

Creative practice reflection

Independent dance artist and arts psychotherapist **Cai Tomos** addresses the physical, emotional and psychological demands brought by a pandemic and reflects upon finding spaces of connection and gaining perspective by being together with support from Rubicon's Wales Wide Training Programme

Creative practice support sessions came to being through various discussions with Rubicon Dance about the need for a framework that could provide independent dance practitioners with additional support in reflecting together and sharing their experience of working through this pandemic.

The intention of the sessions was to have a space that could allow practitioners to be with each other in a process of reflection, supported by simple interventions, where each member was invited to speak and be heard in whatever way they chose. The result was that each session was bespoke and ran its own course depending on who was attending. The space was confidential, held through a therapeutic framework, with the intention of making a little space where those practitioners who were working alone and feeling alone could have peer support and a place of consistent connection for themselves.

I am an independent dance artist, Psychotherapist and Somatic Experiencing Practitioner®.

I have worked in healthcare, hospitals and care homes, facilitating dance and movement for those in palliative care and living with dementia. I know personally, at the end of a working day, when one has witnessed countless stories of sadness, grief, loss and joys, often there is a need to make sense of or digest our experience alongside another person. The usual support that provides an anchor of making meaning of these experiences was not available during the pandemic, so often the stories encountered were held within ourselves, unshared.

The invitation in the practice support sessions

would often be to respond to the question of describing practice through metaphor – like a landscape or a weather system. Metaphor, symbol and a resourceful use of the imagination can often more accurately communicate the terrain of our lived experience than just description. In the sessions, themes would often overlap and be expanded on by another person. All this added to the collective sense of something being shared.

I believe that supervision and practice support is an integral part of having a healthy practice. In a simple way, those who support others need also to be supported.

I think about it like concentric circles of care that allow us to do what we do to the best of our ability. So many practitioners, during the pandemic, have teetered on the edge of burnout, where the physical, emotional and psychological demands of holding groups, or missing the connections of groups that were once there, stacked up.

Those who led sessions during the lockdown noticed that people who attend classes were looking for support in a myriad of ways that sometimes asked a great deal of the practitioner in terms of their facilitation. This then sometimes led to high anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms, and both conscious and

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Photo: Cai Tomos.

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unconscious demands on the practitioner to help in some way. Alongside this, we all adapted in ways that were new to us at the beginning, and with any new learning comes a necessary edge where we can feel de-skilled.

The usual thresholds of our physical journey to and from our sessions have been absent – the conversations before and after sessions, the physicality of being with each other, the touch, drinking tea, how we read a room, were all reduced to a visual world of virtual faces, and deciphering a whole new genre of feedback from our participants’ homes to tell us if we’re on track. We also had the new consideration of being seen and seeing each other in our own homes, which brings in other factors related to the shifting of usual boundaries.

The practice support sessions have therefore been a place to unburden, I hope, and perhaps locate ourselves and gain perspective by being together. As so many practitioners stated – to take a collective sigh in the company and care of others.

The sessions were not geared towards providing answers but to deepen the listening and understanding of each other’s challenges and in that

to hopefully find comfort. The creative movement sessions were a part of the package that Rubicon organised. These sessions were very much geared towards the practitioner’s own moving, their own body and dancing for themselves. Our own dancing, for no other purpose than satisfying that simple joy, goes a long way in allowing us to connect with ourselves, which in turn allows us to connect to others.

What dance artists offer are spaces of connection in a myriad of wonderful different ways. It is the primary language of what we do, and we have had to find new ways in which to create the necessary conditions for connection.

Rubicon’s offer has allowed a linking up of practitioners across North, South and Mid Wales in a way that I hope will allow further collaborations and connections, and help in building a resilient and strong network of support in the coming years for practitioners who might have otherwise felt more alone.

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