

mapping community dance

a research report of the
foundation for community dance

march 2002



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introduction

“We have an incredible archive of material charting the progress of community dance initiatives over the past fifteen years in the Eastern Region, but have never had the resources to sort them and identify which will be of use for others or assist us with future development. More importantly there is a lack documentation of current activity which will assist us in developing a wider audience, new funding and higher quality of work.”

Nikki Crane - former Dance Officer, Eastern Arts

In 1997 the Foundation for Community Dance was awarded an A4E Main Scheme grant for a three-year programme of work. A central element of the programme was to undertake a mapping exercise to establish the scale and range of community dance practice in England.

The research focussed on dance activity led by professional community dance artists, and organised by dance companies and agencies, in other words dance activity receiving some kind of subsidy from public sector finances, locally, regionally or nationally.

It is important to note that we did not include dance participation provided by locally based private dance schools or dance within the curriculum; classes run for people interested in specific dance forms such as Ballroom dancing or Ceroc; nor did we attempt to include participation in social dance, either informally organised or provided in every city and major town in the country by private leisure companies.

Community Dance as a discrete area of the dance ecology and economy began to develop some thirty years ago leading to the appointment of specific posts for dance development which were then known as Animateurs. Over time as the number of such posts grew, the people concerned developed a network for mutual support and information exchange which grew into a formally constituted organisation, the National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs (NADMA - formed in 1986). This developed with funding from the Arts Council of Great Britain into the Community Dance and Mime Foundation (CDMF) an organisation that offered support, advice, training events and publications for the dance sector developing work in community contexts. Out of this has grown the Foundation for Community Dance.

The influence of community dance, developing within the context of the arts funding system, has been far reaching: it has influenced the practice and focus of the work of a great many freelance and independent dance artists; of nationally funded companies across styles and traditions; of a growing network of agencies at local and regional levels as well as supporting Regional Arts Boards and local authorities in establishing community dance across the country.

There have been two formal studies of community dance, in 1985 *The Dance and Mime Animateur Movement - A National Evaluation*, by Ruth Glick; and in 1993, *Community Dance - A Progress Report*, by Anthony Peppiatt and Katie Venner. Both of these studies focussed on the work of dance artists, animateurs and teachers using dance in community contexts. They both offer some kind of measure of the growth of community dance by providing evidence of the numbers of professionals working in the field, the developing range and scale of activity, and a growth in financial support for community dance by the arts funding system, local authorities and public and voluntary sectors.

Since the publication of *Community Dance - A Progress Report* there has been significant growth and development of the dance sector. Lines established between the professional and voluntary have become blurred, the places where dance happens more varied, and the range and diversity of people involved greater. In 1996 the Foundation published *Thinking Aloud - in Search of a Framework for Community Dance*, edited by Anthony Peppiatt, setting out a framework through which community dance could be approached.

The period since the publication of *Thinking Aloud*, has been one of rapid change, the election of the New Labour government in 1997 led to a shift in the priorities and policies of the arts funding system, the impact of the Arts and other Lottery distributors has become far reaching and there has been considerable growth in the awareness of artists of their need to contribute to the life of ordinary people through the new funding streams for the arts.

In this time community dance has not stood still and this research is a timely attempt to capture in as structured a way as possible, within the available resources, not only the numbers of people who are coming into contact with dance through this strand of activity, but also the kinds of contribution and impact community dance is having.

executive summary

How many people took part?

The research showed that 4.780 million people participated in community dance.

How much community dance is there?

There were 73,203 opportunities to participate in community dance every year.

How were people involved in community dance?

The research showed that people participated in a range of one-off workshops, regular classes, residencies, performance projects and sustained community dance companies/groups. It revealed that the majority of practitioners were concerned with the development of individual creativity but worked in a very wide range of dance styles and cultural traditions.

How many people were in the audience?

We were able to calculate from the research that the average size of audience where the work led to a performance was 315. The total audience over the year of the research is estimated to be 10.367 million people.

How is it Funded?

A key feature of the research was to identify how the work was being funded. 35% of community dance is funded through regular or annual grant-aid, 56% depended on additional income and 9% depended on both. Practitioners demonstrated remarkable skill in leveraging additional funding for dance from a diverse range of sources, providing core funders a significant return on their investment.

What kinds of people are taking part?

The research provided hard evidence that community dance reaches people from three to ninety three, that it engages people of all abilities and from every cultural background, history and tradition across the country.

Largely, community dance activity was open to all however practitioners identified specific groups of people they were making special efforts to reach. This included older people, disabled people, black and South Asian people, and socially excluded people.

Where is it taking place?

Over half of community dance activity takes place in urban settings, and one quarter in rural areas. Overall, 65% of activity takes place in non-arts settings.

What are the direct benefits?

The research provided clear evidence of dance, health, personal and social skills related benefits to participants. There is also clear evidence that community dance makes significant contributions in support of the dance ecology, including new audiences, new funding, new partnerships and new approaches to dance-making.

Mapping Community Dance demonstrates a remarkable level of achievement by the dance sector, creativity in the delivery of community dance and clear evidence of the ways in which dance is making a contribution to civil society whilst maintaining artistic integrity.

Professionals engaged in community dance share a consistent set of values and demonstrate that they have a wide portfolio of skills to draw upon to ensure the work takes place.

There is optimism within the profession about the dance outcomes and wider benefits of community dance despite the difficulties encountered in raising funds and sustaining both work and careers long-term.

Obviously, this research is not exhaustive but it does provide a benchmark against which future research can be measured.

Community dance has made a significant impact. Its future is dependent on the developing skills and expertise of existing and future practitioners, together with sustained and new investment in access to and participation in dance.

aims of the research

This research is the first time that any attempt has been made to map community dance. By undertaking it we intended to establish a starting point, and produce data against which future research could be benchmarked.

We identified the following as key aims:

- to map the scale, range and diversity of community dance in England
- to review the policies, principles and practices of community dance, as delivered by freelance dance workers, dance companies, other dance agencies and organisations
- to identify the range of benefits for participants in community dance
- to begin to identify and quantify where community dance has penetrated into other areas of activity - youth work, health, social services, disability, third age
- to identify the conditions and criteria upon which good practice is based
- to identify the range and patterns of funding for community dance.

methodology

The research consisted of five phases:

Desk-Based Research

Collating documentation including published reports and articles, policy documents, published programmes of activity, network listings, archive materials, and the sample group of contacts.

Statistical Research

Two sets of questionnaires were used to collate statistical material based on the delivery of community dance activity nationally and regionally

Focus Groups

A series of ten regional meetings with stakeholders in community dance: dance companies and agencies, freelance and independent dance artists, animateurs, funders and local authority officers

Action Research

Action research of key providers of community dance to identify four individuals /groups participating in community dance for an in-depth study which formed the basis of the creation of the film Dancing Nation.

Publication

To produce a report, Mapping Community Dance and the film, Dancing Nation.

findings: headline statistics

The first phase of the research surveyed a group of 1,879 individual projects and initiatives taking place between June 1999 and June 2000 that can be described as being within the 'subsidised sector', to provide evidence of the scale of activity and participation in community dance, nationally and by region.

We believe that the totals set out below indicate an accurate reflection of the scale of community dance activity in England and compare favourably with the figure of ten million people who dance socially in the venues operated by First Leisure, the one million people who participate in Ceroc and the 300,000 who take graded examinations in dance. The audience figure compares extremely positively with the sum of 1.4 million, which is the audience for dance performances by companies subsidised by the arts funding system in the same period.

The regional variations are not surprising and reflect a number of factors including: population size and make up, transport infrastructure, historical differences in the arts infrastructure, the economics within dance and the preponderance of professional dance training in London and the South East.

The number of people participating in community dance

Nationally, community dance attracted a participant audience of 4.780 million people.

Regionally, this equated to:

East England Arts region:	333,618
East Midlands Arts region:	348,898
London Arts region:	1,077,254
North West Arts region:	466,046
Northern Arts region:	460,953
Southern Arts region:	435,486
South East Arts region:	537,354
South West Arts region:	252,497
West Midlands Arts region:	341,258
Yorkshire Arts region:	506,793

The number of community dance initiatives available

There were 73,203 community dance projects, programmes and initiatives:

Regionally, this equates to:

East England Arts region:	5,109
East Midlands Arts region:	5,343
London Arts region:	16,497
North West Arts region:	7,137
Northern Arts region:	7,059
Southern Arts region:	6,669
South East Arts region:	8,229
South West Arts region:	4,173
West Midlands Arts region:	5,226
Yorkshire Arts region:	7,761

The audience for community dance

45% of community dance activity involved live performance. The audience attendance for this nationally is estimated at 10.367 million.

Funding for community dance

35% of community dance activity was funded through regular or annual grant-aid, 56% of activity was dependent on additional income, and 9% depended on both.

findings: organisation, funding and participation

Having established the scale of the community dance activity we considered it important to go beyond this and look in more depth at:

- how the work was initiated, managed and delivered
- where the funding came from and what patterns could be established
- who was participating and how diverse they were
- what benefits were being established as a result of participating
- what benefits were being identified for audiences
- what benefits were identified for the individuals and organisations undertaking the work

We constructed a questionnaire that sought to address these questions, this was trialed with a group of dance professionals in the East of England and modified in the light of their comments about the ease of completion and the range of questions it contained.

The questionnaire was circulated to 150 of those who had responded to the first phase of the research, ensuring that there was a spread of regions, individuals, agencies and companies within the sample. We received 107 completed replies upon which the survey is based.

organisation, delivery and management

Who initiated the project/programme?

Joint initiatives	27%
Dance Artist	22%
Dance Organisation / Agency / Company	25%
Other Arts Organisation	13%
Local Authority	9%
Community Group	2%
School	2%

From these figures it is evident that the largest proportion of community dance activity (60%) is initiated by the arts community. 27% are joint initiatives of artists working in collaboration with other agencies.

Who Led the Initiative?

Dance Agency / Company	32%
Individual Artist	26%
Jointly managed / partnerships	21%
Community Organisation	7%
Local Authority	7%
Arts Venue	5%
Volunteers	2%

Who delivered the work?

Sole dance artist / animateur	34%
Team, including artists from other art forms	17%
Choreographer	16%
A team of dance artists / teachers	16%
A dance company	13%
A team including people from outside the arts (health workers, for example)	4%

What roles did the leader/team take to ensure delivery of the initiative?

Project Planner	78%
Facilitator	76%
Skills Teacher	72%
Coordinator	65%
Choreographer	65%
Evaluator	63%
Administrator	57%
Fundraiser	46%
Performer	34%

This emphasises that individual artists and organisations require a multiplicity of skills and experience to ensure the success of community dance initiatives. And it was evident from some of the returns that some individuals were having to fulfil all of these roles.

How was the project/programme structured?

Mixed programme of technique, improvisation and creative work	48%
Creative / improvisation leading into rehearsals and performance	27%
A programme of improvisation workshops	7.5%
Learning to choreograph	7.5%
A programme of technique classes	5.5%
A programme of learning a repertory piece	4%
Following a dance syllabus	0.5%

Where did the activity primarily take place?

Dance centre / theatre / arts centre / other arts venue	35%
Village hall / community centre / leisure centre	28%
School	23%
Youth club	6%
Social services setting	5%
Healthcare setting	3%

funding of community dance

Who funded the project/programme?

35% of community dance activity was funded through regular or annual grant-aid, 56% of activity was dependent on additional income, and 9% depended on both.

One of the difficulties facing community dance overall is sustainability and long term involvement with individuals and community groups. The figure of 56% of activity dependent on raising additional sources of funding reflects this. The problem facing, amongst others, the arts funding system is how to use project funds to achieve sustainable growth and longer term benefits.

However, what this demonstrated is the skill of the organisations and individuals involved in the work in creating programmes of activity that attract a wide and diverse range of funding/support as follows:

30% of respondents received support from the arts funding system, of which:

Project funding from RAB/ACE	39%
Regular annual funding from RAB/ACE	32%
Lottery Funding, A4E/RALP	24%
Awards for All	5%

3% of respondents received support from other National Lottery Funding Distributors, of which:

Millennium Commission	60%
National Lottery Charities Board	20%
New Opportunities Fund	20%

25% of respondents received Local Government funding, of which:

Arts funding	51%
Community grants	18%
Non arts funding/education	23%
Central Government (e.g. SRB funds)	8%

1% of respondents received European Funding:

European Social Fund (ESF)	50%
European arts and cultural funds	25%
Other	25%

5% of respondents received other public funding:

Central Government	25%
Health Authority	31%
Other	31%
TEC	13%

36% of respondents stated other sources of funding:

Trusts and Foundations	27%
Other arts organisation	18%
Other	17%
Sponsorship	14%
User Pays	12%
Other non-arts organisation	12%

who takes part in community dance

Where did the participants come from?

Urban area	57%
Rural area	23%
Both	18%
Not specified	2%

Initiatives differed in their geographic scale and scope with some drawing participants from small areas such as neighbourhoods and parishes, whilst others were city and county-wide. A smaller proportion were covered a much larger area and involved people drawn from across regions or England as a whole.

A good deal of community dance activity is offered on the basis that it is open to all, nonetheless specific initiatives were aimed at particular groups of people. We asked people to identify those groups whom they specifically reached by age, gender, ability and cultural community:

Age of Participants:

Youth (11-18)	24%
Young Adults (18-25)	20%
Adults (25-50)	21%
Older Adults (50 plus)	14%
Children (5-11)	11%
All	6%
Preschool (0-5)	4%

Gender of participants:

Both	91%
Female	5%
Male	4%

Disability of Participants:

23% of initiatives included disabled people. Some were integrated projects for disabled and non-disabled people whilst others exclusively involved disabled people.

Cultural Community of Participants:

All	75%
African-Caribbean	8%
South Asian	7%
Other (please specify)	4%
Chinese	3%
Not specified	3%

Other Participants:

27% of activity aimed to include socially excluded people. Many initiatives sought to include professionals from outside of the arts to extend the impact of community dance: health, social work and education professionals for example.

A small percentage of participants were involved in community dance in a variety of other roles including: costume, administration, technical and music – mostly in a voluntary capacity.

achievements and benefits

We asked a series of questions to elicit from practitioners what was central to the process of community dance. Consistently they were concerned with creating a positive dance environment for individuals and groups in which those participants and their needs were paramount. Nonetheless the quality of the dance experience – including technique, improvisation, creative dance – valued the individual and the arts equally.

The way in which much community dance is presented is by using ideas offered by the group, encouraging questions, offering choices, facilitating and developing discussion and promoting critical reflection.

The research established that practitioners identified the following outcomes for community dance as a result of their work:

new participants	78%
new audiences	66%
new partnerships	59%
wider partnerships outside dance (musicians etc)	52%
new artistic partnerships	48%
new choreography / dance works	56%
development of new approach to working with people	44%
new type of participant	43%
new funding	28%
new venue	27%
new context for their work (hospital, prisons etc)	22%
worked with new cultural community	22%
new forms	18%
new employer	17%

Practitioners identified the following benefits/outcomes for participants:

dance related

broader dance skills	76%
performance skills	70%
choreographic skills	59%
appreciation/critical skills	49%
specific dance technique	24%
specific dance style	20%
experienced culturally specific dance style	8%

health related

wider health benefits	41%
greater overall fitness	40%
improved stamina	37%
greater flexibility	32%

Personal skills related

self awareness	82%
creativity	80%
self confidence	80%
body awareness	77%
self esteem	76%
communication skills	54%
language skills	38%
emotional development	37%

Social skills related

team work	76%
sensitivity to others	65%
social skills	64%
social cohesion	54%
leadership skills	45%
enjoyment/pleasure	75%
skills/knowledge in other curricular areas	26%

The respondents were asked a series of questions about the benefits to them and/or their organisation as a result of community dance initiatives:

new funding	40%
further/additional funding	19%
ongoing group	30%
higher profile, including but not only media coverage:	
locally	58%
regionally	42%
nationally	15%
new partnerships:	
with artists	64%
with funders	42%
with other organisations	52%
extended partnerships:	
with artists	55%
with funders	36%
with other organisations	46%
new/unexpected audiences	19%
new venue relationship	23%
new thinking about future direction for the organisation	40%

The research demonstrated a wide range of outputs for community dance, largely though not exclusively performance based. These included:

theatre performance	47%
informal sharing	41%
photographic, visual, written documentation	37%
written, oral or written evaluation	33%
community celebration	28%
press coverage	23%
site specific performance	22%
video	21%
piece of music	14%
post show discussion	13%
publication	11%
multi-media event	11%
film	7%
piece of visual art or sculpture	5%
piece of writing	5%
seminar	1%

of which, 45% involved live performance. The audience attendance for this nationally is estimated at 10.367 million.

We wanted to know, if there had been an audience for the project/initiative, what benefits were identified as a result:

new insight into the potential of the performers/ participants	73%
new insight into the potential of dance for performers/ participants	59%
an experience of dance they've never had before	58%
an enhanced sense of their own community	38%
a new insight into the potential of dance to deal with issues	23%

participants' perspective

The primary focus of the mapping research was the professionals involved in providing and delivering community dance. However we were keen to find some evidence of participant response. Even using the sample of 107 it would have been extremely difficult to find a consistent approach to eliciting information given the diversity of the people taking part.

We were fortunate to receive additional funding from the Millennium Commission to produce a film, called *Dancing Nation*, at the time of our mapping research to identify and present the views of participants in community dance.

We commissioned Rosemary Lee and Peter Anderson to undertake this work, and from the research for this film we identified a sample of four initiatives to represent in-depth.

Dancing Nation features four very different individuals and groups working in different styles and traditions. What was remarkable was the consistency of their responses to participating in community dance. This is what they had to say:

Community dance demonstrates an equal concern for people and art:

'She has this total commitment to artistic integrity, creative expression, technical competence - alongside a total commitment to the group and all the different individuals in the group.' **Jeremy Spafford**

Community dance values the individual:

'They teach in a special way because when they teach you they don't teach you as a group they teach you as an individual, so they suit the best of your abilities to the moves, instead of like, teaching one move for all the group.' **Simon Barber**

'Each individual dances differently because they are different people, which is just proof of the fact that what dance does is enable you to be yourself, but perhaps be yourself in a different way.' **Jeremy Spafford**

Community dance is concerned with quality and pride in achievement:

'Performing is non negotiable... First of all it makes me much more aware of what I'm doing artistically, of what space I'm occupying, of where I am in relation to other people, what I'm doing with my body or not doing, and how to be generous and supportive of other people's dance.' **Jeremy Spafford**

'If you're enjoying the production and you know the audience is enjoying it, you should feel as if your feet are just one inch above the stage.' **Chrissie Kugele**

'When I'm dancing really well and I've pulled off a big move and everybody's cheering and I'm keeping going... you just get that real big buzz off the audience. It's a great feeling.' **Simon Barber**

'I love to perform, I like what the audience can give me... if I do something right I know by their reaction. If they're feeling it, I'm definitely feeling it. Movement is motion, emotion - if we're feeling it, it comes across stronger when we're performing.' **Amarya Fuller**

Community dance provides people with an important focus for their lives:

'My most important thing in my life is 1, or should I say a - family, b - dancing and c -dancing! What would I be like if I didn't dance? I'd probably be a bad boy. I'd probably be on the streets doing things, getting into trouble, stuff like that. Dance changes me.' **Simon Barber**

'If I weren't dancing, I think I would miss the dancing, the movement, the pleasure it gives me.' **Chrissie Kugele**

'If I were to stop dancing, I would definitely feel there was a hole - I just have to get up and dance. Dancing for me is the centre of my life -dancing can give people a sense of freedom. It's the spirit of the moment that slips out.' **Amarya Fuller**

Community dance offers the opportunity to learn new skills and gain new insights:

'It's not just about dance - it's about emotion, feelings - we focus on communication, discipline, professionalism and performing and we have to know what we're doing. There's always something else to learn - we're learning at the same time as performing.' Amarya Fuller

'Recently I did a duet with Joss. He's a very skilled dancer but he's also big, so I was able to lift him, and he me... it felt like we'd sort of grown up a bit together.' Jeremy Spafford

Community dance offers people new ways of relating to others, based on respect and valuing difference:

'We perform to parents and grandparents, generations who didn't get to dance, to celebrate the way that they would wish.' Amarya Fuller

'DugOut is about being part of a chaotic group of people... young people, older people up to the age of 80, people in wheelchairs or not in wheelchairs, people who are very confident with their bodies, people who are less so... DugOut allows for that combination.' Jeremy Spafford

'We've become known around the area as the young black kids performing - people want to know what we're getting up to. We express old 'African' and new 'street' something our younger and older audiences relate to.' Amarya Fuller

'Dance helps create a group ethos which produces the generosity, support, and 'stuff' you want in any good group... Each individual dances differently because they're different people, which is proof that what dance does is enable you to be yourself but in a different way.' Jeremy Spafford

Community dance enhances people's sense of community and supports people to make positive contributions in their community:

'I dance in the streets wherever people are. Whenever someone says to me, 'how do you do that?' I always say, 'well this is how I do it' and I show them how you do it and try to get them to come along.' Simon Barber

'So that is how we are today, friends... and that's our whole ethos - we do everything as friends.' Chrissie Kugele

'Say if [Shaun and Roy] are teaching someone else but someone else wants to know the moves then I'll teach them and give up a bit of my time to help someone else 'coz they'd do it for me 'coz we're all together.'

Simon Barber

'My sister and me also have a group called Vanity... and we all chip in. We perform anywhere we get a chance..'

Amarya Fuller

Community dance provides a safe, healthy outlet for frustrations and for overcoming barriers to participation:

'Dance changes me - it takes the aggression off the street, diverts it into dancing on the dance floor. Inside me is fire - when I'm dancing it's let out. It's another side of me - if you know what I mean. And when I'm feeling low and down I have to go and dance somewhere. Dancing helps me because it stops me getting depressed about things in my life...'

Simon Barber

'Wolfgang believes that everyone possesses a talent - particularly an artistic talent - and that everyone can use that talent.' Chrissie Kugele

'You go to school and there are teachers who teach you, but Gail and Ian are different, that's why our work is so effective because the atmosphere we work in is so great.'

Amarya Fuller

practitioners perspective

To form a representative understanding of the views of community dance practitioners we held a series of meetings, one in each Regional Arts Board area, to draw out:

- The values they hold, as people and dance practitioners, underpinning their work
- The purposes or reasons for doing this work
- Their aims and objectives for specific pieces of work
- The criteria used to identify quality in their work

A cross section of the profession attended the seminars, including freelance artists and amateurs, teachers, academics, dance company and agency representatives, officers from local authorities and the arts funding system and independent arts consultants. These contributors worked across a range of dance styles and cultural traditions. Our findings are as follows.

values

“Twenty years ago I used to think that art didn't really matter very much. I was quite defensive early in my career in the arts. I thought it never really changed anything. Now I think that art is the only thing that will change the world because it changes how you think and follows our beliefs and our values. Art, I think, is ultimately about the expression of values and beliefs. That is what we do when we are involved with art; we are trying to understand our world, think about it, work it out and communicate that understanding to someone else.”

Francois Matarasso – Catalytic Converters Debate 2000

The Foundation for Community Dance has long recognised and promoted the values people hold as the basis of work in community dance. Some of these values stem from deeply held, yet constructed beliefs about the kind of world people want to inhabit. They are often ‘optimistic, progressive, aspirational and about making the world a ‘better’ place for all. Others are about the contribution dance can play in developing their ‘utopian’ vision, its contribution to the lives of individuals, communities and society as a whole. It is clear that in working in dance that we are fundamentally celebrating the human body and we can’t do that without fundamentally believing in people in their wholeness – physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual and social.

What is useful about these values is that they can be compared with the visions and values held by professionals in other arenas of activity – education, health disability, for example – and provide an valuable bridge for communication and developing shared ambitions and partnerships.

There was a remarkable similarity in the values held by practitioners across the country.

Implicit in such phrases as, ‘dance can transform people’s lives’, ‘everyone has the right to be fulfilled creatively’ and ‘everyone has the right to be more fully human’ is a view of a world which is not currently perfect or ideal for people and that practitioners are attempting to change or at least feel they are contributing to changing the world to a ‘better’ place. This forward looking view is an essential function of being an artist, always exploring the ‘what happens if’ question.

So what kind of world are practitioners describing in these values?

- it is a world based on agreed rights for individuals, differences and equality of opportunity for all
- it is a world where individuals can fulfil their human and creative potential, where they feel positive about themselves and are respected and valued by others and can communicate, interact and co-operate effectively with others
- it is a world where the imagination, the emotions, the mind and the physicality of people are equally valued
- it is a world where individuals not only feel they are powerful but can exercise that power expressively in relation themselves and others within, and at a community and societal level
- it is a world where people are valued for their ‘wholeness’ not as mere commodities
- it is a world where people are liberated, free and in some way have been transformed
- finally, it is a world where everyone has the right to dance, how they choose and for whatever reason they choose.

These values are linked to a set of beliefs about community dance, and what can and does happen when people encounter, engage with and participate in dance:

- These 'engagements' emphatically include 'other' ways of encountering dance – making, performing, watching and talking about dance. This is an important step forward, challenging old and tired assumptions community dance - that it is just about getting people to 'join in', that it just a form of social engineering, or for personal/group therapy or educational reasons.
- Community dance is an engagement in the art of dance, providing opportunities for 'untrained' people to experience the world as artists do and to have a critical engagement with their own dance and the dance of others. This debate is still current and there are professional dance artists and arts policy makers who still want to distinguish between what it is that professional and trained artists do, characterised as 'art for arts sake'; and that which has some sort of wider social benefit for others.
- That 'more dance for more people' provides a greater opportunity to have, amongst other things, a wider and more aware audience for increased possibilities and enhanced potential for what dance can be, rather than a narrow 'cultivated' audience for a performing elite.
- That to operate as professional artists do - with an artist's questions, perspectives, intuitions, feelings and responses, to make sense of and create meaning in the world – is of itself a hopeful, empowering and humanising activity for people to engage with – and by the way you get some good art.
- That every individual and every body has the capacity to dance, express themselves and make meaning through dance and that by engaging with it, their individual lives and the experience of being in a community can be changed positively.

This set of values and beliefs provides a powerful 'driver' or motivation for dance practitioners who choose to work in community dance. It provides a deep reason for why they continue to be involved in a sphere of work where the economic rewards are not great and the status of practitioners within the dance profession is low compared to other roles. (See the Independent Dance Review R. Gibson and G. Clark for ACE , published June 1998).

purposes

Thinking Aloud – in Search of a Framework for Community Dance, made the case that the overriding purpose of community dance was to increase access to dance through experience and participation, and that the main ‘product’ of community dance is the process in which participants are involved. Thinking Aloud was an attempt to further develop the conceptual framework for community dance. This research gave us the opportunity to ‘test’ the framework and to get a sense of the parameters within which different practitioners operate:

“to widen access to more people, to more dance”

In the best sense, the purpose behind community dance was established to increase access to dance, ‘to widen access to more people, to more dance’.

“I want to share my passion and love of dance”

Practitioners a number of what can loosely be described as the philanthropic reasons for community dance - wanting to share what they felt they possessed as dance practitioners – their passion, their joy, their pleasure and their enjoyment. This shouldn’t be underestimated as a motivating force either for practitioners or participants; we can all remember those teachers and artists who inspired us with their enthusiasm for their subject or their work. If this ‘passion’ and commitment can be harnessed and passed-on the mission to increase access can surely be achieved. It was also important for this wide group of people “to make a difference”, sustained not only by their core values but by getting feedback about the kinds of difference they were making which then gave them a sense of purpose.

“I want people to develop skills in dance”

Underpinning this was the passing on of dance skills. In part the skills articulated were about specific dance techniques, but more importantly they were concerned with the development of a wider range of skills – intellectual, emotional, physical and social – and skills associated with being an artist - problem solving, creativity, expression and confidence to take risks.

“I believe that people will get things from it”

In addition to sharing passion and passing on skills, the practitioners clearly had a set of purposes that lay behind and informed these: providing opportunities for individuals to develop and change; providing opportunities for groups and communities to develop and change; providing opportunities for dance as an art form to develop and change.

“ I get things from it”

That being said they did move beyond what one person called her ‘personal and selfish pleasure’ and the recognition that there was a relationship between their own needs and their rationale for working in community dance because ‘It fulfils me’, ‘because it feeds me’, ‘it is the biggest buzz you get’ and “it gives me the chance to be creative”.

It is accepted that community dance can and does provide a ‘route’ into professional careers in dance, however this was not articulated as a prime purpose.

objectives

At each of the regional meetings practitioners were presented with a questionnaire which asked them to identify a set of key objectives. From the following statistics, whilst it is clear that within any given session or project, practitioners have a number of objectives nonetheless certain priorities are revealed.

These objectives are clearly related to the values and beliefs previously described.

The importance of creativity and pleasure/enjoyment are clearly paramount and the strong concern for building self-confidence, self esteem and self awareness reinforce evidence about benefits of community dance.

Artform objectives

Dance, choreographic and performance skills were cited as the most common objectives, though there was a strong concern to also develop appreciation and critical skills. Less emphasis was placed on specific techniques, styles and traditions.

Health objectives

A significant proportion of respondents aimed to make a contribution to the physical health and fitness of participants.

Personal development objectives

Increasing self confidence, self esteem and self awareness were consistent objectives; many practitioners also cited that they aimed to support participants' emotional development.

Social development objectives

Building 'teams', social skills and sensitivity to others were key objectives, with a high proportion seeking to improve social cohesion through their work.

Creation objectives

Almost three quarters of practitioners has as an objective some kind of performance, including informal 'sharings', festivals and community celebrations. Consistent with the nature of funding, only one third sought to establish a regular class or group.

Other objectives

These included the development of communication and language skills, and using community dance as a vehicle for developing learning, skills and knowledge in other curricular areas or to explore a particular subject or issue.

benchmarks for quality

The Foundation for Community Dance has previously shied away from setting-down quality criteria, regarding this as the remit of the individual practitioner. However it seemed to us that the context in which we operate has shifted significantly and it is incumbent on the dance sector to clarify how it is making quality judgements, particularly in relation to work being undertaken in partnership with agencies outside the arts. This piece of research provided us with the opportunity to begin to identify the areas of community dance where practitioners are applying criteria of quality and what they are using as benchmarks to identify quality in their work.

“It’s a complex issue - recognising this maybe a benchmark in itself.”

The discussions about quality were inevitably complex and reflected the diversity of professional roles of those who participated in the seminars and the different mix of participants from region to region.

Discussions were wide-ranging and touched on issues relating to values, contexts, partnerships, intentions, purposes, planning processes, evaluation, measurement, the perspectives and assumptions of different viewers, teaching styles, ethical practice and art and aesthetics.

There was in addition an interesting discussion about the difference between notions of quality and success. For a significant number of practitioners the quality of the process was more important in evaluating success (dependent on context) than received or personal notions of the quality of artistic ‘outputs’. Indeed, some argued that because risk-taking was part of the process, it was inevitable that some outputs were of quality even though they had not satisfied external aesthetic criteria.

It was acknowledged that a key difficulty in looking at issues of quality is the problem of operating purely in the realm of subjective judgements. “Liking” and “disliking” were not regarded as benchmarks, although they were accepted as having validity as opinions.

Consistent across the country was the understanding that the ‘context’ for the work was crucial to making any judgements or generating any criteria/benchmarks for quality, as is having absolute clarity about what and whose agendas are being pursued.

It must be emphasised that we were attempting to identify what were the common benchmarks for identifying quality in community dance, not measures for evaluation or how people exercised individual aesthetic judgements.

Some key benchmarks did emerge which begin to hint at the range of ways in which we can identify quality in community dance:

Quality of Purpose

Recognition that people had to have a vision about why they were undertaking any given piece of work or making any particular intervention in a community context. This is not necessarily about having a ‘big’ choreographic idea, but is about “knowing why” - why this dance, with these people, in this context, at this time and with these resources? Without this knowledge, practitioners stated there could be no reason to make partnerships; there could be no basis for learning, progression or change, and there would be no starting point from which to assess or measure achievement.

Quality of Planning and Communication

All recognised planning as a key element of quality practice, both artistically and managerially. A range of benchmarks emerged here:

- A clear route map
- A common and shared understanding between stakeholders
- A common agreement about values and purposes between stakeholders
- A shared agreement between stakeholders about what was to be evaluated and measured
- Clarity about where the intervention might lead
- Flexibility and freedom for change
- Opportunities for negotiation built in
- Realism about the scale of the intervention and its achievability
- Managing resources appropriately
- Being true to intentions, not trying to ‘fit in’ or ‘sell soul to devil’
- Being clear where the initiative sits within one’s own development

Quality of Practice and Process

The discussion about practice and process most closely related to earlier discussions about values and purposes. The following benchmarks were perceived to be key in identifying quality practice and process:

- It matches values and purposes
- It has transparent aims and objectives
- It is ethical, responsible and safe
- It has clarity of purpose throughout
- It is respectful of difference
- It is respectful of the learning style of learners
- It has processes that are structured, planned and have a sense of achievement and completion
- It provides opportunities for reflection
- It provides opportunities for individual and collective risk-taking

Quality of Engagement

Identifying the quality of participants' engagement in dance formed the most substantial and complex part of the discussions. Different people, depending on their views about values and purposes, had different benchmarks. However, we have summarised the discussion and identified ten headings under which practitioners said they applied a benchmark of quality.

They were looking for participants demonstrating, at an appropriate level:

- Readiness and openness to the experience
- Focus and attention
- Competence appropriate to the task(s)
- Active creative contribution(s)
- Responsiveness
- Consciousness and reflection
- Change and overcoming
- Preparedness to take risks and experiment
- Expressions of pleasure and enjoyment
- Aspiration

Quality of Outcomes

What emerged strongly right across the country was that community dance was about positive change or making a difference for the people engaging with it -individuals, groups and communities.

A range of criteria emerged that practitioners are using to identify positive change:

Change by Individuals

- In their in physical and technical ability, awareness, concentration, commitment, confidence, communication, creative expression and critical reflection both within and outside the dance
- In their attitudes and relationship to dance, themselves and each other
- A broader understanding of dance and a range of aesthetics
- Acknowledgment by the participants themselves that change had happened and that they could put this change in context
- Acknowledgment by other stakeholders, including parents and carers, that change had happened
- That individuals wanted to continue dancing

Change by groups/communities

- Change in attitudes to dance
- A greater understanding of the contribution and 'difference' dance can make
- A more developed sense of community
- An enhanced willingness to participate across the specific/targeted community
- Ongoing dance activity
- Ongoing partnerships between stakeholders

These benchmarks need to be set alongside the other more detailed statistics relating to outputs which can then form the basis of further work relating to assessment, measurement and evaluation. It was never our intention through this research to produce a handbook for evaluation, there are many excellent examples elsewhere. What we have identified is a more detailed framework of what practitioners actually say they are doing, rather than a blueprint for excellence in community dance.

Ultimately, these discussions about values, purposes and quality revealed a profession of enormous integrity that has, through dance, made a very real difference to the lives of the people they strive to reach.

They bring to these engagements a keen intelligence, creative energy, a high level of artistic skill; their passion for dance, their belief in its power to make a better world and a deep commitment to and respect for the people they work with.

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about the foundation for community dance

Foundation for Community Dance

the industry's lead body for community dance
working for the development of dance for all



At the centre of the national network for community dance, the Foundation for Community Dance represents the diversity of dance in the UK. Established in 1986 by dance artists to raise the profile and be the national voice for community dance, we work for the development of dance for all.

We campaign, take action and represent the concerns, interests and practice of community dance at all levels, acting as a catalyst for the development of partnerships between practitioners, funders and communities.

Through events, conferences, seminars, an advice service and two regular journals - Animated and Network News - we offer up to the minute information, debate and dialogue about current issues in dance and the arts.

Our network of members includes: dancers, amateurs, artists and dance teachers; dance companies, organisations, agencies and venues; managers and administrators; colleges, universities and training establishments; funding bodies and local authorities.

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