

To: LUTSF
3rd January 2006

Please find enclosed project details, report and supportive documentation

Project details

Title of project: Professional development and research
Remix Dance Project.

Description: Research working practices and management of Remix Dance Company and establish links and relationship between Africa and the UK.

Location: Cape Town, South Africa.

Dates: 1 month visit September – October 2005

What was achieved?

The purpose of the project was fully achieved. During my visit I was involved in the day-to-day running and delivery of Remix Dance Project. My time in South Africa involved observing the managerial aspects of the company, participating in dance classes in many differing contexts, shadowing the education officer and the opportunity to teach and lead creative workshops with the company.

I have refreshed and renewed my existing skills through observation, reflection and the time given to share good practice. I feel that I have developed my understanding of dance and disability. I feel that my experiences in South Africa will impact on future practice.

Highlights in my travels

- Taking on the role of workshop leader with the company.
- Participating in the first Saturday morning open integrated workshop and seeing its impact on the participants of that workshop.
- Experiencing the education work of the company, observing and participating in both performance and teaching.
- Constant animated conversations and discussions with the education officer.
- Sharing the work I had created with the company in an informal sharing in the dance studio (the church hall). We invited audience from the staff working for the church next door, the daily cleaners of the church hall and their children, the company administrator, a friend of a friend and the company performed. In that moment as people arrived I was transported back to what I have always felt and feel sure of, that dance excites me most when dance happens in local, community spaces, with local people. A situation that is comfortable, accessible and lacking any artifice.

Suggestions to help future awardees

It is important to fully research your project prior to embarking on the trip. The information I received prior to going was invaluable. This included information regarding personal safety, how to use public transport, which places were good to visit and much more. Try to gauge as much information about what you might expect so you have a more realistic idea about the project you are visiting.

Just before I departed for South Africa the company did not get the funding for a visiting practitioner to teach the company whilst I was there. I was initially disappointed, but as a consequence had more opportunity to work with the company. I approached the project with an open mind and was willing to adapt to whatever situations arose. In effect the company were hosting me for that period of time. It was important to establish what both parties wanted out of the visit.

If you have to organise your own accommodation pay a little bit more to stay in the right environment for you.

Sharing information about my project

I recently delivered a presentation in Hull for professional artists development day. Not only did I discuss approaches to integrated dance practice but presented photographs and experience in South Africa.

I will share information about my project with students that I teach regularly on undergraduate dance programmes. I am in talks with Beaumont College, Lancaster, and Ludus regarding the delivery of training and workshops to dance artists based regionally on integrated dance practice.

The ultimate aim is to write an article based on this experience for Animated Dance magazine.

Best Wishes

Rachel Liggitt, Dance Artist

Project Report

The Importance of Professional Development: The Journey of a Life Time



The travel cost of this project was supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund. The project was also funded by Arts Council, England

Description of the project

The project aimed to experience the practices and day-to-day management of Remix Dance Project. The visit involved participation in company work, working alongside the education company and delivery of choreographic workshops.

My project in South Africa was a month-long professional development and research project. It took place between September and October 2005 in Cape Town, South Africa. My entire time in South Africa involved working with and alongside Remix Dance Project. Initially, it was proposed that I would participate in a workshop lead by Martin Keo, but very close to my departure date Martin Keo cancelled the proposed workshop. Initially I was disappointed but by this turn of fate, I feel that that the project exceeded all my expectations, providing me with increased opportunity and time to spend with the company. My experience in South Africa was amazing both emotionally and artistically. I learnt an incredible amount about the true meaning of integration and diversity whilst searching for a verbal and non-verbal dance language that speaks across cultural difference.

Who are Remix dance project?

In February 2005 'Remix' became the first full-time integrated dance company in South Africa. I visited at a fundamental time in the company's development and as a consequence of this I experienced first hand all the teething problems and challenges that they were facing as a new and evolving professional company. This was a very exciting time.

Remix strives to create innovative dance performance and education programmes. Remix delivers school residencies, educational performances, new dance and improvisational classes for those interested in dance, creates teacher training materials and resources and makes new choreography for performance. Indeed, Remix is involved in a wide spectrum of dance activity.

I was attracted to Remix Dance Project by its core principles. These promoted access to dance for people with all physical abilities on and off stage and its desire to collaborate with similar organisations nationally and globally, through establishing partnerships and inviting practitioners to work with the company. As I have worked in community dance for 15 years I consider myself a forerunner in integrated dance practice. However to facilitate this, it is vital that I continue refining my practical and philosophical approaches to the work by reflecting upon the work of others and sharing good practice. My visit to Remix facilitated this. The Company's approach in the studio and the working approach of the Director and Education Manager are not dissimilar to my own, however, it was wonderful to share ideas, reflect upon the progress of the company and offer invaluable insights into our differing experience of dance in our respective countries. In many ways it became a co-mentoring experience between me and Nicola Visser, Artistic Director and Gerry Turvey, Education Manager.

Remix was at a far more advanced managerial position than I had ever been providing employment opportunities throughout the year, sustaining five full time dancers, two part-time trainees, a Company Manager and a Director. This was an incredible achievement, particularly in respect of the social and economic situation in South Africa at this time.

Remix by its very nature is a political force. The diverse make-up of the company has instant impact. The work I experienced, particularly in performance and in the community was invigorating and at times challenging in a country whereby apartheid ended relatively recently. One of Remix core principles was to re-address race and gender.

"Remix Dance project recognises that people have had different access to education, training and resources. Remix recognises that each person's body holds their personal as well as a social history. Remix recognizes the specifically of South Africa's past and seeks to work creatively with the legacy of that past in the present."

(Annual report; remix dance project)

Company members

Directed by Nicola Visser, managed by Joanne Langdon the company is made up of five dancers in the professional company and two trainees. All members brought different experience and histories with them and came from all kinds of backgrounds. Remix is a company of diversity. Two dancers are wheel chair users, Matthew and Malcolm and Andile is deaf. Some have years of experience in dance, as is the case with Mpotseng, Andile and Xolani and others very little, but they had a huge desire to learn, in the case of Hannah, Matthew and Masego. Some travel a long way to the church rehearsal space from Townships situated outside the city, others drive. Some have children that they are solely responsible for supporting, others have children that they do not live with and are living in other areas of Africa.

What did I want to gain from the project

On a personal level my involvement in professional development in South Africa was to strengthen my understanding of dance and disability. I aimed to participate in company class and choreographic workshops, share my own approach through practical dance workshop and shadow the work of the education officer Gerry Turvey. On a personal level I wanted the experience to feed me creatively, to absorb new ideas and approaches and to share them. More recently I have realised that I wanted to be involved in the management and delivery of projects and consultancy work in dance. By shadowing the work of Remix and, in particular, working in an all inclusive way I hoped that this would inform my understanding and hopefully direct me towards where I go next professionally.

The project allowed me to gain access to high-quality arts activity with a company that produces fresh, outstanding and intelligent work. The visit helped me to consolidate my skills and re-affirm my approach to dance. To my surprise my role within the company shifted continuously dependent upon what the company required and how they might use me and incorporate me into their work at any one time. It was far more than a course or placement. At times I became a dancer participating in a workshop and at other times an adviser, mentor and workshop leader. This allowed me to practice many of my skills and I feel that we gained a great deal from spending time with one another.

During the month I was involved in many aspects of company life. I am sure that there are too many to mention but here are some aspects that are both memorable and advantageous to my personal development.

- Participation in company technique class taught by Gerry Turvey, Education Officer.
- Participation in company class and creative workshops prepared and facilitated by the company dancers.
- Observation and participation in company led workshops for teachers who are required to teach a dance component within schools curriculum.
- Observation of performance, followed by discussion to trainee teachers.
- Provision of choreographic feedback to company members. I watched all choreographic work and applied the Liz Lerman feedback approach in relation to the evolving work.
- I was a member of the first series of Saturday morning integrated dance workshops, delivered by company members and the Artistic Director.
- I taught an open professional morning creative class.
- I spent a week delivering dance workshops to the company based and partnering and contact work. This explored weight giving and taking and lifts. This was choreographed into a piece and shown to a small invited audience who lived and worked in the geographical area.
- Observations of company meetings and participation in rich and fruitful dialogue with the artistic director and company manager.

Outcomes: The broad picture

My Cape Town visit demystified the amount of planning, energy and sensitivity needed in running a company of this nature. I feel that I emerged from the experience with a realistic understanding of what is involved in managing people. Also, I feel better prepared to continue my own career path. I had, for the first time in a long time, time to reflect on what was working and not and how I might approach things differently in a certain situations.

On a general level I learnt so much through observation alone. I have gained a deeper understanding of people and the impact belonging to a fully integrated dance company can have in people's lives.

Since returning I have reaped the benefits of an increased sense of confidence and professional expertise. The response, support and feedback that I received during my visit was secure, detailed and critical. It was affirming to meet individuals who took the same philosophical standpoint, worked in a similar way in the studio to my own and were asking the similar artistically driven questions.

Outcomes: In detail

Participating in company class and creative workshops has extended my personal dance repertoire as a workshop leader, dancer and choreographer. Selfishly, it was invigorating to be dancing everyday as a participant. To simply realise that I loved dancing. It was wonderful to absorb others ideas and to receive unsolicited, constructive feedback about my dance, whether specific technical amendments or general suggestions in a creative class.

Giving feedback to the dancers allowed me to practice and hone my skills as as a mentor and educator. Searching for a dialogue that communicates across language, disability and cultural difference was challenging and wonderful. I feel that I have learnt a lot from this and can apply to many contexts and situations that I find myself in.

One of the outcomes was a raw and by no means finished piece of choreography. I felt that I provided the company with the bare bones of some choreographic ideas that they could pursue further if they wished. It enabled me to explore fresh ideas in a new exciting environment. I now want to explore those ideas further in the UK. It reminded me of what I enjoy most of all; working in the dance studio with dancers and making work.

The International link is one that both the company and I want to explore further. We will be discussing the possibility of future collaborations and projects. In the meantime we will correspond with articles, thoughts, ideas and possible projects.

Asking questions

My experience in South Africa blew me away. It has moved me beyond belief and raised many questions without feeling the pressure or desire to seek answers or find solutions. What does true integration mean in a country where apartheid ended relatively recently? And how does South African understanding of integration differ from our own in the UK? What is our understanding of

diversity and linked to this how dance can speak of colour and experience. These are just some questions that I will continue to explore.

Conclusion

As a consequence many people are already benefiting from my professional development in South Africa. Not only have Remix Dance Company benefited directly through my involvement with the company but my experience in South Africa has informed and refreshed my approach in many different contexts that I work in this country. It has confirmed my aim and desire to establish an integrated dance group to assist in support and establishment of emerging disabled dance artists. The company however did not emphasise the disabled artist, it was about so much more and represented so much more. Remix is a company of diversity each unique individual being integral to the whole.

It is early days and I am not sure of the long-term impact this project will have. I want to apply it to future choreographic productions both in community and education contexts, develop my skills in implementing projects and schemes of work within an education programme informed by the shadowing of the Education Officer and observations of the company.

On a personal level the project exceeded all of my expectations. I learnt a vast amount in a relatively short period of time. It did give me the opportunity to reflect upon my present practice, philosophical approach and refresh and renew my skills in a unique environment. I envisage that the full impact of this experience will be evaluated over a long period of time as I continue to improve my present practice and develop as an artist.

My key achievement is that I deepened my understanding of people, that my work connected with the company and created a strong, purposeful group. I felt fed, invigorated and alive and reconnected with all that dancing means to me. I learnt not to make assumptions about anyone and that running and sustaining a dance company is hard wherever you are.

I would recommend and encourage every dance practitioner to recognise personal professional 'needs' and identify an organisation that can support your personal professional development.

Dear Rachel. You come with wisdom and clarity, insight, honesty and passion ...and belief. You seem to see it all - glimpses of where we have been, where we are and where we may go - from the inside out. Thank you for the timing of your coming to use and the timing of the words ... pearls ... seeds ... all love and respect

A note in my leaving card
Nicola Visser, company director