

Dear LUTSF,

**Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund**

Please find enclosed a report for the following project:

**Title of Project:** Professional Development and Research  
Touch Compass Dance Trust

**Description:** Research and experience working practices of Touch Compass Dance Trust and establish new relationships.

**Location:** Auckland, New Zealand.

**Dates:** 17<sup>th</sup> March - 7<sup>th</sup> April 2008

**What was achieved?**

During my visit I was fully involved in the day to day running of Touch Compass and delivery of its work. I spent time participating in classes in various contexts, observing rehearsals and also had the opportunity to team teach and deliver some school workshops with the company.

The project achieved my main aim of enriching my professional development. I have refreshed and renewed existing skills through time to reflect and share good practice, as well as deepening my understanding of integrated dance. I have experienced new approaches to dance and disability and these experiences will impact on the way I work in the future.

**Highlights:**

- Meeting and working closely with the hugely inspirational Catherine Chappell, Artistic Director and founder of Touch Compass.
- Taking part in Flying Dance Workshops, with Linda Parker.
- Visiting several schools around the Auckland area and helping to deliver workshops.
- Meeting the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark as she visited one of the schools during our workshop.
- Taking part in a series of Touch Compass Community Workshops where I met the most amazing people and shared some incredible work.

**Suggestions to help future awardees:**

It is important to fully research all aspects of your project before embarking on your trip. Research and have good communication with the company you intend to visit. The information I received prior to going was invaluable in terms of where to stay, public transport and places to visit.

I had to alter the date and length of my initial project due to funding issues that Touch Compass were experiencing. At first I was disappointed but I then approached the project with an open mind and consequently this encouraged me to pre-plan my schedule in detail so as to make the most of my time in New Zealand.

Accept that things will happen that are out of your control but try to approach things with an open mind and a willingness to adapt to whatever situation arises.

**Sharing information about the project:**

I will be sharing the information and the new found skills I have acquired during my project with students that I regularly teach on the Yorkshire Young Dancers Advanced Training Scheme. I have also been asked to deliver a presentation to the BA Dance students on the Education and Community Module at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. This presentation will include approaches to integrated dance practice and my experiences of working with Touch Compass in New Zealand.

I am also due to lead an INSET day for teachers and care workers looking at dance and disability. I will be sharing with them some of the experiences from my project.

My LUTSF project has also been reported on the news pages of The Northern School of Contemporary Dance website.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for supporting my project. It was a wonderful experience that exceeded my expectations.

Best wishes,

Hayley Arthur

**PROJECT REPORT**

**Professional Development: A Journey to New Zealand**

**Description of the Project**

The aim was to experience the working practices of Touch Compass Dance Trust and by doing so increase my understanding and awareness of approaches to integrated dance. The visit involved participation in company work, community dance workshops and a series of school workshops with the Flying Dance team. The project took place in March/April 2008 in Auckland, New Zealand.

## About Touch Compass Dance Trust

Touch Compass Dance Trust is a professional New Zealand dance company that was established in 1997 by Artistic Director Catherine Chappell. It works with a wide range of people, with and without physical and/or learning disabilities. The company's main focus is professional performance but it also delivers classes and workshops in a variety of educational and community settings. The company has toured internationally and has been recognised as a leader in aerial integrated dance.

Touch Compass strives to create innovative dance performances that entertain, challenge perceptions and communicate the passion of dance. Although all members of the company have differing levels of ability, their levels of skill and attitude are all of a high professional standard. Touch Compass has attracted many performers over the years, some have come and gone others including three original members have remained and continue to develop and grow with the Company.

In 1995 there was no one working in Integrated Dance in New Zealand, the term and concept were generally unheard of. Catherine Chappell had spent sometime travelling through Europe and America, training and researching *contact improvisation*. It was through this journey that she was introduced to integrated dance and then began to explore it for herself. When returning to New Zealand she took on the challenge to increase the awareness of integrated dance, she then began to work with interested individuals.

The inclusion of aerial work is something that sets Touch Compass apart from other integrated dance companies. Having involved aerial work in many of their pieces, the company thought it was time to inspire young people around New Zealand and offer community workshops. Aerial work formed a major part of these workshops and the feedback was extraordinary.

*"I was stunned to see my daughter hauled up and made a central part of a unique performance which elevated her above the restrictions of her wheelchair-bound existence, to soar above her disability, to surprise and delight herself, to fulfil a function and purpose she had never imagined, let alone entertained as a possibility".*

John Callen – Touch Compass Celebrating Integrated Dance. Michelle Powles.

It was these types of responses that inspired some company members to take things even further. Linda Parker developed her own successful Flying Dance work in schools alongside her work with Touch Compass.

I was attracted to Touch Compass Dance Trust by its core principles; to promote access to dance for people of all abilities with an uncompromising professional approach to dance performance.

## What were my aims?

- Increase my awareness and understanding of mixed ability dance and then use this knowledge to raise society's awareness.
- Experience the potentials of integrated dance practice in a different environment.
- Undertake practical involvement with Touch Compass, to gain a wider knowledge of integrated dance.
- Analyse and evaluate how approaches differ from a cultural perspective.
- To share my knowledge and practical experience of mixed ability dance. I would also aim to build upon my philosophy of recognising individuality and difference whilst embracing the continued encouragement of artistic and technical high standards within dance.
- Establish strong links and contacts in other countries that will hopefully enable ongoing networking and sharing of ideas and practice.

## Outcomes

During my visit I was involved in many aspects of company life. I participated in company class, choreographic workshops, shared my own approach through practical dance workshops and shadowed the work of Artist Director Catherine Chappell and dancer Linda Parker.

Below is a summary of experiences during my time with Touch Compass, that are both memorable and advantageous to my professional development.

- Participation in Flying Dance workshops, with Linda Parker.
- Visiting several schools around the Auckland area, helping to deliver integrated dance workshops.
- Taking part in a series of Touch Compass community workshops, run by Artistic Director Catherine Chappell.
- Meeting company members and observing their work.
- Observing company repertoire and DVD material.
- Engaging in rich and inspirational dialogue with Artist Director, Catherine Chappell.

The project allowed me to gain access to high quality arts activity in a different country, with a company that produces innovative and challenging work. The visit helped to reinforce my existing skills and verify my approach to dance, as well as introducing me to new techniques.

Participating in the community and school workshops has extended my personal dance repertoire as a deliverer, a performer and a choreographer. It was invigorating to be dancing everyday as a participant, and reminded me of where my passion lies. It was exciting to absorb new ideas and skills and meet so many new and interesting people.

The Touch Compass community workshops were open to members of the community, and both of the 2-day courses had been fully booked for weeks. I was amazed at the variety of participants the workshops had attracted. There was a wide range of abilities and ages, the youngest being 4 years old and the oldest being 65. I wondered how the work was going to engage everyone, considering the diversity of the group.

The first morning was made up of lots of fun exercises to help the group learn about each other. Some of the exercises I was familiar with, others were completely new to me. I loved the vast age range, and was amazed at how all the exercises were engaging everyone in the room to some level. It was lovely to see people of different ages interacting with each other, and everyone being so accepting and willing to take risks with people they had only just met.

Catherine's work was challenging and she had a way of ensuring that everyone was working to realise their full potential. I was impressed by her techniques, in particular her approach to teaching contact improvisation. She used soft, football sized balls to allow people to explore contact work, and learn control skills. I was staggered by the bond the group had formed by the end of the first day. They all seemed to have connected, and the quality of work that was being produced was very impressive.

Shadowing the work of Linda Parker was a huge learning curve for me, and gave me the opportunity to try some new skills. Having worked and performed with Touch Compass for a few years, Linda decided to explore the form of aerial dance further, and with the support of Touch Compass she set up her own company, Splash. She spent many years creating dance projects and taking them into schools around the Auckland area. Coming from a teaching background Linda's work is very structured, with schemes of work and clear learning outcomes for her participants. Flying Dance is aerial contact improvisation based dance, which makes use of ropes, mountain climbing harnesses and karabiners. Participants who may or may not have a disability can come together to experience the challenge and freedom of movement, beyond the usual restriction of gravity. Students work through twelve basic skills and then learn to develop phrases, together, through structured improvisation.

I was lucky enough to visit some of the schools where she runs regular sessions. The first day we visited Te Kura Arohanui Special School (Te Kura Arohanui meaning 'big love' in Mauri). The school had a wonderful permanent outside tented space, with a specialist floor, metal rigging and ropes. Linda explained that she had helped the school put an application together to fund the space where she runs her flying dance sessions. The school also uses the space as an assembly and games area. During the day we had 4 groups of children coming to take part in hour-long workshops. Some of them had been doing Flying Dance for 4 weeks, some had been doing it for a year. It was good to see the different stages they were at. They were all enthusiastic and excited by their session. It was amazing to see how sensibly they work, they all had an excellent understanding of safety and it was obvious Linda had spent a great amount of time on this important issue. Many of the children we worked with at this particular school had Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism; others had emotional or behavioural needs. As well as opportunities to improvise and play on the ropes the children were lead through a routine, made up of a combination of rolls, twists, turns and partner work. Even though some participants were only 4 weeks into the course their agility and confidence was clearly visible. They were all eager to practice and they were demonstrating concentration and dedication levels above their normal attention expectancy.

I also spent a day with Linda in a main stream school, where she runs an excellent integrated Flying Dance project. The successful project is centred on a buddy system, one able bodied child works with one disabled child. The buddies from the main stream school are specially auditioned by Linda and then spend 6 weeks learning basic flying skills and how to work in an inclusive way, accepting everyone's ability. This was an ideal example of how integration can have a positive effect on people's attitudes. Both sets of students were gaining skills and learning how to work with each other. Working in this environment, they learn to recognise individuality and work together to help each person in the group reach their potential.

I visited Touch Compass at a fundamental time in the company's development. They had recently celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which had involved a huge scale tour and the publication of a stunning book. They have been planning to establish their education and community work more formally but, as with many arts organisations, funding this has been an issue and has slowed the progress. The company have been looking for a permanent space to call their own. A space that could be used for rehearsal and company class and also the run their community programme from. Even at the time of my visit this space has not yet been found, although positive talks were underway regarding a space that Catherine believed would "tick all the right boxes". Finding the right space for an integrated dance company that fly's is no easy task! You have to consider the access for wheel chairs, the ceiling height and potential for rigging the aerial equipment, plus all the regular requirements you would expect from a dance space. During my time working in Hertfordshire I was part of a team that put together an application for a new space to be built to house our community work. My knowledge in this area came in useful and I was able to give some advice and suggestions to aid the progression of this important issue. It was interesting to be involved in part of this process and to see that issues like this are the same between countries.

## **Conclusion**

The project achieved the main aim of enriching my professional development. I have refreshed existing skills through having time to reflect and share good practice, as well as deepening my understanding of integrated dance. I have experienced new approaches to dance and disability and these experiences will impact on the way I work in the future.

I will apply my new skills to my choreographic work, both in community and education contexts. I feel confident about implementing projects that will raise society's awareness of integrated dance and its benefits.

On a personal level the project exceeded all my expectations. I learnt a vast amount in a relatively short period of time. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own practice and refresh and renew my skills in a unique environment.

I deepened my understanding of people, working closely with individuals from diverse backgrounds. I feel invigorated and reconnected with what makes me passionate about dance. I have learnt to adapt and work with limitations that may be presented in a variety of forms. I have been given an insight into the hard work and persistence that goes into running and sustaining a dance company - the issue of funding occurs no matter where in the world you are! It was interesting to see the differences in bureaucracy between countries. New Zealand has less barriers and red tape than the UK when it comes to delivering dance and I found this refreshing.

During my visit I met some amazing people with whom I will remain in contact. Having established some strong links I hope to return to New Zealand at some point and work with Touch Compass on their new and thriving education and community programme. I would encourage every dance artist to recognise the importance for professional development. I was lucky to identify an organisation that I was inspired by and I was given the opportunity, thanks to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund to work in an environment that met my needs.

The travel cost of this project was supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.

## **Photographs**



Hayley Arthur: Splash Flying Dance: March 2008



Hayley Arthur & Ross Flood. Touch Compass Community Workshops March 2008



Hayley Arthur: Splash Flying Dance: March 2008