

**NDTA and Dance in Partnership:
Dance Artists in Education Training Project**

2005-2006

An independent evaluation by
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1. Introduction

The Dance Artists in Education Training Project was initiated in the autumn of 2004 by Dance in Partnership (DIP), in partnership with the National Dance Teachers Association (NDTA). The Project, which ran for a 13-month period from March 2005 to April 2006, was funded by DIP and Arts Council England, and managed by the NDTA. It allowed valuable training opportunities for dance artists in the Yorkshire region to prepare themselves for working in schools in the current climate, and offered teachers working in Yorkshire schools the benefit of working alongside an experienced dance artist. For both groups of participants, important issues were raised about the potential differences and similarities between artists based in schools, and teachers in the arts. Essentially the project introduced a comprehensive interactive model of training which, with some modifications, could usefully be applied to other regions, nationally and internationally.

This paper presents an independent evaluation of the project as a whole, completed in six days. It does not refer to any budget or financial mechanisms or comment on the selection of artists, nor does it repeat information which has been well documented elsewhere and which is readily available to all participants and partners. I was provided with all relevant documentation by the NDTA, including copies of feedback forms from participants: I also conducted sample interviews with the dance artists, mentors and schools participating in the project, made visits to schools to see work in progress, and attended and engaged in the plenary day held at Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) on Friday 24th March 2006.

2. Context

The collaboration between Dance in Partnership and the National Dance Teachers' Association represents a relationship between two organisations offering tremendous experience of dance in Education in the UK. DIP is a trust set up in 1989 in recognition of the pioneering work of Margaret Dunn, to support and develop partnerships between dancers and dance teachers in the North of England. After 15 years of support for artists/schools through small annual grants, the trust sought a larger project to culminate the trust's activity. The NDTA began its history as the Inner London Dance Teacher's Association in 1977, and has subsequently developed into a powerful national organisation providing advocacy, conferences, publications and support for dance teachers and organisations. A joint proposal to ACE Yorkshire in 2004 clearly set out the intentions and outcomes of the project for all participants, funding was received, and the project was ably managed throughout by Carolyn Wooldridge, Vice-Chair of NDTA, with support from Amanda Burrows, the Programme Manager.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Project

The project was envisaged as a vehicle for professional development, bringing together 10 dance artists from Yorkshire and the Humber chosen from those who wished to work in education settings. They were offered training and teaching experiences in order to more successfully locate their own practice as dance artists within educational contexts. Through participation in an Induction day followed by 5-day intensive Easter School incorporating taught sessions, seminars and workshops, these dance artists were equipped with knowledge and strategies to work more effectively in an educational context. They were then partnered with a school in the region, and allocated an experienced dance educator as mentor, essentially someone who has experienced working as a practicing artist. The ten artists, partnered with a teacher from the school, developed their understanding of the National Curriculum, of examination syllabi (where dance is treated as an art form), and of appropriate teaching and learning strategies appropriate to working as a dance artist practitioner a formal educational context. They worked in collaboration to negotiate and deliver a dance project or series of mini-projects with different year groups. A further three-day training event took place during the project. Artists received feedback from both teachers and mentors during their school experience, and the project culminated in a plenary day where all participants were invited to reflect on the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities presented.

The benefits offered to artist (as articulated in the publicity material) were as follows:

- fully funded high quality continuing professional development
- participation in a creative dance education project that has the potential to enrich and transform lives
- working with young people in schools with support and guidance from a dance education expert
- developing partnerships with local schools, teachers, students and dance organisations
- furthering your own understanding of high quality dance practice within the school curriculum
- locating your own experience as an artist within school contexts
- developing good practice in setting up, monitoring and evaluating dance projects

Contributions to the workshops were made by an exceptionally experienced group of tutors, including Lynn Jordan, Brigitte Doyle, Carolyn Woolridge, Judy Smith, Adele Thompson, Stacie Hooks, Gareth Griffiths, Peppy Hills and Caroline Scott. Mentoring support was given by Caroline Scott, Claire Pring, Fiona Bannon and Carol Mitchell. Artists received positive feedback from these tutors and mentors, and also, on a regular basis during the placement, from the teacher assigned to them in their placement schools. All artists received a monitoring visit by Carolyn Woolridge in school and received feedback on the planning of the work.

4. Organisation of the Project

Throughout the run-up to the actual project start in September 2005, and beyond to the culminating plenary day, the NDTA worked to a stated action plan. From all the documentation made available, it is evident that this was based on previous experience of organising, managing and appraising projects. Forms, letters and templates were thoughtfully constructed and clearly laid-out, and all information was designed with a particular focus on artist, school or mentor as follows:

4.1 Artists

Publicity material for the artists sought for the project was disseminated in November 2004 through a number of channels: local authorities, national dance organisations, regionally based artist forums, dance centres, Specialist Arts Colleges, Specialist Sports Colleges, HE and FE institutions etc.

The publicity material identified the timescale and the benefits of the project, and the fact that this work was fully funded. The parameters of the project offer were unambiguous and clearly articulated. Detailed application forms were solicited by January 05, and selected artists were invited for interview and to give an informal presentation about the kind of opportunity they would like to set up in a school. From eighteen applications received, ten artists were accepted on to the programme. Criteria included prior experience of delivering dance in a range of settings, a desire to develop teaching skills, knowledge and understanding of different dance forms, a passion for dance, the ability to be reflective and analytical about their own work and commitment to the project.

Each artist was required to sign a formal agreement, and received £50 per session for training and £50 for each day's attendance in school, together with an allowance for expenses. Two further young artists were offered the opportunity to attend the training and shadow through the placements: one attended the Induction/Easter school before gaining a place in a vocational school. Training day dates were identified in advance, and a number of venues in Leeds were used. After each block of sessions, written feedback was solicited from them in questionnaire form. From the original ten, eight artists completed the project: these were required to attend the plenary day, and to provide individual written feedback in the form of an evaluation document. Management of the two withdrawals for personal reasons was undertaken sensitively.

4.2 Schools

In November 2004, letters of information went to schools in the region asking them to complete the Schools Information form should they wish to be considered as one of the project schools. Eighteen schools responded, giving details of what opportunities they could offer, and after consideration of the needs of individual artists, 10 schools were partnered with artists. Most participants commented on the thoughtful matching process

applied by the NDTA. Formal written agreements were made between NDTA and the schools chosen, and the remainder received a letter of apology since their offer to be involved was not taken up.

Selected schools received a school placement handbook and a placement agreement to be signed and returned. Teachers were invited to participate in a Teacher Training day towards the end of the summer term which all but one were able to attend, and they were sent the details of the artist and contact details. The Placement Guidelines for Teachers document provided appropriate information, giving teachers a clear context and indication of their role. This guidance included defined roles, responsibilities and expectations, with useful appendices for on-going feedback to the artists and a feed-back sheet to be completed at the end of the placement. Teachers also received for information some of the preliminary preparation material given to artists. Thus, both parties were made aware of anticipated best practice. Artists were not expected to be directly involved with formal assessment in their placement schools.

4.3 Mentors

Four mentors were contacted directly through NDTA networks, and provided with a list of roles and responsibilities. They were contracted

- to oversee the preparation of artists' session plans
- to visit for two observation meetings
- to provide feedback on those sessions
- to discuss artist progress with teachers and
- to provide critical appraisal of each artist's work at the end of the placement.

All mentors received contact details and schedule details, and note that the administrative arrangements for the project were dealt with efficiently by NDTA. Feedback from them suggests that this guidance package worked well, and that each of them was able to work with artists both flexibly and appropriately, finding appropriate yet personalised methods to achieve their roles. They also needed to liaise with schools and the contact teacher, and on more than one occasion arrangements were a little difficult to secure. It seems that in some cases, the artist was already known to the mentor, so that there was some sense of shared working ethics prior to any inter-relationship with schools.

Teaching commitments and illness prevented three mentors from attending the plenary day, but Caroline Scott who was present had mentored four of the artists and others submitted comprehensive evaluation sheets. Though essentially hugely supportive of the project, the majority felt in hindsight that it would have been beneficial to meet each other in some forum to discuss good practice for mentoring. Two some would also have appreciated being involved in the training days, thus having deeper knowledge of what had already been covered by the tutors, though perhaps there are good reasons, educational, pragmatic and financial, why they were not invited.

4.4 Documentation

All documentation produced by NDTA relating to these groups of participants was thoughtfully designed, clearly stated and well expressed. The publicity material was neither colourful nor visually eye-catching, but it provided a clear and transparent description of what was on offer. To a certain degree, dissemination of this material was reliant on other organisations, and on email systems rather than on typical flyer or brochure. However, the letters, forms and templates relating to the organisation of the project were fully appropriate and well presented.

Systems utilised allowed the project managers to keep detailed information, lists and charts on each partnership of artists, schools, teachers and mentors, and to respond speedily when issues or questions arose.

The interim report (June 2005) identifies that the number of responses/applications from artists and schools was less than expected, but that the interview process did allow the target number of ten to be reached.

Feedback from all participants on the organisation of the project by NDTA has been extremely positive. The artists in particular, three of whom had problems to do with childcare, pregnancy and travel distances, stated on several occasions how much they appreciated the effort that Carolyn Woolridge had gone to in order to adapt arrangements, change schools or problem-solve specific concerns.

5. Evaluation of written materials relating to the training days

The files of written materials and descriptions of specific workshops and seminars are extremely comprehensive and demonstrate the care, attention and expertise that had gone to ensure that these artists are fully prepared for their placements. Indeed, it could be imagined that initially they might have felt quite overwhelmed at the bulk of documentation, covering

- Overview of Dance in Education, historical influences, current concerns, political context
- Current National Curriculum requirements at all Key Stages, GCSE and AS level including examinations
- Key concerns of performance, composition and appreciation
- Personal development and transferable skills
- Syllabi
- Teaching strategies and teaching skills
- Working as artists in schools
- Placement guidelines
- Frameworks for dance
- Teaching and Learning issues
- Health and Safety issues, etc

The artists received a generous amount of photocopied documentation, much of it no doubt of use for future projects. Nevertheless, this was no shortened version of a teacher training course; rather, though such knowledge was essential to effective placements, what was stressed throughout was the importance of the contribution an *artist* could make in a school, a point to be further discussed in this report.

The Induction Day, the 5-day Easter Course and the 3-day November training block provided a developmental learning experience with time to assimilate, plan and reflect. It is evident that artists participated in nine days of intensive practical and theoretical sessions with experienced practitioners and teachers, together with valuable formal and informal discussion. It is more difficult to fully evaluate to what extent each artist was able to use and further develop this knowledge in the relatively short period of 10 days in school; however, it can also be said that they received materials that could be of use to them in diverse teaching and workshop situations throughout their future careers. Artists' evaluations, sample interviewing, and feedback on the plenary day all demonstrate that the material was highly valued, but to some extent it also overwhelmed them as was probably anticipated. Though all were encouraged to evaluate their own learning in their files, one mentor suggested to an artist that the keeping of a reflective journal would aid understanding of her development and growth, and this seems a valuable idea to incorporate in future projects.

The guidance notes for the preparatory planning days was extremely valuable, allowing all artists to negotiate the placement with confidence had they truly planned in advance. Feedback suggests that many artists found the planning process difficult; the notion of clearly articulating aims and intentions and of planning a progressive series of sessions in detail was not something that most had much experience of, or had much time to consider. The examples of Dance Frameworks and the notes on planning individual workshops were clearly invaluable to the artists in preparing their initial ideas, giving a discussion document for dialogue with both teacher and mentor.

The feedback forms note that artists were inspired by the Easter course, describing the value of having sessions from a variety of experienced teachers and artists, and mentioning the importance of a balance of theoretical and practical input. The quality of this teaching was praised, comments ranging from 'it enabled me to understand how delivery can alter what is achieved' to 'it refreshed my perception of the diversity of dance'. Generally, the evaluation feedback recognises that the programme 'allowed us to expand our strengths and recognise our weaknesses'. In addition, information on classroom management, potential creative devices, contracts, placement guidance and the opportunity to learn from each other were all appreciated.

Of particular mention was the value of watching a practical session being taught to students, and most would have appreciated more opportunities to observe classes taught by experts. For some, new understandings about creativity in the classroom, and their attempts to 'step back' and use a more facilitatory teaching method was a significant consideration. Many made comments about feeling very motivated after the Easter

Course, and wished that the placement could have followed more closely. Others commented on the way in which the mentor continued these sessions in supporting the preparation. The only weakness identified in feedback was that more focus on special needs education was considered necessary for the two artists who taught special needs groups. In hindsight perhaps this particular area of work warrants its own training programme.

6. Evaluation of feedback provided by artists, schools and mentors

6.1 Artists

The artists were asked to give feedback by comprehensive questionnaires and interviews at salient points in the year, and again in group discussion during the plenary day. Feedback from Induction day and Easter school identifies how inspired they were by their understanding of the history and context of Dance in Education, which led to very positive feelings about their personal support for the position of dance in schools. A balance of theoretical and practical workshop sessions was offered, each providing plenty of opportunities for input and discussion. These provided a positive working/learning environment and a wide range of approaches for the artists. Most suggested that Induction day might have included a dance experience session to encourage interaction within the group in the language they feel most positive about.

The group received thorough placement guidelines, and were supported in their preparations for setting up the placement by the school, their assigned mentor and the NDTA practitioners. All report feeling well prepared for the placement by appreciating strategies and general conduct utilised in schools, and by being introduced to mechanisms for systematic planning and progression of sessions. They received useful handouts for every session to draw upon in their own preparation. Responses also indicate real appreciation of the opportunity for interaction with other artists. As cited above, artists particularly valued being able to watching teachers teach, and wanted more interaction with workshop tutors. Ideally, there might be the opportunity to watch practical sessions taught by mature, established choreographers who are experienced at working in educational or community contexts.

All artists remarked that they gained confidence and reassurance from the preparatory sessions. After the Easter course, and prior to starting the placements, some were able to articulate their perception of the relationship between artists and education/teachers in the production of quality dance experiences. After the placements, however, this delineation was to become less clear as circumstances required some of them to take on the 'teacher' role, and this was further investigated during the plenary day.

It is obvious that these artists experienced radically different experiences, depending on the choice of school, the commitment to the discipline of dance, and the capabilities of the teacher. Theoretically, it was felt that they should be placed with experienced dance staff that can support artists in a school. Four of the group were placed in schools where

the teacher mentors had many years' experience of teaching dance and in-depth understanding of what they expect from an artist. Thus clear lines of communication were established and a shared understanding of good practice could be reached. Two were placed with Physical Education staff, one in a primary school with generalist staff who had little or no dance experience but a long history of working with NSCD, and one placement was held in a special needs school which perhaps required a different kind of training programme. All these teachers could support general conduct and appreciate the dance work produced, but the artist experience was evidently different. This issue of specialist versus generalised training was further discussed at the plenary day.

6.2 Schools

For the teachers in the placement schools, much of the feedback was concerned with the specific needs of their own pupils, and the requirements of the National Curriculum. Whilst very much appreciating the opportunities presented to them by the project, teachers were very aware that this was a *training* project, and that good communication at all times is essential. They felt that ideally, teachers and artists might have the opportunity to meet and talk before the placements are allocated. From the point of view of the schools, it is very important to have a very clear set of expectations and also to be aware that these might need to be re-negotiated during the process. When asked in what ways the artist's contribution might be different from a teacher's, a range of responses was identified, particularly when the artist has little knowledge of the teaching process within formal educational parameters, or when the artist has much more dance experience than the teacher.

Generally the most beneficial relationships are where each has some specific skills to share. Many felt that a team-teaching situation can most benefit students, i.e. where teacher and artist-in-training work collaboratively, each feeding in to the planning and teaching process. This factor was evident in a number of evaluation visits. Essentially, it is pertinent to remind ourselves that qualified teachers may also be artists, though they choose to work in an educational context where the needs of their students and the requirement of formative and summative assessment defines the role.

At the time of writing, five project evaluation forms were received from the schools. However, a number of common issues were raised by these responses which will no doubt be valuable for improving the quality of such partnership initiatives in the future. Some teachers found it difficult to provide sufficient preparation and feed-back time with their artists, either because of other responsibilities around the school or because of the fragmented nature of a particular placement, where the artist was arriving to teach a session and then departing. It should be noted that this not something considered acceptable by the organisers of the project, but occasionally it occurred where schools were struggling to meet the conditions of the contract, or where artists had prior commitments. These teachers also seemed to have differing experiences with, and attitudes towards the mentors; best practice is obviously related to good communication between teacher, artist and mentor, and concerns grew when teachers were not made

aware of the advice given. Equally, some partnerships reported excellent interaction between the three parties concerned, especially when the teachers were experienced dance teachers.

Generally teachers were extremely positive about what they and their students had gained from working with the artists. Benefits range from an introduction to new styles and/or genres to specific performance achievements such as an evening of dance performance for parents. Staff appreciated the opportunity to refine their own practice through observation, or to affirm their own capability as good teachers through comparison. They note that their students enjoyed a slightly different relationship with artists, and in one case, where sessions were organised off-timetable, students were able to experience a much more intensive time.

On another occasion, it might be useful to reconsider the role of the Head teachers in such a project, as in some cases it became evident that their commitment is key in gaining the most from these partnerships. At the end of the project, one teacher from each school was invited to attend the plenary day to further contribute to the evaluation of the project. Since the Plenary day was held on a weekday, only four were able to attend which impacted somewhat on the quality and range of the group feedback.

6.3 Mentors

Mentors responded very positively to the project and its management. In particular, they note that the programme was well constructed and highly relevant to the needs of artists. They identified the flexibility of the mentoring arrangements as a real strength of the project, allowing them to find the best method or system for each placement. Artists had a large degree of control over how and when they used the mentoring arrangement, and saw mentors rather as ‘critical friends’ than assessors. However, mentors had to be very demanding about planning issues – they soon discovered that artists tended to be better able to articulate verbally rather than on paper, and that some struggled with the concepts of aims and objectives for self and school.

Mentors made positive suggestions for improvement in two main ways; the benefit of a meeting with all mentors before the project began together with their attendance at the induction day; and secondly, reconsideration of the choice of some of the schools for such a project. From questionnaires and interviews, it was quite clear that these mentors aided both artists and teachers to question, focus and reflect.

7. Evaluation of the Plenary day

As independent evaluator of the project I was invited to contribute to the organisation of the evaluation day, and offered a series of discrete questions for small groups of artists, teachers and mentors. All artists were present, though only four teachers and one mentor were able to attend. The questions were based on my preliminary findings during the

sample school visits and interviews, and were designed to allow us to highlight strengths and weaknesses from three different perspectives. All participants were encouraged to reflect on their practice throughout the project, and to articulate identifiable gains and missed opportunities. In the final session, the artists worked in twos to identify important aspects of their career so far, together with their unique qualities, their training needs, preparation for a personal five-year plan, and ideas for personal marketing. It was very evident that all the artists recognised their positive growth during the year, but also the value of their developing relationships with each other. Carolyn Woolridge demonstrated a great deal of knowledge and insight about each artist as she was able to unpick and cross-reference some of the issues raised by individuals in greater detail. It became evident that the real requirement for success was balance between craft, artistry, social interaction and communication skills.

8. Concluding remarks

This project has evidently provided eight young and culturally diverse artists with training and teaching experiences through which to develop appropriate skills and knowledge, and it has given them more confidence to enter the formal educational arena. They have begun to understand the requirements of the National Curriculum, of various dance examination syllabi and a recognition of the place of the art form of Dance in schools. The need for good communication, clear expectations and flexibility of approach were key recommendations from the whole group at the end of the plenary day.

The artists brought with them a wide range of experiences, some very different from others. The induction day, the five-day intensive and further training days covered a huge amount of input, but still it did not necessarily prepare all of them for *all* of the demands of the placements. Some of the material offered in the training days might seem basic for those who have already encountered Higher Education programmes, while it was of course necessary and pertinent for those who had not experienced creative educational dance approaches before. And perhaps some approaches to the teaching of technique that were observed were more appropriate to the vocational school than the comprehensive school. However, the nurturing, support and guidance from teachers and mentors has no doubt shifted artists' practice over the period.

As mentioned earlier, the artist versus teacher distinction was not always clear. No doubt it is relatively easy to 'be' an artist on a one-off visit, but the demand for systematic planning, progression and self-evaluation over a ten-day period is obviously a little more taxing, especially when no performance event was planned. Locating themselves as artists was perhaps difficult because it seemed to me that the majority of this group were actually artists in training: i.e. not yet established as fully fledged artists, and not fully aware of what they have to offer as artists.

Consideration of the original aims/benefits of the project suggests that, though many of these have been fulfilled, and some fulfilled at least partially, it seems that few of the participants had the foresight to take advantage of the opportunity to develop long-term

partnerships with their placement schools or the surrounding community. We might also question whether they have gained sufficient tools for the *evaluation* of future dance projects without support, although none would seem to have a problem negotiating, planning and implementing such projects in the future.

Ideally further interactive programmes in other regions might consider specialising in one particular area; e.g. KS 1 and 2, or GCSE and A level, rather than attempt to satisfy the needs of all in a ‘jack-of-all-trades’ approach. And certainly there is clear consensus from all the feedback that a more valuable experience is gained when dance artists are placed with experienced dance teachers in schools.

These comments should not be seen to mask the real achievements made by the Dance Artists in Education Project, and they are offered only to ensure that such a project, which has been so well documented, will be re-used even more effectively. There is no doubt that this project has provided a valuable interactive model of training for artists desiring professional development in order to more successfully locate their own practice as dance artists within educational contexts. I very much hope that through the mechanisms of local authority, regional dance centres, further and higher education institutes and vocational training academies both nationally and internationally, such a model could be re-utilised as an essential package for artist education and training.