

LISA ULLMANN TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FUND

To whom it may concern,

I enclose a copy of my report that gives details of my recent trip to Cape Town; there is also a reference from the Chief Executive Officer of *Dance For All*, Philip Boyd and on the disc there are some photographs showing some of our teaching work.

Project Title: A professional development and research project working with Dance For All, Cape Town South Africa
Dates: Tuesday 27th July – Tuesday 24th August 2010
Location: DFA studios, 10 Aden Avenue, Athlone, Cape Town
Khayelitsha township, Yomelela Public School
Nyanga township, Hlengisa Primary School
Timescale: 1 year or prep, 1 month in Cape Town

The project with *Dance For All* in South Africa has been an inspirational, educational, creative and exceptional experience. We were lucky enough to have the opportunity to observe dance teaching in a number of different settings while in Cape Town; at the DFA studios in Athlone, professional class at Jazzart Dance Company at Artscape Opera House in Capetown and a rehearsal at Cape Town City Ballet. This not only allowed me to learn from my international peers but was also self-affirming and helped me to reflect upon the strengths and challenges within my own teaching practice.

We taught two groups, the senior outreach company and junior outreach company. It was such a pleasure to work with students who were driven, disciplined and respectful. Every session we taught was so efficient that we were managing to complete what we thought was two session's worth of work into one class. We realised that we were so used to creating classes for disengaged young people with a lack of focus, discipline and respect that we had underestimated what we could achieve.

We noticed just how brilliantly and vibrantly both junior and senior groups responded to creative work. Suddenly they transformed into communicating, engaging students, this paralleled with their intense focus made for some of the most enjoyable classes I have ever taught. Observing *Dance For All's* work also reminded me just how able young people are. So often I have heard 'I can't do that' or 'I don't want to' that it can be easy to just accept that as the case. It was so nice to remember they *can* and it is my job to help them with that.

I think that this project has allowed me to develop as a teacher, facilitator and choreographer working with young people from disadvantaged areas. By being able to teach in a style of dance that *Dance For All* are not currently offering their students I was able to build confidence in my mode of delivery but also recognise that other styles have their own pedagogy that I can learn from.

A particular highlight of the trip was towards the end when we did a sharing for an invited audience of the work we had produced. This was expected to be an informal 'work - in- progress' as there had not been a lot of time to create two pieces. The young people worked so hard and with such

conviction that the standard of the work performed was actually very high, we received wonderful feedback both from audience members and from the dancers on that day.

The main suggestion I would make to any future awardees is that the plans for the project start well in advance and that a good line of communication is kept with the international partner through out the application process. Fundamental cultural differences can sometimes affect the approach you would take to work and it is worth being either aware of those or at least open to and prepared for them. For example the young people we worked with were not used to having their teacher dance with them and ask them questions, they were used to a much more didactic method and initially this actually caused the young people to feel slightly uncomfortable until we both found a way of working with each other.

Disseminating my work

- I did an interview with Sally Naden on 3rd September with BBC Radio Lancashire which can be listened to on the BBC I player
- I will be doing a talk to 3rd year degree students at The University of Central Lancashire as part of their dance in different contexts module
- Helen and myself have been invited to write an article for Animated, and have been given a deadline of 22nd November
- I have written an evaluation report for Arts Council England.

REPORT FOR LISA ULLMANN TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Name: Lucy Nicholson

Activity: A professional development and research exchange with *Dance For All*, Cape Town, South Africa

Project Summary

Dates: 27th July – 24th August 2010

Week 1: Observing rehearsal process that culminated in a large-scale performance in Artscape Opera House.

Week 2: Started our own teaching with The Senior Outreach youth group in Khayelitsha Township, the largest in South Africa.

Week 3: Continued to put choreography together in Khayelitsha and also began to teach the Junior Youth dance group in Nyanga Township.

Week 4: Completed our choreography with both groups and presented them to an invited audience as well as giving a talk about our work in the UK and our process in Cape Town. Both pieces of choreography are now being kept in *Dance For All's* touring repertoire.

Main points of discussion

The project with *Dance For All* in South Africa has been an inspirational, educational, creative and exceptional experience. The first week of the project we spent in an observatory role as the company prepared for its 20th anniversary and tribute to Phyllis Spira (Prima Ballerina Asolluta) gala performance. Phyllis was the co-artistic director of *Dance For All* and Philip

Boyd's wife. She died suddenly a couple of years previously and it was wonderful to see how inspiring she had been to the students at *Dance For All*. The rehearsal process was very interesting and immediately Helen and I were struck by the impeccable behaviour of the students. Rehearsals did not necessarily always run smoothly due to choreographic changes needed or costume questions etc. I noted that in my own experience of working with socially excluded young people this process has to be so well thought about and prepared so it can run as smoothly as possible as the young people's behaviour can often escalate to the extreme when they are unclear of what is needed of them, they have to wait for long periods of time, or have to perform repetitively. However this *is* how the rehearsal process works within a professional setting, and where my priorities have to lie in the balance between getting the choreography and performance to an impeccable standard and keeping the behaviour of the young people contained and safe, during the rehearsals at *Dance For All* it was the product that was the focus and not only were the staff able to solely work towards that but the young people themselves were completely invested in that also and worked tirelessly doing whatever was asked of them to ensure they were getting the best possible standards.

It was at this early stage that we were able to raise a common question that stayed with us throughout our time in South Africa - Process vs. Product. Where should the emphasis lie?

The gala was a very elaborate and exciting affair with speeches from Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and performances from the leading dance companies in the country. The standard of technique was phenomenal and of a consistently high level. Their rigorous training and constant repetition clearly produced an exquisite level of performance. It was clear what a monumental experience this had been for the young people and I could recognise that feeling of 'It was worth it all in the end' from both staff and students. I was keen to observe more teaching to determine just what differences there were in the student's process through a different pedagogic approach.

We were lucky enough to observe teaching in a number of settings, including professional class at Jazzart Dance Theatre and Cape Town City Ballet. The quite significantly different teaching approach I observed was that of verbal instruction with very little physical demonstration, this was combined with very few teachers wearing dance clothing to teach in which seemed almost like a status choice; clothing that made a distinction between teacher and student.

This teacher student relationship was another fascinating discussion point for Helen and I. The young people we were teaching were all from the Xhosa tradition, it was explained to us that a strict respect for any elder is inherent within their culture and this was extremely apparent during our time teaching. On our first session teaching in Khayelitsha we were met with a wall of silence. The participants looked puzzled when we asked if they were ok or had any questions. It took some time for the young people to realise we were happy to answer questions and discuss issues they had with particular movements. It was such a pleasure to work with students who were so driven, disciplined and respectful. Every session we taught was so efficient that we were managing to complete what we thought was two session's worth

of work into one class. We realised that we were so used to creating classes for disengaged young people with a lack of focus, discipline and respect that we had underestimated what we could achieve. We made note that the common lack of discipline in the young people we taught in the U.K. meant that our process as teachers was a much more difficult one as we have to constantly keep in mind how to keep classes new, fresh, interesting, engaging to keep the focus of our participants. At the same time we also wondered if the strong discipline that the young people worked with in Cape Town affected their process? Were their classes as fulfilling and their experience as full by simply attending, learning technique and leaving? We noticed just how brilliantly and vibrantly both junior and senior groups responded to creative work. Suddenly they transformed into communicating, engaging students, this paralleled with their intense focus made for some of the most enjoyable classes I have ever taught.

Helen and I did a lot of filming while in Cape Town and plan to put together a short DVD that shows our work. As part of that we asked the senior group to tell us what had been the highlight of the project for them? One answer stood out quite considerably. They appreciated that within the choreography every person had the opportunity to shine. They said that they were used to the best in their group being chosen to lead while they remained in the background. This was a really self-affirming comment as it is something we both try to achieve in the choreography we make for young people and I think is key to every participant enjoying the process as well as the product. They also commented on our patience, that we did not get angry or frustrated if they forgot or got material wrong. There was not a moment during the month where I felt my patience was tried so I found this to be such a surprising comment.

What I learned

Dance For All are producing tremendously high standards and training young dancers to a very high level of technique. They work from a professional model and expect nothing but professionalism from their students.

'Community dance' or 'dance in education' are not part of Cape Town's provision. I found it interesting to reflect upon my practice and notice where its strengths lie: I run sessions inclusively that are individually centred and focus on allowing participants to develop socially as well as physically and technically. I, like *Dance For All*, think that producing high standard work is vital in building young people's self esteem but I am also a great believer in ensuring the process of getting to that performance is equally enriching. I think it is when these things are combined that excellence within community dance in the U.K. is achieved

Observing *Dance For All's* work also reminded me just how able young people are. So often I have heard 'I can't do that' or 'I don't want to' that it can be easy to just accept that as the case. It was so nice to remember they *can* and it is my job to help them with that. I think that this project has allowed me to develop as a teacher, facilitator and choreographer working with young people from disadvantaged areas. By being able to teach in a style of dance that *Dance For All* are not currently offering their students I was able to build confidence in my mode of delivery but also recognise that other styles have their own pedagogy that I can learn from.

What is next?

Since my return from South Africa I have started to work full time with the University of Central Lancashire on their BA (Hons) Dance, Performance and Teaching. I am particularly excited by this post because of the educational aspect of its training as that is where my real interest lies, in the training of other artists interested in working within the field of community dance. I feel I have had a very valuable experience that can be shared with my students to inspire and engage them. I feel particularly equipped to make clear the qualities of a community dance artist after gaining a clear perspective on that myself.

Philip Boyd, the Artistic Director of *Dance For All*, has invited us back to work further on his outreach programmes and to choreograph for his Young Inspirations Youth Dance Company. He is also very interested in using our skills to set up some dance teaching training in Cape Town. This is something that would not only be very beneficial to my career and practice but would also raise the international profile of UCLAN and the North West so it is something I am very excited about.

I continue to be part of *Out Of Bounds*, a Lancaster-based performance group that performed at 'Turn', Manchester, and 'Dance Cuts,' Lancaster earlier this year. I feel that I have been inspired choreographically and think that the creative process will be positively influenced by my work with *Dance For All*.

Lucy Nicholson



Handstand Lift



Teaching 'curve'



Teaching 'swings'