a socially emergent and complex phenomenon through a rich, contextualised, and nuanced understanding, rather than testing a hypothesis or variables (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). The case study design allows for a comprehensive exploration of Dance United's work in its entirety and complexity, embedding the theoretical foundation of the Methodology within a thorough understanding of its genesis, context, and practical application. While this research design facilitates an in-depth exploration of this specific case, I apply a Grounded Theory Method analysis approach, following Merriam and Tisdell (2016, pp. 204-221) to derive inductive insights. Their analysis framework enables systematic engagement with a wide range of data sources at varying levels of analysis—from descriptive to theory development—using a coherent method throughout. This approach provides a contextualised and robust theoretical foundation for the Dance United Methodology and contributes to the development of theory for community dance

4 All three documents comprising the Methodology's written formalisation were submitted to the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität as part of the doctoral examination. Due to reasons of confidentiality and data protection, they are not included in this publication, but are available upon request. References and quotations from these documents cite source type, date and pagination to ensure transparency and traceability.

practice in the social inclusion sector. As an applied research project, the findings of this study aim to enhance the quality of practice by strengthening theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks.

The following sub-chapters illustrate my research approach, including a thorough description and extensive rationale for employing a case study design (see II.1), a comprehensive overview of each step of the research process (see II.2), and an outline of the data validation strategies and ethical considerations employed (see II.3).

## 1 Case Study Research Design

I understand the Dance United Methodology as a unique case of community dance practice in the social inclusion sector. By bridging professional artistic practice and social justice, Dance United has pioneered an innovative approach to engaging marginalised and vulnerable populations, earning national and international recognition as “one of the most original and successful youth engagement programs in Britain” (Bennhold, 2013, p. 4). The founding members Royston Maldoom and Andrew Coggins were honoured for their outstanding contributions to contemporary dance and marginalised communities with an OBE and MBE, respectively. As a distinct initiative originating in the criminal justice sector (see IV.1.2), the Academy Programme received multiple honours, including the Award for Excellence and Innovation in Arts Work with Young People at Risk, the Youth Justice Award and the Koesler Trust Award (Hunter & Gladstone, 2009, p. 151). As Stake (1995, p. 2) notes, “an innovative program might be a case”, constituting Dance United’s distinctive approach as a significant case for scholarly inquiry. While there are numerous meaningful and effective community dance initiatives within the social inclusion sector (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006), Dance United’s robust and continuous evidencing, coupled with its formalised Methodology, makes it uniquely suited for systematic investigation. Such an analysis has the potential to provide significant insights and learning for community dance practice at large.

Understanding the Dance United Methodology as a unique case from my constructivist perspective requires a comprehensive contextualisation. The case study design accommodates both diverse data

sources and flexible analytical methods to accurately and appropriately describe the various dimensions of this case. As Evers and van Staa (2010, p. 749) observe, “the major strength of the case study design is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence”, enabling a nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of this specific way of working. Moreover, the case study framework situates my research results within the broader context of theory development for community dance practice. Although “case study seems a poor basis for generalization” (Stake, 1995, p. 7), insights refined within and drawn from a singular case can lead to valid modifications of generalisation by extracting a universal from the particular. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 255) assert, a detailed understanding of a unique case can yield findings that resonate with broader contexts.

Despite the widespread and frequent application of case study research—particularly within educational contexts—there is no consensus on its design and implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 73; Harrison et al., 2017, para. 3.1.; Yazan, 2015, p. 134). With different perspectives and sometimes conflicting views, it is important to define an approach that aligns with the parameters of my research process. Since the work of Dance United is concerned with facilitating processes of personal growth and learning, case study approaches in the arena of education appear most relevant and appropriate. Three prominent methodologists—namely Robert Yin (2002), Sharan Merriam (1998; 2016), and Robert Stake (1995, 2005)—have developed distinct approaches in this field, which diverge, converge, and complement one another across various dimensions of the research process (Yazan, 2015, p. 135). By focusing on these three seminal authors, I identify a research design that not only serves the aims and objectives of my research but also aligns with my epistemological position.

Although Robert Yin does not explicitly state his epistemological orientation, his approach is rooted in a positivistic perspective with references to fundamental principles of objectivity, validity, and generalisability (Yazan, 2015, pp. 136-137). The research process he proposes is detailed, structured, and aligned with these fundamental principles throughout. A prior development of theoretical propositions precedes all data collection and analysis processes (Yin, 2002, pp. 13-14). Due to

this epistemological orientation as well as the theory-based research process, Yin's approach does not present as an appropriate framework for my research endeavour. Identifying the core concepts of the Methodology and developing a theoretical foundation is a process of unearthing the meaning of different contributions and various perspectives involved in its genesis, evolution, and practical realisation. There is no objective truth to be identified, as postulated in Yin's positivistic stance.

Thus, a constructivist approach as proposed by Merriam (1998; 2016) and Stake (1995, 2005) presents itself as more appropriate in the context of my research. As Merriam emphasises, "in this type of research, it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behaviour in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (1998, p. 203). Both their positions offer appropriate and relevant perspectives with regards to the definition of a case and a case study, case selection, design of the research process, data collection, data analysis, and quality control. Within these dimensions, I define an appropriate research design combining Merriam's more structured and instructional framework with the more exploratory and flexible qualities of Stake's perspective (Yazan, 2015, p. 141). To develop a comprehensive design, including specifics on data collection and analysis, this is complemented by Creswell and his co-authors (2007, pp. 245-248).

In Stake's view, a case is defined as "a specific, a complex, functioning thing", which is "a bounded system" that serves a specific purpose (1995, p. 2). Stake thus emphasises the object of the study rather than the process, with a particular focus on understanding the case. With his clear emphasis on seeking understanding, he defines case study as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). He further clarifies his definition by providing four descriptive characteristics of qualitative research applicable to his understanding of a case study approach (Stake, 1995, pp. 47-48). Firstly, a case study is holistic through its consideration of inseparable interrelationships between the case and its context. Secondly, a case study is empirical through data collection directly from the field of study. Thirdly, a case study is characterised by utilising interpretation of the data as a method

of understanding. This understanding is reached by the interactive research process between researcher and the object of the study, which is compatible with the constructivist epistemology. Lastly, an empathic characteristic refers to the emic perspective, which a case study establishes through reflective understanding and knowledge from within the field. Additionally, Stake (1995, pp. 3-4; 2005, pp. 445-447) distinguishes two fundamentally distinct types of case studies, depending on the emphasis of interest and focus of understanding to be gained. If the emphasis lies on gathering insights into a particular issue, studied by way of example of a particular representative case, it is referred to as an instrumental study. In contrast, if the emphasis lies on reaching a better and thorough understanding of a particular case, then Stake refers to an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995, p. 16).

Merriam provides a broader definition, encompassing a wider array of possible cases. A case can be “a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27) and might hence describe a person, a programme, a group, a specific policy, and so on. This allows for increased flexibility in the application of case study research, which is defined as “an intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii). According to Merriam, the defining characteristics of a case study include its particularistic focus, its descriptive account of the phenomenon under study through thick description, and its heuristic quality in illuminating the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study.

As neither definition refers to the process of data collection and analysis in depth, I choose to complement the above specifications with a further definition including this aspect of the research process. Creswell et al. (2007) have collated the hallmarks of key approaches representing the core features of a case study. Their formulation thus presents as one of the most comprehensive and specifies the process of data collection and analysis, outlined as follows:

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multi-

ple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes (p. 245).

Adhering to these perspectives, I define the Dance United Methodology as a unique case through the following characteristics. As a legally founded charitable organisation, Dance United presents as a specific, complex, and bounded system around, with clear boundaries constituted through aspects such as clear company objects, explicit aims and objectives, and an established brand identity. Within this system, the Methodology—as a defined framework of practice—is bounded into a case by its formalisation in written documents. The Methodology's engagement of a particular social population further contributes to its distinct identity. Its demonstrated success and impact—evidenced by national and international recognition as well as research and evaluation—further underscore its significance as a complex and functioning system with clearly defined boundaries within the broader field of social inclusion through arts-based practice.

The design of this case study is framed by the above definitions as well as characteristics as stated by Stake (1995), Merriam (1998) and Creswell et al. (2007). Drawing from these three scholars, I employ a case study design that is holistic, descriptive, empirical, and interpretative, focusing on in-depth and contextualised exploration and understanding of the Methodology as a particular and complex case of practice. In line with Stake's distinction, my research is constituted as an intrinsic case study, as the case itself is the central focus of my research. With this singular focus on a complex and distinct phenomenon, I further align with Merriam's particularistic focus, emphasising the specific and bounded nature of the case. Honouring Stake's and Merriam's positions on a holistic approach, I examine the Dance United Methodology within its broader field of practice in community dance in social inclusion (see III) and within its organisational context, providing a thick description of its genesis, evolution, and impact (see IV). This ensures that my research captures the interrelationship between the Methodology and its wider contexts. Following an empirical data collection as proposed by all three scholars, my study encompasses multiple sources

of information from the field. This ensures a multi-dimensional view of the Methodology, integrating diverse perspectives and evidence. The in-depth interpretative and inductive analysis—based on the Grounded Theory Method—achieves the required heuristic approximation of the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology (see V). Through a reflective interpretation of my results, as proposed by Stake, and a case-based analysis, as proposed by Creswell, I not only identify the interrelationships between core concepts through a theoretical model but also relate this to relevant existing theory—ultimately achieving a theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology (see VI).

This integrated research design ensures flexibility, reflexivity, and depth, allowing for both a detailed engagement with the case and meaningful theoretical contributions to the wider field of research. Through this process, my research illuminates not only the particularities of the Dance United Methodology but also provides heuristic insights extending beyond this particular case, offering a valuable contribution to the broader context of community dance within the social inclusion sector.

## 2 Case Study Research Process

The research process adopted for this case study was designed in line with the principles proposed by Merriam (1998; 2016) and Stake (1995, 2005), ensuring a comprehensive, robust, and rigorous examination of the Dance United Methodology. By following a systematic approach, each step is carefully structured to sample, collect, analyse, and interpret my data in alignment with the research aim, objectives, and questions. Through a qualitative case study approach, the Dance United Methodology is examined as the central unit of my analysis, providing a suitable framework for drawing from multiple data sources to develop a contextualised and comprehensive understanding. The Grounded Theory analysis embedded in my case study design systematically develops theoretical insights that are founded in the empirical data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 215-221). The integration of the inductive nature of Grounded Theory with the detailed contextual perspective of a case study design enhances the depth and rigour of this research, providing a robust methodological framework for developing a theoretical foun-

dation grounded in rich empirical data (Alzaanin, 2020, pp. 1362-1363; Eisenhardt, 1989, pp. 546-548; Halaweh, 2012, pp. 36-39).

Overall, the research process is divided into several key stages, appropriately adjusting my sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis to the specific requirements of each step, while maintaining overall alignment with my research aim, objectives, and questions. In terms of my overall sampling strategy, a case study demands two steps: the selection of the case to be studied and the selection of data sources within the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). As I am conducting an intrinsic case study, the specific case of the Dance United Methodology has already been pre-selected and identified, requiring no further case selection sampling strategy (Stake, 1995, pp. 4-5; 2005, p. 450). With regards to my in-case sampling approach, my research is guided by purposeful sampling as described by Merriam (1998, pp. 62-64; 2016, pp. 97-99), carefully adjusted to the requirements of each step respectively. To ensure both breadth and depth in my data collection, I rely on documents and interviews as my data sources (Merriam, 1998, p. 134), each serving distinct purposes in terms of information drawn from them. My document data includes the written formalisation of the Dance United Methodology, encompassing three documents, as well as public records, publications, and internal organisational documents. My interview data derives from fourteen formal interviews and informal communications with stakeholders within and around Dance United.

The analysis process, guided by the approach developed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is appropriately adapted to each key stage of the research process, accessing a wide range of data sources at various levels of analysis—from descriptive accounts to theory development—with a coherent method throughout. The descriptive level of analysis allows me to develop the narrative account of the work of Dance United, embedding the Methodology in a comprehensive description of its context, while the category development analysis enables me to identify the core concepts of the approach. Where necessary, Merriam and Tisdell's approach is enriched with the Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2023) to enhance the analytical rigor and depth of my research. Charmaz's conceptualisation and Urquhart's practice-oriented implementation provide a nuanced

framework that emphasises context and individual perspectives within a constructivist paradigm, supporting a dynamic, flexible, and iterative process of theory development.

By following this systematic process, my study maintains rigour throughout the different key stages, while allowing for the necessary flexibility to adapt to unexpected findings. Due to the complexity of my research process, the following sections argue, describe, and illustrate each consecutive step in greater detail, offering a comprehensive account of how my doctoral study is conducted.

## 2.1 Contextualising the Case

The first step toward developing a comprehensive understanding of Dance United and a theoretical foundation of its distinct Methodology is to situate the work within the wider field of British community dance practice in the social inclusion sector. Establishing this contextualisation not merely provides background information but is an essential aspect of my research process as it directly aligns with the principles of case study research particularly relevant to intrinsic case studies (Stake, 1995, p. 64).

Locating the Dance United Methodology within an understanding of British community dance allows me to delineate distinctive boundaries around my case and helps in developing an in-depth understanding of its specific role and contribution to the field. It historically contextualises the work, illustrates the idiosyncrasies of working in this sector, and highlights shared as well as contrasting principles and methods of good practice. This provides the essential disciplinary orientation and reference point for the study, aiding in the exploration of Dance United's distinct impact within the general practice landscape.

In this study, the contextualisation is achieved through a systematic literature review, acting as a tool for integration, synthesis, and critique (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 93-95). Ensuring a systematic approach, I apply the following steps to this process: defining an appropriate scope, identifying relevant sources, thematically grouping my findings, and critically integrating and synthesising my insights.

To align with the focus of my research, I first limit the scope of the literature review to British community dance, as Dance United was officially constituted as a British charity and conducted the majority of its operations within the socio-political context of the United Kingdom. Within this general field, my literature review pays particular attention to activities in the social inclusion sector, constituting the core operational area of Dance United. As my doctoral research is concerned with the theoretical foundation of the Methodology, I focus on methods of practice within the sector along with their theoretical considerations and underpinnings.

Second, I identify relevant key sources for my literature review. While there exists a selection of seminal writings contributing to the field of community dance (Amans, 2008b; Burrige & Svendler Nielsen, 2018; Carley, 2010; Karkou et al., 2017), monographic publications are very limited. As a result, I expand my search to include relevant peer-reviewed journal publications such as the *Journal of Dance Education*, *Dance Education in Practice*, and *Research in Dance Education*—all published by Taylor and Francis. Additionally, the professional body of British community dance—People Dancing—has been publishing its magazine since autumn 1989. Although not strictly academic, this publication, written by artists, professionals, and practitioners, provides valuable insights into current trends, discussions, and practices within the field.

Third, I group my findings into three relevant case-based themes. Considerations around the historical development of British community dance—encompassing its origins and evolution, key socio-political influences, and defining characteristics—describe the overall landscape of the practice within which Dance United is situated as a unique case. Focusing on the specificities of community dance in the social inclusion sector, I define the socio-political boundaries of the field, outline its specific aims and objectives, and illustrate the particularities of working with populations this practice seeks to engage. This thematic exploration facilitates a more nuanced contextualisation of my case. To enable direct comparisons with the Dance United Methodology, I examine theoretical underpinnings and methods of practice relevant to this specific area of community dance. As a crucial context for my research, this allows for a critical analysis of how the Dance United

Methodology aligns with established conceptions, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on effective approaches in the field.

Lastly, I summarise my findings to distil the essential insights gained from the literature review into a coherent narrative that directly informs my case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 95). This summary critically synthesises the identified themes and illustrates how the historical context, specificities of the practice field, and established approaches converge to shape the overall landscape of British community dance in social inclusion. By drawing clear connections between the reviewed literature and the Dance United Methodology, I provide a comprehensive overview that highlights existing gaps and opportunities for further research, situating my case study within broader discourses on community engagement and social inclusion in dance.

In conclusion, this contextualisation serves as the foundation and backdrop for an in-depth understanding of the Dance United Methodology and my subsequent analysis, reinforcing the significance of my research as a relevant contribution to the field.

## 2.2 Defining the Case

The next step in developing a contextualised and in-depth understanding of the Dance United Methodology is achieved through a comprehensive and rich description of the company in its complex entirety. The historical and organisational development of Dance United, together with research and evaluation on the Methodology's effectiveness and impact, provides the required contextual background and delineates the boundaries of my case. This step in my research process honours the inseparable interrelationship between the case and its context (Stake, 1995, p. 47) and fulfils the requirement of "an intensive, holistic, description" (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii).

Developing this defining account presents a challenging endeavour, as there is little published literature on the work of Dance United in general and the Methodology in particular. Most publications refer to individual projects or specific strands, such as the work in Ethiopia (Plastow, 2004), project initiatives in the justice system (Broughton, 2002; Herbert, 2006), or training programmes for artists (Hunter & Gladstone,

2009). As the work of Dance United as a whole has never been comprehensively captured, it is a vital part of my empirical research process to collect and analyse the relevant data, thoroughly defining my case.

The data collection and analysis are guided by principles of the case study approach (Merriam, 1998, pp. 120-123; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 175-180; Stake, 1995, pp. 120-123) and are additionally informed by document analysis with regard to systematic data collection processes (McCulloch, 2004, pp. 36-41; Olson, 2010, pp. 319-320). Based on these principles, I employ the following steps, tailored to the specific needs of my research.

In terms of the nature of my data, documents constitute the primary source for this descriptive account. They range from publicly accessible to privately attained documents. Public records, defined as official records of social—in this case organisational—activities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 164-166), encompass written information composed and produced by Dance United, both for internal and external use. This data is additionally supported by the very limited published literature on the work of Dance United, consisting primarily of individual project evaluations and research reports. The information derived from these is enriched, complemented, and corroborated through data from interviews, wherever necessary.

Although Dance United has produced an extensive archive of video documentation of their work over the years, these visual documents are not included in the data. The visual records were used to promote and communicate with potential funders and partners, while also providing insights into the rehearsal process for performance audiences. Although the short films and documentary videos depict the working process in the studio, they do not provide a thorough and reflective portrayal of the practical application of the Methodology. As they paint a rather stylised picture for the purpose of marketing and dissemination, it is safe to assume that the data drawn from these visual records is not constructive to gaining a scholarly relevant understanding of the Methodology. Furthermore, including visual documents as a data source far exceeds the context of this research endeavour, as it demands locating, sampling, critically appraising, and analysing a vast volume of records immensely challenging to obtain in its entirety after the closure of the

company in 2014. The expected data results do not justify this immense effort. However, this wealth of data might serve for further research into the work of Dance United at a later stage beyond this context.

Locating and sourcing the documents constitutes the first step in this process (Merriam, 1998, p. 120). Chain sampling presents itself as the most suitable purposeful sampling approach for this aspect of my research—following up on information from one document to source further details from others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). This process is concluded once I reach a point of saturation or when it is not possible to trace further documents referring to respective aspects of the work of Dance United. Potential resulting gaps in information are addressed through other data sources, such as interviews.

I accessed three primary sources throughout this process—ranging on a spectrum from public via semi-public and semi-private to private in nature (Olson, 2010, p. 319). Regarding publicly accessible sources, I refer to publications, published evaluations, and research along with the public archive of Companies House, the executive governmental agency for managing limited companies in the United Kingdom. As a limited company, Dance United was required to submit annual reports outlining organisational structures and governance, funding structures and accounts, aims and objectives, as well as company activities and achievements. All annual reports are publicly accessible on the Companies House website.<sup>5</sup> Further along the spectrum, I access semi-public and semi-private documents through the organisational archives held by former Dance United practitioners and stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> These records are further complemented and corroborated by available publications, the various iterations of the archived company website—online from 2004 until the closure in 2014—and my own records of organisational documents from the time I worked for the company.

The next step in the data collection is an initial assessment of the documents to conduct a systematic selection according to their useful-

5 For further information and access to all reports, please visit: <https://beta.companies-house.gov.uk/company/04119410/filing-history>

6 My sources include Andrew Coggins, the former Chief Executive; Michelle Bynoe, the former Creative Director of Academies and Training; Pauline Gladstone, former trustee; and Blair Davies, former Chair of Dance United Yorkshire board of trustees

ness to the research process (Bowen, 2009, p. 33; Olson, 2010, pp. 319-320; Stake, 1995, p. 68). Firstly, the documents need to be relevant to the aim of developing a comprehensive descriptive account of Dance United in its entirety and complexity, which in turn serves the broader aim of answering the primary research question on the theoretical foundation of the Methodology. Secondly, the selection of documents is based on the purpose they serve in the research process. They are selected if they contribute to describing the history and development of Dance United as an organisation, outline research and evaluation of the work, and relate to the genesis and evolution of the Methodology.

Once useful and relevant documents are systematically selected, they need to be critically appraised according to standards of authenticity, credibility, accuracy, and representativeness (Bowen, 2009, pp. 33-34; McCulloch, 2004, pp. 35-36; Merriam, 1998, pp. 121-122; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 176-178). Standards are ensured and upheld by applying a range of appraisal criteria outlined as follows. Assessing the history and source of documents provides an indication of their authenticity and credibility. The integrity of a document—asking whether it is complete and as originally composed compared to edited versions—further ensures these standards and its level of accuracy. Gaining further insight into the authenticity, credibility, and representativeness of a document requires a critical appraisal of its purpose, intended audience, and authorship, including any potential biases of the author. The overall standards of a document are further strengthened when supplementary and corroborating information is found in other documents. Finally, it needs to be assessed whether the document constitutes a primary or secondary source of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 178). A primary source refers to the first-hand experience of a personal account in relation to the case, whereas a secondary source provides an indirect report on the studied phenomenon.

Before conducting the analysis of the documents, the wealth of information gathered needs to be coded and catalogued (Merriam, 1998, p. 123; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 178-179; Olson, 2010, p. 320). The coding system I apply is based on three dimensions: themes and topics of the document; type of document along the dichotomy of personal and official; and the spectrum of use, ranging from private through

company-internal to public along with a reference to the source. The documents are catalogued into nine different groups according to the information they provided: historical, choreographic process, feedback from audience and participants, reports on participants, project proposals, publications, recruitment of participants, research and evaluation, and training of artists.

The analysis process in this context is guided by the approach developed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016, pp. 204-215). As the primary aim of this step is the development of a comprehensive descriptive account of the work of Dance United, the data collected from documents is analysed to a descriptive level. This level of analysis encompasses thematically clustering the collated information through categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995, p. 74), systematically compressing this information (Merriam, 1998, pp. 178-179), and subsequently organising this into themes (Bowen, 2009, pp. 32-33). Linked into a historical and biographical narrative through chronological organisation, I derive a descriptive account of the historical and organisational development of Dance United, as well as the research and evaluation on the Methodology's effectiveness and impact.

For this account, I am guided by three thematic categorisations in order to track the development of Dance United as a constituted organisation over the years. Firstly, changes in company structures—including governance, management, and funding—highlight the organisational development over the years. Secondly, the evolution of the company's aims and objectives indicates how Dance United has developed and refined the vision, mission, and focus of their work. Thirdly, outlining activities and achievements provides a comprehensive historical overview of the practical implementation of the Methodology. This thematic analysis yields three phases of the company's biography with distinct shifts in these categorisations.

In terms of the company's evaluation efforts, I fundamentally align these with the three phases. Throughout the first phase, these efforts are marked by individual evaluative project reports. To achieve comparative insights across the six obtained reports (Duncan, 2003, 2004, 2005; Wilford, 2001, 2002; Williams, 2007), I conduct a thematic analysis including aims and objectives, impact and outcomes, and challenges

and recommendations. The second phase entails two major evaluative endeavours: the Academy Report (Miles & Strauss, 2008) on the programme's efficacy and a socio-economic analysis (van Poortvliet et al., 2010) on the programme's financial viability. Drawing out shared themes—such as context and aim, research approach and key findings—a comparative discussion illustrates the evaluations' synergetic advocacy of an effective approach. The third phase focuses on evidencing cause and effect through developing and implementing an applicable Theory of Change.<sup>7</sup> Thematically organised, I illustrate insights from the implementation of this evaluative tool across both the Academy Programme and the mental health initiative. In their entirety, the company's efforts of evidencing the Methodology define this case as a viable, effective, and impactful approach to practice.

The result of this detailed process of sourcing, selecting, and analysing documents to a descriptive level defines the case of the Methodology within a comprehensive account of Dance United and lays a contextualised groundwork for identifying its core concepts.

## 2.3 Identifying the Core Concepts of the Methodology

Once the Dance United Methodology as a unique case is contextualised and its boundaries clearly defined, I pursue my first research objective by answering the secondary research question: What are the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology? This constitutes a vital step towards developing a theoretical foundation, as it identifies the fundamental conceptual cornerstones underpinning the practice.

In order to realise this, I rely on two sets of relevant data. The Methodology in its written form constitutes a formalised conceptualisation of the framework. It comprises three documents and addresses different aspects of the approach, including pedagogical principles (Pro-Active

<sup>7</sup> The Theory of Change has been established by the Aspen Institute in the 1990s as an evaluation instrument for initiatives effecting social and political change. Popularised by Weiss (1995), Theories of Change are deductive models used to reason about the impact of a programme.

Strategies, Dance United, 2013), principles of planning and preparation (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014), and choreographic principles (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014). The data is drawn from the three documents in their entirety. Interviews constitute the second source of data, capturing and describing the Methodology in its socially co-constructed and practically applied dimension. This encompasses fourteen semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders in and around the company.<sup>8</sup> Combined, these two data sources provide both a formal and practical understanding of the Methodology, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of its core concepts.

Interestingly, these data sources not only reveal the Methodology's core concepts but also illustrate its inherently co-constructed nature, shaped by interactive and relational processes of meaning-making. This insight aligns with my constructivist epistemology, reinforcing the view that the Methodology emerges through socially shared interpretations. The data from both sources thus furthermore unite in a comprehensive understanding of its defining dimensions (see V.1).

As within the process of defining my case, I continue to apply purposeful sampling. The three documents of the Methodology in its written formalisation are analysed in their entirety and therefore require no sampling approach. With regard to the interviews, however, I apply a maximum variation sampling strategy in order to capture a wide range of organisational and historical perspectives on the practical application of the Dance United Methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98).

To maintain consistency, both sets of data are analysed with the approach proposed by Merriam and Tisdell (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 204-221). Ensuring a robust, transparent, and reliable analysis process, their guidelines are furthermore enriched through applicable insights from a constructivist approach to the Grounded Theory Method. This includes: coding in gerund form to emphasise process and action within the methodological core concepts as dynamic, inter-

<sup>8</sup> All fourteen interview transcripts were submitted to the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität as part of the doctoral examination. Due to reasons of confidentiality and data protection, they are not included in this publication, but are available upon request. References and quotations from these documents cite the interview partner, date and pagination to ensure transparency and traceability.

actional principles of facilitating learning (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 120-124; Urquhart, 2023, p. 127); memo-writing as a supportive analytical tool (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 162-191; Urquhart, 2023, p. 138); and iteratively progressing from initial to focused and theoretical coding. This approach is not only in line with my constructivist epistemology, but also allows me to keep a reflective transparency of my personal perspective of the Dance United Methodology. As Smith (2008) stresses, “when one is researching one’s own context, it is important to acknowledge the perspective one brings; however, the goal is not to overcome or change this perspective, but later make known how it has affected the research” (p. 18). I have recorded my personal perspectives and interpretations throughout the coding process for both documents and interviews through reflective memos and creative writing as proposed by Charmaz (2014, pp. 162-191). For transparency purposes, I indicate significant influences on the analysis process in the outline of my results.

As a first step in the process, I analyse each data set separately to build a foundation for comparing and contrasting the formalised and practically applied dimensions of the Dance United Methodology (see V.2 and V.3). In the subsequent step, I integrate the two dimensions through theoretical coding to provide a cohesive understanding of the Methodology’s core concepts (see VI.1). Although the same analytical approach is applied to both datasets, I outline each process individually. Given the differences in the data sources, this not only improves readability but also allows me to clearly highlight any variations in how the analysis unfolds.

### 2.3.1 Analysis Process of Document Data

In its written form, the Dance United Methodology consists of three documents outlining and focusing on distinct dimensions of the approach. Specific teaching methods and principles are outlined in the Pro-Active Strategies, while the Planning Tendencies provide guidance

for the overall planning process and the Choreographic Tendencies<sup>9</sup> list choreographic and artistic principles employed. To respect the respective historical context of their development, they were initially treated as separate units of analysis before uniting them in an integrated understanding of the core concepts in theory.

The document on Pro-Active Strategies was composed in the early years of the company, while the Planning Tendencies and Choreographic Tendencies were developed at a later stage, as confirmed by the critical appraisal of the documents and supported by interview data relating to the historical development of the Methodology (see V.1.1). As indicated in the interviews, the creation of these documents was a collaborative effort involving Dance United's artists and executive staff. Over time, the formalisation of the Methodology evolved based on research, evaluations (Dance United, 2014c; Miles & Strauss, 2008; Optimity Advisors, 2016), and insights from practical application.

Although these documents underwent continuous edits and updates, a comprehensive historical analysis of all changes would not only exceed the scope of this analysis but also yield no additional insights, as I assume that the core concepts of the Methodology remained generally consistent throughout the years. Additionally, over a decade has passed since the closure of the company, and despite attempts to obtain a complete archive of edits, a full historical review of these revisions is not feasible. Without a complete overview of the evolution and development, a historical analysis would only provide glimpses and snapshots. A comprehensive historical analysis of the evolution of the written Methodology is therefore not only redundant but also impossible. Instead, I use the most recent available versions of the documents: the 2013 version of the Pro-Active Strategies and the 2014 versions of the Planning Tendencies and Choreographic Tendencies. These provide the most recently updated perspective on the Methodology before the closure of the company in 2014.

9 For the purpose of clear reference, I have termed the document "Pro-Active Strategies", deriving this from its introductory paragraph, as the actual heading, "Dance United's Methodology", is prone to ambiguity. The terms "Planning Tendencies" and "Choreographic Tendencies" derive from the actual headings of the documents.

To maintain consistency within the overall research process, I apply the same appraisal standards as I do for the documents for defining my case (Bowen, 2009; McCulloch, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These documents were obtained from my personal records during my time with Dance United and have been consistently used for training purposes, staff development, and project planning during my tenure. I therefore attest to their authenticity, as they present the primary sources reflecting the formalised framework of the Methodology. Their credibility is supported by the collaborative development between Dance United artists and executive staff, as corroborated by interview data (see V.1.1). Their consistent application in practice ensures their accuracy in representing the Methodology. Their centrality to operational and pedagogical functions, combined with their consistent use across various phases of project delivery, demonstrates their representativeness as key data sources.

My data analysis of the documents entails a systematic and iterative approach, encompassing consecutive phases of initial coding and focused coding to arrive at the core concepts as analytically constructed categories<sup>10</sup> (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 113-116; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 204-208; Urquhart, 2023, pp. 74-79). To honour the historical differences as well as capturing each document in its integrity, I analyse each document separately in its entirety before merging the focused codes across the documents to develop the core concepts. Throughout this process, I apply a constant comparative method, “constantly comparing” (Urquhart, 2023, p. 8) data with data, code with code, and code with data. I reflectively monitor my analysis process through freewriting, diagramming, and memo writing, which supports the ongoing refinement of my gradually emerging results (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 162-191). In order to adequately capture the data from these key documents, I apply a line-by-line coding approach (Urquhart, 2023, p. 77).

My analysis process within each document is structured into four iterative steps, with two stages each for both initial and focused coding.

<sup>10</sup> I understand the categories of my findings as the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology. To avoid confusion within the analysis process, I proceed by consistently employing the term “core concept”.

I initially apply a pen-and-paper approach; not only to familiarise myself with the coding process but also to initially stay close to the data (Urquhart, 2023, p. 107). The process of initial coding commences with a descriptive analysis level of the data. In a second step, I iteratively elevate the initial codes to an analytical level—constantly comparing data with data and codes with codes (Urquhart, 2023, p. 127). To adequately manage the process at this stage, I transition to using a word processing programme. Intermittent freewriting and mind map clustering not only reflectively monitor the analysis process but also capture evolving relationships among codes, thus supporting the process of grouping, refining, and evolving the emerging results. This is an invaluable foundation for my subsequent step of focused coding by clustering my refined initial codes into tentative groups aligned with the relevant research question. In my final analysis step within documents, I further refine and abstract these groupings into tentative core concepts through synthesis, analysis, and conceptualisation (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). At this stage, I transfer my process to the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA to manage the extensive coding information more efficiently. This software facilitates a broader overview of the analysis process, while allowing me to maintain close engagement with the data. I also refine my freewriting, diagramming, and memo writing to gradually develop theoretical memos for each tentatively evolving core concept. Figure 1 illustrates my coding procedure within the documents diagrammatically (Urquhart, 2023, pp. 186-187).

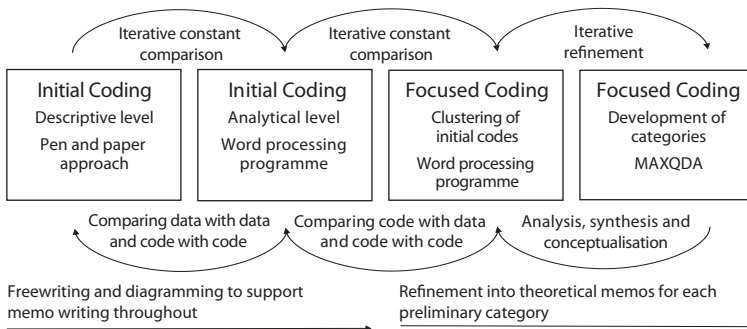


Figure 1: Coding Procedure Within Documents

After analysing each document separately, I merge the focused codes across the three documents, employing a constant comparative method to identify and consolidate related findings in clusters. I iteratively refine and revise my findings through further abstracting my coding—grouping matching codes together, identifying hierarchical structures amongst codes, and noting relations between codes (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 140-141). I reflect on this process by theoretical memos and tentative diagrams, monitoring the emerging core concepts of the Methodology. The analysis across documents is visually represented in Figure 2.

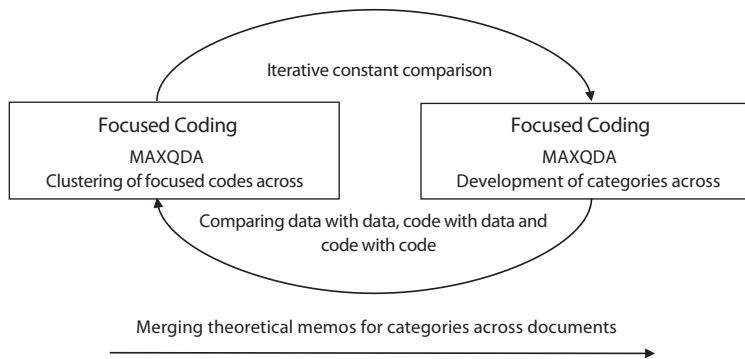


Figure 2: Coding Procedure Across Documents

As a whole, my analysis yields six core concepts for the Dance United Methodology in its written formalisation. Although one core concept remains an unsaturated focused code based on the documents, its unique significance is corroborated by interview data and reflects a central dimension of the Methodology in terms of its emphasis on the collaborative nature of the dance company, warranting its inclusion in the results (see V.2.4). In support of my findings and for the purpose of transparency, Appendix A2 provides a chain of evidence including initial codes and focused codes for each respective core concept (Urquhart, 2023, p. 191).

Applying this consistent, iterative analysis approach to each document and further consolidating insights across all three, I achieve a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Methodology's core concepts in their written formalisation, thus contributing to answering my secondary research question.

### 2.3.2 Analysis Process of Interview Data

The second set of data I rely on to identify the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology is interviews with stakeholders within and around the company, capturing and describing the socially co-constructed and practically applied dimension of this approach. This additional layer of insights complements my findings from the documents and allows me to comprehensively describe a holistic and integrated understanding of the core concepts (see VI.1).

My interviewees all hold specific and unique experiential knowledge in working with the Dance United Methodology—either as front-line practitioners, senior leadership and executive staff, governance stakeholders, or collaborating partners. As their expertise in this approach constitutes additional, meaningful, and enriching insights, I consider them as experts within this context, holding both specific technical knowledge about fundamental principles of the Methodology as well as process knowledge about their practical implementation (Bogner et al., 2018, p. 659; Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 52).

To ensure a robust and comprehensive research process for this stage, principles of case study research for effective interview data collection on planning, guidelines, implementation, and transcription (Merriam, 1998, pp. 81-91; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 124-136; Stake, 1995, pp. 64-67) are thus combined with principles of expert interviews, such as clarifying interview purpose (Bogner et al., 2018, pp. 660-662; Döringer, 2021, p. 267) and positioning myself as a co-expert (Bogner et al., 2018, pp. 662-663; Bogner & Menz, 2009, pp. 58-60).<sup>11</sup> As a co-expert, I do not only share the interviewees' experiential knowledge of the Methodology but also have had a professional working relationship with 13 out of the 17 interviewees. The remaining four did not work with Dance United at the time of my engagement with the company. My interviews with them constitute the first contact, although I was aware of their role and contribution to the company's work ahead of the time.

<sup>11</sup> To avoid potential translation issues and ensure consistency with the research design used in my study, I choose to focus exclusively on literature on expert interviews written for Anglo-American audiences. For seminal German literature on this subject see Meuser and Nagel (1991), Gläser and Laudel (2010), and Kaiser (2021).

The purpose of the interviews is to systematically gather information about the practical implementation of the Dance United Methodology as a dynamic practice in action. This data is vital in identifying the core concepts, contributing to the development of a theoretical foundation for the Methodology. Given this focus, the interviews are defined as theory-generating with the goal to “communicatively open up and analytically reconstruct the subjective dimension of knowledge” (Bogner et al., 2018, p. 662). In line with my constructivist epistemology and case study approach, I view expert knowledge as co-constructed by both the interviewees and myself as a co-expert, reflecting a shared understanding within this specific context.

Having clarified the rationale and purpose in approaching my interview data, I now turn to outlining my data collection process, including sampling and participant selection, interview guidelines, and conducting the interviews.

As to the sampling strategy of the interview process, I apply an approach of maximum variation, describing the Methodology in its complexity and grounding my identifications of the core concepts in “widely varying instances of the phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). With this strategy in mind, I selected and contacted 23 potential interviewees in total. Most of my potential interview partners responded positively. Two interview partners declined the interview—one due to time constraints and one due to having previously spoken to me in an informal conversation, feeling she had nothing more insightful to offer on this matter. Two potential interviewees did not respond at all despite several follow-ups. At the end of this selection process, I had confirmed thirteen individual interview partners and six interviewees for a group interview. However, nearer to the scheduled group interview, two interviewees dropped out due to a family emergency and scheduling issues. I conducted the interviews over the course of five months—with the first interview in November 2021 and the final interview in March 2022.

Clarifying my choice to include a group interview in my data collection process, I want to capture the team-based implementation of the Methodology in action. This decision was informed by my experiential knowledge of the vital importance of this aspect to the process. I

chose to interview members of my former team at the London Academy, allowing me to gather insights into how this cohesive team operationalised the Methodology in practice. Given my pre-existing knowledge of the team's effectiveness, my aim was to elicit collective perspectives on the process rather than explore individual group dynamics in detail. The group interview provide a holistic view of how the Methodology was applied in practice without the need for a detailed focus on interpersonal relationships, which are not central to my study's objectives (Frey & Fontana, 1991, p. 183; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108).

In terms of interview structure, I conduct semi-structured interviews with an interview guideline supporting the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 110-111). In order to capture the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology comprehensively, the guidelines encompass five broad themes. These include a historical dimension, strategies of practical implementation, methods effecting the most noticeable impact, consistency over time and across contexts, and the role of staff in delivering the approach. Introductory questions serve as a lead-in to the conversation and capture the individual biographical perspective of each interviewee (Merriam, 1998, p. 82). A set of closing questions allow time to bring up anything not previously covered in the conversation. In all but one interview, this also contains a summary question as to the essence of the Dance United Methodology.

The interview guideline is flexibly adjusted and personalised for each interviewee depending on their unique perspective of the work. I thus develop adjusted versions respectively focusing on historical perspectives, strategic and organisational context, practical realisation of the Methodology, and external perspectives on the work. Some interviewees hold more than one perspective. In these cases, I flexibly adjust during the course of the interview. While the interview transcripts remain confidential, Appendix B1 to B5 provides all adjusted versions of the semi-structured interview guidelines to provide transparency of the data collection process.

In terms of practically conducting the interviews, most of my interview partners were located in the United Kingdom. At the time the interviews were conducted, two partners resided in Asia—one in Hong Kong and one in Manila. Due to ongoing restrictions regarding Corona

and budget constraints in terms of travel, all but one interview was conducted via Zoom. I recorded both video and sound as raw data and then transcribed mostly from the sound files. Where I needed additional information to accurately transcribe the conversation, I used the video file to support through visual information.

Once I had conducted the interviews, I transcribe them according to a transcription level of intelligent verbatim (McMullin, 2021, p. 145). Given that my analysis process prioritises the substantive content of the conversations, I consider a full verbatim transcription—including linguistic idiosyncrasies—unnecessary in capturing the Methodology's core concepts. I accordingly adjust my transcription approach following Dressing and Pehl (2018, p. 23), transcribing interjections such as “ugh” and “ah” as pauses to make for a more fluent reading, while preserving colloquial expressions that signal shifts in formality. In summary, I adhere to the following transcription rules (Dressing & Pehl, 2018, pp. 21-23):

- Informal and colloquial beginnings and endings of the conversations are edited to focus on relevant content.
- Discontinuation of words or sentences is recorded and indicated by a slash /.
- Punctuation is smoothed in favour of legibility.
- Pauses are indicated by suspension marks in parentheses (.). Pauses longer than three seconds are indicated by the numbers (4).
- Words with special emphasis are capitalised.
- Colloquial expressions are maintained to highlight changes in tone.
- Affirmative utterances and interjections are not transcribed but indicated as pauses.
- Incomprehensive words are indicated as (inc.).
- Speech overlaps are marked by // at the start and the end of the interjection //.
- Names of people who have not agreed to be part of this research process are anonymised and indicated as [anonymised].

To adequately manage the extensive manual transcription process, I work with the transcription software f4.

My data collection overlaps with my data analysis process—as is typical within case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 197). In preparation for the coding process, I collate post-interview notes and maintained transcription notes to capture predominant themes and key points addressed in each interview. This aids me in preparing for the next interviews and in tracking preliminary results during this stage of my research process. To gather an initial overview of the interview data and prepare them for a detailed analysis, I identify general thematic sections within each interview and compose these into summary memos. This overall thematic structure of each interview makes the data more accessible for coding, indicating general topics covered in each conversation (Urquhart, 2023, pp. 118-119).

Managing the large volume of data, I proceed with an incident coding rather than word-by-word or line-by-line initial coding, anticipating that core concepts would emerge as thematic chunks rather than isolated words or individual phrases. As with the document data, I start with a descriptive level of initial codes and iteratively elevate them to analytical codes (Urquhart, 2023, p. 74). This process is reflectively monitored through freewriting, diagramming, and open memos for each initial code. I apply these first two stages to the interviews with the three founders of Dance United to establish a baseline for the Methodology, originating from their initiative and vision. To stay close to the data, I first work with a pen-and-paper approach and then transition to MAXQDA. This yields a list of 26 initial header codes with 73 allocated initial codes in total.

With the guidance of this initial coding list, the remaining ten interviews are analysed in an iterative cycle of initial coding, continuously accumulating and refining my findings through constant comparison between data, existing codes, and new findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). I consolidate codes through corroboration with further data while staying open to new findings within the data. This also allows me to monitor the saturation of initial codes and their gradual consolidation into focused codes. This results in 13 initial header codes accommodating a total of 106 initial codes. Figure 3 illustrates the process of my initial coding procedure.

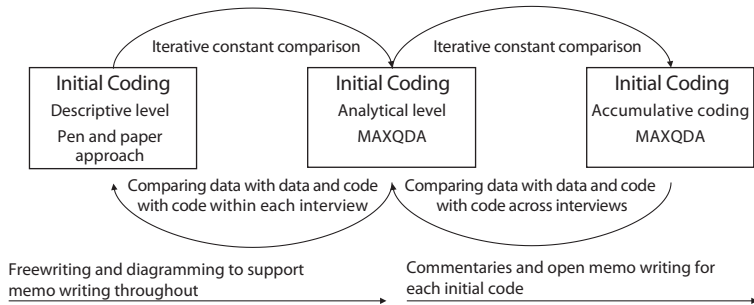


Figure 3: Initial Coding Procedure for Interviews

Through further analytical clustering of my refined initial codes into tentative groups, I gradually progress to the focused coding stage. My initial coding yields a large number of codes, which need to be further abstracted and refined through constant comparison guided by increasingly refined memos for each evolving cluster (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). Once these clusters are consolidated into focused codes, I iteratively abstract them through merging and grouping related focused codes as well as identifying hierarchical relations (Urquhart, 2023, p. 116), gradually clarifying core concepts and their defining dimensions. Guided by my research question on the core concepts of the Methodology, I further refine and abstract these groupings into tentative core concepts through synthesis, analysis, and conceptualisation (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). Figure 4 illustrates the focused coding procedure.

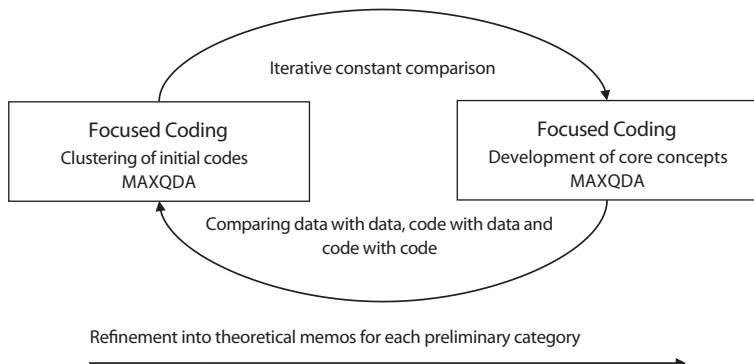


Figure 4: Focused Coding Procedure for Interviews

This iterative analytical process ultimately results in eight core concepts. Five of these enrich my existing findings from the documents, while three expand on them, revealing new dimensions of the approach. Transparently illustrating my findings, Appendix A3 provides a chain of evidence including all initial and focused code for each respective core concept (Urquhart, 2023, p. 191).

To address the ethical dimensions of my interview process, I sent supporting information to all interviewees, enabling them to make an informed decision about their participation. This included an outline of my research and the interview process, as well as an explanation of the data protection procedures employed. Additionally, I provided a declaration of consent form outlining the conditions and the terms of engagement for the interviews. All my interview partners agreed to be quoted directly without anonymisation. Most of the interviewees requested to receive the transcript and had the option to edit any content they felt uncomfortable with being used in my further analysis. However, these revisions did not substantially affect the integrity of the analysis, as the edits primarily related to strategic and organisational dimensions of the company.

## 2.4 Developing a Theoretical Foundation

Having answered my secondary research question regarding the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology, the next step in my research process focuses on the secondary questions on the relationships between core concepts and their links to relevant existing theory. With this theoretical development, the descriptive findings of the core concepts transition to an integrated conceptual model that can be critically examined and applied. In answering these questions, I thus provide a heuristic conceptualisation through a theoretical model of relations and embed this construct in its theoretical situatedness. This process not only deepens the understanding of how the core concepts interact but also situates my findings within broader theoretical frameworks, thus ensuring its analytical generalisability. As this ultimately provides the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology

and realises my research aim, this constitutes the “most critical stage” (Urquhart, 2023, p. 131) of my research process.

Before identifying the relationships between the nine core concepts, I first unite the findings from the document and the interview data through an integrative analysis process. This results in a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and defining features of each respective core concept as a coherent whole. Moving up “from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape” (Miles et al. cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 215), I thus progress from empirical description to conceptual analysis.

I rely on my theoretical memos and evidence trails from both data sets (see Appendix A2 and A3), applying a constant comparison approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206) to iteratively integrate my findings. Oscillating between my empirical data and theoretical abstraction, I navigate the complexities and interdependencies of the Dance United Methodology both in theory and in action, while distilling its core concepts into a higher level of conceptual abstraction (Merriam, 1998, p. 188). This involves synthesising the insights from the document and interview data by cross-referencing key themes and patterns, merging overlapping attributes, and integrating complementary features to ensure alignment.

It is noteworthy, that this step in my analysis revealed no contradictions, indicating considerable consistency and integrity of the approach. This iterative refinement through constant comparison allowed me to move beyond mere description and towards a conceptual framework (Urquhart, 2023, p. 219). The resulting holistic understanding of each core concept reflects the full complexity of the data and lays the foundation for further analysis of their interrelationships. Appendix A4 provides a transparent chain of evidence for this process.

Working from the integrated core concepts, my analysis proceeds with developing a theoretical model through theoretical coding, defined as “the process of relating categories and the process of theorising about those categories” (Urquhart, 2023, p. 131). Different strands of the Grounded Theory Method suggest proceeding with this step of the analysis process through a coding paradigm. However, there has been much discussion on this aspect of the process, stemming from

a dispute amongst its founders, Glaser and Strauss (Urquhart, 2023, pp. 21-22). Glaser emphasises the emergence of the theory from data, hence avoiding the imposition of analytical structures as tools for conceptualisation. He proposes theoretical coding families as guidance for analysis (Glaser, 1978, pp. 73-82). By contrast, Strauss and his colleagues propose a very clear coding paradigm featuring conditions, context, actions, strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). Charmaz (2014) remains open to the application of the coding paradigm, suggesting to be sensitively guided by the needs to the research process and the emerging results in order to “avoid imposing a forced framework” (p. 155).

Despite extensive exploration, I could not identify an applicable coding framework—either imposing rigid structures in conflict with the flexible nature of the Methodology or failing to comprehensively accommodate all core concepts. My theoretical analysis is thus led by the emerging data. Based on this understanding, I position my theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology as a heuristic approximation of conceptualising the core concepts in their interrelationship.

To identify theoretical patterns in the interrelationships between codes, I rely on theoretical memos and integrative diagrams (Urquhart, 2023, pp. 135-137). Having composed a substantial body of memos throughout, I start with iteratively reviewing them for each core concept and visualising my findings in diagrammatic form. Once I hold a preliminary understanding of relationships among core concepts, I systematically relate my emerging model back to the data as well as to my research question for this step of the process (Urquhart, 2023, p. 148). This iterative approach allows a progressive refinement of my model, translating my memos into a coherent presentation of results and my integrative diagram into a visual representation of my findings.

This analysis identifies one central core concept as “the main conceptual element through which all other categories and properties are connected” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 33). Additionally, my analysis yields two new theoretical codes, each serving as overarching categories under which three core concepts are grouped as subcategories. My theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology thus encompasses

an interrelated conceptualisation of a total of five core concepts, relationally aligned toward realising the analytically identified aim.

In the final step of my theoretical analysis, I relate my empirical findings to relevant existing theory, answering the final research question. This process of “theoretical integration” (Urquhart, 2023, p. 147) and “theoretical triangulation” (Lo, 2014, p. 71) involves comparing my emerging theoretical model with established conceptions from relevant fields. This comparative analysis not only validates my emergent theory but also ensures its grounding in extant literature, thereby reinforcing its analytical generalisability. Engaging with established theories also provides a basis for critically reflecting on potential biases and limitations within my analysis, ensuring that my research results are theoretically and empirically robust. This theoretical integration is vital to achieving my overall research aim of establishing a sound theoretical foundation for the Dance United Methodology.

### 3 Data Validation Strategies and Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the scholarly integrity and rigour of my research, it is essential to adhere to established quality standards, applying appropriate data validation strategies throughout the research process. In the following, I address key strategies of ensuring internal validity, reliability, and external validity, aligning with the specific characteristics and requirements of qualitative case study research with an embedded Grounded Theory analysis. Additionally, I maintain robust ethical considerations, applying a duty of care not only to individual interviewees but also at an organisational level, particularly in relation to the ongoing work of Dance United Yorkshire and DU Dance NI in Northern Ireland. With the potential impact of my research in mind, I carefully balance the integrity of my findings with making a positive contribution to these contexts. Finally, I transparently acknowledge and reflect on my dual role as both a researcher and a practitioner of the Dance United Methodology, illustrating how this positionality informs the research process while diminishing potential biases.

Appropriate data validation strategies must align with the employed research design as well as with the underlying epistemology. Merriam and Stake both question the applicability of traditional validity and reliability criteria, as advocated by quantitative research, to the unique characteristics of a qualitative case study (Yazan, 2015, p. 146). Stake (1995, pp. 41-42) argues that the purpose of the inquiry, the role of the researcher within the process, and the knowledge that it produces differ fundamentally. Quantitative studies generally pursue an accurate, objective explanation for a phenomenon, whereas qualitative studies aim to “sophisticate the beholding” (Stake, 1995, p. 42) of complex meanings, often encompassing a personal involvement of the researcher in the field. Within the context of my constructivist epistemological approach, knowledge is understood as a co-construction from different perspectives and the experiential interpretation of the researcher (Creswell, 2014, pp. 7-9). Thus, the quality standards of the positivistic knowledge of quantitative studies require suitable adjustment. Stake and Merriam offer complementary strategies to ensure internal validity, reliability, and external validity, providing a robust framework tailored to the unique nature of case study research (Yazan, 2015, pp. 146-147).

Internal validity refers to the congruency between research results and the studied phenomena, assessing the accuracy of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 259). The question of internal validity is then, “Do we have it right?” (Stake, 1995, p. 107). To ensure my theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology presents a congruent, trustworthy, and credible account, I apply strategies of triangulation, member checks, and researcher reflexivity.

In terms of data source triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 244-246; Stake, 1995, pp. 112-115), my research process relies on a wide range of documents as well as interviews with different partners, reflecting diverse perspectives on the Dance United Methodology. The extensive and comprehensive review of documents along with the maximum variation of interview partners provides corroborating evidence across different sources. With regards to analysis triangulation, I prioritise methodical coherence resulting in a higher comparability across data over different perspectives on the same data. However, as my research findings are related to and contextualised within existing theory, this

is compensated through theory triangulation (Stake, 1995, pp. 113-114). Ultimately, these triangulation strategies provide the diversity of perspectives required “to increase credence in the interpretation” (Stake, 1995, p. 112).

In addition, I conduct member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246; Stake, 1995, pp. 115-116), referring my preliminary findings back to the Dance United practitioners and stakeholders I interviewed. This is a vital strategy in ensuring the accuracy of my findings. I shared the transcripts with my interviewees, relayed emerging findings for feedback throughout, and offered a presentation of my final results at the end of the analysis process. This iterative cycle of member checking allowed me to clarify my insights and “to minimize the misrepresentation and misunderstanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 109).

Lastly, to ensure the accuracy of my findings, it is vital to transparently reflect on my evident personal bias towards this research process. As a practitioner of the Dance United Methodology, I not only approach this research with intricate experiential knowledge but also a unique perspective, as I transparently acknowledge in the introduction of my thesis (see I.2). Additionally, employing a constructivist Grounded Theory approach necessitates reflexivity by critically reflecting on personal assumptions (Urquhart, 2023, p. 99). I maintain a reflective stance towards my process through a research diary as well as within my evolving memos throughout, carefully noting and monitoring moments of jumping to conclusions and leaps of interpretation. Finally, I include evidence trails of my analysis process (see Appendix A), providing a traceable chain from initial codes to core concepts (Urquhart, 2023, p. 191).

In quantitative research, reliability typically refers to the replicability of findings, indicating the extent to which results can be consistently obtained across different studies. However, in qualitative research where human behaviour is complex and dynamic, and a constructivist epistemology, where knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and field, replicability is challenging to achieve. Consequently, reliability is reconceptualised as the consistency and dependability of findings within this context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 252). To ensure that my findings are consistent with the data, I employ the above strategies of

triangulation, member checks, and researcher reflexivity with a focus on producing consistent and dependable results.

Through data triangulation, I corroborate my findings across multiple sources and a variety of perspectives, confirming that my conclusions about the Dance United Methodology hold up across a variety of contexts. Relaying my emerging findings back to my interview partners through member checks, I ensure that the research captures their lived experiences and professional insights accurately. Given my choice of a maximum sampling approach, their multi-faceted understanding reflects the complex reality of the approach. The continuous reflection of my unique positionality within the research process and towards the research object allows me to maintain the required transparency for consistent and dependable results. My evidence trails document and verify my analysis process, grounding my findings in the data and tracing my analytical steps all the way to the conclusions drawn.

To ensure the applicability of my findings beyond the specific case of the Dance United Methodology, external validity must be addressed. Naturalistic generalisations as “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (Stake, 1995, p. 85) allow for broader insights drawn from a particular case through vivid descriptions that help readers relate the findings to their own experiences. The detailed presentation of my case study offers thick, rich descriptions of the practice field, organisational context, and my findings—supported by quotes from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 256). Alongside the case’s contextualisation within its broader practice landscape, this enables readers to assess the transferability of the findings to their own contexts. Additionally, the use of maximum variation in my interview selection captures a wide range of perspectives on the Dance United Methodology, enhancing the generalisability of the findings. In conjunction, Dance United constitutes a unique case of community dance practice, contributing “to the horizontal accumulation of knowledge.” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 258) in this particular practice field and offering valuable insights for further theory development.

To further ensure credibility and trustworthiness, I consider the ethical dimensions of the research process. As the anonymity of participants is challenging to maintain with an explicit reference to Dance United as the studied case, further strategies are employed to safeguard basic rules of ethical conduct (deRoche & deRoche, 2010, pp. 339-340).

I respect my duty of care towards my interview partners, ensuring transparency about my research process, its purpose, methods, and findings by providing additional information ahead of the interviews—in writing and through personal explanations. This duty of care extends to an awareness of the potential organisational impact on Dance United Yorkshire and DU Dance NI in Northern Ireland. In careful balance with the integrity of my research findings, I aim to make positive contributions to this practice, while adequately documenting the legacy of the approach and its theoretical foundation.

Participation was on a voluntary basis and only pursued once informed consent for all aspects of the process was obtained. I respected personal boundaries and issues of privacy, providing an option for anonymity, which all interviewees declined. Additionally, the transcripts and findings were referred back for reassurance of accuracy as well as to provide a sense of ownership of the information shared. This resulted in requests for a limited number of omissions, which are noted in the individual transcripts.

In terms of ethically reflecting my personal research bias, the planning and conducting of interviews took into account my long-standing professional relationships with most interviewees. Being a co-expert, there is always a risk that this mutual understanding is lost in the interview process by failing to make it an explicit aspect of data collection (Bogner et al., 2018, p. 663). The awareness of this issue enables me to monitor its risk throughout all aspects of the interview process—from developing the guidelines to explicitly evaluating effects during the interviews and carefully considering implicitly shared knowledge during the analysis of data. With these procedures in place, my personal insight, understanding, and experience serve as a bridge between the unique case of Dance United and the scholarly examination of the theoretical foundation of its Methodology.



### III British Community Dance in Social Inclusion

As intrinsic case studies require particular attention to context (Stake, 1995, p. 64), it is essential to locate the Dance United Methodology within the wider field of British community dance. This broad contextualisation not only clarifies the distinctive boundaries of this unique case but also indicates potential contributions to existing practice models and theoretical foundations within this professional field, particularly within the sector of social inclusion.

To achieve this, the discussion in this chapter proceeds as follows. A general overview outlines the historical development of British community dance within its specific socio-political context and offers an approximation of a definition through key characteristics, thereby establishing the required groundwork to assess the uniqueness of my case (see III.1). The subsequent section turns to community dance within the social inclusion sector, further centring my contextualisation on defining idiosyncrasies of this specific practice context and the principles and methods of best practice with which the Dance United Methodology may align or diverge from (see III.2).

#### 1 Overview of British Community Dance

In order to assess the Dance United Methodology as a unique case, it is crucial to first provide a fundamental understanding of its general practice context. Community dance has “developed out of the responsiveness of dancers to their audience’s needs, their belief in the value of dance as a creative activity for all people as and its potential for promoting equality in society” (Adewole, 2010, p. 117). As such, it constitutes a distinct artistic practice deeply rooted in a commitment to social responsibility, notably resonating with Dance United’s mission to leverage dance as a catalyst for personal growth and social change (Dance United, 2003, p. 3). On this shared ground, the following embeds my case study within this overall landscape of community dance in Brit-

ain, outlining key historical milestones shaped by contextual factors (see III.1.1) and subsequently defining its key characteristics (see III.1.2).

## 1.1 Origins, Evolution and Socio-Political Context

The history of British community dance stems back almost fifty years, with its continuous expansion considered as “one of the major successes of the dance sector” (Burns & Harrison, 2009, p. 129). Its evolution sits at the friction point between an idealistic “opposition to elitist cultural hierarchies” (Bishop, 2012, p. 177) and a pragmatic alignment with opportune funding structures (Brinson, 1991, p. 133). Henceforth, I provide a historical account of this crucial realm of British dance ecology situated in the catalytic interplay between the emergence of a distinct field of practice and its socio-political context.

Although British community dance gradually defined and officially constituted itself during the 1970s, its early origins go back to the 1940s and 1950s with the foundational influences of both Modern Educational Dance and the popularisation of contemporary dance.

As one of the pioneers in modern dance in Europe, Rudolf Laban, together with his colleague Lisa Ullmann, promoted a participatory and inclusive ethos of dance practice on the premise that dance is a fundamental human activity everyone is capable of (Foik, 2008, p. 22). Rooted in Laban’s pioneering philosophy and theoretical framework on expressive movement, Modern Educational Dance was soon integrated into the national school curriculum and also adopted into teacher training courses. This broadened accessibility of dance not only contributed to the democratisation of the art form but also countered the “destructive individualism” (Thomson, 2008, p. X) of industrialisation by uniting people in communal activity, establishing the value base for the community dance movement.

The pivotal influence of contemporary dance can be traced to Martha Graham’s performance in London in 1954, a seminal catalyst that sparked public interest in this new art form (Burns & Harrison, 2009, p. 269). With her support, Robert Howard founded the London Con-

temporary Dance Company in 1964 and, three years later, the London Contemporary Dance School—both of which significantly impacted the dance ecology in Britain. To cultivate new audiences, these institutions developed outreach programmes within the education sector. By encouraging professional involvement with the wider public, these initiatives laid the historical foundation for the later evolution of community dance (Adewole, 2010, p. 107).

From the 1970s onwards, these historical foundations gradually merged into a nationwide initiative of community dance practice. With neo-liberal Thatcherism as the socio-political backdrop, the arts faced calls for promoting wider public participation, while experiencing a marginalisation in education due efforts to address unemployment by aligning curricula to the needs of the labour market (Stevens, 2013, pp. 3-7). “In the midst of such debates about the nature of arts and the role of artists in society and in education” (Stevens, 2013, p. 7), the first so-called dance amateurs were placed in Swindon, Cardiff, and Cheshire between 1976 and 1979. Rooted in the applied theory of socio-cultural animation in continental Europe, the term *animateur* denotes the facilitation of experiences of self-realisation, self-expression, and societal belonging (Pethybridge, 2017, pp. 62-63). With a focus on enhancing social cohesion and individual empowerment through the arts, the term embodies the dual role of artistic facilitator and community builder.

However, despite these democratic intentions, the emerging community dance movement was inherently entangled with the very cultural elite it intended to oppose through monetary necessities. As Jasper (1995) poignantly remarks: “it is difficult to be ‘radical’ or ‘alternative’ when posts are funded by state quangos” (p. 184). Continuously navigating these tensions between idealistic vision and pragmatic solutions, Peter Brinson played a pivotal role in shaping the emerging landscape of British community dance (Stevens, 2013, p. 4). From the early 1960s, Brinson championed the social relevance of dance, notably through the founding of Ballet for All, which introduced the wider public to the communal value of ballet. Most crucially, he helped to align the goals of community engagement with the necessity of securing funding from institutional sources by advocating for a non-elitist model of dance and

leading inquiries that emphasised the social relevance of dance. His efforts were instrumental in establishing the professional frameworks needed to bridge the gap between artistic ideals and practical funding solutions, thus significantly influencing the direction of community dance (Thomson, 2008, p. X).

Throughout the 1980s, British community dance further consolidated and formalised its professional structures, gaining socio-political recognition through a dedicated department for dance within the Arts Council England established in 1979 (Adewole, 2010, p. 109) and securing sustained financial support through its integration into the council's funding landscape in 1981 (Foik, 2008, p. 19). Brinson continued to play a pivotal role in the professionalisation of the practice as he institutionalised training through a postgraduate training course at the Laban Centre London (Pethybridge, 2017, p. 80). The realm of professional dance practice and community engagement was furthermore bridged through the establishment of Dance Agencies around the country between 1989 to 1999. In an effort to build the necessary infrastructure for a flourishing British dance ecology, these local, regional, and national organisations not only catered for the needs of artist development but also provided the “structure and continuity around the dance amateur movement” (Burns et al., 2023, p. 63).

The foundation of the professional body, the National Association of Mime and Animateurs, in 1986 marked another historical milestone in consolidating the profession (Burns & Harrison, 2009, p. 270). Since its foundation, this development organisation and membership body—serving as a structuring network for professionals practising in the field—has undergone significant growth and development. This is not only indicated by its steady accumulation of members, from 400 in 1995 to currently representing around 4500 practitioners worldwide (People Dancing: Foundation for Community Dance, 2024) but also by re-naming it several times. While changing the name to the Community and Mime Foundation in 1989 illustrates a break from socio-cultural animation, the change to the Foundation for Community Dance in 1996 reflects a clarified emphasis on the art of dance. Following ongoing discussion around the term community (Houston, 2008; Jasper, 1995; Tomkins, 2006), particularly concerning its separation from profes-

sional dance practice and the socio-political complexity of the term, the organisation added the prefix of People Dancing in 2015. To this day, the organisation constitutes a vital regulatory body of this diverse profession as it promotes excellence of practice through defining unifying values and codes of practice along with providing opportunities for the continuous professional development of its members.

While the community dance profession gained considerable momentum during 1990s due to an immense policy shift in arts funding of the newly elected Labour government—particularly with regards to the social inclusion sector (Houston, 2005, p. 166)—the new millennium has presented the profession with increasing challenges that shape its ongoing evolution. The financial crash in 2008 and the election of a Conservative government in 2010 constituted a significant socio-political rupture with a steady reduction in arts funding as part of the government's continuous drive to reduce public spending through their austerity measures. Currently, British community dance faces very precarious times with recent policy shifts and funding cuts “deconstructing 40 years of achievement” (Burns et al., 2023, p. 61). Compounded by the aftermath of the pandemic as well as the cost-of-living crisis, the decline of key support structures, including closures of educational programs and regional Dance Agencies, has weakened the profession's capacity to thrive.

However, with the recently elected Labour government pledging a commitment to the arts as a whole through “growing this industry, for its economic benefit and the enrichment of lives across the country” (Labour, 2024, p. 9), future investment into rebuilding the dance ecology seems very likely. Learning from over four decades of development, future reconstruction of this sector within which community dance is embedded needs to prioritise interconnectedness, collaboration, and long-term support in a way that benefits both individual practitioners and the larger creative community (Burns et al., 2023, p. 65).

Situated within this historical landscape, the Dance United Methodology embodies the inherent tension between artistic and social idealism and pragmatic demands of financial realities (see V.1.4). While community dance has diversified considerably beyond contemporary dance, the Methodology remains aligned with the legacy of the general

practice field in this regard. Drawing on the pioneering work of increasingly recognised practitioners—including Royston Maldoom—in the 1980s, Dance United emerged during a period when opportunities for socially engaged artistic practice flourished (see IV.1.2 and IV.1.3) and navigated the precarious climate of Conservative policies before its closure in 2014 (see IV.1.4 and IV.1.5). Understanding the work of the company within this historical situatedness not only provides a crucial context for its biography but, most importantly, situates the development of the Methodology within this broader evolution of socially engaged dance practice.

## 1.2 Defining Key Principles

Despite its historically developed and robustly established professional structures, providing a unified definition of community dance in Britain presents a challenging endeavour. This reflects the immense diversity of the practice (Amans, 2008a, p. 3), which partly stems from the multi-cultural influences on its historic development. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Non-Western artists challenged the status quo of dominant dance genres, expanding both the scope and reach of community dance (Adewole, 2010, pp. 108-109). Traversing many styles and traditions of dance, community dance practice operates in a variety of settings including education, healthcare, social services, and the justice system, while engaging a heterogeneous demographic that includes all ages, abilities, needs, and backgrounds. As a result, community dance “cannot be thought of as a singular defining entity” (Houston, 2008, p. 15) but rather as a spectrum of practices unified by shared defining key principles. As a result, ongoing critical discussion about core values, shared aims, and key features has persisted since the mid-1980s (Amans, 2008a, p. 3).

The first attempt to address this debate was the Community Dance Framework, published in 1996, which recognised the need for unified defining values to promote future development, enhance professional status, and attract further investment (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 2). Building on this recognition, in 2006 the Foundation for Community Dance launched the initiative Making a Move in

an endeavour to further professional standards of practice (Bartlett, 2006). Developed over more than two years, the initiative aligned with government goals to address skill gaps and improve productivity, while also responding to employer demands for clearer articulation of professional competence (Bartlett & Stenton, 2008, para. 1). The process ultimately resulted in a flexible and inclusive Professional Framework of defining features, core values, and a professional code of conduct (Bartlett & Stenton, 2009). The consolidation of professional quality regulations continued with the introduction of the National Professional Standards for Dance Leadership in 2011, which further solidified the standards of best practice (Craddock & Willmore, 2011). This development culminated in the introduction of People Dancing Professional Qualifications in 2024, which enhance the recognition and formalisation of expertise within the field by ensuring that practitioners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to meet best practice standards (Leatherdale & Stenton, 2024). Drawing insights from these regulatory frameworks, I outline the defining key features of the practice, embedded in its aims, objectives and underlying values.

Founded on the values of equality, access, and inclusion, and grounded in a belief in the transformative power of dance, community dance is distinct from professional practice. It is characterised by a clear focus on increasing access to dance across a variety of contexts and an emphasis on the process of experiencing and creating dance (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, pp. 2-3). In accordance with this ethos, it embraces diversity—both in dance traditions and participants it engages—and broadens the dance ecology outside of statutory education and beyond commercial motivations of profit (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 3). Facilitated by highly-skilled practitioners, “community dance is about professional dance artists working with people” and through its inclusive nature “creates opportunities for people to access quality experiences in dance irrespective of where they live, their age, gender, sexuality, race, disability, educational attainment or economic circumstance” (Bartlett & Stenton, 2009, p. 36). Fundamentally, everyone holds the right and capacity to access dance as a medium of creative expression, meaning making, and community building. Emphasising individual ownership and empowerment, dance

is a humanising and transformative activity that contributes to broader societal change.

A practice manifesting these principles provides inclusive, high-quality experiences within a supportive environment that enables participants to realise their creative and human potential. It nurtures creative expression, fosters personal growth, and strengthens community cohesion, while challenging aesthetic norms and encouraging critical engagement. This is guided by the profession's code of conduct that articulates required professional competencies, standards of practice and expectations of professional accountability and integrity, alongside a commitment to safe practice and interpersonal conduct based on respect, equality, autonomy, and diversity (Bartlett & Stenton, 2009, pp. 37-38).

Community dance fundamentally aims to contribute to the overall development of dance as an art form and the artistic development of professionals and non-professionals alike. Within this it endeavours to improve health and holistic wellbeing, to foster inclusive social relationships, and to promote community cohesion, thus contributing to broader social change and artistic development agendas (Bartlett & Stenton, 2009, p. 36). These goals are not only set out as a philosophical vision in the Professional Framework but are practically reinforced through the National Occupational Standards for Dance Leadership (Craddock & Willmore, 2011, p. 33), as well as the People Dancing Professional Qualifications (Leatherdale & Stenton, 2024, p. 37).

In alignment with these overall aims, community dance pursues the following objectives within its core areas of art, education, politics, and society (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 3). Within the realm of art, community dance endeavours to develop a unique applicable aesthetic code that unifies diverse practices beyond style and form, deepening appreciation for dance while questioning mainstream, elitist aesthetics (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, pp. 8-10). Along a spectrum between process to product, context and relationships are considered pivotal aspects in perceiving and appreciating community dance, as “what we see is not easily divorced from who we see doing it, and from our perception of the context” (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 9). Seeking to redefine and diversify aesthetic values,

it promotes authenticity, intention, and passion as key qualities (Foik, 2008, p. 23). Although there are numerous and ongoing discussions which emphasise the intrinsic value of the arts along with an appropriate aesthetic code for community dance (Bartlett, 2013; Curl, 2006; Maldoom, 2016), there is no unified conception of a theoretical framework applied within this context. Integrating the aesthetic debate into a framework of diverse perspectives could further clarify the unique contribution of community dance practice to the general dance ecology.

As a form of education in and through dance, it is “concerned with the development of the individual” (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 14). Emphasising dance as an experiential process rather than a formal study, it delivers client-centred learning content with a focus on leading and facilitating democratic, participatory decision-making (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, pp. 11-12). Despite this emphasis on the educational realm of community dance practice, there is no overarching methodology within the field. Although the Professional Standards and the Professional Qualifications robustly outline the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies for practising in this field, this is not explicitly aligned with theoretically founded sets of methods aimed to effect these processes of self-development.

Since “community dance is primarily a social activity, uniting creativity and physicality in a way that offers the experience of *communitas*” (Thomson, 2008, p. XI), it can be understood as both a political as well as a social endeavour. In the political arena, it aims to democratise the arts through promoting access, participation, diversification, and inclusion. Envisioned as “different dances for different people” (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 16), it challenges modernist cultural hegemony and empowers participants to make meaning through dance that is impactful on their sense of self and the world around them. Socially, it is driven by values of equality, diversity, and inclusion, engaging with participants to foster personal growth and contribute to wider social change through community cohesion (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 17). While the practice evidently operates within socio-political contexts and engages with socio-political issues, it lacks a consistent, systematic, and unified theoretical integration of these dimensions. Further theoretical development in this area

is required to clarify and adequately describe the impact and contributions of this practice to political and social change.

Despite the lack of a singular definition and a unified theoretical framework, current practice of British community dance has emerged from an ongoing discussion around its core values, shared aims, and key features. Community dance as a diverse practice across dance traditions is driven by the principles of equality, access, and inclusion, as well as the fundamental belief in the transformative power of dance. In its overall aim of promoting artistic and personal development, it bridges the realms of arts, education, politics, and society, thereby challenging societal norms and contributing to meaningful social change. In this drive for social impact, it shares fundamental characteristics with the Dance United Methodology, thus providing a meaningful contextualisation of this specific case of community dance practice.

## 2 Community Dance within the Social Inclusion Sector

I now focus the contextualisation of my case study on the specific practice context of social inclusion. As connotated by the term *animateur* and stemming from its fundamental principles of dance as a universal right and capability, community dance presents with an organic affinity towards social change efforts (Houston, 2018, p. 238). Over several decades, British community dance within the social inclusion sector has developed as a response to social inequalities by engaging those often excluded from traditional artistic opportunities. Rooted in values of equality, access, and inclusion, this practice inherently supports social change through its core aim to empower marginalised populations through the arts.

The following examines the distinctive features of community dance practice in the social inclusion sector, tracing its development through historical socio-political ruptures that continue to shape its aim and practice (see III.2.1). By outlining principles and methods of best practice, I provide the disciplinary orientation necessary to examine Dance United's unique impact within this sector (see III.2.2).

## 2.1 Idiosyncrasies of Practice

British community dance practice in this sector is particularly exposed to the friction between its idealistic vision and pragmatic realities, facing distinct challenges in balancing its artistic ambitions with the socio-political forces that shape its economic sustainability. This sub-chapter explores these defining tensions by examining how the practice has evolved within shifting political agendas and resulting funding constraints.

In opposition to the social effects of neo-liberal Thatcherism, the practice field emerged throughout the 1970s out of initiatives in impoverished and marginalised areas of England, aiming to counteract the fragmentation of communities, the decline in social solidarity, and the instrumentalisation of people as mere human capital (Foik, 2008, p. 19). The social inclusion sector has been a core area of practice ever since and gained a particular momentum after the General Election in 1997, when Labour were elected to the government (Houston, 2005, p. 166). Within the context of their extensive welfare reform, the new government pursued a paradigm shift from “equality to social inclusion” (Lister, 1998, p. 215). With education and employment positioned as primary pathways, it was reframed as equality of opportunity emphasising individual responsibility for realising productive potential (Powell, 2000, p. 46). Under these New Labour policies, the arts were now considered a viable mean of empowerment and a remedy to exclusion (Pethybridge, 2017, pp. 59-60). Matarasso’s “Use or Ornament” (1997)—an extensive and widely cited report evaluating the impact and purpose of the arts within society—reinforced the government’s reliance on arts-based interventions and further cemented their role in advancing the social inclusion agenda. In a noticeable shift from challenging to aligning with government agenda, community dance in this sector “co-opted the infrastructure that the government has made available to address issues around social exclusion” (Adewole, 2010, p. 106), thus exposing itself to a considerable risk of instrumentalisation by aligning with trends, outcomes, and aims set by funders and the government.

The issue of prioritising instrumental socio-political expectations over intrinsic artistic ambitions and community-oriented missions was

acutely heightened following the global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent implementation of austerity measures by the Conservative Government elected in 2010. Community arts organisations were faced with significant funding cuts for the arts and an increased pressure of delivering measurable outcomes (Rimmer, 2018, pp. 296-298). Even if organisations managed to achieve financial sustainability, research confirms that the substantial reductions of local government grants and central funding in the arts sector had “come at significant cost to both their engagement with disadvantaged local groups and their commitment to community development aims” (Rimmer, 2018, p. 310). Although the community dance profession does acknowledge the detrimental impact of Conservative policies (Burns et al., 2023), there has been little consideration around the implications for practice in the social inclusion sector. Especially given the case of Dance United, which ceased operations in 2014 due to funding issues, this underscores a critical area for future inquiry, illuminating the challenges in navigating an increasingly strained funding landscape.

In light of this historical and socio-political backdrop, community dance practice within the social inclusion sector generally aims to make dance widely accessible to socially marginalised and excluded populations. As “projects seek not only to allow those excluded from mainstream opportunities to participate in dance, but also to empower them” (Houston, 2005, p. 166), it can be defined “as a field of transformational practice with the potential to affect personal and social change” (Gladstone, 2009, p. 36).

Although these ambitions of empowerment and transformation provide a powerful justification for the existence and indeed funding of community dance within this sector, it falls upon a precarious socio-political dynamic which potentially construes these concepts in alignment with values of productivity and economic integration. In a subtle but significant alteration of community dance’s “heroic vision” (Bennett in Houston, 2005, p. 166), this alignment shifts the focus from fostering authentic personal and social change to meeting measurable, productivity-driven outcomes. Houston critiques this shift, warning of its potential for instrumentalisation of this practice while also cautioning against the oversimplification of the personal and social complexities

of the issue, ultimately proposing a fundamental respect towards “the power that dance may have to change lives” (2005, p. 176).

A practice honouring and upholding this inherent transformative potential prioritises the art of dance and emphasises an artistic impetus over a social imperative (Houston, 2018, pp. 240-244). This emphasis on the artistic vision allows artists and choreographers working in this sector to foster meaningful connections with participants as creative agents beyond their personal background and societal labels. In turn, participants are enabled to engage in the dance process as creative and competent individuals, enhancing their sense of agency and self-expression. As Houston notes:

Few of these choreographers working in social exclusion settings would describe themselves as radical political activists, considering dance, the enjoyment of the act of dancing and the creating of movement with others of primary concern. For them dance acts as a subconscious guerrilla movement: on the surface doing one thing, but during that process, creating the momentum for something infinitely more radical; a redistribution of the power base for social inclusion (2018, p. 248).

Her perspective illustrates how artistic practice is inherently empowering and transformative, creating a space where meaningful social inclusion is effected through the active engagement and realisation of individual potential, regardless of background. As my case study evidences, this artistic emphasis is integral to the Dance United Methodology. Encapsulated in the tagline “Lives transformed through dance”, the approach upholds artistic integrity as the catalyst for meaningful social impact.

## 2.2 Principles and Methods of Best Practice

Best practice generally refers to the working methods, principles, and standards that are officially recognised as the most effective in achieving desired outcomes within a specific field (Cambridge University Press, 2024a). Over the years, British community dance has experienced considerable effort in developing such principles, methods, and standards

through its regulatory frameworks—the Professional Framework, the National Professional Standards for Dance Leadership, and the People Dancing Professional Qualifications (see III.1.2). These frameworks provide robust yet flexible unifying key principles for the broad spectrum of diverse practices. In the social inclusion sector, best practice of community dance specifically requires a nuanced and careful balance of artistic and social objectives in order to foster a sustainable and meaningful impact. Effective principles and methods navigate the socio-political challenges particularly acute to this sector, which potentially shift the focus from personal transformation to quantifiable external outcomes. Consequently, establishing best practice in this field demands particular sensitivity to these dynamics. The following highlights the specific and pressing need for best practice in this sector before outlining its key dimensions and concluding with a critical review of potential gaps in existing models. This provides the adequate contextualisation to assess the relevance and applicability of the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology to this broader practice landscape.

Community dance within the social inclusion sector presents with a particular need for establishing universally recognised working methods, principles, and standards of practice. As illustrated in chapter III.2.1, the specific socio-political context of this sector exposes it to acute vulnerabilities, making it susceptible to manipulation and instrumentalisation. As Corner (1995) highlights within the broader context of socially engaged arts, in the absence of established frameworks, funding bodies often impose their own criteria, creating a politically infused basis “for initiating and supporting projects where the arts could fulfil some useful social function” (p. 115). Unfortunately, “practitioners and theorists have been unable to define a particular style, form or aesthetic in socially engaged arts” (Badham, 2010, p. 86). Given the diversity of practices—not only across socially engaged arts in general but also within community dance in particular—this lack of clarity potentially results in a fragmented landscape where artistic and social integrity may be compromised in favour of meeting external funding criteria. In turn, this hinders the intrinsic potential of artistic engagement, thus diminishing its distinct contribution as an impactful practice in the aim to promote empowerment of marginalised and vulnerable populations.

In a distinct effort of assessing existing principles and methods of best practice of community dance in social inclusion contexts, the Arts Council England launched an action research endeavour examining six exemplary project initiatives (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006). Building on *The Art of Inclusion* (Jermyn, 2004)—a report which examined arts practices in social inclusion settings but neglected dance organisations—the resulting publication *Dance Included: Towards Good Practice in Dance and Social Inclusion* provides an exploratory assessment of best practice dimensions, including their effectiveness and social impact (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 5). The research process entailed evaluation conducted within each project and an overarching evaluation of central dimensions led by Helen Jermyn. All projects received support from the Arts Council England to develop and conduct appropriate self-evaluation tools throughout. The overarching evaluation assessed areas of challenges as well as positive aspects to develop a best practice model and adequately describe the impact of projects in the social inclusion sector. It constitutes the only research in the field that transcends individual project evaluations, aiming for a comprehensive meta-analysis of this specific practice area.

From 45 applications, six projects were selected: three focusing on young offenders and at-risk youth in both custodial and community settings, one engaging disadvantaged elderly participants, one providing a dance program for people experiencing homelessness, and one offering dance initiatives in educational settings across various age groups (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 4). Dance United was among the selection with a pilot project at HMYOI<sup>12</sup> Wetherby. Led by Royston Maldoom and supported by two assistants, the project *Third Symphony – Men at War* engaged a group of young male offenders in an eight-week intensive rehearsal process, culminating in two final performances as well as accreditation in literacy and other key skills (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, pp. 34-35). Although the projects varied in terms of initiative—either lying with the respective dance organisations or partner organisations within the sector—they all considered “dance as a creative and

<sup>12</sup> HMYOI is the official acronym for “Her/His Majesty’s Youth Offenders Institution” and refers to youth detention centres for offenders aged 15 to 21 in the United Kingdom.

artistic activity that had value in itself” rather than applying it “as a social tool” (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, all projects encompassed a performance element, which not only provided a clear focus and goal for the work but also offered an opportunity to showcase participants’ achievements. Overall, the research identified the following dimensions of best practice: planning and goal setting, partnerships, recruitment, professional development training for staff, and evaluation that included outcomes for participants.

All projects adhered to a careful and considered planning process. The findings indicate that this was most effective and successful when considering the needs of partners and participants throughout development, with jointly set clear, transparent, and realistic goals which were flexibly adjusted according to evolving needs and circumstances (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 6). A critical point raised by the research was the lack of involvement of potential participants in initial planning phases of projects, which could have retrospectively benefited the development of a number of projects (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 8).

Effective partnerships between dance organisations and relevant partners within the sector were identified as pivotal in the realisation of projects, enabling effective participant recruitment, understanding of participant needs, and successful program delivery. Key factors contributing to a reliable, reciprocal commitment included consistent communication, clarity about roles and responsibilities as well as a shared vision of project implementation (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 9). However, the findings also highlighted areas for improvement, particularly in maintaining continuous and sustained support from partners throughout. Particular challenges arose in fostering an appreciation for the value of dance among staff, while changes in staffing caused considerable disruptions. This underscored the importance of understanding the specific institutional dynamics of respective settings for effective programme delivery (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 11).

Especially given the number of practical and psychological barriers to engagement faced by populations defined as hard to reach, recruitment and retention was identified as a key issue for projects, with high drop-out rates as well as sporadic attendance (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 12). Best practice strategies identified to address these issues included

extensive outreach initiatives—such as taster sessions—partner referrals guided by clearly defined recruitment criteria, and targeted marketing and advertising efforts. These proactive strategies were hindered by a number of additional challenges such as participants’ negative pre-conceptions of dance, particularly among boys and men, the adverse impact of organisational structures on attendance, and diverse needs in terms of structural dynamics of each project (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 13).

Many of the selected projects recognised the need to equip dance artists with the relevant skills and knowledge “to work safely, appropriately, and effectively with vulnerable groups” (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 14). As the findings identify, projects implemented this aspect in a number of ways. Externally provided formal training before the start of the project prepared the artists for the specificities of context as well as the client group. On-the-job training and mentoring through working alongside experienced artists allowed novices in the field to gain experiential insights into working methods, while integrating a reflective practice into the overall evaluation consolidated professional development. Reciprocal skill exchange between artists and partners provided additional learning within the partnerships. However, the findings also suggest further areas for improvement in accurately identifying training requirements to pitch training at the right level, as well as consistently translating the learning into practice.

Pauline Gladstone (2009), who has been pivotal in developing and delivering training for Dance United, echoes this issue of providing appropriate training within the sector as a whole: “Despite the expansion in the dance in social inclusion sector, there are no agreed industry guidelines or standards for training” (p. 36). Over 15 years have passed since, however, this has still not been addressed. Although the National Occupational Standards recognise the need for professional development appropriate for respective practice fields, it leaves the initiative as to identifying their needs with the practitioners (Foundation for Community Dance, 2011, pp. 27-28). In addition, the professional qualifications offered by the Foundation do not include specific courses on the social inclusion sector (Leatherdale & Stenton, 2024, p. 38).

In terms of an effective evaluation process of projects, the findings indicate that this aspect needs to be intrinsic to project delivery and integrated from the outset (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 19). Assessing project impact revealed recurring themes that deepen the understanding of potential outcomes for participants (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, pp. 21-22). All projects reported increases in dance skills, knowledge, and appreciation among participants—regardless of their prior dance experience. Notably, the opportunity to perform in front of an audience was found to significantly boost confidence and self-esteem, providing participants with a sense of achievement and pride. Observations and questionnaires further indicated improvements in physical health and well-being, as well as positive developments in interpersonal relationships, such as trust, teamwork, and communication.

The above findings highlight important areas to be considered in the development of good practice models for dance initiatives in the social inclusion sector, addressing both aspects that have positively contributed to the realisation of projects as well as the issues and challenges encountered. Although this action research provides a comprehensive insight into the different dimensions of best practice, the results remain overall explorative and there are several critical aspects to be addressed.

Firstly, the report lacks transparency regarding research methods as very little information is provided on both the overarching evaluation by the Arts Council England as well as approaches employed by individual projects, making it difficult to appraise and contextualize the findings. While some formal qualitative data was gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and video documentation, other data derives from informal sources like conversations and reflective notebooks, with no indication as to data analysis processes.

Additionally, the report offers limited insight into the pedagogical approaches employed in each context. This is particularly surprising given the objective to outline best practices, which should include a thorough exploration of how projects are delivered and learning is conveyed. Without detailed descriptions of clear, replicable methodologies, it is challenging to understand how the different initiatives achieved their desired outcomes, hindering not only the assessment of the effectiveness of different approaches but also limiting potential for knowl-

edge transfer and capacity building within the sector. Unfortunately, this omission is in line with a general absence of methodological frameworks within community dance in general.

Considering the practice's specific vulnerabilities to instrumentalisation within this sector, it is noteworthy that the report also fails to mention the intrinsic value of the arts in promoting the reported impact. Given that the research was initiated by Arts Council England with the intention that "the results of which will be used to inform our policy around future funding for this area of work" (Scholey, 2003, para. 1), it is unsurprising that the report emphasises the instrumental over the intrinsic, assuming that at the time it was conducted government agendas outweighed artistic ambitions and community-oriented missions.

Furthermore, the absence of a theoretical foundation is notable, as the research does not include underlying theories related to artistic values, educational principles, or sociological considerations across the various projects. This lack of theoretical grounding in community dance within the social inclusion sector represents a significant research gap, which this PhD project aims to address by way of examining the Dance United Methodology as a unique case, indicating broader applications of a relevant theoretical foundation of practice.

In summary, while the discussed framework provides essential guidance for best practice in community dance within the social inclusion sector, I identify significant gaps in areas of robust research, methodological clarity, and theoretical foundation. This limits its contribution to navigating the balance between artistic and social objectives, often leading to an emphasis on measurable social outcomes at the expense of the arts' intrinsic value (Corner, 1995, p. 115).

Overall, this chapter lays the contextual groundwork for examining the Dance United Methodology in relation to the wider development of community dance in Britain. Emerging from and shaped by the same historical forces, the work of Dance United shares the professions' commitment to driving meaningful personal and social change through the inherent transformative potential of dance. Addressing the field's lack of universal aesthetic codes, pedagogical principles and socio-political considerations, the Methodology's distinct contribution lies in a rigorously articulated framework that prioritises artistic stan-

dards as the basis for social impact. In turn, my theoretical foundation offers a scholarly sound model of best practice that is less vulnerable to instrumentalisation and more resilient towards evolving socio-political conditions.

## IV The Work of Dance United

Having provided a thorough contextualisation of the Dance United Methodology within its wider practice field of British community dance, in my next step I define its distinct boundaries through a comprehensive and rich description of the company in its complex entirety. This not only honours the inseparable interrelationship between the case and its organisational context (Stake, 1995, p. 47) but also fulfils the requirement of “an intensive, holistic, description” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii).

While a biographical account of Dance United along thematic categorisations illustrates the historical situatedness of the Methodology (see IV.1), the company’s evaluation and research endeavours on its impact evidences its consistent and sustained efficacy (see IV.2). Together, this account of the work of Dance United delineates the company’s unique contributions and underscores its role in evolving a model of practice within the broader field of socially engaged dance.

### 1 A Biographic Account

As the history of Dance United has never been comprehensively captured, providing a biographic account is a distinctive aspect of my empirical research process that allows me to define the historical situatedness of the Methodology. From the origins in Ethiopia in 1995—which brought together the company’s founding members Andrew Coggins, Royston Maldoom, and Mags Byrne—to its closure in 2014, the work of Dance United spans across almost thirty years and maintains a legacy to this day through the ongoing work of Dance United Yorkshire.

In order to adequately describe this history, my biographical account of Dance United is presented in distinct phases, capturing substantial changes and significant shifts in the organisation’s historical development. Resulting from my descriptive analysis (see II.2.2), I identify three distinct modifications of the company’s activities which provide the structural framework for my historical account. Of course, different strands of development extend and overlap across phases; however, it is

the shift in the company's overarching focus that delineates the boundaries between these periods of activity.

To establish a complete and comprehensive biographical narrative, I begin with the origins of the work in Ethiopia (see IV.1.1) before proceeding to the formal incorporation of the company and its subsequent activities across three strands throughout its first phase (see IV.1.2). I then examine the second phase, constituted by a consolidated focus on the work in the criminal justice (see IV.1.3) and conclude with the third and final phase with a distinguished effort to further the artistic vision of the company (see IV.1.4). In the final sub-chapter, I describe the post-liquidation period, which illustrates the ongoing practical implementation of the Methodology and the enduring legacy of the work (see IV.1.5).

## 1.1 Pre-Incorporation – Origins in Ethiopia from 1995 to 2000<sup>13</sup>

Although the work of Dance United has emerged from the field of British community dance practice—more specifically its application in the social inclusion sector—the origins of the organisation lie in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, rather than Britain. In 1995, a collaborative performance project with street and working children brought together Andrew Coggins, a British TV producer; Dr. Carmela Abate from the Ethiopian Gemini Trust, an Addis Ababa-based NGO based; and Royston Maldoom, a British dance artist and choreographer (Coggins, 2020, p. 4; Davies, 2020, p. 1; Maldoom, 2010, p. 209).

At the time, Andrew Coggins was endeavouring to capture the lives of street and working children in the Ethiopian capital through a documentary project. This particularly marginalised population faced extensive systemic governmental discrimination in the form of police bru-

<sup>13</sup> There is no documentary data from public records—such as annual reports submitted to Companies House—prior to Dance United's official incorporation. The information for this period is therefore drawn from publications, supplemented by two internal company documents (Coggins, 2020; Davies, 2020) and corroborated by interview data of stakeholders involved at the time.

tality, social exclusion, and cultural stigmatisation (Heinonen, 2011, p. 4). Coggins had previously visited Ethiopia in the early 1990s for a feature-length documentary (Interview with Andrew Coggins, November 2021, p. 1) and was commissioned by the BBC to return in 1994, documenting the impact of Bob Geldorf's Live Aid initiative on the lives of Ethiopians (Maldoom, 2010, p. 211; Plastow, 2004, p. 129). His efforts to establish this initiative were initially inhibited by a senior executive from an aid agency, who criticised the project for speaking about and for this particularly marginalised population in Addis Ababa, rather than enabling them to find their own voice (Davies, 2020, p. 1). Taking this criticism on board, his focus thus shifted to providing an appropriate means of expression for these children and young people. He turned to the medium of performing arts—in particular dance—as a medium he was familiar with (Coggins, 2020, p. 4). Approaching a vast number of potential funders, Dr. Carmela Abate from the Ethiopian Gemini Trust “was the only one” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 1) who was captured by Coggins' vision and became a pivotal supporter throughout.

As the initiative started to take shape, Coggins contacted Royston Maldoom as an experienced and established expert in international dance work with marginalised populations (Maldoom, 2010, p. 211). “We decided to try and bring in some people who might know a bit more. And to cut a long story short I was introduced to Royston Maldoom and Mags Byrne and they had been doing pretty much ad hoc projects in different parts of the world with disadvantaged groups using contemporary dance” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, pp. 1-2), as he recounts this initial encounter of uniting social vision and artistic expertise. Maldoom and Byrne agreed to collaborate and led on the performing arts strand of the project. Coggins—in close collaboration with the Ethiopian Gemini Trust—established the film aspect of the work through founding GemTV, a filmmaking company run by former street and working children (Plastow, 2004, p. 131).

The pilot project of this collaborative initiative featured 120 street and working children in a public performance of a piece called *Adugna*—meaning hope in Amharic, one of five official languages in Ethiopia. Set to the music of *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff, Maldoom initially devel-

oped the choreography for the Youth Dance Performance Project at The Place<sup>14</sup> in London and had previously delivered it in Northern Ireland (Maldoom, 2010, p. 152). Over an intensive rehearsal process across four weeks, the dance artists Mags Byrne, Susannah Broughton, and Royston Maldoom led on daily rehearsals with the participants (Maldoom, 2010, p. 218). The work culminated in five public performances at the City Hall Theatre and was opened to an eclectic mix of audiences comprising of street children, government officials, NGO representatives and local leaders (Plastow, 2004, p. 130). The performances received very positive responses and led to further invitations for the group, such as the British Embassy centenary celebrations with the performance of a new piece called “Street Dreams” in 1996 (Plastow, 2004, p. 131).

The team around the pilot project sought to further develop the work, prompting Maldoom, together with Mags Byrne and Tara Herbert—a British dance artist who later became Dance United’s Artistic Director (Interview with Tara Herbert, December 2021 p. 1)—to return to Ethiopia for a three-week workshop with the pilot project participants (Maldoom, 2010, p. 225). With the goal to identify a group of young people to be trained under the umbrella of the Adugna Community Dance Initiative, they “selected twelve guys and six young women [...] through a very complex process”, (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 2), as Coggins recalls. Initially intended to run over three years, this intensive training and capacity-building programme actually continued over five years and encompassed technical training in contemporary and African dance, creative and choreographic practice as well as teaching skills through running a wide range of community workshops (Maldoom, 2010, p. 231; Plastow, 2004, p. 135). Accredited through Middlesex University as the Dance Development Programme, the curriculum was delivered by a number of visiting European and African artists (Plastow, 2004, p. 139). The dancers even contributed to a Police Training Programme, targeting the often negative and loaded relationships between the police force and street children (Plastow,

14 The Place is one of the most renowned dance development organisations for training, creation and performance in the UK. For more information, please visit: <https://www.the-place.org.uk/>

2004, p. 146). Funded by the UK Department of International Development, this initiative was managed by Blair Davies. As he recalls, he was “intrigued by the idea that these Adugna dancers, who [...] had themselves been the victims of policing abuses on the streets” and “saw the possibility of using their developing expertise in dance and especially with the Ethiopian traditional dances [...] as a gateway into a relationship with the police” (Interview with Blair Davies, November 2021, p. 1). Since this first contact with the work, Davies continued to support the work of Dance United and subsequently became the Chair of Dance United Yorkshire.

The work was heavily criticised and faced considerable challenges throughout the years: “The issue of professional-level training, and its cost, is – along with the focus of the project being dance – what has caused most unease” (Plastow, 2004, p. 132). This was particularly voiced by the main funding organisation Comic Relief but was also echoed by supporters and staff at the Ethiopia Gemini Trust. This is further corroborated by Andrew Coggins stating “it was quite hard to sell a story in which young people who in the development world might have been regarded as victims or casualties are created to be strong, capable, sustainable, viable, adult beings” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 3). Against all odds, however, all eighteen former street and working children officially graduated as professional dancers with a diploma from Middlesex University (Maldoom, 2010, p. 231). When the Adugna Community Dance Initiative came to a close in 2002, all but two dancers decided to continue to work together under the umbrella of Adugna Community Dance Company (Plastow, 2004, p. 150). Dance United has maintained a close working relationship with the development of the work in Ethiopia ever since (Davies, 2020, p. 3). Two of the dancers from the pilot project and the Adugna Company—Juniad Sendi together with Addisu Demissie—played a central part in the large-scale community dance project *Destino*. This Dance United production for and with Sadler’s Wells brought together community dance practice and professional dance performance with renowned choreographers Hofesh Shechter, Russell Maliphant, and Adam Benjamin. The evolving relationship with Dance United and the development of the work in Ethiopia is furthermore described in each respective phase.

These origins in Ethiopia illustrate a number of founding characteristics of the Methodology, stemming from the shared artistic vision between Maldoom and Byrne, who “sung off the same hymn sheet” and “had a similar ethos” (Interview with Mags Byrne, February 2022, p. 2), as Byrne states. Providing a huge learning curve of universal skills “about how people ACCESS the arts and how people ACCESS dance in a different way” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 2), the work in Ethiopia emphasised a performance-led process aligned towards the aim of harnessing the unrecognised potential of the participants. Through rigorous training within a professionally accredited framework, the Adugna programme supported young people from impoverished and marginalised backgrounds to not only become capable dancers but also advocates for social change within their communities. For Herbert, this impactful interplay between professional artistic practice and community engagement, founded on a transformative ethos of empowerment and community-driven change, constitutes the fundamental “spirit of Dance United” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 10).

## 1.2 The First Phase – Working on Three Strands from 2000 to 2006

The first phase of Dance United as a constituted charitable organisation spans six years and encompasses its early development along the thematic categorisations of evolving company structures, emerging aims and objectives, and undertaken activities. As such, it is marked as a phase of formation, emergence, and continuous growth in developing the work.

In an effort to apply their learnings from Ethiopia to the UK, Mags Byrne, Andrew Coggins, and Royston Maldoom formally established Dance United as a charitable company limited by guarantee on December 4th, 2000. As such, it was incorporated under a Memorandum of Association, setting out its objects and governing its activities in the Articles of Association (Companies House, 2000). It was subsequently registered as a charity on June 28, 2001 (Charity Commission, 2001).

In compliance with UK legal frameworks, the company structure encompassed a board, serving as directors according to company law

and as trustees according to charity law. Headed by a chair and administered by a secretary, the board held responsibility for strategic management, policy development, along with ensuring financial and legal probity (Dance United, 2006a, p. 2). Initially comprising three members, the board expanded in 2006 following the recommendation of an organisational development analysis funded by the Arts Council England (Dance United, 2006a, p. 9). This expansion to four board members endeavoured to better meet the company's evolving needs and develop a broader strategic direction.

As outlined under Article 44 of the Articles of Association (Companies House, 2000, p. 19), a management board of Artistic Directors was appointed consisting of the founders Mags Byrne, Andrew Coggins, and Royston Maldoom (Dance United, 2001a, p. 1). Based on their unique vision and ample expertise, this team autonomously led on planning and undertaking all activities to fulfil Dance United's mission (Dance United, 2001a, p. 8; 2003, p. 2; 2004a, p. 2). While monitoring finances and regularly reporting to the board, they were authorised to appoint the required consultants, contractors, and agency staff to realise these activities. Particularly in response to the aforementioned organisational development analysis, external consultants specialising in fundraising and capacity-building were engaged to thoroughly assess the company's evolving needs (Dance United, 2001a, p. 7; 2004a, p. 12; 2005, p. 10; 2006a, p. 9). In a considerable effort to drive the organisational development of the company forward, the resulting recommendations relating to policy refinement and adjustments of financial structures were actively implemented from 2007 onwards throughout the company's subsequent phase (Dance United, 2007, p. 10).

In 2006, Maldoom and Byrne left Dance United marking a pivotal change not only for the Management Board but for the company as a whole. As a result, Andrew Coggins transitioned into the role of Executive Producer. He was joined by Tara Herbert as Artistic Director, with the additional appointment of a General Manager. These substantial organisational changes prompted the adjustment of the board's terms of engagement with an emphasis on sustainable management and strategy implementation to progress the company's activities through the restructured management team (Dance United, 2006a, p. 2).

Achieving financial growth and stability was a key factor throughout this phase of Dance United's organisational structure. From raising just over £100,000 in its first financial year of operation in 2001 (Dance United, 2001a, p. 12), the company's annual income exceeded £500,000 by 2006 (Dance United, 2006a, p. 20). In addition to continuously increasing their base of funders, Dance United secured pivotal financial support as an Arts Council England Regularly Funded Organisation in April 2006.<sup>15</sup> With this four-year stable funding stream, "the company's future core financial stability has been improved, and has allowed the company to develop a more fixed structure to support its programme of work" (Dance United, 2006a, p. 11). Alongside other gradually stabilising funding from trusts and foundations, this support provided leverage for attracting further financial commitments and advancing the vision of a sustainable business model (Dance United, 2006a, p. 11). The resulting financial resilience enabled Dance United to plan, develop, and implement organisational strategies that prepared the company for the second phase, characterised by a clear focus on work in the criminal justice sector.

As these organisational structures were consolidated, the company's aims and objectives correspondingly evolved, increasing in clarity and focus. As a charitable company limited by guarantee, Dance United was legally bound to act within its defined objects constituted by the trading boundaries within which the company pursued its work. At incorporation, these were stated in the Memorandum of Association under Article 3 as follows:

The objects of the company are the promotion of the use of dance for the relief of poverty, sickness and distress, the advancement of education, the preservation and protection of physical health and emotional health, the relief and rehabilitation of prisoners, refugees, children, young people and all manner of excluded groups and any other charitable purpose (Companies House, 2000, p. 10).

<sup>15</sup> The Regularly Funded Organisations funding model, employed by the Arts Council England until 2012, provided consistent operational funding to arts organisations based on annual submissions detailing activities, finances, and outcomes (Martin & Toledano, 2011, p. 3)

In June 2001, a Written Resolution amended and refined the objects, positioning “the advancement of education and training in dance and related subjects” as the company’s core purpose, while broadening its demographics to “children, young people, prisoners (so as to further their relief and rehabilitation), refugees and others, who may, for whatever reason in the opinion of the company be excluded from society” (Dance United, 2001b, p. 1). Within this legal framework, the company’s aims and objectives progressively developed throughout this phase.

The annual report of 2003 explicitly outlined Dance United’s aims and objectives for the first time, establishing its sole intent “to advance dance as a tool for personal development and social change in the UK and overseas” (Dance United, 2003, p. 3). This articulation was later elaborated on the company’s website, which articulated its ultimate goal as using “dance to inspire marginalised and socially excluded people to realise their full potential, and help them challenge the cycles of misunderstanding, prejudice and abuse in which they are often trapped” (Dance United, 2004b). Both statements of intent underscore the company’s strong social commitment. However, the emphasis on dance as a tool for social outcomes indicates an instrumental framing of the art form, and, consequently, a neglect of its intrinsic transformative value.

The realisation of this primary aim was implemented through four key objectives (Dance United, 2003, p. 3). Firstly, to deliver dance projects furthering personal and social processes of transformation. Secondly, to monitor the impact of the work through evaluation while disseminating the results through advocacy efforts. Thirdly, to provide professional development and capacity building within the sector. Lastly, to operate efficiently through the effective management of the organisation. As the organisation grew, the structural integration of the work within relevant sectors became more vital. Developing partnerships to strengthen the company’s activities was thus added as a key objective towards the end of the first phase (Dance United, 2006a, p. 3).

In implementing these aims and objectives, Dance United’s activities focused on three key areas: international work with marginalised communities; community cohesion in Northern Ireland; and the criminal justice sector in England. In addition to project development and delivery in these three areas, the company adhered to its objectives by

providing professional training opportunities, monitoring the impact of the work through evaluation, disseminating the results, and advocating the work.

Dance United's international activities spanned across three continents, involving large-scale projects in the capitals of Berlin, Addis Ababa, and Lima. In collaboration with Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royston Maldoom—together with his colleagues Susannah Broughton and Tara Herbert—delivered three large-scale performance projects, each involving over 200 participants from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Dance United, 2003, p. 6; 2004a, p. 8; 2005, p. 8). The first and most prominent project in early 2003 featured Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and formed the basis for the internationally successful, multiple award-winning cinema documentary film *Rhythm Is It*. The following year, Maldoom and Broughton—together with German artists Volker Eisenach and Anja Müller—directed a diverse group of young people in a choreography of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloé* (Dance United, 2004a, p. 8). In 2005, Broughton and Herbert directed an intergenerational performance of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, involving 250 participants and culminating in two performances attended by a combined audience of 6,000 people (Dance United, 2006b).

Building on the pilot project in 1996 and the Adugna Community Dance Initiative, which concluded in 2002, the work in Addis Ababa was consolidated under the Adugna Community Dance Company with ongoing support and artistic mentoring from Dance United (Dance United, 2003, p. 7). In an extension of its inclusive approach, the Adugna Community Dance Company engaged young people with disabilities and offered eleven young disabled Ethiopians an opportunity to train and teach in an integrative setting. A collaboration with British choreographer Adam Benjamin, who contributed with his extensive expertise in inclusive practice<sup>16</sup>, provided the required expert mentorship and professional support. To facilitate an active exchange between the

<sup>16</sup> Adam Benjamin is one of the co-founders of CanDoCo Dance Company, one of the first and most established inclusive dance companies in Europe. For further information, please visit: <https://candoco.co.uk/who-we-are/our-history/>

work in Ethiopia and activities in criminal justice in England, Juniad Sendi and Addisu Demissie visited initiatives in Bradford to contribute to project delivery and receive enhanced professional development training (Dance United, 2006a, p. 7).

Between 2003 and 2004, Dance United partnered with the British Council and dancers from the Ballet San Marcos to deliver a dance development programme with the Los Olivos Municipality in Lima, Peru (Dance United, 2003, p. 6; 2004a, p. 9). With the aim of enhancing public health and instigating social development among this marginalised and impoverished community, the programme engaged around 70 young people in performance-led processes and involved capacity-building for local professional artists, ensuring a sustainable and replicable model of practice (Dance United, 2003, p. 6).

Contextualised within the ever-present socio-political tensions of divided communities, the national initiatives in Northern Ireland were led by Mags Byrne. Building on the inclusive pilot project *Out of the Rubble* (Dance United, 2003, p. 4), the evolving *Building Bridges* Programme focused on diversity and inclusion, encompassing intensive performance-led projects, weekly workshops, and regular curricular dance classes across six schools (Dance United, 2006a, p. 8). Running between 2004 and 2006, the programme also provided on-the-job training opportunities for local dance artists (Quinn, 2005). With a focus on community cohesion, the initiative *Crossing the Divide* delivered several interdisciplinary cross-community performance projects that united children and young people across ten schools, while also offering capacity-building training at Teacher Training Colleges (Dance United, 2005, p. 5). In 2006, the work in Northern Ireland was officially constituted as Dance United Northern Ireland (Dance United, 2006a, p. 8), subsequently becoming an independently operating organisation in April of 2007 (Dance United, 2007, p. 8). Byrne has since renamed the company to DU Dance NI, which to this day operates as a dance development company with the aim to facilitate personal and social development through dance.<sup>17</sup>

17 For further information on the work of DU Dance NI, please visit the company's website: <https://www.dudancenl.com/about-us/>

As the third key area of activity, the work in the criminal justice sector in England initially focused on women in custodial settings and gradually expanded to engaging young offenders in custody as well as on probation.

In early 2001, the work of Dance United was first introduced to the custodial context through an intensive pilot project at HMP<sup>18</sup> Holloway in London—the largest female prison in Great Britain, holding a population with complex emotional and psychological needs from diverse backgrounds (Wilford, 2001, p. 2). Over a five-week intensive rehearsal period, culminating in a performance to an invited audience (Broughton, 2002), Royston Maldoom and Susannah Broughton worked with twelve women on *Symphony*, based on Henryk Górecki's *Symphony No.3*. Subsequently, Dance United developed intensive performance projects alongside continuous dance provision with the aim of promoting mental and physical health, increasing self-confidence, conveying transferrable skills, and providing access to learning (Dance United, 2006a, p. 6).

Further broadening the demographic to include young people in custody, in 2002 Susanna Broughton and Tara Herbert delivered several pilot projects at different custodial institutions—including HMP Send in Surrey, HMP High Point in Suffolk, HMYOI Bullwood Hall in Essex, and HMP Styal in Cheshire (Dance United, 2003, p. 5). Early the following year, Maldoom led an eight-week intensive pilot project called *Third Symphony - Men at War* with young men in custody at HMYOI Wetherby in Yorkshire (Duncan, 2005, p. 10). The evaluation of the work was conducted by the external evaluator Katrina Duncan as part of the Arts Council England research initiative *Dance Included* (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006; Duncan, 2005). Following the success of this pilot project, Dance United expanded the work with youth in the justice system to the Yorkshire region by conducting regional research on developing sustainable structures within the sector (Dance United, 2004a, p. 8; Duncan, 2005, p. 10). Within the resulting partnership with the Bradford Youth Offending Team, Dance United delivered two pilot projects

<sup>18</sup> HMP is the official acronym for “Her/His Majesty’s Prison” and refers to adult custodial detention centres in the United Kingdom.

during the latter part of 2003 (Dance United, 2004a, p. 8) and three more community-based projects with young people at risk throughout 2004 (Dance United, 2005, p. 7).

The criminal justice activities subsequently consolidated under the Breaking Barriers Programme, with HMYOI Bullwood Hall and HMP Styal as continuous primary partners (Dance United, 2004a, p. 6). Between 2003 and 2006, the Dance United team—directed by Broughton and Herbert—delivered three intensive performance-led projects a year at each institution and additionally established continuous provisions through performance companies and regular classes (Dance United, 2004a, pp. 6-7; 2005, pp. 5-6; 2006a, pp. 4-6). The delivery of the projects was linked with professional development programmes and presented young artists with the opportunity to train alongside experienced Dance United Artists. Crossing into the second phase of the company, all activities in this area consolidated under the name Criminal Justice Programme (Dance United, 2005, p. 5).

Further amalgamating these efforts in the criminal justice sector, Dance United launched a nationwide action research and development project funded by the Arts Council England with the aim to embed contemporary dance training into long-term pastoral, vocational, and educational provisions of the various partner institutions (Dance United, 2004a, p. 8). The Framework—as the eighteen-month initiative was called—supported the consolidation of the above activities into three key initiatives of the Criminal Justice Programme: the Academy in Bradford; the Academy at HMP Holloway; and the Dance Artist Training and Fellowship Programme.

First, the Academy in Bradford constituted a three-year action research programme and was conducted by Andrew Miles with Paul Strauss from the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change at the University of Manchester (Miles & Strauss, 2008). With the aim “to establish dance-led delivery of orders and sentences for young people that will become a realistic sentencing option for Youth Panels and magistrates” (Dance United, 2006a, p. 6), it was structured as a rigorous twelve-week programme with clear, non-negotiable standards and boundaries (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 4). Offering a broadened curriculum to meet the standards of accreditation by Trinity College,

it included dance-related subjects such as nutrition, cooking, drumming, fitness, and choreography (Herbert, 2006, para. 11). Second, the Academy at HMP Holloway focused on demonstrating how dance-led training and performance programmes support sustainable improvements in mental health and psychological wellbeing (Dance United, 2006a, p. 6). Both Academy Programmes entailed a qualification for the participants through the Arts Council England Young People's Arts Awards (Dance United, 2006a, p. 5). Third, the Dance Artist Training and Fellowship Programme tackled the company's shortage of sufficiently experienced staff to deliver the work in criminal justice by training and supporting a cohort of artists to become competent in delivering the Academy Programme in community as well as custodial settings (Dance United, 2006a, p. 7). The elements of the programme included tools for self-reflective practice, training in the Dance United Methodology, practicalities of project delivery, behaviour management strategies, introduction to accreditation systems, and induction to the structure of the criminal justice sector.

In summary, the historical development of Dance United throughout this first phase was primarily shaped and framed by the vision of its three founding members. With regards to the developing company structures, the founding members led as Artistic Directors on the Management Board to establish an increasingly robust and flexibly evolving framework aligned towards delivering sustainable work. Their vision was furthermore realised through the core aim, defining the company's central social commitment to transformation and change, with the aligned objectives promoting further sustainability. However, their visionary drive became most evident in the three primary areas of activities of the company throughout this phase; with Maldoom leading on the international strand, Byrne focusing on developing the work in Northern Ireland, and Coggins facilitating initiatives in the criminal justice sector. Across all these activities, the work of the company was marked by efforts to achieve professional standards, strategic sustainable growth, and capacity building. Initial engagements were characterised by intensity and goal orientation towards a performance, often utilising classical music assumingly outside the realm of experience of participants. Closely collaborating with experts within the sector as well

as established artists—such as Sir Simon Rattle and Adam Benjamin—confirms this drive towards professionalism. My subsequent analysis of the Methodology’s core concepts assesses the extent to which these historical principles have been maintained and consistently implemented throughout the evolution of the approach.

### 1.3 The Second Phase – Focus on Criminal Justice from 2007 to 2010

Following the departure of Maldoom and Byrne, Dance United’s efforts consolidated around the work in the criminal justice system and the company transitioned into the second phase of its historical development. Spanning three years, this phase was characterised by substantial consolidation and continuous growth across the three thematic categorisations (see II.2.2).

In terms of company structures, developments were informed and guided by the recommendations from the aforementioned organisational development analysis conducted in 2005, which served as the basis of a rolling action plan for both board and management (Dance United, 2007, p. 10). Throughout this phase, the board underwent significant changes aimed at strengthening governance by incorporating specialised and relevant expertise. Starting in 2007, Pauline Gladstone—who had been involved in the pilot project at HMYOI Wetherby through the Unit for the Arts and Offenders—contributed her extensive experience in arts management, training, and development (Dance United, 2007, p. 2). In the following year, the board expanded its expertise in criminal justice by appointing Blair Davies—previously involved in the Ethiopian police training programme (Dance United, 2008, p. 3). Additional appointments enhanced expertise in financial management, business administration, and marketing, and bolstered strategic capacities to effectively oversee and support the company’s development.

Tasked with implementing and advancing policies, strategies, and organisational objectives, the Management Board, also underwent considerable changes. In 2007, continuing Executive Producer Andrew Coggins and Artistic Director Tara Herbert were joined by two newly

appointed team members: Associate Director Michelle Bynoe and Associate Producer Rob Lynden (Dance United, 2007, p. 2). By 2009, the team had been rebranded as the Artistic Management Team, with roles reframed to meet the company's evolving needs. The restructured team comprised an Executive Director, Artistic Director, Head of Programme Development, and Head of Artistic Development and Training. Described as the "innovative heart" (Dance United, 2009b, p. 5) of the company, they were supported by a two-person Project Management Team and consultants with expertise in networking, marketing, public relations, and advocacy (Dance United, 2009b, p. 5). This expanded managerial set-up enabled more effective implementation of the company's extended responsibilities—including developing new opportunities, cultivating strategic partnerships, overseeing program implementation, advancing capacity building and artistic growth, and enhancing public relations and advocacy (Dance United, 2009b, p. 5).

Adding to its increasing stability, Dance United further consolidated and diversified its funding structures during this phase. As a Regularly Funded Organisation of the Arts Council England, the company continued to receive government financial support (Dance United, 2007, p. 10). Additionally, new partnerships not only strengthened the existing structures but also supported the ongoing development of programmes, resulting in a "diverse income portfolio across sectors and sources" (Dance United, 2009b, p. 16). Further diversifying their income, the company initiated the development of a business model for the Academy Programme (Dance United, 2007, p. 11), which was first implemented in 2008 through partners purchasing places for young people (Dance United, 2008, p. 6). In response to the economic downturn following the 2008 financial crisis, the company adopted a mission funding strategy in 2009 (Dance United, 2009b, p. 6). This covered core overhead costs for the Artistic Management Team and ensured that Dance United remained "a responsive, businesslike and mission-led company delivering quality, impact, risk and change" (Dance United, 2010, p. 24). In an effort to build long-term relationships with trusts and foundations alongside developing new relationships with businesses interested in investing in their social responsibility (Dance United, 2010, p. 24), rigorous marketing became a key strategy to the success-

ful engagement of stakeholders and partners (Dance United, 2010, p. 26). This entailed the development of a consistent brand identity with a new logo, strapline, and website, together with a unified core script outlining the company's approach, purpose, and aspirations for all promotional materials and external communications.

This process was closely tied to the formalisation of a mission statement articulating the company's evolving aims and objectives. The 2008 annual report first set out the vision "that contemporary dance is widely adopted as a powerful force for realising the potential of individuals and communities" (Dance United, 2008, p. 3) alongside the mission to "make the case for the transformative power of dance; pioneer its approach in new contexts and applications; train and develop artists of calibre committed to the delivery of the work" (Dance United, 2008, p. 3). These were consolidated in 2009 into a mission statement under the company's new tagline "Lives transformed through dance":

We work with those who are marginalised in society and whose potential is often unrecognised and unfulfilled. Contemporary dance training and performance of the highest quality has the power to unlock this potential. Dance United delivers work that is tough, tightly-focused and highly disciplined [...] By pushing way beyond their own expectations, and those of others, they are inspired to define a new sense of self, and encouraged by their experience, to recognise and seize the opportunities that may now lie ahead (Dance United, 2009b, p. 2).

In alignment with this mission statement, the company's aims and objectives underwent further refinement and detailed specification. Progressing from the general aim of advancing contemporary dance as a tool for personal development and social change, the updated aims included realising the transformative power of dance in action, developing exceptional artists, pioneering the approach in new contexts, and maintaining the highest artistic standards (Dance United, 2010, p. 3). Objectives were explicitly linked to these aims, listing related annual activities and achievements (Dance United, 2010, p. 6). The core objectives focused on developing and replicating the Academy Programme and disseminating action-research findings. This was complemented by

partnerships and projects in West Yorkshire, a national training programme for dance in the social inclusion sector, and a major national performance event supported by a national residency tour (Dance United, 2010, p. 7).

This refinement indicated evolving clarity and focus in the company's work, reflecting increased organisational stability and predictability to plan and implement objectives with consistency. While maintaining a strong social commitment, the company shifted from instrumentalising language to harnessing the intrinsic transformational power of dance and performance to unlock potential, foster achievement, and inspire a renewed sense of self in participants.

The company's activities during this phase were clearly aligned with the above objectives through an emphasis on expanding the Criminal Justice Programme. Having organically evolved from the partnerships with HMP Holloway and the Youth Offending Team in Bradford, these efforts particularly focused on the continued development of the Academy Programme, while also enhancing the Dance Artist Training Programme to ensure consistent high-quality delivery. Investing in its Artistic Programme, the company delivered a national performance event and residency tour, interlinked with the continued international collaboration with Sendi and Demissie in Ethiopia.

With a focus on improving mental health and facilitating personal development, the Academy Programme at HMP Holloway continued into a second year, building on the long-standing relationship since the pilot project in 2001. Throughout 2006 and 2007, Dance United delivered two intensive performance projects and provided regular weekly dance sessions, incorporating training experiences for artists and placements for students from the dance conservatory Laban Centre (Dance United, 2007, p. 6). After its second year, however, Dance United decided to withdraw from this custodial setting as the ambitious scope of the programme overly strained the prison's resources (Dance United, 2007, p. 6).

Dance United subsequently consolidated all efforts to the Academy in Bradford with substantial refinements informed by the ongoing three-year action research project (Dance United, 2007, p. 6). Having successfully secured funds to establish a dedicated space for the Acad-

emy towards the end of 2006, throughout the second and third years of the action research, the Dance United team delivered the core programme of intensive twelve-week performance projects three times a year at United Studios in Bradford (Dance United, 2007, p. 5). With improvements in recruitment and retention strategies (Dance United, 2008, p. 7) alongside broadened access to potential participants through new partnerships (Dance United, 2008, p. 12), young people were better supported to overcome barriers to engagement. As a new component to the curriculum, participants delivered dance workshops in primary schools—not only to enhance their leadership skills but also to promote artistic engagement for pupils (Dance United, 2008, p. 7). Progression route strategies were developed to adequately support participants beyond the completion of projects. This included a vocational accreditation by Trinity College London and later by the Open College Network (Dance United, 2010, p. 9). To effectively deliver the programme, the Academy team was strengthened through the recruitment of new artists via the company's training programmes as well as through the induction and training of support staff via the local Youth Offending Team.

At the end of the three-year action research, the Academy was established as “a radical and intensive 12-week model to work with persistent young offenders and those at risk of offending” (Dance United, 2009b, p. 7). The evaluation report by Dr. Andrew Miles in collaboration with Paul Strauss provided tangible evidence for the efficacy and impact of the Academy Programme (Miles & Strauss, 2008), while its credibility was strengthened through being awarded the Award for Excellence and Innovation in Arts Work with Young People at Risk, the Youth Justice Award, and the Koestler Trust Award (Hunter & Gladstone, 2009, p. 151).

The positive outcomes of the action research provided the necessary leverage to realise the objective of a national replication of the Academy Programme. In November 2009, Dance United delivered a six-week performance project in collaboration with local partners in London—including local Youth Offending Teams and the Southbank Centre's participation department. This pilot project was the first step in establishing the London Academy, with its first full-length programme running in autumn 2010 (Dance United, 2010, p. 15). The development of another Academy in Winchester—the Wessex Dance Academy—was

launched with a three-week pilot project in March 2010 (Dance United, 2010, p. 15).

The Academy in Bradford continued its activities throughout 2009 and 2010 on the basis of the aforementioned business model, delivering three cohorts a year—as the 12-week projects were referred to by then. With a newly formed partnership with Bradford College, college students joined the first three weeks of each project to support the participants as role models, training and rehearsing alongside them as part of the group (Dance United, 2010, p. 12). Additionally, a performance company open to Academy graduates, as well as to college students and young dancers in training, was established (Dance United, 2010, p. 16). With a focus on dance technique, choreographic repertoire, and new works created with visiting choreographers and Dance United artists, it served not only as a progression route for graduates but also provided a link to local dancers, choreographers, and artists as part of a broader outreach and networking initiative (Dance United, 2008, p. 8).

With the expansion of Academy Programmes and the increased need for competent artists capable of delivering this work, Dance United faced a dilemma: “there are too few high-calibre dance artists who can meet the exacting standards this work requires. This puts a very real strain on the expansion of our activities in social inclusion” (Dance United, 2010, p. 18). This was exasperated by a lack of “agreed industry guidelines or standards or training” (Gladstone, 2009, p. 36). As the shortage of appropriately qualified dance artists and lack of shared standards of training was perceived as a more global problem within the field of community dance education and teaching, The Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership was initiated to assess training regulation needs, develop appropriate accreditation structures, and occupational standards (Burns, 2008, pp. 10-11). Within this national strategic collaboration between the Foundation for Community Dance, the Council for Dance Education, several dance conservatoires, Dance UK, the National Dance Teachers Association and Youth Dance England, Dance United contributed by assessing the specific training needs of artists working with challenging and marginalised groups within the

context of an Open Space<sup>19</sup> event (Gladstone, 2009, p. 36). Follow-up publications and a conference presentation summarised the learning and insights from this exchange informing the overall research process of the partnership (Gladstone, 2009; Hunter & Gladstone, 2009).

Further contributing to this nationwide effort, Dance United dedicated considerable resources to training new artists within the area of criminal justice and social inclusion. This activity organically evolved alongside the delivery of projects, encompassing various strands. Primarily developing out of the work in custodial settings, the Dance in Criminal Justice Fellowship Programme continued to provide on-the-job training for artists (Dance United, 2007, p. 7), while a successful application with the Arts Council England funded an extensive training programme for eight artists to be prospectively developed into Academy directors (Dance United, 2010, p. 18).<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Term Ten Training—constituting a week-long intensive training programme—was developed to serve both as a professional development initiative and a recruitment tool (Dance United, 2007, p. 7). Informed by feedback and internal evaluations, the Term Ten Training gradually consolidated into a consistent and coherent national training initiative for university courses and dance organisations (Dance United, 2008, p. 9). Termed the National Training Programme for Dance in Social Inclusion, it gradually consolidated into a set of methods to convey the learning and skills required to work proficiently in the dance and social inclusion sector (Dance United, 2010, p. 18). Developing this particular training approach was a key part of Dance United's efforts in this area; however, I consider this as a separate entity from my research object. While further research on this training methodology is certainly valuable for understanding how professional skills are developed, it is not central to my inquiry.

Investing in the company's artistic programme and advocating "for the power of dance to affect, shape and, sometimes transform, the lives of many who have been written off or who, themselves have decided

<sup>19</sup> Open Space Technology, as a participant-led format of professional exchange and dialogue, was developed and led by Improbable Theatre Company. For further information, see: <https://www.improbable.co.uk/open-space>

<sup>20</sup> I was one of the eight selected artists and received my training through this initiative.

they have no value to society” (Dance United, 2008, p. 10), Dance United developed a collaborative national performance programme. *Destino*—the production co-produced with Sadler’s Wells<sup>21</sup>—brought together community dance with professional dance and performance practice. New commissions from the established choreographers Hofesh Shechter, Russell Maliphant, and Adam Benjamin were staged alongside a large-scale intergenerational community piece choreographed by Herbert and Broughton (Dance United, 2010, p. 20). Addisu Demissie and Junaid Sendi from Ethiopia featured in all aspects of the programme. Composed of performance events hosted by Sadler’s Wells, a tour of residencies in the UK, and workshops in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, this work constituted a landmark production in realising Dance United’s core aim:

*Destino* brought our work to the general public and raised our profile in the cultural sector and in the media. It broke down barriers, showing how high-quality community and professional dance can be entirely complementary. It brought our work with marginalised individuals empathically into the arts mainstream (Dance United, 2009b, p. 13).

Commissioned by the Arts Council England, the process of the production was captured by the documentary film *Destino: A Contemporary Dance Story*. Premiering at Sadler’s Wells, it was screened at the Royal Society of Arts in London and toured at several international festivals (Dance United, 2010, p. 23).

In summary, the second phase of Dance United’s historical development constituted a time of significant organisational growth and consolidation of core activities. With a strengthened board, extended management team, and enhanced financial stability, company structures evolved to efficiently and effectively support the realisation of the company’s refined ambitions. Consolidating the project-based work across three strands into a focus on work in criminal justice, the research-informed Academy Programme became a viable model for working with

21 Sadler’s Wells is a performance art theatre in London and renowned as one of the world’s leading dance venues. For further information, please visit: [www.sadlerswells.com/](http://www.sadlerswells.com/)

young offenders and at-risk youth across multiple locations. It is evident that the intensive, performance-led approach throughout the first phase came to full fruition within this programme. Efforts in creating progression routes for participants, along with the continued engagement of capacity-building through training initiatives within the sector, emphasise an ongoing commitment to sustainability. The Artistic Programme—led by the Destino project—reflects the company's ambition of uniting artistic excellence with their social mission. The analysis of the Methodology's core concepts bears these historical characteristics in mind and illustrates how they are practically translated into the implementation of the approach.

## 1.4 The Third Phase – Evolving the Artistic Vision from 2011 to 2014

The company entered its third phase by extending its work beyond the criminal justice sector into broader social inclusion context across the three regional Academies, while advancing its artistic innovation in a fusion of professional and socially engaged dance practice. Despite receiving national and international recognition (Bennhold, 2013, p. 4) and establishing a robust track record of efficacy (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006; Miles & Strauss, 2008; van Poortvliet et al., 2010), the third phase concluded the work of Dance United as a constituted charitable company due to insurmountable financial difficulties caused by funding reductions and delays (Companies House, 2014a, p. 8). Nevertheless, even during these final four years, Dance United continued to expand its reach beyond the Academy Programme context, particularly evolving its artistic vision and ambition.

In terms of organisational structure, while the company initially maintained its established stability and integrity, it later implemented significant changes to optimise governance, reduce core costs, and meet increasing financial restraints (Companies House, 2014a, p. 7). In response to these critical financial developments, the board experienced considerable changes in its membership and leadership. An interim chair with extensive experience in arts management was

appointed in 2012 and received continued support from the former chair (Dance United, 2012, p. 19) alongside an interim vice chair (Dance United, 2012, p. 33). In early 2011, Blair Davies resigned from the board as increasing demands in his role as the company's strategic advisor for Organisational Development and Partnership created a conflict of interest (Dance United, 2011, p. 30). The board received additional support in early 2012 with three new members joining. This included Nikki Crane, a crucial collaborator with the company since the early 2000s (Dance United, 2012, p. 33). By reshaping its leadership and welcoming new members, the board aimed to strengthen Dance United's governance to better navigate the ongoing financial constraints.

Continuing to hold the overall responsibility for strategic implementation and progression of organisational objectives, the Artistic Management Team was reorganised into three departments to effectively deliver on the strategic aims set for the period 2011 to 2015 (Dance United, 2011, p. 21). Each department was led by one of the senior managers and received additional support from strategic advisors with relevant expertise in programme development, organizational growth, and strategic planning (Dance United, 2011, p. 44). In response to the adverse funding situation this re-organisation effort to streamline the management structure was soon followed by impactful departures, with Tara Herbert resigning in 2012 after over fourteen years of working with the company and Andrew Coggins leaving as Executive Director at the end of the financial year of 2013/2014 (Dance United, 2012, p. 2). However, he remained involved in the company in a consultative role as well as a non-executive director on the board of Dance United Yorkshire (Dance United, 2014a). Furthermore, Michelle Bynoe, as Director of Academies and Training, stood down from her role in Spring 2014. Despite these responsive and adaptive measures in management, the company was nevertheless unable to surmount the financial challenges caused by funding reductions and delays.

In terms of funding structures, Dance United continued to apply the aforementioned mission funding strategy developed during the second phase to cover the core costs of the Artistic Management Team through direct funding by donors. While this was successfully supported by trusts and foundations, the company recognised the substan-

tive need to diversify its sources of income (Dance United, 2011, p. 27). Consequently, new relationships were forged in the Corporate Social Responsibility arena, particularly targeting leading financial organisations in the City of London. Additionally, private donor structures were developed, including a Friends Scheme launched in November 2011 (Dance United, 2011, p. 27). Unfortunately, Dance United's funding structure became increasingly precarious in 2010 when they lost their regular funding stream from the Arts Council England as a Regularly Funded Organisation (Dance United, 2012, p. 16). Despite this setback, the company successfully applied for a grant from the Arts Council England to pursue the development of an alliance structure between the three Academies, aiming to increase their independence and flexibility. Additionally, being selected as one of the recipients of the Royal Wedding Charitable Gift Fund by Prince William and Kate Middleton not only funded progression programmes to support participants to transition back into education, training, and employment but also significantly raised the public profile of the work. The above efforts gained further momentum through an independent evaluation report by New Philanthropy Capital, assessing the financial viability and socio-economic impact of the Academy Programme and evidencing a 215% return on public investment (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, p. 39). However, the report came in too late to prove Dance United as a viable and cost-effective option to potential funders and failed to support the acquisition of sustainable funding sources in time.

While upholding their core mission statement, encapsulated in the tagline "Lives transformed through dance," Dance United further refined their aims into three strategic core goals, respectively realised and delivered through the three restructured Artistic Management Team departments (Dance United, 2012, p. 4). The overarching narrative guiding this strategic development evolved in direct relation to a statement by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron: "There is in this country the most outrageous, the most disgraceful, the most pointless waste of potential amongst teenagers [...] There is a gap in British society, the lack of a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood" (Dance United, 2011, p. 2). In response, the company established a guiding narrative to provide a "rite of passage from a difficult child-

hood to a potentially more fulfilling adulthood” through experiences of “outstanding contemporary dance” implemented by “a bold artistic programme in which artistic quality and social concern are seamlessly fused” (Dance United, 2011, p. 21).

Within this narrative frame, the first aim to develop the company’s programmes with disadvantaged and hard-to-reach young people was realised through the objective of developing a national federation structure of the three Academies in Yorkshire, London, and Winchester (Dance United, 2011, p. 22). Strategically aligned training initiatives aimed to recruit new dance artists for the growing programmes, while a coherent marketing strategy sought to engage new supporters, audiences, and participants (Dance United, 2012, pp. 14-15). The second aim encompassed creating outstanding choreography suitable to the client group and was realised through the objective of artistic collaborations between professional choreographers and senior Dance United practitioners (Dance United, 2012, pp. 7-9). Resulting from the extensive programme development with regular performances across all three Academies, this met the company’s need to extend the choreographic repertoire while maintaining high artistic standards (Dance United, 2011, p. 23). To realise the third aim of showcasing the artistic achievements of participants, the company planned to broaden collaborations and extend the reach and public visibility of the work (Dance United, 2011, p. 24). This included both the production and distribution of live performances at prestigious venues, along with films and digital media that were supported by a robust marketing strategy (Dance United, 2012, p. 15). In their entirety, these aims and objectives demonstrated a clear focus on further consolidating the company’s programme, evolving the artistic ambition, and enhancing the public profile of the work. Their practical realisation translated into four corresponding key areas of activities throughout this third phase.

Following the substantial development of the Academy Programme informed by the action-research of Miles and Strauss (2008) throughout the second phase, it was now ready to expand beyond its place of origin in Yorkshire into a national roll-out. With the pilot initiatives in London and Winchester consolidating into operational programmes,

Dance United pursued its first strategic aim across three Academy Programmes (Dance United, 2011, p. 9).

In June 2011, Dance United Yorkshire was formally constituted as a registered not-for-profit Community Interest Company (Dance United, 2011, p. 11). Operating as a wholly owned subsidiary of Dance United, it was managed by a team of two Dance Directors and an Academy Coordinator under the governance of a regional board. In partnership with Kirklees Council and Kirklees Youth Offending Team, the Dance United Yorkshire launch project extended beyond the remit of Bradford “so that even more vulnerable, disadvantaged and disengaged young people could benefit from its services” (Dance United Yorkshire, 2014a, p. 3). Flexibly responding to the needs and requirements of local partners, they adjusted the 12-week Academy framework to more viable programmes ranging between four to eight weeks (Dance United Yorkshire, 2014a, p. 3). This responsive adjustment of provisions furthermore included the engagement of families, with younger siblings, parents, and carers actively involved throughout different elements. First introduced in a six-week pilot project in Keighley in 2013, this strand was subsequently incorporated into other initiatives (Dance United Yorkshire, 2014a, p. 9). With the strategic aim of regional integration, Dance United Yorkshire consolidated existing and pursued new partnerships in the social sector, arts, and education, from primary schools to higher education settings (Dance United Yorkshire, 2013, p. 17). Through its flexibly extended provisions and responsively broadened outreach, Dance United Yorkshire increased its number of participants, audience members, and partnerships, “proving its ability to continue evolving and growing as a relevant dance and social inclusion organisation in Yorkshire” (Dance United Yorkshire, 2014a, p. 35). Gaining full independence before the closure of Dance United through a special companies resolution (Companies House, 2014b), Dance United Yorkshire continues its operations to this day (see IV.1.5).

Dance United’s London Academy was launched in October 2010, with the first cohort taking place at a temporary space in East London (Dance United, 2011, p. 10). Highlighting the need for a permanent, professional space that ensured confidentiality, safety, and a neutral location that allowed young people to attend without facing territorial

issues tied to London's gang culture, the London Academy was subsequently established at a dedicated space near King's Cross. It generally ran three cohorts a year, from January 2011 until summer 2014, with young people referred through developing partnerships with charitable and public sector organisations, such as local Youth Offending Teams and Pupil Referral Units (Dance United, 2012, p. 11). The programme introduced the National Open College Network-accredited curriculum and a new mentoring scheme to support the participants' progression into education, training, and employment upon completion of the Academy Programme (Dance United, 2011, p. 11). In addition, a performance company was established to provide regular contemporary dance technique training and opportunities to learn, develop, and perform new choreographic repertoire in collaboration with visiting dance artists (Dance United, 2011, p. 12). Work at the London Academy ceased upon the company's closure in summer 2014.

The Wessex Dance Academy in Winchester adopted a more gradual launch than the London operation and functioned under a distinct management structure, overseen by Hampshire County Council rather than directly by Dance United. (Dance United, 2011, p. 12). Following a three-week pilot project in March 2010, Dance United secured and remodelled a bespoke building, which subsequently hosted a six-week project in June 2011. The first full 12-week cohort was delivered in January 2012, welcoming young people referred through Youth Offending Teams, Children in Care Teams, an education centre and a secure unit (Dance United, 2012, p. 11). Since then, Wessex Dance Academy delivered three cohorts a year and, like the London Academy, also developed a performance company featuring graduates from the Academy alongside local dance students from the University of Winchester (Dance United, 2012, p. 13). After the closure of Dance United in summer 2014, the Wessex Dance Academy continued to operate independently under Hampshire County Council (Ofsted, 2015, p. 1). However, due to loss of funding from the local council, they had to conclude their activities at the end of 2024 (Ferrer & Cooper, 2024).

As a key objective towards the first aim, Dance United pursued an alliance structure between the three Academies, which was envisioned as a coordinated management by the Artistic Management Team to

map, develop, and share resources, services, quality standards, and training amongst the operations (Dance United, 2012, p. 11). However, this structure was never fully realised before closure.

With the work stretching across three Academies, Dance United also continued its efforts to train new artists to deliver the work and consolidated its initiatives into a three-tier approach (Dance United, 2011, p. 14). The so-called Stage 1 course, was regularly delivered to students at higher education settings and dance training institutions. In 2012, the course became accredited by the National Open College Network (Dance United, 2012, p. 14). The second stage constituted the on-the-job training of a selected group of practitioners “who showed potential to become the dance directors of the future [...] with outstanding leadership skills, equipped to work effectively at the most challenging end of dance in the community” (Dance United, 2011, p. 14). The third stage of training focused on choreographic development in cooperation with external choreographers interested in extending their work into the social realm.

In line with the second strategic aim, Dance United initiated artistic collaborations between professional choreographers and senior Dance United practitioners, emphasising artistic excellence as “the key to our connection with participants and to bringing about lasting change” (Dance United, 2012, p. 12). In summer 2011, three external choreographers joined Dance United artists under the umbrella of the National Performance Platform to create new work with Academy graduates and performance company members (Dance United, 2011, p. 23). This exchange culminated in the performance event *Rite of Passage 1* at the studio theatre of Sadler’s Wells in September 2011 (Dance United, 2012, p. 7). This initiative laid the foundation for the subsequent choreographic innovation programme, producing new repertoire with performance companies as well as front-line delivery on Academy projects (Dance United, 2012, p. 8). Additionally, Dam Van Huynh<sup>22</sup> became Dance United’s first Associate Artist with the vision

22 Dam Van Huynh is an internationally acclaimed choreographer and the founder of Van Huynh Company. For further information, please visit: <https://www.damvanhuynh.com/company>

of an ongoing artistic exchange across initiatives. Bridging professional practice and engagement of marginalised populations, the programme not only enriched the choreographic skills of Dance United artists but also challenged the choreographers' approaches, proving "conclusively that it is possible to attain artistic excellence with untrained dancers and has set a new standard for the choreographic aspirations of the company" (Dance United, 2012, p. 7).

These artistic collaborations were also closely related to the implementation and realisation of the third strategic aim of showcasing the artistic achievements of the young people (Dance United, 2011, p. 24). By working with choreographers, musicians, composers, and designers, the company further enhanced its creative output and extended the reach of its work. Performance opportunities—such as Rite of Passage 1, followed by Rite of Passage 2 at The Place—along with ongoing relationships with performance venues were pivotal in realising this aim, serving as a public platform to "effectively support the distribution of all aspects of our work" (Dance United, 2012, p. 6).

Beyond these core activities, Dance United ventured into a whole new sector of practice by collaborating with the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, the South London and Maudsley National Health Service Foundation Trust, two voluntary mental health organisations, and the Southbank Centre. "With the overarching aim to build a bridge between the worlds of professional contemporary dance and mental health" (Dance United, 2013, p. 2), the collaboration entailed a four-week pilot project with young adults in the early stages of diagnosis and treatment of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, psychosis, and other mental health conditions (Dance United, 2013, p. 3). Following an initial phase of skill-sharing and knowledge transfer between partners, the Associate Artist Dam Van Huynh—in collaboration with two experienced Dance United directors<sup>23</sup>—developed a bespoke choreography, while the health partners recruited participants with the assistance of Dance United support staff (Dance United, 2013, p. 4). The initiative

23 As one of the Dance United Directors, I contributed to this pilot initiative through my expertise as a dance movement therapist and experience of working in mental health settings.

was delivered by the integrated Dance United team according to the Methodology and concluded with two studio sharing performances to an invited audience. As a progression route for project participants, Dance United subsequently offered weekly provisions within the context of a bespoke performance company (Dance United, 2013, p. 10).

Documented by a short film and evaluated by Dance United staff according to a Theory of Change model (Dance United, 2014c), the project yielded positive outcomes, thus warranting plans for a consolidated research partnership to further test the efficacy of the intervention (Dance United, 2014d). The results of this research are discussed in depth within the context of the Methodology as a research-based practice (see IV.2.3). Unfortunately, the company was unable to advance these developments or continue the pursuit the above key aims due to the company's closure in July 2014.

Overall, the third phase of Dance United's organisational biography describes a time at the friction point between an adaptive response to a drastically changed funding climate—following the global financial crisis and change in government (see III.1.1)—and the ambitious drive for artistic innovation of the practice. While the considerable changes in governance and management illustrate the company's resilient commitment to the sustainability of the work, the aims, objectives, and aligned activities highlight a focus on its artistic ambition—not only maintaining an intensive, performance-led approach but also furthering an emphasis on the intrinsic potential of artistic excellence as a catalyst for change. These persistent historical characteristics of the work provide vital indicators for the analysis of the Methodology's core concepts and its theoretical foundation.

## 1.5 Post-Closure – Continuing the Legacy after 2014

As a constituted charitable organisation, Dance United formally ceased operations in 2014 by officially enacting a resolution to that effect (Companies House, 2014a, p. 2). This was publicly announced on the company's website in a statement by the Chair of the board:

It is with great regret that on Wednesday 24 July 2014, the Trustees of London-based operation, Dance United – generally acknowledged to be one the most innovative and successful contemporary dance companies working with young people in Britain – found they had no alternative but to decide to cease trading as the company, in its current form, cannot any longer create enough funds to meet its liabilities (Dance United, 2014b).

This statement—along with the insolvency report—named financial difficulties resulting from adverse outcomes of a cluster of key funding applications and exasperated by the substantial loss of the Arts Council's Regularly Funded Organisation programme, as the primary reason for closure (Companies House, 2014a, p. 6). Despite best efforts to reduce core costs through management restructuring and responsive adjustments of programmes, delays and reductions in key funding streams ultimately led to the closure of operations (Companies House, 2014a, p. 8). An in-depth investigation into the reasons for this unfortunate outcome would undoubtedly yield valuable learnings, particularly in light of the limited reflections of structural pressures faced by socially engaged dance initiatives within an increasingly constrained funding environment (see III.2.1). However, the organisation itself lies beyond the scope of my research and serves primarily as the defining context for the evolution of the Methodology. I therefore do not delve into specific causes but rather focus on the continued practical implementation of the Dance United Methodology within different contexts (Dance United, 2014b); specifically two independent initiatives and the continued work of Dance United Yorkshire.

First, building on the promising results of the pilot project in partnership with the Institute of Psychiatry and the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (Dance United, 2014c), the collaborators developed a one-year clinical trial aimed at strengthening the evidence base for the intervention's efficacy in mental health recovery. With the vision to establish it as a commissionable service and to increase the professional capacities of dance artists working within this sector (Dance United, 2014d, p. 2), the endeavour was realised under the umbrella of the Alchemy Project in alliance with Dance United Yorkshire and additional production support from Cultural Utilities Enterprises (Annable-Coop, 2016, p. 16).

Overall, the trial entailed an initial research and development phase in late 2014 followed by a one-year research project with the delivery of two intensive performance-led projects throughout 2015 (Dance United, 2014d, p. 4). The clinical aspect of the research and development phase focused on strengthening the working relationships between partners (Dance United, 2014d, p. 3), while the artistic aspect included the development and trial of a new piece of choreography in collaboration between an external artist and two Dance Directors (Dance United, 2014d, p. 3). For the research project, two performance-led projects were developed and delivered according to the principles of the Dance United Methodology with participants randomly allocated in partnership with clinical teams (Dance United, 2014d, p. 11). Each project involved four weeks of intensive training and rehearsal culminating in theatre performances (Annable-Coop, 2016, p. 14). As a progression route, participants were subsequently invited to join a weekly performance company, which continued until late 2015 and was hosted at Morley College—an established adult education institution in South London.<sup>24</sup>

Designed as a randomised control trial and directed by a clinical senior lecturer and consultant psychiatrist at the Institute of Psychiatry, (Dance United, 2014d, p. 5), the research project indicated further promising results (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 48), which are discussed in more detail within the context of the Dance United Methodology as an evidence-based practice (see IV.2.3). Although a core team continued to pursue commissioning opportunities, the Alchemy Project concluded its work in March 2017 (G. Van Spijk, personal communication, March 15, 2017).

Second, The Avanti Project—a regional initiative targeting vulnerable and marginalised young people—was created in collaboration with Kent County Council. Led by Michelle Bynoe as Project Director with support from Andrew Coggins as Associate Director, and produced by Gwen Van Spijk from Cultural Utilities Enterprises, it was delivered by Dance United Artists—a collective of former London Academy practitioners. Running from 2015 to 2017, the programme encompassed both intensive and weekly provisions.

24 For further information, please visit: <https://www.morleycollege.ac.uk/help/our-history/>

It launched with a four-week intensive performance project for young people accessing Kent County's Early Help and Preventative Services (The Avanti Project, 2015, p. 2) and was delivered at Pie Factory Music—a youth centre in Ramsgate—to a group of ten young people, including three students from Canterbury Christ Church University serving as role models (The Avanti Project, 2016, p. 1). The process culminated in a public performance at a theatre in Folkestone. Subsequently, the Avanti Project established a performance company hosted and funded by Pie Factory Music (The Avanti Project, 2016, p. 2). Led by two Dance Artists<sup>25</sup>, weekly rehearsals began in early 2016 with project graduates alongside university students and continued into autumn with weekly sessions in collaboration with Canterbury Christ Church University. The management team also initiated two week-long holiday intensives during summer and autumn 2017. Funded through the Arts Council England, a bespoke piece of choreography by an external artist was delivered to groups of young people accessing Kent County's children and youth services, closing with studio performances in front of invited audience. All activities of the Avanti Project ceased in late 2017, as prolonged efforts to embed the work within Kent County Council's organisational and financial structures proved unsuccessful.

While the above initiatives discontinued, the work of Dance United Yorkshire prevails to this day. "After significant work in developing our own funders both locally and regionally" (Dance United Yorkshire, 2014c, p. 16), the company attained economic independence throughout the financial year of 2013/2014 and secured structural independence from its parent organisation through a company resolution prior to its closure (Companies House, 2014b). It subsequently reconstituted as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Companies House, 2018) and, in July 2014, consolidated its autonomy with the successful application to become an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation<sup>26</sup> (Dance

25 The following information stems from my personal involvement as a Dance Director in all aspects of the described provisions and is based on project notebooks, diaries, and personal communications with stakeholders.

26 In 2013, Arts Council England restructured its Regularly Funded Organisation Programme into the National Portfolio Organisations Programme. For further information, please visit: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-data/our-npos-and-annual-data-survey>

United Yorkshire, 2014c, p. 16)—a status which the company has maintained since. This formal constitution, along with consistent financial support enabled the independent continuation of the work.

The activities of the company built on the developments of the previous phase, establishing Dance United Yorkshire regionally and nationally “as an organisation which not only delivers excellent artistic work with vulnerable and disengaged young people and communities, but also provides both voluntary and paid employment to predominantly Yorkshire-based artists, and engages with a significant number of FE and HE<sup>27</sup> institutions” (Dance United Yorkshire, 2015, p. 19). During its early years of independent operation, Dance United Yorkshire delivered a diverse programme portfolio across some of the most deprived areas of the region. This included intensive performance-led projects with young people in multiple locations and with women in custodial settings, intergenerational initiatives, school-based provisions, outreach programmes, and ongoing performance companies catering to a range of ages and abilities (Dance United Yorkshire, 2015, p. 13; 2016, p. 13; 2017, p. 13; 2018, p. 14). From 2015 onwards, the performance company provision furthermore included a group particularly targeting women suffering abuse and mental health issues (Dance United Yorkshire, 2015, p. 17).

The company successfully weathered the COVID-19 pandemic by flexibly adjusting their programmes, particularly through the use of film (Dance United Yorkshire, 2020, p. 2; 2021a, p. 1). In 2022, they fully resumed their activities with expanded intensive programmes for young people, increased community outreach classes and arts workshops in schools, and extended evening programmes alongside performance opportunities across West Yorkshire (Dance United Yorkshire, 2022, pp. 1-2; 2023, p. 1).

In addition to the project delivery in these areas, Dance United Yorkshire furthered its vision of artistic excellence through choreographic collaborations. Initially engaging with regional artists to develop new repertoire (Dance United Yorkshire, 2015, p. 18; 2018, p. 16), recent years

27 FE is the official acronym for Further Education, including college education, and HE is the official acronym for Higher Education, including academic institutions such as universities.

have seen expansions to working with highly established national artists, such as Matthew Bourne's *New Adventures*, *2Faced Company*, and Gary Clark (Dance United Yorkshire, 2020, p. 1; 2022, p. 1). With Bradford being named City of Culture for 2025, they achieved their most prestigious collaboration to date and successfully engaged the internationally acclaimed Akram Khan Company to co-create a large-scale community project (Dance United Yorkshire, 2023, p. 2). Involving six community groups with 70 performers aged 8 to 79, the collaboration—named *Memories of the Future*—was grounded in a shared “deep conviction in the transformative power of dance” (Dance United Yorkshire, 2025), as Akram Khan noted, and culminated in a world premiere in July 2025 at The Alhambra Theatre in Bradford.

Up to this point of their journey as an independent organisation “at the forefront of creating transformative opportunities for those often excluded from the arts” (Dance United Yorkshire, 2024a), Dance United Yorkshire negotiated a fine balance between maintaining the integrity of the Methodology and adjusting flexibly to the political and economic climate, according to its Artistic Director (Interview with Helen Linsell, January 2022, p. 4). Looking ahead, the company's strategic planning prioritises expanded community engagement, enhanced artistic excellence, and strengthened inclusive practice by creating new choreographic and large-scale participatory works, consolidating partnerships with leading cultural and educational organisations, and pursuing financial sustainability through diversified funding streams (Dance United Yorkshire, 2024b, p. 25).

All of the above post-closure developments grounded in the principles of the Dance United Methodology demonstrate that, despite the organisation's closure, its legacy persists: “However, all is not lost. Dance United as an approach to contemporary dance will live on [...] The heart and soul of Dance United survives” (Dance United, 2014b). My doctoral research seeks to conserve and further develop this legacy, focusing on identifying the “heart and soul” of this distinctive way of engaging marginalised and vulnerable populations in contemporary dance and performance.

## 2 Evidencing the Methodology – Towards a Research-Based Practice

Building on the biographical account of Dance United, I now explore the company's efforts to evidence the impact and efficacy of the Methodology. This exploration provides a vital foundation for understanding how the Methodology has evolved as a research-based practice while illustrating its consistent efficacy and impact. This evidence supports the claim that the Methodology achieves its objectives, establishing it as a relevant case of effective community dance practice in the social inclusion sector.

As the above biographical account illustrates, evaluation along with dissemination and advocacy has been central throughout all of the company's activities. To achieve this, "from the start of its work in the criminal justice system, Dance United has engaged an external evaluator to help the company learn from each project and develop their practice" (Duncan, 2003, p. 22). Not only assessing impact and informing methodological development but also substantiating a robust narrative for the company's funding strategy, these endeavours evolved from initial individual project evaluations (Dance United, 2001a, 2003, 2004a, 2005) to a targeted three-year action research (Miles & Strauss, 2008) and cost-efficiency analysis (van Poortvliet et al., 2010). Later years focused on insights into cause and effect through a Theory of Change framework (Dance United, 2014c; Optimity Advisors, 2016).

To maintain consistency, comparability, and focus across a robust body of documentation, my analysis specifically refers to Dance United's research efforts during its time as an incorporated organisation. While the work in Ethiopia was documented through ethnographic evaluations submitted to the funding body Comic Relief UK (J. Plastow, personal communication, October 26, 2020), I was unable to access further details, rendering them unavailable for inclusion in this analysis. Similarly, post-closure evaluations, such as those commissioned by Dance United Yorkshire (Cameron et al., 2024; Leslie et al., 2024; McDowall, 2025; Strauss, 2014), are also excluded as they fall outside the organisational framework and timeline of Dance United as an incor-

porated company.<sup>28</sup> Focusing solely on evaluations conducted during the company's active years, this analysis ensures a cohesive examination of the frameworks developed within the scope and boundary of my case study.

## 2.1 The First Phase – Project Evaluations

Throughout the first phase of the company, with activities spanning three strands, my account of the evaluation endeavours focuses on reports of individual projects within the criminal justice system. Emphasising the evolution of Dance United's evaluation practices and the insights they provide into the efficacy of the Methodology, the following examines six individual project reports across four different custodial settings, including HMP & HMYOI Holloway, HMP & HMYOI Bullwood Hall, HMYOI Wetherby and HMP & HMYOI Styal.<sup>29</sup> None of these reports were published but used internally for company development and communication with funders and partners, strengthening the case for further establishing the practice within the sector (Duncan, 2003, p. 22). The reports were sourced from Katrina Duncan's personal archive, who joined the company as an external evaluator in 2004 and later became a consultant on developing the business model and staffing for the company (K. Duncan, personal communication, March 2, 2021). Of the six reports, three were authored by Duncan, two by Susanna Wilford, and one by Judith Williams. Each document underwent the collection, appraisal, and analysis process described in Chapter II.2.2. Before identifying overarching themes across the reports, the following provides a general overview of the six projects, summarising their respective structures and evaluation approaches.

Across the evaluated projects, Dance United maintained a consistent overarching framework, with slight adaptations tailored to specific settings, contexts, and goals. Each project employed an intensive, performance-led rehearsal process over several weeks resulting in a piece

<sup>28</sup> I include the evaluation report by Optimity Advisory on the Alchemy Project as the research approach aligns with and builds on endeavours developed throughout the third phase of the company.

<sup>29</sup> For ease of readability, I omit the acronyms for each institution in the following discussion.

of choreography subsequently showcased in performances to both the prison population and invited audiences. The pilot projects *Symphony at Holloway* in 2001 and *Edge at Bullwood Hall* in 2002 focused solely on the dance rehearsal and performance process (Wilford, 2001, p. 6; 2002, p. 2). By contrast, the pilot project *Third Symphony – Men at War at Wetherby* in 2003 further embedded an educational dimension through Key Skills<sup>30</sup> accreditation (Duncan, 2003, p. 9). The subsequent projects *Caught Up/Edge at Bullwood Hall* in 2003 and *Caught Up at Styal* in 2003 maintained this basic structure, which by then had evolved into a three-week intensive training and rehearsal process culminating in two performances (Duncan, 2003, p. 7; 2004, p. 8). *Crossing the Light*—Dance United's last project at Holloway in 2007—expanded this model into a nine-week project and incorporated a three-week performance project leading into a six-week contextualised learning programme delivered by City and Islington College (Williams, 2007, p. 3).

All projects were facilitated by a core team of experienced Dance United artists, often supported by extended Dance United staff leading on documentation and production (Wilford, 2001, p. 5; 2002, p. 3). Building on recommendations from previous evaluations, the 2003 follow-up project at Bullwood Hall engaged a local artist to assist the Dance United artistic team (Duncan, 2003, p. 8). Similarly, the same year at Style the team was joined by two dance artists from Cheshire Dance—the county's dance development agency (Duncan, 2004, p. 6). Such local partnerships furthermore fostered the development of integrated dance companies, with participants from the prison being joined by students and professional dancers, who supported the rehearsal process from within the group (Duncan, 2003, p. 7; 2004, p. 6). Across all projects, the key element was an immersive, intensive dance experience delivered by an integrated team of Dance United staff, alongside seconded prison staff and supporting artists, coupled with a performance that showcased participants' achievements.

30 Key Skills is an educational component for young people across the UK. It encompasses the attainment of transferrable skills and soft skills applicable to education, training, and work. For further information, please see: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/key-skills-qualifications>

In terms of the evaluation approach, all six reports focused primarily on assessing both the realisation of aims and objectives and the impact on participants, particularly with regards to personal development, skills acquisition, and social welfare. Data collection was consistently qualitative, involving interviews, questionnaires, diaries, and performance feedback from participants, prison staff, the Dance United team, and audience members. The evaluation of the pilot project at Holloway in 2001 focused on capturing the participants' views and experiences to assess changes (Wilford, 2001, p. 3). By contrast, the report on the pilot project at Bullwood Hall assessed impact on skill acquisition, social welfare, and individual development of participants (Wilford, 2002, p. 5), while also providing insights into the broader systemic impact of the work (Wilford, 2002, p. 6). The internal evaluation of Men at War at Wetherby in 2003 aligned with the best practice framework of the Arts Council England research initiative Dance Included (see III.2.2), adhering to overall research guidelines and generally assessing challenges, successes, and describing the impact on participants (Duncan, 2005, p. 2). In 2003, both the reports from Bullwood Hall and Styal enhanced qualitative data collection with psychometric questionnaires to better capture participants' personal and social learning journeys (Duncan, 2003, p. 4; 2004, p. 5). As set by the Futurebuilders Fund<sup>31</sup> funding the evaluation process, the report of the final project in Holloway in 2007 employed an overarching framework of objectives centring around personal development, emotional resilience, interpersonal relationships, and increased engagement with supportive interventions to measure impact (Williams, 2007, p. 2). Despite these variations in focus and approach, all evaluations consistently sought to measure the efficacy of the projects in achieving their aims and objectives while fostering participants' development.

As the reports generally vary in structure and emphasis on different aspects of the project process, I employ the thematic analysis described in II.2.2 by clustering, compressing, and organising the information

<sup>31</sup> The Futurebuilders Fund was the first social investment fund in the UK and constituted a ground-breaking, government-backed social investment fund providing loan financing to social sector organisations in England. For further information, please visit: <https://www.sibgroup.org.uk/funding/previous-funds/?fund-not-found=futurebuilders-england#>

into overarching themes common to all reports. Allowing comparability across reports, these overarching themes encompass set aims and objectives, achieved impact and outcomes, and identified challenges and recommendations. With the Dance United Methodology as the primary focus of this doctoral research, the following illustrates the approach as an effective framework with tangible impact.

The aims outlined across the six reports consistently emphasised enhancing participants' personal and social development, while addressing complex individual challenges such as low self-esteem, limited educational attainment, experience of trauma, mental health challenges, and substance abuse (Wilford, 2001, p. 2). Through harnessing the “the motivational power of Dance United’s approach” (Duncan, 2005, p. 5) in contemporary dance training and performance, the projects aimed to develop interpersonal skills, confidence, and self-esteem (Duncan, 2004, p. 4; Wilford, 2002, p. 2; Williams, 2007, p. 2), while also promoting educational attainment through qualifications and engagement with supportive interventions (Duncan, 2003, p. 3; 2005, p. 5; Williams, 2007, p. 2). The aligned objectives reflected a balance of pursuing artistic excellence in performance, with effecting and evidencing personal growth (Wilford, 2001, p. 4; 2002, p. 2). To systemically correspond with broader institutional goals, these objectives expanded to include transferrable skills and delivering educational accreditation (Duncan, 2003, p. 3; 2004, p. 4; 2005, p. 9; Williams, 2007, p. 5). While this created considerable tension between artistic aims and institutional priorities when first introduced in Wetherby (Duncan, 2005, p. 9), subsequent projects more successfully integrated objectives of dance related learning with personal, social, and transferrable skills development (Duncan, 2003, p. 3; 2004, p. 4; Williams, 2007, p. 5).

The evaluation reports consistently highlighted significant personal, social, and educational outcomes for participants. Personal outcomes included improved self-esteem, confidence, emotional resilience, and physical health (Duncan, 2004, p. 16; 2005, p. 29; Wilford, 2001, p. 11; Williams, 2007, p. 10). Participants often reported a sense of pride, achievement, motivated outlook, and positive self-regard along with enhanced emotional literacy and increased capacity for reflective learning (Duncan, 2004, p. 16; 2005, p. 29; Williams, 2007, p. 11).

Social outcomes encompassed strengthened teamwork, group cohesion, improved interpersonal relationships, and communication skills (Duncan, 2004, p. 12; 2005, p. 29; Wilford, 2001, p. 1; 2002, p. 7; Williams, 2007, p. 14). Consistent across projects, the creative process offered participants opportunities to not only exercise choice and creative self-expression, but also experience a supportive, non-judgmental environment that fostered trust, a sense of belonging, and reciprocity amongst participants (Duncan, 2004, p. 16; Wilford, 2001, p. 21; 2002, p. 8). The social entity of the dance company presented as a vital catalyst in facilitating these experiences, as a participant at Bullwood Hall reflected: "Everyone worked together and through the highs and lows, we all became a team, a dance company that I was proud to be a member of" (Duncan, 2003, p. 19). Several reports also highlighted broader social impact by way of the performances. Feedback from audience members and prison staff consistently underscored the high artistic standards of the performances and the professionalism exhibited by participants, (Duncan, 2003, p. 9; 2004, p. 17; Wilford, 2001, p. 17; 2002, p. 9). The Arts Council England's Head of Dance remarked, "I was stunned by the artistic integrity of the work [...] what I saw today was access to excellence" (Duncan, 2005, p. 28). Exceeding expectations and demonstrating potential, institutional impact was also noted, with staff adopting more positive attitudes towards prisoners. As Bullwood Hall's prison governor Antony Hassall summarised, "It has reminded staff to see the human in the prisoner" (Wilford, 2002, p. 8).

Educational outcomes included concentration, focus, perseverance, commitment and the acquisition of new skills (Wilford, 2001, p. 19; 2002, p. 11; Williams, 2007, p. 10). These were particularly noted at Wetherby's Men at War project, where all participants earned Key Skills accreditation, exceeding the expectations of prison staff (Duncan, 2005, p. 26). Participants often expressed newfound determination, as reflected by one participant at Styal: "I'm feeling positive 'cos of what I've achieved. No-one can take that from me. Moving forward will be my other steps. No turning back" (Duncan, 2004, p. 16).

Despite the broad range of positive impacts consistently observed across projects, several reports identified challenges and offered recommendations that provided valuable insights for subsequent project

development. The primary challenges noted were systemic, including practical issues such as timetabling conflicts, inconsistent access to suitable spaces, and staff shortages that caused frequent changes in personnel. Additionally, challenges in working relationships between Dance United and custodial settings were frequently highlighted. This was marked by poor communication, limited support, and minimal engagement from staff (Duncan, 2004, p. 19; 2005, p. 14; Wilford, 2001, p. 6; Williams, 2007, p. 18). These tensions were particularly pronounced in Wetherby, where the project faced “a backdrop of extreme scepticism from many uniformed staff” (Duncan, 2005, p. 4). In contrast, the positive collaboration with Bullwood Hall illustrated the impact of functional working relationships through allocated staff and systemic support, exemplified by champions such as Antony Hassall, the prison governor (Duncan, 2003, p. 14). Concerns about the sustainability of outcomes beyond the duration of projects were also raised, particularly in earlier reports. Recommendations thus emphasised the need for long-term support mechanisms with connections to local dance structures and clear progression routes for participants (Wilford, 2001, p. 21; 2002, p. 12).

As a result, strengthening partnerships and fostering institutional support through robust strategic planning and preparation, as well as offering sustainability through capacity-building and long-term progression pathways, emerged as critical ambitions in enhancing the efficacy of the work (Duncan, 2003, p. 17; 2004, p. 21; 2005, p. 35; Wilford, 2001, p. 22; 2002, p. 11). As outlined in the project structures, these recommendations were gradually implemented in later projects, engaging local artists and students to ensure sustainability (Duncan, 2003, p. 17), formally acknowledging participant’s achievements through accreditation (Duncan, 2004, p. 4), and, most importantly, investing conscientious effort in establishing good working relationships (Williams, 2007, p. 4). The learnings from the pilot project in Wetherby particularly informed subsequent work in the criminal justice system and served as a bridge to developing a working partnership with regional partners, including the Youth Offending Team in Bradford (Duncan, 2005, p. 36). This relationship alongside with the associated learnings, proved found-

dational to the Academy Programme (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 24; Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 7).

Overall, the evaluation efforts of Dance United's early projects consistently highlighted the significant and multifaceted impact of the work within custodial settings, demonstrating a consistent ability to foster personal, social, and educational outcomes among participants. While systemic barriers and inconsistent institutional support posed challenges, the reports provided critical recommendations that informed subsequent project delivery and evidenced a reflective evolution of practice. Incorporating formal accreditation, engaging local partnerships, and employing robust strategic development illustrate the company's proactive response to identified challenges, enhancing both the sustainability and efficacy of its work. These evaluations not only validated the effectiveness of the Methodology but also prepared the ground for the Academy Programme as a scalable model of impactful arts intervention. Particularly relevant to this research, Dance United consistently upheld core principles of its practice. Despite institutional challenges, it maintained intensive rehearsal processes, a performance-led approach, and high professional artistic standards. This analysis underscores the stability of these principles and their efficacy in achieving personal, social, and educational outcomes. While the reports relied on basic qualitative methods without detailed data analysis processes, they provide valuable insights into the approach's positive impact, albeit potentially influenced by the interests of Dance United as commissioning stakeholder.

## 2.2 The Second Phase – Making a Case for the Academy

As the work of Dance United consolidated into developing the Academy Programme, the company's core evaluation activity during the second phase significantly evolved from the approach employed in custodial settings with a focus on two vital endeavours, both published as reports upon their completion. Firstly, a three-year action research project by the University of Manchester assessed the impact of the Academy Programme (Miles & Strauss, 2008). Secondly, a socio-economic analysis

by New Philanthropy Capital—a think tank and consultancy agency for the charity sector—evidenced the cost effectiveness of this practice model (van Poortvliet et al., 2010). Progressing from the basic qualitative evaluation approaches in custodial settings, both endeavours applied coherent research designs with a variety of transparent data collection and analysis methods. The outcomes not only provided Dance United with robust and comprehensive evidence of the effectiveness and efficacy of their approach but also played a crucial role in reinforcing the company's strategy for the national roll-out of the Academy Programme.

In the following, I discuss both research endeavours separately, outlining their context and aims, describing the employed approach, and highlighting key findings before concluding with a critical reflection on their strengths and limitations. In a comparative discussion across both reports, I summarise their synergetic contributions to advocating for the Academy Programme and illustrate how they formed the basis for its national expansion.

In 2008, Andrew Miles and Paul Strauss from the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change at the University of Manchester published the Academy Report, as the culmination of their three-year action research project (Miles & Strauss, 2008). Covering the early years of the Academy Programme in Bradford following its launch in 2006, it gathered data across three cohorts, each comprising twelve-week projects with young people in custody, on probation, and at risk of offending. Participants were referred by a range of partners, including Youth Offending Teams, local school inclusion units, and prisons (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 4). All cohorts were delivered by an interdisciplinary team of dance artists, support workers, and a coordinator, adhering to the Dance United Methodology, with “the primary emphasis [...] on quality and excellence” (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 4). Aiming to establish an evaluation model to produce robust and consistent evidence of impact (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 9), the research assessed soft and hard outcomes related to attendance and completion rates, developments in participants' learning capacities, reductions in recidivism rates and in risk factors contributing to criminal behaviour, and engagement with education, training, and employment upon completion of the programme (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 10).

The research framework employed a mixed-method approach, informed by a realist evaluation model, which provided insights into underlying generative mechanisms explaining how the outcomes were achieved and influenced by the context (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 9). Gathering a realist perspective was particularly vital in supporting the crucial role of dance as a mechanism and catalyst for the assessed outcomes (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 28). Through a recursive framework, the research process consistently fed back into the development of delivery, thereby advancing the practical application of the Dance United Methodology (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 9). Data collection encompassed both quantitative and qualitative methods, including interviews, questionnaires, observations, and focus groups involving participants, staff, and stakeholders, and official records from partner organisations (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 9). Initially, the data collection was conducted by the interdisciplinary Academy team, which presented them with an additional workload they did not feel confident to sustain (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 10). From the third project onwards, an ethnographer was embedded, effectively working as part of the team. This provided detailed first-hand insights into the dynamics and impacts of the intervention, allowing the research process to develop personal, relational, and organisational narratives of change and development. Relationships established with participants throughout the projects also facilitated follow-up data gathering and offered tentative insights into the sustainability of impacts beyond the intervention.

In terms of outcomes, the research concluded that the Academy, as “a radically intensive, dance-led learning programme for young offenders and young people at risk of offending in a community setting [...] makes a major positive impact on participants’ attitudes and behaviour” (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 4). The key findings of the report were divided into the two categories of soft and hard outcomes, which were subsequently related to underlying generative mechanisms of dance and performance.

The so-called soft outcomes included attendance and completion rates as well as the development of participants’ capacity to learn. While attendance and completion rates provided insights into the levels of engagement, commitment, and discipline amongst participants, results

related to learning capacities illustrated the programmes educational outcomes (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). The overall completion rates were remarkably high, especially given the intensity and length of the projects (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 11). The results showed that more than half of all participants completed the 12-week programme, with an additional 23% completing the initial three-week performance project. Overall, attendance rates of 86% further corroborated these positive indications of participants' engagement with and commitment to projects (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). With general low levels of educational attainment and high levels of detachment from learning amongst this population, the learning outcomes of the Academy Programme were measured by applying an adapted version of the 5 'Rs' framework developed by the Campaign for Learning (Goodbourn et al., 2005). Encompassing five key components for learning including readiness, resourcefulness, resilience, remembering, and reflectiveness, the framework was adjusted to appropriately reflect the dance practice as a learning mechanism (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). Each assessed by two or more indicators on a five-point Likert Scale and complemented by behaviour observations in relation to the Academy's code of conduct, the results for each individual project, as well as all projects combined clearly indicated participants' consolidated capacity to learn, with total scores being 12% higher upon completion of the programme (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 17). For both of these soft outcomes, the researchers differentiated the results according to recruitment groups, with participants from custodial settings scoring higher than participants recruited from community-based referral partners. These insights were fed back into the delivery process and instigated discussions around the different constituencies, the referral process, and the implementation of the Methodology with regards to the programmes' intensity and flexibility (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 15).

With regards to the so-called hard outcomes, the research assessed reductions in the recidivism rates, changes in risk factors, and engagement with education, training and employment upon completion of the programme. Compared to the high national recidivism rate of 70% amongst young offenders on community orders (Medhurst & Cunliffe, 2007, p. 10), the results obtained amongst Academy participants

evidenced a significantly lower rate of just under 30% (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 22). Additionally, for those who did subsequently re-offend, criminal activities were less severe and less frequent than before their participation in the programme (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 23). However, due to difficulties in accessing relevant data from referral partners, the variations in the make-up of each cohort, and the small sample sizes, this only provided an exploratory indication of a relationship between the Academy Programme and re-offending outcomes. These positive results were corroborated by findings from the Asset risk assessment tool, which identifies dynamic indicators linked to criminal behaviour, such as living arrangements, educational attainment, and mental health. Overall, two-thirds of participants who completed the Academy Programme presented with reduced risk scores, in stark contrast to those who dropped out early, showing little to no changes in this regard (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 24). With regards to progression into education, training, and employment as a key stabilising factor for preventing recidivism (Hurry & Moriarty, 2004, p. 6), the data collected three to twelve months post-programme showed that 80% positively engaged with education, training, and employment (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 27), far surpassing typical reintegration success rates of around 40% (Stephenson, 2006, p. 184; Youth Justice Board, 2006, p. 7).

Relating both categories to the realist evaluation model revealed several themes of dance-informed processes underlying the outcomes (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 28). Focus—as the mental and physical discipline required for the working process of a dance company—“emerged as both a framing concept for, and a crucial enabling process within the dance-led learning experience” (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 28). Defined as the improvement of embodied self-presentation, embodied confidence resulted from the dance activities by facilitating increased positive physical self-awareness (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 30). The programme’s communal emphasis and the performance-led dynamic effected independent, co-operative, and non-verbal learning interactions alongside teamwork and group identification, all of which contributed to the overall outcomes (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 31). Additionally, the nurturing, supportive, and respectful group environment—evident

also in relationships with staff—instilled a sense of care and responsibility in participants, as illustrated in the following statement:

If someone asked me what's successful about the Academy, I'd say it's in the way it makes people care. When people go off the rails, there's nothing for them. But when I started going to the Academy, I had a reason to get up in the morning. Something to care about, and people who care about you (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 45).

The Academy Programme offered the participants a sense of purpose and opportunity for personal achievement, with performances fostering motivation and confidence, thus building the foundation for personal ambition and aspiration beyond self-limiting expectations. In their totality, these dance-related impacts on participants ultimately contributed to the above key outcomes (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 28).

This research constituted a pivotal step towards establishing the Academy in Bradford as a credible component of the youth justice system and advancing plans for its national roll-out. While the outcomes were very favourable in making a case for the Academy Programme as an embedded and commissioned intervention, some limitations warranted critical consideration. Challenges in obtaining data from referral agencies hindered robust statistical conclusions with the outcomes on recidivism remaining only indicative of a positive relationship between the programme and re-offending rates. Additionally, the small number of cases investigated reduced generalisability of outcomes. Nonetheless, the positive synergy between all three hard outcomes strengthened the overall credibility of the programme's impact.

The research further substantiated the effectiveness of the Dance United Methodology, providing indicative insights into key mechanisms. The principle of intensity was identified as a contributing factor in supporting educational engagement through its holistic and immersive nature (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 37). The goal orientation through a performance-led process served as a crucial catalyst for developing personal motivation, fostering a sense of purpose and facilitating social experiences such as team work (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 33). The experience of working together as a dance company in a professional con-

text with high artistic standards instilled focus, discipline, and personal achievement, positively impacting participants' confidence, ambition, and outlook. As one participant noted, "It's made me know I can go further. It's just a feeling that when you know you can go further then you will" (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 37). Additionally, the report provided an insight into the specific quality of the learning environment created by the Academy Programme. Participants felt "supported and respected as individuals by skilled and highly committed staff, who made them feel safe and gave them a sense of belonging" (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 45). This indicates a particular pedagogical framework which creates a containing yet challenging learning culture as a potential further key principle of the Dance United Methodology.

Based on the above outcomes from the Academy Report, New Philanthropy Capital conducted a socio-economic analysis to evidence the cost effectiveness of the Academy Programme as part of their Trial and Error report (van Poortvliet et al., 2010). Overall, the report sought to address the wider problem of youth crime by examining how charitable organisations within the sector contribute to its mitigation. In doing so, it provided potential funders with guidance on supporting the sector effectively while also informing charities about the wider socio-political context of their work. Comprehensively describing the issue, the report first assessed the level and nature of youth crime in England and Wales, including causes, costs, and public perception (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 7-14). In its subsequent outline of the youth justice system, the report positioned the work of charitable organisations within this complex environment and emphasised their role in addressing gaps in services (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 15-24). A comprehensive review of evidence on effective practice highlighted the need for tailored, differentiated, and locally responsive programmes in successfully tackling the issue (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 25-34). Within this contextualisation, charitable organisations were then positioned to play a vital role, demonstrating the extent to which their interventions successfully address the problem (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 51-56). The report concluded with an overview of challenges faced by charities and proposed potential solutions to overcome these obstacles (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 57-61).

New Philanthropy Capital positioned Dance United as a small but specialist organisation, delivering an innovative model to address offending behaviour and support young people's transition back into education, employment, and training (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, p. 37). Characterised as a targeted, arts-based prevention, the work provides at-risk youth with a bridge into engagement with learning. The report's in-depth analysis of its socio-economic impact highlighted the cost-effectiveness and significant savings achieved through the preventative Academy Programme. Ensuring transparency of the analysis, the report detailed all data sources, which included government sources such as the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board alongside information supplied by Dance United (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, p. 72). In particular, the calculations evidencing the program's cost-effectiveness were based on the recidivism outcomes from the Academy Report by Miles and Strauss (2008, pp. 22-23).

The analysis demonstrates that the Academy Programme offers a compelling and financially viable investment opportunity for funders (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 70-72). Based on government numbers, the report proposed a baseline public cost of £6,260 for every crime committed. With this benchmark, calculations balanced the cost of the Academy Programme per participant against its demonstrated impact on criminal behaviour, concluding an annual saving of public expenses of £82,639 for every young person who did not re-offend after completing the Academy Programme. In addition, the programme's impact on reducing the severity and frequency of re-offending resulted in a further saving of £413,200 per year. Taken together, the report concluded that the work of Dance United generated a total of £494,839 in annual savings for public spending on youth crime, achieving an impressive 215% return on investment.

Building on these individual assessments of effective practice, the authors close with a discussion on general sector-wide challenges in tackling youth crime and recommendations for funders on how to effectively respond (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, pp. 51-61). Most of the challenges described aligned with those experienced by Dance United. First, the commonly uncertain and inadequate funding structures rarely provided sufficient unrestricted funds to cover overheads and

core organisational management costs. In my personal communications, Coggins particularly highlighted that this had been a persistent struggle for Dance United (A. Coggins, personal communication, February 3, 2021). Additionally, the report noted fragile links between voluntary and statutory agencies as a major challenge—not only affecting service provisions but also organisations’ abilities to produce robust evidence. Generally relying on champions within the statutory sector, charities were left vulnerable to disruptions when these key relationships were affected by changes in staffing (van Poortvliet et al., 2010, p. 53). This particular challenge evidently resonated with Dance United, as demonstrated by the findings of the Academy Report (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 55), as well as in evaluations of their prison projects (see IV.2.1).

The New Philanthropy Capital report recommended Dance United’s work as an innovative approach in preventing criminal behaviour and reducing custody sentencing. This endorsement was particularly relevant to justifying the Academy Programme’s high costs—a persistent concern raised by statutory partners (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 52). However, given that the Academy Report’s data on recidivism remained merely indicative of a positive trend, this socio-economic analysis should be critically interpreted as suggestive rather than definitive. Unfortunately, in the overall picture of the historical development of the organisation, the report came too late to prove Dance United as a viable and cost-effective option to potential funders, failing to motivate sustainable funding sources in time (A. Coggins, personal communication, February 3, 2021). While the report did not explicitly focus on the Methodology as such, it nevertheless highlighted the positive economic impact of the work, thus providing wider socio-political contextualisation.

Together, the two evaluations provide complementary yet distinct arguments that, in combination, formed the basis for the Academy Programme’s national roll-out. While the Academy Report outlined a practice-based and explanatory-focused account on how the dance-led intervention impacted change, the New Philanthropy Capital’s socio-economic analysis translated these outcomes into a financial argument for the programme’s cost-effectiveness. In synergy, they articulated the programmes’ distinct methodological mechanisms and

framed them in economic terms as offering tangible public value for policymakers and funders. The combined evidence bases thus presented a coherent narrative of both social and economic impact within the broader landscape of youth crime and public spending. Although challenges in data robustness, funding structures, and partnerships with statutory agencies ultimately limited the full realisation of this potential, the findings nonetheless serve as a credible testament to the efficacy of the Methodology in catalysing positive personal and social change.

### 2.3 The Third Phase – Insights into Cause and Effect

Building on the second phase's substantial impact evidence, Dance United subsequently sought to refine and evolve their evaluation and monitoring strategies. These efforts aimed to more accurately and comprehensively capture the personal and individual learning journeys of participants while demonstrating the particular role of dance as a catalyst for change. In pursuit of developing academically robust yet appropriately practice-driven solutions, the company entered a collaboration with Project Oracle, an interdisciplinary initiative assessing children's and youth services across London (Billington, 2013a, p. 1). The following outlines the evolution of this collaboration across its implementations—both at the London Academy and within the context of the mental health initiatives. An initial overview of the partnership is followed by a chronological discussion of each stage for clarity. This encompasses respective context and aim, the employed research approach, and key findings. I conclude with a critical comparison across these stages, particularly emphasising the relevance to my research endeavour.

Project Oracle was launched in 2012 as the Children and Youth Evidence Hub with the aim of improving the evidence base for children's and youth services across London (Project Oracle, 2014, p. 4). Managed by The Social Innovation Partnership—an advisory body for the social impact of private and public organisations—and London Metropolitan University, the initiative integrated rigorous academic approaches with practical, realistic considerations to provide organisations with robust

evaluation solutions for comprehensive standards of evidence-based practice (Bediako, 2014, p. 1). Project Oracle operates to this day but has been overseen by the Centre for Youth Impact since September 2018 (Centre for Youth Impact, 2021).

Having successfully entered the Project Oracle Evidence Competition, Dance United was awarded £5,000 to support the development of a new monitoring and evaluation system tailored to the company's needs (Bediako, 2014, p. 1). Led by two Project Oracle researchers, this process entailed a substantial initial review of current practices at the London Academy, resulting in more applicable solutions through the development of a Theory of Change model. The model was subsequently applied to the pilot project in the mental health sector (Dance United, 2014c) and served as the basis for the external evaluation of The Alchemy Project (Optimity Advisors, 2016). While insights into the endeavours in mental health rely on publicly accessible reports, the account of the work conducted at the London Academy relies on documents obtained from one of the researchers' personal archives (H. Billington, personal communication, March 1, 2021).

Project Oracle's work at the London Academy was embedded into the project delivery of the multidisciplinary team, joined by an ethnographer for the initial review and subsequent development of the Theory of Change. The collaboration was primarily aimed at a rigorous reappraisal of the current evaluation system, which at that time was predominantly based on the action-research by Miles and Strauss (2008). While examining whether the employed monitoring strategy adequately assessed the changes for participants, the review also needed to reflect and inform planned programme changes (Billington, 2013d, p. 2). With these central aims in mind, the collaboration formulated key objectives for the evaluation strategy's review and development (Billington, 2013d, p. 2). Capturing the full range of changes experienced by participants across key outcome areas was emphasised to ensure that the soft outcomes particularly crucial in arts-based programmes were not overshadowed by prioritising hard outcomes. Additionally, it was deemed vital to identify the most impactful areas of the programme's activities, providing evidence-based insights to inform its redesign. To ensure feasible practical implementation, the new model also needed

to work effectively alongside the programme's core activities. Finally, to ensure its credibility and broader applicability, the new framework envisaged a rigorous and objective system eligible for accreditation with the Project Oracle standards of evidence.

As a first step, the Project Oracle research reviewed the existing evaluation and monitoring strategy, which at this stage focused on quantitative programme outputs such as completion rates, accreditation achievements, post-project offending behaviour, and engagement with education, training, and employment (Billington, 2013a, p. 4). The review identified several areas of concerns and limitations with the current approach (Billington, 2013d, p. 12). Most importantly, the current approach did not capture a number of qualitative indicators of change. Additionally, inconsistent baseline data collection, particularly for self-referred young people, resulted in one-dimensional assessments and prohibited a realistic, complex view of participants' progress throughout the programme. The final area of concern was the limited and biased data on long-term outcomes, relying solely on those participants who remained in contact with either Dance United or their referral partner. These areas of concern were contextualised within the challenge of integrating monitoring and evaluation processes alongside the core activities of the Academy Programme.

The next step addressed these issues and developed of a Theory of Change model for the Academy Programme. This evolved from an initial consultation workshop between Dance United staff from all levels of the organisation and the Project Oracle researcher (Billington, 2013b). Assessing the underlying assumptions and implicit theories of cause-and-effect relationships within the programme, this process supported the development of a clear logic model that articulated the complex causal links between input of resources, conducted activities, resulting outputs, intermediate outcomes, and long-term impacts (Billington, 2013b, p. 10). Based on this logic model, a summarising Theory of Change was developed to gain first insights into the interrelationship between the programme and its impact (Billington, 2013d, p. 8). In an effort to further refine this overall Theory of Change into a more detailed description, three separate Theories of Change were developed to examine the processes of change against key areas of impact

(Billington, 2013d, pp. 9-11). Reduced offending rates and engagement with education, training, and employment were based on the outcomes identified by Miles and Strauss (2008), while additionally taking physical and emotional wellbeing as a previously unmeasured but essential outcome into account (Billington, 2013a, p. 4). The insights provided through this differentiated analysis were then summarised and consolidated into a final overall Theory of Change (Billington, 2013c, p. 2).

Based on this Theory of Change model, a new evaluation and monitoring strategy was developed and applied at the London Academy (Billington, 2013c, p. 4). The strategy identified twelve intermediate outcomes grouped into four defining areas, including embodied change, engagement, social behaviour, and employability defined as precursors for positive change regarding the above key areas of impact (Billington, 2013c, p. 8). These were further linked to outcomes defined by the government's Every Child Matters<sup>32</sup> strategy and the Asset assessment framework by the Youth Justice Board, which had already served as a data reference point for the Academy Report (see IV.2.2).

The monitoring process was designed to use a combination of observational and self-reported methods. Seven out of these twelve intermediate outcomes were assessed and monitored via observation from both Dance United staff and participants' external support network, before, during, and up to 24 months after programme completion (Billington, 2013c, p. 10). These were scored on a five-point scale with clearly defined criteria for each intermediate outcome (Billington, 2013c, pp. 12-15). The remaining five intermediate outcomes were captured through participant surveys, employing an accessible agree/disagree-response format (Billington, 2013c, pp. 16-17). Additional information was collected through an improved baseline data-gathering process conducted at the end of the first week, with short qualitative entry and exit interviews, as well as secondary data on comparative populations within the community gathered by the Project Oracle researcher, further contributing to data robustness (Billington, 2013c, p. 6).

32 In 2004, the New Labour Government submitted the "Every Child Matters" strategy in an aim to reform and improve children's services across the country with a focus on wellbeing. For access to the complete strategy, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-matters>

Unfortunately, the full implementation of this evaluation model coincided with the closure process of Dance United, when all assets of the company were seized by the liquidator, including the evaluation documents held at the London Academy.<sup>33</sup> Although I gained access to incomplete datasets on individual participants, I could not obtain a full evaluation and monitoring report, thus rendering an assessment of the successful implementation of this new system and a report on the results of the evaluation impossible.

However, as the collaboration with Project Oracle extended beyond the London Academy, the Theory of Change model was also applied to the pilot project in mental health in late 2013, resulting in a full report of impact on participants. Within this process, the Dance United team was supported by the Project Oracle researcher in developing an appropriate evaluation framework based on the Academy's Theory of Change model (Dance United, 2013, p. 11).

As a foundation to systematically monitor change, the partners at the Institute of Psychiatry and South London and Maudsley NHS Trust had identified key problems experienced by the client group (Dance United, 2014c, p. 7). These issues encompassed social isolation and difficulties in interpersonal interactions, limited body awareness and poor physical fitness undermining self-confidence, and a struggle to maintain energy and optimism due to tendencies to overly focus on mental health conditions (Dance United, 2014c, p. 7). Tackling these key issues not only became the focus of the development of the Theory of Change logic model but also guided the delivery of the project.

In close collaboration with the two Dance Directors<sup>34</sup> of the project, the Project Oracle researcher developed causal relationships between the project activities and three long-term outcomes defined in response to the above issues as satisfying interpersonal relationships, positive embodied functioning, and positive affect (Dance United, 2014c, p. 12). Each of the long-term outcomes was realised through a number of inter-

<sup>33</sup> This information is based on my personal involvement as a Dance Director in all aspects of the closure of the operations of the London Academy.

<sup>34</sup> As one of the Dance Directors, I was personally involved in developing the Theory of Change, as well as leading the evaluation process of assessing the intermediate outcome of physical symbolic expression.

mediate outcomes as measurable indicators (Dance United, 2014c, p. 11). While the outcome of satisfying interpersonal relationships was indicated by improvement in communication skills, levels of trust, and the capacity to work as a team, an increase in bodily control and physical symbolic expression supported positive embodied functioning. The outcome of positive affect related to improved resilience and increased optimism.

The above intermediate outcomes were monitored through three different evaluation tools, with all but two being captured through the Recovery Star—an outcome measure developed by Triangle in collaboration with the Association of Mental Health Providers—enabling people using mental health services to monitor their own recovery progress.<sup>35</sup> The Recovery Star was adjusted in order to specifically target the proposed intermediate outcomes (Dance United, 2014c, p. 29). Participants scored themselves before, during, and after the completion of the project, while the Dance United team scored each participant based on their observations alongside daily interactions. The intermediate outcome of increased optimism was measured through the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), a 14-item scale measuring mental wellbeing developed by the Warwick Medical School (Dance United, 2014c, p. 17), completed by participants alongside the Recovery Star. Changes and developments with regard to the intermediate outcome of embodied symbolic expression were conducted through movement observations at the beginning and at the end of the project using the Laban Movement Analysis framework.<sup>36</sup>

The analysis of all three sets of the evaluation data demonstrated positive developments for all seven intermediate outcomes, overall indicating positive developments for the three long-term outcomes as “the group moved from below average wellbeing, to achieving normal wellbeing levels, above the norm for this population” (Dance United,

35 For further details on this evaluative tool, visit: <https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/recovery-star-4/>

36 Laban Movement Analysis constitutes a comprehensive system used to observe and analyse human movement behaviour. Initially developed by Rudolf Laban, it is an established approach in both therapy and education. I received extensive training and mentoring in this analysis throughout my dance training at Laban Centre London and in my dance movement therapy studies at Goldsmiths College.

2014c, p. 22). The ten-point increase on the WEMWBS from the mid-forties to a final score of 53.9 was assessed by the Institute of Psychiatry's lead clinical collaborator, as "very impressive" (Dance United, 2014d, p. 2). This was additionally supported by positive changes for five of the seven intermediate outcomes recorded on the Recovery Stars (Dance United, 2014c, p. 32). The Laban Movement Analysis further indicated a considerable overall increase in complexity of movement qualities, thus broadening the expressive movement range of participants, as well as their physical intention, presence, and awareness (Dance United, 2014c, p. 35).

Though the results were very positive, it is important to critically assess their significance. While the working relationships between staff and participants potentially impacted the objectivity of data gathered by the Dance United team, the lack of follow-up data limited insights into the persistence and sustainability of changes. Overall, the evaluation process lacked statistical robustness and a long-term analysis.

Improving on these critical points and further building on the promising results, Dance United initiated additional work within this collaboration and, post-closure of the company, delivered two more projects under the umbrella of The Alchemy Project as part of a randomised control trial (see IV.1.5). An independent evaluation was thus commissioned to Optimity Advisors, an international healthcare consultancy (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 2). The primary aim of the evaluation was to corroborate the positive pilot project results and to conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis, not only demonstrating the provision's consistency of impact but also its value for money (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 5). Overall, the results aimed to build a case for local commissioning within the mental health sector.

The evaluation was guided by four core research questions (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 12). First, with a particular focus on self-efficacy and confidence, it evaluated the programme's impact on improving participants' quality of life. Second, it examined whether participation contributed to improved engagement with mental health services. Third, it questioned whether participants were supported in progressing into education, training, and employment upon completion. Fourth, the evaluation assessed cost-effectiveness. The Theory of Change developed

for the pilot project served as a basis for the research design, linking its questions with the causal hypotheses about the programme's impact.

Data collection tools were assigned to their respective indicators of outcomes in an evaluation logic model (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 12). In a mixed-method approach, the evaluation intended to collect data at the start and end of the provision as well as follow-up data after three months and six months (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 13). Quantitative data collection methods used standardised tools for all four research questions. These included the WEMWBS and the Outcome Star, previously used in the pilot project evaluation, and introduced the EQ-5D, a standardised user-reported instrument indicating health outcomes and particularly measuring changes in quality of life indicated by improved self-efficacy and confidence (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 13). The cost-effectiveness was evaluated through economic analysis. All quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistical methods. Qualitative research methods captured insights into participants' progress, engagement with mental health services, and their progression upon completion (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 14). This data was gathered through focus groups with the Alchemy Project team and interviews with Early Intervention mental health staff. Data gathered through qualitative means were summarised into a framework to allow for comparisons and then analysed to identify emerging themes.

Despite the robust research design, the data collection encountered significant challenges, not only negatively impacting results but also considerably limiting findings (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 16). In addition to a potential bias in participant selection through subjective recruitment, the small sample size of only 22 participants across two projects resulted in increased sensitivity to individual scores, affecting the statistical robustness of the study. Most importantly and in contrary to the initial design, mental health staff failed to collect follow-up data due to the busy and dynamic nature of their workload (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 17).

The evaluation report confirmed the replication of the positive outcomes for participants' quality of life, as assessed during the pilot project (Optimity Advisors, 2016, p. 50). Results from the quantitative data indicated significant and consistent improvements in self-efficacy, con-

confidence, mental wellbeing, trust, social skills, and resilience (Optimicity Advisors, 2016, p. 48). However, due to the lack of follow-up data, there were no insights into the sustainability of these changes upon completion, leaving the first research question only partially answered, albeit positively. The questions on improved participants' engagement with mental health services and progression into education, training, and employment were similarly affected by the lack of follow-up data (Optimicity Advisors, 2016, p. 48). Regarding the provision's cost-effectiveness, the evaluation conducted a cost-utility analysis instead of a cost-benefit analysis due to the limited data collected, concluding that cost-effectiveness was unlikely unless the positive outcomes were sustained over a considerable period (Optimicity Advisors, 2016, p. 49). Although lacking follow-up data to confirm this, the positive results from the WEMWBS and Outcome Stars suggested complementary monetary benefits (Optimicity Advisors, 2016, p. 47). Unfortunately, the evaluation overlooked other contributing cost-effective benefits, such as reduced reliance on mental health service and increased productivity through engagement with training and employment (Optimicity Advisors, 2016, p. 49). Due to these limitations, the report recommended further long-term research with a larger sample size as well as the introduction of appropriate qualitative research methods to measure broadened categories of benefits, thereby strengthening a robust evidence base and obtaining a more comprehensive picture of benefits (Optimicity Advisors, 2016, p. 50).

The critical results of the evaluation by Optimicity Advisors reiterate two persistent challenges in evaluating the impact of the Dance United Methodology. Firstly, across all these evaluative endeavours, Dance United struggled to obtain data through third parties, whether due to the adverse and conflicting workloads of cooperating staff or data protection guidelines prohibiting access. Secondly, there has always been a struggle to employ appropriate research methods to gain comprehensive insights into the often-subtle changes participants experience. I have personally witnessed these life-changing shifts throughout my time with the company and could share many moving anecdotes of its impact and impressive outcomes. But the question still remains: how can these sometimes subtle and often very personal transformative journeys be adequately measured? This is certainly a relevant area for

further research into the Dance United Methodology. With my doctoral thesis, I endeavour to at least establish a clear theoretical foundation for the work, so that further evaluations can be informed and guided by an academically sound framework.

In conclusion to my discussions on Dance United's efforts in evidencing the impact and efficacy of the Methodology, I have not only illustrated how the Methodology has evolved towards a research-based practice but also evidenced its consistent efficacy and impact throughout the years, thus positioning it as a relevant case of effective community dance practice in the social inclusion sector. The company's consistent evaluative efforts are a testament to their tireless commitment to excellence in practice, marked by an evident willingness to scrutinise, reflect upon, and continuously improve their approach.

## V The Core Concepts of the Dance United Methodology

Having contextualised the unique case of the Dance United Methodology within community dance practice and defined its boundaries through a comprehensive discussion of the work of the company, the following chapter presents the results of my empirical research process. Based on data from both its written formalisation and expert interviews with relevant stakeholders within and around the company, I unveil implicit values, principles, and key characteristics and thus explicitly identify the approach's core concepts. As a vital step in my research process, this analysis answers my first secondary research question: What are the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology?

Employing a constructivist epistemology, I first establish a working definition of the Dance United Methodology, informed by both document and interview data (see V.1). I proceed by separately presenting my findings from documents and interviews, not only allowing for critical comparison but also ensuring transparency in the subsequent integration. While the core concepts identified in the documents illustrate the approach's formal conception, in theory as it were (see V.2), the core concepts derived from the interview data describe their practical application in action (see V.3). Some interview findings enrich the insights from the documents, while others expand into entirely new core concepts.

### 1 Defining the Dance United Methodology

Through the constructivist epistemology underpinning my research, I understand the Dance United Methodology to be a conception construed by interactive and relational processes of meaning-making between relevant stakeholders within and around the company. An accurate analysis of its core concepts thus requires a transparent understanding of the shared implicit meaning attributed to it by those who

developed and practiced it. Based on data from both the written formalisation and the interviews, I outline defining characteristics constituting the key features framing the Methodology.

The term Methodology was consistently used by Dance United for both internal and external communications to indicate that a specific approach to the work was adhered to throughout all of the company's activities. This is evident in their public communications, such as their annual report to the central companies' registry, Companies House, stating: "the company's distinctive dance methodology [...] embraces a holistic approach to personal and social development" (Dance United, 2006a, p. 5). It is indeed noteworthy, that the report references it as a dance Methodology and not a teaching Methodology as such. This is further corroborated through the first document of the written formalisation, where it is simply referenced as "Dance United's Methodology" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p.1). From my personal experience of working for Dance United, I can further attest to the consistent internal use of the term Methodology to describe the company's distinct and specific way of working.

As this was indeed a shared communicative term, my analysis seeks to render its implicit meaning explicit by articulating four defining characteristics, identified by my data analysis as categories (see Appendix A1). Firstly, in outlining the origins, evolution, and formalisation into a written framework, I provide insights into its historically developed key features. Secondly, in terms of its nature, the data analysis defines it as a comprehensive practice-based and flexible guide to 'good teaching'<sup>37</sup> practice actively implemented through competent artists. Thirdly, it is marked as an approach firmly based on a shared ethos with human values at the heart. Lastly, I argue that it can be characterised as an idealistic approach, defending its vision of catalysing positive personal and social changes against the often-harsh realism of socio-political challenges. These characteristics are presented separately for ease of understanding; however, in their totality, they describe a thorough

37 The term "good teaching" stems from both the document and interview data. It is therefore defined as an *in vivo* code according to Grounded Theory Method (Urquhart, 2023, pp. 121-122). In the following, all *in vivo* codes are marked by single quotation marks.

defining understanding of the Dance United Methodology as specifically highlighted in my concluding remarks of this sub-chapter.

## 1.1 A Historically Developed Practice

Gaining insights into the historical dimension of the Methodology as a socially constructed term provides an understanding of the context of its foundations, including initial catalysts and motivations for its conceptualisation. It furthermore illuminates key factors that influenced its evolution over time, particularly highlighting the contributions of influential key figures in shaping its development. Outlining the impact of historical socio-cultural dynamics presents as particularly relevant regarding the process of formalising it into a written framework. Overall, examining the category of the ***Historical Development of the Methodology***<sup>38</sup> is vital in deciphering these implicit aspects, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding. Having identified *Historical Origins*, *Historical Evolution*, and *Written Formalisation*<sup>39</sup> as focused codes within this category, the following assesses where the approach's origins lie, how it gradually evolved, and what motivated its written formalisation.

As described within the historical context of the work of Dance United (see IV.1.1), the work originated in Ethiopia where Andrew Coggins' vision of bringing the stories and struggles of street children to the attention of a wider audience was brought together with Royston Maldoom's and Mags Byrne's artistic expertise in working with marginalised populations through contemporary dance. The initial inception of the approach in Ethiopia and its subsequent development in the UK was thus led by the pioneering artistic vision of those first artists involved (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 1). Historically, however, a methodological clarity started to emerge later during the first phase of the company (see IV.1.2) within the context of the prison projects led by Susannah Broughton and Tara Herbert. This signified a critical milestone in the conception and formalisation of a specific approach.

38 In the following, I illustrate analytical categories through a bold and italic emphasis.

39 In the following, I illustrate analytical focused codes through an italic emphasis.

As Broughton recalls: “it was the prison work that really got us going on this Methodology” (Interview with Susannah Broughton, December 2021, p. 3). Herbert confirms this perspective of the work in custodial settings as the initial catalyst for the emergence of a distinct way of working (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 2). This is further corroborated by Carly Annable-Coop, an artist who joined the company through their Dance Artist Training and Fellowship Programme at this stage of their development: “the first Methodology [...] the principles around it, was being evolved at the time of all the work back in Holloway” (Interview with Carly Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 4). At this origin stage, while a clarity was evolving as to the patterning of the projects, it was not yet formalised in writing.

The interview data further indicates that this clarification evolved from the collaborative process between Broughton and Herbert, with their reflective learnings throughout and after projects further informing the formalisation of a distinct way of working. The Methodology, in its origin, can thus be considered a practice-based approach. For Broughton, this methodological development stemmed from a need for clear processes and defined roles: “we needed to be clear when we walked into a studio of who was doing what and what we were doing” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 2). This collaborative process of reflective practice signalled a pivotal shift in how Dance United’s Methodology gained clarification. It also marked a departure from the approach employed previously, as Herbert observes: “the prison projects were very much based on HOW WE wanted to work rather than how [...] the generation before would have worked” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 2). Maldoom’s approach, characterised by a visionary and spontaneous way of working, was an integral to early development. However, as the organisation matured, the Methodology evolved to prioritise structure and formalisation, transitioning from an intuitive to a systematic approach.

From this starting point, the initial conception of a distinct Methodology matured throughout the second phase of the company with the development of the Academy Programme (see IV.1.3). Establishing the work in this new context outside of the prison structures and extending the programmes through introducing new components sig-

nificantly impacted its further *Historical Evolution*. Faced with this “very different proposition” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 6), the approach experienced a considerable shift toward affording more attention to individual learning processes by becoming “more individual-centred” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 6). To sustain participants’ engagement over longer periods, “the process became really, really important” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 2). This shift highlights the intricate task of balancing process and outcome, as embodied by the final performance. The growing recognition of the value of the learning journey itself, however, introduced the challenge of potentially sacrificing the edge and risk of the final performance. The Methodology notably shifted from emphasising the transformative power of “mesmerising” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 6) performances as the culmination of the learning journey to focusing on a more incremental, step-by-step learning process delivered in a supportive yet stimulating environment. The interview data underscores the intricate balance between process and product in the evolution of Dance United’s Methodology, stemming from a pronounced shift toward individual-centred orientation of the work. This dichotomy reflects the company’s dedication to both artistic ambition and participants’ personal development. Nevertheless, the potential friction between product-driven demands and the core commitment to an inspiring learning journey for participants indicates the complex challenges of this way of working.

A further vital step in the historical development was the *Written Formalisation* of the Methodology. The need for a written documentation of the approach arose during the second phase (see IV.1.3), as the Academy Programme consolidated as a viable provision within the criminal justice system. This was, in part, a response to external demands, as Bynoe explains: “the external eye on the company in terms of funding, evaluation etc. [...] was always keen to have something more formalised” (Interview with Michelle Bynoe, January 2022, p. 3). Consequently, it was recognised that a written formalisation could enhance transparency and accountability toward relevant stakeholders, such as partners and funders. The company’s growth also necessitated a more structured approach to maintain consistency of standards. As

new artists joined the company, the written formalisation served as guidelines for a shared practice, “so that the quality of the work didn’t deteriorate” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 3). A significant catalyst within this process of writing the Methodology down was the extensive research conducted by Andrew Miles and his team at the University of Manchester (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 4). His findings confirmed a distinct way of working, thus providing an external scholarly validation to the process of evolving the approach (Miles & Strauss, 2008, p. 8).

The responsibility of formalising the Methodology rested on various individuals within the organisation and was a collaborative effort, primarily involving Pauline Gladstone, Michelle Bynoe, Tara Herbert, and Susannah Broughton. This resulted in the first and primary document encompassing the company’s Pro-active Strategies (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). The document incorporates the fundamental principles founded on Broughton’s and Herbert’s practice-based reflections outlined above, which were “always there from the beginning and then it just got kind of pulled together and written into a document really,” as Annable-Coop states (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, pp. 4-5). As the company further evolved its artistic vision throughout the third phase of their development (see IV.1.4), the need for formal clarification resurfaced. To ensure that collaborations between Dance United artists and external choreographers translated the Methodology’s core principles into appropriate choreographic repertoire, the company composed two guiding documents: *Choreographic Tendencies* and *Planning Tendencies*<sup>40</sup> (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 5). These were also utilised in inducting and training new dance artists joining the company during this phase.

The written formalisation involved a nuanced process marked by a shared reluctance about translating the Methodology into writing. These reservations were expressed in multiple interviews and rationalised by Bynoe as follows:

<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the document *Pro-Active Strategies*, these two documents have actually been officially titled as *Planning Tendencies* and *Choreographic Tendencies*. These titles are hence used throughout my analysis.

The fear was that external people would read it and think they could replicate it and this is Dance United. So it was protected but also and more importantly, it was because they wanted it to be able to evolve as we developed our practice (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 2).

These concerns about the written Methodology are also explicitly outlined in the first and primary methodological document on Pro-Active Strategies, stating that:

The idea that in the same way that one and one makes two, a list describing Dance United's methodological approach would guarantee anyone following it, the very same results is misguided. The fear is that it will be used without flexibility rather than as a guide (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1).

The fact that this was articulated in the introductory paragraph of the document further highlights the relevance of this concern. However, interviewees acknowledged that the written formalisation had its advantages, providing a valuable reference point for the organisation. Gladstone underscores this by stating: "because that method was written down, it was something you could always go back to" (Interview with Pauline Gladstone, November 2021, p. 5). She further emphasises that the documents evolved through continuous review according to learnings from practice: "I think that process was ongoing all the time [...] it was a living method that was constantly being looked at and changed" (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, pp. 15-16).

As a consequence, the process of formalising the company's Methodology was marked by a delicate balance between the need for transparency and accountability and a fear of constraining and stifling the organic development of practice. Navigated through collaborative efforts and external pressures, this process ultimately led to a written Methodology serving as both a point of reference and a safeguard for the company's core values and principles.

Overall, outlining the *Historical Development of the Methodology* reveals several key characteristics. Founded on Byrne's and Maldoom's artistic vision, the Methodology, in its systematic conception, describes

a practice-based approach stemming from the collaborative, reflective process between Broughton and Herbert. Balancing process and product throughout its evolution, it is characterised by a dedication to uniting artistic vision with social aims. The company's commitment to preserving the Methodology's adaptability and dynamism during its written formalisation frames it as an evolving and flexible approach. These historical characteristics inform a comprehensive understanding of the core concepts of the Methodology.

## 1.2 A Comprehensive, Practice-Based, and Flexible Guide to 'Good Teaching'

To further uncover the implicit understanding of the Dance United Methodology, it is essential to gain insights into its defining nature. My analysis seeks to unravel the meaning embedded in the term used by the company and its stakeholders. Data from interviews and the Pro-Active Strategies document provide a deeper understanding by framing the Methodology as a ***Comprehensive, Practice-Based, and Flexible Guide to 'Good Teaching'***—one that exceeds a mere methodical framework of instructions for teaching dance. As indicated in its historical origins, its principles emerged from a practice-based and reflective process, serving as an adaptive framework for effective teaching. Dance artists play a crucial role in realising it in action through their individual practical implementation. Along the three identified focused codes—*A Comprehensive and Holistic Approach*, *A Practice-Based and Reflective Approach*, and *A Flexible Guide to 'Good Teaching'*—the following findings outline the defining characteristics of the Methodology's nature.

First, the Methodology emerges as *A Comprehensive and Holistic Approach*, transcending a narrow focus on pedagogical methods of teaching dance. "I think it's more than a Methodology," Herbert states, reflecting on its expansive nature (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 5). It extends beyond the artistic development of participants to include realms of safeguarding, well-being, behaviour management, and holistic learning processes. In considering all elements of the participants' learning experience, the Methodology integrates these aspects

into a cohesive whole, thus defining it as a holistic approach. Using the analogy of the interconnected components of the human body, Elisa Aloe—a Support Manager at the London Academy—highlights this perspective: “It was a full package [...] everything was seen to, everything was looked after [...] the dance, [...] their well-being [...] how they were feeling, how they were acting, how they were thinking” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 3). The Methodology provides guidance on individual aspects, which work together in synergy as part of a multi-faceted system. Gladstone supports this holistic view, particularly in the training of artists: “How would I strip out the actual DANCE method [...] from what you might call the behaviour management method or understanding young people [...] or understanding yourself” (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p. 2). This perspective underscores the challenge of isolating dance teaching methods from the broader interconnected framework of the Methodology. It requires not only general educational skills but also self-reflective capacities, further emphasising its holistic nature. These findings suggest that the Methodology is conceived as an overarching term, encompassing principles that guide all aspects of the work—not only informing the instructional design of learning delivery but also addressing participants’ broader needs to ensure their well-being, personal development, and engagement throughout projects. In other words, the Methodology considers the required holistic support of participants in their learning journey.

Second, as highlighted in its the historical development, the Methodology evolved from practical experiences and learnings from projects. Even following its formalisation into written documents, the interview data confirms that it continues to function as *A Practice-Based and Reflective Approach*. Its practical application relies heavily on the practitioners’ shared, implicit knowledge and understanding of its basic principles and elements. Through its practical foundation, the approach is subject to continuous evolution and adaptation through active implementation. “It was just this constantly evolving thing,” as Kwesi Johnson—a dance artist at the London Academy—states (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 3). He elaborates: “this is what you do in a practical sense rather than [...] in a written down

sense” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 10). The Methodology is thus collectively agreed upon as a specific approach to practice, with its written formalisation serving as a foundation for a contextual and flexible practice-based realisation.

This dynamic and evolving implementation necessitates practitioners’ reflective self-awareness. According to the data, reflective practices within teams and self-reflection for artists are crucial for evolving and applying the Methodology effectively (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 7). Open, ongoing communication and continuous reviews during and after projects enable the practical realisation of the strategies indicated in the documents. Additionally, professional self-awareness allows staff to acknowledge their personal experiences and vulnerabilities, carefully considering how and why methodological principles are implemented (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 11).

The importance of practical experience in confidently implementing the Methodology is underscored by Linsell: “I have led SO many projects in SO many different places with SO many different kinds of people, I have a kind of trust in myself [...] that is an instinctive [...] I feel like it’s based on experience” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 9). This instinctive application of appropriate methodological tools and principles results from historical knowledge and experiential learning. Consequently, learning about the Methodology often involves on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and mentorship from experienced artists. Most Dance United artists entered this work through such pathways, progressing from supporting roles to leadership positions over time. This progression underscores the importance of practical experience in acquiring the expertise needed to implement the Methodology. Through its emphasis on experiential learning and continuous improvement, the Methodology emerges as a dynamic, resilient framework for a practice-based and reflective approach.

Third, in its written formalisation, the Methodology is framed as a non-prescriptive, flexible guide serving as a specific approach to “good teaching” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p.1). This aspect of the nature of the Methodology is highlighted in the introductory paragraphs of the Pro-Active Strategies document, which explicitly states

that the Methodology is not intended as a rigid set of instructions. Instead, it advocates for flexible, reflective application, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful practice. The document outlines the Methodology's key features and principles, describing them as "pro-active strategies" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). While the term itself remains undefined, it suggests a pre-emptive approach—acting in anticipation of future challenges or needs. Although the Pro-Active Strategies document does not explicitly define 'good teaching,' the content of the three methodological documents reveals specific principles guiding the learning process, environment, and outcomes (see V.2.5). Bynoe echoes this understanding, describing the Methodology as a best-practice model: "What we realised is that a lot of it is what we would call best-practice" (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, pp. 3-4). This reference to consistent principles guiding teaching underscores the Methodology's alignment with educational best practices.

By constituting the Methodology as a flexible guide of best-practice principles, the approach becomes adaptable and transferable across different client groups and contexts. This adaptability is evident in Dance United's history of working with various marginalised populations—from Ethiopian children in street situations to individuals with mental health challenges—affording the company "a track record of the Methodology in all of those different contexts" (Interview with Nikki Crane, November 2021, p. 6). While the approach adjusts to specific settings and client needs, its consistent pursuit of high artistic standards remains intact. As Linsell notes: "When you're working towards performance, you're still working towards that quality piece [...] you're working towards that kind of professional standard. But certain things that happen in the sessions, have to be, maybe a little bit adjusted" (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 8). The Methodology thus strikes a careful balance of upholding fundamental principles and maintaining its integrity, while effectively navigating diverse community landscapes and participant characteristics. This insight indicates that artistic excellence is upheld as a consistent principle of the approach.

As a flexible framework of principles, the Methodology is dependent on the individuals implementing it in practice. The artists employed by Dance United play a pivotal role in its practical application, as "ulti-

mately the success of the work [...] is down to the dance artists we employ and their passion, personalities and unyielding commitment to their art form” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). Thus, the artists’ attributes, skills, and experiences are considered essential to successfully realising the work. As indicated in the Pro-Active Strategies document, they are expected to be professional artists with performance experience rather than teachers or educators. In addition to their professional expertise, they bring specific attributes, such as passion and commitment, to the work. Within this framework of key features and principles, artists apply their own unique teaching styles.

While this provides some insight into the role of staff in delivering the Methodology, further analysis is needed to explore how this is realised as a core concept. Although the Methodology provides guidance on didactic-methodical principles, the professional, personal, and social competencies of staff are critical to their practical implementation. With the ultimate aim of maximizing the potential success of the work, this approach is achieved through an interplay between flexible principles and their practical realisation by dance artists “of calibre” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). The comprehensive analysis of interviews offers additional insights, specifying the roles artists and staff play in realising the approach in action (see V.3.2.2).

The above analysis presents a comprehensive understanding of the defining nature of the Dance United Methodology as a ***Comprehensive, Practice-Based, and Flexible Guide to ‘Good Teaching’***. As a comprehensive and holistic approach, it extends beyond methods of teaching dance to include aspects of safeguarding, well-being, and overall learning processes. As a practice-based approach, it continuously evolves through reflection. As a flexible framework for ‘good teaching’, it allows for adaptation and transferability across diverse client groups and contexts while carefully balancing the maintenance of fundamental principles with adjustments to the specific needs of varied practice landscapes. The pivotal role of passionate and committed artists, who bring their professional experience and unique teaching styles, is highlighted as crucial to the successful realisation of the approach. These defining characteristics provide a clear understanding of the term’s implicit meaning, establishing the necessary framework within which its core concepts are realised.

### 1.3 A Shared Ethos with Human Values at the Heart

Emerging primarily from the interview data, another defining characteristic of the Dance United Methodology is its foundation in **A Shared Ethos Founded on Human Values**, characterising it as *A Value-Based Approach* which is *Embedded in a Shared Ethos*.

The historical origins of the work in Ethiopia were built on a common ground between the two leading artists. As Byrne recalls: “we kind of sung off the same hymn sheet. We had a similar ethos” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 2). Based on this foundation, a shared ethos continued to underpin the approach, shaping and influencing its development and practical applications as a *A Value-Based Approach*. While its specific methods are agile, flexible, and evolving, its fundamental values appear to remain consistent throughout its formalisation. As Gladstone confirms: “I think there were a LOT of human values at the heart of the method” (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p.6). Within this way of working, a shared ethos and corresponding values are not mere ideals but a practical driving force at the core, motivating methodological actions and decisions.

As highlighted in the interviews, these profound human values are anchored in principles of dignity and respect. A recurrent theme throughout the data emphasises the significance of treating each individual with kindness and care, regardless of their background, biography, or social status. Herbert succinctly captures this principle: “It’s very basic. It’s about treating people how you would want to be treated” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 4). The interviews collectively portray an organisation deeply grounded in an ethos where the Methodology is guided by a fundamental recognition of the inherent worth, potential, and value of every individual. For Antony Hassall, who played a pivotal role in establishing Dance United’s work in custodial settings during his tenure as a prison governor, this ethos extended beyond the company. As he reflects, his motivation to partner with Dance United stemmed from “a lot of synergy about [...] treating people with dignity, treating people with respect, not judging people, treating people as an individual” (Interview with Antony Hassall, December

2021, p.13). Given the positive collaboration with Hassall, as evidenced by several evaluation reports (see IV.2.1), this shared ethos likely played a crucial role in the partnership's success. It is consequently reasonable to conclude that these human values functioned as a unifying factor, not only amongst staff but also with collaborating partner organisations.

The data also highlights how a collectively shared ethos shaped a unified vision and mission within the company “from the very top down,” as Jamie Friel—the former Director of Safeguarding and Learning at the London Academy—reflects (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 20). This unity became the driving force behind Dance United's strong and enduring identity, motivating a collective commitment that resonates in the interview data with clarity, integrity, and authenticity. In turn, the clarity and authenticity embedded in the organisational identity served as a guiding force in shaping its distinct approach. This clarity translated into a distinct Methodology marked by intentionality and purpose. As Van Huynh remarks from his perspective as an external choreographer and associate artist: “Dance United was clearly conscious to its kind of activities and in that kind of structure and model” (Interview with Dam Van Huynh, December 2021, p.8). Dance United's Methodology is thus defined by its focus and commitment to a shared vision among stakeholders. In other words, it is *Embedded in a Shared Ethos* as the foundation upon which the approach was formalised, resulting in a strategic, impactful, and authentic approach.

The above analysis defines the Methodology as a values-driven approach, highlighting the unwavering commitment to these values throughout the company. This commitment imbues the organisation with clarity, authenticity, and integrity, resulting in a well-defined identity. This ***Shared Ethos with Human Values at the Heart*** forms the bedrock foundation of the Methodology, guiding its development and application in practice. As defining characteristic, it necessitates further assessment as to how these human values are embedded within the core concepts of the Methodology.

## 1.4 Defending an Idealistic Approach

Based on insights from the interview data, the Dance United Methodology is further defined as an idealistic approach focused on high aspirations and an optimistic belief in the possibility of transforming lives through dance. Although not explicitly termed as such by the interviewees, numerous indicators in the data support this analytical interpretation. In its idealistic nature, the Methodology faces considerable challenges in upholding its integrity against socio-political realities. Despite these challenges, the data confirms an unwavering commitment to ***Defending an Idealistic Approach***, characterised by two focused codes: *An Idealistic Approach* and *Facing Adverse Realities*.

As *An Idealistic Approach*, the Methodology is founded on a firm conviction in achieving outcomes beyond commonly held beliefs of what is possible. Through its risk-taking nature, the approach challenges conventions and deviates from established expectations. The work's origins in Ethiopia realised what Coggins terms the “insane proposition” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 2) of staging a professional performance involving a large group of street children—who were typically discouraged from congregating by police—within only three and a half weeks. This spirit of pushing boundaries persisted, with projects ranging from staging professional performances in prisons to working with highly vulnerable populations in Early Intervention in Psychosis services. This notion of achieving the seemingly impossible was frequently described as “magic” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 2; Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 5; Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 14; Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 15; Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 18), underscoring the profound impact of the Methodology.

An additional indicator of the Methodology's idealistic nature is its notable pioneering innovation. As Friel observes, this way of working was “way ahead of our time” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 9). An experienced teacher with decades of working in educational contexts, he further notes that pedagogical principles embedded in the Methodology are now being adopted into mainstream education: “this kind of thinking is only now seeping into

the general consciousness” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 9). The company’s innovation extended beyond the Methodology itself, with its early and pioneering efforts in impact evaluation and research (see IV.2). As Crane reflects with her extensive insight into current academic research on arts and health: “Dance United were doing it eons ago” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 12). These data excerpts underscore the organisation’s commitment to challenging conventions and pushing boundaries through pioneering and risk-taking ambitions.

In pursuing an idealistic vision, Dance United’s work often clashed with cultural presumptions, as reflected in the data under the focused code *Facing Adverse Realities*. Defying conventional norms subjected Dance United to considerable challenges. Annable-Coop aptly summarises the effort required to defend this idealistic approach against adverse conditions: “It’s magic but a bloody hard work magic” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 14).

Emphasising the socio-political challenges of the work, the idea of empowering marginalised populations is a difficult narrative to present to potential funders and defend in the court of public opinion. Reflecting on the work in Ethiopia, Coggins recalls: “it was quite hard to sell a story in which young people who in the development world might have been regarded as victims or casualties are created to be strong, capable, sustainable, viable, adult beings” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 3). This challenge extended to the work with young offenders, where their participation in Dance United’s programmes was sometimes perceived by the public as a reward for criminal behaviour (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 6). In addition to these perceptions, the data highlights cultural resistance to dance as a transformative medium (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p.16). Influenced by stereotypes perpetuated in popular and social media, dance is often viewed as merely a fun pastime rather than a serious, impactful art form. This misconception creates barriers not only for participants, who may initially dismiss dance as irrelevant to their lives, but also for partner organisations, which might undervalue its potential. Linsell describes these ongoing struggles as “constant BATTLES [...] trying to get people to understand [...] how impactful the work is and how unique it is”

(Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 15). These adversities extend to addressing inequalities within the arts. Van Huynh highlights this issue: “It’s HUGELY political and you’re saying AGAINST the kind of status quo that the arts is generally just really accessible to some [...] you are looking at great art for everyone essentially” (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 8). By striving to make high-quality artistic experiences accessible to marginalised and vulnerable populations, Dance United and its Methodology challenge conventional paradigms within the arts.

The interview data also identifies funding sustainability and evidencing impact as prominent challenges. The work demands significant resources, including highly qualified staff, high staff-to-participant ratio, professional rehearsal and performance setups with costumes, lights and technical equipment, and comprehensive participant care to enable access. Funders, often focused on quantitative measures, view the provisions as costly relative to the number of participants. This tension significantly shaped the development of Dance United’s programmes, with funders’ demands leading to extended programmes and resource adjustments. These financial pressures persisted throughout the company’s history and became acute during the economic crisis, which significantly disrupted established funding avenues and contributed to Dance United’s closure (see IV.1.4). From her perspective as the Artistic Director of Dance United Yorkshire, Linsell reflects on the economic crisis as a pivotal factor: “The economic crisis was MAJORLY significant in the journey of Dance United and Dance United Yorkshire” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 3). After Dance United’s closure, Dance United Yorkshire responded to the altered funding landscape by adapting their provisions to regional demands. As Linsell elaborates, “if we didn’t respond to what was going on in the region [...] we wouldn’t have survived” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 3).

Closely related to the continuous challenge of convincing funding bodies, Dance United invested considerable and persistent efforts in evidencing the impact of its work (see IV.2). However, this confronted the company with additional adversities, as it was difficult to adequately correlate the impact of the work with a monetary benefit for those investing. Anecdotal evidence of the personal impacts on

participants, while valuable, was deemed insufficient by funders who requested numerical, quantitative evidence. As Coggins highlights: “people wanted to codify it and I don’t think you can” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 8). The company thus struggled to appropriately capture the often uniquely personal transformative journeys of participants in terms of quantitative data output.

Despite these challenges, several interviewees emphasised the importance of resilience and the ongoing commitment to their idealistic vision in the face of societal changes and political constraints. In other words, despite adverse realities, Dance United upheld its unshakable belief in their work, refusing to compromise the integrity of the Methodology. The data reveals that maintaining the integrity of the approach is detrimental to its transformative impact. In its idealistic nature, the Methodology is non-compromising and stands by its principles, which Davies describes as “sacred” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 10). As Dance United Yorkshire continues this practice, it faces “the challenge [...] to keep hold of the heart and soul of what Dance United was but also to be a sustainable organisation in today’s climate” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 4). This highlights yet another precarious balance within which the Methodology operates—the delicate equilibrium between idealistic aspirations and the pragmatic challenges of navigating the ever-changing socio-political and cultural context of the work.

In summary of this chapter, the data from both the documents and interviews provide a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the shared implicit definition attributed to the Methodology by those who developed and practiced it. My analysis defines this understanding as a construct of interactive and relational processes of meaning-making between relevant stakeholders. It is described as a historically evolved, practice-based, comprehensive, and flexible guide to ‘good teaching.’ As such, it is firmly founded in a universally shared ethos of human values and framed by an idealistic vision. Notably, the Methodology navigates several precarious dichotomies: balancing process with outcome; artistic ambitions with social impact; flexible adaptation with the integrity of core principles; and an idealistic vision with realistic adversities. This established working definition of the Dance United Meth-

odology allows for a focused analysis of the core concepts as consistent aspects that have persevered over time. As the above considerations indicate, the further analysis particularly necessitates an assessment of what constitutes ‘good teaching’ practices and requires a closer look at underlying values. It also mandates further investigation into the role of artistic ambitions as a consistent characteristic.

## 2 The Core Concepts in Theory – Analysis of the Written Framework

I now turn to my analysis of the three documents of the Methodology in its written formalisation as a first step in identifying its core concepts, thus answering my first secondary research question. Overall, my findings encompass six core concepts, with four constituted as categories and two remaining tentative focused codes at this stage. While ‘*Working to the Highest Artistic Standards*’, the Methodology frames a particular learning space by ***Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*** and ***Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre***, where participants engage in the communal experience of *Working as a Dance Company*. Guided by ***Principles of ‘Good Teaching’***, the approach focuses its learning content on ***Delivering Dance-Specific Learning***. Before discussing each of the identified core concepts individually, I begin this chapter by contextualising my analysis in the editorial composition of the three documents and addressing limitations in capturing their historical changes.

In terms of overall outline, composition, and editorial structure, all three documents generally encompass lists of principles, key features, and strategies employed. The document on Pro-Active Strategies outlines 39 bullet-pointed items and an additional two prerequisites, whereas Planning Tendencies and Choreographic Tendencies respectively contain 16 and 13 numbered points. The Pro-Active Strategies document provides an introductory section consisting of four paragraphs. As my discussions on defining the Methodology explicated (see V.1.2), this introduction communicates the company’s understanding of the Methodology as a flexible guide to ‘good teaching’ practice and

highlights the pivotal role of artists in its realisation. Most methodological points in the Pro-Active Strategies documents are phrased as statements, often lacking explanation as to why they are employed, which indicates implicit assumptions about this way of working. My comprehensive analysis unearths their inherent meanings through comparing, corroborating, and contextualising them with other related data across the documents. In the Planning Tendencies and Choreographic Tendencies documents, this aspect of the Methodology is made explicit by inserting the column “Why?” into the documents, outlining reasons for employing specific strategies and principles.

In terms of layout, it is striking that the Pro-Active Strategies document contains an image from a project performance on its front page, marking it as a representational document. Given that it was utilised within the context of training artists<sup>41</sup>, it is assumed that considerable editorial effort was invested to communicate it externally. This assumption is further supported by the inclusion of an introductory section in the document. Both Planning Tendencies and Choreographic Tendencies have a working document layout, including a blank column for personal notes. Neither document contains introductory explanations or clarifications. This specific layout edit reflects that these two documents were primarily used for internal communications with visiting artists and dance artist trainees throughout the planning and delivery of specific projects. This contextualisation is provided to comprehensively frame the process but does not constitute an analytical dimension of my coding process according to a constructivist Grounded Theory Method (see II.2.3.1).

For my analysis, I utilise the most recent obtainable edits from 2013 for the Pro-Active Strategies and from 2014 for the Planning Tendencies and the Choreographic Tendencies. Over the years, the Methodology in its written formalisation underwent adaptations informed by research, evaluations, and learnings from practical implementation (see V.1.1). The documents have thus experienced continuous change and review. However, a historical analysis of these alterations and edits exceeds the

<sup>41</sup> This statement is based on my personal experience through my own training process, as well as through personally inducting several dance artist trainees on a number of projects.

context of my analysis, as it is assumed that the core concepts of the Methodology remained generally unchanged and consistent throughout the years. Furthermore, as over a decade has passed since the closure of the company, despite my best efforts, I was unable to obtain the complete archive of the various edits throughout the years. Without this complete overview, a historical analysis would only provide glimpses and snapshots. A comprehensive historical analysis is therefore not only redundant but also impossible.

## 2.1 ‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’

The analysis of the three documents highlights the core concept of ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’ as a pivotal and central component of the approach, consistently referred to within all three documents. Although some aspects of this core concepts remain unsaturated at this stage, my analysis identified this aspect as a focused code with four defining initial codes, as described below. While this may appear to be a poor analytical basis, previous considerations on the company’s work indicate this as a stable aspect of the approach, evidenced through both its historical development, particularly throughout the third phase (see IV.4), as well as evaluations, particularly through audience feedback (see IV.2.1). This view is further supported by insights into the defining nature of the Methodology as a flexible guide that maintains a consistent pursuit of high artistic standards across a multitude of practice landscapes (see V.1.2).

Within the Methodology’s artistic ambition, the art form is at the core and leads the process as a whole: “We work to the highest artistic standards and always allow the art form to lead” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2). This indicates a belief in the inherent value of the art form and emphasises its capacity to guide and most importantly drive the social mission of promoting personal growth and development. As the data indicates, setting and maintaining high artistic standards within the approach is paramount to upholding the company’s reputation for excellence and innovation (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). Consequently, the approach is

unwavering in its commitment to setting and maintaining the highest artistic standards as a core concept.

A mechanism for realising these ambitiously set standards is a performance-led framework. It not only results in a very clear and pragmatic goal-oriented process, but also ensures that the culmination of projects appropriately showcases participant's achievements and the company's artistic ambition. Emphasising the importance of "professional production values" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2) further underscores a dedication to delivering a polished and professional presentation, which aligns with this primary ambition.

As previously stated (see V.1.4), the work of Dance United is characterised by its innovation and risk-taking. Its pioneering and idealistic vision remains coherent within its artistic ambition by pursuing strategies to further the innovation of its work. A unique mechanism that is employed to achieve this is the collaboration with established professional choreographers and artists outside of the company. This exchange achieves a reciprocal enrichment between the Methodology and professional arts practice—furthering the artistic pursuit of the work while embedding it in professional contemporary dance practice. "This has been a significant step forward and we are charting new territory as we continue to test what is possible and the striking results which new artistic influences, dedicated teaching and methodology can deliver" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United 2014, p. 1). However, since these collaborations were only developed during the final phase of the company's activity (see IV.1.4), this is only evidenced in the Planning Tendencies and Choreographic Tendencies documents and not corroborated by the earlier document on Pro-Active Strategies.

An indicator of what constitutes high artistic standards is the notion of enabling participants to "shine on the stage" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). As a metaphorical expression, it encapsulates that the highest artistic standards are realised when participants demonstrate their full capabilities and present themselves with confidence in an artistically accomplished performance. As the culmination of an intensive rehearsal process, the performance serves as a pivotal moment in which participants exceed their perceived limitations. By setting professional expectations for the performance, the Methodol-

ogy provides a structured environment for participants to realise their potential, demonstrating its commitment to human-centred values and transformative outcomes. In this regard, when participants shine on stage, they display both artistic achievement and personal growth.

In summary, the Dance United Methodology's commitment to the highest artistic standards is multi-dimensional. It involves setting and maintaining a standard of excellence, embracing a performance-led process with professional production values, fostering artistic innovation, and ensuring that participants can "shine on the stage" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). Although this aspect of the Methodology represents a pivotal core concept, the data from the documents has not fully saturated this as a category, requiring further insights into how high artistic standards are defined and why they are considered to be important to the approach. Other than employing professional production values, the data also lacks explanations as to how these standards are implemented and realised in practice. As corroborating data is prevalent in the interview data, these aspects are elaborated on further within the context of my analysis of the Methodology in action (see V.3.1.1).

## 2.2 Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential

According to my document analysis, the Methodology emphasises the creation of a specific environment that enables participants to safely step into processes of personal growth and learning by offering a highly focused, structured, immersive, intensive, and demanding learning environment. This key characteristic was identified by Miles and his team of researchers (see IV.2.2) and is further corroborated within the three documents.

Numerous methodological principles support the core concept of ***Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential***. By building a tight, clear, and supportive structure that promotes progression, achievement, and engagement, participants are enabled to gradually build the required trust, belief, and confidence in themselves, the process, the group, and

the staff to step into their learning, their growth, and ultimately, their potential. As such, the established learning environment is characterised by a dichotomy between safety and challenge—captured in the focused codes *Containing and Holding*<sup>42</sup> and *Facilitating Learning and Growth*. In other words, a safe space is maintained in a careful equilibrium with a brave space.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.2.1 Containing and Holding

To create a contained and held learning space, the Methodology employs a range of strategies that ensure participants' physical safety through safeguarding and risk management practices, provide comprehensive emotional support through working as a multi-disciplinary team, and establish clarity and structure throughout the learning process. As the document on *Choreographic Tendencies* states, particularly when working with marginalised populations with particular needs, it is paramount to “create an environment that is stable, safe, structured, driven and where they know staff are in complete control of the process and know where they are taking them” (*Choreographic Tendencies*, Dance United, 2014, pp. 3-4).

Establishing a sense of containment within the learning space requires boundaries and structure within and around the process. This is achieved through a range of mechanisms. A notable methodological principle is the protection of the process from external disruptions. The data suggests that visits to the space are limited and controlled, with participants being transparently informed about who is entering their space and why, indicating a culture of transparency and respect (*Pro-Active Strategies*, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, the space is kept physically safe by removing obstacles and distractions,

42 As a dance movement therapist, I hold professional expertise on the importance of a boundary and protected space constituted in relevant psychotherapeutic theories such as Winnicott's Holding Environment (Winnicott, 1960) and Bion's Containment (Bion, 1962). Therefore, I rely on these established terms to adequately describe this aspect of the Methodology.

43 I derive the term “brave space” from literature on Transformative Learning Theory (Le Hunte et al., 2022, p. 863), as theory relevant to my theoretical foundation (see VI.3).

ensuring a clear, safe, and professional work environment. A predictable working structure of sessions, particularly opening and closing sessions in a circle where everyone is seen, adds to this sense of boundaries, structure, and thus containing safety. Relationships between the Dance United team and participants are guided and managed by “professional boundaries with a human touch” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2) through a set code of conduct. Although this emphasises professionalism and care within the relationship with participants, the content of this code of conduct remains unspecified.

In addition to containment through boundaries and structure, participants need to feel safely held within their learning process. The Methodology realises this by building trust in the process and the team, as well as providing comprehensive support through authoritative leadership and team-teaching. A sense of trust in the process is primarily established by working with a tailored and “pre-mapped” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2) choreography, which provides a mechanism for making the learning process predictable and reliable. Providing clear objectives and a sense of achievement within short timeframes not only facilitates trust in the process and the staff but also instils confidence and belief in the participants’ own capacities to achieve the overall goal of the performance. An additional aspect of promoting trust in the staff is their reliably consistent dedication and commitment to accommodating the often-volatile nature of the client group, while delivering on a successful performance “no matter what” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6).

A team-teaching approach involving both dance and support staff not only provides comprehensive support but also contributes to a unified staff front. The multi-disciplinary team works together as a unit in all aspects of project delivery. It thus functions a vital mechanism in maintaining consistency, cohesion, and predictability, while also allowing flexibility in responding to the individual needs of participants. The Methodology describes an authoritative and clear leadership style implemented through setting boundaries, expectations, objectives, and learning content, rather than facilitating this in a participatory process negotiated with participants. As “staff are in complete control” (Cho-

reographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, pp. 3-4), participants are safely held in their learning process.

The intention behind implementing these principles is to create a safe space that promotes achievement, facilitates commitment, and eliminates the risk of disengagement, so that participants have the opportunity to build trust, belief, and confidence in themselves, the process, the group, and the team. This sense of safety through *Containing and Holding* provides the foundation for participants to step into learning, growth, and ultimately the realisation of their potential.

## 2.2.2 Facilitating Learning and Growth

The process of participants' learning and growth is not only appropriately supported but deliberately facilitated through a number of methodological mechanisms. Within a professional environment, participants are exposed to unfamiliar experiences in a new role and challenged to leave "their comfort zone" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 9). As they progress towards the performance, with continuous experiences of achievement, they are empowered to gradually become more confident and take overall ownership, not only effecting a process of personal development but, most importantly, leading to a realisation of their potential.

Professional standards are realised not only in the artistic standards of performance but also in providing a professional work environment for participants throughout (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). By facilitating optimal conditions for growth and learning, participants are surrounded by professionalism and experience the value their efforts are assigned. This serves as a motivating invitation to meet these standards and work to a professional level.

Throughout a Dance United project, participants are exposed to a vast array of new experiences, including novel ways of moving and unfamiliar music genres (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2). The choreography never focuses on issues—such as gang crime or domestic violence—but engages participants in creative physical expression within fundamental human themes that everyone can relate to—such as hope and rites of passage. These experiences have

the potential to broaden participants' horizons, opening up potential spaces for learning and growth. By taking them out of their comfort zones—their familiar environment of lived experience—they are exposed to new impressions without being overwhelmed, in a delicately negotiated balance between unfamiliarity and familiarity, uncertainty and predictability.

Most of the participants have never danced before and are especially unfamiliar with contemporary dance. The Methodology prescribes deliberately addressing them as “dancers and a company” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2), constituting a vital mechanism for facilitating learning and growth. In this novel role, participants acquire new skills and often achieve something they never thought possible. The unfamiliar role of a dancer marks a departure from the social identities they typically inhabit in their everyday lives. Many arrive with histories of being categorised through deficit-based labels that reflect their interactions with the criminal justice system, experience of school exclusion, or use of mental health services. Such stigmatising attributions potentially narrow the possibilities that participants can envision for themselves. By implication, their engagement with the social role of a dancer offers an alternative point of orientation—a role that emphasises discipline, creativity, and capability. Enacting this role through sustained physical and mental commitment to the training and rehearsal process offers experiences of agency that are not abstract but embodied. In their research, Miles and his team have conceptualised this learning outcome as “embodied confidence” (Miles & Strauss, p. 30), firmly locating this impact within the bodily experiences of competence and increased positive physical self-awareness.

Another mechanism facilitating learning and growth is the promotion of ownership and confidence. This process is a carefully managed and guided by the Methodology, unfolding on the foundation of the clear and transparent leadership outlined above. Throughout the project, a deliberate transition occurs, gradually transferring increased responsibility to the participants. This strategic approach, described as allowing “for the dance company to feel confident and have ownership” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5), gradually progresses as part of a developmental process. As participants acquire with the

necessary skills and confidence through the carefully considered and curated learning content, the strict and authoritative leadership adapts, moving towards increased ownership. This is facilitated by the united delivery team, ensuring participants are prepared and supported in their journey towards an independent and self-assured performance. It is also reflected in the choreography, as creative material becomes a crucial element that offers diverse opportunities for ownership and creative engagement. The culmination of this developmental progress unfolds on the stage, where participants are encouraged to fully embrace their roles and responsibilities as dancers within their dance company.

A motivating catalyst in facilitating learning and growth is the methodological consideration of deliberately fostering achievement throughout the process (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). By carefully navigating the balance between providing a sense of safety and presenting challenging opportunities for growth and learning, the Methodology propels participants forward through continuous experiences of achievement—from the first exercise, to the end of the first day, to the completion of a choreographic section at the end of the first week. The ultimate ambition is to meticulously cultivate a conducive learning environment for participants to step into their learning journey with the assurance of both safety and challenge.

In summary, the Methodology catalyses learning and growth by exposing participants to new experiences within a novel social role, framed by professional standards, while encouraging a process that promotes ownership and confidence, motivated by regular experiences of achievement. As a methodological core concept, *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential* is not fully saturated from the document data. The analysis of the interviews further expands on aspects of care, attunement, and nurturing as relational contributing factors in realising this specific characteristic of the learning environment. It also provides further insight into how the balance between safety and challenge is practically navigated and achieved (see V.3.1.2).

## 2.3 Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre

In addition to the dichotomy of safe and brave space, my analysis reveals an approach that advocates and promotes the creation of an inclusive, person-centred, and needs-based environment. Captured in the core concept of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, this methodical principle encompasses *Inclusive Terms of Participation*, *Employing a Person-Centric Approach*, and *Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs* of vulnerable populations and untrained dancers. These holistic considerations ensure that projects are accessible and welcoming to a broad range of participants with diverse requirements, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds or physical capacities.

### 2.3.1 Inclusive Terms of Participation

The data indicates that inclusive terms of participation are promoted from the outset and throughout the projects. Based on a conscious and informed decision, participants enter projects voluntarily, fostering a sense of ownership and choice in their involvement. Since “there’s no dance audition” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2), there are no expectations or criteria regarding particular skills, knowledge, or abilities. The absence of a selection process suggests an open and inclusive accessibility to the projects. In other words, participants actively choose to take part; they are not selected or excluded. This creates an intriguing power dynamic in relation to the described authoritative leadership employed throughout. Participants own their deliberate choice to participate and subsequently relinquish some degree of power to the Dance United team. Throughout the process, power and ownership are gradually transferred back to participants, ultimately culminating in their stage performance. This inclusivity is further complemented by ongoing efforts “to get everyone through the project” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4), accommodating different levels of engagement for a diverse and inclusive outcome.

Although the written Methodology, particularly the Pro-Active Strategies document, clearly indicates an inclusive ethos of participa-

tion, it lacks saturation regarding other potential strategies employed to facilitate access and overcome barriers to engagement. However, these aspects are corroborated and enriched by the interview data (see V.3.1.3).

### 2.3.2 Employing a Person-Centric Approach

The written Methodology prescribes specific person-centric mechanisms throughout projects. As stated in the Pro-Active Strategies document, the approach focuses on working with individuals rather than adhering to labels or backgrounds, promoting a non-judgmental and accepting environment. By actively avoiding information and knowledge about participants' backgrounds—such as their offending history or mental health issues—Dance United staff approach individuals as dancers, minimising potential biases. This person-centric stance is further emphasised as staff are instructed to “work with individuals not with their crimes/issues” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2). However, the document data does not elaborate on why this is employed or its relevance to the process. Hence, this aspect requires further corroboration and enrichment through interview data (see V.3.1.3).

An additional indication of a person-centric approach is the emphasis on individual recognition. This includes celebrating personal achievements by giving “each dancer a special moment in the spotlight” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4), thus showcasing each participant's unique contributions to the choreography and the performance. Deliberately facilitating unique contributions from every participant fosters the creation of an inclusive space where each person is seen, heard, and appreciated for being “important, unique” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 10). It is through this active acknowledgment and valuing of each participant's individuality that the inclusive ethos of the learning environment is realised in practice.

This key mechanism within the Methodology is closely linked to a differentiated teaching approach and the choreographic learning content, which allows for a range of parts to be distributed among a diverse group. Furthermore, it supports ‘*Working to the Highest Artistic Standards*’ by ensuring that everyone is witnessed achieving their unique potential and “shining” in their performance. These tentative relation-

ships are furthermore explored within the development of my theoretical model (see VI.2).

### 2.3.3 Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs

The Methodology adapts to the specific needs of participants, ensuring an inclusive learning culture by addressing the unique requirements and challenges of marginalised populations within the teaching process and the choreographic development.

The creation of the learning environment is specifically informed by the participants' needs, as "the nature of our young people means that learning must feel safe, be tightly structured, supported" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5). These specific needs are addressed by creating a safe space and providing a structured, contained work environment with clear, authoritative leadership. This links strongly to the principles of a safe learning space and aligns with the challenges of working with the marginalised populations Dance United engages through their practice.

Additionally, the Methodology is mindful of working "with non-dancers with little movement or no movement vocabulary and lack of confidence" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 4). This sensitivity towards working with untrained bodies ensures that the process remains accessible to participants of all abilities, acknowledging their starting points while incrementally building their capacity for a confident creative expression through dance.

The documents emphasise the need for adaptability and responsiveness in delivering learning content to effectively engage diverse, marginalised, and untrained groups. Flexibility is a vital mechanism in this process, as "due to unpredictable nature of client group, anything could happen" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). To maintain a sense of safety and to facilitate continuous engagement, the Methodology requires dance artists to attune to the group process and respond accordingly by sensitively adjusting session structures, objectives, and content. This attunement demands flexibility, as indicated: "it is important to observe and read the group and to respond as appropriate" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8). The Dance United team

must remain committed and reliable, ensuring the process succeeds despite unpredictable changes.

The Methodology also considers participants' specific needs in the choreographic process. To ensure meaningful and accessible learning experiences for participants with varying levels of experience, physical abilities, and confidence, the choreographic material must be "suitable for untrained bodies and challenging groups" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2). This demonstrates a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of a heterogeneous group of participants. The choreography not only aims to be "both imaginative and inspiring" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1), fostering both emotional and creative engagement, but also balances high artistic standards with practical accessibility. Movements are designed to be accessible, relevant, and meaningful to participants, promoting both high physical standards and individual growth.

The document analysis highlights the Methodology's alignment towards accommodating and meeting the specific needs of marginalised populations. As the approach is deeply rooted in practice-based experience, it can be assumed that these outlined characteristics stem from practical engagement with these client groups. The inclusive dimension of the work permeates many other methodological considerations. Its safe nature responds to the acute needs of the client group, culminating in high artistic standards that enable participants to showcase individual achievements. Inclusivity is realised not only through staff commitment and flexibility but also within the choreographic content itself. This underscores the centrality of this methodological core concept. Interview data further clarifies the gaps in the document data by providing insights into additional strategies employed to facilitate access and overcome barriers to engagement (see V.3.1.3).

## 2.4 Working as a Dance Company

My analysis of the written Methodology further identifies the dimension of communal learning through the experience of *Working as a Dance Company* as an important aspect of the process. However, this is identified only as a focused code, defined by six initial codes. It thus

requires additional corroboration through interview data to develop into a full category (see VI.3.1.4).

As a focused code emerging from the documents, this methodological principle emphasises the collective experience of working and achieving together as a social unit, potentially contributing to facilitating meaningful social relationships and connections amongst participants. According to the data, the Methodology deliberately encourages a collaborative culture by facilitating embodied experiences of working together and emphasising the collective process of artistic creation and achievement which is founded on trust and equality within the dance company.

Explicitly offering experiential learning to promote “a dance company feel” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United 2014, p. 5), methodological principles within this focused code particularly emphasise unison movements and the purposeful inclusion of contact work, such as trust-building activities. The tailored choreography plays an important role in providing the relevant movement material to facilitate such experiences throughout the rehearsal process. Since partner work and ensemble movement are choreographic devices included in the performance piece, “there is a purpose and reason” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8) for practicing these skills throughout projects. This indicates that the Methodology intentionally links learning content with envisaged learning processes.

Emphasising collaborative artistic creation and promoting collective achievement creates a sense of community and meaningful belonging, with everyone making a valued contribution to the greater good of the dance company. The Methodology prescribes involving the whole group in completing the first section of the choreography by the end of the first rehearsal week, promoting “a sense of the company achieving something together” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3). This provides a tangible sense of working together towards the realisation of a collective goal and establishes a concrete, commonly shared purpose.

Additionally, the documents highlight that the dance company is constituted as a trusting community of equals, where everyone works with everyone. Fostering a sense of equality among the dance company, the working process encourages participants “to swap partners

and ask them to work with someone that they have not yet worked with” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4) and employs a “no option element” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8) of everyone working with everyone regardless their “size, gender” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8). Contact work provides relevant experiences in building trusting relationships with others, facilitated through embodied learning that fosters “responsibility and trust” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2013, p. 8). These mechanisms not only promote a culture of equality and diversity within the dance company, but also provide the foundation for building positive, collaborative relationships among participants.

My analysis of this aspect of the written Methodology underscores the significance of creating a communal space through the experience of *Working as a Dance Company*. However, while the document analysis outlines this as a focused code, further insights from interview data are required to fully establish it as a core concept. This includes corroborating the above and defining additional strategies for its practical realisation in relation to the wider social context created to facilitate this (see V.3.1.4).

## 2.5 Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’

As an *in vivo* code, the term ‘good teaching’ is referenced throughout all the documents of the written Methodology, most notably in the introductory paragraphs of the Pro-Active Strategies document (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). Unfortunately, this section provides no further information as to what constitutes ‘good teaching’ practice in Dance United’s understanding. However, throughout the documents a range of key features and principles are described with the aim of providing participants with “a good quality learning experience” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3). The systematic analysis unearthing this implicit meaning allows for a more in-depth understanding of the term and establishes *Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’* as a core concept of the Dance United Methodology.

The overall goal of implementing these principles of best-practice methods is stated as to “maximise the potential of a project / pro-

gramme to succeed” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). What constitutes success in this context remains implicit in the document. However, the comprehensive analysis of the documents demonstrates that success entails participants’ progression and enjoyment of the process while ensuring engagement and promoting regular experiences of achievement. Ultimately, the “success” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p.1) of a project aligns with the artistic ambition of the work, realising high artistic standards through participants succeeding and shining on stage. As the written Methodology states, “to maintain high artistic standards which our reputation is built on and the young people can shine on the stage” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). It can thus be assumed that the following principles of ‘good teaching’ practice fundamentally serve the realisation of these intentions.

This methodological core concept is ensured through several mechanisms, principles, and methods identified in the document data, consisting of seven discernible focused codes. These encompass a *Thorough Planning and Preparation* process before and during projects; *Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication* with participants; an emphasis on *Setting Clear Objectives*; careful considerations around *Achievability, Accessibility* and *Variation* in learning content and process; and the importance of *Differentiation* to facilitate the individual realisation of potential. The following sections outline each of these dimensions of ‘good teaching’ individually.

### 2.5.1 Thorough Planning and Preparation

The identification of this focused code demonstrates that *Thorough Planning and Preparation* is a vital principle in providing participants with a good learning experience. Fundamentally illustrating the relevance and importance of this aspect, the Planning Tendencies dedicate a whole document of the written Methodology to considerations around the artistic and pedagogical planning process (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2013). This process not only includes preparations ahead of projects with the dance delivery planning but also planning throughout projects, with daily flexible adjustments according to

the evolving needs of the group as a whole and those of individual participants.

*Thorough Planning and Preparation* notably starts well before a project begins and also encompasses preparatory meetings with project partners wherever possible (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). While there is no further indication in the data as to why this is important or the purpose that it serves, my discussions around evidencing the Methodology (see IV.2) support the idea that this is undertaken to establish the positive working relationships that are detrimental to the success of projects. In terms of artistic planning ahead of commencing a project, the thorough and comprehensive preparation process includes all aspects necessary for the effective implementation of the choreography, providing a clear roadmap for the teaching and learning journey ahead. While the preparation of a warm-up dance technique class ensures participants are equipped with the specific “skills needed for the choreography” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1), planning the overall order of delivery of the choreography aids in scheduling casting decisions, breaking down learning steps and skills needed at different stages of the process, and dedicating time for production aspects, such as costumes. This demonstrates the deliberate methodological implementation of a meticulous and comprehensive planning process in preparation for projects and an acute awareness of all aspects that “are important and crucial to achieving a high artistic standard” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5).

According to the data, this meticulous process is maintained throughout the delivery of projects. Each session and rehearsal day is “planned and tightly structured to ensure learners/participants are clear of objectives and achieve at all times” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). While providing a clear and tight structure, this also serves as the foundation for being flexible and attuned to the group. Daily team reviews and reflections provide a vital tool for flexibly adjusting to the needs of the group and individual participants, navigating an agile methodological balance between set plans and flexible responses. This pro-active approach to session planning ensures potential conflicts or risks of disengagement are pre-emptively addressed. It serves as the foundation for setting clear expectations and objectives,

in turn providing reliability and predictability in the learning process with the ultimate aim of progression and achievement.

Overall, *Thorough Planning and Preparation* emerges as an essential teaching principle. By meticulously considering all aspects of project delivery, it provides a well-structured learning experience with a clear path for progression and achievement while remaining agile and adaptable to evolving needs.

### 2.5.2 Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication

As another focused code identified in the documents, *Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication* is employed as a vital methodological principle in promoting clarity of structure, transparency of the process, and building a positive rapport with participants.

In terms of clarity, the data emphasises the importance of having “one clear authoritative voice in each session so that everybody is really clear about who is leading” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2). In the team-teaching setting employed by the Methodology, this deliberately directs the participants’ attention to the respective artist in charge of delivery at any given moment. Additionally, clear communication is realised through careful considerations about the timing and nature of information conveyed to participants. The Planning Tendencies document specifically states this with regards to communicating casting decisions as well as choreographic feedback notes (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, pp. 5-6). Clear communication is also emphasised in managing the group process throughout rehearsals, particularly with respect to maintaining energy levels and addressing any issues (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8). This aspect particularly underscores the dynamic use of tone and voice as tools for facilitating meaningful engagement and motivation.

Transparency in communication provides a sense of safety through predictability while carefully managing participants’ expectations. Before engaging in the process, participants have the opportunity to meet staff, who comprehensively outline the project, including “what we expect of the group and what they can expect in return” (Pro-Ac-

tive Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). Throughout the process, daily check-ins with the group are utilised to communicate the structure of the day, ensure participants' well-being, and inform them about any external visitors. This particular communication strategy around external intrusions of the learning environment is further specified: "they join the circle and introduce themselves and let the group know why they are there" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). This demonstrates the respectful protection of the working process and serves as a clear and managed boundary against potential interruptions. As it provides transparent reassurance for participants, it contributes to an overall sense of safety.

In terms of building positive rapport, communication is employed as a vital mechanism for establishing trusting and respectful relationships with participants. Actively calling everyone by name from the outset and giving positive feedback through "genuine and [...] specific" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4) praise reinforces an environment where everyone feels welcomed, seen, acknowledged, and appreciated for their contributions and progress. This emphasis on respect and positivity contributes to an overall enjoyable and encouraging work environment. Being individually recognised for achievements facilitates a rewarding learning experience, providing clear direction in the learning journey and potentially aiding in developing intrinsic motivation.

Overall, *Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication* constitutes a vital teaching principle in ensuring clarity of structure, transparency in the process, and the cultivation of a positive rapport with participants. Through meticulous considerations around tone, timing, and content, this principle fosters an environment of trust, respect, and motivation.

### 2.5.3 Setting Clear Objectives

Captured in the focused code, *Setting Clear Objectives*, my data analysis evidences a particular conscientiousness around setting learning goals for the group throughout. With a consistent emphasis across all three documents, it emerges as a vitally important principle of 'good teaching'. The primary document on Pro-Active Strategies highlights

the setting of individual and group challenges as a daily part of the check-in with the group (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2). This indicates a deliberate methodological choice to integrate clear goal-setting into the teaching process, which is then transparently communicated to participants.

Resulting from the performance-led process dictated by the core concept of '*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*', the overall learning objective is working towards a professionally staged performance. As this ultimate goal may seem unachievable to most participants—who often lack confidence and self-esteem—it is deconstructed into smaller, more manageable performance-led objectives, such as completing an entire section of the choreography by the end of the first week. Within these interim objectives, the emphasis is on promoting a sense of achievement within a very short timeframe by involving “the whole dance company” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2). This promotes a positive physical experience and a sense of community through a collective achievement as a dance company. Tangible and embodied experiences of succeeding in incremental steps build participants’ trust in the process and, most importantly, their belief in their ability to achieve the overall goal.

The data further emphasises, that these sub-objectives must be “definite to achieve for all” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p.12), indicating an inclusive dimension within this teaching principle. Beyond inclusivity, achievability in setting objectives is also considered in terms of allocating sufficient “time to refine” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 4) by completing choreographic structuring early enough to allow for appropriate rehearsal time of the piece as a whole. This not only “helps young people trust the process and the team” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 4) but also ensures that participants perform the movement material with mastery and proficiency.

Overall, the analysis of this principle of ‘good teaching’ reveals a deliberate and consistent emphasis on *Setting Clear Objectives* throughout the teaching process. With a particular focus on promoting collective and individual achievement, inclusivity, and trust among participants, this principle ultimately leads to successful performance outcomes.

## 2.5.4 Achievability

The teaching principle of *Achievability* is consistently evident in all three documents. Considering the required technical dance skills, the range of individual abilities, and varying levels of confidence at the different stages of the project, it comprehensively encompasses all aspects of the process—from making “the first exercise simple enough so that everyone achieves it” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3) to teaching “the choreography in an achievable order” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3). At all times, participants are equipped with the necessary dance and performance skills relating to the choreography, with the aim of making it achievable for all, indicating an inclusive dimension. Working at a balance point between challenge and achievement, this principle ensures overall engagement and progression throughout. In its practical implementation, the documents describe a variety of particular methods and teaching tools.

First, the principle of *Achievability* considers the pacing of the learning process by allowing adequate time to not only learn, practise, and rehearse the choreographic material but also develop the required performance skills. This includes the characteristics of the choreography—specifically in terms of its length—to ensure it is achievable within the short, intensive timeframe employed by this approach. Guided by the artistic ambition, creating a choreography of a suitable length should enable participants “to master the piece at high quality, work to the highest artistic standards, perform with professional production values and look excellent on stage” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). This deliberately respects the fact that developing proficiency and confidence in a new skill such as dance requires time. Adequate time allocation, both for learning and refinement through rehearsal, thus contributes to the achievable mastery of the choreography as a whole.

Second, *Achievability* is ensured through segmenting the learning content into manageable increments. Breaking down the choreography into achievable segments ensures participants can consistently engage without feeling overwhelmed. This strategy extends to the delivery of creative tasks, framing them as purposeful, supportive, and guided

by implementing stepping stones for exploration and development of movement. Breaking learning down into “bite size chunks” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7) ensures continuous steps of achievement and provides a manageable learning process. This is particularly important with regard to participants from marginalised backgrounds, who generally present with specific needs and vulnerabilities, such as low frustration tolerance levels and an increased risk of disengagement from learning (Ng et al., 2018). Breaking down learning into stepping stones and building blocks ensures a steady progression, which in turn motivates a more continuous engagement with learning. The gradual accumulation of these manageable increments of learning furthermore allows participants to achieve a higher level of physical complexity in terms of the choreographic material (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7).

Lastly, repetition serves as a tool of *Achievability* by building both the physical and mental capabilities required for dance and performance. By not shying away from repeating exercises, the Methodology aims to cultivate stamina as well as allowing the body to memorise and master movement sequences. Repetition is not monotonous but encourages a focused approach to the accomplished execution of various elements and qualities of the movement. This tool extends into choreography, where the strategic repetition of choreographic material ensures progressive mastery. Daily reviews and revisions serve as tools to “ensure progression, realise potential and quality as the group works towards the performance” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7). As a deliberate, strategic tool woven into the fabric of the teaching process, repetition becomes a pathway to excellence in performance, ensuring participants not only remember the steps but fully embody them with confidence and precision.

The employment of the teaching principle of *Achievability*, evident throughout all documents, underscores the importance of fostering engagement, progression, and mastery of dance and performance skills for all participants. Encompassing the pacing of the learning process, segmenting content into manageable increments, and the strategic use of repetition, this principle ultimately contributes to an accomplished and proficient performance.

### 2.5.5 Accessibility

Both the documents on Planning as well as Choreographic Tendencies provide insights into the deliberate implementation of *Accessibility* as a principle of ‘good teaching’. By emphasising attainable learning content and implementing transparent tracking of progression, the Methodology offers a range of pathways into learning and multiple modalities for understanding and retaining information.

In terms of ensuring accessible pathways to the choreography as a core content of learning, the approach caters for a range of learning styles. This includes visual learning by providing a visual representation of the choreography. A storyboard depicting all sections and movement material “makes the choreography less abstract” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3) and serves as a tangible access point for participants. The diagrammatic depiction of the choreographic piece is coupled with the descriptive naming of choreographic material. As a verbal and auditory pathway into the learning content, it provides in-depth information, such as the intention and quality of the movement, “without a huge amount of engagement or words” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 11). This quick access to the learning content anchors participants’ cognitive and physical memory in the learning process. These pathways are further complemented by clear and interactive physical demonstrations, facilitating a kinaesthetic access point to the learning content. Especially within the context of teaching contact work, this not only ensures that movements are visually presented and broken down, but, most importantly, easily copied by the participants. The act of demonstration becomes a crucial aspect of ensuring access to learning and understanding within the rehearsal process.

Furthermore, the visual depiction of the choreography serves as a vital method in making the progression of the learning process accessible. Acting “as a measure and a target to keep on track” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3), the choreographic storyboard provides a tangible orientation of the completed progress, as well as the learning journey ahead. As such, it is utilised to make achievements visually evident but also promotes a sense of ownership of participants’ personal journey in the choreography.

Overall, the Methodology deliberately employs *Accessibility* as a key teaching principle, providing visual representations, descriptive naming, and interactive physical demonstrations to cater to diverse learning styles. This ensures that participants have multiple modalities to understand, retain, and track their progress in learning the choreography. The considerations around this particular principle furthermore indicate the approach's commitment to creating an inclusive, positive, and comprehensible learning process for participants.

### 2.5.6 Differentiation

Supported by data across all three documents, *Differentiation* emerges as another important principle of 'good teaching'. This aspect is especially highlighted with regard to the choreographic delivery process, considering multiple dimensions and serving as a mechanism for realising individual potential.

This principle not only considers and caters to diverse physical abilities, ensuring that everyone can participate at their own skill level, but also takes into account participants' confidence levels, commitment, and engagement. While indicating a comprehensive approach to meeting a wide range of needs, it furthermore illustrates an awareness of fairness, which in turn promotes trust in the safe and inclusive learning environment. Participants can rely on staff treating everyone in the dance company with equal respect based on their commitment and conduct in relation to the clearly set expectations of the projects. This is particularly implemented with regard to casting decisions as "parts are distributed in a fair and considered way on peoples' commitment and attitude during the project" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 10).

According to the document data, employing *Differentiation* by fairly accommodating individual differences is aimed at pushing each participant to their full potential. Specifically with regard to choreographic content, the Methodology provides opportunities for individual challenges, thus fostering growth and development tailored to each participant's unique needs. In offering universally accessible as well as more technically demanding movement material, the diverse choreographic

content encourages everyone to reach beyond their current capabilities and realise their potential (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4).

As a key principle of ‘good teaching,’ *Differentiation* revolves around recognising and addressing individual differences in abilities and confidence while maintaining a commitment to fairness. As the data analysis emphasises, choreographically accommodating these diversities within the group is of key significance in pushing each participant to access and reach their full potential.

### 2.5.7 Variation

As all three documents demonstrate, the written Methodology adopts dynamic *Variation* as a principle of ‘good teaching’. Offering a variety of learning experiences throughout each session, each day, and across projects not only creates an enjoyable and engaging learning process but also provides multiple access points for a group with heterogeneous skills, strengths, learning preferences, and abilities. The learning process is deliberately varied throughout the process to ensure “a good quality learning experience” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p.3). This principle is realised through dynamic variability in the pace and structure of sessions, as well as a balance of diverse activities and learning content.

Diverse elements are introduced intentionally, steering away from a linear progression in choreographic delivery. The choreography itself “allows for a variety of teaching activities, pace and structure in delivery” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6) by encompassing a range of movement materials including ensemble, group, solo, and duet work. It further accommodates a variety of movement dynamics and qualities, which are additionally supported by an eclectic choice of music for the choreography.

The balance of activities within a day—incorporating a range of dynamic movement experiences—demonstrates a thoughtful strategy aimed at sustaining interest, concentration levels, and engagement throughout. Within the team-teaching approach, adaptability is encouraged, allowing for responsive adjustments to the group’s needs.

This dynamic variation serves as an effective strategy during the delivery process, enabling the dance artists to switch between contrasting materials based on participants' responses, thereby maintaining sustained engagement and interest. Providing contrast and diversity not only adds depth and dimension to the overall learning experience but also supports participants in achieving "at all times" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3).

These methodological considerations underscore the significance of dynamic *Variation* as a strategic principle, not only catering to heterogeneous skills, preferences, and abilities but also to flexibly adjusting according to evolving needs, ensuring overall "interest, enjoyment and creative achievement" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8) for all participants.

In summary, each individual principle is instrumental in facilitating an effective learning process. Collectively, as the core concept *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'*, they form a cohesive yet flexible framework of guiding best-practice teaching principles. With the intention of ultimately fostering the realisation of potential through an accomplished performance, it constitutes an inclusive approach to teaching aligned not only to effect progression, achievement, and engagement but also to establish trustful and respectful relationships. My subsequent integrative analysis outlines the principles' interrelationships and presents a cohesive framework of best practice (see VI.1.7).

## 2.6 Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content

My analysis reveals that the Methodology prescribes specific, dance related learning content, entailing two main areas of focus. The first—captured in the focused code *Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills*—details the dance-specific knowledge and skills necessary for participants to achieve an accomplished performance. The second—identified as the focused code *Working with a Tailored Choreography*—defines a distinctive choreographic approach and specifies essential choreographic elements. Together, they describe the core concept of

***Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*** as the required learning content envisaged by the Methodology.

### 2.6.1 Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills

Regarding the focused code *Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills*, my analysis evidences an acute awareness of participants' needs and a considered effort to equip them with the competencies they require to succeed in their stage performance. As the document on Planning Tendencies states, "working with beginners, need to learn the basics and prepare them for performance, fitness, posture, quality, and stamina etc and lead to massive transformation of the dancers" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). The approach is deliberately designed to instil these fundamental skills right from the start of a project. This encompasses an emphasis on developing body awareness, acquiring and practising a variety of basic dance skills, and instilling performance quality.

As a fundamental dance-related competency, body awareness is primarily promoted through working barefoot and the deliberate absence of mirrors (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). This encourages specific experiences of somatic perception, grounding in direct contact with the floor and focusing on internal sensations rather than external presentation. This specific aspect of participants' dance-related learning is further promoted through deliberately facilitating enjoyable physical experiences, which are "typically high energy" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 12) and "exciting and active" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2). Designed to allow participants "to get into their bodies" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2), these basic bodily experiences not only engage participants in the dance process but also provide the foundation for acquiring other necessary dance and performance skills.

Building on this groundwork, the envisaged content includes learning and practicing a variety of basic dance skills, with a particular emphasis on the importance of achieving focus and stillness "as the key to success" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). Conscientiously conveying the basic dance skills necessary to master the

choreography demonstrates an acute awareness of the specific needs of non-trained dancers, as they are not expected to be proficient in masterful physical expression. Participants are deliberately equipped with the movement capacities they need “to achieve real quality and develop growth, mastery, execution” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). These basic skills include fundamental aspects of dance practice, such as body control, stamina, and expressivity in movement. Slow movements and floor work, along with the integration of partner work and creative tasks early on in the process further contribute to a comprehensive set of basic dance skills, adequately preparing participants for the required choreographic structures and devices. Modelled on professional dance practice, the consistent structure of a daily dance technique training with a progression in exercises further supports the development of fundamental dance and performance skills (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3; Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). Adequate time is allocated for participants to acquire and, most importantly, practise these skills to ensure proficiency in body and movement memory.

In addition, the Methodology emphasises performance quality, such as intention in movement and range of movement qualities, as pivotal dance-related learning content. This aspect is consistently practised throughout both the technical training and the rehearsal process, as “we have found that it cannot be tagged on at the end” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). Dance artists teach with a clear understanding of the desired quality of movement, using accessible metaphors and imagery to effectively communicate and reinforce these performance standards.

The focused code of *Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills* reflects a conscientious and comprehensive commitment to building a strong foundation in terms of basic dance-related learning. Overall, methodological specifications on this aspect are designed to instil and refine performance skills, ensuring that participants are sufficiently prepared for an accomplished performance.

## 2.6.2 Working with a Tailored Choreography

Primarily supported by the document on *Choreographic Tendencies*, the Methodology employs a carefully tailored, structured, and inclusive choreographic approach regarding its artistic learning content. Through “pre-made, mapped out and trialled” (*Choreographic Tendencies*, Dance United, 2014, p. 2) pieces of choreography, the emphasis is on producing an achievable choreography within the set time constraints of intensive performance projects. This authoritative choreographic approach stands in stark contrast to the more prevalent process-oriented and participatory approaches in community dance (Wilson, 2008, pp. 63-64). As such, the choreographic approach defined by the Methodology can be considered quite distinct within this field of practice.

The document data provides insights into required choreographic elements for an effective execution and illustrates strategies for inclusive differentiation. Apart from referencing the short timeframe as a reason for employing this approach, the data yields no further insights into its underlying rationale. However, corroborating data from the interviews extends the understanding of why the Methodology relies on such a potentially contentious approach to choreographic development in community dance practice (see V.3.1.5).

Through a considered balance of taught and creative dance elements, the choreography accommodates diverse abilities and ensures an inclusive process with the specific needs of marginalised populations in mind. As stated above (see V.2.5), creative tasks are carefully framed as structured moments of creative exploration, with a deliberate purpose and progressive stages. Thus, participants experience their own creative capacities without being overwhelmed or pressured to produce certain creative outcomes (*Pro-Active Strategies*, Dance United, 2013, p. 4). As the choreographic journey is mostly pre-set, dance artists can fully focus on delivery and provide a predictable learning journey. This approach avoids extensive moments of creative unknowing and exploration, as participants tend to “struggle with having to make their own decisions as this can feel exposing for them at the beginning” (*Choreographic Tendencies*, Dance United, 2014, p. 4).

The various elements of the choreography prioritise achievability, differentiation, and variation. Incorporating “a main phrase that everyone could dance” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7) and “a duet that is achievable for all” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8) ensures that the choreographic repertoire is universally accessible for heterogeneous groups and allows anyone to participate, independent of physical attributes or capabilities. The choreographic structure offers “a range of parts” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 10) as special moments for dancers with varying abilities and commitment levels. Within this structure, each participant is challenged in their abilities and thus “pushed to their potential” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p.7). With a wide range of dynamics and qualities as well as different movement materials including solos, duets, and unison group moments, the choreographic structure additionally enables flexible variation within the learning process providing “a depth and wide range of learning experiences” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 9).

Overall, the Methodology focuses on tailoring choreography to the unique needs and capabilities of participants, creating cohesive and inclusive choreographic repertoire. The choreographic content allows for variation in the teaching process, ensures universal achievability of the movement repertoire, and enables differentiation throughout the rehearsal process. However, this understanding of the envisaged choreographic learning content requires further corroboration to explain why this specific approach of working with pre-made pieces of repertoire is employed.

Embedded within the core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*, the above components construct a comprehensive framework for the envisaged learning content, facilitating effective performance execution while fostering inclusivity through a choreographic repertoire that ensures both universal accessibility and individual realisation of potential.

This concludes my analysis of the Methodology in theory, which yields six distinct methodological core concepts. While ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’ and *Working as a Dance Company* remain unsaturated focused codes at this stage, further enrichment with inter-

view data subsequently establishes them as full analytical categories and thus viable core concepts (see V.3.1.1 and V.3.1.4). Together with the remaining four core concepts—*Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*, *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, *Principles of ‘Good Teaching’*, and *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning*—they articulate a heuristic approximation of the Dance United Methodology in its written formalisation, providing the basis for the next steps in my empirical analysis.

### 3 The Core Concepts in Action – Analysis of Expert Interviews

The Dance United Methodology is characterised as a practice-based approach (see V.1.2), not only captured in its written formalisation but realised through its practical implementation. As such, a comprehensive analysis of the approach requires the integration of both perspectives. The following presents a holistic understanding into its practical realisation by way of interviews with relevant stakeholders within and around the company, exploring areas of coherence, expansion, and potential tension between theory and action. This aligns with the objectives of a case study approach, seeking to construct a nuanced portrayal of a phenomenon by capturing multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995, p. 64).

In relation to the six core concepts that articulate the Methodology in theory, my interview analysis provides relevant findings enriching the understanding of these already established dimensions (see V.3.1). In addition to these enrichments, the interview analysis reveals three expanding core concepts (see V.3.2). The interview data thus not only validates and corroborates the theoretical dimensions captured in the documents but also substantiates previously implicit or underexplored principles. The interplay between written formalisation and lived practice adequately reflects the practice-based yet structured nature of the Methodology, underscoring the importance of capturing multiple perspectives to adequately portray the intricacies of this specific approach.

### 3.1 Action Enriching Core Concepts in Theory

The interview analysis provides additional insights into core concepts established through document data, enriching their conceptualisation by corroboration and saturation. Unsaturated areas of the preliminarily focused code ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’—including how these standards are defined and actualised in practice—are supported by my interview analysis, thus allowing for the formation of a saturated analytical category. Insights from the interview analysis also provide additional contributing aspects to an enriched understanding of the core concept ***Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential***, as the carefully maintained balance between safety and challenge within the specific learning environment. While the document data emphasises the importance of an inclusive, person-centred learning space in ***Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre***, the interview findings clarify why and how inclusive access to projects is realised in practice. The unsaturated focused code of *Working as a Dance Company*, yielded from the document data, indicates the emphasis on fostering a trusting community. The interview analysis provides further evidence and additional factors, allowing for the formation of the core concept ***Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*** by way of an analytical category. The core concept of ***Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*** defines not only principles of conveying basic dance-related knowledge but also a specific choreographic approach. Interview findings evidence the rationale for employing this specific choreographic approach.

In the following, I outline these enriching insights from the interview analysis for each individual core concept, progressively constructing a complete and nuanced understanding of their respective role within the Dance United Methodology in action.

#### 3.1.1 ‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’ in Action

Corroborating findings from the interview data establish ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’ as an analytical category, confirming this

principle as a core concept of the Dance United Methodology. As Annable-Coop illustrates: “The core concepts of quality [...] was always there” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 2). The results from the interview analysis not only reiterate but also enrich insights into this aspect of the approach by providing three focused codes relating to why it is considered important, how it is defined by the stakeholders, and how it is translated into practical application.

As captured in the focused code *Transformative Potential of Artistic Excellence*, the interview analysis reveals why high artistic standards are considered a consistent aspect of the practice, founded on a firm belief in both their intrinsic and transformative potential. Working to high artistic standards is thus not only an arbitrary ambition the company holds, but serves an important and pivotal purpose as a foundational principle, guiding decision-making and shaping the practical realisation of the work. A defining aspect is the shared belief in the intrinsic value of artistic excellence, with interviewees reiterating findings from the written Methodology by placing art at the centre of catalysing the process. As Bynoe states: “It’s about the dance itself and I do think that THAT always needed to be and always should be in my opinion what leads” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 13). Particularly in the arena of socially engaged arts practice and the sector of social inclusion (see III.2.1), the Methodology actively challenges the dichotomy between instrumental and intrinsic value, with interviewees placing a strong emphasis on the pursuit of great art as a pathway to realising individual potential. In other words, artistic excellence is believed to access this potential by offering an opportunity for participants to achieve beyond their perceived capabilities.

Complementing the belief in its intrinsic value is the view of artistic excellence as a powerful catalyst for personal transformation, founded on the belief that upholding artistic values and creating outstanding art with the desired aesthetic qualities collectively cultivates transformative experiences. This proposition reflects the Methodology’s holistic perspective on its artistic standards, emphasising the transformative power inherent in striving for and achieving excellence. As Van Huynh poignantly states regarding the position of art within the Methodology: “They just believed in great art, they believed in people having the

greatest potential to be the best versions of themselves” (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 9). Capturing the interplay between the intrinsic value of artistic excellence and its transformative potential, this focused code illustrates the commitment to high artistic standards as a catalyst for personal and collective growth, rooted in a belief in individual potential.

The document analysis fails to provide a defining understanding of what constitutes high artistic standards according to those who developed and practised this approach. However, the focused code ‘*Making Them Shine*’—as an in vivo code derived from interview data—evidences a shared perspective among interviewees. It revolves around getting the best out of everyone, setting realistic expectations, fostering aspirations, and nurturing commitment in order to make participants “shine and be seen in the best possible light” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 8). High artistic standards—defined as a collective effort where everyone gives their best—transcend mere technical proficiency, emphasising the expressive quality of movement. As Herbert explains, the essence of quality is not confined to the technicality of steps but is revealed in the intention of the movement (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 7). The true quality of performance lies in the feeling and emotion conveyed, not just the choreographic material. Maldoom summarises his perspective as follows: “Quality is when every person is GIVING their BEST. Everything they can to the BEST of their ability, is totally committed on that stage at whatever level. Then you have quality” (Interview with Royston Maldoom, March 2022, p. 5). The above interview data illustrates that the expressive and emotional depth in movement takes precedence over technical execution as a hallmark characteristic of artistic excellence.

Clear and attainable expectations for participants are considered crucial in practically realising this understanding of high artistic standards. Working within the constraints of the given timeframe and the specificities of non-trained bodies, “it has to be achievable, high quality” (Interview with Herbert, December 2022, p. 6), as Herbert states. This involves a careful balance between expecting the best from participants and creating a realistic process, allowing them to reach their highest potential. Nurturing commitment and fostering aspirations are con-

sidered essential to achieving this definition of high artistic standards, as they ignite intrinsic motivation by ensuring participants deeply care about and fully commit to their performance (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 12). This understanding of artistic excellence transcends technical perfection, embracing a holistic perspective that emphasises the human experience within the artistic journey, with the stage as a destination where everyone fully radiates in the realisation of their potential.

Another aspect of this core concept not comprehensively conveyed through the document data is its practical implementation. The interview data provides further insights and evidences two key mechanisms employed to realise the artistic ambition of the approach.

Firstly, the Methodology emphasises the realisation of artistic excellence through employing a *Comprehensive Professional Framework* throughout the rehearsal process and performance. This is marked by “care and attention” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 1) and involves aspects such as staffing, the choreography, and overall support—generally speaking “good [...] wrap-around input” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 11). The professional production values of the performance play a crucial role in the practical realisation of artistic excellence and include a professional theatre venue, costumes, and lighting design. The company consistently upheld this commitment in action, often encountering considerable organisational challenges, especially within the context of custodial settings. As Coggins recalls: “creating [...] a small studio theatre within a prison, transforming the prison gym for three weeks [...] I mean the outcry THAT caused, let me tell you. With a proper lighting rig and flooring, the whole thing” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 5). This uncompromising stance confirms the understanding of the Methodology as an idealistic approach (see V.1.4) and underscores the company’s artistic standards as a principled commitment they upheld and defended against adverse realities.

Secondly, the interview data reveals an immense commitment to continuously *Furthering Artistic Vision* with practical strategies employed to pursue this. Both Herbert and Broughton emphasise maintaining their professional integrity as artists within the context of their practice with non-trained dancers. According to Broughton, this stemmed from

Royston's original vision of aiming for artistic excellence within the sector and elevating the performance work "to stand alone as an artistic piece" (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 12). This is closely linked to other interview data, which reflects an uncompromising stance on pursuing the artistic vision of the company. With absolute belief in the potential of participants to achieve the steep demands of this vision, Crane states boldly, "a part of the Methodology is not to dumb down" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 5). As a professional choreographer, Van Huynh reiterates this principle, illustrating his experience of working with young people for a Dance United project: "I put them through a creative process, really no different than anyone else that I would work with" (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 2).

This commitment to an uncompromising artistic vision is translated into furthering choreographic innovation through collaborating with external choreographers, particularly introduced during the third phase of Dance United (see IV.1.4) and since advanced by the ongoing work of Dance United Yorkshire (see IV.1.5). Bynoe justifies this development of the approach as follows: "when the quality began not to be there that's when [...] we want to collaborate with external professional choreographers because we want the artistic standard up here" (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 13). This initiative bridges professional and community engagement practices, advancing choreographic development and expanding artistic vision while fostering skills exchange across these sectors as an avenue for reciprocal professional growth. The integration of diverse choreographic influences demonstrates a commitment to pushing artistic boundaries, with the Methodology as a robust framework, guiding external artists through the unique challenges of working with marginalised populations. The above findings reveal a dynamic approach to collaborative artistic growth within the Dance United Methodology, promoting ongoing innovation and evolution.

Concluding my findings on the core concept of '*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*' in action, the interview analysis reveals that it is employed due to its intrinsic transformative potential, defined by making every participant shine on stage, and implemented through practical measures which ensure that these standards are not only consistently upheld but continuously furthered.

### 3.1.2 A Safe Space for Realising Potential in Action

Overall, the interview data confirms the methodological balance between safety and challenge, providing participants with a secure learning space to creatively explore and achieve in realising their potential. As Nicky Crane summarises this dichotomy: “In the Methodology is that discipline and structure, is that expectation and ambition” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 5). My interview analysis not only reiterates *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential* as a core concept but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances and practical implementation of the established focused codes of *Containing and Holding* and *Facilitating Learning and Growth*. Furthermore, the findings reveal two additional focused codes. While *Attuning, Caring and Nurturing* describes the relational dimension of the safe space, *Transcending Realms of Life Experiences* emerges as a vital catalyst in realising potential. In the following presentation of results, I assess corroborations and enrichments on findings from the document data regarding the two established focused codes before introducing these new insights to further expand the understanding of this core concept.

With regards to the established focused code of *Containing and Holding*, interviewees confirm the crucial importance of creating “a genuine place of safety” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p.5), as Friel terms it. This is considered particularly important within the context of working with vulnerable populations in a high-risk process such as this, where participants are not only exposed to a range of novel experiences but may also feel vulnerable in their creative physical expression (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 3).

The interview data confirms the role of external and internal structures and boundaries in creating a containing and holding environment, as indicated in the documents. A safe space is partly created through establishing external boundaries of the work, such as managing the presence of external visitors (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 2). Internally, the creation of a safe space requires staff to appropriately support participants and the group as a whole in order for them to feel safely held. As Linsell explains: “that’s probably a skill in fact that I think is pretty crucial [...] that ability [...] to hold a group of people in

the right way” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 15). The interview data further highlights the physical characteristics of a welcoming, inviting, and dedicated space that is fit for purpose. The Methodology not only postulates an emotionally contained and held space but also guides the physical foundations required to realise this. Annable-Coop illustrates: “Those fundamentals of the space [...] has it got a good light, has it got a separate space for them to be for lunch and breaks [...] what’s the entrance like, what’s the environment. That was always really part of that” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, pp. 3-4).

The interview analysis also enriches the understanding of how structure and boundaries are practically realised. A consistent structure is provided through transparently communicated expectations, clearly set achievable objectives, behavioural boundaries, and work discipline, thereby creating a stable and predictable environment for participants (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). This consistency, evident across various transcripts, serves as a pillar for establishing a safe space. Clear expectations are articulated as essential, not only for managing the process and individual journeys but also for fostering a sense of direction and purpose. Additionally, the data emphasises the positive role of discipline within this structured framework. Discipline is portrayed not merely as a set of restrictive measures but as a means of focus and achievement (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 5). Together, these aspects form a cohesive foundation, facilitating the actualisation of potential within a structured and bounded safe space.

Another key aspect in practically implementing this focused code is its consistent application by a united staff team. As Davies explains: “the FACT that the standards, the rules, the requirements, the expectations, the ground rules, all of that, are so explicit and if there’s any wandering over, it gets challenged. Not a blind eye turned to anything, but it gets addressed and challenged” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 8). The interview data thus corroborates the importance of the multidisciplinary team, consisting of dance and support staff, working closely together with a shared understanding of consistent principles. Additionally, the data highlights the specific role of the support team play in maintaining socio-pedagogical disciplinary boundaries around the rehearsal process. “THAT team, because it was acquainted with a

little bit more of the individual characters' backgrounds [...] had a very different role to perform and that was [...] very much in the issues of discipline", as Coggins describes (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, pp. 13-14). Through the close liaison between dance and support teams, participants receive holistic and comprehensive support in a multidisciplinary approach to holding and containing their learning process. A high staff-to-participant ratio and a range of personalities, qualities, ethnicities, and cultures amongst the team added to this comprehensive support of participants. As Friel emphasises this strength of the approach: "it felt like everyone was carried and it was rarely did anyone slip through the net so I feel like it was a very comprehensive service that was given" (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 6).

Closely related to the comprehensive holding provided by staff is the emphasis on their reliability and commitment, rooted in a fundamental sense of responsibility. This commitment is not only evident in the unwavering dedication to "delivering what we said we were going to deliver" (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9), but also in the determination to ensure the overall success of projects, defined by the overarching goal of creating a positive and empowering experience for participants on stage (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 5). This is realised by the persistence and resilience of staff, coupled with a refusal to give up on gaining participants' trust, particularly in the face of challenges. Their commitment extends to addressing transgressions of boundaries and behavioural issues thoughtfully, opting to work through challenges rather than excluding participants from projects (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 9). This solution-oriented focus ensures that participants are appropriately supported and held throughout their journey, even when their behaviour tests boundaries.

Collectively, the interview data illustrates a commitment to success, resilience in the face of challenges, and a reflective approach to managing challenging behaviour, all practically contributing to a structurally contained and held safe space. These methodological considerations underscore the vital role of staff and the intrinsic motivations and values they realise in this way of working. As Annable-Coop highlights this sense of responsibility and commitment: "I think there was such a

desire from people in the company to make it work at whatever” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 3).

The interview data generally confirms and corroborates the findings from the document analysis regarding the focused code *Facilitating Learning and Growth*. Within a professional environment, participants progress towards the performance through continuous experiences of achievements, empowering them to build their confidence and gradually take ownership of their process. In addition, my interview analysis provides further insights into this focused code. These new findings include practical strategies to facilitate achievement, the critical role of uncompromising high expectations, and the importance of creating an immersive and intensive space of potentiality to promote personal development.

With only one piece of data in the documents indicating the professionalism of a challenging learning environment as a vital factor, this aspect was unsaturated. However, further data from the interviews confirms this methodological emphasis on working standards reflective of professional dance practice. Promoting a specific “work ethic” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 9), this imbues participants with a sense of value—a sense that they are worthy of the best quality care along with the appropriate professional apparatus around them. In creating a professional learning environment, participants are invited to take the process and their work seriously, encouraging them to continually challenge themselves, strive for improvement, and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for growth. These essential elements of a thriving learning environment promote a culture of accountability, discipline, and personal development.

The interview data further confirms the role of facilitating achievement as a critical factor in promoting learning and growth, particularly through teaching principles of achievability, such as breaking learning into manageable steps (see V.2.5.4). Beyond the practical strategies already identified in the documents, the data reveals a broader, more encompassing principle as a key strategy for ensuring achievement. In a continuous pursuit of improvement—of “always raising the bar” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 4)—a balance between challenge and skill is maintained by “CONSTANTLY keeping those things in equi-

librium with the challenge JUST ahead of the skill” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 14). This principle, addressed by all three founding members of Dance United and supported by Pauline Gladstone (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p. 7), sets expectations just beyond participants’ current capabilities, keeping them in a continuous state of learning and growth. As Coggins explains this balancing act: “you were never quite achieving what you were being asked to achieve but it was never so far away that it was impossible to you” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). Requiring participants to reach beyond their perceived limits, coupled with immense care in preparation and planning, demonstrates a methodological dedication to reinforcing a learning culture of constant improvement and engagement. These additional insights enrich the understanding of how the Methodology supports participants in building confidence through achievement: it encourages them to embrace challenges they once believed were beyond their capability by progressively developing their skills and consistently raising the bar of expectations.

This methodological strategy is closely connected to a further new finding within the focused code of *Facilitating Learning and Growth*, constituted in setting and maintaining uncompromising high expectations towards participants as a consistent theme for driving them to achieve more than they thought possible. Crane considers this as a fundamental aspect of good education, explaining:

The kindest thing you can do to somebody, even when they are in a very vulnerable position, is to expect something of them and to put some aspiration in their way, extend their horizons. I mean it’s a model of good education mainly (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 3).

Aligned with the ambition of working to high artistic standards, this approach pushes participants beyond their perceived limits with a firm belief that they, when appropriately challenged, will rise to meet and even surpass expectations. Approaching participants with a resolute commitment and “an ABSOLUTE determination never to give up” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 7), the Methodology

continuously challenges individuals to exceed their own expectations, creating an opportune environment for personal development.

In addition to professionalism, a balance between challenge and skill, and high expectations, the interview data highlights the importance of an immersive and intensive learning environment in *Facilitating Learning and Growth*. The intensity and fast pacing of the working process are perceived as deliberate strategies to keep participants in a state of constant engagement, preventing them from overthinking and fostering achievement through rapid progressions. Crane summarises this dynamic as: “this energy and momentum and pace and intensive nature of the work that swept you along” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 4). Described by several interviewees as a driving force, the immersive and intensive nature of the process minimises barriers to engagement, such as hesitation and self-doubt, and contributes to participants’ effective engagement and rapid progression within the given limited time frame.

Overall, the interview data corroborates and enriches the document analysis findings regarding the focused code of *Facilitating Learning and Growth*. While the creation of a professional learning environment, marked by uncompromising high expectations, fosters a culture of personal responsibility and discipline, the emphasis on facilitating achievement maintains a delicate balance between challenge and skill to ensure continuous progression and learning. Setting and maintaining high expectations emerge as a driving force, challenging participants to surpass their perceived limits. The deliberate strategy of an immersive and intensive learning environment creates the necessary dynamic pacing to keep participants engaged, thereby fostering effective involvement and progression.

Having discussed these enriching insights into existing focused codes, I now turn to discussing the new findings of the interview analysis. While the extant focused code of *Holding and Containing* outlined structural aspects of security, stability, and socio-emotional regulation of participants, the additional focused code of *Attuning, Caring and Nurturing* reflects the interpersonal and relational dimensions of creating an understanding, supportive, and nurturing environment for participants.

As an initial step towards the realisation of these principles, Mags Byrne emphasises the importance of “recognising where they are” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 6) to promote initial engagement. This is paired with the intention of creating a space where everyone feels seen, acknowledged, and valued. Exercising individual appreciation, such as knowing and calling everyone by their name within the first few days or assigning special roles within the choreography, signals a clear commitment to valuing each and every participant within the group. In the words of Herbert, “they have to MATTER” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 5). From his external perspective as a collaborating partner, Hassall confirms this fundamental principle: “The individual was at the CENTRE of EVERYTHING” (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 6). The highly attuned and personalised approach evidenced in the data underscores the significance of individual recognition, tailoring interventions to create a responsive and supportive framework for participants’ growth and learning.

Another relational factor identified in the data is the notion of attuning and flexibly responding to the process. Friel highlights this as a pivotal factor, noting that “possibly the most important function that I think did allow the success of the Methodology was attunement” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 4). Remaining consistently attuned to the dynamics of the group, being responsive to unexpected situations, and adjusting plans as needed ensures a flexible and effective approach, with the needs of participants at the centre of project planning and implementation. Staff are required to exercise adaptability, sensitivity, instinct, and intuition in navigating the complex and constantly changing group dynamics. As both Linsell and Byrne emphasise (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 14; Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 9), attuning sensitively and responding appropriately to the presenting dynamics takes confidence built on experience and practice. This further confirms and deepens the understanding of the Methodology as a flexible guide (see V.1.2), which adapts through immediate situational responses to the unfolding process. In other words, the Methodology constitutes a highly attuned and responsive practice-based approach aligned towards creating supportive, caring, and nurturing environments.

In addition, my interview analysis emphasises the creation of a caring and nurturing environment built on a foundation of trust and facilitated by positive, transparent, and sensitive communication strategies. Care is perceived as a core component of building those trusting relationships, as Herbert explains: “there has to be care, because otherwise you lose your people on the way” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 6). This is coupled with the fundamental intention to “HELP them see their best side” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 1), as Aloe, from the London Academy, expresses, facilitating a nurturing space where participants’ positive attributes are not only highlighted but also reflected back to them. Within this relational process of care and nurture, Byrne emphasises, “trust is the first thing” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 5), prioritising it as the foundational element of interpersonal relationships. Across multiple interviews, the pivotal role of trust is highlighted as a catalyst for the group’s willingness to embark on an unknown process of learning and growth. In contrast to the analysis of documents, where trust featured as a structural aspect of holding and containing (see V.2.2.1), the interview data evidences trust as an aspect of interpersonal relations. For participants to invest trust, Dance United staff employ respect, care, and individual recognition, as participants “were seen for who they were, not what they’ve done or why they were on that programme” (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 7). Even in the face of resistance and challenging behaviour, maintaining trust remains essential. In turn, staff place their trust in the participants, trusting in their abilities, engagement, and, most importantly, their potential. As Davies notes: “everything that has been done is borne out of TRUST. Trust that you will cooperate, trust that you will get something out of this” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 9).

The methodological aspect of trust is closely related to effective communication strategies. Several interviewees emphasise the significance of communication that is positive, sensitive, and adaptable, considering the diverse needs and heterogeneous characteristics within the group. To accommodate and meet these, the multifaceted nature of communication strategies is highlighted with an aim to connect with the variety of individuals in the group. From being fun or calm to providing

meaningful praise and adapting communication styles to different personalities, the interview data emphasises the importance of flexibility in communication, especially when working with individuals exhibiting challenging behaviour (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 13).

Two practical mechanisms are highlighted in the interview data as essential to realising this focused code. First, the high staff-to-participant ratio enables intensive, individualised support, as Davies notes: “you can’t do that with a hundred people in the room” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 5). Second, Dance United staff operate outside institutional systems of power, such as custodial or educational structures. This dynamic enables a more collaborative relationship between staff and participants, as Hassall observes: “it wasn’t a relationship of power. It was a relationship of equals” (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 3). In a careful balance with the employed authoritative leadership style, this fosters mutual respect and trust while maintaining the necessary leadership to guide the process effectively.

Overall, the analysis of *Attuning, Caring, and Nurturing* as an additional focused code within this core concept reveals a nuanced understanding of its practical realisation, encompassing the relational and interpersonal dimensions crucial for fostering a safe learning environment. Individualised attention, recognising and valuing each participant, and an attuned, responsive approach are key components, built on a foundation of reciprocal trust. Effective communication strategies, the high staff-to-participant ratio, and the absence of institutional power structures contribute to the effective realisation of this methodological principle. Together, these elements contribute to a caring, responsive, and nurturing learning space characterised by a flexible, attuned, and responsive practice that prioritises participants’ needs.

Another vital new insight regarding the methodological principles within this core concept is the focused code of *Expanding Realms of Life Experiences*. It not only exposes participants to new and novel experiences but also provides a space of potentiality for growth and development. Within this, contemporary dance—positioned as a vital transcendent medium—fosters holistic and integrative engagement.

While my document analysis evidences the mechanisms of exposing participants to unfamiliar experiences, assigning them new roles, and

challenging them to step outside their comfort zones within *Facilitating Growth and Learning* (see V.2.2.2), the interview data contributes additional information supporting the formation of a distinct focused code. Andrew Coggins encapsulates this in an anecdotal quote from a participant in a custodial setting:

I said to him [...], ‘what’s the most memorable thing about this thing’ and there were tears in his eyes and he said to me, ‘it made me feel like I had never felt before’ and to me that, if anything, characterised the work of Dance United [...] he MEANT it and it had bewildered him [...] he’d entered a realm of experience that had been not available to him (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 7).

To enable participants to access previously unavailable realms of experience, the first emerging mechanism is the deliberate exposure to new and unfamiliar experiences, not only corroborating my conclusions from the document analysis but further expanding on the underpinning rationale of this aspect. As identified in the documents and corroborated by the interviews, it encompasses the exposure to unfamiliar music genres, novel ways of moving through contemporary dance, and artistic themes and narratives that extend beyond their daily life worlds. In a deliberate challenge to preconceptions, participants are pushed beyond the boundaries of their familiar cultural and social landscapes. Highlighting this as a fundamental mechanism in promoting transformative processes of change, Friel explains: “it gave them higher vistas [...] it encouraged change, it encouraged transformation” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 14). The introduction of a variety of new experiences sparks a sense of possibility, encouraging personal growth, and creating a space for participants to navigate their journeys towards realising their potential.

The second component indicated in the interview data is the intentional consideration of providing a transformative space of potentiality, intended to support participants in envisioning and reshaping their identities. In the words of Bynoe, it is “an environment where they were allowed to change” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 10), echoed by Friel’s observation that “it was a system that allowed them

to thrive for the very first time for a lot of them” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 6). The interview data stresses the importance of offering participants the space and opportunity to envision and reshape their sense of self and identity through exploring facets of themselves that may have remained dormant or previously undiscovered. The methodological aspects addressed within this context include the active engagement in their educational journeys, emphasising the value of self-discovery, and the activation of latent potential. In essence, the analysis of the data related to providing a space of potentiality revolves around the notion that the work of Dance United served as a “springboard” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 23), offering opportunities for change, self-discovery, and personal growth, as well as creating an atmosphere where the belief in limitless possibilities is nurtured.

The third factor contributing to this additional focused code is the unique and transcendent qualities that contemporary dance brings to this process. It is a dance style unfamiliar to most participants and thus represents a fundamentally new experience for them. In contrast to other styles—such as street dance or hip hop—contemporary dance not only allows for individuality and differentiation but also serves as a “leveller” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 16), as Johnson, from the London Academy, describes it. Several interviewees agree on the distinctive characteristic of contemporary dance as a transcendent form of creative physical expression. Byrne even extends this discussion into the spiritual realm, postulating a profoundly holistic and integrative experience through dancing as an endeavour to “find that place again where EVERYTHING is just right, everything is IN that moment, in that specific time, in that specific place, it’s right” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 14). Within this context, Johnson links live percussion music to the dance experience, enabling participants to enter “into a state that they’ve NEVER experienced before” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 11). Overall contemporary dance constitutes a unique medium to facilitate distinct transcendent experiences within the process of expanding participants’ realms of life experiences.

Concluding my findings of the core concept of *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential* in action, the interview analysis not only corroborates but significantly enriches the insights derived from the documents. While the established focused codes of *Containing and Holding* and *Facilitating Learning and Growth* gain a deepened understanding of their practical implementation, the two additional focused codes provide further information on the relational dimension of the safe space—described in *Attuning, Caring and Nurturing*—as well as on pivotal catalysts for realising potential—evidenced by *Transcending Realms of Life Experiences*.

### 3.1.3 An Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre in Action

Within the context of the core concept of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, the analysis of the Methodology in its written form highlighted holistic considerations around inclusivity and accessibility to ensure that Dance United projects welcome, reach, and engage a broad range of participants, irrespective of their socio-economic background, and with the specific needs of marginalised populations in mind. However, the focused codes *Inclusive Terms of Participation* and *Employing a Person-Centric Approach* remained unsaturated, posing questions about additional strategies for ensuring inclusivity and the rationale behind this person-centred approach. The interview data addresses these gaps, providing further insight and broadening the understanding of inclusivity as an equitable environment with actively created access pathways and differentiation tailored to individual needs, skills, and abilities.

Firstly, turning to the unsaturated focused code of *Inclusive Terms of Participation*, the interview analysis confirms the findings yielded from the documents. As Coggins corroborates: “there’s no audition [...] there is no process by which somebody is sort of edited out” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 14), which is further echoed by Hassall, who states, “they pretty much didn’t want to exclude anyone” (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 2). However, the interview data extends this aspect, indicating a considered commitment to actively

creating access pathways for participation. This inclusive framework employs pro-active measures to remove barriers to engagement and meets participants where they are in terms of their needs. As Mags Byrne illustrates, this stems from the learnings in Ethiopia and is translated into actively facilitating accessibility: “the young people in Ethiopia had nothing. So, we had to provide for them in order for them to train [...] we don’t assume that people can ACCESS the work that we do. We ACTIVELY MAKE access routes to it” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, pp. 2-3). In Ethiopia, this included meeting very basic needs such as food and shelter. Translated to the UK context, it includes strategies to overcome socio-economic, geographical, and cultural barriers to engagement, such as offering projects free of charge, providing transportation, and delivering local outreach within communities. Suggesting an acknowledgment of existing disparities by actively promoting strategies for fair treatment based on participants’ specific circumstances, this aspect exceeds inclusive participation to include equal opportunities for individuals to access projects.

Within this endeavour, the data indicates that contemporary dance is perceived to hold unique inclusive characteristics. It is not confined to narrow aesthetical ideals of body types but embraces a variety of physical abilities and bodily expressions. This aligns with the idea that each individual can shine within the flexibility of contemporary dance, as Coggins emphasises: “people of different intrinsic capacities, that might be that they’re more instinctively expressive or it might that they’re just more athletically developed, but each individual [...] could shine” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4).

Underlying this principle of equitable and inclusive participation is a commitment to making high-quality art accessible to everyone. As expressed in several interviews, the approach rejects distinctions such as high and low art or community and professional practice, emphasising that everyone, regardless of background or socio-economic context, deserves to experience great art. Bynoe summarises this succinctly when she states:

Because it's community, because it's young people, because it's novice dancers, you still make GREAT work as you would with professionals and I think that that's a core belief that everybody who worked for that organisation shared. That dance is dance and we are inclusive and if we are inclusive then it has to be amazing (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 12).

Transcending traditional distinctions between high and low art indicates a desire to address perceived injustices in these categorisations. The belief that everyone deserves the same artistic experience regardless of their social status challenges societal norms regarding access to art based on socio-economic background. Breaking down these societal divisions in the pursuit of inclusion and equality constitutes a manifestation of the Methodology's idealistic vision (see V.1.4). It further serves as a value-based contributing factor to the artistic ambition of the approach, manifested in the fundamental belief that everyone deserves the "real deal" (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 13) in the realm of artistic expression.

Secondly, turning to the unsaturated focused code *Employing a Person-Centric Approach*, the interview data corroborates a deliberate focus on the person rather than adhering to labels or backgrounds, thus promoting a non-judgmental and universally accepting environment. While the document data lacks an identifiable rationale, the interview analysis reveals a value-based emphasis on treating individuals with dignity and respect, recognising their unique identities, and prioritising their current experiences over preconceived labels.

Several interviews highlight the foundational principle of rejecting social categorisation and preconceived judgments based on the backgrounds of participants, striving to create an environment where participants are valued for who they are as individuals. This principle is facilitated by actively avoiding knowledge of participants' biographical backgrounds, meeting each person in the present moment with a focus on the shared goal of working towards a performance. As Herbert explains: "I don't care what you did but I really care who's standing in front of me RIGHT at this moment and what we can do together to come to that product" (Interview with Herbert, December 2021,

p. 5). This approach aligns with findings from the document analysis and provides insights into its underlying rationale. Actively avoiding knowledge of participants' histories promotes an inclusive space and equitable access to the project. Herbert elaborates: "if you know, you can pretend as much as you like but it does affect how you treat somebody" (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 8). By way of example, the interview data thus advocates for a person-centric approach, emphasising the humanity of each individual and steering away from assumptions related to disabilities, health, criminal histories, or other social labels. Emphasising this focus on shared humanity within the work, Maldoom states, "just remember you're a human being, you're working with human beings" (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 8).

By deliberately avoiding information about personal histories, criminal records, or other potential biases, participants are afforded a fresh start in the new social role of being a dancer. Coggins summarises this principle: "we will start with you as dancers not as people who have been in trouble. Your slate is clean." (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 10). This clean-slate approach, free from external judgments or past baggage, enables participants to express themselves freely and redefine themselves in a resource-oriented role. Interview data highlights the positive impact of this approach in fostering a sense of equality, freedom, and accelerated personal growth. As Bynoe reflects, "you did see accelerated change quite often in the young people because they were allowed and believed in" (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 10).

The principles converge to form a comprehensive person-centric approach central to the Methodology. The analysis reveals a strong emphasis on recognising the inherent value in each and every participant involved in the projects. Data stresses that every individual in the room, regardless of their abilities, compliance, or background, is considered valuable. Byrne encapsulates this inclusive culture: "EVERY single person in the room is of value" (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 7). Emphasising that everyone deserves acknowledgment and positive feedback regardless of potentially challenging behavioural presentation is highlighted as a significant aspect. This methodological principle extends to strategic planning around casting decisions, ensuring that roles within the choreography are distributed fairly and align

with individual confidence levels so that “every single person had their moment to really shine” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p.3). This respect for the unique perspectives and contributions of each individual is identified as a core element in creating an inclusive and supportive environment.

Collectively, the above findings support the core concept of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre* in action. Rooted in value-based commitment to equal opportunities in the arts, the approach actively creates access pathways while engaging with the universally accessible characteristics of contemporary dance. By recognising participants’ inherent value beyond preconceived notions, the approach offers a fresh start in a new role, fostering personal development and growth. The interview data thus enriches my findings from the documents by illustrating the rationale of this person-centred approach and describing additional strategies for ensuring equal opportunities.

### 3.1.4 Working as a Dance Company in Action – Creating a Communal Space

The document analysis provides considerable insight into the methodological principle of *Working as a Dance Company*, facilitating a communal culture through embodied experiences of collective artistic creation and achievement, alongside fostering trust, fairness, and equality within the group. Unfortunately, this aspect was only constituted as a focused code with an emphasis on the dance and rehearsal process. However, the interview data further enriches this understanding of the relevance of communal processes and evidences a more holistic landscape by introducing the focused codes of *Fostering Collaborative Processes* and *Fostering Social Connections*. Together, they form a distinct analytical category resulting in the core concept of *Creating a Communal Space as Dance Company*.

In order for the dance company to function as a unit, or in other words, as a community of dancers, the interview data highlights *Fostering Collaborative Processes* as task-oriented processes working towards the shared artistic goal of the performance. The interview data confirms

the findings from the document analysis, with a more explicit emphasis on the importance of trust, responsibility, and teamwork exercised by the group, as well as modelled by the staff team.

Within this additional focused code, a significant theme emerges from the interview data around the deliberate promotion of trust and responsibility as foundational elements. Facilitating embodied experiences of collaboration, such as lifts and contact work, where participants must rely on each other, not only cultivates trust among participants but also encourages them to take responsibility for themselves and each other (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9). This emphasis on collective and individual responsibility fosters an awareness of individual actions and their potential impact on the company as a whole. Being united in a joint effort of individuals places each participant in a role of active contributor to the overall collective goal. Friel summarises this aspect of the approach as follows: “it invited them again to show a bit of responsibility and forward thinking and that realisation of being [...] a vital ingredient for that recipe” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 19). Creating this shared sense of responsibility establishes a bedrock of trust within the collaborative dynamic.

The experience of teamwork is vital in fostering unity and overall cooperation within the dance company. Hassall identifies this aspect as a significant contributor to the approach, stating: “you worked together as a team and you’re only as good as the weakest link in the team and that is a **STRONG** core value of this” (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 4). This emphasis on teamwork acknowledges the interdependence of team members and highlights the importance of unity, mutual support, and a shared sense of purpose. The interview analysis further reveals modelling of effective teamwork through the Dance United staff as a contributing factor in shaping collaborative environments. By setting examples of positive communication and collaboration, the multidisciplinary delivery team embodies a learning culture that values and emulates teamwork. A vital strategy employed is the team’s collaborative dedication to the dance and rehearsal process, no matter their respective role within the team. Annable-Coop states: “I think that sense of everybody gets involved is at the heart of the Methodology [...]

we had separate roles but we were all very much in that studio supporting, working towards that end goal for the participants” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 9). This highlights the pivotal role of exemplary leadership in fostering a collaborative ethos.

The final performance serves as a vital collective motivation and ambition within this focused code. When this shared objective becomes a unifying and driving force, it inspires individuals to contribute their best efforts and creates a sense of achievement tied to the overall team outcome. This reinforces the idea that success is not an individual endeavour but the result of every participant’s unique contribution, emphasising the power of collaboration in achieving shared aspirations. Broughton underscores the performance as a unifying influence in navigating interpersonal differences and challenges during the process: “it kind of helps to get through [...] all the sticky moments and all the tricky moments and even if people having the wobbliest of days [...] but we’re still ALL going down this route together and we’re all in it together” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 13). Collectively, these aspects constitute a process of *Fostering Collaborative Processes* and contribute to the overall realisation of ***Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company***.

In addition, the interview analysis reveals a deliberate effort in *Fostering Social Connections*. This encompasses all interpersonal aspects of promoting communal group cohesion, such as creating a common ground, establishing a sense of community, and promoting reciprocal support within the group.

With the intention of overcoming differences, the focused code evidences a deliberate effort to identify and establish a common ground that transcends the multitude of individual backgrounds. This intentional emphasis on commonality facilitates a sense of connection and becomes the catalyst for unifying individuals beyond their potential differences. Two of the founding members—Byrne and Maldoom—illustrate this aspect of fostering reciprocal understanding and transcending boundaries that might otherwise reinforce division, when they state: “it’s not focusing on the differences, it’s focusing on something [...] that we can all come to” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, pp. 4-5) by “working with commonality not with difference” (Interview with

Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6). As this involves working with people beyond their social positioning it aligns closely with the person-centric approach, enabling personal connections beyond preconceptions based on social labels and categories.

Additionally, the interview analysis reveals considerations around promoting a sense of community. Most notably, Maldoom poses a fundamental question around the term community dance when he suggests that it is not about working within certain existing communities “but actually very often, they become a community in the studio. I think that’s where I now think the community is” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, pp. 15-16). This conception aligns with critical discussions within community dance practice (Houston, 2008, pp. 14-15), proposing that a sense of communal belonging emerges within the shared space of artistic collaboration. Offering a new collective identity through the dance company is a vital mechanism in promoting a sense of meaningful belonging and connection among participants, likened by Bynoe to a “kind of sense of [...] family amongst the young people” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, pp. 10-11). The shift from individual labels to a shared, collective identity is noted as a powerful perspective shift, fostering unique connections and providing a positive, supportive network. In other words, being a valued contributor to something larger than its parts deepens a sense of community and shared purpose.

Furthermore, my findings from the interviews underscore the significance of shared experiences in strengthening social connections. Communal activities, such as meals and excursions, contribute to a profound sense of togetherness (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 13). This communal atmosphere of reciprocal care and solidarity often extends beyond the dance studio. Friel illustrates this through an anecdote:

I remember once there was one of the girls that [...] wasn’t there one day [...] we couldn’t get hold of this girl and then the NEXT day she wasn’t there and neither were about five of the other kids [...] we were all vexed, really vexed. But what had happened, is these barest members of that cohort from all over London, all different backgrounds some-

how communicated, gone down to that girl's house and FOUND her and ascertained what was up and comforted her and got her in the next day (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, pp. 14-15).

This narrative of participants actively supporting each other, even outside the studio, demonstrates the depth of connections forged through the community of the dance company.

Overall, these additional insights from the interviews allow for the identification of the methodological core concept *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company* as an analytical category. While the document analysis focuses on choreographic principles and the rehearsal process, the interview data offers a more holistic and comprehensive perspective, shedding light on collaborative processes within the dance experience and social connections within the broader project context. This enriched core concept of the Methodology underscores the significance of a communal learning space, with the dance company as a social locus for collective growth and shared purpose.

### 3.1.5 Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content in Action

As evidenced by my document analysis, the Dance United Methodology prescribes a particular focus on what is taught as defined in the core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*. Within this, it applies a specific choreographic approach by using “pre-made, mapped out and trialled” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2) repertoire for the projects (see V.2.6.2). Providing artistic learning content with achievable elements and flexible variations, this fosters universal participation and enables individuals to challenge themselves within their abilities, ultimately leading to a cohesive choreographic outcome. However, the document analysis does not yield further insights into the underlying rationale of this specific choreographic framework. The interview analysis enriches the understanding of this methodological core concept by not only illustrating why this specific approach is employed but also by positioning it as a crucial factor in the realisation of the artistic ambitions of the work.

Findings from the interviews corroborate that the choreographic approach of Dance United bears the specific needs of vulnerable populations in mind when it comes to balancing taught and creative material within the choreography (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 7). However, the interview data substantially extends beyond this specific choreographic aspect and provides an underlying rationale for this approach, with several interviewees particularly emphasising the barriers to engagement faced by marginalised and vulnerable populations. These include socio-emotional barriers—such as behavioural challenges, learning deficits, and disruptive life circumstances—as well as psycho-emotional barriers—such as low self-esteem, low confidence, and negative body image. In an effort to overcome these issues and ensure that participants, as non-trained dancers, acquire the necessary skills and vocabulary within the short timeframe, a tailored and pre-structured choreography provides the appropriate framework as a means to ensure participants' success. A pre-mapped choreography equips participants with the required movement vocabulary and holds them safely within a predictable structure. As success is not only realised in an accomplished final performance but also in fostering positive learning experiences, the set choreography ensures consistent steps of achievement and contributes to a sense of safety for the participants facing these significant challenges. Specifically referring to the work with women in custodial settings, Broughton summarises this aspect:

[...] not only had a lot of them never danced in this way before but [...] we were dealing with women who maybe had HUGE issues about themselves on all different levels and very much about the body [...] to then ask for them to be completely free and creative with their body [...] it's almost too much to ask that and put them in front of an audience (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, pp. 5-6).

As illustrated by this quote, working with a tailored choreography evidences a methodological commitment to honouring the specific needs, abilities, and circumstances of the vulnerable populations this approach engages through deliberately accommodating potential socio-emotional and psycho-emotional barriers within the devised choreographic learning content.

Another reason for employing this specific choreographic approach that emerges from the interview data is the commitment to achieving artistic excellence aligned with professional dance practice. This is not purely an aesthetic ambition but a deliberate consideration of the impact of high artistic standards on participants and audiences alike. The realisation of professional performance standards intends to promote a profound sense of achievement and to exceed expectations—a performance the participants take pride in and audiences sincerely respond to with awe. As Linsell summarises: “you end up with something that surprises the young people, that surprises the audience, that surprises people in this sector” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 6). Thus, the specific choreographic approach of the Methodology emerges as a deliberate pursuit of artistic excellence aligned with professional practices and deepens the understanding of the role the artistic learning content plays in realising this artistic ambition.

A final crucial finding revealed by the interview data is the potential controversy around committing to such a “top-down proposition” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 7). The contention arises because working with a pre-mapped choreography is perceived as an authoritative approach, which potentially overlooks creative contributions from participants. The interview data suggests that this practice model might be viewed as unconventional within the community dance sector as a whole, especially by those who advocate for a more participatory and process-orientated forms of practice. As the Methodology’s choreographic approach stands in contrast to these prevalent approaches in the community dance sector (Wilson, 2008, pp. 63-64), it can be considered quite distinct. With its unconventional nature, it is particularly important that artists working within these methodological principles are comfortable and committed to approaching choreographic development in this way. As Linsell emphasises: “you have to also BELIEVE in this kind of pushing for artistic quality. So again, if you’re someone who thinks [...] I’d rather see what comes from the young people, then that’s not gonna fit with the Methodology” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 10). The importance of commitment and belief from artists becomes paramount in the face of potential controversy, further solidifying its distinctiveness within the community

dance sector. Lessening those concerns around overlooking participants' active contributions within the process, the analysis of both the documents and the interviews evidences conscientious critical reflection around empowering participants, be it through their voluntary participation or the ultimate ownership over their accomplished stage performance.

In conclusion, the Methodology's choreographic approach prioritises client-centred considerations to overcome barriers to engagement and addresses socio-emotional and psycho-emotional challenges faced by marginalised and vulnerable populations. Seeking both artistic excellence and participant achievement, this distinctive approach requires a high level of commitment from artists who must align with the paramount importance of realising artistic excellence as a catalyst for transformational change. Collectively, these insights from the interviews complement and enrich this aspect of the core concept *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*.

### 3.2 Action Expanding Beyond Core Concepts in Theory

In the following, I outline the findings from the interview data which expand beyond the core concepts identified within the documents. Captured in three additional core concepts, they constitute novel insights into other crucial dimensions of the Methodology. In this expansion of the methodological framework, *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* emphasises the belief in each participant's ability to succeed beyond expectations, while *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'* evidences the pivotal role of artists in effectively implementing the approach as a flexible practice-based guide. As the third expanding core concept, *'Transforming Lives Through Dance'* describes the intended impact of the approach driven by its social mission, emulated in Dance United's tagline.

### 3.2.1 Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential

A new methodological insight emerging from the interview analysis is the evidence of a profound belief in the inherent potential of every participant. This is characterised by the open codes Holding an Unshakable Belief in the Potentiality of Every Individual, Commitment to Nurture Potential, and Transformative Effects Recognised in Participants, which together form the focused code *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential*. Compared with other methodological core concepts, this dimension of the work is supported by relatively little data. However, I elevated it to a core concept for two reasons. First, the interview data consistently affirms its essential relevance, with several interviewees—including two of the company’s founding members—describing it as central to the work; Coggins terms it “the most important one, the underpinning” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). Second, the Dance United Methodology is defined as a value-based approach framed by a shared ethos (see V.1.3). The core concept of *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential* articulates this underlying value as a crucial dimension of the approach.

In a deliberate shift from focusing on deficit to embracing potentiality, interviewees express a fundamental belief in the innate capabilities of each individual participant, regardless of their background, circumstances, behavioural presentations or challenges (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6; Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2022, p. 1). By adopting this fundamentally resource-orientated perspective, participants are perceived as human beings with untapped potential awaiting realisation, rather than as victims of unfortunate life circumstances. As an underpinning motif, this unwavering belief is positioned as a critical aspect for the impactful realisation of this work. The data stresses the necessity of investing personally in each individual as a unique soul with potential in order to persevere through the considerable challenges of the work and realise the artistic ambition envisaged. In the words of the two of the founding members, Maldoom and Coggins: “you have to have an unshakable belief in the extraordinary potential of every human being” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6)

because “if you don’t believe in that potential then we could not deliver the work” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). This conviction is framed not merely as an idealistic stance but as an indispensable necessity for the practical implementation of this approach.

The notion of an active implementation of this belief is further strengthened by interview data indicating that this commitment is practically manifested through unwavering and continual efforts (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 1). One practical manifestation of this commitment is the refusal to compromise throughout the rehearsal process, deliberately instilling the confidence in participants, that they are capable of achieving and thriving (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 9). This belief is further actualised through treating participants with constant high regard, as Friel highlights: “no matter what their daily experiences, behavioural manifestations were and whatever they brought with them, there was just that continual high regard, continual encouragement and belief” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 1). This notion underscores a consistent approach to deliberately fostering an environment of positive encouragement and belief. In the concluding section of the group interview, Friel terms this unconditional acceptance and the benevolent concern for the good of another as love: “it was love and that was the essence” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 23). In this, he is echoed by Maldoom in the conclusion of his interview: “I think, it’s a cliché, but I think it’s love” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 17). Encompassing kindness, compassion, acceptance, and respect for each individual, love in this context constitutes the unconditional and unwavering belief in the very best in every single individual.

The infectious nature of this practical commitment to nurturing potential becomes a catalyst for achieving beyond expectations, recognised in the interview data for its transformative impact on participants (Interview with Crane, November 2021, pp. 7-8). Investing this belief in someone who most likely lacks self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-belief—as is often the case with marginalised and vulnerable populations (see V.3.1.5)—serves as a foundation to gradually internalise this newly discovered aspect of the self. Linsell illustrates this

through an anecdote from a participant: “somebody believes in me and that meant something to her for the first time in her life, that she was believed in and therefore has believed in herself” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 13). This internalisation of a newfound aspect of the participant’s sense of self exemplifies the transformative potential of this methodological principle, illustrating how external belief can foster personal change.

In summary, the newly established core concept of *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential* constitutes a profound and unwavering investment in the inherent potential of each participant. With an active commitment to nurturing potentiality and the recognition of its transformative impact, it manifests as the underlying value of the Methodology.

### 3.2.2 Active Implementation by Artists ‘of Calibre’

Characterised as a flexible guide to practice (see V.1.2), the Methodology relies on the artists for its effective practical implementation. Since their crucial role is emphasised in the introductory paragraphs of the Pro-Active Strategies document without further in-depth information, I ensured to include this area of enquiry in my interview guidelines (see Appendix B1 to B5) with the intention of unearthing insights into the nature of this responsibility and the defining characteristics of suitable staff.

Captured in the core concept *Active Implementation by Artists ‘of Calibre’*, the interview analysis confirms that the successful realisation of the Dance United Methodology relies heavily on the expertise, commitment, and active involvement of the frontline team, encompassing dance artists as well as support staff.<sup>44</sup> Their vital role is specifically highlighted by Annable-Coop, who states:

<sup>44</sup> For readability, I refer to the multidisciplinary team consisting of dance artists and support staff as the “staff team”. The term “dance artists” is used specifically for the artists, when the data indicates this specification.

The Methodology is only as good as the people that are working in a team [...] I think if you don't have the quality of artists, team, people, then I don't think you'll get the results even if you did A, B, C, D and everything on that Methodology [...] it's down to the people that lead the work (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 12).

The interview data recognises that staff are not just merely translating the approach into action but actively contribute to its realisation through their knowledge, skills, and expertise. Underscoring this dynamic role of the staff team in the application of the Methodology as a flexible guide, this core concept is described through three focused codes. While *Recruiting Suitable Staff* outlines the parameters for identifying and selecting appropriate individuals for this work, *Specifications of Suitable Staff* defines their unique qualities, skills, and attributes. As explicated in *Following a Vocational Calling*, the pursuit of this line of work is driven by a genuine passion for dance and its transformative potential, with several interviewees being called to it by others or following an intrinsic drive.

The focused code *Recruiting Suitable Staff* illustrates the immense challenge of locating and identifying appropriate high-quality staff of the right calibre. This challenge is founded on the considerable and unique demands of working with marginalised and vulnerable populations. As Coggins confirms: “there were not many artists who could sustain it, particularly not with the challenges that working with groups of people who were marginalised or disadvantaged would present” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). The “very, very specialist work” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 10) demands not only exceptional artistic aptitude along with pedagogical expertise but also a profound understanding of the inherent barriers and difficulties faced by participants. Beyond suitable staff being able to work within the rigours and disciplines of the working environment, it is vital “that they are genuinely understanding of and committed to the philosophy” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 10), as Davies explains. The requirement for methodological alignment thus adds another dimension to the challenging intricacies of recruiting suitable staff. These findings explicate the precarious balance between artistic and peda-

gical credentials which are appropriately aligned to the challenges faced by this client group. Together with methodological alignment and commitment, these aspects mark the recruitment process as a crucial determinant in the Methodology's successful realisation.

The continuous growth of the company intensified the need for suitable artists and accentuated the inherent difficulty of finding the right people. Despite immense efforts in recruiting and training artists throughout the years (see IV.1.2 to IV.1.4), the interview analysis indicates a lack of defined selection criteria, adding to the challenge of identifying individuals who can effectively employ this approach. As evident in the data, the recruitment process is mostly based on a subtle and intuitive understanding of suitability—beyond formal qualifications or role specifications. Across multiple transcripts, interviewees express the challenge of articulating a specific formula for suitable artists, acknowledging that it is an aptitude recognised when observed. The selection process thus involves an instinctive sense of an artist's potential compatibility. This intuitive knowing was expressed consistently throughout all relevant data, as summarised by Gladstone, who was intensively involved in the company's training programme: “you kind of knew in your bones” (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p. 4). Both Herbert and Bynoe emphasise a subtle but vital cue of suitability in observing artists who effectively engage and connect with participants (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 5; Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 5). This emphasis on the required innate interpersonal skills underlines the relationships between the staff team and participants as a fundamental building block of this work.

While the company never formalised a defined selection criteria for the recruitment of artists, the focused code *Specifications of Suitable Staff* reveals specific characteristics and attributes, including personality, disposition, and values, alongside specific skills, competencies, and aptitudes. Together, these findings specify a distinct set of six criteria for suitable staff, which I collectively refer to as specifications.

Firstly, the interview analysis highlights empathy, kindness, and care as crucial capacities for the unique demands of the work. Mostly intrinsic and inherent in suitable staff, these compassionate attributes catalyse supportive and positive relationships with participants, essential for the

overall success of projects. Within this, an empathic understanding and connection with participants on an emotional level is highlighted as an indispensable dimension. As Friel states, being an empath—described as someone who is attuned, sensitive, intelligent, and prone to serve—constitutes “a unifying characteristic” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 6) among staff.

Secondly, the analysis reveals the pivotal role of a genuine passion for the work and, in turn, being an inspirational teacher by infusing participants with this unwavering drive. This is particularly emphasised by two of the founding members—Maldoom and Byrne—as a fundamental starting point: “First of all, you have to be passionate” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 2) because “if you’re not passionate about what you do [...] you’re not starting anywhere” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 7). Personal passion and conviction not only serve as the bedrock foundation in upholding intrinsic motivation to sustain staff through the challenges of the work but also play an important role in fostering and motivating engagement from participants. As a driving force for sustained engagement, staff’s profound and authentic passion ultimately constitutes a contributing factor to the positive impact and meaningful outcomes of the work.

Thirdly, the interview data emphasises dedication, commitment, and resilience as fundamental characteristics of suitable staff. Several interviewees highlight that anyone working within this context faces considerable challenges and uncertainties, both within and outside of front-line delivery of projects. These include the often-unpredictable nature of the client group (Interview with Davies, November 2021, pp. 3-4), conflicting demands from funders and partners (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 6), and a general uncertainty in the funding landscape (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 11). As commitment and reliability are important relational factors in creating a held and contained learning environment (see V.3.1.2), it is vital that suitable staff embody these qualities, particularly when faced with such challenges. Stemming from the genuine passion outlined above, this “unwavering resilience and absolute commitment” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 12), equips staff with the required drive, stamina, and perseverance required to achieve the envisioned impact and outcomes of the work.

Defined as not hiding behind a specific role and approaching participants with genuine honesty (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 13; Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 13), authenticity emerges as the fourth important specification from the interview data. Within this context, both Bynoe and Herbert emphasise the importance of dance artists holding professional experiences in performing “just to understand that feeling” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 6). As artists have “been in that vulnerable place” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 4), they can authentically relate—with empathy—to the intimidating experience of performing in front of an audience. Paired with the genuine passion suitable staff ideally hold, this creates an additional pull of engagement for participants. As Linsell states: “when you’re at the front of a room with young people who don’t believe in anything and you’re going, THIS is going to happen, they feel, that you’re genuine and you’re honest and you’re real” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 11). As purpose, motivation, and emotional expression authentically align, staff demonstrate an immense integrity towards others within the team but, most importantly, towards the participants. This highlights the value of sincerity and honesty in fostering engagement and building meaningful connections with participants.

The fifth specification evidenced in the interview data is the ability to work effectively as part of a multidisciplinary team. While a united team provides the comprehensive support around participants required to create a safe learning environment (see V.3.1.2), working effectively as a team provides a sense of support for staff as well (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 7). Despite staff holding different roles and responsibilities within the team—generally divided into dance and support teams—the analysis reveals an emphasis on equality, respect, and interconnectedness. It is considered vital, that individual staff members contribute to the greater good beyond personal ambitions. As Annable-Coop explains: “people that didn’t last very long in teams was when they brought an ego in [...] that didn’t work in part of teams. There needed to be a kind of equalness between people to make those projects work” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 8).

However, within the unified sense of togetherness, the staff team is described as having unique qualities, with diverse personalities and

skill sets (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 7). The versatility of individual team members—such as their ability to flexibly switch and adjust roles and responsibilities in response to participants’ needs—is highlighted as a valuable aspect of teamwork. Aloe, from the London Academy team, illustrates the importance of the right mix of people with the analogy of a cocktail: “Just the blend of who we all were individually for some reason seemed to be such a good mix, you know. A little bit like when you find the perfect cocktail” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 7). According to the data, what unites the team is a shared belief in the work and a collective commitment to the success of projects. This forms a vital foundation in approaching participants with unified consistency, essential to the comprehensive support referred to above (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 13).

The final specification identified in the interview data refers to staff’s ability to exercise clear and firm leadership. In a multifaceted understanding, leading is conceptualised as inspiring and enabling others (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 12), marked by demonstrating inner confidence to navigate challenges and maintaining resilience in the face of difficulties (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 6). This conceptualisation of leadership also encompasses the idea of leading by example through “raising the bar for yourself as well” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 12). In other words, it is not enough to expect the best from participants without taking personal risks—pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone and striving to be the best you can be. Leadership is considered to exceed imparting knowledge and dictating the learning process. It involves a collaborative process with participants to understand their needs and navigate their challenges while firmly holding them throughout. In coexistence with the acknowledgment of the significance of the participants’ voices, there is an appreciation of the specific expertise experienced artists apply to their decisive and confident guidance (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 9). Overall, being able to exercise clear and firm leadership not only serves as a foundation for the realisation of potential within a safe and supportive space, but also embodies an inspiring, enabling, and collaborative approach that effectively navigates the challenges of the process.

The focused code *Following a Vocational Calling* illustrates that staff are generally motivated by deep dedication to this work, driven by a strong sense of professional purpose. It is striking that a considerable number of interviewees describe their pathways into pursuing this line of work as either being called into it by stakeholders within the company or following an intrinsic vocational drive to engage with the company. In either case, the data reveals an overall genuine passion for dance and its transformative potential.

On the one hand, the data suggests, that interviewees' journeys into working with Dance United were initiated by external invitations and recommendations from pivotal figures within the company—such as Andrew Coggins, Royston Maldoom, and Tara Herbert. In many instances, they were actively sought out for their specific expertise and knowledge to fulfil and respond to specific needs within the organisation, thus emphasising the dynamic and responsive nature of their involvement. By way of example, Bynoe recalls her pathway into the company upon a request from Herbert and Broughton: “It wasn’t something they would just put out an advert for and audition teachers for because it was so specialised. And that the only person they could both think of who they felt would match the work was me” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 1). Often building on previous contacts and existing networks within their professional field, initial associations with the company often started on an informal and casual basis, gradually building towards more formal and continuous engagements (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p. 1). Overall, aligning the expertise and qualities of individuals with the specific requirements of the organisation indicates a certain integrity and cohesion among staff, with those brought on board harmoniously and organically fitting in.

On the other hand, the interview analysis reveals that several members of staff felt an intrinsic vocational drive towards working with dance in the social inclusion sector in general and, more specifically, with Dance United.<sup>45</sup> This inherent sense of vocation either built on already existing professional interests and values or aligned with per-

<sup>45</sup> As outlined in I.2, this vocational pathway of feeling intrinsically called to the work of Dance United also applies to my personal experience.

sonal backgrounds (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 1; Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 1). Linsell describes this as a pivotal moment of realisation: “When I started working with Dance United, I thought this is what I was meant to do, this is what I was put on the planet to do” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 11). This sense of profound purpose is not merely a career choice but a deeply felt pull towards making a meaningful difference. As Davies emphasises this vocational motivation of suitable staff: “it’s because you feel a genuine pull towards making a difference” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 10). The findings thus suggest that staff within Dance United were drawn to the work not by financial gain or personal ambition but because they genuinely believe in the transformative power of dance and its potential to positively impact the lives of those considered marginalised and vulnerable within society.

This genuine passion for making a meaningful difference through dance is not limited to the intrinsic pathway into the work but is consistently revealed across interviews. The interviewees are driven by a deep dedication to their artistic vocation, with a sincere and profound enjoyment of dance (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 1). In some instances, this even entails personal biographical experiences of dance as a catalyst for personal transformation (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 1). The analysis further evidences a profound desire and drive to facilitate personal and social change. Especially in relation to enabling personal development, this is described as an immensely rewarding and satisfying honour and privilege. As Maldoom states: “This feeling of being able to be a spark in someone’s life, how great is that. How great is that. What a reward” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 11). This intrinsic motivation for creating opportunities for people to make a positive difference in their lives is deemed essential for sustaining commitment through the demanding and challenging nature of the work, alongside the relatively low financial rewards. The intrinsic passion for dance and enabling change unite in a fundamental belief in the transformative potential of dance. As Linsell aptly summarises: “I think it **MUST** all stem back to a desire to make [...] a significant change through your passion for dance and performance. And if you don’t have that then it’s not gonna work” (Interview

with Linsell, January 2022, p. 10). This underlying, inherent passion is a potential contributing factor in the unique qualities of suitable staff—such as their dedication, commitment, and resilience; their authenticity; and their passionate and inspirational approach to teaching. The interviewed stakeholders appear to resonate deeply with this approach, creating a certain momentum and drive in realising its communally shared ideals in the face of adverse realities (see V.1.4).

In summary, the core concept of *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'* encompasses the recruitment and specifications of suitable staff aligning with the specific requirements and challenges of the Dance United Methodology. Moreover, as staff generally follow a vocational calling, they are driven by an intrinsic professional purpose beyond mere job requirements and role descriptions. Combined, these aspects evidence a holistic approach to staffing, where individuals are not only hired based on their suitable characteristics but also their alignment with the vision of the company—to transform lives through dance. This methodological core concept thus reflects the significance of employing suitable staff who not only successfully implement the Methodology but ultimately realise it as an inherently value-driven and idealistic approach.

### 3.2.3 'Transforming Lives Through Dance'

As an in vivo code, *'Transforming Lives Through Dance'* constitutes the final additional core concept identified through the interview analysis. As evident from my findings so far, the Methodology aims to effect positive outcomes for participants, facilitating personal development and the realisation of potential. This additional core concept illustrates the emphasis on effecting transformative learning processes as a vital component of this approach.

Outlined in the company's mission statement (see IV.1.3) and encapsulated in their tagline—"Lives Transformed Through Dance"—this finding evidences the integrity of the approach in realising its social ambitions. As Crane poignantly states: "They ARE what they said they were on the tin" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 2). This core concept not only encompasses transformative outcomes for par-

ticipants, described in the focused code *Impacting Personal Transformation*, but also a collective impact “on everybody who was touched by it” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 10), as captured in the focused code *Impacting Collective Transformation*. As the pivotal catalyst, *Harnessing the Transformative Power of Dance* places the art at the centre of the work.

First, turning to the personal transformation of participants within this core concept, *Impacting Personal Transformation* encompasses the positive outcomes evidenced by the interview data and includes embodied confidence<sup>46</sup>, psychosocial changes, empowerment, and changes in perception of self. As previously described, the vulnerable and marginalised populations this work engages generally hold limiting self-beliefs, little self-worth, and negative self-concepts, often resulting from adverse social perceptions and experiences of stigmatisation. As Linsell emphasises within this context:

Most of the people we meet at the beginning, there is very little self-worth and self-belief [...] they’ve been labelled [...] this is what I am: I’m dyslexic, I’ve got anger management, I’ve got ADHD, I’ve got mental health issues, I’m a young offender, I’m a criminal. All these labels. It’s almost like these labels have created this shell of a person and then you have to get inside where there’s nothing. There’s no self-belief, there’s no self-worth (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 12).

As my analysis reveals, enabling participants to move towards a more positive, confident, and empowered sense of self is fundamentally an embodied process that is primarily facilitated by deliberately engaging participants in the continuous physical practices—such as stillness, focus, upright body posture, and internal awareness. Using the body as a felt starting point for bodily experiences of confidence holds the potential to translate into psycho-emotional and cognitive perceptions of self-worth. As Byrne explains: “If you can stand up and you can stand

<sup>46</sup> This term was introduced by Miles and Strauss (2008) as part of their action-research findings (see IV.2.2) and is used within this analysis as it appropriately describes the findings within the interviews.

tall and you can stand wide and you can TAKE your space, that sends a message to the brain that you're worth it [...] you DESERVE to be here.” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 11). This is instilled in participants with the performance in mind; to perform on stage to high artistic standards and shine in the best possible light, participants are required to exude confidence through a stilled focus and a poised posture even in moments of self-doubt (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 6).

Another area of personal growth recorded in the interview data, indicating the transformative impact on participants, is psychosocial changes in behavioural presentations and interpersonal relationships. These changes are often described as individual and, at times, small in scale. However, through the consistent methodological investment in and attention to participants' personal development, psychosocial changes are consistently motivated and recorded. This impact is further corroborated by the numerous evaluations on the approach (see IV.2). Dave Smith, a percussionist at the London Academy, had the unique perspective of joining projects at both the beginning and the end. He notes: “When they came in to start off with to how they finished at the end and how they were behaving, how they were relating to each other and how they generally were in themselves [...] I could see a huge difference” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 2). These significant changes in participants' behaviour, relationships, and overall demeanour further demonstrate the transformative impact of this approach.

The empowerment of participants represents an additional dimension of personal transformation fostered by the approach. As Davies asserts: “It is astonishing [...] the outcomes in terms of empowerment” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 3). The interview data evidences various ways in which participants experience empowerment, including developing a more positive outlook, actively shaping their futures by overcoming self-imposed limitations (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 10), and translating newly acquired skills—such as self-control and self-regulation—into everyday life (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 8). Most notably, empowerment is demonstrated as participants transition from beneficiaries to benefactors, giving back to their communities. Herbert particularly highlights this in

relation to the work in Ethiopia: “The fact that these community dancers worked their way through to a professional level [...] but have taken everything back [...] and it IS the Dance United Methodology that they have taken back” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 10). Crane links this specific impact of enabling and empowering participants to the company’s emphasis on artistic standards and quality as a catalyst for “unleashing” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 4) people’s potential. Overall, the data emphasises that participants—whether in the UK or Ethiopia—experience a shift in mindset, gain a sense of agency in shaping their lives, and realise their potential, demonstrating the empowering influence of the approach and its transformative outcomes.

The final aspect of impacting personal transformation focuses on self-discovery, resulting in a changed sense of self among participants. Throughout the process, participants are reported to discover previously inaccessible or suppressed aspects of themselves. Bynoe and Friel respectively term this as “real” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 9) and “true” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 17) education, referring to a process of releasing unhelpful aspects of the self and bringing forth new perspectives. This change is not only recognised by participants but also witnessed by family members. As Davies states: “You’ve got your own family recognising that you’re a different person or the real you has been exposed” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 7). This change in self-perception and self-presentation is facilitated by providing individuals with opportunities to explore and present their best selves. By offering new and novel experiences, the process of self-discovery is enabled, unlocking and awakening new connections and perspectives. Linsell describes this profound and positive change as magical: “You’re making something magical happen [...] because you’ve touched something inside of them which [...] maybe hasn’t been unlocked before” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 18). This profound change in how participants experience, perceive, and embrace a different sense of self constitutes a vital dimension within the transformative impact of the Methodology.

As the second focused code identified within this core concept, *Impacting Collective Transformation* describes the wider transformative impact of the work and evidences transformative outcomes at a collec-

tive level. Within this context, Crane describes the work as: “A movement [...] that was being incredibly influential on so many people’s lives, not only young people” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 10). Captured in this focused code, the analysis encompasses two areas of collective impact: the communities around the work and the staff.

Firstly, the approach impacts individuals and communities surrounding the work, fostering changes in family dynamics—such as reconciliation and renewal of relationships (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 8)—as well as instigating shifts in institutional cultures exemplified by partner organisations including the police services in Ethiopia and prisons in the UK. As Hassall recalls: “It started to change the staff culture” (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 3). In both cases, this is catalysed by perceiving participants in a new light and witnessing them in their achievement, reminding family members of their potential and service providers of their humanity. Additionally, the transformative impact extends to the role models embedded in the projects<sup>47</sup>. Although effectively acting as participants, these individuals were not involved in projects for personal benefit but to support the group from within. Despite their generally mature and functional socio-emotional presentations, the process often affected them deeply and profoundly. As Friel recalls: “No matter who you are, what stage you are or whatever your current needs are [...] it didn’t fail to have that effect [...] of transformation” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 22).

Secondly, this collective effect of transformation extends to Dance United staff and stakeholders. As Van Huynh reflects on this shared experience of transformative growth, “everyone was growing together” (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 8). Several interviewees reported a profound impact of working with Dance United and with its specific Methodology, both professionally and personally. For many, their engagement with the company marks a pivotal moment in their professional journeys, providing opportunities for growth,

<sup>47</sup> Role models were introduced throughout the Academy Programme to strengthen and support participants from within the group working as part of the dance company (see IV.1.3). With backgrounds in dance and an interest in social inclusion, they were not identified as vulnerable or marginalised.

achievement, and self-discovery. In some cases, it provides important fundamental inspiration for ambitious subsequent career choices. Linsell encapsulates the profound resonance of the work, stating: “as an artist and as a practitioner and as a participant, I think it reaches [...] to your soul” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 18). Her statement illustrates how the work not only motivated transformative processes in participants but also deeply impacts practitioners, touching them at their core. The experiences shared in the interviews demonstrate the lasting influence of working with Dance United on the lives and careers of its practitioners.

Encapsulated in the focused code *Harnessing the Transformative Power of Dance*, the interview analysis underscores the pivotal role of dance—particularly contemporary dance—in effecting the transformative processes described above. While the personal transformation of participants illustrates embodied learning processes as a catalyst for confidence and self-belief, this focused code expands on the specific aspects of the rehearsal and performance process that harness the transformative power of dance. Affirming this as a founding principle of the company, Byrne asserts, “the POWER of dance as a vehicle for personal development, community cohesion, community development [...] looking at this as not just a tool of entertainment but a tool of positive change” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 3).

Dance is understood as a holistic engagement in movement, simultaneously activating physical, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions—“all aspects of the self” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 4). As a form of creative bodily expression, dance provides a medium for self-expression that requires internal and emotional connection to convey purpose, meaning, and intention. Remembering steps and movement sequences demands cognitive engagement, while the methodological emphasis on the communal aspect of the dance company incorporates a social dimension. Through this holistic engagement, the body becomes an access point for change, with dance serving as a catalyst for transformation beyond mere aesthetics or recreation. Byrne summarises this potential:

If we get it right and we can GET this integration then the ability for the person to GROW in whatever way they want to, to MOVE into the person [...] that they most want to be, the ability for them to do that is MASSIVELY increased (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 10).

In elucidating the transformative potential of dance and the profound impact of the approach, the data analysis reveals vivid and recurring metaphorical language—often referencing the terms “magic” and “alchemy”. Broughton affirms this as the essence of the work, stating, “there is a trust in the magic of dance, there is a trust in the magic of movement that [...] opens the doorway for the transformation” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 14). Central to harnessing this alchemical magic of dance is its profound neurobiological impact on the body, holistic engagement, and the communal experience of movement (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, pp. 10-11). Even when participants do not consciously register these processes of profound change within themselves, the communal nature of the work allows them to witness this transformation in others. Friel emphasises: “if they didn’t experience it themselves, they identified it in others because of the admiration that they had for each other and the close bonds and the sacrifice and dedication and the trust they had in each other” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 14). This metaphor of alchemy—turning base metals into gold—aptly reflects the transformation of participants as they realise their inherent potential and shine on stage.

The interview data confirms the stage performance as a pivotal and vital transformative catalyst. As the document analysis reveals (see V.2.1), the performance-led orientation is integral to the approach and essential in realising the company’s artistic vision of achieving artistic excellence. Within the context of the core concept of *‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’*, the performance emerges as a fundamental element in instigating processes of change. Byrne articulates this, stating, “all of the work [...] has performance at its core on the recognition that performance is a catalyst for change” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 3). The analysis of the interview data reveals a multifaceted and

nuanced picture of performance as an agent for personal and communal transformation.

The performance is considered a vital transformative moment, allowing participants to present a positive, often unrecognised side of themselves. Especially when working with marginalised and vulnerable populations, the idea of showcasing previously unrecognised potential plays a crucial role in establishing a renewed sense of self. Broughton describes this as: “suddenly they were being seen, a side of them that maybe had been quite buried” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 8). Performing on stage to the best of their ability represents a pivotal moment of achievement for participants—an outcome few of them deemed possible within the short timeframe. This process often exceeds their own expectations, pushing beyond perceived limitations. Furthermore, participants are recognised and witnessed in their achievement by an audience. Through this act of empowerment, they move from being beneficiaries to becoming benefactors (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6). For many participants, this marks a rare moment of positive recognition, as Coggins points out: “If you take a typical young person that we worked with, how many times have they been applauded for doing something that was excellent, how many times have people said, well done” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9).

The audience, often composed of people who hold particular perceptions of the participant—such as their social workers, carers and family members—enters into communal dialogue with the performers. Witnessing participants’ achievements and seeing them in the best light becomes a dynamic force for changing and reshaping the audience’s perceptions and expectations. This collective dimension becomes a vital contributor to transforming not only participants’ lives but also potentially driving broader social change. Crane summarises this universal impact: “There was commune created on the stage. It was created between audience and [...] performers. And then there was the bigger community [...] that ricochet effect and ripple effects of all of that out into the world” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 11).

As illustrated, dance and performance function as powerful catalysts for transformation. By integrating physical, emotional, cognitive,

and social dimensions, and by providing a platform for participants to challenge expectations, the transformative power of dance enables profound personal and communal change.

In conclusion, this chapter has systematically identified and analysed the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology, derived from both its document-based formalisation and its practice-based realisation. Founded on a constructivist working definition of the Methodology, my analysis yields six core concepts in theory and eight core concepts in action, with five enriching insights from the documents and three additional dimensions emerging in practice. This results in nine methodological core concepts and answers my first secondary research question: What are the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology? This establishes a comprehensive and robust foundation for the next chapter, where I examine the interconnections between these core concepts and their relationships to existing theory, ultimately establishing my envisaged theoretical foundation.



# VI A Theoretical Foundation of the Dance United Methodology

Having answered my first secondary research question by way of the nine methodological core concepts in theory and in action, my next step in the research process aligns with the secondary questions concerning the interrelationships between the core concepts and links to relevant existing theory.

Before establishing these, I first unite my findings from the document and interview data through an integrative analysis process, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of each respective core concept as a coherent whole (see VI.1). In the subsequent theoretical development of my findings, I transition to developing an integrated theoretical model that provides a heuristic conceptualisation of the Methodology in its entirety (see VI.2). Building relationships between my theoretical model and relevant existing theory embeds this conceptualisation in its theoretical situatedness and constitutes the concluding step in providing a theoretical foundation of the approach (see VI.3).

## 1 Integrating the Core Concepts in Theory and in Action

Providing the foundation for establishing the interrelationships between the defining dimensions of the Dance United Methodology, the following describes the integrative analysis of each of the nine identified core concepts in a further theoretical abstraction of my findings. This analytical process is transparently tracked in my evidence trail on the integration of core concepts (see Appendix A4).

Before integrating each core concept individually, it is notable that my analysis reveals no evident contradictions between the findings in the three documents and the insights from interviews. On the contrary, the combined results provide a holistic and comprehensive picture, illustrating the Dance United Methodology in its entirety. This

consistency reflects the integrity of the approach in its translation from abstract formalisation into applied practice.

Five of the six core concepts identified in the document analysis are further corroborated and enriched by a more nuanced understanding of their nature in the interview analysis. However, the core concept of *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'* is not explicitly established through the interview data as a distinct analytical category. I attribute this to the fact that I am considered a co-expert within the context of my interviews, holding shared implicit knowledge of the specific teaching principles employed (see II.2.3.2). Unfortunately, the interview process did not explicitly unearth this aspect. Furthermore, the documents are specifically composed as a set of teaching and delivery methods (see V.2). Given the documents' purpose, this specific core concept naturally emerges as a meaningful analytical category from the data. The following integration of this core concept thus encompasses the integrative analysis of the seven distinct teaching principles identified in the document data and indicates implicit supporting references in the interview data.

With *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential*, *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'*, and *'Transforming Lives Through Dance'*, the interview data reveals three additional core concepts, further expanding the overall understanding of the Dance United Methodology. As the documents are intended as guides on principles and methods, it is plausible that the underlying value of the work is not adequately captured but shared as an implicit understanding among stakeholders. While the document data indicates that staff hold a vital role in the active implementation of the work, the documents' focus along with the absence of set role specifications preclude an in-depth outline of this aspect. The first document of the Methodology references the aim of the listed key features and principles as being "to maximise the potential of a project / programme to succeed" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p.1). As previously mentioned, the document does not further explicate the company's definition of success within this context. From the results of the interview analysis, it can be inferred that success is thus considered the multidimensional transformative impact of the work by harnessing the transformative potential of dance and performance.

## 1.1 ‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’

While the document analysis did not reveal ‘*Transforming Lives Through Dance*’ as a distinct category, a systematic integration of document and interview data provides insights into how this core concept implicitly permeates the written formalisation. Through specific methodological principles outlined in the documents, an opportune space for transformative change is deliberately created, and transformative learning is actively facilitated. These elements complement the insights from the interview analysis, providing an integrated understanding of this core concept.

Although the concept of transformation is not explicitly referenced in the documents, various methodological principles indicate efforts aligned to facilitate the personal transformative changes described in the interview data. Deliberately neglecting the personal histories and biographies of participants by *Employing a Person-Centric Approach in Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, participants are invited to step into a neutral space, where they can define themselves anew, free from social labels or preconceived notions. Adding to this opportune space for a redefinition of selfhood, *Fostering Learning and Growth in Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*, offers participants a conducive environment to step out of their comfort zones and acquire new skills. In the novel social role of a dancer in a dance company, they “can experience and show different qualities of them” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 9). In addition to creating a space, where transformative change is possible, the written Methodology indicates efforts to actively facilitate this process through ensuring “achievement at all times in the process” and investing in building “confidence, self belief [...] self worth” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014 p. 4-5). The *Performance-Led Process*, prescribed by the core concept of ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’, ensures that participants have an opportunity to “shine on the stage” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6) as a public platform to showcase their potential in a pivotal moment of their learning journey. These implicit indications in the document data thus complement the findings from the interview analysis.

In the interview analysis, *‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’* is defined by the focused codes *Impacting Personal Transformation*, *Impacting Collective Transformation*, and *Harnessing the Transformative Power of Dance*. Through developing embodied confidence, experiencing psychosocial changes, empowerment, and shifts in self-perception, participants experience profound transformative changes. These transformations extend to communal shifts in family dynamics and institutional cultures, as well as having a profound impact on the professional and personal biographies of staff. Within this context, the “magical” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 14) and “alchemical” (Group interview with London Academy team, p. 11) potential of dance—particularly contemporary dance—is positioned as a catalyst for change through its holistic engagement. By giving “every individual the greatest opportunity to present their best self” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9), the dynamic dialogue of the performance enables participants to showcase their unseen potential, exceed expectations, and challenge preconceived notions about themselves, ultimately realising their full potential and contributing to positive social change.

In summary, the integration of both the document and interview data not only describes a comprehensive understanding of this core concept as a whole but also reveals relevant insights into possible relationships between *‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’* and other core concepts. Harnessing the inherent transformative potential of contemporary dance and performance, this specific approach deliberately deploys mechanisms to create a space of potentiality, while investing in the realisation of potential through facilitating personal change and growth, ultimately resulting in personal and collective transformative processes. Building on these insights, my subsequent development of a theoretical model explores these mechanisms further and evolves them into meaningful interrelationships.

## 1.2 ‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’

*‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’* emerges as a methodological core concept from both the document and the interview analysis, defining the company’s artistic ambition as a pivotal principle. As the anal-

ysis from both datasets reveals, the Methodology's commitment to its realisation is multi-dimensional and comprehensive in nature, employing a systematic and deliberate approach to ensuring artistic excellence and professional quality throughout the process which culminates in accomplished performances.

The document analysis confirms the significance of artistic excellence by way of a focused code but remains unsaturated regarding a more nuanced understanding of its definition, purpose, and realisation in practice. While the findings from the documents fail to consolidate into a core concept as an analytical category, the interview analysis enriches this understanding. Combined, my integrative analysis establishes a comprehensive view of '*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*', merging the initial codes from the document analysis with the focused codes from the interview analysis as follows.

Described in the open code of Commitment to Artistic Excellence, the document data confirms the artistic ambition of the company as a relevant and consistent aspect of the Methodology; vital not only for the company's reputation but also as a driving force throughout the process (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). As a fundamental guiding principle and essential component of the broader professional framework around the realisation of artistic excellence, it integrates with the focused code of *Comprehensive Professional Framework* from the interview analysis. In its alignment towards the realisation of high-quality, professional performances, this integration also applies to the documents' initial code Performance-Led Process. As a driving mechanism, the integrated focused code *Comprehensive Professional Framework* not only manifests the relevance of artistic excellence but also provides insight into how high artistic standards are realised in action, employing a high-quality and professional performance-led process throughout all aspects of projects—from the rehearsal space, staffing, and provisions during the process all the way to the performance space and required production values.

While the documents yielded the initial in vivo code 'Making Them Shine' as a relevant aspect, containing only one set of data, it remains unsaturated. With further corroboration, the interview findings substantiate it as a focused code that captures both the aspiration and

strategy for achieving artistic excellence. Encapsulated by Maldoom as, “when every person is GIVING their BEST” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 5), it is defined as the full commitment of each participant to perform to the best of their abilities. In its practical realisation, it depends on setting realistic expectations tailored to the specific needs of non-trained dancers with marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds, allowing participants to each showcase their individual potential.

As an initial code within the documents, Collaborative Artistic Innovation describes an additional strategy for the practical realisation of artistic excellence. It illustrates the commitment to upholding and maintaining the artistic ambition by seeking reciprocal practice exchange with external choreographers in the professional field of contemporary dance. This aspect is further corroborated and enriched through the interview analysis under the initial code of the same name. In an integration of my findings, this translates into the focused code *Furthering Artistic Vision*. Together with the other initial codes of Maintaining Artistic Integrity and Uncompromising Artistic Approach, this focused code describes how the principle of artistic excellence is practically implemented, maintained, and upheld.

The focused code *Transformative Potential of Artistic Excellence* emerged only from the interview data. I attribute this to the nature of the documents as flexible guidelines of practice, thus failing to capture insights into underlying held beliefs. My data analysis illustrates an evident belief in both the intrinsic value and the transformative potential of artistic excellence, promoting processes of personal learning and growth. This steadfast belief is upheld by the Artistic Director of Dance United Yorkshire, Helen Linsell: “what Dance United has taught me, is to BELIEVE in creating something that is really so excellent and so amazing and it’s by doing that that’s where that life transformation can happen” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 5). Due to its transformative potential, this focused code indicates a potential link between artistic standards and the core concept of ‘*Transforming Lives Through Dance*’.

Defining artistic excellence and detailing its practical implementation, the integrated core concept of ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’ aims to harness the transformational potential of a continuously furthered and innovated artistic practice, making participants shine in the best possible light by providing a comprehensive professional framework.

### 1.3 Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential

As supported by the interview data, the core concept of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* is characterised by a profound and unwavering belief in the inherent potential of each participant. Emphasising an active commitment to nurturing potentiality, it recognises the transformative effect this belief has on individuals, especially those facing challenging life circumstances. Although this core concept constitutes a crucial dimension of this value-based approach, it is not explicitly referred to in the written Methodology. As stated above, this omission is dedicated to the documents' focus on outlining "key features and principles" (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1), rather than articulating its underlying belief. However, on closer examination, the written formalisation is permeated by an implicit commitment to the inherent potential of each and every participant. In an integrative analysis, I highlight these aspects and unite them with the interview findings to provide an integrated understanding of this crucial core concept.

The belief in participants' inherent potential is intricately woven into several methodological principles identified in the document analysis. *'Working to Highest Artistic Standards'* assumes that participants are fundamentally capable "to master the piece at high quality, work to the highest artistic standards, perform with professional production values and look excellent on stage" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). Within this, *'Making Them Shine'* serves as both a practical mechanism and a powerful affirmation of this core belief, as it demonstrates a confidence in participants' ability to surpass self-imposed limitations, exceed expectations, and showcase their inherent capabilities. Similarly, the core concept of *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*, through its commitment to *Fostering Learning and Growth*, invests in the conviction that participants "are capable" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3) and encourages the "realisation they can do" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5). Emphasising that participants are fundamentally able to learn, improve, and overcome challenges, this aligns with the basic assump-

tion of their potential for growth. This belief in the inherent capacity for personal development is also reflected in *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, as it assumes that all participants are equally able to engage, succeed, and even excel in this endeavour, regardless of their background, biographical experience, or physical abilities. Furthermore, both *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'* and *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* implicitly consider practical mechanisms to enable participants to recognise and harness their inherent potential. While the teaching principles “ensure progression, realise potential and quality” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United 2014, p. 7), the choreographic learning content guarantees “each person is pushed to their potential” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7). This integrative analysis not only confirms the pervasive nature of this core concept within the written Methodology but also suggests tentative relationships to other core concepts.

The interview data explicitly underscores a profound conviction in the innate potential of each participant. Defined as a value-based approach rooted in the shared ethos of the organisation, this belief is fundamental to the Methodology. Interviewees consistently express a resource-oriented perspective, viewing participants as individuals with untapped potential rather than victims of unfortunate circumstances. Coggins proposes this as the underpinning motif of the work when he states:

No matter how difficult your life is, what trouble you have been in and the extent to which you have been written off by society, we believe that you have potential that you have not been able to yield, certainly to other people and most definitely to yourself (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 10).

As the interview data confirms, this belief is not merely ideological but is practically implemented through continual efforts to nurture potential, a refusal to compromise on standards, and treating participants with unwavering respect and continuous encouragement. This commitment to potentiality is noted to have a transformative impact on

participants, who gradually internalise a newfound sense of self-belief and confidence in their capabilities.

In its integration, the core concept of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* is both an implicit underpinning in the documents and an explicit methodological principle in the interviews. While the documents indicate an inclusive belief in everyone's capacity to learn, grow, and excel beyond expectations through accomplishing the highest artistic standards, the interview data confirms the unshakable belief that "ANY individual has potential" (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). This is not merely an idealistic ethos but shapes the practical implementation of the work in an active effort to harness the transformative potential of upholding the belief in each and everyone's extraordinary potential.

## 1.4 Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential

The methodological core concept *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential* constitutes a crucial characteristic defining the specific learning environment envisaged by the approach. Through both document and interview analysis, it is described as a dichotomy of establishing a sense of safety through structural and relational mechanisms, balanced with providing a challenging space of potentiality. While this balance between safety and challenge remains implicit within the documents indicated by two complementary focused codes, the interview analysis explicitly corroborates this through supporting data within the initial code of Balancing Safety and Challenge. In the integration of findings from both datasets, I first address the integrated understanding of safety before outlining the factors that encompass the challenges essential for fostering growth.

The creation of a sense of safety in the learning space is described through *Containing and Holding* and *Attuning, Caring and Nurturing*, with the latter only emerging as an enriching dimension within the interview analysis. Together, these dimensions illustrate a comprehensive understanding of sense safety through structural and relational ele-

ments. The data not only reveals a deliberate consideration of this methodological principle but also describes its practical implementation.

Derived from the merged initial codes from both documents and interviews, *Containing and Holding* elicits the significance of consistent structures through clear expectations, boundaries, and discipline. In its implementation, this ranges from the practical aspects of the rehearsal space—reducing distractions and interruptions—to maintaining consistency in session structure and transparent communication of behavioural expectations. Fostering a sense of stability, reliability, and predictability, participants are appropriately supported to engage fully in the learning process without fear of uncertainty. Closely related, reliability and commitment through a steadfast focus on the collective goal promotes a sense of trust in a consistent and predictable learning journey. These aspects are complemented by structural considerations around team-teaching and the multidisciplinary team. The comprehensive staff support ensures that participants receive the appropriate personalised attention to address individual needs and challenges. These structural elements work synergistically to create an environment where participants feel secure and supported to explore their potential.

Established through the interview analysis, *Attuning, Caring and Nurturing* describes the relational dimension of creating a sense of safety crucial for fostering a positive and supportive environment. This is characterised by personalised care, relational processes of trust-building, and effective communication, prioritising participants' individuality and potential while maintaining a supportive environment with a high staff-to-participant ratio and minimal institutional hierarchy.

In a dichotomic balance, the Methodology emphasises the creation of a space for realising potential through the focused codes *Fostering Growth and Learning* and *Transcending Realms of Life Experiences*. While the first is identified within both datasets, the latter only emerges through the interview analysis. However, the document analysis implicitly indicates this additional dimension through a number of initial codes within *Fostering Growth and Learning*. Reallocated into the latter focused code, this results in the following integration of findings.

Within the focused code of *Fostering Growth and Learning*, both the document and interview analysis reveal an emphasis on profes-

sionalism and achievement as vital factors for personal development. Within a professional work environment, participants progress towards the performance with continuous experiences of achievement and are empowered to gradually become more confident to take ownership of their learning process. The interview data furthermore enriches this focused code by providing a more nuanced understanding of how achievement is fostered through consistent progression in a considered balance between challenge and skill. This is further complemented by setting and maintaining high expectations within an immersive and intensive learning environment, which drives participants to exceed perceived limitations, promoting resilience, a positive mindset, and effective engagement for continuous progression.

The focused code *Transcending Realms of Life Experiences* emerges solely from the interview analysis but is integrated with initial codes from the document analysis relating to taking learners out of their comfort zones, exposing them to new experiences, and allocating a new social role as a dancer. As an integrated focused code, *Transcending Realms of Life Experiences* serves as a vital factor in realising potential by actively cultivating a learning environment where participants expand their life experiences through an intentional exposure to novel experiences beyond their comfort zones and through self-discovery in a space of potentiality, enabling them to envision and reshape an embodied sense of self in the unfamiliar social role of a dancer in a dance company.

In summary, the integrated methodological core concept of ***Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*** describes the careful and deliberate dichotomy between structural and relational safety, on the one hand, and personal development and the expansion of participants' realms of experience, on the other hand. Their balanced synthesis creates the conditions through which participants experience personal growth and transformative change.

## 1.5 Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre

Confirmed by both datasets, the core concept of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre* emerges as a vital methodological characteristic of the specific learning environment framed by this approach. As such, it is defined by its focused codes *Inclusive Terms of Participation*, *Employing a Person-Centric Approach* and *Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs* of untrained, marginalised, and vulnerable populations. Although all three aspects emerged through the document analysis, the first two focused codes remained unsaturated as initial codes. The integration of findings provides a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of strategies employed to realise this core concept—namely, fostering inclusive participation with a value-based commitment to equal opportunities, substantiating and practically enacting the person-centric approach, and attending to participants' specific needs to ensure accessible learning.

The focused code *Inclusive Terms of Participation* is identified in both the documents and the interviews. While the document analysis evidences inclusive access—such as voluntary participation and the absence of a selection process—the interview analysis substantiates equitable access by recognising differences in individual circumstances and actively creating opportunities for participation. Within this broadened understanding of the focused code, contemporary dance is shown to hold specific characteristics as a particularly inclusive form of dance. Furthermore, as the interview data reveals, the inclusive nature of participation is founded on a value-based commitment to equal opportunities, defining art as a universal practice accessible to everyone regardless of their socio-economic background, their behavioural presentations, or personal histories.

Yielded from both datasets, the focused code *Employing a Person-Centric Approach* places the individual at the centre of the work, welcoming them into projects as human beings in the here and now. To practically realise this proposition, the Methodology in its written form prescribes staff to actively avoid knowing participants' backgrounds and histories. The interview analysis corroborates this and

further broadens this understanding by emphasising the opportunity for a fresh start in the novel social role of a dancer. Underlying this principle is a focus on individual recognition—as identified in the document data—and the notion that every single person in the space is of value—as identified in the interview data.

The focused code *Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs* aligns the teaching process and the learning content to the specific needs of untrained dancers with experiences of marginalisation. Deliberately considering their specific vulnerabilities furthermore contributes to the inclusive learning environment by ensuring universal access for a heterogeneous group. Although only identified in the documents, the focused code's considerations on flexibility and an attuned response to the group emerge in the interviews as a distinct aspect of the safe learning environment. These methodological principles thus link the inclusive dimension with the relational dimension of establishing a sense of safety. This indicated connection is further elaborated upon within the context of my theoretical model (see VI.2.4).

In summary, the analysis of both documents and interviews confirms the methodological core concept of ***Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre***. It encompasses strategies that ensure inclusive participation, make high-quality art accessible to all, adopt a person-centric approach that recognises participants as individuals with inherent potential, and tailor the learning process to the specific needs of marginalised populations. In its integrated form, this core concept ensures that every participant is welcomed and treated with respect and dignity in a universally accessible learning space that responds sensitively to the complex and multifaceted needs of those at the centre of the work.

## 1.6 Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company

The core concept of ***Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*** describes the social dimension of the learning environment created within this specific approach. The analysis of both datasets emphasises

the social structure of the dance company as a vital mechanism for creating a community, establishing a sense of meaningful and purposeful belonging for each and every participant. In an integration of my findings, the focused code *Working as a Dance Company* from the documents, together with the focused codes *Fostering Collaborative Processes* and *Fostering Social Connections* from the interviews, merges into a comprehensive understanding of how the communal space of the dance company is guided by the Methodology.

Providing an insight into working mechanisms, *Working as a Dance Company* illustrates how social cohesion is achieved through embodied collaborative experiences, collective artistic achievement, and the promotion of trust and equality amongst participants. Enriching these insights, *Fostering Collaborative Processes* contributes a more nuanced emphasis on individual responsibility, teamwork exercised by the group, as well as modelled by the staff team, and the performance as a shared driving goal. These collaborative working processes as a community of dancers are contextualised in *Fostering Social Connections*. Specifying the social context in which these relationships are formed and fostered, this is marked by a common ground, transcending individual backgrounds through the dance company as a shared identity. This deliberate shift from individual labels to collective identification facilitates unique connections among participants and provides the foundation for a positive, supportive, and productive community. As a shared social space, the dance company thus emphasises commonality by offering a sense of communal belonging, while facilitating an embodied dialogue across personal and individual differences.

The integration of the above focused codes elucidates the methodological underpinnings which guide the intricate relational and interpersonal dynamics within the communal space of the dance company. As an integrated core concept, ***Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*** fosters collaborative processes and social connections through the embodied experience of working as a dance company. It underscores the synergy between an individual sense of agency—fostered through mutual accountability—and an emphasis on group cohesion—united by a collective artistic endeavour and grounded in a shared identity. Reshaping participants' social experiences of margin-

alisation and exclusion, the dance company fosters belonging within a shared community, instils interpersonal skills, and cultivates a reimagined sense of self as part of a purposeful and united group, thereby highlighting the transformative potential of collective engagement in a shared artistic pursuit.

## 1.7 Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’

As the methodological core concept *Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’* emerges solely through the document data analysis, the following integration of findings focuses on a unified outline, particularly emphasising the interrelationships of the seven principles aimed at maximising the potential for success in participants’ learning experiences. Individually, each principle contributes to facilitating an effective learning process. Together, they form a cohesive framework of guiding teaching principles.

Emphasising an effective balance between structure and responsiveness, *Thorough Planning and Preparation* serves as the bedrock foundation for effective teaching through meticulous organisation ahead of delivery and flexible adaptations to participants’ evolving needs throughout projects. As a pivotal principle, it is related to all other principles in effecting their successful implementation. In relation to *Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication*, it “ensures good communication from all within the team” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8) by carefully considering all aspects of the teaching process and providing a roadmap for conveying information to participants. In turn, the communicative principle realises the effective implementation of those plans by imparting information in a way that is accessible, transparent, and encouraging. As “Dance sessions are planned and tightly structured to ensure learners/participants are clear of objectives and achieving at all time” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3), it serves as the foundation for both *Setting Clear Objectives* and *Achievability*. By identifying overarching goals and breaking them down into manageable increments of learning, the planning process accommodates sufficient time for their achievement, thereby maintaining the *Achievability* of all learning objectives. Through anticipating the diverse

needs of participants in the planning process, this principle further contributes to the successful realisation of *Accessibility* and *Differentiation*. Accommodating the need for *Variation*, the project preparation incorporates a range of activities, pacing, and structures to keep participants engaged and motivated. In turn, the varied and diverse range of learning experiences allow for the responsive, flexible adjustment of the planning framework.

The principle of *Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication* plays a crucial role in fostering trust, respect, and motivation among participants by promoting clarity, transparency, and positivity throughout the learning experience. It is not only founded on the meticulous planning process but also facilitates the effective communication of the goals articulated by the principle of *Setting Clear Objectives*, as referenced specifically within the context of daily check-ins with the group (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2). The inclusive nature of this teaching principle—realised by making everyone feel seen and appreciated in their achievement—contributes to *Differentiation* by providing individualised feedback, support, and guidance (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4).

Concerned with articulating both the overarching goals and breaking them down into manageable and achievable milestones, the principle of *Setting Clear Objectives* is not only deliberately considered as part of the *Thorough Planning and Preparation* process and effectively conveyed to participants through *Clear, Transparent and Positive Communication*, but also closely links to *Achievability* by providing participants with a clear and realistic understanding of the goals to be accomplished. Through breaking learning down and allowing enough time for objectives to be achieved, participants are enabled to make consistent progress, thus experiencing achievement throughout their learning journey. Progression is transparently charted as “you can visually see what you have achieved” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2), linking this principle with *Accessibility*. As objectives always consider a heterogeneous group, the inclusive dimension of goal setting is interrelated with *Differentiation* by setting “individual challenges” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United 2013, p. 2), while ensuring that vital choreographic milestones are “definite to achieve for all” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 12).

*Achievability*, with a focus on tailoring learning experiences so they are accessible as well as challenging for all participants, is factored into the process of *Thorough Planning and Preparation*. Considering pacing the learning process and segmenting content into manageable steps, it closely interrelates with *Setting Clear Objectives*. Additionally, this principle employs an inclusive aspect by ensuring “that everyone achieves it” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3), thereby linking it to *Differentiation* in accommodating a diverse group. The principle of *Variation* informs the strategic implementation of repetition as a mechanism of *Achievability* through a varied learning focus “on different aspects for each repetition” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2). This ensures that participants have diverse learning experiences, while reinforcing their mastery of the choreographic material.

The teaching principle of *Accessibility* incorporates multiple pathways for participants to understand, retain, and monitor their learning process. These various access points to learning are deliberately embedded into the *Thorough Planning and Preparation* process. *Setting Clear Objectives* allows for the transparent and accessible tracking of the learning progress participants accomplish. As this principle caters to diverse learning styles, it promotes inclusivity and thus contributes to *Differentiation* through recognising individual differences in accessing learning.

With the intention to cater for diverse needs in abilities, confidence levels, and learning preferences of a heterogeneous group, *Differentiation* offers universally accessible as well as more technically demanding material. Ultimately, this principle pushes each participant to reach their full potential while maintaining fairness and respect. As outlined above, this inclusive teaching dimension is intricately linked to all other methodological principles as it relies on these for its practical realisation but also reciprocally informs all other aspects, ensuring overall inclusivity of the teaching principles employed.

*Variation* involves offering a diverse range of learning experiences to sustain interest, engagement, and creative achievement. By incorporating dynamic variability in pace, structure, and activities, this principle ensures that participants remain stimulated and motivated throughout the learning process. The multitude of access points to learning realised

in this principle closely interlinks it with *Differentiation*. Ultimately, the deliberately employed rich variety of learning elements “gives young people a good quality learning experience and allows them to achieve at all times” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 3).

The above integration of the core concept *Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’* demonstrates the complex and dynamic interplay between the seven identified guiding principles. Taken together, these principles form a comprehensive approach to ‘good teaching,’ promoting not only skill development in dance and choreography but also engagement, enjoyment, and artistic achievement for all participants. ‘Good Teaching’ in the understanding of the Dance United Methodology is thus defined as a tightly planned and meticulously prepared approach, which deliberately utilises communicative strategies to effect engagement and positive rapport, while ensuring consistent progression and achievement through setting specific and measurable goals embedded in the achievable, accessible, differentiated, and varied delivery of teaching tailored to the needs of a heterogeneous group with marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds. As a whole, it constitutes a cohesive framework of effective teaching principles, aimed at maximising the potential of participants to succeed in an accomplished performance.

## 1.8 Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content

Defining the learning content prescribed by the Methodology, insights into *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* are drawn from both datasets and result in the two focused codes: *Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills* and *Working with a Tailored Choreography*. While the document analysis refers to both dimensions, the interview analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of the rationale underlying the specific choreographic approach employed. In an analytical integration of the two defining components, this methodological core concept describes the nuanced and detailed considerations around the practical implementation of specific, relevant, and tailored learning content.

Although the focused code *Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills* emerges only in the document analysis, the yielded insights nevertheless provide sufficient evidence that fundamental dance and performance skills are considered a vital aspect within the learning content of this approach. Outlining deliberate considerations around teaching and practising fundamental skills, such as body awareness, basic dance techniques, and performance quality, the Methodology ensures that participants are equipped with the necessary foundation for an effective and accomplished execution of the choreography. While the interview data does not evidence a distinct focused code, several references emphasise the significance of focus, stillness, and body awareness. As Crane illustrates within the context of the transformative impact on participants' embodied confidence: "When they went out on the stage, they were not just doing movement, they have been trained to find the core, to find the focus, to find the stillness" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 7).

Identified in both the documents and the interviews, the focused code *Working with a Tailored Choreography* illustrates the Methodology's choreographic approach using "pre-made, mapped out and trialled" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2) repertoire. Within the document data, this focused code describes a methodological emphasis on achievability, differentiation, and variation of the choreographic content. It reflects a nuanced understanding of the specific needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations, particularly in a sensitive balance between taught and creative material in the repertoire. Corroborated and enriched through the interview analysis, client-centred considerations—such as socio-emotional and psycho-emotional barriers to engagement—emerge as the underlying rationale for the choreographic approach. The pre-set choreographic structure is designed to provide both access and fundamental skills, as Coggins explains: "First of all you need people to have tools that they can deploy [...] in those initial stages where the barriers that we are trying to get across are so fundamental" (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 7). In addition to overcoming those barriers, this choreographic approach reflects a deliberate pursuit of artistic excellence that is aligned with professional dance practices. As Linsell states: "It's about

working towards something that looks professional and feels professional for EVERYBODY involved” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 7). Distinct from process-orientated and participatory community dance practice, this way of working requires a high level of commitment from artists who must adhere to its perceived unconventional nature.

In an integration of the insights from both documents and interviews, the core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* equips participants with the relevant fundamental dance and performance skills for an accomplished performance of a tailored pre-made and structured piece of choreography, aimed at achieving inclusivity, overcoming barriers to engagement, and realising high artistic standards for non-trained dancers from marginalised and vulnerable populations. Prioritising client-centred considerations, the comprehensive methodological learning content fosters achievement, promotes positive learning experiences, and balances artistic excellence with participant empowerment. Its unconventional nature within the community dance sector demands a significant commitment from artists who align with its innovative Methodology.

## 1.9 Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'

The core concept *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'* describes the vital role of staff in the practical realisation of the Methodology. While this analytical category is identified only in the interviews, its relevance is indicated in the defining characteristic of the approach as a flexible guide (see V.1.2). Described as a framework of “key features and principles” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1), the written formalisation evidently depends on skilled practitioners for its effective implementation, with the Pro-Active Strategies document explicitly stressing this in the introductory paragraphs (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). As the documents present no further explicit specifications for the reasons illustrated above, my integration of this core concept examines implicit indications derived from the written Methodology, merging them with findings from the interview analysis

to develop a comprehensive understanding of the pivotal role of artists in the implementation of the approach.

The documents contain no implicit references to the recruitment process outlined by the focused code *Recruiting Suitable Staff* or to the intrinsic motivation and deep professional dedication described by the focused code *Following a Vocational Calling*. However, they do provide implicit information on the focused code *Specifications of Suitable Staff*, most prominently in the introductory paragraphs of the Pro-Active Strategies document. Described as “dance artists of calibre able to take on the challenges and work to the highest artistic standards” with “passion, personalities and unyielding commitment to their art form” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1), they are exceptional professionals in their field with a resilient, determined, and ambitious commitment to realising the artistic ambition of the approach. In relation to other core concepts of the Methodology, the document analysis implicitly indicates the following attributes, skills, competencies, and qualities of suitable artists.

The comprehensive implementation of ‘**Working to Highest Artistic Standards**’ relies on *Collaborative Artistic Innovation*, requiring artists to cooperate successfully in developing new repertoire towards the commonly shared goal of “charting new territory” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). This collaborative capacity is further underscored in *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*, where artists “always team-teach” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2) and present with a “united staff front” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 4) in a collective effort to provide comprehensive support for participants. As “staff are in complete control” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 4) of the process, this core concept additionally emphasises leadership skills as a key competency in providing a contained and held learning environment. Both teamwork and leadership skills are also indicated in the core concept of *Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’*. Throughout the *Thorough Planning and Preparation* process, artists are expected to “give and receive from colleagues” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8), requiring a capacity for respectful and productive collegial exchange. Exercising their leadership skills, artists demonstrate *Clear, Transpar-*

*ent, and Positive Communication* through a “clear authoritative voice” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2).

While the above competencies are corroborated through the interview analysis, the documents additionally emphasise communication as a distinct principle of teaching practice. Staff must possess strong communication skills to implement “good communication from all within the team” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8). This insight, although not explicitly coded in the interviews, suggests an additional dimension of *Specifications of Suitable Staff*. The indications drawn from the documents thus not only confirm but also expand the findings from the interviews. Additionally highlighting critical links between required skills of suitable artists and methodological core concepts, these insights serve as a foundation for the subsequent development of my theoretical model.

Alongside these essential skills in teamwork, leadership and communication, the interview analysis additionally emphasises the personal aptitudes for compassion, passion, commitment, and authenticity. These specifications are embedded in the required artistic competencies and pedagogical expertise necessary not only to work in alignment with the Methodology but moreover to successfully engage marginalised populations. Driven by a deep, intrinsic motivation towards making a positive difference through an inherent passion for dance, artists follow a vocational calling in engaging with this work. Although there is no formal role description or person specification, the above analysis emphasises the highly specialised nature of this work and the complexities involved in recruiting suitable staff who can implement the Methodology successfully. In the words of Blair Davies, “you are looking for quite a rare person” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 11).

In its integration, *Active Implementation by Artists ‘of Calibre’* describes the vital role of suitable staff who are motivated by a vocational passion for the arts and social concern in the practical realisation of the Methodology. Providing a more comprehensive overview of the required skill set, the implicit indications from the documents also suggest tentative relationships to other core concepts as a foundation for the subsequent theoretical analysis.

## 2 Developing a Theoretical Model of the Dance United Methodology

Building on this integrated understanding of each methodological core concept, the subsequent theoretical coding process—guided by Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (see II.2.4)—elevates my findings to a higher level of abstraction and establishes interrelationships within a theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology.

Within the theoretical model I evolve through my analysis, *‘Transforming Lives through Dance’* constitutes the aim of the approach. Encapsulating the overarching purpose, this methodological core concept describes the envisaged personal and collective impact by harnessing the transformative potential of contemporary dance and performance. Identified as the key objective in the realisation of this aim, the core concept *‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’* situates artistic excellence as a catalyst for transformative processes at the heart of the work. *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential* constitutes the underlying guiding value of this specific way of working. It frames the approach as a whole, infusing and permeating every other aspect of its implementation. In an effort of further analytical abstraction, I summarise the core concepts *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*, *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, and *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*, as subcategories under the overarching theoretical category *Holistic Learning Environment*. As a “detailed plan for achieving success” (Cambridge University Press, 2024b), it constitutes the strategy employed to realise the objective and, ultimately, the aim, describing the comprehensive specificities of the learning space aligned towards the accomplishment of the desired outcomes. Summarising the core concepts *Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’*, *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*, and *Active Implementation by Artists ‘of Calibre’*, as subcategories under the theoretical category *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* presents another vital development in my theoretical analysis. Identified as the method, it describes the specific practical measures implemented to operationalise the broader strategy effectively.

My theoretical model illustrates the dynamic interplay between the theoretical categories of the core concepts. As the pivotal core cate-

gory, the aim of *‘Transforming Lives through Dance’* is directly realised by the objective of *‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’*, while the strategy of *Holistic Learning Environment* indirectly supports its realisation through practical implementation. The objective is the driving force of the strategy, which in turn realises the artistic ambition of the approach. As the practical measures operationalising the strategy, the method of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* indirectly contributes to its realisation. I position the underlying guiding value of *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential* into reciprocal inter-relationships with all other theoretical categories. As a facilitator of both the aim and the objective, their realisation validates and reinforces this value-based belief. While the guiding value informs and guides both the strategy and the method, their practical implementation realises the underlying belief in action. The development of my theoretical model concludes by orienting the strategy towards the objective and aim while aligning the method towards its direct realisation. Figure 5 illustrates my theoretical model as a whole.

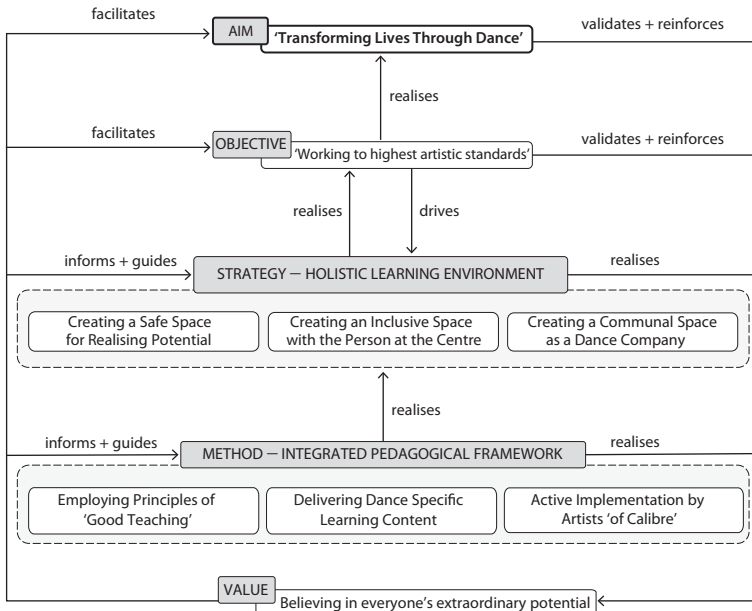


Figure 5: Theoretical Model of Core Concepts

In the following, I discuss my theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology in detail, outlining the position of each analytical category within this intricate and dynamic network of the methodological core concepts.

## 2.1 The Aim of ‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’

As the aim of the Methodology, *‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’*, serves as the guiding core concept for all efforts within the approach and is thus identified as the core category according to the Grounded Theory Method (Urquhart, 2023, p. 26). As demonstrated by the company’s evaluation endeavours (see IV.2), this primary purpose of effecting transformative outcomes is not merely an abstract, idealistic ambition. Its practical realisation is evidenced by the consistent positive outcomes for participants over the years, reinforcing my analysis of transformation as the primary purpose of the work. To further substantiate this, the following analytical considerations outline the dynamic relationships between *‘Transforming Lives through Dance’* as the core category and the other core concepts in their hierarchical alignment with its realisation.

*‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’*, which defines the artistic ambition of the approach, serves as the primary means of realising the aim, positioning it as the objective. The data illustrates a fundamental belief in the inherent potential of artistic excellence as a catalyst for transformative processes. Upholding the intrinsic value of the arts in this regard, “it has to sing and dance at its absolute zenith to have those impacts” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, pp. 2-3), as Crane emphasises the significance of artistic excellence in effecting personal development. The objective not only attributes an intrinsic transformative potential but also relies on the aspirational expectation it places on participants. As Linsell observes, presenting participants with the challenge of achieving such excellence within a short, intensive timeframe is pivotal, as “that expectation on somebody can transform their life” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 5).

As the analysis of both datasets evidences, highest artistic quality is realised when every participant gives their absolute best on stage, fully realising their potential (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 5). The focused code '*Making them Shine*' encapsulates this specific understanding of artistic standards as a full realisation of everyone's individual ability in their performance. Linsell highlights this transformative impact, stating, "in that recognition, that moment of achievement, that moment of being seen, of really GETTING to that place and achieving that goal" (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 6), lies the transformative potential, impacting personal processes of growth, such as embodied confidence, psychosocial changes, empowerment, and a changed sense of self. As most participants hold negative self-perceptions and suffer from low self-esteem, and lack of confidence, affirming them in their abilities and aiding them to fully realise their potential through artistic excellence serves as a powerful catalyst for personal change.

The relationship between the aim and the objective is further supported by the *Comprehensive Professional Framework*, which plays a critical role in achieving artistic excellence. Within this focused code, the performance-led process and professional production values emerge as key contributors to transformative experiences. Relevant data within the aim emphasises the performance itself as a pivotal moment of change: a moment of being witnessed in the embodied presentation of a changed sense of self. As Coggins emphasises: "It really was quite transformative particularly of people's attitudes to themselves and the attitudes of others to them" (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 5). Fully harnessing its transformative impact, the performance needs to be surrounded by professional production values, not only to further the overall artistic standards but also to emphasise participants' sense of confidence. As Byrne states: "when you perform in something that is AMAZING, then you FEEL amazing" (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 4). An appropriate performance space, designed costumes, and tailored lighting serve as vital components to elevate participants' confidence and reinforce their sense of accomplishment. By way of example, Coggins describes getting into costume as an almost magical instance of transformative realisation in participants, stating, "you could feel they weren't quite in that beyond place that they were able to get to but when

they put their costume on—and we shall go to the ball” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9). The methodological frame of working towards performances with high production values as part of realising artistic standards is thus a vital contributing factor of the objective in realising the overall aim.

My analysis thus evidences how *‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’* is positioned as an objective in relation to the overall aim of *‘Transforming Lives through Dance’*, leveraging the intrinsic transformative value of artistic excellence, while instilling participants with aspirational expectations about their capabilities. Working towards performances that are surrounded by professional production values, participants are not only provided with an embodied and tangible experience of their extraordinary potential but are also being witnessed in its realisation. As Davies states, this instils a profound feeling of limitless possibility, with the realisation of “my god, if I can do this, I can do anything” (Interview with Davies, November 2021, p. 2).

Regarding the creation of a conducive space for transformative processes to occur, the theoretical category *Holistic Learning Environment* is implemented as an indirect practical strategy towards the realisation of the aim. Encompassing the subcategories *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*, *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*, and *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*, these core concepts of the Methodology safely frame a space of potentiality, offering each and every participant the opportunity to explore alternative, often more positive social roles and relationships within a meaningful community based on a shared identity.

As the integrated core concept of *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential* illustrates, deliberately exposing participants to new experiences beyond their comfort zone within a supportive environment creates a transformative space where participants are invited to explore a different understanding of themselves and their perception of the world around them. The balance between comprehensive structural and relational support with deliberate efforts to facilitate the realisation of potential creates “an environment where they were allowed to change” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 10). Within this supportive yet demanding learning environment, participants are encouraged to

“dream the dream and be someone, almost the person that you want to be, not the person that you are” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, pp. 4-5). This subcategory of the strategy emphasises approaching participants with high expectations that extend beyond their realms of life experiences, thereby promoting processes of growth and learning and fostering confidence beyond perceived personal limitations, particularly among marginalised and vulnerable populations. Crane articulates this mechanism when she states: “The kindest thing you can do to somebody, even when they are in a very vulnerable position, is to expect something of them and to put some aspiration in their way, extend their horizons. I mean it’s a model of good education mainly” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 3).

Another essential aspect is the use of artistic themes that emphasise universal human experiences, abstract concepts, or imaginative realms, rather than directly addressing participants’ personal struggles. Since the “theme of the dance is not issue-based” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 2), the artistic engagement deliberately shifts away from individual challenges and societal issues, allowing participants to explore new ideas, perspectives, and qualities. As Coggins explains: “any of those qualities that transcend us [...] out of our darker selves [...] I think that’s an important dimension of the work” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 11). This shift enables participants, often coming from challenging environments, to explore new ways of being.

In contrast to external settings that may require defensive or aggressive personas for survival, the Methodology provides a safely held space for authentic self-expression. Johnson, from the London Academy team, notes this as a unique quality of the work with transformative potential when he states:

[...] the opportunity to be in a space where they could be the better version of themselves [...] some of the environments that they were in required that they were to be a particular kind of person [...] defensive or angry or violent and that is what was required for their survival. But I think [...] in our space, they could be whoever they chose to be (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, pp. 1-2).

The safe yet demanding dimension of the specific learning environment allows participants to safely embody a more positive sense of self beyond the defensive or aggressive behaviours required for survival in their usual social landscapes.

In addition, it broadens their perspectives of the world. Throughout the process, they are encouraged to see previously unimagined possibilities, envisioning a world of unlimited potential. Referring to the impact of the embodied dance experience, Maldoom describes this transformative process of breaking free from constrained perspectives as follows: “all these things that kind of suddenly popping out of their cells and suddenly the world becomes another place, full of possibilities, that you haven’t imagined in your little cage” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 9).

The person-centric approach employed within *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre* further contributes to the transformative potential of the holistic learning environment. By fostering each and every participant’s individual ability and skill in the novel role of a dancer in a dance company provides “every individual the greatest opportunity to present their best self” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9). The deliberate allocation of a novel social role proves particularly impactful for participants who have possibly experienced negative social labels adversely affecting their sense of self. By freeing participants from these past identities, this approach offers the freedom to explore their sense of self anew, revealing undiscovered aspects. Broughton notes this at play within the context of working with women in custodial settings: “What I think really helped is not knowing the women, not knowing their story, not knowing their backgrounds [...] that was one of the most liberating points for them” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 9). Bynoe describes this clean slate principle as a vital contributor in allowing participants to become the person they aspire to be:

There was no baggage encouraged or passed, it was all in the moment, here and now and you are allowed whoever you want to be. And I think, that that facilitated young people [...] to be the THEM, that they wanted to be, or to work towards being the person they wanted to be without conflict and struggle (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 10).

In the inclusive learning environment, participants are all valued equally, regardless of their personal histories and backgrounds. The work is focused in the moment on the task at hand: to collectively work as a company of dancers towards a performance. This creates a conducive space for transformative personal development, enabling participants to cultivate a more positive sense of self.

The transformative potential of the specific learning environment is further supported through its interpersonal dimension in *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*. The collaborative processes and social connections facilitated by working together as a dance company foster a sense of unity and belonging among participants. Specifically relevant when working with marginalised youth, positive social connections present an important learning experience often lacking in participants' past experiences. As Crane emphasises: "bearing in mind that social connection was such an issue for young people and social connection of the right kind" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 11).

The communal learning environment offers participants alternative social roles, providing a contrast to the potentially negative social identities they may hold in other contexts. Johnson, from the London Academy team, describes the contrasting experiences of social connection between the lifeworld of London youth and the team effort emphasised in working as a dance company:

If they're in gangs [...] where it's like they always have to be a leader or they always have to be the person that don't take any shit [...] I'm hoping that's what they got out of it, that it's the team effort, the team effort that [...] I'm part of. I don't always have to be the person being the aggressor or the person being at the front, I'm here, I'm making it work, we're making it work together" (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 18).

This illustrates how the social context of the dance company offers participants an opportunity to experience a sense of belonging and contribution within the group, where they are not constrained by previous social expectations.

Moreover, the communal setting fosters alternative and often more positive social behaviours. The social bonds established within the social unit of the dance company not only facilitate transformative learning processes but also provide a social experience of witnessing and appreciating personal growth in others (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 14). The dance company thus becomes not only a communal space of connection and belonging but an opportune environment for collective transformative change. The performance, as the realisation of the collective effort of the dance company, is recognised as a pivotal transformative moment of recognition and realisation of potential. Coggins emphasises this in the moment of curtain calls when “people were applauding you and shouting [...] for what you had done. Not just you individually but you together, all of us” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9).

As my theoretical analysis has illustrated, the *Holistic Learning Environment* created by the Methodology constitutes a vital practical strategy in fostering transformative learning processes and is thus an important indirect contributor towards the realisation of the aim. Within a safe yet demanding learning environment, participants experience the freedom to explore a new sense of self beyond their comfort zone, embracing more positive social roles and forming meaningful social connections as dancers in a dance company.

In relation to the aim, the underlying guiding value of *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential* provides the foundation for acknowledging inherent worth and untapped capacity for growth in each and every participant. This value recognises the transformative impact of perceiving and treating participants based on this foundational belief, particularly in catalysing changes in self-perception. Staff, unwavering in their belief in each individual’s potential, instil participants with a sense of value, purpose, and possibility, thus empowering them to strive for the realisation of their inherent capabilities. Crane underscores this relationship between the primary aim and the underlying guiding belief when she responds to the question of how personal development is effected: “I think I just wanna be giving you a simple answer, which is about belief in people’s potential” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 8).

The findings within the underlying guiding value confirm this belief as not merely an abstract ideal but a principle of practice. Realised in the deliberate commitment to actively nurture this potential in each and every participant, staff treat everyone with continual high regard. This active implementation of the guiding value acts as a catalyst for personal growth and shifts in self-perception, driving participants towards a more aspirational sense of being. Friel identifies this as one of the specific and unique qualities of the approach: “that sort of resolute determination to encourage to sort of step out from behind themselves and witness their higher self” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 1). His statement underscores that upholding this underlying belief supports participants in transcending their perceived limitations and self-doubt, moving towards a more empowered sense of self aligned with their fullest potential. As an underlying guiding value, it is thus actively aiding the realisation of the primary aim. In turn, the realisation of the Methodology’s aim reinforces and validates the underlying guiding value, confirming the held belief in everyone’s inherent potential.

Overall, the core category of *‘Transforming Lives Through Dance’* encapsulates overarching purpose and desired impact of the approach. As the aim, it is realised by the objective which harnesses the inherent transformative potential of artistic excellence, and operationalised by the strategy which actively promotes a safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal space conducive to change. In a reciprocal interrelationship, it is facilitated by the underlying guiding value—instilling confidence and self-belief by upholding and actively implementing an unwavering commitment to the inherent potential of participants—which in turn is validated and reinforced through their transformative achievements.

## 2.2 The Objective of ‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’

The core concept of *‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’* constitutes the objective within my theoretical model. As discussed above, it serves as the means by which the aim is achieved and provides actionable steps

towards its attainment. My following theoretical analysis thus focuses on outlining the relationship of the objective between the employed strategy of *Holistic Learning Environment*, the implemented method of *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*, and the underlying guiding value of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential*.

Positioned as the strategy employed to ensure the realisation of the objective, the *Holistic Learning Environment* with its three subcategories is aligned towards attaining the artistic excellence of the work and fostering the conditions necessary to achieve these standards. In a reciprocal exchange, the objective drives the process of establishing the envisaged learning environment by providing a clear purpose and rationale.

First, artistic excellence is operationalised through the core concept of *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*. In the safe yet demanding learning environment, participants are comprehensively supported, cared for, and nurtured to realise their potential beyond perceived limitations, resulting in an accomplished performance where they can shine on stage. Coggins explicitly links the objective with this aspect of the specific learning environment when he states:

We will ensure you arrive on stage and perform in a manner that would not disgrace a professional company even though you've never danced this way before [...] in order to do that, we will provide a safe and structured environment with very clear rules and expectations (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 10).

In addition to the structural safety, the multidisciplinary staff team is vital in providing the required comprehensive relational support throughout the participants' learning journey. This is particularly important for marginalised and vulnerable populations with challenging social backgrounds, as Bynoe explains:

In order to do that with a group of novice dancers from chaotic backgrounds who will give [...] challenging behaviour, have very low self-esteem [...] not strong physical skills, in prisons could be [...] recovering

from addiction. There's all sort of variables that you could deal with and so in order for a dancer to get to that process, to get to that performance end-goal, you need support (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 7).

Together, the structured environment and comprehensive relational support system are fundamental in enabling participants—especially those from marginalised backgrounds—to achieve and sustain high artistic standards.

Another contributing factor towards the realisation of the objective is the aspect of reliability and commitment towards participants to ensure they excel in their performance. This commitment to quality and making participants shine is noted by several interviewees. Herbert references this in relation to the work in custodial settings when she states: “we HAVE to succeed for those women. We HAVE to. We CAN’T allow them to go on the stage looking bad or mediocre” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 8). This sense of safety, facilitated through structure, comprehensive support, and commitment, allows participants to overcome challenges and push themselves beyond perceived limitations, ultimately contributing to the achievement of the objective.

In a reciprocal exchange, the objective drives the process of creating a structured environment where the realisation of potential is paramount. With regards to providing a sense of safety, the artistic objective of an accomplished performance creates the required focus, structure, and momentum which supports participants to overcome moments of self-doubt and hesitation. In my theoretical analysis, the clear and ambitious goal-orientation emerges as a tangible rationale for pushing and challenging participants in their learning journey. As Annable-Coop states: “driving to those high artistic standards helped you create that kind of focus [...] and keep challenging them [...] to get the best out of everybody. But not in a forceful way [...] in a gentle, nurturing way” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 11). With regards to facilitating the realisation of potential, the emphasis on artistic excellence exposes participants to a wide range of experiences beyond their lifeworld, such as contemporary dance as a novel way of moving and unfamiliar music genres used in the choreography. These experiences, rooted in the artistic objective, function as a catalyst for

development and open up new perspectives. As Maldoom explains: “I use classical music, I use a form of dance they’d never come across, I use themes they may have never have thought about. So I want them to be BOMBARDED with new images and sensations [...] it’s like getting into people and just BLASTING them open” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 4).

The above theoretical analysis thus describes a synergetic relationship between the objective and the strategic core concept of *Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential*. In simple terms, because the learning environment is safe yet demanding, participants are enabled to realise the highest artistic standards and because artistic excellence is the set ambition, participants grow beyond perceived limitations and realise their potential. Bynoe identifies this as an essence of the work when she states, “it’s creating environments where people can safely explore and develop and achieve with a kind of goal that is just incredibly high” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 15).

This reciprocity also characterises the relationship between the objective and the strategic core concept of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre*. On the one hand, the inclusive, person-centric, and needs-tailored nature of the envisaged learning environment enables a heterogeneous group of participants to achieve artistic excellence to the best of their individual abilities. On the other hand, the inclusive space is based on the underlying conviction that “great art” (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 9) should be accessible to everyone, forging an inseparable link between inclusion and artistic excellence. This intricate relationship describes a careful equilibrium between the artistic ambition and the complex needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations.

The inclusive learning environment ensures each participant is not only valued and recognised in their unique abilities but also met in their specific needs. Consistently sustained throughout, the choreographic process deliberately differentiates roles within the piece according to abilities, confidence levels, and fairness. Aligned towards the objective, everyone is enabled to shine in “a special moment; a moment in the spotlight” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 4). By carefully tailoring the choreographic process to accommodate diverse needs,

the Methodology creates an environment where everyone feels valued for their unique contribution and included in the overall performance. Broughton describes this inclusive dimension within the realisation of artistic excellence in custodial settings:

We made sure that by the end of the first week, we were agreed between the two of us as to who could take the limelight, who needed support but was ready to be a little more exposed and who needed to stay very much within the group. So we would write a list of all of our participants and we would discuss each one between us and so we could then decide who would have a solo, who would have a duet, who would be part of a trio and who would maybe JUST be at the front of a group, so that every single person had their moment to really shine (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 3).

Within this, contemporary dance constitutes a unique tool to showcase individual potential and transcend barriers of ability or background. As Coggins states: “contemporary dance has unique characteristics in this regard [...] you have people of different intrinsic capacities [...] but each individual [...] could shine” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). As these aspects illustrate, the inclusive dimension of the strategy ensures that each and every participant has an opportunity to showcase their unique potential in the realisation of artistic excellence.

Upholding the objective in relation to the inclusive moment of the learning environment is rooted in a shared commitment to making great art accessible to everyone. As Bynoe emphasises: “I think that that’s a core belief that everybody who worked for that organisation shared. That dance is dance and we are inclusive and if we are inclusive then it has to be amazing” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 12). However, maintaining this equilibrium between the artistic ambition and the inclusive dimension of the learning environment entails a careful balance that requires thoughtful consideration and flexible adaptation. Gladstone describes this as an unlikely marriage between “the highest quality of art that could be achieved in any discipline and [...] the psychological need to work with people at their most vulnerable” (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p. 8). Through the intri-

cate interrelationship between the artistic objective and the inclusive learning space created, the Methodology ensures that everyone—no matter their abilities, background, behavioural presentations, and other personal challenges—has access to arts practice to professional standards and is recognised for their unique value, worth, and contribution towards achieving the objective. By empowering individuals through contemporary dance, embracing inclusivity as a core belief, and carefully balancing participant needs with artistic excellence, the Methodology fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone has the opportunity to shine in the realisation of their individual potential.

The theoretical analysis of the relationship between the objective and the strategic core concept of *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company* illustrates another reciprocal interplay. While the communal space facilitates the collaborative efforts and social connections necessary to achieve artistic excellence, the objective drives the collective goals and aspirations of the dance company.

The objective is fundamentally embodied in the collective goal to stage an accomplished performance. In order to realise this, participants are encouraged to work together as a cohesive unit by taking care of and supporting each other, while striving for excellence both individually and collectively. With every member playing a vital role in the collective success, Coggins explains this reciprocity as follows: “TOGETHER you will work as a company, as a company of dancers. You will take care of each other, you will make each other safe, you will make yourself safe and will perform individually and together at the highest possible mark” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 10). This shared responsibility fosters a sense of belonging and encourages individuals to support each other in their artistic endeavours, thus facilitating the collaborative experiences and social connections necessary to achieve these standards as a community of dancers.

The collective aspiration serves as a great motivator for everyone involved in the dance company—staff and participants alike. As Broughton illustrates: “I think for ALL of us, you know, the participants and choreographers, [...] I think for the whole team, having that GOAL both time wise as well as standard wise was a great motivator” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 12). The artistic objective

encourages participants to fully engage in the communal learning environment created by sharing a common ground. “The GOAL itself, the performance itself, can knit a group and bring people together, because they have then something in common, something that they can work towards” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 3), as Byrne explains this collective motivation.

In its communal realisation, the artistic ambition extends beyond the frontline delivery of projects and includes the collaborative engagement with the wider arts sector to develop repertoire. Not only integral to ensuring the professional development of artists delivering this work, these collaborations are also vital in furthering the artistic vision of the approach. The methodological objective thus not only drives participants towards working together as a team but also motivates the artists practising this approach to reach out. Bynoe states this clearly by saying, “we want to collaborate with external professional choreographers because we want the artistic standard up here. And that’s for our sake as well [...] with those aspirations for ourselves as well as the young people” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 12).

The above analysis defines the intertwined relationship between the objective and the strategy. While the implementation of a safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal learning space ensures participants are provided with the best possible opportunity to achieve artistic excellence, striving to meet these standards drives a conducive environment for participants to safely realise their individual potential in an inclusive and meaningful community. Within this mutual reinforcement, artistic standards and the learning environment work in synergy to pursue the realisation of transformative learning through dance.

My theoretical analysis positions the method of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* with its respective subcategories of *Employing Principles of ‘Good Teaching’*, *Active Implementation by Artists ‘of Calibre’*, and *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* as the practical measures operationalising the objective. Each subcategory comprises specific means which contribute to the attainment of artistic excellence and support participants to excel in an accomplished performance. Similar to the interrelationship between the objective and

the strategy, this relationship is intricate and multi-layered, as the following analysis illustrates.

Within the core concept of *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'*, the respective teaching principles are strategically tailored to attain the overall objective, ensuring the achievement of artistic excellence through the consistent progression and engagement of participants. While the principles of *Thorough Planning and Preparation*, *Setting Clear Objectives*, and *Achievability* are explicitly aligned with the objective, the principles *Clear*, *Transparent and Positive Communication*, *Accessibility*, *Differentiation*, and *Variation* indirectly contribute by optimising learning outcomes for participants. As all the teaching principles are closely interrelated and intertwined (see VI.1.7), they collectively contribute to achieving the objective as a whole.

The teaching principle of *Thorough Planning and Preparation* ensures that every aspect of the project is carefully managed to maximise learning opportunities and facilitate the development of participants' dance skills and abilities. Both the dance training and the choreographic rehearsals are planned "to introduce, reinforce and master the skills needed for the choreography" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). Additionally, the planning process deliberately takes into account all aspects of the professional production values envisaged by the objective, as they are considered "important and crucial to achieving a high artistic standard" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5). *Setting Clear Objectives* provides direction, momentum, and focus, guiding participants towards specific performance-led goals aligned with the objective. Driven by the performance, it considers both interim steps and overarching goals which result in a transparent roadmap for artists and participants towards the achievement of the envisaged standards. *Achievability* not only ensures that the choreography is of a realistic length so that participants "master the piece at high quality, work to the highest artistic standards, perform with professional production values and look excellent on stage" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1) but also allows for sufficient time to practice, as the "standard that they are expected to reach in such a short time frame requires adequate rehearsal time" (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5).

While the remaining teaching principles do not directly relate to the realisation of the objective, they considerably contribute to fostering progression, engagement, and achievement as indirect factors of attaining the envisaged artistic standards. *Clear, Transparent, and Positive Communication* effects the collaboration, understanding, and achievement essential in realising the objective. Providing multiple pathways for participants to understand, retain, and track their learning process, *Accessibility* ensures all participants can successfully access the learning content, and thus facilitates their ability to meet the required artistic standards. By addressing diverse needs in abilities, confidence levels, and learning preferences, *Differentiation* pushes each participant to reach their full potential in an accomplished performance. Finally, *Variation* offers a diverse range of learning experiences to sustain interest, engagement, and creative achievement, fostering the intrinsic motivation and drive essential to the realisation of the objective.

In their entirety, the methodological teaching principles not only systematically align with but also actively support the overarching objective, with each principle—whether directly or indirectly—playing a crucial role in facilitating individual learning and collective achievement in the overall pursuit of artistic excellence.

As the core concept of *Active Implementation by Artists of Calibre* confirms, staff as a whole and the artists in particular play a vital role as an additional practical means of attaining the objective. In the words of Crane: “the artists maintained the art at the centre” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p.10).

In line with the artistic emphasis, the written Methodology clearly states, that the individuals delivering this approach are experienced professional artists, rather than qualified and trained teachers (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 1). With a deliberate focus on the objective, professionals in the artistic field are considered best equipped to uphold these standards. Herbert confirms this stance by stating: “I was a dancer and teacher and choreographer, so it’s MY standards [...] I’m not gonna lower my standards, they’ve got to come to me” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 7). The professional standards of the artists delivering this approach are thus vital in the attainment of the objective. As reiterated by Byrne, it is “massively important to sur-

round all of the work with professional people” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 6). As experts in their field, artists hold an intrinsic and authentic passion for upholding the standards of the work, with their artistic ambition actively driving the approach towards the realisation of the overall objective. Reinforcing this notion of personal aspirations for upholding artistic standards lying with the artists themselves, Annable-Coop states “there was a DESIRE from everybody on the team to just make something REALLY good” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 2). Her statement furthermore suggests that this drive towards achieving excellence is shared among the team as a whole and not just among the dance artists involved.

My analysis illustrates how the objective of ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’ is actively implemented and realised through the artists delivering this work, whose professionalism, passion, dedication, and commitment are fundamental to achieving the desired artistic outcomes. Within this context, Bynoe adds that “the most successful artists were focused on getting the group to achieve, the success and maybe the least successful artists were trying to help people and gave themselves so much that they lost themselves” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 6). Her statement underscores the risk of burnout and the significance of the artistic ambition in persevering through the challenges of the work, creating a reciprocal enrichment between the objective and the role of staff in its practical implementation.

The core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* ensures that the tailored choreographic repertoire enables participants to fully realise their potential and shine on stage, while the learning content equips them with the basic dance and performance skills required for an accomplished performance.

The choreographic approach is aligned with the artistic vision of the approach, bearing the specific needs of vulnerable and marginalised populations in mind. The document on *Choreographic Tendencies* details the specific choreographic approach employed. It is designed to meet the population’s need for a highly structured learning (*Choreographic Tendencies*, Dance United, 2014, p. 2) and is justified by the artistic objective: “to learn 15 minutes of choreography and to put a piece on stage in three or four weeks working to high artistic standards”

(Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014 p. 3). This balance is reiterated in the interview data, with Coggins specifically outlining how the structured framework allows for individual creative expression while maintaining a cohesive and impactful artistic experience:

[...] it is imposed in large part. The reason it's imposed is to provide that flexibility for individual work within that framework because if you have too many moving parts then you end up with something that people go: 'aww, aww'. We don't want that. We didn't want that. We wanted people to be BLOWN AWAY (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 7).

Thus, the choreographic approach serves as a mechanism for optimising the artistic impact of the work, both for participants and audiences. The structured framework does not restrict individual creativity but provides the necessary stability for participants—who often experience low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and little self-worth—to safely explore their creative expression without feeling exposed or self-conscious. This constitutes a vital contributing factor in an empowering learning journey, since “creative work is of huge value as this can offer other things during the process such as confidence, self-belief, decision making, self-worth in creation, realisation they can do” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 5).

By partnering with professional companies, the approach aims to create work that exceeds the expectations of both participants and audiences. This emphasis on professionalism not only elevates the quality of the output but also contributes to a sense of accomplishment, confidence, and pride among participants, as Linsell illustrates:

By creating a structured piece in partnership with a professional company who make work that's relevant today, that's been tried and tested, with moments that have allowed young people to create within a framework, you end up with something that surprises the young people, that surprises the audience, that surprises people in this sector (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 6).

Her statement not only confirms the above analysis but also suggests an intention to push boundaries and challenge expectations within community dance in the social inclusion sector. This emphasis on choreographic collaborations confirms the strategic alignment with the objective by not only fostering an impactful learning experience for participants but also ensuring artistic innovation. My theoretical analysis highlights how the specific choreographic approach of the Methodology strategically balances the artistic ambition with participant needs, employing a highly structured framework to optimise the envisaged artistic impact while fostering the personal development of participants.

Conveying basic dance and performance skills as part of the learning content ensures participants are sufficiently equipped with the required fundamental movement competencies to achieve an accomplished performance. This deliberate methodological emphasis is explicitly related to the artistic standards in the document on Planning Tendencies: “Working with beginners, need to learn the basics and prepare them for performance, fitness, posture, quality, and stamina etc and lead to massive transformation of the dancers. To achieve real quality and develop growth, mastery, execution.” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). Within this targeted preparation for the performance, a competency receiving particular attention in terms of its contribution towards realising the objective is focus and stillness. As the Pro-Active Strategies document states: “Stillness and focus are the keys to success and are incorporated in everything we teach” (Pro-Active Strategies, Dance United, 2013, p. 3). Considered essential for achieving the technical proficiency and overall accomplishment of performance, this involves a directed attention, rested concentration, and stilled attentiveness on the task at hand. Participants often lack this experience in their lives. As Coggins emphasises: “to be still is not about standing rigidly to attention, it was about another quality of stillness and so many of the people that we’ve worked with don’t know that quality. Their lives are not often conducive with opportunities for real stillness” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). Further underscoring the significance of internal focus and stillness—particularly for this population—this internal grounding forms the starting point for external expression and

facilitates depth and authenticity in performance. Crane describes this as a profound mechanism of artistic excellence:

When they went out on the stage, they were not just doing movement, they have been trained to find the core, to find the focus, to find the stillness. So that was one of the most powerful things. Before you moved to the external, you have the internal. Given that a lot of these young people have [...] that sort of sense of emptiness or failure. For somebody to walk on stage and TAKE that [...] Now you can get that out of one of those young people and you have done something extraordinary (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 7).

Connecting these insights with the focused code ‘*Making them Shine*’ as a fundamental hallmark of artistic standards, illustrates how this specific competency is a vital aspect of facilitating full commitment and dedication to participants’ creative bodily expression on stage. In addition, the written Methodology emphasises the performance quality as a vital learning content throughout training and rehearsals, further contributing to an accomplished and expressive performance: “To achieve real quality and develop growth, mastery, execution. We teach knowing the quality that we would like the group to perform with because we have found that it cannot be tagged on at the end” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). As the above analysis illustrates, the basic dance and performance skills conveyed in the learning content are vital in effecting the objective, deliberately equipping participants with the skills to succeed in a confident, expressive, and fully committed performance.

In summary, all three sub-categories of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* align towards the practical realisation of the overall objective of ‘*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*’. The teaching principles not only ensure engagement and progression but actively facilitate the performance-led process, while artists play an active role in driving the process towards the objective. The learning content not only ensures that participants are equipped with the required skills and abilities but also provides a choreographic structure suitable for this population to achieve artistic excellence.

In my theoretical model, the objective is facilitated by the underlying guiding value of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential*, while the artistic outcomes further reinforce the validity of this upheld belief. Fundamentally, the artistic ambition of the approach is founded on the underlying belief that everyone is capable of achieving the envisioned standards. Pivotal in pushing participants to achieve beyond perceived limitations, the artistic aspirations serve as a catalyst for accessing and realising this potential, instilling a sense of confidence and motivation to strive for excellence. As Crane emphasises: “if you have the will and you have the belief, say in young people and young people at risk, then you CAN achieve these things” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 3). It is not sufficient to merely expose participants to this belief in their inherent potential; providing participants with a tangible, embodied experience, the artistic objective in action constitutes the active realisation of this potential.

Specifically working with vulnerable and marginalised populations, instilling confidence in participants grounded in the pursuit of artistic excellence provides an impactful mechanism of empowerment. As Linsell emphasises: “I think, it's that BELIEF that you give to somebody who has come from a challenging background of some kind that they will achieve something they never imagined and it's all based on the EXCELLENCE of the art” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 4). Participants not only generally lack confidence in their own abilities and capacities but also often experience little positive reinforcement from their social environments. Being presented with a belief in their inherent potential constitutes a pivotal turning point in this regard and propels them towards becoming more confident. As Linsell illustrates through the example of a participant at a Dance United Yorkshire project: “she literally turned it around, performed a beautiful solo and came up to me at the end and hugged me and said thank you for believing in me when nobody else has ever believed in me before” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 13). As participants gradually progress towards the performance, they experience continuous achievements as tangible results of their efforts. This experiential learning reinforces the belief that with commitment and perseverance, they can overcome challenges and achieve their goals, further strengthening a belief in their own

potential. Broughton illustrates this by the increased intrinsic motivation of participants to achieve those artistic standards, as she states: “their kind of desire to make it a dance piece that would be viewed by any critic alongside any other piece. They wanted that as much as anything. They wanted to be seen to be [...] right up there” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 11). Interlinking the artistic ambition and the fundamental belief in people’s potential for personal development and improvement, Van Huynh summarises this intricate relationship in simple terms: “they just believed in great art, they believed in people having the greatest potential to be the best versions of themselves” (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 9). As my theoretical analysis illustrates, the underlying guiding value facilitates the practical realisation of the objective.

In summary, *‘Working to Highest Artistic Standards’* is positioned as the pivotal objective in the realisation of the overall aim of *‘Transforming Lives through Dance’*. In a reciprocal relationship with the strategy of the *Holistic Learning Environment*, it drives the strategic realisation of the specific environment, which in turn ensures the operationalisation of the objective. As practical means of its realisation, the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* utilises teaching principles and specific learning content, with both actively implemented by suitable artists to support the attainment of the envisaged artistic standards. The underlying guiding value of *Believing in Everyone’s Extraordinary Potential* not only facilitates the objective, but in its realisation, is furthermore validated and strengthened. As a methodological driving force, the objective transcends the distinction between high art and low art as a defining characteristic of the idealistic nature of the work (see V.1.4). As described in the evolution of the Dance United Methodology (see V.1.1), the artistic vision of the work is in a precarious and careful balance between the outcome of high artistic standards and the learning process of participants. In this way, the approach exemplifies the inseparable synergy of excellence in the arts and transformative social impact.

### 2.3 The Guiding Value of Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential

As a whole, the Dance United Methodology is characterised as a value-based approach founded on a shared ethos maintained by stakeholders within and around the organisation (see V.1.3). Consequently, my theoretical analysis identifies the core concept of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* as the underlying guiding value that relates to all other core concepts within this approach. As such, it extends beyond the human values of treating participants with fundamental respect and recognises their inherent worth, irrespective of their social background or personal history. By investing "into each individual as this soul with potential" (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p.8), the Methodology acknowledges everyone's individual and unique capacity for personal development and growth, revealing a deliberate commitment to actively nurturing the realisation of that potential. As the following theoretical analysis illustrates, the underlying guiding value links to all other core concepts of the Methodology, permeating all aspects of the approach.

In relation to the aim of *'Transforming Lives through Dance'*, my theoretical model identifies a reciprocal interplay between these two core concepts. Upholding the underlying guiding value contributes to the realisation of the aim as it effects and catalyses transformative changes in self-perception (see VI.2.1). As Crane describes, the underlying guiding value taps "into people's innate abilities which have been squashed by their own sense of failure or somebody else's sense of their failure" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, pp. 8-9). This allows participants to embrace and experience a new and unfamiliar perception of themselves marked by competency and self-efficacy, which gradually becomes internalised and integrated into a more positive self-concept. Instilling a sense of value, worth, and purpose in participants empowers them to strive and excel beyond self-limiting beliefs about themselves and their capacities. In turn, effecting these transformative outcomes in participants validates and thus reinforces the underlying belief in everyone's inherent potential.

The theoretical model determines a similar synergetic interrelationship between the underlying guiding value and the objective of **'Working to Highest Artistic Standards'** (see VI.2.2). As a driving force facilitating the artistic objective of the approach, its practical implementation constitutes a tangible experience of realising participants' potential in action. The unwavering commitment to participants' potentiality provides the foundation to build everyone's confidence in themselves and in the work. As Crane emphasises: "the confidence that you imbue people with when you do that is huge" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 3). As they progress towards the performance, the continuous achievements along the learning journey reinforce this belief in themselves, gradually internalised through the embodied experience of its realisation. Culminating in an accomplished performance where everyone shines, not only showcases participants' realised potential but confirms the validity of the underlying guiding value, thereby further reinforcing this belief.

In an extension of these established insights, the underlying guiding value informs the active realisation of the strategy of **Holistic Learning Environment**. In the context of **Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential**, the belief in the inherent potential of each and every participant is a vital foundation for the commitment and reliability needed to create the structural sense of safety. Additionally, it shapes the relational aspect of the safe learning space by encouraging participants to recognise and develop their positive attributes, indicating the inherent trust in the existence of latent potential. These qualities, though already present within participants, require the appropriate support and guidance to be fully realised. This involves "nurturing people to kind of see their best side. To HELP them see their best side and reveal what their better qualities were" (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 1), as Johnson states. Whereas these aspects ensure the appropriate structure and relational support, *Fostering Learning and Growth* together with *Transcending Realms of Life Experience* actively realise everyone's inherent yet unrealised potential. Maintaining and committing to high expectations demonstrates an underlying conviction that participants are capable of growth and meeting these expectations. Byrne underscores this confidence in participants' capabilities in

relation to progressively increasing challenges: “it’s important that we are ALWAYS raising the bar [...] and the bar is always a little bit higher than the participant feels that they can reach. But we know that they can reach it” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 4).

This fundamental acknowledgement of latent capacities is also evident in the practice of providing learning experiences that extend beyond participants’ familiar experiences, enabling them to discover and develop their potential. Underscoring this belief in untapped potential revealed through supported and guided exposure to novel experiences, Maldoom states: “none of us knows our potential and it’s difficult to know your potential and at my age I STILL don’t know what my potential is because there may be things I could do but no one showed me them” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 4). In an integrated understanding, while the unwavering belief in inherent potential informs the structured and supportive environment necessary for growth and development, this belief is realised in practice through providing opportunities for learning beyond participants’ current lifeworlds.

The underlying guiding value is inherently inclusive by affirming that everyone possesses not only value and worth but also extraordinary potential. Coggins explicitly emphasises this inclusive aspect by commenting on the fundamental underpinning of the approach as “the belief that any individual, no matter in what terrible or dismal circumstances, no matter in what shape, size, character or language or culture, gender, non-gender, whatever, ANY individual has potential” (Interview with Coggins, November 2022, p. 4). Upon this baseline of fundamental equality among participants, the core concept of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre* is realised.

First, this guiding and informative influence is illustrated in the *Equitable and Inclusive Terms of Participation* employed by the Methodology. As there are no auditions, each participant is considered equally capable of achieving the expectations of high artistic standards, ensuring that no one is excluded based on perceived ability. Deliberate efforts are employed to provide tailored support for participants to access the work and fully realise their inherent potential. The approach democratises access to arts, further demonstrating the relationship to the under-

lying belief that everyone has the capacity to partake in such artistic endeavours. As Van Huynh states, “they too have the capacity to reach and make great art just like ANYONE else [...] It’s not because some of these youth participants are coming from more challenging backgrounds that we should treat them lesser than” (Interview with Van Huynh, December 2021, p. 5).

Second, the person-centric approach employed reflects a practical realisation of the commitment to valuing each participant regardless of their social background or personal history. Actively avoiding any knowledge of participants’ backgrounds not only demonstrates a deliberate dedication to upholding this unwavering belief in everyone’s potential but actually is a practical necessity in its realisation, as Coggins clarifies:

You have to buy into each individual as this soul with potential and you had to start with a clean sheet. I don’t see how else you would have done it because I don’t think it’s unreasonable if you know somebody has done something, to think of them as somebody who has done something. I mean I don’t think that’s unreasonable. I think it’s naive to believe otherwise. So the easiest thing to do is to not acquaint the dance artist with that background (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 8).

To ensure that this commitment to treating everyone as equally capable to be effectively realised in practice, it is crucial to balance and tailor support to the specific needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups as a whole as well as individual circumstances. The Methodology ensures this through *Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs*, flexibly attuning to the process and adjusting the choreographic and teaching process to those needs (see VI.1.5). With this caveat in mind, the inclusive dimension of the **Holistic Learning Environment** is infused with the underlying guiding value, providing the baseline upon which it is realised while also employing practical strategies to ensure its effective implementation.

The underlying guiding value furthermore imbues the strategy of **Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company**, where everyone is considered equally “important, unique” (Choreographic Tendencies,

Dance United, 2014, p. 10). The community of the dance company is grounded in commonality rather than difference, constituted as a group of individuals with unique inherent potential. Annable-Coop emphasises that this shared sense of being valued fosters “a sense of belonging and connection in a project” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, p. 7). The underlying guiding value is crucial in creating a sense of community, providing the fundamental baseline for a common ground within the group. Strengthening the sense of community and connection, it fosters communal pride and mutual respect, reflected in participants’ interactions. As Friel recalls: “I think there was a lot of pride there as well, a lot of pride in each other” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 14). This sense of pride in each other suggests that the underlying guiding value has infused the social connections among participants, fostering a community where everyone feels appreciated and valued for their contributions. By promoting a communal learning environment where everyone is seen for their individual potential, the guiding value ensures mutual support and collective growth, enhancing individual self-worth and strengthening the connections within the group. This cohesive and supportive community is essential for achieving the collective goal of the performance and, ultimately, for the holistic development of each participant.

Integrating the above theoretical analysis of the interrelationship between the guiding value and the strategy, all three subcategories are considerably informed and guided by the value-based trust in the inherent potential of each and every participant. It motivates the structural and relational sense of safety required and drives the practical realisation of potential forward. It promotes an ethos of equality within the inclusive space and, in turn, is practically upheld by each participant starting with a clean slate. Furthermore, it facilitates a cohesive and communal space, which welcomes everyone for their unique and individual contribution to the group.

Additionally, the underlying guiding value of the Methodology shapes and informs the practical implementation of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*. It serves as the value-based foundation upon which the teaching principles are built, guides the learning content, and affects the relationship and interactions between staff and participants.

In turn, the three core concepts within this theoretical category translate the underlying guiding value into practical methods, shaping the overall learning experience of participants.

The teaching principles as defined by the core concept of *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'* are aligned towards harnessing the inherent potential of participants through consistently and deliberately ensuring engagement, progression, and achievement. Built on the foundation of this belief, the teaching principles provide a practical pathway to its realisation. As Crane describes: "it's about believing in a young person's potential. And in the studio, you would see that working its way out, because there were no concessions, no compromising in the wrong sense of the word" (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 6). Collectively, the teaching principles embody the practical support, guidance, and facilitation needed to realise the inherent capacities within participants. While the planning and preparation process ensures the overall alignment towards the realisation of potential, setting clear objectives throughout creates a defined pathway to its achievement. Differentiating and varying an accessible and achievable learning process demonstrates a deliberate effort in meeting the diverse and unique abilities within the group, reinforcing the trust that everyone is fundamentally capable.

The core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* is tailored to ensure everyone is equipped with the right skills for an accomplished stage performance, while employing a choreographic approach aligned towards achieving inclusivity and overcoming barriers to engagement for vulnerable populations. Similar to the teaching principles employed, the learning content ensures that participants receive the adequate knowledge and skills to realise their full potential, evidencing the trust in their inherent capacity to do so. The choreographic approach employed by the Methodology evidences confidence in the capacity of each participant to progress and improve regardless of their starting point. While acknowledging the range of abilities within a heterogeneous group, the approach is committed to giving everyone the opportunity to excel: "It is essential each person is pushed to their potential because going to have a real mix of ability in the group – the choreography has to take all that into account" (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7). Emphasising the value-based foun-

dation, the learning content ensures that each participant can access growth and learning towards the realisation of their potential.

It is pivotal that staff sign up to this fundamental value underlying the Methodology in order to weather the challenges of working with marginalised and vulnerable populations but also to ensure the trusting and respectful relationships required to foster the realisation of potential. As a vital aspect in the relationship between the underlying value and the core concepts of *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'*, staff have to wholeheartedly embrace the underlying guiding value system, as Maldoom emphasises:

You have to have an unshakable belief in the extraordinary potential of every human being. Because without it you'll give up on this little person here who's giving you a nightmare or this person who's falling all over the place and not paying attention. You've GOT it always in the back of your mind, that person is FANTASTIC but they JUST don't get it. So that's essential (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6).

Crane confirms this steadfast belief in the approach and in the inherent potential of participants by stating: “there was a group confidence that WE are working on this Methodology, WE believe it works, WE believe in our young people and we are not going to be swayed from that” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 9). As her statement illustrates, the collective conviction among staff ensures that the Methodology is consistently employed with integrity, recognising every participant for their inherent potential, thus reinforcing the value-based foundation of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*.

Overall, the core concept of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* is identified as the underlying guiding value of the Methodology. This belief frames the entire approach and infuses all aspects of its implementation. In a reciprocal reinforcement, it facilitates the effective realisation of the aim and objective, which in turn validate and reinforce the underlying guiding value. In a synergetic interrelationship, it informs and guides the implementation of the strategy and the method while they translate the underlying guiding value into applied practice.

## 2.4 The Strategy of a Holistic Learning Environment

The strategy of the *Holistic Learning Environment* describes the broad strategic design and encompasses the specificities of the learning space to foster development, learning, and growth. It is aligned towards the aim and serves as its practical operationalisation (see VI.2.1). In a reciprocal exchange with the objective, each strategical subcategory serves to practically realise the objective, while the objective drives the implementation of each strategical dimension (see VI.2.2). Within this interrelationship, artistic excellence and the learning environment mutually reinforce each other, synergistically pursuing the realisation of transformative learning processes through dance. In its relationship to the underlying guiding value, the strategy is guided by a fundamental belief in the inherent potential of each and every participant in its active realisation (see VI.2.3). In a reciprocal interrelationship, the underlying guiding value is not only upheld in principle but actively realised in practice through the strategy.

Building on the above summary of my theoretical model, I now proceed with the intricate interrelationship between the strategy and the method of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*. For readability, I relate each subcategory of the strategy separately to the method and its respective subcategories, illustrating how the teaching principles, the learning content, and the active implementation through staff enable the practical realisation of the specific learning environment envisaged by the Methodology.

*Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential* relies on all three subcategories of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* for its practical realisation. In relation to the structural aspect of the safe learning environment, *Holding and Containing* is realised through specific teaching principles in an interplay with the envisaged choreographic learning content and the practical implementation through staff. The teaching principles of *Thorough Planning and Preparation*, together with *Clear, Transparent and Positive Communication*—particularly of expectations and boundaries—and *Setting Clear Objectives*, constitute the most vital methodological tools to practically realise the clear and

consistent structure required for creating a safe space. Emphasising the clarity of expectations and objectives, Bynoe states, “the expectations [...] and the clarity of the objectives [...] so that very safe, structured, supported environment, I think it makes you secure” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 11). With regard to *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content*, working with a set and pre-planned choreography allows for a clear roadmap of the process, further contributing to a clear and consistent structure that promotes trust and safety within the learning environment. As stated in the document on Choreographic Tendencies: “Groups respond well to definites - the fact the choreography exists already helps the young people put their trust in the process” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, pp. 3-4). The *Specifications of Suitable Staff* define them as dedicated, committed, and resilient. Together with being able to provide clear leadership, these specifications are vital in consistently maintaining comprehensive support and providing the reliability and commitment required to create a sense of structural safety. Friel identifies this synergetic effect between methodological principles and the unique attributes of staff, stating: “a kind of combination of the personal attributes of the staff combined with the Methodology just allowed and fostered a sense of trust, place of safety” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 5).

A similar synergetic interplay is evident with regard to implementing the relational aspect of the safe learning environment. Communication as a teaching principle unites with the compassionate capacities and authentic presence of staff in order to build the relational trust and rapport necessary for *Attuning, Caring and Nurturing*. To ensure effective implementation, staff must hold considerable communication skills, as Annable-Coop emphasises: “you had to be [...] on both sides, support team and dance team [...] a brilliant communicator” (Interview with Annable-Coop, November 2021, pp. 8-9). In order to attune and flexibly respond to the group process as a whole and to specific individual needs, the teaching principles of *Differentiation* and *Variation* interlink with the varied choreographic content available. These are flexibly implemented by staff who hold the empathetic and caring attributes required to “be able to hold a room [...] observing the dynamics, feeling the dynamics and then choosing how you’re going to

work with or against the dynamic” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 14). It thus becomes evident why it is vital, that the Methodology is framed as a flexible guide (see V.1.2). Without an agile adaptation of its core concepts—specifically its method of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*—the approach would fail to provide the relational principles required to create a space of safety for realising potential.

As the integration of all teaching principles is aligned towards ensuring engagement, progression and, most importantly, achievement (see VI.1.5), in their totality they motivate the realisation of potential through *Fostering Growth and Learning*. The achievable, differentiated, and varied choreographic learning content ensures the effective implementation of several teaching principles and thus, in turn, contributes to facilitating achievement. Additionally, the variation in choreographic content allows for everyone to be individually met in their unique skills and abilities, ensuring individual development. The document on Choreographic Tendencies deliberately considers this by stating: “It is essential each person is pushed to their potential because going to have a real mix of ability in the group – the choreography has to take all that into account” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7). In the careful balance between challenging participants and meeting their current skill levels, the basic dance and performance skills considered in the learning content ensure participants steadily progress and develop further. The markedly passionate and inspirational staff drive the professionalism as well as the uncompromising high expectations necessary to promote a continuous learning journey for participants.

*Transcending Realms of Life Experience* is practically implemented by delivering varied learning content, which exposes participants to new experiences and takes them out of their comfort zones. Both the basic dance and performance skills and the choreography provide a wide range of novel experiences—from contact and floor work to a variety of movement dynamics and unfamiliar music genres. Fundamentally, contemporary dance, as a transcending artistic medium, is essential in fostering this aspect of the safe yet demanding learning environment. As Broughton illustrates: “doing the style of dance that we did was very unfamiliar to them [...] It was creative, it was contemporary [...] there was no patterning there, that they could fall back on” (Interview with

Broughton, December 2021, p. 10). This is practically delivered through a balance of the teaching principles, specifically *Accessibility* and *Achievability*, together with flexible *Variation*, to ensure an engaging learning experience. Additionally, the learning content allows “for a range of teaching activities that give rise to a depth and wide range of learning experiences” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 9). The passionate and inspirational staff are vital in driving the implementation of novel experiences forward, imbuing participants with the trust necessary to aspire to seemingly impossible tasks, as Linsell emphasises: “they trust you, because you believe in it so much. I believe in what I’m doing and THEY then come with you and believe in it with you. [...] even though it’s impossible, it’s seemingly impossible” (Interview with Linsell, January 2021, p. 9). Through their conviction and enthusiasm, staff motivate the necessary confidence to enable participants to enter the unknown and embrace new, transformative experiences.

In a reciprocal interrelationship, the strategy of *Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre* not only relies on the synergy of all three subcategories of the method to be effected in practice but also informs the teaching principles and learning content employed by the Methodology. The *Equitable and Inclusive Terms of Participation* are actively implemented by staff who are passionate about their art and genuinely feel called to the inclusive ethos of the work (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 12). In the learning space, the teaching principle of *Accessibility* ensures a range of pathways to learning and progression, while *Differentiation* adjusts the learning process to individual needs, ultimately contributing to equitable access to participation. In terms of the learning content, contemporary dance constitutes an inclusively accessible and flexible medium. In conjunction with the relevant teaching principles, it allows every participant to access the work according to their individual abilities, skills, and needs. Coggins describes this dynamic interplay by stating “methodologically, what fascinated me was the way in which within a given dance company, every individual was calibrated in the middle, there was something within that flexibility of contemporary dance that allows me to do that” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4). This adaptability of the learning content delivered through the specific teaching principles ensures every par-

ticipant is given equal opportunities to engage, progress, and achieve within the dance company.

The compassionate nature of staff is vital in *Employing a Person-Centric Approach*, welcoming each participant as a person with potential and maintaining a continuous high regard despite past experiences or present behavioural presentations. Herbert emphasises this aspect of empathic care for the individual at the centre of the work by stating, “I don’t care what you did but I really care who’s standing in front of me RIGHT at this moment and what we can do together to come to that product [...] I really think you have to care” (Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 5). The dynamic interplay between the learning content, specifically the choreography with its varied material, and the teaching principles, particularly *Differentiation* and *Variation*, ensures everyone is recognised and supported in their individual contribution to the dance company. Designed to be inclusive, the choreography deliberately considers varied movement material “that can be accessed by the range of abilities within our groups” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6), while the teaching principles deliver the piece in a way “as to provide a rich variety of elements delivered in an interesting way that gives young people a good quality learning experience and allows them to achieve at all times” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 3). As staff’s compassionate care ensures a focus on the individual and the teaching principles, along with the learning content, facilitate individual recognition, the synergetic interplay of the method achieves the person-centric approach required for the inclusive aspect of the strategy.

In terms of *Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs* of marginalised and vulnerable populations, the method is synergistically aligned towards meeting those specific needs, which, in turn, inform the pedagogical mechanisms employed. The totality of the teaching methods ensures that the learning process is both highly structured and enjoyable, fostering a sense of safety while maintaining motivation and engagement. For participants presenting with low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, negative self-concept, and challenging behavioural presentations, “learning must feel safe, be tightly structured, supported, not pressured, or scary, feels fun and achievable” (Choreographic Tenden-

cies, Dance United 2014, p. 5), thus informing the implementation of the teaching methods. This reciprocal interrelationship extends to the learning content. The particular choreographic approach of the Methodology meets the specific needs of the targeted population by being “suitable for untrained bodies and challenging groups” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2). The learning content specifically equips non-trained dancers with the required fundamental skills as “working with beginners, need to learn the basics and prepare them for performance” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 1). The appropriate and effective implementation of both the teaching methods and the learning content requires considerable flexibility and empathic attunement to the dynamics within the group on behalf of staff, evidencing why they need to be dedicated, committed, and resilient, as well as compassionate. The document on Planning Tendencies underscores this need for flexibility as a specific need of vulnerable groups, stating: “due to unpredictable nature of client group, anything could happen! It is a vital part of our delivery on a project to be flexible at all times” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 6). Additionally, it is crucial that staff “observe and read the group and to respond as appropriate” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 8), a specific skill also emphasised by Gladstone: “group dynamics was part of the understanding that dance artists needed to have” (Interview with Gladstone, November 2021, p. 11).

The subcategory of *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company* also requires a synergetic alignment of all aspects of the method for its effective implementation. In order for the group to be *Working as a Dance Company*, the teaching principles deliberately promote collective achievement and progression throughout the process. Particularly with regard to *Thorough Planning and Preparation* and *Setting Clear Objectives*, an experience of collective achievement early on in the process is carefully prepared, planned, and deliberately set as a pivotal goal for the process. This involves identifying “a section of the choreography that can be achieved with the whole group by the end of the first week. A goal to work towards and definite to achieve and involve the whole dance company” (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2). This emphasis on the collective working process is further reflected in the

learning content, which deliberately offers embodied experiences of connection and togetherness—such as contact work, lifts, and unison—as it “emphasises the dance company and feel of togetherness” (Choreographic Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 7). Coggins reiterates the importance of the embodied experience of teamwork and collaboration in creating the communal space of the dance company, when he states:

You’re as good as your weakest part and therefore it’s important that everybody bought in and everybody supported each other. You can TELL somebody that but surely you really need to experience it to know the validity of it and the importance of it (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 9).

Staff are responsible for promoting and maintaining equality and fairness within the group, in a careful and considered balance with responding to individual needs and requirements. These adjustments to individual needs require intuitive attunement among staff, as Friel illustrates: “everyone was very intuitively led [...] of when to have that [...] discretion and move those boundaries a little bit on a specific case [...] that still allowed the Methodology and everything else to come to fruition” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 6).

Additionally, staff play a vital role in *Fostering Collaborative Processes* and *Social Connections*, as they lead by example and model the necessary teamwork and collaboration to build a coherent and functioning group. In terms of the learning content, the choreographies are not focused on issues but employ universal themes everyone can connect to, creating a common ground and sense of connection among participants. Byrne particularly highlights this within the context of her work on community cohesion in Northern Ireland:

I don’t engage with a theme that [...] is direct. By that I mean that [...] if I perceive the thing that we’re working on is these two communities don’t come together then I don’t focus on these two communities and why they don’t come together and bringing them together. Because it just reinforces the cognitive stereotypes basically. So what I do is try to

find something that both can look at and reach and imagine, so it's not focusing on the differences, it's focusing on something that [...] we can all come to (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, pp. 4-5).

The above analysis illustrates the synergetic interplay of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* aligned towards the realisation of the communal methodological strategy. As staff lead by example and carefully manage the group process in balance with individual learning journeys, both the teaching principles and learning content facilitate collective working processes aimed at *Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company*.

In summary, my theoretical analysis positions the *Holistic Learning Environment* as the strategy of the Methodology. As such, it is aligned towards the realisation of the aim by creating an opportune space of potentiality, facilitating transformative processes of learning and personal development. In a mutual reinforcement, it implements the objective while being motivated and driven by the artistic ambition envisaged by the approach. The reciprocal interrelationship between the strategy and the underlying guiding value ensures that valuing each participant is not only upheld as an idealistic principle but practically implemented and, in turn, reinforced by its operational manifestation. The method synergistically aligns teaching principles, learning content, and staff specifications to create a safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal learning environment, fostering individual growth, collaborative processes, and social connections.

## 2.5 The Method of an Integrated Pedagogical Framework

Within my theoretical model, the analytical category of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* is positioned as the method employed to practically realise the strategy, indirectly contributing to the implementation of the objective while also being informed by the underlying guiding value. These interrelationships have been extensively discussed in the preceding sections. The following thus provides a succinct summary of the key findings, positioning the method as the focal point of my ana-

lytical discussion and providing the basis for the subsequent theoretical grounding in existing theory.

In its contribution to the methodological objective of the approach, the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* constitutes a collection of specific practical means employed to realise the artistic ambition of the work (see VI.2.2). Each subcategory plays a vital role in operationalising the objective, and in an intricate interplay, contributes towards its realisation. The subcategory of *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'* ensures engagement, progression, and achievement for each participant by framing a transparently structured and communicated, universally accessible and achievable, as well as a diverse and varied, learning process. Engagement, progression, and achievement are vital contributing factors in facilitating an accomplished performance and, thus, indirectly contribute to the realisation of the objective. In a more direct relationship to the methodological objective, the comprehensive planning and preparation, along with the clear objectives and the emphasis on an achievable learning process, constitute direct practical means of realising the objective. Additionally, the methodological core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* is clearly aligned with the realisation of artistic excellence by enabling participants to 'shine on stage'. While the choreographic approach optimises the artistic impact of the work by carefully balancing the specific needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations with an intention to push boundaries and challenge expectations within the community dance sector, the envisaged learning content deliberately equips participants with the tools and skills to succeed in a confident, expressive, and fully committed performance. The *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'* is the third practical means through which the approach's objective is actively realised. Their passion and commitment to maintaining the art of dance at the centre of the process drive a professionalised process toward the realisation of artistic excellence. In a reciprocal interchange, the artistic ambition of the work motivates and informs their delivery process of the approach.

Additionally, the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* is informed in its operationalisation by the guiding value of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* (see VI.2.3). Guided by this value-based foun-

dation, *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'* encompasses the pedagogical support, guidance, and facilitation required to harness participants' inherent potential, thus constituting the practical pathway to its realisation. Similarly aligned with realising potential, the core concept of *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* ensures that participants are not only equipped with the required dance and performance skills for an accomplished performance but also have the opportunity to showcase their inherent individual capabilities within suitable and tailored choreographic repertoire. Regarding the core concept of *Practical Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'*, it is vital that staff collectively commit to the guiding value, as this dedication not only motivates their pursuit of the envisaged artistic ambition and fosters trusting relationships with participants but also sustains them through the considerable challenges of the work.

In an intricate relationship with the strategy of the *Holistic Learning Environment*, the method aligns with the implementation of a safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal learning space, where each participant is adequately and comprehensively supported to explore and realise their individual potential in a universally accessible, collective experience (see VI.2.4). The flexible interplay of *Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'* creates the required structure and boundaries to ensure structural safety, while the attuned variation and differentiation of the teaching process allow for relational safety to be established. Collectively, the teaching principles align towards engagement, achievement, and progression, offering a range of novel experiences in an accessible and achievable manner to ensure continuous development of potential. The flexible adjustment and implementation of the teaching principles are informed by the specific needs of the client group but also serve to meet those needs. In other words, the teaching principles enable an inclusive approach while being realised within an inclusive ethos. By emphasising collective achievement, they ensure the realisation of the communal aspect of the learning environment.

As the teaching principles depend on the learning content for their effective practical implementation, *Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content* furthermore ensures the realisation of all aspects of the strategy. The specific choreographic approach creates a clear roadmap

for the learning journey, thus ensuring structural safety through predictability, transparency, and reliability. The varied choreographic content allows for attuned adjustments and pushes participants to realise their potential beyond the perceived limitations of their comfort zones. The inclusive nature of contemporary dance is harnessed through a choreography that allows for individuality and considers a range of skills and abilities in a heterogeneous group. This inclusive dimension of learning content is further supported by addressing the specific learning needs of participants and equipping them with the fundamental dance and performance skills needed for an accomplished performance. To ensure a communal learning process, the learning content incorporates embodied experiences of togetherness and connection, with the choreographic theme deliberately creating a common ground that is universally accessible.

Through the *Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'* both the teaching principles and the learning content are practically realised as a flexible practice-based and reflective framework of methods. With their required specifications of reliability, commitment, and compassion, along with strong communication and leadership skills, staff provide the structural and relational safety while promoting an inclusive ethos among the group. Their passion for their art form drives the demanding learning journey beyond participants' comfort zones as they flexibly adjust both their teaching approach and the content to the group's specific needs. Leading by example as a team and deliberately promoting a collective ethos among the dance company, staff realise the communal dimension of the learning space.

In its totality, this synergetic interplay is aligned with the overall aim of *'Transforming Lives Through Dance'*, resulting in a comprehensive and dynamic network of the nine methodological core concepts. Together, these interconnected elements constitute a cohesive framework through which the approach realises its transformative potential, effecting meaningful change on individual as well as on collective levels.

## 3 Building Relationships to Existing Theory

Having developed a theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology as an essential first step in its theoretical foundation, I now turn to building meaningful relationships with relevant existing theory to further substantiate this.

At first assessment, a broad array of theories presents as relevant reference points to an approach aiming for personal and social transformation in marginalised and vulnerable populations through the experience of dance and performance. These include theories on social change and social justice such as Paolo Freire's *Critical Pedagogy* (1970) and Michel Foucault's critical philosophy on power and structures of oppression (1977), theories on experiential and embodied learning such as Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory* (1984) and Lakoff's *Embodied Cognition* (1980), as well as theories on the significant role of art in human development such as John Dewey's *theory of Aesthetic Experience* (2005) and Ellen Dissanayake's *Evolutionary Aesthetics* (1988). However, as my theoretical model identifies the core concept of '*Transforming Lives Through Dance*' as the aim and pivotal core category at the heart of the Methodology, I apply Transformative Learning Theory as the primary reference point to which I relate the findings of my theoretical analysis.

To achieve a meaningful relationship with this existing theory, I first provide a general overview of its genesis and evolution over the years, before arguing its applicability to my context (see VI.3.1). Second, I integrate my theoretical model with relevant strands by outlining individual relationships between the theoretical core concepts and Transformative Learning Theory (see VI.3.2 to VI.3.6).

### 3.1 Transformative Learning Theory as an Applicable Theory

To develop a contextually relevant understanding of Transformative Learning Theory, I examine its key principles and their evolution over time. As a foundational step to my subsequent discussion, this includes

the theory's original conception and alternative perspectives on foundational concepts, particularly those that have emerged in recent years. By tracing these developments, I establish a nuanced understanding of how Transformative Learning Theory relates to the Dance United Methodology, allowing for a flexible and informed application to my context.

Jack Mezirow is considered the "initial architect" (Tisdell, 2012, p. 23) of Transformative Learning Theory within the field of US adult education. Based on a qualitative study examining factors that impeded or facilitated the learning progress of women re-entering college education after "an extended hiatus" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 1), he and his colleagues conceptualised Transformative Learning as a ten-step process initiated by a life crisis that challenges existing beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). In the early development of his theory, Mezirow was considerably influenced by Kuhn's (1962) paradigm, Freire's (1970) concept of conscientisation, and Habermas' (1971) three domains of learning (Kitchenham, 2008, pp. 104-113). Over the years, he substantially developed and revised his theory, including but not limited to: expanding the ten-step model; explicitly outlining his underlying constructivist assumptions; and elaborating on his notion of underdeveloped meaning perspectives (Baumgartner, 2012, pp. 102-106).<sup>48</sup>

Fundamentally, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory explicates how adults learn by changing their perspectives through rational processes of critical reflection and discourse on established frames of references. Triggered by what he termed a disorientating dilemma—"a life crisis that triggers a questioning of assumptions, resulting in transformed beliefs" (Laros, 2017, p. 85)—this process involves reassessing and reinterpreting experiences, as the source of individual frames of reference, ultimately leading to a paradigmatic shift in worldview as a guide for future action. As Mezirow summarises: "Learning is understood as the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience as a guide for

<sup>48</sup> A comprehensive outline of the numerous revisions of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory exceeds the context of my research. For an in-depth account of the evolution of his perspective, see Baumgartner (2012) and Kitchenham (2008).

future action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 5). Adult learning, therefore, exceeds the accumulation of new knowledge and encompasses a transformative shift in how individuals understand themselves, their relationships with others, and the world around them.

Mezirow’s understanding of Transformative Learning has been extensively critiqued over the years, particularly with regard to neglecting social dimensions, power issues, cultural context, and an overemphasis of rational thought (Cranton, 2016, p. 30). This catalysed an immense extension and intricate emergence of a wide range of approaches, with notable efforts to reconcile differing perspectives (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). In a comprehensive summary, Taylor (2017, pp. 19-23) discusses seven alternative conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory, addressing some of the issues identified in Mezirow’s understanding. The psychoanalytical view defines transformation through Jung’s concept of individuation, a process of self-realisation through forming a distinct and authentic sense of identity. As this entails working through images, symbols, and metaphors of unconscious psychic structures, this perspective reconciles extrarational means of meaning-making with the theory (Dirkx, 2000, p. 2). The psycho-developmental perspective, led by scholars such as Daloz (1986) and Kegan (1982), understands transformation as incremental steps of epistemological change across the lifespan. This perspective appreciates holistic ways of knowing and the relevance of relationships, both of which are largely overlooked in Mezirow’s rational and individualistic conception. Further addressing the neglect of interpersonal context, the social-emancipatory perspective is primarily rooted in Freire’s work and aims for “social transformation by demythicizing reality, where the oppressed develop a critical consciousness (e.g. conscientization) of their world” (Taylor, 2017, p. 20). The neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary perspective present the newest additions to the field. These introduce novel aspects such as transformative changes in brain structures, personal narratives contextualised in social contexts, non-Western perspectives, and a broad contextualisation in ecological and planetary dimensions (Taylor, 2017, pp. 21-22). Within this emerging comprehensive and more holistic understanding of Transformative Learning Theory lies the opportunity for

an appropriate framework for my theoretical integration. With the body as the methodological access point for a creative and expressive process of meaning-making, theoretical relations to psychoanalytical viewpoints of extra-rational pathways become meaningful. Psycho-developmental perspectives further address holistic knowing as utilised in such a dance-based intervention, while their emphasis on relational aspects reflects the communal orientation of the Methodology. At the same time, the focus of social dimensions within social-emancipatory strands of the theory offers a fruitful basis for its application to engaging marginalised communities in transformative change.

Although this theory strongly aligns with my analytical understanding of the core category of '*Transforming Lives through Dance*', applying Transformative Learning Theory to an approach that facilitates fundamental personal and social change through arts—particularly targeting young people and young adults from marginalised and vulnerable populations—raises important contextual challenges. In addition to the specific cultural context of North America, Mezirow's original conception presents the following hindrances to relating it with my theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology. His strong emphasis on rationality neglects the impact of the sociocultural positionality of this client group on their cognitive functioning and excludes extrarational ways of knowing, such as embodiment and dance. The exclusive contextualisation within adult education raises questions about its applicability to a broader age range, including young people and young adults. Moreover, his focus on individual processes of transformative change neglects the communal dimension so strongly emphasised within my theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology. Addressing these reservations on the applicability of Transformative Learning Theory to my theoretical analysis, the considerable developments of this theory in progress alleviate these concerns.

Regarding an application within a European context, in recent years, scholars have initiated a dialogue across the Atlantic, including Kokkos (2012, 2014) and, more recently, Laros et al. (2017) in an edited volume exploring the relationship between Transformative Learning Theory and Eurocentric theories of Bildung. Further building on this flourishing connection, the International Transformative Learning Conference

was held at the University of Siena, Italy, in September 2024. These existing exchanges thus alleviate concerns around limited applicability to a Eurocentric context.

Additionally, I argue that the theory's roots in Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy already indicate its applicability to practices in the social inclusion sector, which is furthermore evident in its emergent social-emancipatory strands (Taylor, 2017, p. 20). A contextually appropriate understanding of Transformative Theory must be sensitive to the impact of negative social labels and social positionality on self-concept and habits of mind, defined as patterns of thinking, attitudes, and dispositions (Johnson-Bailey, 2012, pp. 267-269). This sensitivity extends to cognitive functioning, as marginalised populations may lack the "advanced level of cognitive development" (Merriam, 2004, p. 61) mandated for critical reflection and reflective discourse. Unfortunately, by "focusing on highly skilled mature thinkers, Mezirow does not concern himself with the problem of inequality" (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 73). An applicable understanding for this client group thus requires "to substantively expand the theory of transformational learning to include more 'connected', affective, and intuitive dimensions on an equal footing with cognitive and rational components" (Merriam, 2004, pp. 66-67). With this in mind, engaging populations from challenging circumstances in processes of Transformative Learning holds considerable potential. For instance, Fischer-Yoshida (2009) observed "modified self-images and new personal identities that evolved from them feeling recognized and appreciated as valued contributors to a process" (p. 82) in her participatory action-research within an organisation supporting people with criminal justice histories. As these critical voices suggest, an applicable understanding of Transformative Learning Theory within social inclusion contexts extends beyond the rational-cognitive model and applies a socially situated understanding of personal change. This conceptualisation thus provides a meaningful connecting point to the Dance United Methodology, which sensitively acknowledges the social positionality of participants, while emphasising embodied experiences of a collective artistic practice as primary catalysts for transformation.

Mezirow positioned his conception of Transformative Learning within the realm of adult education. However, several scholars advocate

for a pre-adult expansion of the theory (Kokkos, 2022, p. 884). Reviewing relevant theoretical perspectives and educational practices, Kokkos (2022, p. 893) concludes that Transformative Learning is a worthwhile educational pursuit, expanding schools as spaces of knowledge acquisition by laying the reflective foundations for further transformative learning processes in adulthood. Viewing the transition into adulthood as an intellectual and emotional transformation, Benjamin and Crymble (2017, p. 251) argue for the applicability of Transformative Learning Theory through an empirical study examining young people building their adult identities as a form of perspective transformation. These scholars thus not only argue a fruitful extension of the theory to younger ages but also illustrate its usefulness in viewing the formative years of transitioning into adulthood as a transformative process. This offers a relevant reference point for my theoretical grounding of the Methodology—not only allowing for an application across the broad age range the approach engages but also scholarly underpinning its ambition to provide a “rite of passage from a difficult childhood to a potentially more fulfilling adulthood” (Dance United, 2011, p. 21).

To achieve applicability to the context of dance and performance, Transformative Learning Theory needs to consider artistic and embodied ways of knowing and meaning-making. Although “extrarational and arts-based approaches to learning have remained on the margins in most of the discourse on transformative learning” (Lawrence, 2010, p. 147), the relevance of the arts in catalysing transformative learning has gained more and more recognition in recent years (Blackburn Miller, 2020, p. 338). Furthermore, evolving holistic approaches not only acknowledge other ways of knowing and meaning making—such as emotional, intuitive, imaginative, and social dimensions (Taylor, 2017, p. 24)—but also emphasise the embodied nature of transformative processes (Schlattner, 2022, p. 833). This increased recognition of the transformative potential of the arts, alongside the acknowledgement of the role of embodiment, strengthens the theoretical grounding of my research. With dance at the heart of the Methodology, these theoretical perspectives provide the relevant scholarly basis for arguing this art form as a catalyst for transformative change.

In summary, the broadened scope of Transformative Learning Theory conceptually aligns with my theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology, situating its primary aim of '*Transforming Lives through Dance*'. The above theoretical considerations and perspectives effectively argue a broadened understanding of knowing and meaning-making through embodied and extra-rational processes which is applicable to dance. They provide a basis for defending the methodological emphasis of relational and communal transformative change, while appropriately reflecting the social situatedness of vulnerable communities. With the potential for engaging a broader age range and applying insights to a European context, this discussion illustrates how Transformative Learning Theory scholarly supports the Methodology's theoretical model. Thus, despite initial reservations, these evolved conceptions provide a suitable framework for theoretically situating my findings.

### 3.2 Transformative Learning through Dance and Performance

As defined by my theoretical analysis, the methodological core concept of '*Transforming Lives through Dance*' harnesses the transformative potential of contemporary dance and performance to effect personal and collective transformation. As the primary aim of the approach, it is achieved through a commitment to artistic excellence, actively realised within a safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal learning environment, and underpinned by a guiding belief in participants' extraordinary potential. To accomplish a full theoretical foundation, I now relate this conceptualisation yielded from my theoretical analysis to relevant aspects of Transformative Learning Theory. First, I establish a scholarly grounded understanding of the personal and collective processes of transformation through this theoretical lens. Second, I validate the transformative potential of dance and performance by identifying relevant theoretical considerations.

From working with street children in Ethiopia to people in British custodial settings and individuals experiencing mental health challenges, the Dance United Methodology engages populations who have

been habitually exposed to adverse experiences such as marginalisation, exclusion, deprivation, and discrimination. “Written off by society” (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 10), participants are often subject to negative societal perceptions that systematically reinforce feelings of inadequacy, limit opportunities for growth, and perpetuate a cycle of disempowerment. Negatively affected by their allocated social roles and inhabited social contexts, participants hold deeply ingrained understandings and assumptions about themselves. In cyclical feedback, this commonly manifests in a negative self-concept, diminished self-confidence, and self-limiting beliefs about personal potential and positive life choices.

It is precisely these internalised assumptions and perspectives on selfhood—built on prior experiences accumulating into habitual expectations—that “are called into question during the transformative learning process” (Cranton, 2016, p. 7) envisaged within the Dance United Methodology. Indicated by my analysis (see VI.1.1) and further supported by the evaluative impact studies on the work (see IV.2), participants experience significant changes throughout their learning journeys. Marked by embodied confidence, psycho-social growth, an empowered sense of agency, and a redefined sense of self, they reassess and reinterpret their understanding of themselves, their relationships with others, and the world around them.

This multi-faceted transformative impact relates to a holistic understanding of Transformative Learning, involving cognitive, emotional, and somatic changes within individuals. An applicable theoretical perspective invites the whole person into the learning process, engaging “all the functions we have available for knowing, including our cognitive, affective, somatic, intuitive, and spiritual dimensions” (The Group for Collaborative Inquiry cited by Taylor, 1997, p. 48). Through this theoretical lens, the Dance United Methodology serves as a means “to create and act on new opportunities and new ways of being in the world” (Fisher-Yoshida, 2009, p. 67). Deliberately providing such opportunities, the approach immerses participants in the role of a dancer in a dance company, where they ultimately act upon this prospect in their performance, exercising confidence, competence, self-efficacy, and most importantly, the realisation of their potential. These experiences

initiate a “questioning of assumptions and perspectives” (Cranton, 2016, p. 50), fostering transformative change and leading to new ways of understanding by encouraging participants to critically assess negative and self-limiting beliefs. Such changes resonate with Transformative Learning Theory, which “seeks to assist adult learners in their attempt to liberate themselves from assumptions that limit their way of being and living” and, through perspective transformation, enables learners to develop “a new, transformed understanding of themselves, including their self-concept and identity” (Eschenbacher & Levine, 2022, p. 46).

Additionally, the transformative outcomes of the approach extend to a collective dimension, impacting the social contexts around participants, such as families, the organisational bodies supporting them, and the Dance United staff implementing this approach. Although Mezirow’s conception of Transformative Learning Theory emphasises the individual at the centre of transformative processes of change, recent expansions include collective and relational aspects in their theoretical considerations (Buechner et al., 2020; Schapiro et al., 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012, pp. 44-45; Wasserman & Gallegos, 2009). By “looking at transformation from the level of social systems” (Buechner et al., 2020, p. 106), the Methodology motivates the social structures surrounding participants to revise often negative habitual expectations, perceptions and assumptions. This process breaks the negative interpersonal feedback loop and is effectively catalysed through witnessing participants’ accomplished performance on stage, motivating “an emergent and shared worldview shift that is grounded in a shared experience” (Buechner et al., 2020, p. 87).

This transformative impact through shared experiences also extends to Dance United staff, reflecting the profound communal and convivial nature of the approach. As Taylor (2017) suggests, teachers facilitating Transformative Learning have to be open to their personal development and growth by asking themselves, “am I willing to transform in the process of helping my students transform?” (p. 26). My interview data confirm this willingness and openness to change. As Crane reflects: “it was truly transformational” (Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 11). With staff driven by their dedication to the arts and personal investment in social change, their high level of commitment exem-

plifies how facilitators themselves participate in a reflective process of transformation that is consistent with the theoretical considerations of Transformative Learning.

As illustrated, the transformative impact of the Dance United Methodology is not restricted to individual participants but extends to everyone involved in the process: participants develop a new understanding of themselves; staff experience professional as well as personal growth; and social systems gain new perspectives on participants. In their totality, these impacts reflect an intricate interconnectedness of personal, communal, and societal change. Viewed through a uniting theoretical conception of Transformative Learning as an approach that “shapes people; they are different afterward, in ways that both they and others recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47), the Methodology exemplifies a distinct way of working that simultaneously fosters personal learning, professional development and relational change of social contexts.

These holistic transformative outcomes are grounded in contemporary dance and performance as pivotal catalysts for change at the heart of the Methodology. To adequately situate this understanding within a broader theoretical context, I first position dance as embodied as well as expressive knowing and meaning-making, which unites in its function as embodied narrative transformation. Upon this foundation, I then highlight the significance of performance as a crucial catalytic element, further contributing to the approach’s transformative impact.

When conceived and practised as embodied knowing and meaning-making, dance functions as “a visceral language that has the capacity to connect body, mind, heart, soul and imaginative thinking” (Snowber, 2012, p. 54). Within this holistic understanding of dance, the body is recognised as a vital epistemological locus of experiential knowledge through which we can make sense of ourselves and the world around us. This theoretical conception is reflected in the Methodology, envisaging dance as a holistic engagement, involving physical, emotional, cognitive, relational, and even transcendental dimensions. A dance practice involving all aspects of selfhood and centring the body as a site of knowledge ensures not only an expressive and accomplished performance with intention and full commitment but also harnesses

“the magic of dance” (Interview with Broughton, December 2021, p. 15) to facilitate transformative processes.

While Mezirow’s early work focuses primarily on cognition, often neglecting the body’s role in learning and transformation, more recent developments increasingly recognise the body as a primary source of accessing knowledge (Lawrence, 2012b, p. 7) and conceive of cognition as an integrated, embodied process (Finnegan, 2020, p. 84). O’Sullivan’s (2002) holistic conception of Transformative Learning proposes equality between rational, emotional, and bodily dimensions: “Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling and actions” (p. 11). This includes understanding of ourselves, relationships with others, body awareness, and visions of alternative approaches to living, intended to promote and facilitate integration of the whole person. This embodied conception of Transformative Learning, which “recognizes the inseparability of rationality, movement, emotion, and other related conceptions such as spirituality, creativity, or intuition” (Schlattner, 2022, p. 834) not only aligns with the holistic engagement envisioned by the Methodology but also explicates the body’s role as a site for learning about oneself.

Within this theoretical frame, the physical experiences facilitated through the creative process of dancing constitute somatic learning, defined as learning from bodily experiences (Clark, 2001, pp. 84-87). Through the dance process, the Methodology ensures that participants physically experience their capability, self-efficacy, and potential. Since “self-concept is embodied through experience” (Schlattner, 2022, p. 835), the dance process offers an embodied alternative that challenges the negative sense of self adopted by participants through their adverse life experiences. Grounded in this transformative conception of embodied knowing and learning, participants holistically redefine their self-concept and explore new possibilities for shaping their lives.

In addition to its embodied dimension, dance offers an expressive way of knowing and meaning-making through its symbolism and narrative (Davis-Manigault et al., 2006, p. 27). This theoretical lens expands dance beyond internal somatic processes and constitutes it as a relational and communicative practice. By engaging with dance as an “alternative way[s] of generating meaning” (Tsouvala & Magos, 2016,

p. 29), the Methodology provides a medium through which new meanings can be expressed, communicated and negotiated with others. In accessing insights that cannot be articulated through verbal reflective dialogue alone, the dancing body becomes an expressive metaphor for a renewed sense of self.

This expressive dimension is particularly prevalent within contemporary dance practice, which “draws on the expressiveness of bodily movement itself” (Kuzian, 2021, p. 60). By accessing the body’s natural capacity for expression and aestheticising ordinary, everyday movement, contemporary dance centres the symbolic potential of lived bodily experience (Kuzian, 2021, p. 54). Within the Methodology, this allows participants to draw on familiar physical expressions, while inhabiting their embodied histories anew. In simple terms, contemporary dance provides an accessible expressive medium through which participants can tell different stories about who they are and who they might become.

Uniting the dimensions of embodied and expressive knowing and meaning-making, Clark (2012) conceptualises transformative learning as an “embodied narrative” (pp. 435-437) of change. Drawing on her personal experience of illness, she illustrates how transformation is not merely a cognitive reinterpretation of selfhood but an evolving story that is bodily inhabited and enacted. Applying this understanding to the Methodology, dance acts as a catalyst for transforming participants’ embodied narrative of themselves in the world. Throughout their learning journeys with Dance United, they are invited to reinvent themselves as dancers in a dance company, thereby embodying an alternative sense of self marked by accomplishment, capability, self-efficacy, and potential. As this change is somatically experienced, creatively expressed and communally shared, participants are enabled to rewrite their personal biographies.

For these personal transformations to become enacted social realities, the performance provides a vital, multi-layered transformative catalyst for everyone involved. It is not merely the culmination of the dance and rehearsal process but a pivotal moment when participants are witnessed in their accomplishment, acknowledged for their potential, and affirmed in their redefined sense of self. The relational and

intersubjective nature of this experience amplifies its impact, creating a shared space where transformation is not only convivially recognised but also actively celebrated.

Although initially neglected in Mezirow's considerations, unified conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory bridge the gap between individual and social dimensions of transformative processes, offering an applicable understanding through the pivotal role of recognition. Drawing on Axel Honneth's reinterpretation of Critical Theory, recognition by others is not only considered a basic human need but more importantly a precondition for transformative learning (Fleming, 2014, p. 322). Founded on an "intersubjective basis for individual development" (Fleming, 2022, p. 564), self-affirming interactions with others facilitate self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Relating being "recognized as a person whose capabilities are of constitutive value to a concrete community" (Honneth, 1997, p. 30) to the development of self-esteem is particularly relevant to this aspect of the Methodology.

For participants, the public performance provides a powerful validation of their redefined self-concept. While many participants have previously derived social recognition through negative associations, such as gangs (West, 2017, p. 222), showcasing their capabilities validates and affirms their valuable contributions to the community of the dance company, serving as a metaphor for society at large. For the audience, the performance acts as a disorienting dilemma that challenges preconceived notions and habitual perceptions. This stems from their prior misrecognition and an underestimation of participants' potential (Fleming, 2022, p. 574). By relating these considerations to the role of recognition within Transformative Learning Theory, it becomes evident that the performance is not merely a conclusion of the dance and rehearsal process but a crucial transformative element of the Methodology on multiple levels. Affirming personal growth while reshaping social perceptions, the performance manifests the holistic and interconnected nature of the personal, intersubjective, and societal change envisioned by this approach.

In summary, relating the methodological aim of '*Transforming Lives through Dance*' to relevant conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory establishes the theoretical foundation of the approach's pur-

pose: it consolidates a scholarly grounded understanding of the holistic transformative impact on participants, social contexts, and staff alike; it theoretically constitutes dance as an embodied metaphor for rewritten selfhood; and it explicates performance as an interpersonal, recognition-based catalyst. Through its theoretical integration, this core concept demonstrates how transformative learning enacted through dance and performance converges into holistic change across personal, communal, and societal dimensions.

### 3.3 Artistic Excellence as a Catalyst for Transformative Learning

My theoretical analysis defines the core concept of '*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*' as the process of making participants shine on stage within a professional framework that is led by an ambitious artistic vision and aligned with the aim of harnessing the transformative potential of contemporary dance and performance. While its practical implementation relies on the strategy that provides the required safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal learning environment, the method employs the appropriate teaching principles and learning content, implemented by passionate staff committed to upholding the arts at the centre of the work. This synergetic interplay is informed by and facilitated through the guiding value, ensuring the steadfast commitment to everyone's inherent potentiality to achieve artistic excellence. In turn, the realisation of the objective affirms the belief in the inherent potential of every participant. Together, these methodological elements position artistic excellence at the heart of the approach as its central transformative driving force.

The following discussion consolidates this understanding of the objective within a theoretical framework by establishing relationships to relevant aspects and applicable considerations of Transformative Learning Theory. First, I argue that the process of achieving this objective constitutes a disorienting dilemma as a critical catalyst for personal perspective change. Second, by conceiving the performance as an aes-

thetic experience<sup>49</sup> with emancipatory potential for both participants and audiences, I demonstrate the inherent transformative potential of artistic excellence.

Before participants can shine on stage in an accomplished performance, they undergo a demanding, disciplined and challenging learning journey throughout projects. This process can be understood through the concept of disorientating dilemma, which is central to Transformative Learning Theory. Within the Methodology, the rupture in participants' experiences is multifaceted, posing not only artistic challenges but also introducing novel embodied and social dimensions.

Artistically, participants are exposed to choreographic content and musical repertoire beyond their realms of experience. From a theoretical perspective, Kokkos and Fleming conceptualise such unfamiliar artistic encounters as disorientating dilemmas, noting that “these unsettling experiences are akin to the puzzling experience one often finds in engagements with art” (2024, p. 5). Contemporary dance provides unique artistic access in this regard. As this dance form “aestheticises our everyday movement” (Kuzian, 2021, p. 54), it offers recognisable and familiar bodily expressions that the participants can readily engage with. Simultaneously, as an unfamiliar dance style, it disrupts assumptions about what dance is and how bodies move creatively. This dichotomy thus meets participants in recognisable territory while expanding their aesthetic perspectives.

This unfamiliarity with the dance style also effects an embodied disorientating dilemma, exposing participants to a wide range of movement experiences without prior points of reference. By exploring novel ways of moving, attuning to unfamiliar sensations within their bodies, and engaging in different forms of social interaction, such as touch and lifts, participants physically change perspectives. Thus, perspective change—as a key characteristic of disorientating dilemma (Laros, 2017,

49 An extensive definition of the complex concept of Aesthetic Experience exceeds the context of my discussion. For the purpose of my argument, I apply an appropriate conception to the field of dance as provided by Vukadinović and Marković (2012), defining it as an “exceptional state of mind that is characterized by a strong focus on a certain object, which engages and fascinates a subject, whereas all other objects and actions in the environment are excluded from consciousness” (p. 24).

p. 85)—is first and foremost a somatic experience of perceiving oneself and the world anew. In addressing deeply ingrained bodily habits, the approach expands participants' perspectives on their physical capacities as a metaphor for their overall potential.

Socially, the novel role of a dancer within in the context of a dance company presents participants with disruptive intersubjective experiences, challenging their identities and interactions with others. Moving away from their social positioning as marginalised subjects, the acquisition of a new socially recognised identity triggers a social disorientating dilemma (Fleming, 2022, pp. 12-13) and prompts participants to renegotiate who they are in relation to others. In simple terms, participants become someone they never imagined they could be—a dancer. This functions as a socially grounded metaphor for expanded perspectives on personal and interpersonal possibilities.

Within these artistic, embodied, and social realms beyond everyday experiences lies “the power of the arts to create disorienting dilemmas” (Blackburn Miller, 2020, p. 341). As participants engage with these challenges, they are pushed out of their comfort zones and into a transitional space beyond the familiar, where they must reassess their sense of self, including self-limiting beliefs and restricted capabilities. Understanding the process of working towards high artistic standards through the theoretical conception of disorientating dilemmas illustrates its transformative impact and thus its central role within the Methodology.

In order to understand how the artistic excellence of the performance functions as a transformative catalyst rather than a solely aesthetic ambition, it is necessary to first relate it to theoretical conceptions of aesthetic experience within Transformative Learning Theory. As a manifestation of the objective, I consider the performance as an aesthetic experience for both the dancers and the audience. Acting as the subject as well as the object of aesthetic experiences, the dancers rely primarily on proprioception, assessing the quality of movement through internal kinaesthetic and vestibular sensations rather than visual feedback (Vukadinović & Marković, 2012, pp. 24-25). Meanwhile, the audience engages vicariously through imagined and projective participation in the observed dance (Vukadinović & Marković, 2012, pp. 25-26). Within the Dance United Methodology, the aesthetic encoun-

ter of the performance immerses participants and audiences alike in a convivially shared focus, providing the foundation for its transformative impact.

By aligning with theoretical perspectives that regard aesthetic experiences as vital triggers of transformative learning, the performance—when realised to high artistic standards—functions as a significant catalyst for personal and collective transformation. On the theoretical basis of key scholars from the Frankfurt School, Kokkos (2010, pp. 158-163; 2017, pp. 333-336) demonstrates how aesthetic experiences not only offer opportunities for alternative interpretations and the conception of different realities but, more importantly, play a crucial role in “triggering the revision and reformulation of meaning perspectives” (Kokkos, 2017, p. 333). He concludes that aesthetic experiences hold “a distinctive role within the theoretical framework and practice of transformative learning” (Kokkos, 2010, p. 163). However, this emancipatory dynamic in triggering critical thinking is contingent upon artistic work of high artistic value, defined by multidimensional meaning, morphological texture, and complexity of content. In contrast, a “trivial aesthetic experience damages the potentiality of fostering a critical form of knowing and weakens the dynamics of a transformative learning process” (Kokkos, 2017, p. 336).

I argue that Kokkos’ defining criteria of high artistic standards apply to the artistic ambitions envisaged by the Methodology’s objective. By refraining from issue-based work and instead focusing on universal themes that resist literal interpretation, the approach provides a multidimensional access point. This not only allows participants to derive individual meaning from their artistic expression but also invites a multitude of interpretations from the audience. Morphological texture is achieved through the intricate interplay between choreography, music, costume, and lighting design. This “dialectical relation of form and content” (Kokkos, 2010, p. 161) directs perception and intensifies sensorial attention: participants engage with layered artistic elements of experiential depth, while audiences are drawn into a holistic artistic experience that generates meaning. The broad range of movement content, qualities, and dynamics ensures the complexity of the artistic production. Realised through a layered and varied dramaturgy,

the choreography enables participants to access expressive richness in their performance which offers the audience a symbolically dense aesthetic experience. Taken together, the artistic standards envisioned by the Methodology fulfil Kokkos' criteria for an emancipatory aesthetic dynamic: they disrupt habitual perceptions and thereby trigger a revision of meaning perspectives. For both participants and audiences, the performance as an aesthetic experience thus provides foundational functions of transformative learning processes.

As my theoretical integration illustrates, the methodological objective of '*Working to Highest Artistic Standards*' does not merely ensure an accomplished performance quality but serves as a pivotal transformative agent in realising the aim of the approach. By conceptualising the process of working towards the artistic ambition as a multifaceted disorientating dilemma, insights from Transformative Learning Theory illustrate how the artistic, embodied, and social experiences disrupt participants' habitual ways of perceiving themselves and others. With the performance understood as an aesthetic experience for everyone involved, it serves as both a culmination of practice and a mechanism for personal, intersubjective, and social change. Through these theoretical relations, the objective is thus scholarly substantiated as a central catalyst for transformative learning processes within the Methodology.

### 3.4 Potentiality as a Guiding Value of Transformative Learning

Constituted by my theoretical analysis as the underlying guiding value of the approach, the core concept of *Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential* is defined as actively harnessing the transformative potential of upholding the unwavering belief in the inherent yet unrealised capabilities of each participant. In relation to the aim, it facilitates positive changes in self-perception and is in turn reinforced through realising personal transformations. While fostering the ambitions of the artistic objective, its validity is reinforced by participants' accomplished performances. It guides and informs both the strategy and method, which effectively translate this idealistic value into actionable steps.

In the following discussion, I relate this understanding to relevant aspects of Transformative Learning Theory in an effort to achieve its theoretical integration. First, I illustrate shared philosophical underpinnings in constructivism, critical theory, and humanism. I then demonstrate the particular significance of humanistic values within the Methodology, defining them as mechanisms of recognition and support throughout the transitional process of Transformative Learning. This scholarly contextualisation not only realises the intended theoretical foundation but further consolidates this particular way of working as a value-based approach.

Having identified the Methodology's philosophical considerations in its guiding value, it is necessary to first identify the corresponding assumptions and orientations underlying Transformative Learning Theory. Taylor (2017, p. 26) provides a vital indication about the relevance of such a value-based foundation, emphasising that Transformative Learning is "first and foremost about educating from a particular worldview, a particular educational philosophy." In this regard, Transformative Learning Theory fundamentally relies on three strands of philosophical underpinnings: it is based on constructivist assumptions; rooted in critical theory; and founded on humanistic values (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, pp. 5-7).

In its constructivist notion, Transformative Learning Theory understands our perceptions of ourselves and the world as resulting from experiences assimilated through the lens of previous meaning perspectives. These perspectives are not universal, positivistic truths but can be challenged, examined, and revised (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, pp. 5-6). Similarly, the Methodology adopts a constructivist notion by allowing for individual development of knowledge and understanding through dance and performance, offering an extrarational, embodied, and expressive way of meaning-making. As illustrated, dance as an embodied narrative of change and performance as a process of recognition challenge dominant epistemologies for both participants and audiences. The Methodology's underlying value provides the corresponding philosophical foundation and assumes that everyone is capable of engaging in such processes of change.

Through its roots in critical theory, Transformative Learning Theory adopts the notion that we uncritically assimilate oppressive structures disseminated through dominant ideologies around us, such as those stemming from family, community, and culture (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 7). The Methodology aims to instigate societal change and critique these structures of inequality by actively providing inclusive access to great art for all and showcasing the unrecognised potential of those on the margins of society. Driven by the guiding value that asserts every participant's potentiality, it socially positions participants as capable, valued, and relevant agents of artistic expression as a critical metaphor for the disruption of existing structures and dominant ideologies. With its humanistic foundation, Transformative Learning Theory stipulates aspects such as individual freedom of choice, the human potential for growth and change, and the personal definition of reality (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 6). As humanistic philosophical underpinnings are particularly poignant in informing and infusing the Methodology's guiding value, I outline this relationship with more analytical depth.

Assessing a range of philosophical foundations in their application to adult education, Elias and Merriam (1980, pp. 117-121) outline five common elements and principles of humanistic education, which are relevant to the theoretical grounding of the Methodology. First, human nature is considered to be inherently good and when provided with a supportive and unconditionally accepting environment, individuals are able to thrive (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 117). Founded on the humanistic belief in freedom and autonomy, this philosophical stance also requires a fundamental trust in each person's capacity to exercise choice and actively engage in self-improvement (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 118). The principle of individuality and potentiality recognises and celebrates the uniqueness of each person, nurturing their individual skills and abilities in an endeavour to become the best possible version of themselves (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 119). This is closely linked to understanding self-concept as a person's subjective perception of who they are and its role in shaping their behaviour and influencing their capacity for growth and development. Finally, the humanistic principle of self-actualisation—as articulated by the American psychologist

Abraham Maslow (1943)—constitutes the fundamental human drive toward growth through realising one's full potential.

The above principles are consistently and deliberately enacted within the Methodology through its guiding value. The assumption of inherent goodness is considered a functional baseline to realising the work in practice, as Maldoom poignantly states: “if I think human nature is NOT good, I can't work” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6). The conscientious investment in a holistic learning environment enabling participants to thrive further consolidates the practical implementation of this principle. The trust in participants' capacity to exercise choice in their self-development is evident in staff's steadfast and unshakable belief and their active commitment to participants' potential for development and growth. Additionally, the principle of individuality and potentiality is practically implemented through the person-centric learning environment and the individualised differentiation of teaching principles and learning content. Offering an alternative resource-oriented role, within which participants can define themselves more positively anew, the Methodology recognises that “a positive or negative self-concept can promote or inhibit learning respectively” (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 126). Finally, the human drive for self-actualisation is central to the guiding value, with all core concepts aligned to support participants in realising their full potential. Through this deliberate implementation of humanistic principles, the Methodology's guiding value creates the philosophical foundation conducive to Transformative Learning.

Building on these shared philosophical underpinnings in humanism, unconditional positive regard—as defined by the American psychologist and psychotherapist Carl Rogers (1951)—provides a poignant concept to understand the transformative impact of the Methodology's guiding value. As indicated by my findings and confirmed by considerations in Transformative Learning Theory, I understand that it serves two fundamental purposes. First, unconditional positive regard facilitates processes of recognition, fundamental to transformative processes. Second, it provides a vital relational holding mechanism throughout the transitional process of transformative change.

Unconditional positive regard might be communicated and experienced as love—an unconditional acceptance of someone as they are and a benevolent concern for the good of another. Related to Honneth's conception of recognition, love is vital in developing self-confidence as the ability to recognise and lovingly accept one's uniqueness of selfhood by forging an identity through the acceptance of others (Fleming, 2014, p. 320; 2022, p. 569; West, 2017, p. 221). As my interview data reveals, this is considered an essence of the Methodology (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 17; Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 23). Disregarding participants' behavioural presentations and lovingly investing in them as people with extraordinary potential is a vital dimension of the guiding value and its practical implementation. Within this dimension of recognition lies transformative potential, building participants' self-confidence and supporting them in forging more positive identities. As Tisdell (2012) poignantly states, "Indeed there is nothing like the power of love to transform" (p. 28).

In relation to experiencing disorientating dilemmas, unconditional positive regard serves as a vital interpersonal holding structure throughout the transitional process, while participants redefine their sense of self and develop new perspectives. "If that other person gives unconditional positive regard, they provide provisional ground for the disoriented individual. This relationship becomes the interpersonal context that supports the client to reflect, explore, and discover more adequate psychic premises" (Green, 2023, p. 196). The unconditional positive regard employed by the Methodology thus not only provides the recognition required to facilitate growth and development but also establishes the relational safety necessary to take the leap of faith into this uncertain journey of change.

Relating the Methodology's guiding value to Transformative Learning Theory demonstrates that they not only share underlying philosophical principles in constructivism and critical theory but are also deeply rooted in humanism. Conceptualising the Methodology as a humanistic approach to Transformative Learning through dance and performance consolidates its capacity to foster personal growth and societal change by harnessing the transformative power of ***Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential***.

### 3.5 Transformative Learning within a Holistic Learning Environment

The theoretical category of *Holistic Learning Environment* constitutes the strategy of the approach, outlining the specificities of the envisaged learning space. In its practical alignment toward the aim, the strategy provides an opportune environment for transformative exploration and self-discovery. As the strategy operationalises the objective and the objective drives the strategy, their interplay effects a synergetic pursuit of the aim. A further reciprocity is identified with the guiding value, as it guides and informs the strategy, while, in turn, the strategy realises it in action. To create and facilitate the specific dimensions of the learning environment, the strategy depends on the method through an intricate interplay between teaching principles, learning content, and practical implementation by suitable staff. In the following, I proceed to relate this understanding of the strategy to relevant aspects of Transformative Learning Theory, conceptualising it as a holding environment conducive to personal change, learning, and development.

Overall, relevant considerations within Transformative Learning Theory acknowledge that artistic experiences need to be embedded in specific learning spaces to yield transformative impact (Taylor, 2006, p. 93). From Mezirow's perspective, an environment conducive to change requires "feelings of trust, solidarity, security, and empathy" (2000, p. 12), while also providing inclusive opportunities for participation. More recent research increasingly recognises the significance of the intersubjective and relational dimensions (Taylor & Snyder, 2012, pp. 44-45) as vital environmental conditions for transformative processes. Challenging participants to step outside of their habitual patterns and pushing them into a liminal space "devoid of familiar structure" (Green, 2023, p. 194) is considered crucial in promoting growth, learning, and development. However, these experiences beyond experiential comfort zones need to be carefully balanced with structural and relational safety in a dichotomy of "brave spaces for learners to step outside of their patterns and habits of comfort, and safe spaces for any disorientations that may happen" (Le Hunte et al., 2022, p. 873).

When relating these perspectives to the Methodology, it becomes evident that the specific learning environment it creates is instrumental in fostering transformative growth and development, while indicating a specific relevance of its three defining subcategories. To develop a coherent theoretical grounding within Transformative Learning Theory, I specifically draw on Kegan's socio-developmental psychology and his notion of the holding environment as a central analytic framework.

Building on Winnicott's concept of the holding environment within child development and psychotherapeutic settings, Kegan (1982) conceptualises human development as a lifelong evolution of personality through adaptation, "an active process of increasingly organizing the relationship of the self to the environment" (p. 113). This process is embedded in the psychosocial context of the holding environment as the "context in which, and out of which, the person grows" (p. 116). He defines three functions of opportune environments for transformative change: confirmation through holding, providing a feeling of safety and validation throughout the experience of disequilibrium; contradiction through letting go and presenting the individual with disconfirming information and experiences; and continuity through remaining in place and providing ongoing, stable, and consistent interpersonal relationships (Kegan, 1982, pp. 118-120). This is extended by Schapiro to include the fourth function of creation through exposure and discovery of new ways of "knowing, doing, and being" (Schapiro, 2009, p. 96). Conceptualised as a crucible, these four functions combined provide both the holding container as well as the momentous catalyst for transformative change (Schapiro, 2009, p. 97). Related to the Methodology, this theoretical understanding evidences the pivotal role of creating a specific learning environment in facilitating transformative change. Although most strongly aligned with its safe yet demanding dimension, I extend this theoretical understanding to all three subcategories as a unifying framework which is supplemented with additional theoretical considerations.

The confirming function of the learning environment provides the support, affirmation, and acceptance of the person in the here and now, serving as both an encouraging springboard and a reliable safety net (Schapiro, 2009, p. 98). This is ensured by the Methodology through all

three dimensions of the learning environment. The safe yet demanding dimension provides the structural and relational support necessary for establishing a sense of safety. The inclusive and person-centred dimension, with its humanistic undercurrent views, affirms each individual as unique (Elias & Merriam, 1980, pp. 122-125) and focuses on them in the here and now, beyond previous biographical baggage. Flexibly attuning and tailoring the process to participants' needs further contributes to a sense of reliability and continuity, and thus, a sense of supportive holding. The communal space of the dance company adds to the confirming function, as "feeling like an accepted and valued member of a group provides a strong container of safety and support" (Schapiro, 2009, p. 99).

In its contradicting function, the demanding nature of the learning environment encourages participants to stretch beyond perceived current limitations, actively fostering growth and learning while creating a space of potentiality through an array of novel experiences in contemporary dance and performance. With its person-centric and communal emphasis, the Methodology provides a new social role within a novel social context, leading to a disequilibrium with previous social reference points for participants. This creates a collective space where individual transformation is adequately supported and amplified through shared experiences of disorientation and communal bonds. The heterogeneity of groups introduces further stimulating contradictions through diverse social interactions and collaborative creative processes, stimulating "learning-within-relationships" and nourishing an emphatic "group habit of being" with each other (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 183).

The creative function, as introduced to Kegan's model by Schapiro (2009, pp. 102-104), is concerned with fostering an environment that offers opportunities to explore new ways of knowing, doing, and being. In the safe yet demanding dimension of the learning environment, contemporary dance and performance expose participants to artistic and aesthetic experiences beyond their comfort zones that manifest as novel ways of embodied knowing and meaning-making. Embedded in a professional environment with uncompromisingly high expectations, this creative function is amplified by legitimising participants' artistic

agency and credibility. The person-centric approach prompts participants to reimagine and reinvent themselves in their allocated identity as dancers. Within community music contexts serving marginalised youth, Mullen and Deane (2018, pp. 189-190) employ the concept of resignification to describe this replacement of negative labels—so often experienced by participants from marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds—with positive identities, such as artist and musician. Resignification is inherently creative as participants are invited to forge new perspectives of themselves and the world around them. This ensures that the learning environment not only provides new ways of knowing and doing through dance but also new ways of being as a dancer. The communal dimension of the learning environment further complements the creative function by providing embodied explorations of new “habits of relating” (Wasserman & Gallegos, 2009, p. 156). The dance company offers a space where participants can safely explore, practice, and internalise novel ways of interacting with others. In fostering collaborative processes and social connections among a diverse group, participants are enabled to challenge, reconstruct, and experiment with their social relationships. Especially through modelling and promoting teamwork, they are encouraged to develop relational habits that are more inclusive, collaborative, and supportive. These new norms of relating not only enhance their interactions within the learning environment but also have the potential to provide a transformative blueprint for their relationships in a wider social context.

The continuing function of a transformative learning environment provides stability and support throughout the transformative change process (Schapiro, 2009, pp. 104-105). The safe yet demanding learning environment ensures, that through relational holding structures, participants are attuned to, cared for, and nurtured throughout—both individually and collectively. The reliable presence of staff is further emphasised by the person-centred and tailored approach of the inclusive dimension of the learning environment, where participants are individually recognised and reassured during their process of change. I argue that unconditional positive regard, as articulated in the guiding value, underpins this relational continuity and fundamentally motivates staff to provide this steadfast and dependable support. The com-

munal dimension of the learning environment contributes not only by ensuring ongoing interpersonal connections among the group but, more importantly, by providing a stable social context. As a containing collective identity, the dance company functions as a consistent and predictable social structure with established norms, shared goals, and transparent expectations, ensuring that participants have the social stability and continuity needed to navigate and sustain their transformative development.

In summary, Kegan's (1982, pp. 112-132) and Schapiro's (2009) conception of creating transformative learning spaces, together with relevant theoretical supplementations, provides a robust framework for understanding the transformative role of the Methodology's *Holistic Learning Environment*. Viewed through this theoretical lens, the three dimensions of this theoretical category operate as a holding environment that enables and sustains participants' transformative learning journeys. My theoretical integration thus confirms the transformative function of this methodological aspect and substantiates its strategic significance within my model of practice.

### 3.6 Transformative Learning through an Integrated Pedagogical Framework

I conceptualise the theoretical category of *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* as the method of the Dance United Methodology, encompassing specific teaching principles and appropriate learning content which are actively implemented by suitable staff. In its totality, it functions as the practical means of realising the objective. As staff are driven and informed by the artistic ambition, both the teaching principles and the learning content actively promote the artistic outcome. In its relationship to the strategy, the method aligns with the realisation of a safe yet demanding, inclusive, and communal learning environment. The guiding value of the approach informs the method as a whole, while in turn being actively realised by its different dimensions. Based on this understanding, I relate the method to a relevant perspective on integrated pedagogical practice within Transformative Learning Theory,

thereby demonstrating its significance in facilitating the overarching aim of transformative change.

Due to its diversity of theoretical perspectives and practice, Transformative Learning Theory does not provide a comprehensive and unified vision of pedagogical principles (Taylor, 2009, pp. 3-4). Oscillating between the dichotomies of rational and extrarational knowing, individual and social change, and autonomous and relational learning, approaches are wide, varied, and dependent on context and emphasis (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3). However, I identify a relevant perspective in Cranton (2016, pp. 9-12) and her application of Habermas' domains of knowing to an integrated pedagogical practice of Transformative Learning. Historically, Mezirow has relied considerably on Habermas, adopting his instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory domains of knowledge and translating them into domains of learning (Eschenbacher & Levine, 2022, p. 50; Mezirow, 2000, pp. 8-10). According to Cranton these domains are interrelated: "meaningful learning" (2016, p. 13) emerges from the integration of instrumental and communicative knowledge, while emancipatory learning occurs when this integration shifts a person's perspective of themselves and the world. The following discussion applies this unifying framework to all three subcategories of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*, with additional theoretical considerations on dance-specific learning contributing to a comprehensive theoretical foundation.

The domain of technical knowledge is acquired through instrumental learning (Cranton, 2016, pp. 9-10). In relation to the Methodology, this practical, task-oriented process describes the acquisition of skills and abilities required to confidently and proficiently execute the choreography in an accomplished performance. The teaching principles align with this learning domain through their focus on accessible teaching strategies, adequately facilitating the development of technical dance and performance skills. With transparent, clear, and achievable objectives, participants work step-by-step, gradually building their skills, while ensuring enough time to practise these for technical proficiency. The varied, achievable, and differentiated approach engages a diverse group of learners, continuously promoting progression and achievement in their instrumental learning throughout. The learning content

deliberately and clearly focuses not only on the necessary basic skills, such as focus, movement intention, and body awareness, but also on the required choreographic movement material and dance sequences.

The dance artists implementing both the teaching principles and the content take on the role of “experts and authorities” (Cranton, 2016, p. 80) in their field, exercising the authoritative leadership necessitated in the acquisition of technical skills. In terms of their specifications, this calls their leadership skills, their passion, and artistic expertise into action. Although not transformative by itself, acquiring technical skills and aptitudes has the potential to lay a foundation for changes in self-perception (Cranton, 2016, pp. 80-81). As participants develop new competencies and develop confidence in their accomplished execution, the dance experience invites them “into a different relationship with their bodies” (Snowber, 2012, p. 59), building the embodied foundation for transformative processes to occur.

The domain of practical or communicative learning conveys social knowledge about commonly accepted codes of behaviour and shared beliefs (Cranton, 2016, p. 10). Related to the Methodology’s method, this refers to the learning facilitated through working as a dance company, promoting a sense of community with shared values and a common goal. This domain requires the employment of teaching principles that foster interpersonal learning processes. Clear, transparent, and respectful communication not only establishes rapport and trust with participants but also models positive, supportive, and cooperative social interactions. Differentiation and variation particularly attune to the communicative dimension of learning, as participants experience being acknowledged and met in their individual and collective learning needs.

The dance-specific content strongly emphasises collective and collaborative experiences. Dance in general, and contemporary dance in particular, presents with distinct features in this regard, fostering embodied collaborative practices and generating co-constructed knowledge between dancing bodies (Bannon & Holt, 2012, pp. 7-8). Offering embodied interactive and collaborative experiences—such as unison, contact work, and lifts—contemporary dance facilitates a shared, intercorporeal in-between space, where understanding, meaning, and sense-making dynamically arise through the process of creative physi-

cal interaction with each other (Hermans, 2022, p. 213). This embodied and intersubjective co-construction of knowledge highlights the unique potential of dance-based content to facilitate communicative learning.

In actively implementing this domain, staff act as facilitators. As they respond to participants' needs, foster a productive group process, provide nurturing support and encouragement, and build respectful and trusting relationships, they deliberately challenge previously held perceptions, beliefs, and assumptions (Cranton, 2016, p. 81). Additionally, staff operate as a strong and united team, thus modelling positive, productive, and cooperative group work. As the specifications describe, they need to be compassionate, act as team players, and have excellent communication skills to successfully facilitate this domain of the learning process.

Concerned with the perception of self and the surrounding social world, the domain of communicative learning holds transformative potential by exposing participants to new perspectives (Cranton, 2016, p. 82). From my analysis, it is evident that the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* ensures that the dance company becomes a locus of such learning. By becoming valued and actively contributing members of a cohesive social unit, participants engage in diverse collaborative experiences that challenge their self-limiting beliefs. This transformative potential is further reinforced by the synergy between skills acquisition (instrumental learning) and working as a dance company (communicative learning). Individually mastering choreographic movement material and sequences strengthens the work of the artistic community and, in turn, this collective process motivates personal improvement. A key methodological principle illustrating this interconnection is the completion of a choreographic section within the first week: designed to be technically accessible for everyone and danced by the group as a whole, it ensures both individual accomplishment and collective achievement (Planning Tendencies, Dance United, 2014, p. 2).

The domain of emancipatory knowledge entails critical reflection and questioning of social systems (Cranton, 2016, pp. 10-11). This process of critically examining the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences (Taylor, 2009, p. 7) is central to understanding the conditions and circumstances that shape our

thoughts, actions, and relationships, and ultimately transforms previous frames of references (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). Although Mezirow conceptualises this as a rational process, this knowing can be accessed through other ways (Hoggan et al., 2009, p. 15), with the arts presenting as a unique extrarational pathway (Cranton, 2016, pp. 118-119; Lawrence, 2012a, pp. 477-478). I thus position contemporary dance and performance as a powerful extrarational and, most importantly, embodied pathway to critical reflection. As participants progress through projects, they physically experience previously undiscovered aspects of themselves, challenging their self-limiting beliefs. In their performance, they are witnessed in physically showcasing this previously unrealised potential, further catalysing changes in their deeply held assumptions about their capabilities. The high artistic standard of the work is crucial in triggering the revision of meaning perspectives (see VI.3.3) and thus catalysing emancipatory learning, challenging participants' self-conception, and expanding their beliefs about what they are capable of and how others perceive them.

In terms of the *Integrated Pedagogical Framework* of the Methodology, all three subcategories support and significantly contribute to facilitating the process of emancipatory learning. The totality of the teaching principles is aligned towards maintaining engagement and ensuring continuous improvement, with a deliberate and accessible reflection on progression throughout. Clear and achievable objectives, along with positive feedback, explicitly emphasise achievements all throughout the learning journey. Participants are thus supported in recognising their growth and learning, challenging preconceived notions about their capabilities. Additionally, through a differentiated teaching process, participants are individually pushed beyond their perceived limitations, potentially triggering reconsiderations about what they are capable of. The learning content, especially the tailored choreographic approach, ensures high artistic standards as a vital source of emancipatory learning. Accomplishing a complex piece of choreography is not only something most participants never thought they could achieve, but the high artistic value of the work—with its complexity of content, morphological texture, and multidimensional meaning—offers a vital trigger for the creative and embodied reassessment and re-evaluation of meaning perspectives (Kokkos, 2017, p.

333). Dance provides a pivotal catalyst, as it “has the capacity to be the muscle of the imagination, a magical invitation through the creative process to reimagine new worlds. This is the same imagination that is needed for every new beginning in life” (Snowber, 2012, p. 56).

Staff play a vital role in implementing emancipatory learning as they take on the roles of reformists and co-learners (Cranton, 2016, pp. 82-83). As reformists, they empower participants to explore their undiscovered potential, being both compassionate and responsive to participants’ needs, as well as passionate, dedicated, committed, and resilient to inspire them to become the best versions of themselves. As co-learners, they engage in a collective and convivial transformative process. As “the educator is part of the change, and not merely a facilitator aiming to promote change in others” (Lee & Taylor, 2011, p. 90), their own growth and empowerment are intertwined with that of the participants. Building respectful, trusting and, most importantly, authentic relationships, is key in promoting transformative change. Practicing authenticity requires staff to be reflective and self-aware as well as genuinely invested in participants as unique individuals with potential (Cranton, 2006, pp. 8-9). The Methodology’s reflective nature and its underlying guiding value indicate a conscientious and deliberate effort in this regard.

Overall, situating the Methodology within Cranton’s (2016, pp. 9-12) integrated perspective on the three domains of learning illustrates the comprehensive nature of its *Integrated Pedagogical Framework*. As demonstrated, the dynamic interplay between the specific teaching principles, the dance-related learning content, and the active role of staff effectively facilitates instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning, together catalysing the transformative processes at the heart of the Methodology.

## VII Discussion – A wider application of findings?

In comprehensively addressing my secondary research questions regarding the interrelationships of the core concepts and their meaningful links to relevant existing theory, I establish a theoretically situated, heuristic conceptualisation of the Dance United Methodology. Through this theoretical foundation, I answer my primary research question and thus fulfil my research aim. The following discussion critically evaluates the scholarly contributions and practical implications of my findings, synthesising and contextualising them with a focus on their potential applications beyond this intrinsic case study. In particular, I examine their relevance to community dance within the social inclusion sector, consolidating the broader significance of the Methodology and its ambition to transform lives through dance.

As the foundation for my subsequent discussion, I first summarise my most critical findings. This is followed by an analytical synthesis that presents a contextualised interpretation and evaluation in relation to their situatedness in community dance theory (see VII.1) and practice (see VII.2).

Led by my research aim of establishing a theoretical foundation for the Dance United Methodology, my doctoral study identifies several critical findings. Through the constructivist underpinning of my research design, the Methodology is conceived as a collaboratively construed framework, shaped in its understanding by the shared meanings of its practitioners. By identifying the underlying defining characteristics of the term, it emerges as a historically evolved, practice-based formalisation, which serves as a comprehensive and flexible guide to 'good teaching' which is rooted in humanistic values and framed by an idealistic vision. Within these defining characteristics, the Methodology navigates dichotomies inherent in community dance within the social inclusion sector, situated at the precarious intersection of artistic excellence and social engagement (Adewole, 2010, p. 117). The theoretical foundation of the Methodology—as an exemplification of

effective practice in negotiating these forces—offers a coherent model for the further development of community dance theory and practice.

Grounded in this working definition, inherent values, principles, and key characteristics are identified as the consistent core concepts of the Methodology. Drawing on both its written formalisation and expert interviews with stakeholders, nine core concepts comprehensively articulate the essential components of this specific approach. My document analysis provides six core concepts of practice, encompassing its artistic ambitions, key characteristics of the learning space, best teaching practice, and envisaged learning content. The interviews not only corroborate these findings but also expand on them, evidencing a specific underlying value, the pivotal role of artists in its practical implementation, and the envisaged transformative impact of the approach. Having identified the vital components for a comprehensive yet flexible framework of engaging marginalised populations in a process of dance and performance, my findings address a significant gap in community dance. Despite a remarked emphasis on education and personal development, there is currently no overarching methodology unifying the profession's diverse practices. By articulating the core components constituting the Dance United Methodology, my research contributes fundamental principles that bridge this gap, offering both clarity and cohesion to the broader field.

Through subsequent theoretical analysis, my findings from both datasets are integrated into five theoretical categories, within which six core concepts consolidate into two theoretical categories of three core concepts each. Building on this refinement, further abstraction and relational analysis results in a theoretical model that illustrates the complex and dynamic interrelationships among these theoretical categories. With a hierarchical alignment towards the overarching aim of facilitating transformative processes, the artistic objective is positioned as the catalyst, realised through the strategy and the method. As a value-based approach, the underlying guiding value imbues all aspects within this model. The Methodology's guiding principles align closely with the aspirations of community dance—grounded in values of equality, access, and inclusion, and emphasising the transformative power of dance to engage diverse populations. However, it distinguishes itself by

formalising an approach that prioritises transformation at both individual and collective levels. This distinction positions my theoretical model as a meaningful contribution to both theory and practice.

In a final step, the theoretical foundation of my model achieves academic validation through its relationship to Transformative Learning Theory. Situating my empirical analysis of the Dance United Methodology within this established framework, my findings gain both depth and credibility. This relationship not only substantiates the approach's transformative potential but also positions it within the wider arena of scholarly thought, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Despite its considerable, long-standing impact on British dance ecology, community dance lacks a unified theoretical foundation, particularly in areas such as aesthetic principles, educational methodologies, and socio-political contributions. My research offers an indicative and exploratory response to these gaps, potentially providing the necessary scholarly reference points to articulate these dimensions more coherently.

The following discussion explores these contributions in greater detail, illustrating how the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology informs the professional landscape of community dance, particularly within the social inclusion sector. Considering both its theoretical contributions and practical applications, this analytical synthesis evidences how my research addresses overt gaps in the field with an approach that safeguards the transformative power of dance against the pressures of instrumentalisation.

## 1 Potential Contributions to Theory

Addressing potential contributions to community dance theory, my research findings offer a more unified conception of an applicable aesthetic code, a codified roadmap of pedagogical principles aimed at personal development, and a refined alignment to socio-political ambitions that centre the transformative potential of dance. These insights align with and enrich the critical dimensions of community dance as defined in its established framework of practice (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996). Framed by a robust research design and situated

within established theory, my theoretical foundation provides a scholarly sound and comprehensive framework that carefully balances each core concept in its orientation towards harnessing the transformative power of dance. The following examines each dimension in turn, offering a critical evaluation of their significant contribution as supported by findings and relevant literature.

First, in relation to the artistic dimension of community dance theory, my insights into the Methodology's aim align with the prevalent belief in the transformative power of dance in theoretical considerations of community dance (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, pp. 2-3). With the socio-political pressures specifically prevalent in the social inclusion sector, it is vital to present scholarly robust and sound arguments for maintaining the arts' inherent value within this work. However, despite ongoing discussions emphasising the intrinsic value of the arts along with an appropriate aesthetic code for community dance (Bartlett, 2013; Curl, 2006; Maldoom, 2016), no unified conception has been established to date. My research conceptualises a theoretical model that directly links personal development and social change to the transformative potential of dance and performance, thereby clarifying the Methodology's unique contribution to community dance theory in this arena. By effectively integrating artistic excellence with social ambitions, my theoretical foundation addresses long-standing debates surrounding artistic standards in community dance, proposing a foundation for an appropriate aesthetic code that honours the intrinsic value of the art form.

My theoretical model illustrates how the art of dance can be maintained as a pivotal catalyst in achieving personal and collective transformative outcomes, upholding its intrinsic capacities without compromise dictated by measurable outcomes. This inherent transformative potential of dance is not only consolidated in my theoretical model but also grounded in scholarly considerations. As embodied artistic experiences through dance present new and different realms beyond everyday experience, they hold the potential to create powerful disorientating dilemmas, catalysing new perspectives on self and world (Blackburn Miller, 2020, p. 341). However, this emancipatory dynamic of critical perspective re-evaluation is contingent upon maintaining the integrity

of high artistic value defined by complexity of content, morphological texture, and multidimensional meaning. With more trivial aesthetic experiences weakening these transformative impacts (Kokkos, 2017, p. 336), it is thus pivotal that artistic integrity is maintained, equipping community dance theory with a solid argument for prioritising artistic endeavours over measurable social impacts to bring its transformative potential to full fruition.

In addition to presenting a viable argument for the intrinsic value of artistic standards, my theoretical foundation indicates an applicable aesthetic code for community dance theory. Encapsulated in the focused code *'Making Them Shine'*, the aesthetic value of the work endeavours to showcase everyone to the best of their individual abilities, emphasising commitment, dedication, and intention over physical proficiency. Contrary to prevalent contextualising thought in community dance (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 9), it neglects the social relations and dynamics between participants and audience, instead emphasising an aesthetic outcome "that surprises people" (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 6). This aesthetic outcome involves a carefully negotiated process where participants are pushed to exceed expectations, developing fundamental dance skills, such as focus and body awareness, while being supported in a professional framework with conducive conditions, such as space, lighting, and costumes. Particularly within the social inclusion sector, such an aesthetic framework enables participants to transcend societal expectations, affording recognition through their performance "as a person whose capabilities are of constitutive value to a concrete community" (Honneth, 1997, p. 30). By presenting participants in a way that challenges misrecognitions, the work repositions participants as individuals of inherent worth and potential, cementing the transformative impact of this approach for both participants and audiences. My proposed aesthetic code preserves the artistic integrity necessary for catalysing transformative experiences while positioning it as a powerful medium for empowerment and social change through recognition, underscoring its vital role within the social inclusion sector as a robust argument over measurable social outcomes. In terms of the educational realm of community dance theory, my research offers a structured yet flexible methodological framework for

fostering personal growth, learning, and development. Despite an evident emphasis on this dimension in community dance theory (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 14), there is no theoretically founded conceptualisation of methods aimed at effecting self-development. Although the Methodology specifically harnesses the transformative potential of contemporary dance, I believe its fundamental pedagogical principles can be adapted to a wider range of styles, provided its general integrity remains intact.

My theoretical model emphasises the pivotal function of a holistic learning environment as a strategy for effecting profound personal learning and development. With its safe yet challenging, inclusive, and communal nature, it embodies the underlying values of equality, access, inclusion, and community cohesion of community dance theory (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, pp. 2-3). However, as a relevant contribution, it expands on the rationale behind employing these principles to foster personal development. As participants are confronted with disorientating dilemmas—such as the artistic content and new social roles—the learning environment itself becomes a crucible for personal development and growth (Schapiro, 2009, p. 97). In the environments' dynamic interplay between safety and demand, person-centred inclusion, and communal belonging, the approach realises a conducive holding environment with transformative potential. Fulfilling a confirming function, the Methodology ensures relational and structural safety, where participants are universally welcomed to a non-judgemental space as valued members of a cohesive unit. In its contradicting function, it offers novel experiences in a new role within a heterogeneous group. While its creative function allows for the resignification of personal identities and repatterning of habits of relating, its continuing function provides the necessary stability to weather such an uncertain journey through the predictability and reliability of social relations and context. Drawing on Kegan's (1982, p. 113) concept of a universally applicable holding environment for lifelong learning, I argue that these theoretically founded principles of creating an opportune space for transformative learning can be flexibly adjusted to community dance theory: any dance style can introduce disorientating dilemmas while offering individually calibrated access to a heterogeneous group;

any context of provision can employ principles of relational and structural safety while promoting the necessary destabilisation for personal change; and any envisaged client group can be encouraged to question their sense of self and the world around them while being held in a stable and predictable cultural milieu.

Additionally, the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology illustrates the transformative function of the integrated pedagogical framework in the interplay between the specific teaching principles, the dance-related learning content, and their active implementation through artists. Although the individual teaching principles identified within the Methodology are in no way novel in isolation, their synthesis provides a conceptualisation of effective methods currently lacking within community dance theory. This gap is particularly prevalent within the social inclusion sector, as illustrated in the best practice report by Bramley and Jermyn (2006). While the client-centred learning content is in line with the theoretical framework of community dance (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 11), it deviates from participatory decision-making in the choreographic process through its authoritative nature. Derived from my analysis, this structured approach is not only integral to the Methodology's artistic ambition but, most importantly, provides the structure, safety, and stability specifically required when facilitating transformative processes among vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, my theoretical foundation exceeds current considerations around the role of artists as highly professional practitioners (Bartlett & Stenton, 2009, p. 36) by explicating their active role within this dynamic interplay. While they act as experts within their field to facilitate instrumental learning, they also embody their role as facilitators for communicative learning and as co-learners in a joint journey through emancipatory learning (Cranton, 2016, pp. 9-12). This multifaceted engagement of artists thus extends beyond their dance expertise, locating them as active agents in facilitating personal development.

At the social level of community dance theory in general (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 17) and the social inclusion sector in particular (Gladstone, 2009, p. 36), my theoretical foundation resonates with the ambition to contribute to wider social change through

community cohesion—not only prescribing the creation of communal spaces but also instigating collective transformative processes. As this dimension of community dance currently lacks a consistent, systematic, and unified theoretical integration, my findings address this gap. Positioning the inherent potential of dance and performance as pivotal catalysts, they indicate how this change is fostered. This perspective is exemplified by Sir Christopher Frayling, the former chair of the Arts Council England, in relation to the Academy Programme in Bradford: “Some people see, that artistic quality and social concern are in some way in opposition to each other. I think they enhance each other. So here’s an example of artistic quality and social concern coming together in a really excellent project.” (Dance United, 2009a). This methodological interplay between artistic excellence and social ambitions constitutes the driving force in fostering societal change, both among participants and the broader social contexts they inhabit.

As identified in my findings on the communal dimension of the holistic learning environment, the collective artistic ambition of an accomplished performance motivates the formation of the cohesive social unit, bounded by their shared identity based on a common ground. Reflecting on the concept of community within the work, Maldoom observes: “What is community? [...] I would say actually the community bit is the bits in the studio, that’s where the community is” (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 15). This understanding is echoed in community dance theory, where community is defined as a value term describing the artistic “communication between people through collective creativity” and “an activity that brings people together to work in reciprocity” (Houston, 2008, p. 15). Beyond confirming this shared meaning interpretation, my theoretical foundation demonstrates an explanation for the potential of interpersonal learning to effect transformative processes, not only providing the necessary sense of reciprocal support (Schapiro, 2009, p. 99) but also creating opportunities to revise habits of relating (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 183).

Expanding on community cohesion as a manifestation of facilitating social change through community dance, my findings explicate the potential for wider social impact, such as on families and statutory systems surrounding participants. The performance challenges the audi-

ence's preconceptions about participants, not only humanising them (Interview with Hassall, December 2021, p. 3) but also showcasing their potential in a social context that has often dismissed them (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 10). This collective transformative effect hinges on the artistic integrity of the approach, as confirmed by Houston (2018, pp. 240-244), who prioritises the artistic impetus over social imperatives when discussing impactful practice in community dance within the social inclusion sector. My findings provide a robust theoretical foundation of the social impact of community dance. While my theoretical model positions high artistic standards as an objective in the realisation of this aim, its theoretical embeddedness in Transformative Learning Theory deepens an understanding of its potential to drive profound personal and social change.

Politically, community dance theory aims to democratise the arts by promoting access, participation, diversification, and inclusion, challenging modernist cultural hegemony and empowering participants to engage with the art form as an impactful means of actively shaping self and world (Foundation for Community Dance, 1996, p. 16). Occupying a politically charged realm, the profession is exposed to the pressures of productivity and economics, particularly within social inclusion agendas. This political vulnerability underscores the urgent need for universally recognised standards of practice, as the absence of such frameworks leaves the practice vulnerable to instrumentalisation by funding bodies, whose imposed criteria may prioritise social functions over artistic and transformative goals (Corner, 1995, p. 115). The effective democratisation of the arts requires equal opportunity, with equitable access to active participation for all—regardless of socio-economic status or background. Challenging dominant cultural hegemonies and bridging traditional notions of high and low culture, democratic artistic creation reflects diverse lived experiences and values a multitude of voices and expressions. Encompassing a colourful spectrum of practices (Houston, 2008, p. 15), community dance reflects this political ambition of the work but, in lacking a unified aesthetic code, fails to articulate the critical position of artistic excellence within this argument. In simple terms, it is insufficient to merely provide access to art while neglecting its transformative potential in overcoming societal

barriers. The steadfast commitment to artistic standards evidenced in my theoretical foundation ensures that the democratisation of dance entails universal access to exceptional art, as Bynoe proposes, “dance is dance, and we are inclusive, and if we are inclusive then it has to be amazing” (Interview with Bynoe, January 2022, p. 12). Thus, the Dance United Methodology formulates a value-based artistic ambition within an effective framework for engaging marginalised populations in dance and performance, lending a tentative contribution to upholding artistic standards within the political aim of democratising the arts.

Further strengthening the political dimension of community dance theory, my theoretical foundation proposes a comprehensive aesthetic and pedagogical framework, contributing to the conceptualisation of robust methodologies within the social inclusion sector. As a viable and effective approach, evidenced by the pervasive evaluation efforts of Dance United, my theoretical model not only defines aims and objectives but also demonstrates how they can be consistently achieved. Additionally, its theoretical situatedness not only ensures that it is conceptually sound but also demonstrates its scholarly credibility.

In its entirety, my research details a roadmap for establishing the universally recognised standards necessary to mitigate externally imposed agendas and cement dance in its transformative potential as a distinct and impactful art form of practice at the heart of effecting meaningful social change. Although this particular contribution may not extend to the sector as a whole, it potentially serves as a viable argument to funding bodies for Dance United Yorkshire, who continue the legacy of the Methodology to this day.

## 2 Potential Contributions to Practice

In addition to my research’s theoretical contributions, it enriches community dance practice in multiple areas. It provides a robust yet flexible comprehensive framework for effective practice and, in articulating required professional specifications, informs the training needs of practitioners. Its focus on transformative learning not only indicates meaningful avenues for impact evaluation but also makes a case for incorporating performances as means of promoting positive self-devel-

opment among marginalised populations. Within the specific practice context of Dance United Yorkshire, my insights contribute to the legitimisation of the ongoing implementation of this approach. In a comprehensive outline of contributions to practice, the following discusses each of these areas in turn.

My theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology not only addresses the theoretical lack of a unified pedagogical framework but, as a historically evolved practice-based approach, constitutes an applicable catalogue of methods and principles. The regulatory frameworks of the National Professional Standards for Dance Leadership (Craddock & Willmore, 2011), along with the People Dancing Professional Qualifications (Leatherdale & Stenton, 2024), assure quality standards of the profession and adequately equip practitioners to meet these standards. However, neither encompass the specificities of practice in the social inclusion sector. This lack of sector-specific pedagogies is also echoed in the best practice report by Bramley and Jermyn (2006). Project parameters, outcomes, and challenges are detailed, whereas respective methodologies of individual initiatives are omitted, limiting the report's potential for knowledge transfer and capacity building within the sector. My identification of core concepts provides a comprehensive blueprint of relevant dimensions of practice. While my theoretical model illustrates their dynamic interplay, its theoretical grounding provides a robust justification for their implementation. As the broad spectrum of Dance United's work evidences, these principles are transferrable and replicable in a range of contexts with various populations when their foundational integrity is maintained.

Over the years, the Foundation for Community Dance has demonstrated immense efforts in assessing and providing for the professional development needs of its membership (Burns, 2008; Jasper, 2013; Leatherdale & Stenton, 2024). Within the social inclusion sector, the importance of equipping dance artists with the skills and knowledge for safe and effective practice with vulnerable groups has been recognised (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, p. 14), motivating initiatives which assess these requirements in depth (Gladstone, 2009). However, to date, the Foundation for Community Dance does not offer a specific training course for working in the social inclusion sector. Dance United has

consistently offered training initiatives throughout its active years (see IV.1), evolving a specific approach for equipping dance artists with the necessary skills and knowledge to work in this sector. Although my research does not focus on this activity of the company, my findings illustrate the specifications of suitable staff and their role in actively implementing an impactful approach in social inclusion. These insights inform critical areas of learning, such as reflective capacities, interpersonal sensitivities, communication skills, and leadership abilities. As practical experience presents itself as vital in proficiently delivering this way of working (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 12; Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 9), my research also suggests expanding training beyond courses to include mentorship programmes with on-the-job learning. Both aspects provide valuable information for tailored professional development with a potential integration into existing regulatory frameworks.

Moreover, my research findings outline applicable professional specifications for artists intending to practise in the social inclusion sector. While the professional code of conduct by the Foundation for Community Dance encompasses professional competencies and responsibilities (Bartlett & Stenton, 2009, pp. 37-38), these are not tailored to specific sectors. This lack of guidance leaves professionals uncertain of skill requirements and role expectations, posing challenges to recruitment due to the absence of criteria for evaluating candidates. Dance United historically struggled to recruit suitable artists who could sustain the rigour of the approach amidst its considerable multi-dimensional challenges (Interview with Coggins, November 2021, p. 4; Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 5; Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 10). Compounding this challenge, the company never composed a comprehensive person specification to identify suitable artists, instead relying on an intuitive understanding of who was right for the job. My findings on the specifications of suitable staff and their described responsibilities in actively implementing the approach provide valuable insights into this area, offering a theoretically based foundation for composing clear and actionable guidelines to inform recruitment processes within this sector.

Identifying transformative learning as the core aim of the Dance United Methodology presents an opportunity to strategically design impact evaluation efforts directed toward this specific outcome. In simple terms, once the intended impact is identified, the appropriate tools can be employed to capture it effectively. Historically the company struggled to appropriately assess the nuanced, individual processes of change undergone by participants, often yielding to external influences from partners or funders. For instance, reports on the Academy Programme predominantly focus on recidivism, while the Alchemy report prioritises mental health outcomes as proposed by medical professionals (see IV.2). Aligning with transformative learning as the primary outcome would ensure that evaluations transparently reflect anticipated impacts which less susceptible to external pressures. Validated research tools, such as the Transformative Learning Survey (Stuckey et al., 2013), can flexibly be integrated into project delivery, even incorporating arts-based techniques (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012, p. 527). Subsequently, referencing results to the extensive body of Transformative Learning Theory situates outcomes within a scholarly discourse, bridging theory and practice. As community dance in the social inclusion sector seeks to empower and transform (Houston, 2005, p. 166), focusing project evaluations on transformative learning provides a validated and meaningful research design for the sector.

As community dance practice generally emphasises the process-oriented experience of creating dance, “the process of dance making is given higher value than the performance” (Adewole, 2019, p. 9). However, incorporating performance opportunities into provisions serves as a powerful source of achievement and pride, significantly boosting participants’ confidence and self-esteem levels, specifically within the social inclusion sector (Bramley & Jermyn, 2006, pp. 21-22). As evidenced in my theoretical foundation, performances are pivotal catalysts for personal and collective transformations. This is not only corroborated by my analysis but also supported by its theoretical integration with Transformative Learning Theory. While participants benefit from increased self-esteem through the recognition of their capabilities and potential (Fleming, 2014, p. 321), audiences are challenged in their social preconceptions (Fleming, 2022, p. 574), effecting broader social

change though the performative dialogue. By positioning performance as a critical element within community dance practice, my research underscores its value in the social inclusion sector as it enhances the public visibility of the work and affirms its significant role in driving wider societal transformation.

In addition to these general contributions to community dance practice in social inclusion, my research findings specifically benefit the ongoing implementation of the approach by Dance United Yorkshire, upholding its “heart and soul” (Interview with Linsell, January 2022, p. 4) while maintaining organisational sustainability amidst changing and challenging socio-political climates. Supported by continued evidence of its efficacy (Dance United Yorkshire, 2014b, 2021b), the organisation has flexibly adapted and expanded its provisions with a steadfast commitment to artistic innovation (see IV.1.5). My research provides a coherent theoretical underpinning to this approach, further enhancing its validation and credibility. The theoretical model demonstrates the transformative potential of artistic excellence in dance and performance through a comprehensive, dynamic, and accessible conceptualisation of practice. Situated within established theory, I provide a scholarly understanding of this transformative impact, demonstrating the intellectual rigour of an evidence-based practice. This can support the company in their effective engagement with relevant stakeholders, securing funding, informing policy, increasing visibility, and fostering recognition of its wider impact.

In specific terms, my findings inform both staff capacity building and evaluation procedures. Dance United Yorkshire steadily invests in workforce development and partners with further and higher education institutions by delivering training and offering student placements (Dance United Yorkshire, 2024c). Contributing to these endeavours, my research specifies required skills, competencies, and aptitudes. In the dynamic interplay of the Methodology, these insights bridge training with the practical implementation of learning. Furthermore, in terms of recruiting suitable artists, it provides a nuanced person specification to evaluate candidates for positions. Evaluation of outcomes presents another significant area of contribution to Dance United Yorkshire’ work. Through its established relationship with Transformative

Learning Theory, my findings justify the use of validated research tools to assess transformative learning, while embedding evaluation results within a credible and relevant theoretical context.

As a concluding reflection on the above contributions, I reiterate that the Dance United Methodology represents a specific case of community dance, exceeding the facilitation of dance activities for, with, and within community contexts by embodying a profound commitment to dance as a catalyst for transformative change. As Byrne aptly notes, “what we do is so much more than that” (Interview with Byrne, February 2022, p. 4). Encapsulating a critical shift of focus, this approach positions the inherent potential of artistic excellence in dance to instigate personal growth and social change as its central ambition.

I do not suggest that community dance theory and practice lack these fundamental commitments and principles. The profession is indeed marked by a multitude of viable, effective, and pioneering initiatives within the social inclusion sector. Driven by highly qualified professionals dedicated to their art form and social mission, many esteemed companies continue to innovate the sector through flourishing educational and community engagement programmes, with over 56 such initiatives currently listed on the Foundation for Community Dance website (Foundation for Community Dance, 2024).

What my research findings contribute is a comprehensive framework that explicitly articulates these often-implicit and inherent practices, offering a robust, theoretically founded conceptualisation with the intrinsic value of the arts at the heart of it all. Rather than critiquing the field, I seek to strengthen its potential and recognition as a distinct artistic practice that is deeply rooted in a commitment to social responsibility. By offering a shared language, my theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology as a best-practice model not only strengthens the articulation of its impact but also supports the sector’s ongoing efforts to defend the transformative power of dance against often adverse socio-political demands.



## VIII Conclusion

“Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art”  
(Stake, 1995, p.136)

Resonating with the metaphorical connotation of this perspective, the completion of my case study on the Dance United Methodology represents not only the culmination of years of scholarly research but also a defining milestone in my professional journey with this transformative approach. Exceeding the bounds of an academic endeavour, this doctoral dissertation has been an intellectual, creative, and deeply personal endeavour, reshaping my identity as both an academic and a practitioner. Much like the participants’ journey on a Dance United project, I faced daunting challenges, celebrated achievements, navigated the unknown, and ultimately succeeded through dedication, perseverance, and commitment. The strategies I employed to manage my progress—such as breaking tasks down into achievable steps, varying activities, cultivating a supportive community, acquiring the necessary basic skills, and nurturing belief in my academic potential—reflect key aspects of the Methodology’s core concepts, underscoring their profound relevance, both theoretically and practically.

Throughout this academic journey, I was guided by the aim of establishing a theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology, asking the primary research question: What is the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology? I realised this ultimate goal through the objectives of identifying the approach’s core concepts and subsequently interrelating these into a theoretical model. By asking: What are the core concepts of the Dance United Methodology? and How do the core concepts relate to each other?, I achieved a heuristic approximation of theoretically conceptualising the approach. In a concluding step, I related my findings to Transformative Learning Theory. This process was guided by the question of meaningful links between the core concepts and relevant existing theory, embedding my conceptualisation in its theoretical situatedness. My theoretical foundation of the Dance

United Methodology provides explorative contributions to community dance theory and practice, particularly in the social inclusion sector.

Given the research gap of a theoretical underpinning for the Dance United Methodology and, more broadly, within community dance, my findings hold significance as a meaningful contribution, not only to scholarly discourse but also to practice. While the academic rigour of my research addresses the profession's need for robust theoretical development, the structured yet adaptable model serves as a best-practice precedent, contributing to professional standards and advancing the field. This bridge between theory and practice reinforces the legitimacy of impactful dance initiatives within the social inclusion sector as a unique art form in their own right, providing a coherent language for further advocacy with relevant stakeholders to foster the recognition and support for this work.

Having accomplished what I set out to achieve, in the following I reflectively situate these contributions within the realistic limited boundaries of my research (see VIII.1). By identifying these limitations and potential gaps, I also recommend areas for further exploration as a roadmap for subsequent studies (see VIII.2).

## 1 Limitations

While my findings succeed in addressing the research gap concerning a theoretical foundation for the Dance United Methodology, with significant potential for contributing to the wider field of professional practice, it is important to transparently acknowledge their realistic limitations. These limitations—related to design issues, subjective biases, and the theoretical reference point—frame my research within specific boundaries to ensure a realistic understanding of its scope and utility, emphasising its significance without overstating its contribution.

Firstly, limitations arise concerning generalisability and transferability, stemming from the singular focus of an intrinsic case study. I deliberately choose this research design “to understand the particular in depth” (Merriam, 1998, p. 208), investigating the Dance United Methodology as a specific case of community dance in social inclusion. While this focus provides depth to my analysis, it limits the breadth

of applicability across a wide, diverse, and complex professional field, thereby restricting my theoretical and practical contributions.

To mitigate these issues, I employ applicable data validation strategies, maintaining external validity of findings. Rich descriptions of both the case's context and its boundaries provide sufficient contextual understanding to help determine the applicability of my research across other settings, client groups, and dance genres, deliberately constrained to the social inclusion sector as the relevant practice field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 256). The maximum variation of interview partners captures a comprehensive range of nuanced perspectives on the approach, increasing diversity in findings “for a greater range of application” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). Together, these strategies allow for naturalistic generalisations, with sufficient detailed description provided, so that practitioners can determine applicability to their respective context (Stake, 1995, p. 85).

Despite these data validation efforts, I believe that my theoretical foundation, in its entirety, is not universally applicable. Although individual core concepts may be more widely relevant—such as an inclusive and communal learning environment or best-practice teaching principles—the theoretical model as a whole may not extend to process-oriented, non-intensive, or long-term dance provisions with a strong participatory emphasis on working from and within participant's realms of experiences. As my research evidences, the Methodology relies on its overall integrity to yield transformative results, so fragmenting it into applicable aspects may lessen its impact. By focusing on the intrinsic case of the Dance United Methodology, my research prioritises depth of scholarly rigour over breadth of applicability as a deliberate trade-off. Nevertheless, the identified core concepts can serve as reference points for other innovative practices with comparable parameters, inviting further exploration and adaptation, while maintaining methodological integrity to achieve transformative outcomes.

Secondly, my research is limited in its objectivity by considerable perspective bias, arising from both my researcher positionality and the stakeholder influence of my interview partners. While my professional connection to the case provided advantages, such as field access and a density of specialist knowledge as a co-expert (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p.

69), my positionality bias may have influenced the data collection and analysis process, potentially overlooking alternative interpretations and favouring certain outcomes. I mitigate this issue by employing a robust research methodology, including Constructivist Grounded Theory Method as an inherently reflective analysis approach, which positions me interactively within the process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 321; Urquhart, 2023, pp. 99-100). Furthermore, I openly state my personal perspective and motivation prior to discussions and maintain transparency in my analysis throughout the discussion of my findings.

Regarding stakeholder influence, while I gain nuanced and multi-faceted insights into the Methodology through the in-depth expertise of my interview partners, their vested interests in the approach's efficacy may introduce bias. This potential for partiality could limit a balanced evaluation of areas for improvement or contradictions. The retrospective nature of the data, with most interview partners reflecting on past experiences rather than current applications, further compounds this issue. I alleviate these challenges through triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 252), with extensive comparison and subsequent integration of data from both documents and interviews. Additionally, I broaden the scope of my interviews through maximum variation to capture a wide range of stakeholder perspectives.

Despite these limitations, the coherence of my theoretical foundation is attributable to the in-depth and nuanced perspectives captured in my research context. Both my reflective positionality and the expertise of stakeholders contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the Methodology as a complex, dynamic, and multi-faceted approach. By delineating a robust theoretical foundation, my research invites further validation, critique, and development, providing a meaningful starting point for a broadened dialogue on the transformative potential of community dance in the social inclusion sector, advancing both its theory and practice.

Finally, I identify limitations with regards to its theoretical reference point, relating my theoretical model of the Dance United Methodology to Transformative Learning Theory. Although it presents as a robust, established, and relevant body of theory, critical voices suggest “that transformative learning may not exist as an identifiable phenomenon”

but is more appropriately understood as “good learning” (Newman, 2012, p. 36). This critique, challenging whether the theory describes a unique kind of learning or merely reflects effective educational practices, raises valid questions about the theoretical reference point of my analysis. Does the Dance United Methodology genuinely instigate processes of transformation—a profound change of improving character or appearance (Cambridge University Press, 2024c)—or is it simply a model of good practice that fosters effective processes of learning leading to change? This question potentially undermines the specificity and theoretical robustness of my foundation while highlighting crucial implications for my research and pointing to enriching discussion points for further exploration.

In addressing three specific aspects raised by Newman (2012), I demonstrate how my theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology not only aligns with Transformative Learning Theory but also expands its conceptual boundaries in a reciprocal enrichment. Firstly, Newman questions the positioning of agency, which he considers an indicator of transformative emancipation, and concludes a lack of it in practical realisation (Newman, 2012, pp. 38-39). I argue that my analysis clearly evidences instances of such agentic processes with participants transitioning from being beneficiaries to becoming benefactors, whether for their audiences or their communities (Interview with Maldoom, March 2022, p. 6; Interview with Herbert, December 2021, p. 10; Interview with Crane, November 2021, p. 14).

Secondly, Transformative Learning does not represent a fundamentally distinct kind of learning but merely describes a certain degree of effective learning (Newman, 2012, pp. 40-41). Within his argument, Newman applies quite a traditional notion of educational change constrained to knowledge, skills, and attitude, neglecting more holistic conceptions of learning (Newman, 2012, pp. 38-39). I differentiate the learning promoted by the Dance United Methodology as a unique kind, extending beyond intellectual engagement to encompass profound shifts in participants’ embodied sense of self. By integrating physical development with cognitive and emotional growth, this approach offers a multi-dimensional and holistic understanding of transformation, challenging the theory’s traditional framing.

Lastly, while Transformative Learning Theory does emphasise changes in consciousness, Newman (2012, pp. 42-43) argues a theoretical prevalence of superficial changes in identity. Based on Freire's concept of conscientization—as collective process of reflection and action that integrates thinking, feeling, and doing to inspire meaningful change—Newman highlights the fundamental differences in their transformative value. I align my theoretical foundation with both, changes in identity as well as consciousness, and extend it to embodied consciousness—how participants physically inhabit and experience their bodily and social selves. By grounding transformation in embodied consciousness, this approach relates to Freire's praxis of critical reflection and action, while extending it into the creative and physical realm, where expression through movement serves as a catalyst for profound personal and social change. To this end, I propose extending Newman's (2012, pp. 51-52) nine aspects of learning—including instrumental, communicative, affective, interpretative, essential, critical, political, passionate, and moral—by another dimension: embodied. Although relating my theoretical model to Transformative Learning Theory requires further validation to ensure it meets the criteria of transformation as opposed to developmental learning change, this theoretical alignment offers significant opportunities for further exploration.

In summary, this reflection on the limitations of my study demonstrates the value of my contributions within realistically defined boundaries, while inviting further explorations as discussed in the following.

## 2 Further Recommendations

In light of the evident lack of a coherent theoretical base in community dance, my doctoral research constitutes a vital contribution to the field as a whole. While Dance United's work has been robustly documented and evaluated for its impact, my research addresses the gap in comprehensive theoretical analysis. By identifying, conceptualising, and theoretically embedding the core concepts that define the Methodology, I strengthen the approach and inform its practical applications. My findings contribute to the broader field of community dance by developing a theoretical foundation for a successful and impactful way of working,

which could serve as a starting point for further development, particularly in the social inclusion context. Through my examination, I bridge practical dance provision and academic theory, not only enriching both areas but also fostering a closer exchange between the two. Harnessing these contributions, I derive three specific areas of further recommendations for theory and practice from the above limitations: exploring universal applicability, pursuing critical validation, and deepening theoretical embeddedness.

Firstly, I recommend further research on the applicability of my study across the diverse cultural, demographic, and institutional contexts of community dance practice. While this research intentionally focuses on the Dance United Methodology, the findings provide a foundation for exploring similar approaches within the social inclusion sector. A multi-case study, including other well-documented contemporary dance initiatives could identify overlapping frameworks and highlight contradictions in distinct strategies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 233-234). Through further analytical abstraction, a cross-case synthesis would reveal a more generalised understanding of best practice principles, extending the generalisability and transferability of findings. Building on such comparative investigations, subsequent studies could assess the adaptability of these principles, exploring their resonance in varied contexts, even beyond the social inclusion sector and outside this specific dance genre.

Secondly, addressing the evident research bias of my study, I propose further validation, critique, and development by incorporating additional data triangulation and extended maximum variation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). With my theoretical foundation as a reference point, further investigation into the perspectives of stakeholders outside Dance United—including external collaborators, funders, and practitioners—could provide critical insights into its validity, applicability, and challenges. A crucial area of interest in this regard is the lived experience of participants as the recipients of the Methodology. Capturing their perspectives not only provides invaluable evidence of its transformative impact but also insights into their perceptions of how the principles of the Methodology facilitates these changes. Understanding which core concepts of the approach are perceived most significant in

fostering personal growth would offer participant-centred validation of its theoretical foundation.

Lastly, stemming from the limitations inherent in my theoretical reference point, I suggest an extended amalgamation of my theoretical foundation with Transformative Learning Theory. Rather than merely relating my findings to the theory, I propose exploring reciprocal enrichments to further validate the transformative impact of the Methodology and, in turn, contribute to a broadened scope of existing theory.

On the one hand, through the Methodology's shared alignment towards facilitating processes of transformation, Transformative Learning Theory offers appropriate and applicable assessment approaches, alleviating the Methodology's challenge in adequately describing its outcomes using other evaluative tools, such as Theory of Change (see IV.2.3). With ongoing discussions and developments in the field (Melcarne, 2019; Stuckey et al., 2013), this not only provides a contemporary framework for evaluating and evidencing the nuances of transformational processes but also connects to evolving theoretical debates around best practice to capture and validate these outcomes.

On the other hand, with the theoretical foundation of the Dance United Methodology defined as an extrarational, embodied, creative, and collective approach to Transformative Learning, it is positioned as a relevant contributor to scholarly dialogue and enriches current perspectives within the field. While its embodied nature expands current conceptions of extrarational dimensions of learning (Finnegan, 2020; Tsouvala & Magos, 2016), its commitment to artistic excellence offers a critical perspective for discussions on the role of the arts in transformative processes (Blackburn Miller, 2020; Kokkos & Fleming, 2024). This aspect presents as particularly relevant as the performing arts are underrepresented in current considerations. Its emphasis on the communal dimension of the dance company and collective transformative impacts provides relevant insights into the collective dimension of Transformative Learning Theory (Buechner et al., 2020; Finnegan, 2020). Additionally, the Methodology contributes to debates on client-specific applicability, particularly for young people (Benjamin & Crymble, 2017; Kokkos, 2022), while also addressing the often-overlooked area of social marginalisation (Fisher-Yoshida, 2009; John-

son-Bailey, 2012). These potential contributions merit further exploration through extended theoretical integration, expanding the scope of Transformative Learning Theory and offering practical strategies for fostering personal and social change.

Concluding this doctoral dissertation marks the culmination of my in-depth exploration of the Dance United Methodology. Through my scholarly examination of the theoretical foundation of this specific approach, I have sought to address critical gaps, not only within the work of the company but also within the wider community dance profession. In its contributions, my findings bridge scholarly discourse with an actionable model of practice. While the limitations of my study invite further inquiry, they also illustrate pathways for further valuable exploration within community dance and Transformative Learning Theory.

Above all, my research advocates for the transformative power of dance and the space of potentiality created through an unwavering belief in people's extraordinary potential—their inherent human capacities to become the best version of themselves. Just as a Dance United project serves as a “springboard” (Group interview with London Academy team, January 2022, p. 23) for participants, venturing into new opportunities and previously unimagined possibilities, I view the conclusion of my dissertation not as an endpoint but as a beginning of critical dialogue, insightful reflections, and creative advancements. This academic learning journey has had a profound impact on my professional development, and with its release into the world, I aspire to leave a lasting impact on community dance in social inclusion and beyond.



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# Appendix A – Evidence Trails of Data Analysis

## Appendix A1 – Evidence Trail for Defining the Methodology

<b>Defining Characteristic</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	
<b>A Historically Developed Practice</b>	<i>Historical Origins</i>	Pioneering Origins in Ethiopia	
		Pivotal Role of Founding Artists	
		Reflective and Collaborative Origins	
		Emerging Methodological Clarity	
		Origins in Custodial Setting	
	<i>Historical Evolution</i>	Shifting to Person-Centred Focus	
		Shifting Focus from Outcome to Process	
		Stagnating Conflict Between Outcome and Process	
	<i>Written Formalisation</i>	Resisting Formalisation	
		External Pressures Motivating Written Formalisation	
		Written Formalisation as Quality Ensurance	
		Collaborative Process of Written Formalisation	
		Written Methodology as an Evolving Guide	
		Disseminating Practice through Written Formalisation	
	<b>A Comprehensive, Practice-Based, and Flexible Guide to 'Good Teaching'</b>	<i>A Comprehensive and Holistic Approach</i>	Methodology as a Comprehensive Approach
			Methodology as a Holistic Approach
		<i>A Practice-Based and Reflective Approach</i>	Evolving Methodology Through Practical Implementation
			Evolving Methodology Through Reflection
Experiential Learning of Methodology			
<i>A Flexible Guide to 'Good Teaching'</i>		A Flexible Guide to Pro-Active Key Principles	
		A Best-Practice Model	
		Adaptability and Flexibility of Methodology	
		Vital Role of Artists in Practical Implementation	

<b>Defining Characteristic</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
<b><i>A Shared Ethos with Human Values at the Heart</i></b>	<i>A Value-Based Approach</i>	Historical Foundation on Shared Ethos
		Human Values as a Foundation
	<i>Embedded in Shared Ethos</i>	Shared Ethos Shaping Company Identity
		Collective Commitment to Shared Ethos
<b><i>Defending an Idealistic Approach</i></b>	<i>An Idealistic Approach</i>	Methodology as a Risk-Taking Approach
		Methodology as a Pioneering Approach
	<i>Facing Adverse Realities</i>	Socio-Political Challenges
		Challenges in Funding Acquisition
		Challenges of Impact Evaluation
	Defending the Integrity of the Methodology	

## Appendix A2 – Evidence Trail for Core Concepts in Theory

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>		
<b><i>n/a - not saturated through documents</i></b>	<i>'Working to Highest Artistic Standards'</i>	Commitment to Artistic Excellence		
		Performance-Led Process		
		Collaborative Artistic Innovation		
		'Making Them Shine'		
<b><i>Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential</i></b>	<i>Containing and Holding</i>	Creating a Safe Space		
		Building Trust in Process		
		Providing Consistent Structure		
		Comprehensive Support Through Team-Teaching		
	<i>Fostering Growth and Learning</i>	Creating a Professional Work Environment		
		Promoting Ownership and Confidence		
		Taking Learners Out of Their Comfort Zone		
		Exposure to New Experiences		
		Allocating a New Role		
		Facilitating Achievement		
		<b><i>Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre</i></b>	<i>Inclusive Terms of Participation</i>	Choosing to Participate
				Inclusive Access to Projects
			<i>Employing a Person-Centric Approach</i>	No Background Knowledge
		Working with Person not Label		
<i>Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs</i>	Individual Recognition			
	Tailored Choreography			
	Tailored Teaching Process			
	Being Flexible			
		Attuning to Group Process		

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
<b><i>n/a - not saturated through documents</i></b>	<i>Working as a Dance Company</i>	Embodied Experience of Togetherness
		Collective Choreographic Creation
		Collective Achievement
		Fostering Relationships
		Equality Within the Company
		Balancing Individuals and Group
<b><i>Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'</i></b>	<i>Thorough Planning and Preparation</i>	Preparing Project in Communication with Partners
		Planning Dance Delivery
		Planning Throughout
	<i>Clear, Transparent and Positive Communication</i>	Considered Communication
		Managing Group Process Through Communication
		Communicating Transparently
		Communicating Respectfully
		Giving Positive Feedback
	<i>Setting Clear Objectives</i>	Setting Challenges
		Setting Performance-Led Objectives
	<i>Achievability</i>	Making Process Achievable
		Allowing Adequate Time
		Breaking Learning Down
		Improving Through Repetition
	<i>Accessibility</i>	Making Content Accessible
		Making Progression Accessible
	<i>Differentiation</i>	Considering Ability and Confidence in Differentiation
		Considering Fairness in Differentiation
Pushing Everyone to Their Potential		
<i>Variation</i>	Variating Learning Content	
	Maintaining Interest and Engagement Through Variation	

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
<b><i>Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content</i></b>	<i>Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills</i>	Facilitating Body Awareness
		Facilitating Enjoyable Physical Experiences
		Teaching Variety of Basic Dance Skills
		Practicing Basic Dance Skills
		Teaching Performance Quality Throughout
	<i>Working with a Tailored Choreography</i>	Working with Set Choreography
		Balancing Taught and Creative Material
		Achievable Choreographic Content
		Differentiation in Choreographic Content
		Variation in Choreographic Content

## Appendix A3 – Evidence Trail for Core Concepts in Action

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	
<b>'Working to Highest Artistic Standards'</b>	<i>Transformative Potential of Artistic Excellence</i>	Believing in the Intrinsic Value of Artistic Excellence	
		Believing in the Transformative Potential of Artistic Excellence	
	<i>'Making Them Shine' (in vivo)</i>	'Making Them Shine' (in vivo)	
		Getting the Best out of Everyone	
		Setting Realistic Expectations	
	<i>Comprehensive Professional Framework</i>	Ensuring Holistic Quality and Professionalism	
		Professional Production Values	
	<i>Furthering Artistic Vision</i>	Maintaining Artistic Integrity	
		Collaborative Artistic Innovation	
		Uncompromising Artistic Approach	
<b>Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential</b>	<i>Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential</i>	Balancing Safety and Challenge	
		Containing and Holding	
	<i>Containing and Holding</i>	Containing and Holding	
		Creating a Safe Space	
		Providing Consistent Structure	
	<i>Fostering Learning and Growth</i>	Comprehensive Support through Multidisciplinary Team	Comprehensive Support through Multidisciplinary Team
			Reliability and Commitment
		Creating a Professional Work Environment	Creating a Professional Work Environment
			Facilitating Achievement
			Balancing Challenge and Skill
Uncompromising High Expectations	Uncompromising High Expectations		
	Working Intensively and Immersively		

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
	<i>Attuning, Caring and Nurturing</i>	Meeting Participants where They are at Making Participants Feel Seen Providing Individualised Support Attuning and Flexibly Responding to Process Creating a Caring and Nurturing Environment Building Trust and Rapport Positive, Sensitive and Flexible Communication
	<i>Transcending Realms of Life Experiences</i>	Transcending Realms of Life Experiences Exposure to New Experiences Providing a Space of Potentiality Contemporary Dance as a Transcendent Medium
<b>Creating an Inclusive space with the Person at the Centre</b>	<i>Inclusive Terms of Participation</i>	Inclusive Access to Projects 'Actively Making Access' (in vivo) Inclusive Characteristics of Contemporary Dance 'Great Art for Everyone' (in vivo)
	<i>Employing a Person-Centric Approach</i>	Working with Person not the Label Starting with a Clean Slate as a Dancer Valuing Every Participant
<b>Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company</b>	<i>Fostering Collaborative Processes</i>	Promoting Trust and Responsibility Working as a Team Modelling Teamwork Performing as a Collective Goal
	<i>Fostering Social Connections</i>	Creating a Common Ground Establishing a Sense of Community

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
<b><i>Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content</i></b>	<i>Working with a Tailored Choreography</i>	Client-Centred Choreographic Approach
		Ensuring High Artistic Standards of Choreography
		Committing to a Controversial Choreographic Approach
<b><i>Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential</i></b>	<i>Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential</i>	Unshakable Belief in the Potential of Every Individual
		Commitment to Nurturing Potential
		Transformative Effects Recognised in Participants
<b><i>Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'</i></b>	<i>Recruiting Suitable Staff</i>	Challenges in finding suitable staff
		Intuitively knowing who is suitable
	<i>Specifications of Suitable Staff</i>	Being Compassionate
		Being Passionate and Inspirational
		Being Dedicated, Committed and Resilient
		Being Authentic
		Being a Team-Player
		Being a Leader
	<i>Following a vocational calling</i>	Being Called to the Work by Others
		Feeling Intrinsically Called to the Work
Following a Genuine Intrinsic Passion		
<b><i>'Transforming lives through Dance'</i></b>	<i>Impacting Personal Transformation</i>	Developing Embodied Confidence
		Registering Psychosocial Changes
		Empowering Participants
		Developing a Changed Sense of Self

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
	<i>Impacting Collective Transformation</i>	Impacting Communal Transformation Impacting Staff Transformation
	<i>Harnessing the Transformative Power of Dance</i>	Holistic engagement through dance The alchemical magic of dance Performing as a catalyst for transformation

## Appendix A4 – Evidence Trail for Integration of Core Concepts

### Core Concepts identified in both documents and interviews

Core Concept	Focused Codes	Initial Codes	Data Source
<b>'Working to Highest Artistic Standards'</b>	<i>Transformative Potential of Artistic Excellence</i>	Believing in the intrinsic value of artistic excellence	Interviews
		Believing in transformative potential of artistic excellence	Interviews
	<i>'Making Them Shine'</i>	"Making them shine" (in vivo)	Documents and Interviews
		Getting the best out of everyone	Interviews
		Setting realistic expectations	Interviews
	<i>Comprehensive Professional Framework</i>	Commitment to Artistic Excellence	Documents
		Performance-led Process	Documents
		Ensuring Holistic Quality and Professionalism	Interviews
		Professional Production Values	Interviews
	<i>Furthering Artistic Vision</i>	Maintaining Artistic Integrity	Interviews
Collaborative Artistic Innovation		Documents and Interviews	
Uncompromising Artistic Approach		Interviews	
<b>Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential</b>	<i>Creating a Safe Space for Realising Potential</i>	Balancing Safety and Challenge	Interviews

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
	<i>Containing and Holding</i>	Containing and Holding	Interviews
		Creating a Safe Space	Documents and Interviews
		Providing Consistent Structure	Documents and Interviews
		Comprehensive Staff Support	Documents and Interviews
		Building Trust in Process	Documents
		Reliability and Commitment	Interviews
	<i>Attuning, Caring and Nurturing</i>	Meeting participants where they are at	Interviews
		Making participants feel seen	Interviews
		Providing individualised support	Interviews
		Attuning and flexibly responding to process	Interviews
		Creating a caring and nurturing environment	Interviews
		Building trust and rapport	Interviews
		Positive, sensitive and flexible communication	Interviews
	<i>Fostering Growth and Learning</i>	Creating a Professional Work Environment	Documents and Interviews
		Facilitating Achievement	Documents and Interviews
		Promoting Ownership and Confidence	Documents
		Balancing Challenge and Skill	Interviews
		Uncompromising High Expectations	Interviews
		Working Intensively and Immersively	Interviews

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
	<i>Transcending Realms of Life Experiences</i>	Taking learners out of their comfort zone	Documents
		Exposure to new experiences	Documents and Interviews
		Allocating a new role	Documents
		Providing a space of potentiality	Interviews
		Contemporary dance as a transcendent medium	Interviews
<b>Creating an Inclusive Space with the Person at the Centre</b>	<i>Inclusive Terms of Participation</i>	Choosing to Participate	Documents
		Inclusive Access to Projects	Documents and Interviews
		'Actively Making Access' (in vivo)	Interviews
		Inclusive Characteristics of Contemporary Dance	Interviews
		'Great Art for Everyone' (in vivo)	Interviews
	<i>Employing a Person-Centric Approach</i>	No Background Knowledge	Documents
		Working with the Person not the Label	Documents and Interviews
		Starting with a Clean Slate as a Dancer	Interviews
		Valuing Every Participant	Interviews
		Individual Recognition	Documents
<i>Tailoring Approach to Specific Needs</i>	Tailored Choreography	Documents	
	Tailored Teaching Process	Documents	
	Being Flexible	Documents	
	Attuning to Group Process	Documents	

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	
<b>Creating a Communal Space as a Dance Company</b>	<i>Working as a Dance Company</i>	Embodied Experiences of Togetherness	Documents	
		Collective Choreographic Creation	Documents	
		Collective Achievement	Documents	
		Fostering Relationships	Documents	
		Equality Within the Company	Documents	
		Balancing Individuals and Group	Documents	
	<i>Fostering Collaborative Processes</i>	Promoting Trust and Responsibility	Interviews	
		Working as a Team	Interviews	
		Modelling Teamwork	Interviews	
		Performing as a Collective Goal	Interviews	
	<i>Fostering Social Connections</i>	Creating a Common Ground	Interviews	
		Establishing a Sense of Community	Interviews	
	<b>Delivering Dance-Specific Learning Content</b>	<i>Teaching Basic Dance and Performance Skills</i>	Facilitating Body Awareness	Documents
			Facilitating Enjoyable Physical Experiences	Documents
Teaching Variety of Basic Dance Skills			Documents	
Practicing Basic Dance Skills			Documents	
Teaching Performance Quality Throughout			Documents	

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
	<i>Working with a Tailored Choreography</i>	Working with Set Choreography	Documents
		Balancing Taught and Creative Material	Documents
		Client-Centred Choreographic Approach	Interviews
		Ensuring High Artistic Standards of Choreography	Interviews
		Committing to a Controversial Choreographic Approach	Interviews
		Achievable Choreographic Content	Documents
		Differentiation in Choreographic Content	Documents
		Variation in Choreographic Content	Documents

### Core Concepts Identified in Documents Only

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
<b>Employing Principles of 'Good Teaching'</b>	<i>Thorough Planning and Preparation</i>	Preparing Project in Communication with Partners	Documents
		Planning Dance Delivery	Documents
		Planning Throughout	Documents
	<i>Clear, Transparent and Positive Communication</i>	Considered Communication	Documents
		Managing Group Process Through Communication	Documents
		Communicating Transparently	Documents
		Communicating Respectfully	Documents
		Giving Positive Feedback	Documents
	<i>Setting Clear Objectives</i>	Setting Challenges	Documents
		Setting Performance-Led Objectives	Documents

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
	<i>Achievability</i>	Making Process Achievable	Documents
		Allowing Adequate Time	Documents
		Breaking Learning Down	Documents
		Improving Through Repetition	Documents
	<i>Accessibility</i>	Making Content Accessible	Documents
		Making Progression Accessible	Documents
	<i>Differentiation</i>	Considering Ability and Confidence in Differentiation	Documents
		Considering Fairness in Differentiation	Documents
		Pushing Everyone to Their Potential	Documents
	<i>Variation</i>	Varying Learning Content	Documents
		Maintaining Interest and Engagement Through Variation	Documents

### Core Concepts Identified in Interviews Only

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
<b><i>Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential</i></b>	<i>Believing in Everyone's Extraordinary Potential</i>	Unshakable Belief in the Potential of Every Individual	Interviews
		Commitment to Nurturing Potential	Interviews
		Recognising Transformative Effect of Believing in People's Potential	Interviews
<b><i>Active Implementation by Artists 'of Calibre'</i></b>	<i>Recruiting Suitable Staff</i>	Challenges in Finding Suitable Staff	Interviews
		Intuitively Knowing Who is Suitable	Interviews

<b>Core Concept</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	
	<i>Specifications of Suitable Staff</i>	Being Compassionate	Interviews	
		Being Passionate and Inspirational	Interviews	
		Being Dedicated, Committed and Resilient	Interviews	
		Being Authentic	Interviews	
		Being a Team-Player	Interviews	
		Being a Leader	Interviews	
	<i>Following a Vocational Calling</i>	Being Called to the Work by Others	Interviews	
		Feeling Intrinsically Called to the Work	Interviews	
		Following a Genuine Intrinsic Passion	Interviews	
	<b>'Transforming Lives through Dance'</b>	<i>Impacting Personal Transformation</i>	Developing Embodied Confidence	Interviews
			Registering Psychosocial Changes	Interviews
Empowering Participants			Interviews	
Developing a Changed Sense of Self			Interviews	
<i>Impacting Collective Transformation</i>		Impacting Communal Transformation	Interviews	
		Impacting Staff Transformation	Interviews	
<i>Harnessing the Transformative Power of Dance</i>		Holistic engagement through dance	Interviews	
		The alchemical magic of dance	Interviews	
		Performing as a catalyst for transformation	Interviews	

# Appendix B – Interview Guidelines

## Appendix B1 – General Interview Guideline

---

### **Perspective of interviewee (opening / icebreaker)**

---

Please give a short overview of your involvement with Dance United

How did you become involved with the work of Dance United? / How did you come to the work of Dance United?

What role did you have? / What was your relationship to the work of Dance United?

What was your experience / perspective of the Dance United Methodology?

---

### **Historical Dimension**

---

What was the formalization (written methodology) of the Dance United Methodology based on?

When was it written down? / When were the choreographic and planning tendencies added?

Why was it written down / formalized into a written framework?

Who wrote it down? – including choreographic and planning tendencies

In your perspective, how did the methodology change / evolve over time?

Which aspects of the methodology have been consistent over time?

---

### **Methodology as a practice**

---

How was the written framework translated into the realisation of projects / programmes?

How did the methodology inform your work for Dance United?

How does the methodology inform your current practice?

How does / did the methodology guide your preparation, planning and delivery of a Dance United project / programme?

How does / did the methodology inform your decision-making processes during a project / programme?

What are the specific qualities of a project / programme guided by the Dance United methodology?

---

### **Effectiveness of Methodology**

---

How does this way of working effect change, learning and personal development in participants?

Which principles are most important / valuable tools in effecting this change in participants?

In your view, how and why does this approach work with marginalised, vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations?

---

### **Consistency of Methodology**

---

Are there certain aspects of the Dance United methodology, which are applied flexibly depending on the project and / or client group?

Are there consistent principles across different projects and client groups?

Which aspects of the methodology have been consistent over time?

---

---

**Role of staff / artists in implementing the Methodology**

---

What are the most prevalent qualities / qualifications of staff / artists working with this approach?

How important are these specific qualities / qualifications in realizing the effectiveness of the Dance United methodology?

According to which criteria were staff / artists selected into the Dance United teams?

How does the methodology guide the working process of the dance team and of the multidisciplinary team?

---

**Closing questions**

---

Are there any other aspects of the Dance United methodology we have not talked about yet, which you feel are important to the work?

How would you describe the essence of this work?

---

## Appendix B2 – Interview Guideline for Historical Perspective

---

### **Historical perspective of interviewee (opening / icebreaker)**

---

Can you give me an overview of your journey INTO Community Dance and WITH Community Dance?

Can you describe how you got involved in the work in Ethiopia and how that work developed over time?

What were the steps towards founding Dance United and how did your work constitute within that organisational structure?

---

### **Methodology as a practice**

---

How would you describe the core qualities of your work?

What are the most important principles guiding your practice?

---

### **Effectiveness of Methodology**

---

How does this way of working effect change, growth and personal development in participants?

What are most valuable tools in effecting this change in participants?

In your view, how and why does this approach work with marginalised, vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations?

---

### **Consistency of Methodology**

---

What principles have remained consistent over your years of practice?

Which aspects of your practice has evolved and changed over the years?

---

### **Role of staff / artists in implementing the Methodology**

---

What are the most prevalent qualities, skills and abilities artists working with this approach?

---

### **Closing questions**

---

Are there any other aspects of the Dance United methodology we have not talked about yet, which you feel are important to the work?

How would you describe the essence of this work?

---

## Appendix B3 – Interview Guideline for Organisational Perspective

---

### **Perspective of interviewee (opening / icebreaker)**

---

How did you become involved with the work of Dance United?  
 What role did you have within the organisation?  
 What was your experience / perspective of the Dance United Methodology?

---

### **Historical perspective**

---

What was the formalization (written methodology) of the Dance United methodology based on?  
 When was it written down? (When were the choreographic and planning tendencies added?  
 – Michelle, Pauline)  
 Why was it written down / formalized into a written framework?  
 Who wrote it down? – including choreographic and planning tendencies  
 In your perspective, how did the methodology change / evolve over time?  
 Which aspects of the methodology have been consistent over time?

---

### **Methodology as a practice**

---

What are the specific qualities of a project / programme guided by the Dance United methodology?  
 How was the written framework translated into the realisation of projects / programmes?  
 How did the methodology inform your work for Dance United?

---

### **Effectiveness of Methodology**

---

How does this way of working effect change, learning and personal development in participants?  
 Which principles are most important / valuable tools in effecting this change in participants?  
 In your view, how and why does this approach work with marginalised, vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations?

---

### **Consistency of Methodology**

---

Are there certain aspects of the Dance United methodology, which are applied flexibly depending on the project and / or client group?  
 Are there consistent principles across different projects and client groups?  
 Which aspects of the methodology have been consistent over time?

---

### **Role of staff / artists in implementing the Methodology**

---

What were the most prevalent qualities / qualifications of staff / artists working with this approach?  
 How important were these specific qualities / qualifications in realizing the effectiveness of the Dance United methodology?  
 According to which criteria were staff / artists selected into the Dance United teams?  
 How did the methodology guide the working process of the dance team and of the multidisciplinary team?

---

### **Closing questions**

---

Are there any other aspects of the Dance United methodology we have not talked about yet, which you feel are important to the work?  
 How would you describe the essence of this work?

---

## Appendix B4 – Interview Guideline for Practice Perspective

---

### **Perspective of interviewee (opening / icebreaker)**

---

How did you become involved with the work of Dance United?  
What role did you have within Dance United?  
What was your experience / perspective of the Dance United methodology?

---

### **Historical perspective**

---

In your perspective, how did the methodology change / evolve over time? (the time you were there)  
Which aspects of the methodology have been consistent over time?

---

### **Methodology as a practice**

---

What are the specific qualities of a project / programme guided by the Dance United methodology?  
How was the written framework translated into the realisation of projects / programmes?  
How did the methodology inform your work for Dance United?  
How does the methodology inform your current practice?  
How does / did the methodology guide your preparation, planning and delivery of a Dance United project / programme?  
How does / did the methodology inform your decision-making processes during a project / programme?

---

### **Effectiveness of Methodology**

---

How does this way of working effect change, learning and personal development in participants?  
Which principles are most important / valuable tools in effecting this change in participants?  
In your view, how and why does this approach work with marginalised, vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations?

---

### **Consistency of Methodology**

---

Are there certain aspects of the Dance United methodology, which are applied flexibly depending on the project and / or client group?  
Are there consistent principles across different projects and client groups?  
Which aspects of the methodology have been consistent over time?

---

### **Role of staff / artists in implementing the Methodology**

---

What are the most prevalent qualities / qualifications of staff / artists working with this approach?  
How important are these specific qualities / qualifications in realizing the effectiveness of the Dance United methodology?  
How does / did the methodology guide the working process of the dance team and of the multidisciplinary team?

---

### **Closing questions**

---

Are there any other aspects of the Dance United methodology we have not talked about yet, which you feel are important to the work?  
How would you describe the essence of this work?

---

## Appendix B5 – Interview Guideline for External Perspective

---

**Perspective of interviewee (opening / icebreaker)**

---

How did you come to the work of Dance United?

What was your relationship to the work of Dance United?

What was your experience / perspective of the Dance United methodology?

---

**Methodology as a practice**

---

What are the specific qualities of a project / programme guided by the Dance United methodology?

How did the methodology inform your work for Dance United?

How does / did the methodology guide your preparation, planning and delivery of a Dance United project / programme?

How does / did the methodology inform your decision-making processes during a project / programme?

---

**Effectiveness of Methodology**

---

In your experience, how did this way of working effect change, learning and personal development in participants?

Which principles are / were most important / valuable tools in effecting this change in participants?

In your view, how and why does this approach work with marginalised, vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations?

---

**Closing questions**

---

Are there any other aspects of the Dance United methodology we have not talked about yet, which you feel are important to the work?

How would you describe the essence of this work?

---





Particularly since the late 1990s, within the socio-political agenda of New Labour in the United Kingdom, dance has been increasingly mobilised as an instrument of social inclusion, often accompanied by claims of transformative impact. Despite numerous project reports and evaluation studies attesting to its social outcomes, the conceptual and theoretical foundation of these transformative processes remains underdeveloped.

This doctoral research views dance—particularly contemporary dance—as a powerful catalyst for personal and social change and examines the Dance United Methodology as a specific case of community dance in the context of social inclusion. Within an intrinsic qualitative case study, empirical analysis of both documents and interviews identifies nine methodological core concepts and establishes their dynamic interrelationships in a theoretical model. The subsequent theoretical integration with transformative learning theory not only bridges scholarly discourse and heuristic conceptualisations, but above all demonstrates the transformative potential of dance as an aesthetic, social, and embodied practice of knowing and meaning-making.

**Ellen Steinmüller** is a professionally trained contemporary dancer, a qualified Dance Movement Psychotherapist and experienced Community Dance artist. With nearly twenty years of professional practice, her doctoral research at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München develops the theoretical foundation for dance as transformative learning at the intersection of art and pedagogy.

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