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Cover photo: 30th anniversary Planetary Dance, Mount Tamalpais, California. Photo: Taira Restar

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We are the professional organisation for anyone involved in creating opportunities for people to experience and participate in dance.

We believe that dance can transform the lives of individuals and communities. Our vision is of a world where dance is part of everyone’s life, our mission to make dance important to individuals, communities and society.

Our leadership of the community dance network and over 2,000 members supports the development of community dance in the UK and internationally, through inspiring events, training and publications, an information-packed website, and extensive member support services. Our current development projects include dance, health and wellbeing, dance and London 2012, dance and disabled people, and the National College for Community Dance.

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From the editor

Community Dance practice as it has developed in the United Kingdom is regarded as pioneering and inspiring. It has been a model for developing similar work elsewhere in the world, with British dance artists in the field leading projects and training programmes in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

That being said I am increasingly interested in seeing how artists starting with similar values and commitment to art, dance and people have developed this ‘community dance’ practice in response to their own culturally specific contexts, and seeing what we have in common and what we can learn afresh from their experiences.

To that end I invited artist and writer Pegge Vissicaro, who I first met at an international conference on community dance in Lisbon some years ago, to curate a series of articles that reveal some of the issues and practices currently at play in the USA.

In addition Linda Jasper, Director of Youth Dance England presents her ambitions for the next ten years of development for youth dance which is set alongside an article by Jane Rails calling for similar developments for the adult population, and an example of such work from Liz Atkins, based at Laban.

The benefits dance can bring to the health of the wider population have often been rehearsed in the pages of Animated, so it is good to see a major national charity, Diabetes UK, proposing to use dance as a major part of its development strategy in the coming months.

Ken Bartlett, Creative Director, FCD

National College for Community Dance

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For newcomers or refreshers
Dance South West are running two Passport to Practice: Induction to Professional Practice in Community Dance Courses in Gloucestershire and Somerset between January – March 2011.
Contact James Rooke on 01392 436547 / james.rooke@dancesouthwest.org.uk

For advanced practitioners
This three-day course in January 2011 offers an opportunity for community dance artists with over ten years of experience to evaluate their practice and identify new directions.
Contact lisa@communitydance.org.uk

www.communitydance.org.uk/nationalcollege

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Critical faculties

Appetite

Donald Hutera sniffs creatively around the notion of being an international glutton for the arts

What single word best defines your thoughts and ideas about creativity? That was the question posed to a bevy of creative types earlier this year by Artis. Founded in 2004, this innovative company has trained over 100 specialists from all branches of the performing arts to go into schools and stimulate learning. Chief executive Rebecca Boyle estimates that her team reaches 35,000 students per week. The benefits rebound onto the facilitators. Each specialist has a mentor, access to a post-graduate qualification and works in partnership with a school or local authority so that the creative curriculum is tailored to a school’s priorities.

In March Artis joined forces with the online dictionary Wordia.com in a scheme designed to underscore the importance of creativity in people’s lives and in children’s language development. To do so they enlisted the help of various movers and shakers in the arts, each of whom agreed to be filmed waxing lyrical about their word of choice. You can view it in the Wordia archives. On March 27 Kenneth Tharp, executive director of The Place, explained the significance of instinct while, fourteen days earlier, the percussionist (and Artis adviser) Dame Evelyn Glennie expounded on what coordination means to her.

To mark the launch of its initiative with Wordia, Artis held a one-off showcase of its work in one of the studios at The Place. A sweet group of little kids from Randal Cremer Primary School in Hackney was ushered into a roomful of adult observers, including yours truly, for a playful sound and movement session led a gently charismatic Artis specialist called Gloop. That’s not his real name but a self-chosen moniker; apparently all Artis reps must adopt a catchy new identity when they go out into the field.

It was fun to watch Gloop and his tinier co-stars in action. Now, months later, I still haven’t decided what word I’d select that most accurately sums up my associations with creativity. Doubt? Failure? That’s no joke. I regard doubt and failure as valuable components of any creative process. It might be easier, however, to consider a self-designated name a la Artis specialists. Boyle’s is Buzz. One of the company patrons is cinema bigwig David Puttnam, aka Whirl. I met others from Artis whose name tags sported such alternative handles as Twang, Wham and Kersplat.

I think I’d opt for Glut, as in glutton for the arts. That’s often how I feel as a professional audience member exposed to an international array of work, especially in dance. As a London-based writer I’m never at a loss for vivid, engaging subject matter without even having to step outside of the city. From a community dance perspective two experiences this spring come to mind.

The first was Kontakthof, a three-hour marathon of tenderness, cruelty, desire, despair and pain-laced comedy that the late Pina Bausch originally fashioned for her Tanztheater Wuppertal in 1978. The piece subsequently inspired the German genius to take some incredible risks. She restaged it in 2000 with a non-professional cast of ‘Ladies and Gentleman over 65.’ Then, eight years later, she remounted the show again but with teen-agers only.

Seen virtually back to back, as I did at the Barbican last April, these two generation-spanning performances shaped up into one of the most indelible, polished and profound community dance events I’ve ever witnessed. Life-changing, too, especially for the youths and senior citizens (the eldest, I was told, is 82) directly involved. Catching both casts is amazing, claims Bausch’s long-time assistant and rehearsal director Josephine Ann Endicot. Why? ‘To see what happens to the bodies whenever life eats you away.’

From Teutonic genius to krumping for Christ. The latter was a major motive behind Our Streets, choreographed by champion dancer Duwan Taylor and Hakeem Onibudo (artistic director of Impact Dance) for seven male students of Woolwich Polytechnic. The lads, who go by the name Radical, performed in the 7th edition of the annual hip-hop dance-theatre festival Breakin’ Convention. They’d only been exposed to krumping as part of a school project with Greenwich Dance Agency. But as channelled through their taut, young bodies on the stage of Sadler’s Wells, the violent paradoxes of this aggressive street style seemed to possess a liberating, almost sacred power.

That’s rather more than I accomplished while researching a story on Bollywood for The Times of London in May. The pictorial evidence accompanies this column. Yup, that’s me, a pale-skinned, stiff-bodied cultural interloper shot while experiencing first-hand the rudiments of one of the world’s most hybrid dance forms. What else could a clumsy glutton do but trust the presiding gods and goddesses of kitsch and strike a pose? Creatively, of course.

Donald Hutera writes regularly for The Times and many other publications and websites. Contact donaldhutera@yahoo.com

www.communitydance.org.uk
Weaving threads of connectivity?

Guest curator Pegge Vissicaro, Professor at Arizona State University School of Dance and Director TerraDance, leads us through some perspectives on socially based practice in the USA

Over two years ago while visiting the Foundation for Community Dance (FCD) offices in Leicester, England, Ken Bartlett, Creative Director approached me with the idea of developing an issue of Animated based on community dance practices in the United States. I enthusiastically accepted the role of editor/curator thinking that I would focus on different artists working with specific communities. The process for identifying these communities took an interesting turn this past spring when I participated in Anna Halprin’s leadership workshop for Planetary Dance. Travelling to her mountain studio just north of San Francisco, I felt certain that the experience would change my life and perspectives about dance in general. Even before the workshop, I knew that understanding Anna’s contribution was key to investigating the evolution of community dance practices in this country and that I hoped to include an article written by someone who embodied her work. What I didn’t realise was that my interest in the Animated project would also shift dramatically.

The creative practices Anna Halprin taught us emphasised peace building as a tool to expand community. Techniques to engage this process involved expressing individual intention to shape movement rituals that occurred, primarily but not exclusively, in natural environments. The power of nature to heighten sensory awareness aligned closely with my own work, TerraDance, which explores interactions and parallels between people and the Earth. These acts of peace in nature resonated personally and allowed me to open my awareness to a more holistic, integrated view of community dance. No longer did it make sense to single out a particular population based on ethnicity, gender, ability, age, or cultural similarities. Even the range of practices in the United States were so varied that focusing on one group at the expense of another demonstrated inequity and exclusion, the antithesis of my understandings about community dance. I knew it was impossible to identify all the practices that existed since no comprehensive resource was available to access information about every artist working in this field. To offer anything that could be considered representative of the United States was completely superficial and totally unsatisfying. For all these reasons I needed to develop a strategic approach that introduced Animated readers to community dance practices in the United States while examining the role of dance in society. I decided to meet that challenge by soliciting contributions about context, practice, and debate that addressed key issues affecting Americans as well as offered new insights about a 21st century paradigm shift in which dance is leading the response to those issues.

The reader’s journey begins with a rich historical overview of community dance written by Arizona-based dance artist/educator, Mary Fitzgerald. Written from a professional practitioner’s perspective, her informative commentary traces roots over the past forty years that highlight individual artists and models, providing an excellent lens through which to observe major developments in the field. One of these artists, Liz Lerman, director of the Dance Exchange based in Washington, D.C., contributes the second article, excerpted from her soon to be published book, Hiking the Horizontal. This deeply personal essay unpacks assumptions about the therapeutic underpinnings of artistic practice. She describes therapy as the transformation that happens when people work with and learn from each other in community-based art making. Meaningful participation through dance empowers individuals and communities, which is embodied in Anna Halprin’s work over the past half a century. Taira Restar’s article about this legendary arts pioneer and mentor discusses the Planetary Dance ritual, an exemplar of intentional movement that calls for healing and connection to the Earth. Taira, an independent artist/educator based in northern California, explains that the fundamentally interrelated life-art process, a term coined by Anna, explores human experience and the sensing body to inform art making. The integration of life and art is beautifully illustrated in Ida Dances with Irv performed by Kairos Dance Theatre. Director Maria Genné shares her process of creating that work which incorporates the experiences of two individuals, Ida Albeit, 100 and Irv Williams, 91 who grew up in New York City during the 1920s-1930s Harlem Renaissance. This Minnesota company is one of the few nationwide that embraces intergenerational dance initiatives and is creatively engaging our growing elderly population through dance. Kairos is a superb example of how life becomes art to build and strengthen relationships between people, their community, and their environment.

Authentically capturing the whole story being told through and with the arts in communities is the goal of the Arizona-based Cultural Arts Coalition. Co-directors, Melanie Ohm and Judy Butzine offer a powerful narrative about documentation as a practice of participatory art making. They explain that their methods for documenting facilitate
 discovery to learn about how people know what they know as well as how they see the world. Besides recognising community, honouring individual voices, and allowing for interpretation beyond the event itself, documentation is also an invaluable evaluation tool to advocate and influence social research and policymaking. This type of evidence-based work supports the message delivered by Simon Dove, director of the School of Dance at Arizona State University (ASU). His article makes a convincing case for why and how socially-based practice repositions dance as an integral part of society in the 21st century United States. He discusses the role of higher education as a catalyst to move forward curriculum that provides the training ground for socially-engaged and innovative artists. The possibility of radically transforming the American cultural landscape is the theme of my own contribution to Animated. I contextualise this historical moment in which Americans are experiencing a major attitude adjustment to evolve more sustainable living practices. Diversity, in all of its human and natural world manifestations, is the critical, untapped resource to generate social capital and promote creativity through dance making that can rebuild the nation’s social fabric.

My objective for you, the readers of this issue of Animated, is to offer fresh and inspired thinking about community dance practice in the United States. The experience of travelling down the paths that the various contributors take offers much intellectual nourishment and provides enlightening perspectives that you are the first to know.

Breathe deep and enjoy the ride!

Dr. Pegge Vissicaro, director of TerraDance and professor in the School of Dance at Arizona State University has been engaged in community dance initiatives since 1983. Since 2001 she has partnered with refugee agencies using dance as a strategy to cope with resettlement trauma. Besides writing, dancing, drumming, and researching (mostly in Brazil), she loves travelling and camping with her husband, Vito and sons, Caio and Ari.
Tracing roots

Some historical highlights of community dance in the United States (1960s-present)
by Mary Fitzgerald of Arizona State University

As an artist working to develop and engage communities through dance over the past twelve years, I have been interested in studying the history that informs my practice. The following text traces some of the roots of that heritage, and includes excerpts from a more comprehensive article about community dance aesthetics that I published in the 2009 International Journal of the Arts in Society, which also has the complete list of sources referenced in this essay. My focus for Animated looks primarily at professional practice over the past forty years, highlighting individual artists and models that have contributed to the rich breadth of community dance that exists in the United States. I also briefly describe the emergence of universities as leaders in community dance training, which parallels trends in higher education during the early twenty first century that provided a foundation for creative dance to grow in this country.

Since the mid 1970s and 80s, community dance practices in the United States have been growing exponentially, propelling contemporary dance as a whole in

Marylee Hardenbergh’s Ascending: The Steps of Borough Hall, Brooklyn, New York. Photo: Cory Devereaux
‘As we move forward in the 21st century, socially-based dance in the United States continues to challenge this archetype, exploring the myriad roles of dance in culture, and integrating a broad spectrum of movement practices from around the globe.’

groundbreaking directions. Although an exact definition of community dance is almost impossible to pinpoint due to its sprawling and all encompassing nature, from a historical perspective, dance always has been a community or ‘socially-based’ art form. As an essential part of communal rituals, celebrations, and socialising, dance has had multiple functions in culture for much of human history. In the Western European tradition, it has only been during the past eight hundred years or so that dance has bifurcated into social dances for ‘the people,’ and dance for the courts, or ‘art world elite.’ While this artificial divide persists in much of the concert dance world today, as we move forward in the 21st century, socially based dance in the United States continues to challenge this archetype, exploring the myriad roles of dance in culture, and integrating a broad spectrum of movement practices from around the globe. It is far beyond the scope of this article for a comprehensive discussion of such a rich and diverse field, however I think that it is interesting to trace at least a small thread of the modern/postmodern lineage, focusing on the 1960s until the present.

Numerous examples of community based dance practices exist throughout United States modern dance history. In the 1930s, for instance, Workers Dance League artists choreographed dances that share some of the fundamental principles in contemporary practices such as a belief in an egalitarian creative process, the inclusion of untrained dancers, and a strong commitment to social change. During the 1940s and 50s, several luminaries in the field, including Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, challenged traditional paradigms of ‘high’ cultural expression in their work, and expanded modern dance aesthetics to include African and Afro Caribbean dance traditions. Dunham and Primus also pioneered community arts and education models that espoused the training of ‘engaged global citizens,’ a concept that resonates strongly with contemporary thinking in socially based art.

Despite these and many other exceptional examples, most historians agree that community dance coalesced into a significant art movement only within the past forty or so years. The turbulent sociopolitical climate of the 1960s and 70s, combined with increased government support of the arts contributed to an enormous ideological shift in the art world. The Civil Rights and Peace Movements, Women’s Liberation, environmental protection, etc. created an atmosphere of rebellion and unrest. Artists broke down conventions and challenged the status quo. The Judson Church choreographers, while not typically considered community artists, explored a wide range of art making approaches, such as involving untrained movers, taking dance off the prosenium stage, and addressing charged political issues about race, class, and gender that still characterises socially based dance today. In a presentation about community dance history at the World Dance Alliance Global Summit in 2008, artist Satu Hummasti made the interesting point that though Steve Paxton may not view himself as a community practitioner, the emphasis on democratic partnerships in Contact Improvisation also is a central tenet of community arts practice. Other significant artists associated with this era, such as Anna Halprin, who actually greatly influenced the ‘Judsonites,’ developed unique community practices on the West Coast that focused on therapeutic rituals for healing and peace. Later, in the mid 70s and 80s, two of the most esteemed artists in the field, Liz Lerman and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, arrived on the scene to establish contemporary dance companies that played vital roles in the growth of the community dance movement throughout the country.

The shifting ideologies of the 60s and 70s also resulted in the emergence of several public policies that contributed to the development of community based arts. For example, the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), which was established in 1965, promoted the philosophy that art and culture are resources that benefit the society as a whole. Government support was awarded to artists who combined ‘artistic excellence with the broadest public accessibility.’ In addition to the NEA, programs such as the Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) in New York, and the federal government’s Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) were founded during the 1970s that furthered this community based, public access model. For example, the CAPS program awarded funding to artists who offered public lectures and workshops about their work. Much like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the 1930s, CETA provided employment for artists in an effort to rebuild local communities during the recession.  

www.communitydance.org.uk
More and more, the interest in public accessibility and community based efforts grew, dramatically influencing new trends in the art world overall. With the economic downturn in the 1980s, arts funding became increasingly limited, yet community dance continued to flourish. This trend can be attributed partially to the culture wars of the mid 1990s, which maintained that government-supported art should be ‘non inflammatory and beneficial to the community.’ The controversy surrounding the works of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andre Serrano, for instance, played an enormous part in the organisation’s amendment of grant requirements, which restricted funding to art that took into account a sense of ‘decency’ and respect for the American public’s diverse belief systems. The NEA’s change in position and the overall decrease in government support caused many contemporary dance companies, even those that had not been community based, to begin developing ‘outreach’ programs to offset their operating expenses. Thus although sometimes inspired by fiscal necessity rather than ideological passion, the establishment of this new company structure actually served to broaden the practices of community dance.

The current models of community based dance practice in the United States are wide-ranging and constantly evolving. While some community dance artists facilitate projects that include community members only, others engage directly with a community to inspire the creation of exclusively professional repertory. Choreographers such as Blondell Cummings and Bill T. Jones often engage communities through participatory workshops, panel discussions, and rituals as part of their creative process. Although community participants may not perform in her work, Cummings believes that the exploration and sharing of ideas is in itself ‘a communal act.’ On the other end of the spectrum are models that engage participants in all aspects of the work. Choreographer Pat Graney’s renowned Keeping the Faith is a beautiful example of such a model. Like countless other prison programs across the country, it uses the vehicles of movement, visual art, and creative writing to foster the development of important ‘outside life skills.’ These residencies culminate in performance events for fellow inmates, prison staff, as well as members of the public.

Other artists whose unique practices I find inspiring include Marylee Hardenburgh, who founded Global Site Performance in 1985. Hardenbergh choreographs large scale outdoor works that aim to draw attention to the unique characteristics of an environment. Rather than working with an established group of dancers, she collaborates with community members and artists from the local area to ensure that at all aspects of the performance are site specific in nature. Formerly employed with the CETA program in the 1970s, Martha Bowers, director of Dance Etcetera, also is an established community practitioner who creates elaborate site performances that focus on the themes of history and place. One of her most notable projects involves a 15 year commitment to the
revitalisation of her local community – Red Hook, Brooklyn. In addition to producing the Red Hook Festival, Bowers (and many other artists, such as Aviva Davidson’s Hip Hop Generation Next and Dancing in the Streets programs), has played a key role as a community organiser in that area, using the arts as a powerful catalyst for urban renewal and trans-cultural exchange.

These are just a few of the hundreds of examples of socially-based dance that have been developing in recent years. The predominant model in the United States, however, still consists of a company whose mission involves the creation of professional contemporary dance repertory, as well as collaborative performance projects and educational programs with diverse community members. As I stated earlier, this company structure evolved partially as a result of policy changes in funding organisations such as the NEA during the 80s and 90s, and partially as a continuation of the modern/postmodern dance troupe tradition. The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, established in 1975, is probably the most renowned pioneer of this model. Other highly recognised companies include Urban Bush Women, David Dorfman Dance, PearsonWidrig Dance Theatre, Stuart Pimsler Dance Theatre, Zaccho Dance Theatre, and AXIS. These companies have created collaborative projects with communities across the nation and abroad that centre on themes ranging from family, to spirituality, to healing, to history, to human rights.

In addition to creating several seminal works, choreographers such as Liz Lerman and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, have developed specific methodologies for working in community contexts. The Dance Exchange’s online Toolbox, for example, has codified many of Lerman’s approaches, which they generously share as a free resource to the public. Though perhaps not codified, Zollar and Lerman also have contributed to a method of dialogic democracy in the arts, which very simply stated, allows for the public to respectfully share dissenting points of view without the goal of reaching consensus. Whether they have established recognised techniques or not, I think that all of the above mentioned artists have developed innovative practices in community based art during the past four decades using dance as a powerful instrument for social transformation, and moved the field as a whole beyond the confines of the concert dance tradition. As dance writer and scholar Ann Daly points out, “Community based dance is emerging as a paradigm for the twenty first century.”

In the world of higher education, this paradigm shift has become increasingly evident. Within the past ten years or so, the revitalisation of community service and civic engagement initiatives on college campuses, combined with new trends in the art world overall has expanded the focus of academic departments. Throughout the country, degree programs have been featuring community arts and community cultural development. The Community Arts Network (CAN), an extensive online resource, lists over forty eight academic programs in the United States. While the majority of these emphasise a fairly broad focus, such as arts and community, arts and service learning, arts and social justice, arts and youth etc., several universities provide training specifically in dance and community contexts. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro offers a concentration in community dance as part of the BFA degree in dance. At Florida State University, students can earn a certificate in Arts and Community with an emphasis in dance. The University of San Francisco has designed a fascinating curriculum in Performing Arts and Social Justice with a concentration in dance. Arizona State University, which has a long history of developing innovative strategies in community dance, has recently incorporated socially-based creative practice into the core curriculum.

The development of these campus programs reflects both a larger cultural trend toward ‘the fully engaged citizen and university,’ and I believe a profound change in our thinking about the field. As funding sources dry up again, the traditional two tiered company model (professional repertory/community works) has begun to reshape itself. Many of the long-term project-based models (such as Red Hook) that have a trans-cultural focus, and establish themselves in particular communities, offer us opportunities to take our practices in new directions.

Within academia, some similar shifts have been occurring. Several dance programs are moving away from traditional performance/choerography curriculums towards a wider focus on creativity and trans disciplinary studies. While many professionals have concerns that this broad focus may mean sacrificing some of the depth and rigor of the art form, on the other hand, I think that the expansion more closely reflects the multidimensionality of the field. It seems that our charge now is to continue improving the quality of community arts training across the country. Questions about best practices and professional development have been coming to the fore, as well as discussions about the establishment of a national organisation. Of course there is much more to be done, but during the past forty years, socially based dance in the United States has made significant strides. The inspiring and tireless efforts of the artists that I have discussed (and countless others) give us a solid foundation to build upon. To put it in community arts leader Maryo Gard Ewells words, our unwavering “search for a society that is meaningful and inclusive” remains strong.

Mary Fitzgerald is an educator, choreographer, and socially-based arts practitioner. As an associate professor at Arizona State University, she has collaborated with other artists on a range of community engagement projects with youth groups throughout the Phoenix area for the past twelve years.

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Dilemmas of practice in art and healing

In her upcoming book Hiking the Horizontal, due out from Wesleyan Press in Spring 2011, choreographer Liz Lerman reflects on the many connections between art, life, and varied professional disciplines, including therapeutic practice, addressed in the essay previewed here, in response to an email from Lucia Serra Estudillo

Subject: Questions from Lucia
Dear Liz,
This is an e-mail that I have been wanting to write for two weeks, but I have been waiting until I have enough time to really express my thoughts.
Do you remember the question that I asked you? I have worked for four years using dance and movement with women suffering domestic violence, and for one year with persons in an addiction rehabilitation centre. In both experiences I have had the feeling that I am on the thin line between therapy and community-based work. Sometimes I really don’t know how to react, because I do not think that everything in this process needs to operate on the level of therapy. So I have questions about how I control my role, and how can I know and strongly name my role as facilitator and not as therapist.
Or does this mean I need to study for a master’s degree in therapy? My thesis advisor asked me, “How can you help people in this kind of work, if you don’t have the skills of a therapist? Are you putting them in danger with activities that bring forward their emotions?”
But I don’t think about it that way. I have watched the beauty in the process with those great women, really connecting the body with the soul, without the rigid requirements of ‘therapeutic’ progress.
With admiration, and thanks again,
Lucia Serra Estudillo
USF, exchange student from ULA Leon, Mexico

Subject: RE: Questions from Lucia
Dear Lucia,
First, thank you for your response to the Small Dances About Big Ideas, and for your large and important question about the relationship between therapy and community-based dance practices. Before I try to answer the question let me say that Martha Minow, the woman who commissioned the piece you saw, also wrote a book called Between Vengeance and Forgiveness. Interestingly enough, she too addresses issues of therapy, in this case in relation to the courts and the legal ramifications of human rights law. So you might find the book and look into the way she characterises the evolution of the law in a therapeutic sense. It perhaps suggests that we tend to categorise any healing process as therapy when in fact the therapeutic piece of it might be quite small. There are, I think, many other things going on for a person and for a community of people, who choose to confront difficult experiences. I think we do a bit of a disservice by labelling all of this as therapy. There is a lot of territory between noticing our feelings, trying to change our experiences and behaviour, reliving, celebrating, sharing our histories and even taking some kind of action.

Part One
In the beginning I used to say that all artists do art as a way to feel better. From the very start I am sure I turned to dance as a way to improve my own condition. Even as a small child I saw that twirling made me laugh, that jumping made me enthusiastic, that holding hands and swinging someone else made me feel connected. These are good things, I thought, and though I might have only stumbled into these realisations, I did everything in my power to repeat the experiences that caused the feelings.
When I actually started to take dance classes I found a few other things very quickly. First that I had efficacy in my own existence because I could see by applying myself I got ‘better’ at what I was doing. My ability and my capacity to achieve whatever my teachers were asking me to do actually happened if I worked at it. And once, when I was about eight years old, and just standing at the barre with the other little
girls I had this amazing thought: I sensed that I could be completely myself and alone in that moment, if I wanted to, or I could think of myself as part of a group, this line of young women. It made me happy to notice that I could control the way in which I identified myself at that moment and that the nature of belonging was in part mine to bestow upon myself.

I think you can see that I am building a case for the therapeutic underpinnings of artistic discipline. But I don’t think we notice these things quite this way as we grow and build our artistic palette. I don’t think that people in the field address these skills as therapeutic either. They only become therapy when we use them with populations deemed bruised or hurt by circumstance or by society.

This is a significant omission in our thinking about art and it is why you are having part of this dialogue with yourself. That is, we have failed to understand and notate the amazing skills that artistic action brings to serious practitioners. Of course we get better at making whatever our chosen art is, if we are fortunate enough to have good teachers and a healthy amount of self-drive. But we are also gaining other skills too, and our ability to see them, understand how they arise within our artistic domain and eventually harness them for their multiple uses. Well, that is a big learning curve.

And later still, having accomplished some of that, we might find ourselves in situations where we are teaching art making and drawing on these other skills too. In my case I realised that holding together an ensemble of dancers, none of whom were asking or expecting therapy, nonetheless required that I use many skills that went beyond my dance training, or my choreographic curiosity. I used many tools borrowed from other aspects of my life to keep the collaboration alive and vibrant. We didn’t call it therapy because these folks weren’t in ‘typical’ troubles. But in many ways the emotions that arise in our art making sessions resemble those that might come up in any community based practice and I believe our ability to meet them head on makes for a better work environment, and perhaps better art, though for sure others might say otherwise.

**Part Two**

After about a decade of working in senior centres, prisons, schools, hospitals, I found another answer to the question you have posed.

I said that a therapist has a contract to make a person feel better. I have a contract to make art. And by the way, when you make art you do feel better. The feeling better is a by-product, not the goal. And later still I would sometimes amend this statement with a controversial notion that the more I challenged people to make better art, the better they would feel as the project came to a close. This latter idea has actually been born out in the research of Dr. Gerald Cohen, who has been studying the effects of art making on older adults. According to his metrics (all health-related, such as number of trips to the doctor, how much medication, etc.) older adults involved in art do feel better. But what really works, he says, is when they are challenged. It cannot be just some little condescending creativity session. People have to work hard.

Over the years I have come to see how my methods of art making have evolved as I have worked with folks who are new to it, or those who might be characterised as needing some kind of therapeutic help. If you go to our toolbox on line I think you can find some of these thoughts. But here is one just to give you a taste of what I mean. When we have done a process together and I want to get feedback from the group I will ask, “What did you notice, what did you experience, what did you observe.” I never ask, “What did you feel?”

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Why? Because if I ask them how they feel, I often think I get what they used to know about themselves. They say what they have felt in past situations similar to this. They cannot get themselves into the current moment. And secondly, if I ask how they feel, then they think, and I agree, that I must listen to the whole story. In art-making I can cut them off. In fact in art-making, learning to cut oneself off is a tool of great importance. You begin to see that you don’t need the full story, and that learning to discover the ‘fragment of worth’ is very powerful.

The inquiries of art making and therapy overlap. On occasion I have moved to the therapeutic solution rather than the best one for art. When this happens I usually have to check on what my own personal goal is, and on what was the invitation for me to be there. For example, in my work at a Children’s Hospital I found that some of my own measurements for success had to be rethought. And in that rethinking some of the ways I taught or what I was looking for changed significantly. It turned out that trying to unlock the most interesting movement, a goal that persists for my choreographic self, was not the best approach if the child could only move one hand. In that case, simply getting participation was success in itself and I had to change my notion of what made it good. In that case, what made it excellent even was keeping the young woman engaged long enough so that her ‘audience’ of parents and other patients could see her hand, and thus see her, in a new way and to applaud her accomplishment for the day.

One reason I have organised my life the way I have, with one foot in the art world and one foot in the community, is my realisation that each of these shifts in my goals taught me something useful to take into the other realms of my work. And that although I might ‘compromise,’ I was not going to have to give up on my journey of discovery of interesting movement. It turned out that I could take that aspiration elsewhere. There would be other communities and other dancers with whom I could partner to help me find that one. And instead, while working in the hospital, I could quietly go about my business of making dances with children whose bodies were in desperate need of release from pain, frustration, and lack of ownership. When she danced with her hand to our music, a young hospital patient was liberated in ways as profound as any professional dancer at her technical best under the lights in a big theatre.

Part Three
But your question has another side. Which skills do we need to be able to handle the emotions and needs of the people we work with, and how do we get them? Some of those skills we learn on the job and some we acquire in more structured ways. You, of course, will be the ultimate synthesiser of all that you already know and that which you take from others. And I am sure, there are some very good programmes out there that could give you skills that you need.

Sometimes I have gained entry into difficult situations by partnering with folks who do have those skills already. Thus, while at Children’s Hospital I always had with me a person the hospital called a ‘child life worker.’ People in this job always had a lot of expertise in medical areas, but were not medical workers. They made sure I did nothing dangerous or anything that might have brought harm to one of the children. Over the years this has become a very important part of my understanding of this work. Know how to partner. This means that I don’t have to have the same knowledge of other experts in the room, in the field, in the world. I do have to know how to work with them and together we have to make up a way of working so that we can serve these people in front of us. This has proved true whether we are talking science, religion, health, almost any field.

I think you already have a lot of those skills. I think of them as listening, watching, knowing when to act and when to step back, how to check in with someone and what to ask when checking in. A big one for me is also making sure to check in on what my partner’s imagination is doing. Sometimes we are each making up stuff in our head that is affecting what we are doing and if we don’t realise it that is what gets us into trouble.

Part Four
When I first started all of this I did have a few therapeutic skills under my belt. They grew out of a several years of
practice in something called Reevaluation Counselling, or RC. I had found this quite by chance in my early twenties and kept up the formal practice for almost 10 years.

I raise it here because it, like many systems, has within it some basic ideas that have served me well in my various capacities as teacher, leader, facilitator, choreographer, and mother. I don’t know if it is better than others, but I do know that by doing it I have had the awareness of what emotions can do to a group, and I have felt that I have some skills in decoding various moments that might otherwise sabotage a teacher.

What are these? One idea in this form of counselling, is that crying, laughing, shaking, sweating are good. And that by doing these things we are actually paving the way to changing our patterns. (This is not the time to go into the whole deal with RC, you can find that elsewhere. But I do want to take a little time explaining how I managed to ‘borrow’ from it and show you at least one way we can take trainings from one place into another).

Within RC you do a lot of practicing of being around people who are crying. In fact, you try to make it happen. This turned out to be of great use to me in workshops, because very often people cry about some of the subject matter we attend to, or because of the connections they are making, or for a variety of reasons I couldn’t begin to fathom. But I didn’t have to worry about the tears. In fact, what I worried more about is that when someone cries the whole group wants to stop and comfort them, which leads to two things: It makes the person stop crying, and makes the group stop working. I hated both of these outcomes.

So I just developed a way of explaining the moment: something like this: “Crying and having feelings is a natural partner to making art. It is going to happen. This is a good thing. Human beings need to do this. But let’s just keep working now. You can keep crying, but also keep dancing.” The response is a little miracle every time. The group realises that I have noticed. The person is taken care of. And we can continue. Usually at some point I might check in with the person who was crying, or I might ask someone else in the group to do see if they need anything. This too is an outcome from my experiences with RC where the idea of peer counselling is very strong. It doesn’t have to be the person in charge who handles the moment. Someone else from the group can do it.

Part Five
At the beginning of every workshop at the Dance Exchange, we will say, “You are in charge of your body.” I really mean it. And I think if you say it enough, and continue to treat people as if they are in charge of their bodies, and give them the skills they need to actually experience that, well then I don’t have to be therapist. I know that not everyone agrees with me. And that sometimes folks are so damaged that even if they want to be in charge of themselves they can’t be. But this is my goal.

And if I find that this idea is too far away for success, then before I turn to therapy I turn to bringing in more artists. Sometimes I find that if I have enough dancers with me, and we can pair everyone up, then we can accomplish so much more. And of course, the learning does not move in only one direction. What finally makes this work, and makes it not therapy, is that everyone is doing the learning; everyone is having a change to grow and change. It is a two-way street.

Before I finish I want to say that some situations require the presence of trained therapists. Some situations place art-making in a secondary role to the needs of the group. And in some settings it would be dangerous to everyone present to not have the right partners in the room. I don’t know the particulars of your situation. This may be one of those times. If so, perhaps before embarking on another degree programme it makes sense to partner with someone who has the skills you are looking for and see if that changes things, or if that liberates you to do more of what you envision.

I hope this helps. Keep in touch. I am eager to know how your own work evolves and how your understanding of these ideas changes over time.

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Dancing the planet

Dance pioneer Anna Halprin now in her 90’s is renowned worldwide for her groundbreaking engagement with community participants and important issues, here Taira Restar, artist and arts educator reveals Halprin’s work and ambitions

The Planetary Dance, a community dance ritual, was held 6 June 2010 in a meadow at the base of Mount Tamalpais, north of San Francisco. It was a glorious day with blue skies and warm weather. This particular Planetary Dance was unique, as it was in celebration of the 30th anniversary of Planetary Dance and the 90th birthday of dance innovator, Anna Halprin.

The main component of the Planetary Dance is the Earth Run, a dance that consists of the participants’ individual dedications as well as their ‘intentional’ running in one or more concentric circles. The fastest runners create an outer circle, which moves counter clockwise. Those moderately paced run clockwise in a middle circle and the walkers form an inner circle moving counter clockwise. Typically, there is a drummer in the centre to provide a pulse for the runners. Each runner dedicates her run to both individual healing for someone or something other than herself and to global healing. Anna Halprin says, “The Planetary Dance is a call for healing the economic turmoil, ongoing wars, climate change and many other problems that are threatening our planet.”

In terms of design, the Earth Run is a dance of simplicity. The floor pattern is a circle. The music is a steady pulse. The dance movement is a run. Those that cannot run, walk. Those that can’t walk, stand in one of the four directions — east, south, west, north. Dance historian Janice Ross states in Anna Halprin: Experience As Dance, “…Anna has evolved toward a way of bringing the sacred back into the everyday. With … the Planetary Dance, using a deliberately accessible movement vocabulary, often as simple as walking or running, she invited anyone to enter into what she has called ‘the… transforming power’ of dance.”

That June morning, surrounded by tall wild flowers and grasses, 400 participants ran in an enormous circle. As I entered the circle of runners, I called out my dedication. I heard others calling out their own dedications. I heard a poet riff on Chief Seattle’s speech. “All things are connected,” he chanted. “Every step is a prayer.” I concentrated on my own steps one after another after another. Running feet touched the earth. My feet and all the feet ahead of me, behind me, along side of me touched the earth. Circles of runners, young and old, ran with the pulse of the drum. “We all breathe the same air.” Inhaling, I breathed in the mountain air. I breathed in the poet’s chant. My breath circled into an exhalation. I let go into the concentration of the moment. The circle of runners supported me and I supported them. As my breath paused, I remembered my dedication for the run. Inhaling again, I breathed deeply and felt a surge of renewed energy. Exhaling again, my dedication travelled outward as a prayer. A red-tailed hawk circled above. Utterly focused, I concentrated on my running body - the circling spiral of my body in motion. My right foot and leg moved forward accompanied by my left shoulder, arm, hand. My spine spiralled, rotating in its inner dance. For one blissful moment both feet were off the ground. I was suspended in the clean mountain air. For one moment I was flying. Then I hit the ground running. The ancient dance of sky meets earth was my body. It was all of our bodies. We all were the dance: all 400 runners, 800 feet, the heartbeat of the drums, and the musicians, the poet, the hawk, the sun, the air, and Anna.

This exquisite experience embodied all that Anna Halprin has devoted her life to creating: art that reflects life, art that ignites creativity, art that offers resources for living life more fully, art that empowers both individuals and communities.
The roots of the Planetary Dance go back to a community crisis. Between 1979-1981, six women were killed on the trails of Mount Tamalpais. The murderer became known as the Trailside Killer and remained at large. The mountain was unsafe and off limits. At that time, Anna and Lawrence Halprin facilitated a community project entitled Search for Living Myths and Rituals through Dance and the Environment. During this, fear of the killer and loss of the mountain as a community resource arose as significant themes.

The project culminated in a performance ritual called In and On the Mountain. Enacting this ritual served to address the community crisis and empowered the community to reclaim the mountain as an important symbol and place. The fact that the killer was caught shortly thereafter served to reinforce the power of community ritual. A Huichol shaman, Don José Mitsuwa, advised Anna Halprin to repeat the ritual for five years, which she did.

During the following years, a series of performance rituals were created. These included Thanksgiving Offerings (1982), Return to the Mountain (1983), Run to the Mountain (1984), Circle the Mountain (1985) and Circle the Earth (1986).
“We must return to the resources that are really our own - our bodies and our experiences - to forge a new way of honouring peace and human dignity.”

When I came to Tamalpa Institute to train with Anna in 1983, part of my studies included these community rituals. As a Tamalpa student and then graduate, I was able to witness, participate and perform, and to gain an ‘embodied’ understanding of Anna Halprin’s approach. In terms of Anna’s community dance rituals, it was an exciting chapter to enter into. The tradition that began in response to a community crisis was evolving. The intention expanded from peace on the mountain to peace worldwide. This series of community events would develop over the years into a major facet of Anna Halprin’s work.

After the completion of the five-year cycle, Circle the Earth continued on and evolved as well. As Tamalpa graduates took the Earth Run back home to their international communities, the ritual shifted into what is now the Planetary Dance, a community dance ritual. Anna Halprin still offers it each spring on Mount Tamalpais. Yet, it has expanded well beyond California. Each year it is held in more countries around the world.

On 26-28 March 2010, Anna Halprin, with support from the Planetary Dance Committee, offered the first Planetary Dance workshop held at Anna’s studio on the flanks of Mount Tamalpais. This workshop was significant because it was the first time that Anna extended an invitation to people beyond Tamalpa graduates to become facilitators of the Planetary Dance. On the first evening, Anna said, “This is a highlight of my life. To see all of you here and to celebrate a particular moment, I would call it, a moment of history.” The Planetary Dance workshop was designed for people who were committed to presenting the Planetary Dance in their own communities to create a circle of Planetary Dance events around the world. The intention was for participants to acquire skills to address significant community issues and to use the Halprin Life/Art Process to create a community ritual. Nearly 30 women and men gathered from across the United States and from as far as Canada, Brazil, Europe and Israel. Participants attended for a variety of reasons. A social worker considered the Planetary Dance a way to unite people. A young mother intended to use it to bridge communities within her hometown. A French dancer planned to offer the Planetary Dance as a way to comment on the current political situation in France. It was particularly meaningful to witness participants as they anchored their workshop experiences through dancing the Earth Run. This workshop exemplified Anna’s commitment to empowering others to lead their own communities in dance that has meaning and purpose.

Recently, Planetary Dance events have been offered at the Eiffel tower, on the rooftop of a New York preschool, in a downtown Phoenix, Arizona civic park, at a WWII rocket base that is now a peace memorial in Neuss, Germany, and in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem, as part of a peace education workshop sponsored by the Israel Palestine Centre for Research and Information.

Since the 1980’s, I have participated in many Circle the Earth and Planetary Dance events with people of all ages. Whether there are a handful of participants or hundreds, whether we are in a schoolroom or overlooking the Pacific Ocean, each time I am reminded of the power of intention setting and the importance of community dance ritual. We dance as individuals together. We dance as peace in action. “Every step is a prayer.” Our dances join the dances of others - those dances known and unknown to us. “All things are connected.”

In Libby Worth and Helen Poynor’s 2004 book Anna is quoted, “We must return to the resources that are really our own - our bodies and our experiences - to forge a new way of honouring peace and human dignity”. (3) As we dance the Planetary Dance across the planet, we, as individuals and as communities, forge this new way.

visit www.tairarestar.com

Taira Restar is an artist and arts educator, serving on the faculty at Tamalpa Institute. She performs and teaches with her mentor, Anna Halprin. She facilitates events and workshops using the Halprin approach and the Tamalpa Life/Art Process.

For information on Planetary Dance visit www.planetarydance.org, for the Planetary Dance film visit www.earthalive.com, and for Tamalpa Institute visit www.tamalpa.org

Kairos Dance Theatre
makes a world

Maria DuBois Genné, artistic director of Kairos, intergenerational dance company, sets out her and the company’s values and priorities

I first met Ida Arbein when her son David called me up on the phone. He and his wife were moving his mother to St. Paul from New York City. “My mother danced with Helen Tamiris in the 1930s,” he said. “We heard about your company and we thought you might be interested in meeting her.”

“Of course,” I responded, “I’d love to meet her.” Little did I know then that meeting Ida would steer the direction of Kairos Dance Theatre to collaborating and performing with this firecracker of a woman and at the same time take us back to Harlem where American artists birthed truly American art.

The petite and ebullient Ida, who just turned 100 years old, gestured dramatically from her chair one day and told us this story:

“I’ve learned to laugh each day. I could be crying, but I know that if you laugh the whole world laughs with you. Come on let’s laugh! I always wanted to be a dancer. I’d do anything to dance. I was in a dance company with Helen Tamiris in New York City. What a tall gorgeous creature she was! When she jumped you thought she would never come down. We performed with her on Broadway. We had regular jobs as dancers. I got paid $50 per week. One time I left the theatre and took a taxi to the 92nd Street Y to do an audition. I was still in costume. I came out on stage, and sang and danced, ‘It’s Me, It’s Me Oh Lord, Standing in the Need of Prayer.’ I brought the house down. Most of those other dancers, like Martha Graham, weren’t happy,” Ida contracted and contorted her body in her chair to demonstrate. “Me – I came in, and sang and danced, and the audience laughed and laughed.”

Ida has had a long career. As a young woman in the 1930s, she danced in the company of American modern dance pioneer Helen Tamiris who was a leader for the Work Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Dance Project. Under President Franklin Roosevelt, the WPA provided employment to artists and others during the Great Depression from 1936-1939. Tamiris was a contemporary of Martha Graham and Ida performed in the Tamiris show Look Home Brethren on Broadway, dancing to spirituals and protest songs. Tamiris was one of the first American choreographers to use jazz and spiritual music to explore social themes in dance. On off-eveings, Ida and her friends travelled to Harlem for the music and nightlife. Since arriving in the Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis) two years ago, Ida has been collaborating with my company, Kairos Dance Theatre. With her we mounted a show this year, Ida Dances with Inr, which premiered on 18 April 2010 along with the Irv Williams Quartet and gospel singer, Tom Tipton, to a standing room only, sold-out singing, dancing, clapping audience.

I founded Kairos (KIGH-rowce) Dance Theatre in 1999. Kairos is an ancient Greek word meaning ‘the open moment.’ Kairos performers span four generations, ranging in age from four to one hundred years old. The company is the only intergenerational modern dance company in Minnesota and one of only a handful in the U.S. Our aim is to encourage audiences to re-examine their expectations about what is beautiful and worthwhile on the performance stage, about just exactly where the stage is and who is on it, and about the scientific as well as aesthetic and emotional necessity of what happens there. In the process, we are knitting together communities with the intent to change how we are together in the world.

Several years ago Kairos began a series of performances with legendary jazz saxophonist, Irv Williams. Irv, almost 91, is a treasure among Twin Cities jazz lovers. His tenor saxophone has been heard here since he arrived during

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'As an artist, I believe it is my responsibility to facilitate self-discovery and empower each person by creating meaningful and even profound art through dance. Dance changes the dynamics of relationships between people, heightening social interaction and dissolving formalised relationships, such as those between care professionals and patients, to ones of peers creating and discovering together.'

WWII, his lush sound and lyrical, romantic phrasing earning him the nickname 'Mr. Smooth.' His eighth CD, Finality, was just released last year. He is presently working on his ninth CD.

I told Irv that I wanted to develop an evening-length concert inspired by the artists who were creating in Harlem when Ida was there as a young woman, like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. “Yeah,” said Irv, “and there were other artists that you probably never heard of like the Chocolate Dandies with Coleman Hawkins, and McKinney’s Cotton Pickers. They were great musicians too. Let’s play their music, too.”

Centered in Harlem, New York City between 1920-1930, there was an outburst of creative activity in many art forms, originally named ‘The New Negro Movement’ and later known as the Harlem Renaissance. More than a social revolt against racism, it was a celebration by a black ‘Who’s who’ of musicians, composers, poets, dramatists, visual artists, and intellectuals of all things African-American that first attracted prosperous black middle class audiences.

My story connects back to Harlem, too. I am named after W.E.B. Du Bois, the scholar, writer, publisher, public intellectual and activist, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). My late mother, Noma Genné, worked as a field secretary for the NAACP national office in New York in the 1940s under Thurgood Marshall and Roy Wilkins, traveling the country north of the Mason-Dixon line doing ‘intercultural education.’ Noma was a friend of Dr. Du Bois’ soon-to-be wife, Shirley Graham. My mom thought the best place to dance was the Cotton Club and talked about people dancing in the streets at night in Harlem in the dark because of wartime restrictions.

The performance we recently realised through this unique collaboration with Ida and Irv employs a community-based approach of radical inclusion and celebration of the diversity of each person’s gifts, which has informed my entire career as creative dance educator, choreographer and dancer. Inspired by their experiences and the lives of the artists with whom they worked has taught me to continue to respect their unique artistry and, at the same time, push my artistic output into new territory. Kairos embodies these ideas by recognising that people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds have their own dances to share and stories to tell that are beautiful and make compelling art.

Since 2001, I have expanded my community-based work through the creation of an innovative programme to vitally engage older adults through the artistic expression of dance and storytelling. The Dancing Heart – Vital Elders Moving in Community™ is now a national award winning, evidence-based arts programme that demonstrates positive health outcomes for older adults in adult day programme and nursing homes. This programme won the Award for Excellence in programme Innovation given by the Archstone Foundation and the Gerontological Health Section of the American Public Health Association.

Additionally, The Dancing Heart™ received the American Society on Aging’s 2008 Mind Alert Award that addresses early stage cognitive impairment. This programme exemplifies inclusion and equity by engaging all people to explore how dance vitalises and brings communities together, resulting in measureable health benefits and cost of care savings.

My mother, who believed fiercely in the importance of social justice, instilled in me the values that The Dancing Heart™ embodies. She always said, “I have to make a difference.” Inviting people to express their joy and grief through dance, music and story is my way of offering a path toward freedom – freedom of the spirit. I find that older people are re-awakened – through dance, music and story – to their lives, dreams and vitality. When they are vitally engaged they can share their legacy with their families and their community. When those creative outpourings are supported, nurtured and celebrated, we find that lives change. The former opera singer begins to sing again in the halls, at meals, and playing Name that Tune with another resident. Or an elder gentleman invites the cook, the music therapist, his daughter, a volunteer and a resident in a chair to waltz with him. Another gentleman living with Parkinson’s can lead the performance for the Founder’s Dinner in a rousing rendition of Old Man River with clarity and power. It is not the same at the nursing home anymore. People are dancing, singing, sharing their stories, and doing what we aren’t expecting them to do in a nursing home or adult day programme. They are reshaping the paradigm to ‘I can make a difference.’

As an artist, I believe it is my responsibility to facilitate self-discovery and empower each person by creating meaningful and even profound art through dance. Dance changes the dynamics of relationships between people,
heightening social interaction and dissolving formalised relationships, such as those between care professionals and patients, to ones of peers creating and discovering together. There is no right or wrong way to dance, just many different possibilities. Dance evokes the power of eros in its broadest kinship sense, promoting connections of many kinds between people. Whether we are making a chair version of the Virginia Reel, or dancing the two step with one partner holding on securely to the other more frail partner, or creating a ‘dance of the sea’ with silken cloths linking dancers across the dancing circle, we are building a community that no longer is limited by time and place, and is enriched by our imaginations and our presence.

Reginald Prim, an independent arts activist and critic who previously worked for the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis as its community liaison and now serves on our board of directors, wrote about his experience of watching one of our performances for the first time at a Minnesota Fringe Festival in 2005. He called his piece, The Generous Heart of Dance: Kairos Makes a World:

“There is something quite moving about watching seventeen people of varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds, ages and skill levels, creating enjoyable, entertaining and even profound dances together. It’s as if you’re watching a little working model of patience, care and respect. And, you find yourself, for an hour or so, rediscovering your faith in community and believing that art can heal, that dance is ritual and world-making, and that a theatre can be a sacred space. I must assume there is a lesson here, a sermon if you will, about how to recover grace and beauty in our everyday lives; how to live artfully despite the limits of our skill and abilities; how to transmute the quotidian into the transcendent. Moreover, the dance here feels like a blessing – an active imparting of Grace into the world, a transfusion of wonder directly to the heart.” (1)

What Reggio so eloquently describes is what Kairos tries to live up to and what we think is possible in the nursing home, in the community center, and in the world. Our choreographed public performances, like our informal workshop performances in assisted-care facilities, are often ‘gee-whiz’ experiences for audiences. Many people throughout the United States are not accustomed to valuing or having rewarding artistic experiences from performers who are usually marginalised by a youth-oriented society. We are changing those stereotypes about our aging population and inviting everyone to dance together again.

**visit** [www.kairosdance.org](http://www.kairosdance.org) The documentary, Dancing Heart™ - Power to Nurture and Heal is at [www.vimeo.com/9239437](http://www.vimeo.com/9239437)

(1) Reginald Prim, Published on the web, 22 July 22 2005, Minnesota Fringe Festival Blog.
Capturing community

Melanie Ohm and Judy Butzine, co-directors, the Cultural Arts Coalition describe how they capture the whole story for whole communities through purposeful documentation

Humans create, exchange, and pass along ‘knowing’ through material forms and expressive means. This is art-making, and art-making is for everyone. The artifacts of human history reveal these things to us from the beginning of time, documenting our movement across the earth. What are the artifacts of participatory art-making, for dance as community-making? Do we have methods for documenting that are purposeful and meet the many human needs for communicating our work? This article describes a fresh way of considering, and creating, documentation as a practice of participatory art-making offered by the Cultural Arts Coalition, a non-profit networking organisation that supports community arts practices in diverse contexts.

‘Capturing community’ is about animating people through participatory arts programming that places them at the centre of their own experience – and documenting that experience in such a way that their voices and images are revealed, honoured, and celebrated over time. In Immigrant Participatory Arts, Pia Moriarty defines participatory arts as ‘forms of artistic expression in which everyday people actively engage in the process of making art.’ Thoughtful documentation in this context recalls for us our purpose, acknowledges community, honours the individual, and also allows for participation in and interpretation of a gathering long after the event has passed. The arts and community are expressed in time, space, and relationship. In an 1889 essay ‘The Decay of Lying,’ Oscar Wilde states that “The self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression… Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy.” Life is realised in our work. According to Merriam-Webster online, the term ‘document’ comes from a Latin word for ‘precept, teaching, proof’ and the Microsoft Word thesaurus gives the synonyms ‘provide evidence, authenticate.’ What does evidence of it look like? ‘Evidence’ brings to mind artifacts: photos, a logo, a t-shirt, curriculum, a funding report, newsletters, a brochure, or a video. What if we ask, “How do we authenticate our community building and art-making?” ‘Authenticate’ holds the idea of action, a process, such as celebration and reflection. Our documentation then can be both artifact and process in an ongoing cycle, telling the story of the work. Thoughtful documentation is the inner journey of participatory art-making, with milestones carefully mapped.

When documenting, a dance practitioner captures not only the detail of an event, but also:
- Context – place, ideology, historical perspective
- Connections – between people, ideas, places
- Action – a sense of motion that encompasses the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual
- Story – and stories inside of stories.

With these concepts in mind, we ask many questions. Meaningful documentation is a search to see, to hear, to honour, and to learn. Each purposeful question begins with ‘quest,’ and is one small gesture on a pilgrimage to know and to understand.

About Context, we ask...
- How can I capture the geographic location?
- Does the story of place tie to the intent of this project?
- Why is this project occurring?
- Is it driven by a larger movement or social issue over time or geography?
- Who are the catalytic people?
- Does national or local news reveal any information?
- About Connections, we inquire...
- In this place, where do I see ideologies creating tension or symmetry?
- Are there symbolic elements that reflect connections to something deeper?
- Where in the interactions among people and activities can I capture purpose, focus, revelation, immersion, emotion, tension, etc?
- Have I included all participants, representative individuals and organisations as well as key players?
- Can I make connections to other events, literature,people?
- About Action, we explore...
- How can I capture people in the act of connecting?
- Or in the act of creating?
- Where can I capture the energy of the space?
- How can I record vital motion as small as a brush stroke or a facial expression and as large as a dance or a crowd?
- How can the movement of colour or concept be expressed?
- How many ways can the action be documented?
- And with what materials?

About Story, we investigate...
- Is there a small plot inside the larger project, or a larger plot in a single idea that reaches beyond the project?
- Is there a single story (one person, one idea) that is hidden inside the story of this project, which is but part of a larger social issue?
- Will my narrative create a story’s arch through both images and text?

Purposeful questions are our first tool for the work of documentation, and set the framework for its practice. The
'Capturing community is about animating people through participatory arts programming that places them at the centre of their own experience – and documenting that experience in such a way that their voices and images are revealed, honoured, and celebrated over time.'
next consideration is our equipment, our physical tools. What is required? Minimally, a camera that is flexible enough to ‘grab’ pictures on the move and in various light conditions; a notebook or recording device to capture participants’ words; and a computer. We do not use expensive cameras. Ours were selected for their capacity to take high quality images, and the video feature. The battery may be a consideration as well. Slipping rechargeable batteries into a camera may prove less expensive over time, and a battery that is common (in the U.S., AAA, AA) is easy to replace on the fly. The video feature can serve as a means to capture sound as well as motion. We generally travel with notebooks and cameras only. The computer is both archive and production centre for creating products from the materials gathered.

Moving through a participatory art-making process and snapping pictures is simplest with more than one practitioner in the space. Some practitioners become adept at briefly stepping back from the action and snapping pictures or jotting down comments. It is not ideal but definitely doable. This takes practice and becomes automatic with time. As one of our young colleagues said in reference to us, “It’s hard to do this work alone. You need to be like Judy and Melanie, and find a partner to keep you going.”

Through the Cultural Arts Coalition (CAC), we document to bring recognition to the stories being told through and with the arts in our community. While we are creative, even innovative in this practice, we almost always produce a photo narrative in conjunction with other strategies. A photo narrative is not a recounting of an event; it is the human story as expressed through a participatory arts experience. As a tool, it is invaluable because it is not high tech, and can be distributed in multiple formats: web, email, and as a handout. The photo narrative provides background information, photos and text about the action interspersed, and contact information for the practitioner and collaborators. It doesn’t need to be long on text, only to tell the story. Advanced photo editing experience is not required either. Most computers are programmed with a simple photo editing tool, allowing the user to make simple adjustments to photos, such as ‘cropping’ to zoom in on one section of the photo, rotate, resize, and even ‘auto correct’ the image. Photo editing programs are also available on the web as freeware. Colour frames can be added to photos once they are pasted into the word processing program. A web version may have video and music added, but the photo narrative can easily be printed and handed out as an advocacy tool at meetings, or forwarded by email to a new contact. A variety of photo narrative examples are viewable on the CAC ‘events’ page at www.artsare.org/cac6.shtml and at www.communityarts4peace.org

Finally, documentation begins with attention to the way we look at the world, as individuals and organisations, and being aware of our values, ideas, and beliefs. The individual must continually assess, ‘Do my questions come out of my values only, or do they respond to what my community of participation values as well?’ Because we are thoughtful, walking in with our eyes full of intention, we SEE – perhaps differently than we ever have before. Then as we look at the materials and language we’ve gathered, yet more is revealed. The image, when seen in hand or on a computer screen, communicates far more than the initial framing of that captured moment in time.

One ever-present objective for any participatory arts initiative is to provide strategic, purposeful documentation. Therefore, preparation is essential. While planning is commonly understood to be necessary for evaluation and assessment, as is needed for funders, it is often considered after the fact in regard to other purposes. Documentation as we practice it through the CAC is a deliberate process, not a random collecting of artifacts. Its development is as intentional as any other organisational effort, and includes marketing, communications, archiving, learning, research, policymaking, recognition, and advocacy in addition to evaluation and assessment. Documentation is specific, creating different products for each strategy and each community. The processes are used for single projects as well as larger organisational goals over time. With planning, an additional piece of information – a quote, an image – can be acquired to fulfil multiple purposes. Whether we are sending a message of respect for a particular issue or group of people (migration/immigrants), or working to create a change in public policy (health and dance/services for youth on probation), preparation and planning are part of the practitioner’s work. Ultimately, documentation is not the end of a course of action; it is the beginning. As a process, it is one aspect of the complex rhythms flowing through our work. As a product, it is the embodiment of our work communicated to an expanded audience over time.

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Start making sense

Simon Dove, Director, Arizona State University School of Dance in the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts considers evolving the art form through socially-based practice in the United States Higher Education system

Dance is inherently a socially-based practice. It is rooted in community celebration and family rituals around the world. Yet professional contemporary practice seems to have become so culturally marginal. How has this happened, and why does the field still seek to define professional practice as separate from community activity? Why do people seem to value individual physical virtuosity more than the power of dance to convey ideas and meaning?

As Director of Yorkshire Dance Centre, the National Dance Agency in Leeds, UK for five years and subsequently eight years as Artistic Director of the Netherlands’ international dance festival Springdance, I have evolved a clear understanding of the power of dance to transform people’s lives, and the role of the dance artist as a potent catalyst for this social evolution. From the school-excluded young person in Leeds culminating a year’s project with us by leading a dance workshop in his former school, to Paris-based Rachid Ouramdane, stimulating critical social debate through his performance piece examining suicide among young people, I have witnessed how dance can really move us all (pun intended). Yet it seems that the very structures that have been built to foster and nurture dance in the West, are also the very ones that lead to an isolation of practice, the marginalisation of the art form, and such limited public engagement. If only 6% of the population claim to attend dance performances, then that leaves a massive 94% who find no purpose in attending. Clearly current dance practice does not make sense to most people.

Dance training is intensive. The immense investment of time, effort and resources that it takes for each individual to hone their body into an instrument of technical virtuosity is certainly laudable. However if this physical dexterity is the sole focus of the dancer’s effort, then we are already sowing the seeds of isolation. If institutions are training dance artists so that their work can only be seen in expensive buildings with high specification floors, controlled temperatures, advanced technical facilities, and broad sightlines, then Western society is simply consolidating that separation. In the pursuit of the highest standards in dancing, it is important not to forget the critical importance of us knowing why we are dancing, for whom, and to what end?

Many of the dance makers from around the world I have worked with over the years are developing a profound sense of purpose for their work, and questioning many of the established assumptions about what dance is and where it happens only after they have completed their training and begun their professional practice. Exceptions are all too often those who have not undertaken a formal dance education, but are autodidacts, having constructed their own path to dance proficiency from internships, workshops and programmes of their own choosing. If dance is to play a more significant role in people’s lives, clearly we need to ensure that developing dance does not also encourage social disengagement. So how does one change the notions of what appropriate dance training is for the 21st century? How can professional dance activity be more relevant to more people?

In the United States the majority of advanced dance training programmes take place in colleges and universities. Higher education then, offers the opportunity to provide an appropriate training ground to ensure that future generations of artists develop a more socially-engaged practice. The new curriculum for Dance we have developed here at Arizona State University (ASU) seeks to offer students a much wider range of possibilities for their practice. Central to the principles of the programme is the focus on the students’ own creative practice, crucially shifting the emphasis away from learning an imposed set of movements, towards an understanding of what it is they...
wish to communicate and how. Rather than have a specific technique imposed on all, students can now choose a ‘personal movement practice’ – a dance form they wish to focus on each year – from five options, Dances of Africa and the Diaspora, Contemporary Ballet, Movement Language Sources (Somatics), Post-Modern Contemporary, or Urban. This is supported by a contextualising course in Movement Practices, which offers an introduction to somatic principles, embodied knowledge from around the world such as Ta’i Chi, Yoga, and Aikido, and a kinesiological understanding of how the physical body functions. Theory and history is integrated in the personal movement practice courses and a range of history, philosophy, and ethnology courses help to frame all this information. The sum of this practice is applied and explored in an ongoing programme of creative practice courses that runs through each year culminating in a final graduation project. This creative inquiry is the core of the curriculum, constantly asking the student to synthesise their acquired knowledge in relation to their own ideas, their own creative imagination, and their own sense of the world they inhabit. The students continually demonstrate how they make sense of it all, and in their work how it makes sense to the participant or viewer. This is a powerful way to catalyse a form of self-discovery in the student, and develop in them a real sense of responsibility for what they do, why they do it, and for whom and with whom do they do it. These are central questions for any artist in the 21st century, and students who begin this process of self-inquiry whilst still at college are years ahead of those who only begin to engage with these questions when confronted by the realities of professional life.

Critical to the development of this inquiring student is a real understanding and empathy for the people and communities around them. What is their role and responsibility as an artist in the world today? How can they use their artistry, for example, to work meaningfully with a group of homeless young people? How can they use their movement knowledge to explore the stories of people who speak a different language? Confronting these questions opens the dance artist to imagining solutions that are not taught in the classroom, but where the cumulative skills, knowledges, and personal understanding of the world are applied to achieve very tangible, practical, and creative solutions. To ensure all students undergo this experience, we have integrated into the third year of creative practice the examination of international models of socially-based practice followed by a practical internship applying that understanding locally.

Clearly it is our responsibility as dance educators and administrators to foster a curiosity to really explore this phenomenon called ‘dance’ – from the personal to the wider practices around the world. The students need context from the widest possible knowledge of the field and they need to find their own connection to this work. As a response to this we have developed a visiting artist faculty program, so there will always be artists here on campus from diverse parts of the world, working, teaching, researching, and just chatting; each bringing a different way of thinking and making, in a very tangible form for the students.

There is substantial long-term value for artists working in varied settings to offer us fresh perspectives on the world around us. This will help nurture a healthy and engaged society, as well as evolve new and dynamic manifestations of the art form itself. The challenge here is to both transform society’s limited access to dance practice, and expand the dance artists’ understanding of their role in society. We need to foster a shift towards respecting and supporting the artist, not just the finished work; to invest in the artist’s presence in our world, and not only the product. Our mission here at ASU is clear; we are becoming a training ground for socially-engaged and innovative artists, who use dance as their primary means of engagement. A cultural practice based on products is not dynamic. A cultural landscape based on seeding artists to thrive in diverse contexts will evolve and give rise to work we cannot yet imagine, and transform people and society in ways we have only dreamed of.

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‘This is a powerful way to catalyse a form of self-discovery in the student, and develop in them a real sense of responsibility for what they do, why they do it, and for whom and with whom do they do it.’
The politics of extraordinary possibilities

Pegge Vissicaro explains how in the United States, dance is leading the revolution to positively transform society
dance education as a cultural and community builder, support the First Lady’s initiatives that address childhood obesity, and further dance as an important form of physical fitness and artistic expression. Obviously passage of the bill provides a tremendous boost to dance in the United States, which is for the most part peripheral to everyday life. What caught my eye in the resolution were the words: dance, community, and artistic expression. I thought, “This is radical stuff! The combined forces of corporate America AND the Obama administration are fueling the fire of a new dance revolution in the United States.” A change in the collective culture of America is actually happening… a true paradigm shift!

The seemingly instantaneous achievement of a national platform for dance is largely unprecedented in the United States. It is a uniquely 21st century phenomenon that has grabbed people’s attention facilitated by mass media, specifically social networking technology and an audience entertained by youth culture, physical virtuosity, and the competitive spirit. While farther beneath the radar, dance as an artistic tool to engage and develop communities will likely benefit from the same attention captivating our nation. Strategically, the model proposed by House Resolution No. 1514 provides THE foundation from which to build a more comprehensive policy about the vital role dance can achieve in United States society. In effect, it becomes a catalyst to completely revolutionise how Americans think and act toward dance with the potential to meaningfully connect people to the social and natural environment through a heightened sense of self.

From my view, this important resolution is like a major tributary of a larger river shaping America’s socio-cultural landscape. All the water flowing together represents a convergence of many events that provide the conditions for extraordinary possibilities to emerge, creating a watershed moment in our nation’s history. It’s the perfect storm! Faced with the current economic problems, the citizens of the United States have no choice but to adapt to a new reality, requiring major reform in how they spend money, take care of their health, and relate to the world. It’s a long overdue wake-up call, which shouts at people to question priorities, specifically attitudes toward developing more sustainable practices.

One such sustainable practice considers the value of community investment to effect positive change. At a grassroots level there is a rapidly growing interest in community development as an antidote to counteract social disintegration and other unhealthy behaviours that occur among highly industrialised and technologically dependent nations. This renewed emphasis on community implies social interaction, a basic human need. People interact to ‘know’. However, in times of adversity and unpredictability, interaction serves as a coping mechanism to build mutually supportive relations based on cooperation and trust. Interaction animates and mobilises community formation, which offers solidarity and an anchor of stability in an increasingly dynamic world.

In the USA today communities are taking on new roles as important forms of social capital. No longer relying on individual assets, the emerging model of sustainability harnesses the collective energy of a group to transform society. While recognising that every group is equally diverse, each person contributes a unique perspective and understanding of the world. At a local level, the combination of these knowledge resources offers a wide range of information and ideas, which may be used to solve problems facing the community. The variety of experiences and viewpoints also provides the opportunity for groups to extend networks and develop partnerships that enhance self-sustaining practices. Further, diversity is essential for producing social capital. In communities, members naturally encounter differences between each other, which creates tension. Commitment to collaboration and mutual exchange that benefits the group means negotiating differences to find common ground. This process leads to new ways of knowing, encourages discovery, and stimulates imagination to envision a more civil society.

We have in the United States more than 300 million individuals navigating their paths through space and time. Continued migration within borders and across borders diversifies thought and interaction, reinforcing the connective tissue that unites Americans. Affecting harmonious community development, dance creatively engages people to meet ‘difference’ as a strategy to adapt to these changing contexts. At this favourable time in history with the support of our nation’s leaders and corporate media we are afforded extraordinary possibilities to reposition dance as central to human experience, making a quantum leap toward understanding dance as a communal force for social transformation.

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Diabetes UK embraces dance

Andrew James, the Marketing Director of Diabetes UK outlines how this major national charity sees participation in dance as a genuine route to combat and educate about the disease

What is diabetes?
Diabetes is one of the biggest health challenges facing the UK today, one person is diagnosed with the condition every three minutes in this country. There are 2.5 million people in the UK with diabetes and a further half a million people living with the condition but don’t know it. On average a person can live with Type 2 diabetes for ten years before being diagnosed.

Diabetes UK is the leading charity for the three million people in the UK with diabetes. Our mission is to improve the lives of people with the condition and to work towards a future without diabetes.

There are two versions of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 diabetes develops if the body is unable to produce any insulin. It accounts for about 10 per cent of all cases of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is not preventable.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body still makes some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance). In most cases this is linked with being overweight.

When diabetes is not managed correctly, it can lead to complications including heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness and amputation. The complications of diabetes kill more people yearly than bowel and prostate cancer combined.
Diabetes UK
Although diabetes is a serious condition, when managed well, people with diabetes can live healthy and active lives and Diabetes UK supports people with diabetes to do this.

The charity operates across the four nations, with offices in London, Cardiff, Glasgow and Belfast, as well as seven regional offices in England. We also have 400 voluntary groups across the UK providing support and resources for people with diabetes.

Diabetes UK supports people who have diabetes by campaigning & lobbying for better care, providing education and information and funding research. As well as people with diabetes, we reach out to healthcare professionals and those at risk.

Roadshows
Since 2006, Diabetes UK has run its roadshow programme, raising awareness of the risk factors of Type 2 diabetes and encouraging people at risk to take steps to reduce their risk. The roadshow is a bright magenta van that visits towns and villages across the UK providing information on diabetes and assessing people’s risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

The following are risk factors of Type 2 diabetes and anyone with two or more of these should visit their GP for a diabetes test:

- Waist measurement of 37 inches or more for men (35 inches or more for men of South Asian origin) 31.5 inches or more for all women
- Being overweight
- Being aged over 40 (or 25 for people of Black and South Asian origin)
- Having a family history of Type 2 diabetes.

The cost of diabetes
It is currently estimated that 10 per cent of the NHS budget is spent on diabetes (around £9 billion a year). It is possible to reduce the number of people developing Type 2 diabetes and the associated cost to the NHS, through improved education and awareness of the known risk factors. It is through this roadshow programme that Diabetes UK aims to raise awareness of Type 2 diabetes and prevent a diabetes epidemic.

Diabetes and dance
In recent years, we have seen a significant growth in the number of people who are obese in the UK. If we can reduce the number of overweight people, we can significantly reduce the number of people who develop Type 2 diabetes and therefore improve the health of the nation.

To do this Diabetes UK has developed two clear messages which people can easily understand around healthy eating and increasing physical activity.

We chose dance as the vehicle for getting people to move more and to encourage a healthy lifestyle. The rationale behind this choice is simple: Dance is inclusive, totally accessible and positively celebrates diversity. It is also fun.

Dance is growing faster than any other art-form in the UK. Around 4.6 million people take part in community dance with over 13% of the population now attending dance performances. The variety of different forms it offers is unparalleled.

We want to tap into this diverse and exciting world and increase the numbers getting involved in dance, as a way of keeping in shape and thus reducing the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Super Road-shows
This summer, five super roadshows were held in Dundee, Nottingham, Staines, Ilford and Bexley. These roadshows carried out the usual risk assessments and provided information, but also had a healthy eating element, in the form of a ‘kitchen’ handing out free healthy food samples and hosting healthy eating games.

Each roadshow had a dance element, which saw one or more local dance group giving a series of performances outside the roadshow. The performances were a great success, some were interactive, and all attracted large crowds. The dance groups were given a great opportunity to promote their local performances and classes and encourage people to take up dancing as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Scottish Dance Theatre (SDT), Scotland’s national contemporary dance company, performed two pieces from current works at the first Super Roadshow, in Dundee. Katie Smith, Marketing Manager at SDT said:

‘Performing at the Diabetes UK roadshow was a fantastic way for SDT to promote our performances to a wide audience. The dancers had great fun performing and chatting to passers by about Scottish Dance Theatre and the importance of keeping active and healthy. We fully support Diabetes UK’s efforts to get people moving through dance and look forward to any opportunity to work together again in the future.’

Results
Overall, the Super Roadshows saw an average increase of double the number of risk assessments and treble the amount of materials distributed than a normal roadshow. This is proof that dance works on a number of levels to engage audiences, spread the message about the importance of healthy lifestyle and act as a fun vehicle to spread healthy lifestyle and Type 2 diabetes prevention messages.

Plans for 2011
In 2011, we plan to run 50 Super Roadshows across the UK, each including dance. Keep up to date with the latest information, opportunities for recruitment and all other diabetes related information at www.diabetes.org.uk
Lifelong dancing?

In the following section Linda Jasper sets out a 10 year vision for youth dance. We have linked this to articles about dance with adults by Liz Atkin and Jane Ralls to address the question “what is on offer for young people when they stop being categorised as ‘young’?” and shouldn’t the ambitions set out by Linda be available for dancers throughout their lives?
Young people’s dance

A collection of leading dance, education and school sport organisations and individual experts have produced a ten year vision discussing how young people’s dance in and beyond school be developed, as Linda Jasper, Director of Youth Dance England (YDE) explains.

The need for a ten year vision

There are pockets of excellent practice in England, where young people have the chance to access high quality dance and progress their interest to whatever level they wish and are able; but this is not the picture in most areas of the country and it is this key issue that the Vision addresses.

As a world leader in dance education and youth dance we cannot rest on the laurels of the achievements and progression over the past year, but rather, build on what we have achieved and push further to make sure we reach all young people in England. As a result of this aim the first ever Ten Year Vision has been produced.

The investment (£5.5m 2008 - 2011)
in young people’s dance has shown the potential for what can be achieved in a short time. Even in the current challenging and economic climate we need to invest in our young people, as future citizens, entrepreneurs, leaders, work force and artists.

In order to make a cohesive offer for young people across the country, key stakeholders who have responsibilities and interest in young peoples’ dance need to work together to ensure that we are making the most of the expertise, resources and provision available to create a coherent dance offer for young people.

Focus of the Ten Year Vision
The Vision, which was launched at Youth Dance England’s national conference in September, outlines the ambition to create a cohesive dance offer for all children and young people up to 19 years (24 years for disabled young people) across England. It includes schools (including alternative educational establishments such as short stay schools, young offender institutions and hospital schools) as well as arts, dance, sports and youth organisations.

The Vision was produced by members of the Programme Board for young people’s dance in England, including YDE and national network, Association for Physical Education (afPE), National Dance Teachers Association (NDTA), Specialist Schools & Academies Trust (SSAT) and Youth Sport Trust (YST) in consultation with many individuals and organisations involved in dance for children and young people, from policy makers, Arts Council England, practitioners and artists, dance company education departments and of course young people themselves.

The Ten Year Vision describes how we want to create a rich dance experience that allows young people to not only participate in a range of dance genres but also to give them the experience of dancing, creating dance, performing, viewing and taking on leadership roles.

The main objective is to provide a seamless dance experience that takes an individual from first steps in dance, deepening engagement through participating in dance in and beyond schools, to progression onto training for a dance career. The lasting legacy will be for young people to become life-long dance enthusiasts and participants - and for a few, our dancers, choreographers, teachers and managers of the future.

The Vision outlines the following goals:
• To provide every young person with access to a range of high quality dance experiences in schools and in the localities where they live
• To provide more opportunities for young people to deepen and broaden their dance knowledge and skills as participant, creator, viewer/critic and leader
• To identify and nurture our most talented young dancers regardless of their backgrounds
• To Improve progression routes for young people into a range of dance careers
• To create a world class work force for young people’s dance
• To ensure that young people know how to and have the confidence and motivation to continue their involvement in dance post 19 years.

Priorities for development
These top national five priorities were identified consistently throughout the consultation period for the Vision. Key actions (agreed by the key partner organisations) to address these priorities are outlined in the Vision and will be described in more detail in the five-year Strategy which will be produced in 2011.
• Workforce development: the number of skilled teachers, practitioners and artists working in and beyond schools needs to be increased and reflect the gender balance and cultural diversity within the population
• Restricted access to dance in and beyond schools: all young people must have access to dance programmes so they can progress their interest to whatever level they wish and are able. In particular, boys should have equal access to dance in school and be encouraged to take part in dance beyond school. The cultural diversity of practice and practitioners needs to increase
• Focusing on the least engaged: making sure that those young people who face the most barriers to participation are reached
• Lack of dance spaces: young people need to dance in spaces that meet health and safety requirements and inspire artistic and physical exploration
• Strengthening the national young people’s dance network: to provide a cohesive, well connected and quality assured dance offer for all children and young people in England.

Challenges facing the Ten Year Vision
Don’t stop now - we’ve just got
started! might seem an appropriate strap line to any vision or strategy, but in the fast changing political landscape in which YDE, national network and the partner organisations are working is the main challenge this Vision faces. We move in uncertain times and all the organisations involved are affected by this situation which has made it difficult to plan ahead with confidence.

Young people’s dance, as a relatively new investment area, has to secure its place within the new, broad cultural agenda as reflected in government policy. This development could provide opportunities for the burgeoning young people’s dance sector to provide advice, practitioners and best practice for inclusion in cross arts/cultural programmes.

In spite of being second only to football as the most popular physical activity of the nation’s youth, dance attracts startlingly low levels of funding. In response to under-investment in young people’s dance, the Tony Hall review was commissioned by government. This represents a per capita spend on dance through the £5.5m investment is 58p. To put this in perspective: £38 was spent on music and £79 on School Sport in the same period.

Through this investment there has been significant development in the young peoples’ dance sector that we do not want to lose in the light of the stringent financial climate. Sustaining the improvements to the sector is therefore paramount.

The most visible impact has been the creation of a first national network for young people’s dance with 40 sub regional hubs that create sign-posting, coordination and joint resourcing for young people’s dance delivered through partnership delivery. The network has been created through commissioning existing arts/dance organisations to exTend their role in regional/local development and delivery of young people’s dance. It is seen by funders and other sectors as a very economical, efficient and effective way of increasing capacity and building on the continuum that exists in dance, that connects professional dance with educational and youth dance practice.

Following the vision’s launch, further consultation will take place with young people, practitioners, teachers and organisations as well as the key national partner organisations to produce the five-year Strategy. We will set up a facebook page as well as a space on YDE and the other organisations’ websites to encourage dialogue and exchange.

In these uncertain times it is essential to plan for the future so that we communicate what we want to achieve through presenting clear messages and identifying where we can work together, in and beyond the dance sectors, to sustain developments in young people’s dance.

YDE remains optimistic about the future of young people’s dance: the case has been made and the effect of modest investment over the past three years clearly demonstrated in the numbers of young people accessing high quality dance.

Dance remains highly popular amongst young people and is a very important tool for improving educational attainment, health and well-being and improving life choices – it remains the time for dance!

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www.yde.org.uk
Laban adult performance projects

Courses Manager at Laban’s Education and Community Department Liz Atkin describes the development of adult performance projects in South London

Deciding to enroll for a weekly dance class when you’re an adult can be quite a daunting commitment. Work and life challenges often get in the way. But as I’ve witnessed in my role as Courses Manager in the Education and Community Department, the adult dancers at Laban have been pushing themselves further for several years.

In 2008 the Performance Project was launched within our already well-established evening dance programme, connecting the adult community activities of Laban and Blackheath Halls for the first time. The dance strand was designed to give adults the chance to broaden and develop their contemporary technique and choreographic skills by learning and creating movement material to Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake (in 2008) and Prokoviev’s Romeo and Juliet (in 2009). The Blackheath Halls Community Orchestra played the music live in public performances that were the culmination of each 12-week course.

These collaborations have been a huge hit with participants and audiences alike. Choreographers Stella Howard and Lee Smikle have team-taught the dancers for both events. Typically the projects offer two classes enrolling between 20 and 25 participants each, with Stella leading a level one beginners class and Lee teaching level two for more experienced dancers. The choreographers combine their efforts in a project’s latter stages, setting choreography from both groups to perform with the orchestra. As Lee explains, “In London there are few opportunities for non-professional adult performers in terms of dance. Enrolling in the Performance Project allows them to do more than just attend open classes. It starts as a desire to dance, but the social aspect becomes very important. Some people have previous dance or performance experience, and some have none, but different backgrounds and ages work towards the same aim. I feel...”
they should be treated like a professional company. We expect a lot from them. Not technically, but in terms of commitment.”

With 45 adults fitting dance and performance into their daily lives there was, understandably, an air of excitement at weekly evening classes and rehearsals. Aged anywhere between 17 and 68 years old, they came from broad social, ethnic and economic backgrounds. Their life experience covered a spectrum of occupations from lawyer, television producer, nursery nurse, design consultant and banker to music student, surveyor, retired primary school teacher, doctor, and full-time mum.

“I love working with adults who have chosen to come to a project like this,” says Stella. “There’s a real sense of spirit about it. People want the fun, but they also want professionalism. They want to give it their all. They’re a diverse group empowered by their work together. Here their ideas and skills are valued, and together we progress towards a common goal.”

Creative classes had been offered on Laban’s community evening programmes in the past. Initially there was a lot of interest, but over the weeks of terms attendance often diminished. When they’re open-ended, and thus without a theme or outcome, people sometimes just stop coming. But as Stella noted, the adults in Performance Projects are working towards something. People come to rely on others to be there. Shirley Moffat was a dancer in Romeo and Juliet, “The commitment to an end-product means I know I’ll turn up to class. A regular class I wouldn’t prioritise over work or family, but for a Performance Project I would.”

The choice to work with established music also helped make the process immediately accessible. Because people were familiar with these scores there was more security; it wasn’t just about harnessing an inner creative voice.

Meeting the needs of such a diverse group required a rigorous and supportive learning framework. Building relationships with individuals and with the group took time. Lee and Stella underpinned the first four weeks of classes with contemporary technique to develop confidence, ability and a movement vocabulary. They established a shared kinetic language through phrases and sequences taught while working with CDs of the scores, and with trust exercises and creative tasks. As classes progressed the tasks were less teacher-led and more about the participants finding their own ways to explore and move. As Stella describes it, “Part of teaching these kinds of groups is providing people with solid phrases they can learn and feel confident about, as well as drawing out their own material. It creates a sense of ownership, which makes them feel more comfortable about eventually performing in front of friends, family, and the public. For me it’s rewarding to see bodies move so differently from the same idea, but without trying to work in unison and always allowing for the differences they hold.”

“Moving in front of other people can be very exposing,” Lee adds. “That’s why it’s so important for us to establish a safe, supportive environment. Partnering can be a challenge, and adults can be vulnerable. To work in close physical contact with strangers requires a degree of trust. There are other physical demands in terms of stamina, but in my experience people of all ages just love to get on with it. Older participants are just as enthused as younger ones. As choreographers we need to be flexible and realistic. We create a high quality of performance by reacting organically to changes within our groups.”

Commitment and professionalism were established by teachers and participants alike. I spoke to some of the former about their experiences. Hazel Lindley Milton, a 32 year-old Human Resources adviser, danced in both Swan Lake and Romeo and Juliet “These projects have developed me as an individual,” she enthused. “It was a real buzz to work with other dancers of all abilities, ages, body shapes and backgrounds. I loved it and would do another project in an instant.”

The dancers rehearsed at Laban separately from the orchestra until the project’s last three weeks, when Sunday rehearsals at Blackheath Halls combined live music and dance in the performing space. The shift from working with CDs was initially a challenge, but participants quickly learnt to tailor their movements to the orchestra’s speed and dynamics. “Working to live music is brilliant,” says Nigel Campbell, 52, an occupational accountant who danced in Romeo and Juliet. “Each performance with the orchestra is different. You have to listen out a lot more to the music. It makes your dancing edgier and sharper. I heard the music again the other day and my stomach started to tighten. I was mentally getting ready to go onstage again!” I asked Nigel what he felt were the benefits of taking part in a project like this. “It’s an opportunity to do something completely different. It helps me relax from work because I’m concentrating on so many things outside my normal thought process. And being part of a team, and working to create a successful performance, I’ve seen another side of life and met people I wouldn’t normally meet.”

Most importantly, and simply, the value of these projects can be found in the intensity of experience for the participants. This is not just in terms of dance and music, but encompasses the friendships, camaraderie and commitment of the individuals taking part. “At 58 years-old I wondered if I could still be creative,” says Sheila Twitchett, “and respond to others in a group situation. It was 30 years since I’d danced. I wondered if I would be good enough, but my heart still longed to dance and perform. I built up my confidence through technique and rehearsals and began to really believe in myself. There were no barriers. It was a remarkable experience.”

Laban and Blackheath Halls are planning another exciting Performance Project for autumn 2010, set not to a specific and complete score but rather to a series of short classical pieces bound by a dark theme. Bookings for dancers opened in August.

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Growing up to the challenge

Jane Ralls, Dance Development Director, DanceXchange talks about difficulties in providing sustained creative and performance based opportunities for non-professional adults and makes a call to action

We are all aware that there has been a huge investment in the provision of activities and the development of infrastructure relating to dance and young people in Britain during recent years – and most of us acknowledge the positive impact this has had on the number of young people dancing and the value (both intrinsic and extrinsic) that they and others now place on dance. However, I’d like to reflect on what is available to these young people once they become adults – and whether they have anywhere near the same number, diversity and quality of activities as they did when they were ‘young’. After all, there is no point nurturing a specific lifelong learning habit if it can’t really be pursued after you have reached adulthood (at whatever age that is deemed to be – over 16, over 18 or over 25).

I am proud to work for DanceXchange (dx) in the West Midlands region, which has a strong dance scene with excellent regional dance agencies, renowned dance companies, skilled independent dance artists and some brilliant youth dance work.

In relation to youth dance, there are over 200 youth dance companies who have the opportunity to perform in around 25 platforms in the West Midlands over a year. Initiatives such as Creative Partnerships (in Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke-on-Trent) and Find Your Talent (in Telford) have increased engagement in the arts, and regional partnerships such as DAIR To... (Dance Artists in Residence) and the regional commissions made possible by Youth Dance England resources have triggered a more coordinated and strategic approach to youth dance provision. At DanceXchange, we run an extensive class programme which includes 25 classes a week for people under the age of 18, two youth dance companies, the Buzz! project (resourced by BBC Children in Need for young people who are disadvantaged in specific ways) and, in partnership with sampad, the Centre for Advanced Training for South Asian and Contemporary Dance. We also provide opportunities through other partnership projects, such as International Dance Festival Birmingham.

Whilst we have pretty reliable figures relating to the region’s engagement with youth dance because of the
diligent monitoring we undertake for Youth Dance England and government funding bodies, we have to make informed estimates in relation to adults dancing in the West Midlands – adults who choose not to make a career out of dance. There seems to be excellent access to recreational dance activities in a wide range of styles for adults in the West Midlands. Many different kinds of settings organise these, such as sports and community centres, private gyms, night clubs and schools – as well as dance agencies like dx, which offers 23 different classes a week to adults as part of its class programme. There also appears to be quite a focus on projects which target groups that might be classified as ‘hard to reach’ – projects that improve both the physical and mental health of participants. However, there are only a handful of opportunities for non-professional adults, who aren’t classified as ‘hard to reach’, to engage in regular dance activities that enable them to create, perform and view work in the same way that most youth groups would. I have two questions in relation to this: ‘why?’ and ‘does it matter?’

I think there are three main reasons why few adult groups that exist in the West Midlands.

Firstly, it’s often hard to know how to promote this type of work well and to find the resources to do so, particularly if you believe, as I do, that community dance crosses age, class, ethnicity and gender divides. There’s no easy way of reaching all adults in your area (in the way that you can approach all schools to promote youth dance companies) and, even if you could, you’d probably need to talk about different things and communicate in different ways to your ‘urban arts eclectic’, ‘traditional culture vulture’ and ‘mid-life hobbyist’, terms used in Arts Council England’s Arts-based Segmentation Research report.

Secondly, financial resources to support this type of work are relatively hard to come by, compared to work targeted at ‘hard to reach’ groups. Whilst it is possible to argue that grants shouldn’t be needed for this type of opportunity because working adults should be economically independent and those without student debt or dependents may have a good proportion of disposable income, in an environment where dance is competing with other leisure time activities, value for money is very important. Without grants, participants’ fees need to be high to cover the cost of guest choreographers, travel to any performance opportunities and, if independently presented, technical costs.

Finally, and most importantly, there seems to be a real lack of infrastructure to support this type of work. There doesn’t appear to be the same network of opportunities for sharing, presenting and critically debating work, as there is for youth dance.

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Above: Jane Ralls. Photo: Ed Moore. Above right: DanceXchange outreach activity, Telford Culture Zone. Photo: Phil Sayer

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