

‘Community development through dance’

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Image from ‘Built on Stilts’: The Martha's Vineyard Community Dance Festival

***Culture breathes richness and vitality into our lives;
it animates those things which make us human –
meaning-making, identity, belonging***

Bridging Cultural Conflicts, Michelle LeBaron, 2003

Welcome everyone.

I am pleased to have worked with Ausdance and the Youth Dance Festival, the Art Is Festival and Regional Arts Victoria’s Marion Matthews to develop today’s program. We hope this day and the ideas we would like it to engender, have the outcome of more and better opportunities for local communities of Horsham to participate in and celebrate their lives through the arts.

My organisation, the Cultural Development Network works to support communities across Victoria to develop vital local cultures. Our area of particular interest within all that is culture are the arts, so we seek to support and encourage opportunities for communities to actively participate in creating their own stories and celebrating their identity through the arts.

I will start by discussing a definition of community cultural development, as developed by the Australia Council, our national funding and advocacy body for the arts, so we begin with a shared understanding.

Community Cultural Development

Community cultural development strengthens relationships between and within communities and recognises that our differences are fundamental to our identity.

Community can be any group of people who identify with each other. Their common interest may be geographical location, shared cultural heritage, age group, professional, social or recreational.

Cultural activities and/or groups may vary within any community. Community cultural development practice facilitates interactions between and within cultures where, with the assistance of professional artists, creative ideas, skills and knowledge can be shared.

Development through collaborative processes in any artform can enhance aspects of cultural life, provide a tool for economic development, address social issues, develop self-representation, express identity or reclaim public space.

(Australia Council)



Wedderburn's country dancers- an example of expression of a popular local artform, bootscooting, presented in a new way as part of the 'Small Towns Big Picture' creative development, central Victoria, 2003.

Some common features of community cultural development

- social and developmental changes take place alongside artistic outcomes through the exploration of ideas and issues;
- community members and professional artists share knowledge and skills, working towards a common goal;
- a community's culture is expressed, explored, interpreted, presented or developed.

Community cultural development offers communities an opportunity to express themselves and to create and manage the projects in which they participate.

Evidence for the value of arts participation: health and well-being

I would now like to talk briefly about some of the evidence for the contribution that involvement in art-making can make to the well-being of individuals and the strength of communities. There are additional contributions that dance can make, but I will begin by speaking more generally.

The Australia Council says that community cultural development can be a highly effective means for communities to:

- develop new skills and address issues which affect them;
- interact and increase communication and networking;
- address social justice issues;
- represent themselves to their own and to other communities and enjoy rich and diverse cultural activities

There is evidence that participation in arts is a factor in the development and sustainment of health and well-being. Cultural theorist Jon Hawkes argues for the value of arts participation at a community level:

....active community participation in arts practice is an essential component of a healthy and sustainable society..... arts practice not only open up fantastic vistas of community expressivity but also.... profoundly contributes to the development of community (Hawkes, 2001).



Wik dancers at the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival- an example of dance being used to express traditional indigenous culture and educate non-indigenous audience members.

In the UK in 1997, Francois Matarasso made the first large-scale attempt to gather evidence of the social benefits and impacts of participation in the arts. Using rigorous research methods, he identified fifty social impacts on individuals and communities through participation in arts programs. Matarasso concluded that participation in the arts does bring benefits to individuals and communities, with individual benefits such as an increase in confidence, creative and transferable skills and human growth translating into wider social impact, building of confidence of minority groups, promoting contact and contributing to social cohesion. He also considered that many of the social impacts of participatory arts work can be identified and demonstrated, and that it ‘cannot be argued that the arts, and the benefits they return for the public money invested in them, are beyond evaluation other than in aesthetic terms’.

In the landmark US study, ‘Champions of Change: the impact of the arts on learning’, Fiske (1999) found that the arts provide young people with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts and bodies. The study documented how

involvement in quality arts learning experiences engages young people in ways that other experiences do not, in that they:

- reach young people who were not otherwise being reached
- reach young people in ways that they are not otherwise being reached
- connect young people to themselves and each other
- provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people
- connect learning experiences to the world of real work

Fiske discovered that out of school arts programs for disadvantaged youth were more beneficial in terms of learning and achievement for young people than programs in sport or community involvement.

Deidre Williams describes studies in Australia and the UK that show social and educational outcomes of involvement in community arts programs including;

- building and development of communities
- increase of social capital
- activation of social change
- development of human capital
- improvement of economic performance

There is a large body of evidence that the major residual benefits from community based arts programs come from developing social and human capital, that is, in how these experiences can develop new insights, connections, skills and knowledge which influence changes to people's attitudes and behaviour (Williams, 1996)



Soul Speed Activist Theatre and Dance Troupe, Whaingaroa Raglan New Zealand: addressing environmental issues through dance

So, these are a few examples of the many studies that indicate the possible outcomes of participation in art making for a range of different communities. Dance has some additional qualities that make it of particular benefit. The first is its obvious physical nature- the fact that dance provides creative and expressive opportunities like other artforms, and it also involves physical activity, even exercise in an enjoyable and

creative way. This is particularly important in our increasingly sedentary communities.

The second is that dance involves a non-verbal form of expression, which has advantages for many communities for whom language adds rather than reduces barriers. These can include people with disabilities, especially intellectual, people with hearing and speech impairments, some young people (those of you who have teenagers in your lives will know that often asking for an explanation is a sure way to get not much more than a grunt for an answer).

So, we have looked at research indicating how participation in art-making can be of benefit to communities, and how dance has its own particular benefits. Given that, we also need to consider how we can do the best job of what we do.

Working towards best practice

The Cultural Development Network has been working to develop a 'Charter for Lead Practice' in community cultural development, or community based arts practice. We haven't got to the end of that process yet, but are working in an ongoing way with artists, artworkers and organisations to try and distill what the elements of successful practice are, so we can know how we can do the best job when working with communities.

Copies of our draft paper are available from our website at <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net/publications.htm>. This paper has an extensive reading and reference list- many of which are easily available for downloading. Our website also has extensive reading and reference lists for further information at www.culturaldevelopment.net/resources.htm

The Australia Council, our national leadership and funding organisation has this to say about the qualities and skills of artists we should seek to work with communities. Artists and artworkers involved in community cultural development are highly skilled and adaptable. They require:

- artform expertise to ensure innovative, high quality artistic outcomes;
- project management, planning, negotiation, communication and collaboration skills;
- responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs of the many different communities and understanding of social justice principles;
- the ability to lead, challenge, motivate and facilitate communities in their activities without dominating or directing them

Bill Cleveland, a well-known American writer and researcher about community based arts practice, was a recent guest of the Network, and in February, he presented these qualities of best practice for artists work with communities. Cleveland believes that community based arts practice should be:



If we can consider these principles in our work, we are on the road to doing the best job we can with the communities we care about and work with.

Thankyou

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Some resources

Organisations

Ausdance www.ausdance.org.au

The Cultural Development Network www.culturaldevelopment.net.au

Community Dance UK, www.communitydance.org.uk

The Dance-Movement Therapy Association of Australia www.dtaa.org
has a range of interesting resources for sale

Dance specific resources

(mostly available from Ausdance victoria@ausdane.org.au 9417 1200)

Positive/Negative - writings on integrated dance, Assemble Arts, 2001

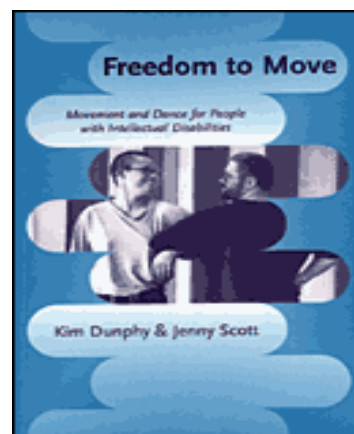
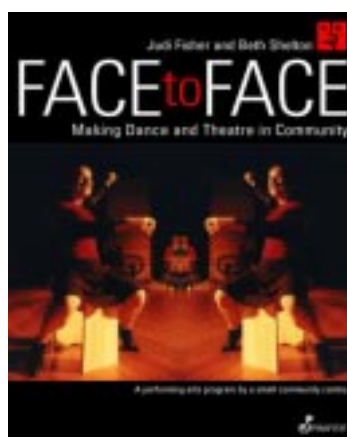
Dancers and Communities, Poyner and Simmonds, 1997

Face To Face: Making Dance and Theatre in Community, Beth Shelton and Judy Fisher, Spinifex, 2002

Freedom to Move: movement and dance for people with intellectual disabilities, Dunphy and Scott, Elsevier, 2003

The origins and philosophy of the Community Dance movement in Britain and its effect on British dance culture,

http://www.swissdance.info/svtc/HTML/community_dance_origins.htm



General references about community based arts

Art and Wellbeing, Deborah Mills and Paul Thomas, (2004), Australia Council
Art and Wellbeing assembles ideas and case study material which demonstrate connections between community cultural development and government 'wellbeing' initiatives under seven themes, Health, Ecologically Sustainable Development, Public Housing and Place, Rural Revitalisation, Community Strengthening, Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity.
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/art_and_wellbeing/

Beginners Guide to Community Based Arts, Keith Knight & Mat Schwarzman, (2005), New Village Press, http://www.newvillagepress.net/pub_BegGuideCommunityArts.html

Champions of change: The impacts of the arts on learning, Fiske, E.B. (Ed.). (1999). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.
This report compiles seven major studies that provide new evidence of enhanced learning and achievement when students are involved in a variety of arts experiences. "Champions of Change" was developed with the support of the GE Fund, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Arts Education Partnership, and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.
<http://aep-arts.org/PDF%20Files/ChampsReport.pdf>

Evaluating Community Arts & Community Well Being: An Evaluation Guide for Community Arts Practitioners, Clare Keating, (2002)
Developed by Arts Victoria, VicHealth, Darebin City Council and the City of Whittlesea, this guide includes worksheets and tools to assist the community arts sector evaluate its work.
http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Content.aspx?topicID=239#cs_650

The fourth pillar of sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning, Hawkes, J (2001)
Cultural Development Network in association with Common Ground Publishing.
www.culturaldevelopment.net

Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts
Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth Heneghan Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras and Arthur Brooks
This new approach offers a more comprehensive view of how the arts create private and public value, underscores the importance of the arts' intrinsic benefits, and links the creation of benefits to arts involvement. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MG/MG218/>

Literature Review: Community Arts Practice
This report reviews the evidence base of the VicHealth Arts for Health Program in the light of existing Australian and international studies on similar programs.
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/Promoting%20Mental%20Health%20-%20Arts%20Participation%20.pdf

Literature Review Of The Evidence Base For Culture, The Arts And Sport Policy
Janet Ruiz, Social Research, Research and Economic Unit, Scottish Executive Education Department, 2004. <http://www.sportdevelopment.org.uk/evidencebase2004.pdf>

Making Exact Change: How Arts-Based Programs Have Made Significant and Sustained Impact on their Communities, research project on exemplary arts-based programs that have had a significant, sustained positive impact on their communities.
<http://www.lulu.com/can> or download as a free PDF from <http://www.makingexactchange.org>

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing through Community & Cultural Development: A Review of Literature focusing on Community Festivals and Celebrations
This report focuses on the impact of community celebrations on community development, health and wellbeing to determine what further evidence or research is required to build present knowledge in these fields and to provide assistance in developing policy or programs related to community celebrations.
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/PromotingMentalHealthCommunityCelebrationsFestival.s.pdf

Putting people in the picture? The role of the arts in social inclusion

Jo Barraket, Social Policy Working Paper No. 4, February 2005, Melbourne
Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.
www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/barraket_arts_social_inclusion_1.pdf

The Social Impacts Of Participation In The Arts And Cultural Activities

Cultural Ministers Council Statistics Working Group, Australia, 2004
This report investigates the social impacts of participation in the arts and cultural activities. It comes with an annotated bibliography of research in a searchable Excel database.
http://www.dcita.gov.au/swg/publications/social_impacts_final%202.pdf

The Social Impact of Arts Programs: How The Arts Measure Up,

Australian research into social impact, Deidre Williams, 1996
<http://www.artshunter.com.au/communityarts/papers/Commedia.htm>

Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in Arts Programmes,

Francois Matarasso, Comedia, 1997
This influential publication reports on the first stage of Comedia's research into the social impact of the arts. It analyses the social benefits of arts-based projects, from amateur to professional to community work, clearly revealing the important role that the arts can play by drawing on case studies in the UK, Ireland, Finland and New York.
<http://www.creativecommunities.org.uk/essaychunkpdfs/2.5UseorOrnamentWholeText.pdf>