

JP, D.DANIELS & N. ARABZADEH AT THE HIP HOP SUMMER SCHOOL AT DOROTHY STRINGER SCHOOL (RIGHT). PHOTOGRAPHER: BEN JOHNSON

SUMMER SHAKEDOWN - BREAKDANCE CLASS (BELOW AND BOTTOM). PHOTOGRAPHER: BEN JOHNSON



SOUTH EAST DANCE IN-SYNC WITH YOUTH

Kyla Lucking, Head of Community and Learning, describes the programme of professional development by South East Dance to support artists to work with young people at risk



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



A rainy Friday in January, 8.30am. I'm bombing along the M23 with a car full of chatty dance practitioners. We are debating whether safe touch guidelines for dance teachers are necessary or restrictive. All I can focus on, apart from the car in front, is whether I've got enough biscuits for eighteen people and whether the staff at our training venue will have set up the DVD player correctly or if I will be forced into another embarrassing technical experience.

This was a fairly typical Friday morning for me. For the past three years South East Dance has been delivering the Dansync Training Course Dance, the Arts and Social Inclusion. In partnership with Artswork, a national youth arts development agency, we have trained 48 arts practitioners and youth workers to deliver dance to young people in challenging contexts. It's been an interesting journey...

In 2003 I was working as a freelance dance manager when I got a call from South East Dance, asking me to help write a funding application. After accepting I was drawn into a new world of dance. I was now making the case for young people 'at risk', social inclusion and partnership working.

Creative Dance Apprenticeships (CDA) was an innovative project combining delivery, research and training for practitioners to work in challenging contexts. With successful funding bids to Arts Council England, South East, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Positive Activities for Young People, CDA – now renamed Dansync – took off.

Having been inspired by the aims of the project whilst working on the funding bids, when an opportunity arose to work full time on CDA I jumped at the chance.

Before CDA, there was a lack of practitioners trained or willing to support and deliver dance in challenging contexts such as Pupil Referral Units, youth centres and in disadvantaged communities. The training course was designed to address this gap, with full days focusing on Planning Work with Young People 'at risk', Safeguarding, Child Protection and safe touch, and the 'holy grail'-sounding Behaviour Management. Through Artswork we have been able to engage excellent specialists such as John Thompson from Playtrain, Juliet Brain from Arts Award and

Helen Le Brocq from Oxfordshire Youth Arts Partnership.

Some of the most useful training has arisen out of the freedom Dansync has encouraged for people to be open with questions. Rather than a feeling that we should all just know the answers it has been important to foster an atmosphere of trust, honesty and safety.

After completing the training sessions each practitioner undertakes a placement in a challenging context. Practitioners often place impossible expectations on themselves to deliver flawless sessions. In practice the placements are a learning experience focused on putting theory into practice. Even the most experienced workshop leader can have their confidence knocked when dealing with resolutely uninterested and vulnerable young people in conjunction with social factors such as exclusion from school, living in care etc.

For me, the last session of ten where all the young people have arrived in tracksuit bottoms rather than jeans can be a more significant marker of success than it would appear in other contexts. During the placements the practitioners all keep a journal of their lesson plans and what actually happens in each session, reflecting on the learning from the training days. From this they submit an assignment reflecting on their experience, enabling them to receive accreditation from the University of Middlesex for completing the course.

In developing the programme we hoped that dance practitioners may be employed within the activity strands of Dansync and/or use the experience to enrich their own practice and expand their networks and work opportunities. I'm very proud that in many cases this has really happened. From the first course Maria Stylianou, a Locking specialist, has been engaged to work on many of our projects, building special relationships with Waterside Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Sevenoaks PRU in Portsmouth and Linton's Youth Centre in Surrey.

It is thrilling for Dansync to have overseen Maria's developing passion and experience. I now regularly call Maria to mentor budding practitioners and we are becoming something of a double act when asked to speak about Dansync at conferences and events.

We have made a real effort to encourage a diverse range of practitioners for the course. In the last course I was excited to >

36

I WAS REALLY GLAD TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT AND IT'S BEEN REALLY FRUITFUL. I'D WORKED IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES BEFORE AND BEEN FINE BUT THE COURSE HAS HELPED ME GAIN TOOLS TO TACKLE CHALLENGES WHEN WORKING WITH 'AT RISK' YOUNG PEOPLE. I FEEL MORE ABLE AND CONFIDENT TO WORK IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS SINCE THEN AND THIS TYPE OF WORK IS NOW A MAJOR PART OF WHAT I SPECIALISE IN

**JP OMARI, 2ND COURSE PRACTITIONER
(BBOY AND FUNK STYLES PRACTITIONER)**

look around the room and see contemporary teachers chatting to an MC artist, youth arts workers drinking coffee with b-boys and a poet discussing funding opportunities with a commercial dance specialist.

The training programme has enabled us to support less experienced practitioners too. We have provided introductory level support for a number of emerging practitioners. This may mean observing or team teaching workshops with established practitioners or dance companies, attending selected training events or being put in touch our partners such as Surrey County Arts-Dance or Hampshire Dance to undertake entry level training. One practitioner came to us last year with little informal education teaching experience. We arranged for her to attend special training and identified local teachers for her to observe and assist. By demonstrating her natural talent for teaching and initiative she was able to join us for the final course this spring.

I feel it is vital to keep practitioners inspired and informed about current artistic developments as well as good practice. So we have established a link with Robert Hylton Urban Classicism. In a kind of 'dance swap shop' we invited their dancers to join us for two training events and in return Robert will lead a workshop for our practitioners.

We also run an annual Funk Styles weekend to inform and inspire practitioners on the heritage and technique of the funk styles which can be so

appealing to young people.

Along the way there have been lots of, shall we say, 'challenges'! Initially the University of Portsmouth was partnered to provide accreditation for the course. However, at the start of the course Artsworld were informed that the university had withdrawn the BA course route the training was accredited through. Luckily, the practitioners viewed the course as valuable in its own right and did not withdraw.

In the same year the practitioners recruited were particularly experienced and reported that the placements were not challenging enough. There were also concerns that the course was too theoretical. For the following course we looked at managing expectations by reviewing the application pack and renaming the course (from 'Using the arts/dance to work with young people at risk') to 'Dance, the arts and social inclusion' to more truly reflect the broader context of the course content. We also increased the proportion of practical content.

It does seem that practitioners have been satisfied with the content and inspired by the trainers. I've been keeping in touch with the placements and it seems like a great range of work has been happening with lots of interesting experiences.

There are many individual successes within this project. Shelley Mack, a breakdancer from Brighton, has benefited hugely from the training. During his interview for the training course Shelley said 'I used to be one of the kids you work

with now'. Despite not having a professional training in dance or formal training in teaching, with his understanding of the kind of young people we work with Shelley had an advantage on the course. We have since been able to employ him as a team teacher in several other workshops, providing him with opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues.

After completing the first course Helen Linsell told me she did not immediately put her learning into practice. In her new role with Education and Community at Laban she said has had to draw on it many times. It's great to hear that the course has such a long shelf life!

Looking back at the desired outcomes stated in the original grant application I feel confident that the training programme has delivered innovative and regionally relevant professional training provision, enhanced regional dance expertise in community development, provided new posts and further employment prospects for dance practitioners, and enhanced regional dance infrastructure for community development.

So far, so tick box. But what next? As I write Dance Partners South East (DPSE) are consolidating plans to develop our work in social inclusion. Training and mentoring will continue to be at the very heart of this work. There are plans to launch a new peer review scheme, partnering practitioners to provide positive, critical feedback and support on their practice. The potential in the networks established through the course will be further exploited to create a networked group of 50 practitioners across the South East all talking, sharing and supporting one another, with access to specialist support and advice from a team of lead practitioners.

So now, fast forward! There's an evaluation session for the final course in a few months and I'm already looking forward to meeting up. I'm sure there will be more challenges for us to resolve in designing the future training and mentoring scheme, as the needs of practitioners will always shift and develop. But I'm also confident that so long as there are enough biscuits to go around, we can work it out together.

For more information about Dansync, DPSE or South East Dance contact kyla.lucking@south-eastdance.org or visit www.southeastdance.org.uk

SUMMER
SHAKEDOWN –
BREAKDANCE
CLASS.
PHOTOGRAPHER:
BEN JOHNSON

