

## **Next Choreography Evaluation and Research**

### **Project Team:**

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Siobhan Davies Dance

## **Executive Summary of REPORT 1: July 2015**



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

### ***Next Choreography* Evaluation and Research**

**Kerry Chappell, Charlotte Slade, University of Exeter: July 2015**

This report documents the year 1 evaluation and research into the Siobhan Davies Dance (SDD) *Next Choreography* project, led by a team from the University of Exeter's (UoE) CREATE Research Group<sup>1</sup> overseen by Dr Kerry Chappell working with Charlotte Slade and Amy Phillips. Laura Aldridge, Emily Jenkins and Rachel Attfield from the SDD Creative Projects Programme have collaborated with the UoE team at appropriate points and have led on particular strands.

Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, *Next Choreography* is a 3-year SDD project for 14 – 21 year old young people, which aims to develop their knowledge, skills insight and experience to create their own unique choreographic work. Distinct to SDD, the project encourages young people to look beyond dance to the different choreographic processes used by artists across art forms (e.g. film makers, writers, visual artists, designers and curators). *Next Choreography* offers 3 different cohorts of young people (2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17) a one-year programme over three terms, each term with a different focus progressively building their understanding, developing their experiences and using their skills.

The project was conceptualised by the SDD team so as to be impactful in three main ways: on Individuals and communities, on SDD as an Organisation, and on policy and practice. This Evaluation/Research report details both the project's Yr 1 achievements in relation to measures of success (evaluation), as well as making connections where appropriate to the existing body of research into creativity in young people's dance education, specifically, the theory of wise humanising creativity (WHC).

### **Methodology and Method:**

The evaluation and research has used a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. Quantitative methods have been used for two questionnaires administered to all participants and the SDD marketing team, and for basic numeric processing such as attendance at events. Qualitative methods (i.e. observations [3 young people only], WHC creativity wheel [all young people] and semi-structured interviews [3 young people only] for participants, and interviews and reflective diary for the Arts Facilitator) have been used for data collection, which has focused in a more in depth way on key participants lived experiences of the project. The main research questions are: Firstly, what is the impact of Next Choreography on each participant? Secondly, what is the impact of Next Choreography on Siobhan Davies Dance? Thirdly, is SDD's approach to choreography (through looking at other artists and work from other disciplines) an effective way of increasing participants' understanding and knowledge of choreography? Analysis techniques appropriate to the data type were used to draw out the Findings. The research was bound by the Ethical protocols of the University of Exeter.

### **Findings:**

#### *A Impact on Individuals*

What is the impact of Next Choreography on each participant?

- Personal changes experienced by young people were strongly grounded in the project's communal approach, which took work to sustain.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/groupsnetworks/create/>

- Over half of those who filled in the WHC creativity wheel felt that they had developed their ability to express their voice, use their imagination to embody their ideas or changed in small ways when making new dance ideas.
- Potential transformative change of *Next Choreography* on the young people might not be noticed so early; this is an on-going process that is beginning to take shape within them.

There was also:

- strong evidence for the quality of participants' engagement, with evidence of the young people's developing understanding of the creative process, and how this is connected to giving the young people space to invest in exploration, and for their own curiosity. However, the young people were not as confident in expressing this themselves.
- strong evidence of the young people's understanding of contemporary arts developed through the project challenging them in a positive way
- strong evidence of the young people's developing ability to use and take risks with choreographic tools through an increased ability to: make connections between their ideas and choreographic work, to use choreographic tools in the moment, to make strong work with choreographic tools and to recognise it, to use choreographic tools well as directors, to work with improvisation as part of their choreographic toolkit, and to understand their physicality, which then informed their choreography.
- considerable evidence of positive shifts in young people's ability to identify choreographic tools in other's work and their perspective on how art can be made, although some room for development here from the 3 case study's evidence
- evidence of young people needing to understand the uniqueness of their own opinion
- evidence of the young people coming to better understand the curation process.
- evidence that the young people were developing the ability to reflect and articulate their opinions through group discussions, their notebooks and the blog
- questionnaire evidence that young people had gained experience in producing and organising an arts event, a dramatic increase and evidence of interest in the variety of career choices that support making work, and a slight increase in participants' regularly applying for funding
- unclear evidence as to whether participants' participation in external arts events increased

In relation to SDD's part A indicator of success: Overall it is clear that the UoE qualitative analysis shows that the young people have a greater engagement with choreography and the arts from their development on all the dimensions of choreography, creativity, personal change reported above. The SDD questionnaire analysis supports this where it shows a shift from 74% to 91% of participants expressing increased confidence to take choreographic risks, and a shift from 60% to 100% of participants claiming that they had a 'broad awareness of choreographic tools'.

### *B Impact on Organisation*

What is the impact of *Next Choreography* on Siobhan Davies Dance?

Organisationally, the evidence shows that *Next Choreography* has impacted on SDD as follows:

- Recruitment of external marketing consultant has improved marketing to young people, identifying ways in which SDD can modify their approach
- SDD communications team have reviewed and changed language use when targeting young people to use more direct and inviting language in promotional material and via social media
- There was a significant change in methods to work with participants to position them as spokespeople in the press for *Next Choreography*, and to increase the SDD Blog presence which increased digital engagement with the project

- SDD marketing and comms team progressed to using stronger and more representative use of imagery, and encouraged more activity on social media, which hugely increased SDD's social media presence e.g. around the Festival
- SDD experienced an increase in *Next Choreography* taster session applications by 25% in 2015 compared to the figures from 2014, but a drop in 17% for 2015-16 due to the loss of a key promotion source
- SDD experienced sustained engagement by the ultimate core group of 13 *Next Choreography* participants, 10 of whom will go on to populate the Youth Advisory Group (the others are moving overseas), and has developed a 6month contact meeting and pledge system to stay in touch with these young people's progress
- SDD have gained a stronger network of relationships to promote *Next Choreography* in Higher Education, Arts and youth organisations and Conservatoires through mechanisms such as Industry events and reciprocal marketing packages
- SDD have experienced an increase in attendance by young people per se at SDD events, although this is not directly associate-able to *Next Choreography* this trend will be monitored in Years 2 and 3 to assess the relationship

In relation to the SDD Part B key indicator of success: the most evident indicator of success so far is the sustained engagement and communicated enjoyment that the *Next Choreography* participants' experienced, and the ongoing commitment of the 10 of the 13 to the YAG. The Festival brought approximately 80 new audience members and a significant percentage of them were young people which goes some way towards achieving the 3 year target of 200 new young audience members.

Pedagogically, the evidence shows that *Next Choreography* has generated the following core pedagogies:

- developing a communal working environment/atmosphere
- nurturing participants' creativity in relation to *their different* practices
- encouraging participants to see practice differently and to make new connections because of this
- working with shifting hierarchies i.e. moving from traditional top down hierarchies to more equal relationships with participants
- and combining knowing through doing/feeling with varied reflective strategies (the latter being less common with this age group).

In turn, the evidence shows that these pedagogies have developed around the following themes:

- use of time: acknowledging that less is more and being brave enough to do less in order to gain more from the participants within sessions, and considering restructuring the flow of sessions in Term 2 to allow for this.
- use of structure and resources: particularly changing the Term 1 and 2 structures so that they have more of a mixed purpose, working in Year 2 to aim for a more continuous *Next Choreography* experience, and opening the Term 3 experience of curation more to the participants.
- balancing different kinds of choreography e.g. offering participants experience of more standard and more challenging choreographic work
- finding better connections between the moving and the talking to prevent reflection from taking over from practice.
- communication and relationships: developing more personal and individual relationships with each participant e.g. giving the blog more space, and finding a useful way for people to share their experiences of performances
- further shifting of hierarchies: the Arts Facilitator is aiming to work to allow the participants to understand how to take on more responsibility, and for herself to be more responsive to this in the moment. This was thoroughly reinforced by the young people in Term 3.

- considering how to facilitate the facilitators so that they achieved what she needed for the young people perhaps by giving them more information about the young people.

Underpinning this, were the Arts Facilitator's personal journey, and the strength of the constructive critical environment around her. As the year progressed, the Artist Facilitator and the SDD Creative Projects team began to work more closely together, their working environment became more consolidated and their planning more concise, which resulted in a more collaborative approach to the course and shared learning outcomes.

#### *C Impact on policy and practice:*

It is not possible to answer this question at the end of Year 1. On reflection the UoE would like to suggest that this indicator of success and accompanying question are not productively phrased to currently offer comment on policy and practice impact.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The summary is incorporated concisely above and the recommendations are as follows:

#### **INDIVIDUALS**

1. Continue with working to change the individual participants within and via the communal experience, acknowledging that transformative change takes time
2. Find a way to track the young people after they have finished on Next Choreography. Planning is already underway by the SDD team to make sure that this happens for Year 1 participants during Year 2
3. Ensure that the wheel is used consistently with the young people either as an in depth dialogue tool or as a snapshot, and also aim to be clear whether the emphasis is on how the young people feel at that point in time or more generally for that term.
4. Continue to support the young people in their choreographic explorations within their own practice in the same way as Year 1 (see question 2 for pedagogies) as the above evidence shows that creatively and choreographically the young people are developing in multi-faceted ways. They might perhaps consider further methods for developing the young people's confidence but this in itself takes time, a fact which the SDD team seem sensitively alert to
5. Consider how theatre visits are framed in terms of response and appreciative analysis.
6. Include a timeline in the questionnaire

#### **ORGANISATION**

7. Continue to explore ways in which they can relax the style of language used in promotional material to attract and explain the programme to younger audiences.
8. Source other means of promoting the project, perhaps in a diverse range of media so that they protect themselves

#### **PEDAGOGY**

9. Structure Yr 2 sessions so that they involve less delivery and more time and space for spontaneity and participants' voices.
10. Re-structure Yr 2 session relationships across Term 2 in order to also allow for this
11. Change structures in all terms to be more mixed purpose and continuous, and to open experiences to participants
12. Change and play with the balance of different kinds of choreography offered to participants in terms of its level of challenge, how mainstream it is, and how much experiences related to it aim to teach choreographic skill or offer space for exploration alongside being both serious and having fun
13. Offer more Year 2 time for participants' own creative, practical work in order to counter-balance reflections with increased practice
14. Use the blog and other appropriate mechanisms within and outside of face to face sessions to allow deeper relationships between the Arts Facilitator and the participants

15. Continue to shift hierarchies within session structures through greater dialogue and responsiveness in the moment
16. Develop strategies for facilitating visiting facilitators and for incorporating the wider SDD team into sessions where appropriate
17. Continue with this wider involvement of the SDD Creative Projects team to capitalise on this collaborative approach to course planning

#### EVIDENCING WIDER IMPACT

18. UoE and SDD hone section C measure of success and key question to make it answerable and useful to be able offer insight in this area by the end of Year 3.

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