



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



Shaping your practice: a qualification to support Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Linda Jasper, Chair DTAP Qualification Working Group and Director of Youth Dance England (YDE), shares the experiences of four dance artists in their quest to develop their practice

The Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership (DTAP) works to develop the workforce that teach/lead/facilitate dance participation. One of its work strands, led by YDE, was the creation of the Diploma in Dance Teaching and Learning (Children and Young People) (DDTAL (CYP)) that is a qualification awarded by Trinity College London (TCL). DDTAL was created to fill a gap for practitioners who work, or who wish to work, with children and young people beyond the school curriculum and private dance sector.

DDTAL aims to instill an appetite for ongoing professional development through its focus on self-reflection to equip and motivate individuals to sustain commitment to CPD after the qualification has been gained. This is what we set out to do. Did we succeed? Now that over 20 artists/practitioners have gained the qualification and 124 are in the process of taking it – four artists were asked to share their experiences:

Hopal Romans is a freelance arts professional and dance tutor working primarily with children and young people. She completed DDTAL in 2012 and this is her experience:

I enrolled on the DDTAL course because I wanted to re-enter the dance sector after spending over nine years working in the wider arts sector

context in arts management and music education. I wanted to do something that would give me an opportunity to reintegrate and revisit the skills I had as a professional dancer and target them towards a teaching role.

Even though in practice I knew how to teach I wanted to understand the craft of teaching, regardless of the style or genre taught. As an ex-professional dancer the way I used to teach was quite didactic and commanding in nature. I suppose I came from the 'old school' approach of the teacher 'doing' and participants copying without questioning. I wanted to learn how to develop other strategies that would get young people learning, thinking and developing.

I learnt that there were many approaches to teaching young people and children, particularly with the introduction of different learning theories. What I did had to be age-appropriate and cater to their needs, development, growth and learning. I also appreciated that in teaching there is no right or wrong way to discover how to perform and problem-solve a movement idea or task. In the past, when I was very young, I always wanted to get steps and combinations right and fretted that if not corrected in some way, I had failed. I learnt that there were a number of ways a teacher could bring out the potential in a student/participant. I developed multi- >

dimensional and multi-sensory ways of teaching and learning and it was a deeply refreshing and challenging experience. I also learnt how to develop and structure, especially when thinking through and planning my work in detail with the end goal in sight, be it a performance piece or a technical skill.

A lot of my learning was through working with peers. All of us were so different in our approaches and experiences and I knew that each of us had something unique to offer. Being a professional dancer, for me, didn't necessarily mean that I knew how to teach and that was a useful lesson to learn: being exposed to others who were in my mind professional teachers clarified this for me. I also learned how to develop the art of critical reflection. I am still on that journey and it has been extremely useful to reflect on my practice and the practice of others and take action if needed.

Currently I am studying for an MA in Professional Practice – Dance Technique Pedagogy – at Middlesex University. This has come about directly from my learning on the DDTAL course. It is complementary to it and fulfills what I have planned for the medium to long-term future in developing my practice as a teacher.

Lisa Lort, Creative Producer for Dance, Bath Dance, is in the final stages of taking DDTAL:

I stepped straight out of dance training into the deep end of youth dance leadership, which I felt an instant connection to. Whilst my four years of Higher Education dance training gave me the space to deepen my understanding of the artform, how I translated this passion into teaching was something I have instinctively had

to do over the past decade of leading dance in a variety of settings. Although teaching has been a learning curve for me, it has always felt like a natural part of my dance being; connecting with people through a joint love of movement, sharing that something that makes you want to move. But this has never stopped me placing a question mark over my practice. I had nothing to base my leadership against apart from my experience of those teaching me throughout the years – seeing others teach and my own gut instincts.

When I enrolled on DDTAL it was originally to gain a qualification that enhanced and verified my dance leadership experience. To make sure that what I was instinctively doing in my practice was providing the best service to the people I was teaching, whilst remaining true to myself. Now I'm close to finishing my final unit this still stands true, but it has also given me so much more than I originally expected. It's not necessarily that I've learnt something new, it's more that the course has reinforced and enhanced my awareness of the way I teach. For now this includes:

- Having everything in place legally and physically to create a positive and safe environment for learning
- Knowledge of how I measure what I am teaching, why I am teaching it and the learners' development
- Exercising different teaching and learning strategies to support individual participant needs
- Reminding myself that there is no end to my teacher training – as I evolve as a person so should my teaching practice
- Questioning how much my own experience of how and what I have been taught impacts on the way I teach

- Identifying all of the elements that make up my own teaching ethos and ensuring this is at the heart of all I teach.

You could say it has created a strong foundation for my teaching, a set of values and beliefs that sit confidently in my mind when referring to my practice. The bones of which have been slowly built by the way I've taught over the past decade, now having muscle, skin and spirit to provide a deeper set of values for me to refer to.

The best part of my learning has taken place over the course weekends with other dance teachers of all different backgrounds and dance genres. It's a safe space to reflect and question your practice, supported by peers and the course leader. Freelancing can often lead to a feeling of isolation, especially if you're not teaching as part of a team or in an organisation. Having time to reflect on what we do and why we do it is priceless and leaves you at points vulnerable, as you start to question and challenge yourself.

Overall I have developed a sense of confidence and confirmation that the way I instinctively teach has been the right way for me, deepening the awareness of my own teaching ethos.

Gemma Connelly is Programme Manager at DanceDigital in Essex and just completing the DDTAL qualification:

I enrolled on the DDTAL training programme to provide myself with a qualification for delivering dance. I hoped that the qualification would show those who take part in my sessions that I am committed to providing a high standard as a contemporary and creative dance teacher. At the time of enrolment I had only just begun to teach alone, so I

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hoped that the course would provide a grounding of knowledge and advice to teach independently.

My practice has changed greatly since taking part in the qualification. I have taken what I have learned and re-written how I teach children. I now understand that the key to child development and understanding of dance is the strategies we put in place for them to learn; whereas before I would just teach in the way I had been taught, such as warm up, four to five exercises and ending. Now I make specific choices based on my individual dancers to help them improve their learning.

I have learned how to teach from the inside out. Each week I reflect on what I have taught to develop my session for the following week. I have implemented informal assessments, (which I thought were not needed for the age range I teach), to provide the children with a better understanding of what they are learning. I try to test new ideas and I am no longer scared of getting it 'wrong' but understand that I have to implement different strategies to see what is the best fit for the dancers. For example, one of the best things I have learned is understanding children's movement development and not giving a negative comment when they cannot perform something – for I now understand that what I am asking them to do is too complex for their age and praise should be given so they feel like they are achieving and stay motivated. I realised that it was not the children but my teaching practice that needed to change.

The result of my experience has given me more opportunities. I have opened my own school and become the programme manager for my local dance development agency DanceDigital, which has given me

more confidence and wider recognition as a dance artist. I understand how to teach better, I can see the enjoyment in the children's eyes and their movement. I have noticed that the children are becoming more vocal and are active learners in the sessions by offering peer feedback, which was not present in the classes before. I am following my own development programme as I understand the need to continually update my knowledge. I try to read as much as possible and keep up-to-date with changes in legislation. From this I feel I am able to advise other teachers and offer support: I am building a CPD work programme across Essex as I feel it is crucial that people are given the opportunity to take part in the DDTAL programme as it offers such a high standard of dance knowledge.

Jo Rhodes has been an independent dance artist for twelve years. She tested out DDTAL in its pilot stage in 2009 submitting work without access to external training or mentoring. She reflected on its impact on her approach to CPD:

Without wanting to sound complacent, I think it highlighted to me an issue of responsibility when it comes to CPD. Previously I've been guilty of waiting to see what courses and conferences service providers are offering before committing myself to development. However it made me realise that I should be more proactive in creating professional development opportunities for myself and approaching people about my own needs. Reading was enlightening and valuable during the diploma as before then, I had never really classed this as CPD. I also hadn't categorised peer conversations and sharing as such, though this was one aspect during

the diploma that I feel I learnt the most from, due to my own and others' reflections. Although I've always seen learning as a continuous process, it made me formalise CPD plans in a more structured way rather than my ad-hoc (without wishing to sound disorganised) approach to attending events.

I thought my skills were suited to intrapersonal methods of learning, but have realised I learn much better in interpersonal environments. In hindsight, training with others rather than studying on my own would have taken me out of my comfort zone and challenged me more, thus making my learning more effective. Being observed for my teaching assessment was eye-opening. Some things I had considered as strengths were identified as needing improvement and aspects that I considered weaknesses were seen as strengths. This revealed how important self-awareness is in planning for professional development.

Four different voices all demonstrating that their experience of taking DDTAL has had a profound effect on their practice and has challenged them to consider how they sustain, and take responsibility for, their own professional development journey. As more artists have experience of this qualification, and other initiatives, we expect that they will become part of a larger workforce committed to CPD that will raise standards in dance leading for the benefit of many more people.

For more information on DDTAL **visit** www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=1585

Dance Teaching and Learning: Shaping Practice, Second Edition – now on sale **visit** www.communitydance.org.uk/shop