

Helping to create reflective practitioners

Anna Leatherdale, FCD's Programme Manager for Continuing Professional Development (maternity cover) tells us about FCD's brand new online Development Needs Analysis toolkit (DNA), for artists and practitioners

Over the last few years the Foundation for Community Dance (FCD) has been working alone and with partners from the Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership (DTAP) to identify the skills and knowledge that dance artists need to be effective dance leaders in a variety of contexts.

Research has shown that Higher Education courses tend to develop dancers with strong performance and choreographic skills but give less attention to the development of workshop, leadership and management skills – despite the fact that 75% of dance jobs are in the education or community fields (1).

In her publication 'Mapping the Terrain: Entrepreneurship and Professional Practice in Dance Higher Education' Susanne Burns noted that "It is evident that, despite the primacy often designated to the performer and choreographer, they make up a very small proportion of the dance labour market. The market demand appears to be for dance practitioners who can teach, facilitate dance in community contexts and manage and produce the work." (2) This requires dance practitioners to have an extensive range of skills.

Dance artists working in community settings not only need a good knowledge of their artform but need to know how to communicate with others, develop professional relationships, understand the context of their work in relation to local, regional and national policies and the law, know how to deliver safe and effective practice and have the ability to reflect on their own learning needs and those of their participants.

These skills are set out in detail in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Dance Leadership that were developed by the Foundation on behalf of the Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership (DTAP). Since the NOS were completed the Foundation's professional development team have been considering a number of new questions over recent months:

- What does it mean to become a reflective practitioner?
- How do we identify our own training needs?
- What challenges do dance artists face in taking part in continuing professional development opportunities?

A brief survey of the Foundation's Summer School participants showed



that finance is, unsurprisingly, one of the major factors influencing dance practitioners' choices of CPD. Concerns about the cost of courses, travel, accommodation, associated resources and loss of income are all key factors in a participant's choice of CPD. However practitioners also reported feeling overwhelmed by the range of CPD opportunities available and said they found it difficult to identify opportunities that met specific learning outcomes.

With a number of these factors in mind FCD has created a resource to help practitioners identify their own strengths and weaknesses and supply information about CPD opportunities linked to particular learning needs. The Development Needs Analysis (DNA) is a set of on-line questionnaires based



Left: Foundation for Community Dance Summer School 2012. Photo: Rachel Cherry

on the National Occupational Standards for Dance Leadership. The DNA has eight sections that fall under the following headings:

- Communication
- Writing
- Research
- Skills development
- Legislation
- Health and safety
- Reflection, assessment and evaluation
- Resources.

Each section hosts a series of questions relating to the headline topic. Completing the questionnaire helps practitioners to identify skills they may need in their current and future practice – thereby encouraging self-reflection. Each completed section of the questionnaire results in a

personalised and confidential on-line report highlighting the practitioner's personal strengths and weaknesses. The report also links learning needs to potential and current CPD resources. These range from suggested reading lists, online reports and peer-mentoring groups through to short one-day or full-time courses.

The DNA is accessible only to FCD members, and is an additional tool that we believe adds significant value to membership. The results of the DNA questionnaire are stored on each member's personal profile page, to which they have exclusive access. Members can complete the DNA in their own time and can return to their profile page to review their results or retake all or part of the DNA in the

future as their personal circumstances alter over time.

Using the DNA offers practitioners a number of benefits:

- Based on the skills and areas of knowledge outlined in the National Occupational Standards for Dance Leadership it acts as a guide for self-reflection, enabling practitioners to think clearly about their own level of confidence and ability in relation to specific skills and knowledge
- It provides links to a wide range of CPD resources, helping practitioners to recognise that CPD can take many different forms – not all of which have to be expensive or time-consuming
- By linking available resources to specific learning goals the DNA cuts through the plethora of CPD opportunities – saving the dance practitioner time
- It provides practitioners with an on-going resource to track their own growth and development, which they can refer back to over time. (This can be particularly helpful when updating a CV or preparing for an interview).

This autumn FCD will publish a series of three booklets, on behalf of the Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership, that provide further guidance on the National Occupational Standards for dance artists, educators and employers so that we can continue to build a framework that will enable all those involved in the dance sector to value and promote dance practitioners' continuing professional development.

Check out the online DNA at www.communitydance.org.uk/dna

(1&2) Burns, S. 2006, 'Mapping the Terrain: Entrepreneurship and Professional Practice in Dance Higher Education', Palatine Publishing, Hall, T, 2007