

### Time

Another factor to be aware of. Some students need longer to digest the information given and it is advisable to wait. Too often we make the mistake of assuming the student/participant has not understood the task and see their hesitation as not understanding what has been requested. 30 seconds later the response comes and the task has been fulfilled. How frustrating for a student who has understood, but has not been given the time or the opportunity to show their potential.

We often misread our students' level of understanding and determination to be understood. It is not they who do not understand us, but it is we who do not understand them. They may receive the information we try to pass on very differently to how we would perceive it, but not passing new experiences on because we presume it would not be understood is utterly wrong. Most people in their career will have low points, questioning their work. This is natural. We all need acknowledgement that our work has value and that we are needed. Luckily, in AMICI, the raw energy of group members gives me back new energy to carry on the task.

"AMICI affirms life, creativity and the power of compassion"(3). My students have been my teachers on this long road of discovery. Without them I would be nothing. So my advice to all new teachers who would like to open the horizons of their students is to open your own narrow attitudes and try to be honest. Learn from the honesty of your students and make the discovery a two-way street.

### Info

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### References

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1. Clement Crisp, Dance Critic, The Financial Times (2009) Foreword, The Magic of Amici: a practical guide
  2. Edward Morgan Forster (1905) Where Angels Fear to Tread
  3. Clement Crisp (2000) Life-enhancing creativity in The Financial Times, 29 July 2000

# Biggest challenges, greatest love

**Carol Brown**, Founder and former Director, TAN Dance, talks about her unexpected journey from audience member to participant to artist practitioner and finally, Artistic Director, and her belief that we all have something special to give

**My dance journey has travelled along the same timeline as community dance in Wales. We have grown up together.** In the early 1980s, I was enthralled watching a Graham Class at The Cardiff Community Dance Project, (now Rubicon), the first community dance project in Wales. Even though I was in my 30s I knew I had found what I wanted to do with my life. My body struggled, but my passion grew.

I began as a participant, became an artist practitioner, a director of a community dance organisation (TAN Dance), had a spell as Chair of Community Dance Wales, and now, at 71, I'm an independent dance artist.

While I was developing my practice, community dance was evolving from the Animateur movement to organisations employing teams of artist practitioners and administrative staff. To combat isolation, as early pioneers we met informally to support one another, calling ourselves 'Animateurs in Wales'. This grew into Community Dance Wales, a wonderfully progressive organisation

during its lifespan of representing and lobbying for the sector, identifying development needs, formalising standards and offering affordable and relevant training programmes and conferences. Wales is justifiably proud of what has been achieved and continues to be an exemplar of good practice.

With the seismic shift in the 1990s from community dance seen purely as art, to being a tool to deliver social agendas, funding bodies made it clear that continuing support depended on the sector taking on this shift. Dance can do this. Dance can do so many things. Especially when art is at the heart of it. Client groups and demographics changed but the joy of creating art through movement was always the transformative force.

My geographical 'patch' in South West Wales had a city, a town, valleys and rural coastal areas, many of them socially and economically deprived. So the programmes offered varied from major three-year community regeneration projects to the more usual weekly class formats.

But there was something missing! Molière's declaration resonated with me: "There is nothing so necessary for men as dancing".(1) I was only too aware of how few were attending classes, and so I formed Dynion Male Dance Company in 1986, the first of its kind in the UK. It was heartening to see boys' groups springing up in our touring areas. Dynion was truly pioneering and elicited so much interest that the company toured to 11 different countries. Not easy for a 5ft woman to manage such a company. So much testosterone! They were my biggest challenge and also one of my greatest joys.

I always strove for my work to expand the lives of the people involved. I listened to what kind of dance they wanted to do but also sprung ideas on them that they would never have thought of. For example, creating performance work with primary school children to The Rite of Spring and the Headteacher commenting that he had seven-year-olds whistling Stravinsky in the corridors; street dance and percussion for disengaged young people, performing to the works of



Photo: Callum Coombs

Homer; and learning disabled people dancing a version of Romeo and Juliet, set in war torn Gaza.

My practice was underpinned by my philosophical view on life. With a Buddhist variation on Immanuel Kant, I wanted the work to have beauty, benefit and good as outcomes, whatever the style and whoever the client group.

Much of the work was about collaborative process and I particularly love the excitement of working with people towards performance. It is such a total experience to explore, create, develop, polish and then share.

Whether devising movements or working on 'given' choreography, people bring themselves to it. They can

generate 'good' through creating their own 'beauty' and sharing the 'benefit' with the world. I was mesmerised by a short film presented by Royston Maldoom at the 1986 NADMA (National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs) conference. A young boy from Kentish Town Primary School, London tottering barefoot, one pointed foot trailing behind him as though broken to Saint-Saens's Dying Swan from the Carnival of the Animals. He was completely absorbed in what he was doing and so hypnotic to watch. I never forgot this and before a performance I would love to tell the dancers that "no-one can dance that role the way you can." It has nothing to

do with how high you can lift your leg or whether you think someone can do it better than you. Bring all of yourself to it and it will be wonderful. It's a privilege to perform in front of an audience. You have to create a different world for them to enter. If you do not give it, the world will not have it and you have something special to give. We all do.

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#### Info

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#### References

1. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 'Molière' (1670), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*