

ArtWorks London

Higher education institutions in London and artists working in participatory settings

Case studies

March 2013

Case studies by Amanda Smethurst for A New Direction and Barbican/Guildhall as part of ArtWorks London a new special initiative funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which supports the continuing professional development of artists working in participatory settings.

Examples from four London-based higher education institutions which offer courses or modules that support the training and professional development of artists working in participatory settings.

Introduction

These case studies provide an overview of some of the examples of courses available within Higher Education Institutions in London that offer training for artists working in participatory settings. They were written in March 2013 by Amanda Smethurst, following a series of interviews with the institutions – Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Birkbeck, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, and the University of East London.

The choice of case studies was intended to represent the different nature of HEIs, a variety of delivery methods and levels. They were commissioned by ArtWorks London, to help contribute to the discussion about how to most effectively support artists and practitioners working in these settings, and are designed to help inform the debate in terms of what is currently available, what might constitute good practice and how this might be shared and built upon strategically in the future through a partnership approach.

While each institution is different in its approach, there were some common threads to the conversations, which are interesting to note:

Commitment

For all of the HEIs interviewed there was an institutional commitment to delivering courses focusing on participatory arts practice, reflecting the values of the organisation, and demonstrated through the support these courses are offered from senior management level.

Language and perception

The perception of participatory arts practice, and the terminology used to describe it was brought up in each scenario. Across the HEIs different language is used to represent participatory practice – with words such as “education”, “public”, “community”, featuring for example. For some, this was about students at undergraduate level understanding what the terms meant, or the perception that this course was for students who weren’t able to make a career as an artist first and foremost and the subsequent negative impact on the ability of courses to recruit. However, more positively the students who did choose to undertake these courses or modules were described as those who were drawn to this area of work, vocationally, and were excited and enthused about the possibilities it brings.

Readiness

There was a question about at what point you become an artist or practitioner, and the readiness of students at undergraduate level to understand and appreciate the complexities of working in participatory practice. Many felt that the degree programmes were, and

should be focused on the students immersing themselves in their artform, and becoming competent in that. Also the acquisition of the skills, experience and practical knowledge required for participatory practice being something that students were better placed to develop slightly later in their careers when they had the confidence to operate empathetically and effectively across a range of community contexts. This provides an opportunity to explore where those points might be for practitioners to re-enter HE later in their careers, and what that offer could be.

Economic climate

The current economic climate featured in all conversations, not simply because of changes to fee structures, which incidentally is yet to have a significant impact on these courses, though some did report an increase in the quality of applicants, but more because of the impact on arts organisations who partner HEIs. There is a real risk that the funding scenario we are facing means that arts organisations will not have the capacity to host placements in the future. For some, the change is already happening from an ethical perspective, with organisations unwilling to take on unpaid work placements. For others, their capacity will be impacted on by further cuts, and their priority needs to be to offer the services and programmes to their clients and audiences. With each HEI offering a placement in some form, this could have a significant impact of the quality of the experience a student may have when studying on a participatory arts programme. All HEIs agreed that the live experience of delivering a project in the community is crucial and enriching for the students experience, and indeed some wish to develop and broaden the range of community contexts and partnerships on offer. What is needed is consideration as to how to support and sustain the relationships with arts organisations to enable this to happen.

Employment

Perhaps more significantly, the financial climate, changes in education policy and the debate around the EBACC was also referred to with respect to potential employment opportunities for those wishing to work in participatory arts, and the impact that this may have on students choices of study options.

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

ArtWorks London met with Tim Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Music Education, Annie Sheen, Projects Manager Learning and Participation (Music), Karen Taylor, Acting Head of Learning and Participation (Music), Veronica Jobbins Head of Learning and Participation (Dance), Sue Akroyd, Head of Community Studies and One Year Programmes Laban, and Colin Bourne, Head of BA Dance Programme.

About Trinity Laban

In 2005, Trinity College of Music and Laban, leading centres of music and contemporary dance, came together to form Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, the UK's first ever Conservatoire of Music and Dance. As leaders in music and contemporary dance education, the organisation also provides opportunities for the public to experience dance and music, and access arts and health programmes. The conservatoire prides itself on the unequalled expertise and experience of its staff and world-class facilities which are housed in landmark buildings in Greenwich and Deptford. The innovative course provision, exciting performances and groundbreaking education, community and social-inclusion work make Trinity Laban a leader in the advancement of creative artistic practice and has created opportunities for collaboration between instrumentalists, singers, composers, dancers and choreographers.

Across both sites Trinity Laban has circa 1,100 students, and runs a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as professional development opportunities for practitioners. HESA* name Trinity Laban as having the 5th highest graduate employment and further study rate in the entire UK HE sector: 97.6%.

*Higher Education Statistics Authority

The current offer

The primary focus of Trinity Laban is to support dance artists and musicians in developing their practice as artists. This is reflected by the evident commitment to employ practitioners as lecturers. However, the importance of acquiring skills and experience to work within participatory practice is also acknowledged and championed at a senior level, and both sites offer a number of opportunities to undertake this.

The Music faculty has a number of programmes across undergraduate and postgraduate level. For example, modules in Engaging Audiences, Instrumental/Vocal Teaching or Creative Education Practice are offered to undergraduate students. These support the development of practice in educational settings, and there is an enthusiasm to broaden the range of community contexts students are able to gain experience in, for example working within hospital schools or prisons. Delivered through a combination of taught sessions, and student initiated placements, the assessment is undertaken by Trinity Laban staff. Assessment of

practice is maximised where possible either through video recordings, group assessment or 1-1 observations appropriate within cost boundaries.

The PGCE Certificate course is an example of the responsive approach of the conservatoire, as it has been developed in response to the needs of the sector. This is targeted at working professionals and offers eight days of contact time, online support and an assessment framework, which supports the students in creating their own projects or placements. This course has offered an interesting opportunity for synergy between the Senior Lecturer in Education and the Learning and Participation Project Manager, utilising the skills and knowledge on both sides.

The Dance faculty undergraduate programme includes an option titled Dance Artists Community and Education for second-year students which gives a flavour of this type of work. Recognising that the majority of dance professionals will teach at some point during their career, there is also an option of teaching dance technique in the third year.

The Postgraduate Diploma: Community Dance is a vocational programme for people who want to work as professional dance artists in community contexts. This programme was established over 30 years ago, and is still unique in its offer. The combination of developing artistic and pedagogic practice on site at the Laban faculty, and practical experience through a placement with delivery partners such as Greenwich Dance and Oval House, and lectures from community dance specialists equips students to work effectively as practitioners. This mix of dance training alongside specialist skills development and practical experience was felt to be critical to the programme's effectiveness as it respects the need to be good as an artist, not just as a facilitator.

The Dance faculty also offers a Diploma in Dance Teaching and Learning (Children and Young People) - a level 6 qualification, this is unusual to offer a teaching qualification as part of professional development.

There is also a strong Learning and Participation department, with a team for each artform. These support the conservatoire's work within the community, and have established strong links with local organisations and schools. For example, at the Dance faculty, the team facilitates opportunities for dance students to work as volunteers within community classes and projects to gain valuable experience.

A recent announcement by the Office for Fair Access singled Trinity Laban out for community participation work: "The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) today (Thursday 17 January 2013) called on universities and colleges to step up the long-term work they do reaching out to schools and communities where few progress to higher education - and names Trinity Laban as one organisation doing exactly that."

The conservatoire has strong partnerships with local schools, arts organisations and music hubs, and the Animate Orchestra overseen by the South Riverside Music Partnership, but

there is an acknowledgement that it would like to widen the breadth of community contexts it can support the students to gain experience in.

Challenges and Opportunities

Across the conservatoire, there was a genuine concern about the sense of readiness in students to have the skills and empathy to undertake participatory arts practice, and a feeling that this isn't often present at undergraduate level, when many want to immerse themselves in their artform practice.

Within the Music faculty, there was a real sense that students don't understand the term "community music", and particularly at undergraduate level can initially be a little blinkered or monocentric about wanting to just follow teachers into a closed profession. For some students the term "community" could infer second-class, though this was not felt to be the same at postgraduate level.

Following on from the publication of the Henley report, and the debates about the EBACC, it was noted how few music teacher vacancies were being advertised, as schools simply didn't have the confidence in the future policy direction. There is a parallel effect on dance teaching in schools, made more so as dance is not identified as a separate subject in the national curriculum.

To expand the range of opportunities for students to study at Trinity Laban, the team in the Music faculty are exploring different options for delivering their courses, through music summer schools targeted at international students, or by building on the success previous stand alone CPD initiatives such as the Action Learning Sets for Arts Managers. It is hoped that this will create a range of pathways to support the professional development of practitioners.

The Music faculty are also currently developing a new postgraduate Diploma and Certificate which will offer mid-career creative music practitioners and teachers a flexible opportunity to refresh and develop their practice. These courses have offered an interesting opportunity for synergy between the Senior Lecturer in Education and the Learning and Participation Project Manager, utilising the skills and knowledge on both sides.

Junior Trinity and the Music Learning and Participation Department are also beginning to work together on implementing a mentoring/placement infrastructure which will offer both secondary school music teachers as well as freelance practitioners relevant "on the job" training by offering bespoke shadowing, mentoring and placement opportunities on Trinity Laban's public engagement programmes.

A challenge for the Postgraduate Diploma: Community Dance is increasing the amount of information that students and practitioners need to know to work across a range of community contexts such as health care or social justice for example, and the need for

students to be workplace-ready. Ensuring that both the policy context and practical aspects of child protection, safe practice and professional standards are covered can be a struggle. This in itself reflects the increasing tension between the sector and HEIs where the agenda is teaching and learning rather than creating employment-ready candidates.

This challenge reflects the responsible approach taken by Trinity Laban, but is mindful of the realities of what can be taught throughout an already demanding programme. One opportunity may be for a shared online learning space that could support students of all disciplines in accessing current information about the policy contexts and practical applications of working across the spectrum of community contexts.

There was a keen interest in understanding the work of other HEIs, and looking to identify appropriate partnerships with them. In addition, there was an enthusiasm to develop stronger partnerships across the arts sector to enable students to undertake more substantial projects

A question was also posed about how the quality of participatory arts practice was judged generally – not just within the HEIs. While we know there is some outstanding practice, there is also much that is mediocre, so where should the benchmark be; and who is competent at making the judgement about what excellence looks or feels like for the artists and the participants?

Birkbeck, University of London

ArtWorks London interviewed three lecturers from the Arts Management programme in the Department of Media and Cultural Studies – Dr Sophie Hope, Elena Yuan and Alexis Johnson.

About Birkbeck

Birkbeck is a world-class research and teaching institution, a centre of academic excellence and London's only specialist provider of evening higher education. Overall student numbers are around 14,250.

The Department of Media and Cultural Studies sits within the School of Arts, one of five schools at Birkbeck, and was created as part of the restructuring of Birkbeck in 2009. Approximately 700 undergraduate students and 460 postgraduate students currently study at the School of Arts, with more than 2,000 students taking short courses. In addition, over 200 students are undertaking research at PhD level.

Teaching staff within the Arts Management programmes are practising specialists within their areas of expertise, so are able to maintain a strong knowledge of contemporary practice in their field, and bring this experience directly into their teaching.

Current offer

The most relevant courses to the ArtWorks initiative are offered by the Department of Media and Cultural Studies. The Certificate HE Arts Management (level 4), Arts Management Graduate Diploma (level 6), and the Arts Policy and Management MA (level 7), are general arts management programmes, all of which have modules which focus on areas such as Arts in Education, and Understanding Audiences. The team have clearly also embedded aspects of participatory practice – for example the political context or history, throughout the breadth of these courses which reflects the passions and experiences of the lead lecturers.

The delivery of these courses is through a mix of lectures, projects, visits and for the MA an option to undertake a placement, which is initiated and organised by the student. The ethos has been about developing a creative and flexible structure that can be adapted to suit students needs within reason, but also creating situations such as a 'lab' where students can test ideas. Participatory practice is reflected in the teaching methodology throughout the courses. The Graduate Diploma has a more practical slant than the MA, which is strong in its exploration of context and policy. Within the MA students can chose to explore a pathway consisting of two modules, each with a practical or theory focus.

Strong partnerships are in place with a range of cultural organisations, including Tate, DreamArts, British Film Institute and the Wallace Collection. These enrich the programme through contributing to lectures, as well as hosting visits, but it was described how this was

a reciprocal relationship with partners continually learning and reflecting on their own practice as well.

The mix of students applying to these courses is interesting. For example, the MA tends to attract those with experience, and often an administrative or managerial focus, some working with the arts and heritage industries, as well as those looking to change their career. While not necessarily targeted at practitioners or artists, the courses do attract those wishing to support or develop their practice within a participatory arts context. It is thought that around a third of the students may be practitioners. This brings an interesting dynamic to the classes, with significant opportunities for dialogue between students working across different areas of the sector.

Given the nature of Birkbeck, students have tended to be more established in their careers, and were described as attending these courses as a way of reinforcing their practical learning throughout their careers to date. Interestingly, there is a sense that students are becoming younger, with a stronger international focus possibly reflecting changes in fee structures.

There is a strong approach to assessment and evaluation throughout all of the programmes, with both formal and informal opportunities for student feedback, as well as peer observations. The team described how opportunities for their CPD were generally self-directed, but a passion about maintaining their creative practice was clearly evident.

Challenges and Opportunities

The teaching of these programmes is heavily reliant on associate lecturers who are hourly paid, which means the opportunities to connect the teaching team outside of classroom time are rare. The opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas about the course, and its development are not proactively supported, and this is something that there was an enthusiasm to explore and seek to develop. This could extend to developing partnerships across other HEIs, particularly with reference to sharing knowledge and resources.

The current political context is potentially impacting on the course, for example with organisations that were willing to host placements now questioning the ethics of unpaid work placements. This is affecting the approach taken by students, teaching staff and host organisations towards their placement module. The funding climate is also potentially damaging to future employment opportunities for graduates from the programmes, as opportunities within participatory practice in the cultural sector become more limited.

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London

ArtWorks London spoke to Professor Sally Mackey Pro Dean (Programmes), and Selina Busby, Senior Lecturer and Course Leader for MA Applied Theatre at Central

About Central School of Speech and Drama

Central's position at the forefront of training and research in theatre, film and television is world renowned. Uniquely placed as a dedicated conservatoire of drama within the widely acclaimed University of London, Central is a small but international community of theatre practitioners, drawn from some 50 countries across the globe. It is a community embracing the widest range of skills in theatre and performance practice, with the largest postgraduate tier in the sector.

With more than 55 academic staff, together with visiting artists and lecturers, Central contains the largest grouping of drama/theatre/performance specialists in the UK, who make a major contribution to research in their various disciplines. CPD for staff is positively encouraged, with time allowed for the development and delivery of staff-initiated projects, recognising the networks and professional connections that such practice-based research work can generate. This approach reflects the longstanding culture of Central from its foundation in 1906 with its strong focus on industry collaboration in, for example, its teacher or actor training.

With a student body of circa 1,000 students, around a quarter of these are involved in applied theatre practice at undergraduate or postgraduate levels.

Central prides itself in its strong industry partnerships, and the value these bring to the student experience, either through placements or visiting lecturers, or when professional directors and designers will often work alongside students, or as mentors on projects.

Current offer

The main courses supporting participatory arts practice are the BA (Hons.) Drama, Applied Theatre and Education, MA Applied Theatre, and the PG Certificate in Applied Theatre with Young People (PGATYP) in Directing Text in association with the National Theatre, as part of their National Connections Scheme, or in Facilitation, in association with the Almeida Theatre Workshop Leader Scheme. In addition, it has PGCEs in secondary Drama and Media.

Although the names of the courses have changed over the past 20 years, the commitment to teaching this practice remains, and is felt to be core to the mission of the organisation.

The MA is structured to enable students to undertake five to six placements, which allow the students to challenge themselves and experience their practice in different contexts. The course is devised to try to ensure a fine balance between theory and practice, but underpinned by the belief that you can't learn how to deliver this work by theory alone. To

support this emphasis on placements, Central has around 250 hosting partnerships in place for applied theatre¹, the majority of which are in London. These are structured learning opportunities, where Central commits resource to visiting hosts, and supporting them in contributing to the assessment process.

In addition, around 100 industry and sector partners also come into the applied theatre courses of the School, and provide the students across the courses with an insight into their sector knowledge, and an opportunity to work directly with people from a range of community contexts.

There are opportunities to undertake placements in a wide range of community contexts from working with children to prisons, and health settings. International placements, for example with NGOs in India or South Africa, are also supported.

Central works hard to ensure that applicants know what the applied theatre courses will involve in advance, so that those who do apply are committed to developing a socially engaged practice, and have an appreciation of what this will involve. The BA attracts those who wish to train to enter the industry as a career and provides an opportunity for them to build up their artistic practice, while the MA attracts those who may be more established but wish to develop particular skill sets. There is a real sense of care about ensuring students that enter these courses fully embrace what the nature of the course will be, and have the sense of maturity required. The range and intensity of placements available reflect this.

It was also felt that as it is a small institution with a high level of contact hours, the relationship between students and staff is strong, and there is an honest dialogue and sensitivity about the nature of this work.

Challenges and Opportunities

The challenge around the perception of participatory or community arts practice is handled sensitively with a non-hierarchical approach by Central, to ensure that there is a sense of mutual respect among all students and staff, and the intention is that this approach flows into the industry.

Central staff remain alert to the impact of the current funding climate on cultural sector organisations. Some host organisations may struggle to survive as we move towards a scenario of further cuts. Furthermore this may affect the employment opportunities for students wishing to work in participatory arts. One argument is that this area of work could become even more important, with much targeted provision developed as we incur a greater level of social change. However, there is a risk to the current infrastructure which supports this practice in the sector. The School is also sensitive to *supporting* the industry

¹ There are a range of additional courses that engage in placements e.g. MA Creative Producing, MA Voice Studies, MA Movement Studies, MA Actor Training and Coaching, BA (Hons.) Theatre Practice

with providing experienced students during a challenging period and yet not replacing paid staff roles.

Thinking about the future, Central has connections across some HEIs such as Queen Mary's and Royal Holloway, and has tutors that might work across a number of institutions to deliver sessions, but they are keen to explore how a more strategic approach to working with HEIs could develop.

University of East London

ArtWorks London spoke to Liz Pearson, Associate Dean of the School of Arts and Digital Industries, as well as to Clare Qualmann and Luis Sotelo-Castro, both lecturers within the Performing Arts department who are specialists in participatory arts practice.

About the University of East London

The University of East London (UEL) is a global learning community with over 28,000 students from over 120 countries world-wide. The vision of UEL is to be an enterprising, international university bringing transformational opportunities to individuals, communities and businesses in the region, through diversity, partnership and excellence in teaching and research. With campuses in Beckton and Stratford, the university has nine schools, including the School of Arts and Digital Industries.

Courses within the School of Arts and Digital Industries cover a broad range of disciplines, from fashion, film, fine art and media, to digital arts and communications, games design and animation, music, theatre and dance, creative writing, cultural and heritage studies, and journalism and advertising across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The aim is to offer collaborative and entrepreneurial learning experiences, supported by the resources of the University and the wider creative community of East London and beyond.

There is a commitment to employing lecturers who are active and experienced professional practitioners and researchers and the School has close links with employers and leading organisations across the arts, cultural and creative industries who contribute to and support the courses offered. CPD is positively encouraged with staff able to take time for research, and to continue to develop their own practice.

UEL has a strong commitment to the communities of east London, and works to widen and increase participation and support social, economic and cultural life. The student population represents 123 nationalities, and students are generally aged from 21-30. The greater proportion of students are full time.

Current offer

Reflected in the aims of UEL is a strong commitment to connecting with local communities and participatory practice. The ethos of the University's art and design courses is one that is rooted in supporting artistic practice, and that encourages self-generated projects by students. Often because of the number of students who come from east London, these naturally have links to local groups or schools.

Until recently UEL offered a Community Arts Practice degree, but found that it was difficult to recruit to this programme. In part this was due to the name of the course, and the perception that students undertaking this course were assumed to be weaker in their

artistic practice and were unlikely to become artists. A decision was made to stop the course, but the Community Arts Practice modules still exist, and are now offered as options within the undergraduate theatre studies degree programme. These are now named “Public Projects one and two”, and offer students the opportunity to develop and deliver live projects, which are assessed through student workbooks and an essay style report.

Partnerships with arts organisations are strong, for example Hoxton Hall, which acts as the host for a site-specific project. These were felt to be key to enhancing the richness and depth of learning that the students experience.

A Professional Doctorate programme is already offered by the Art & Design department which supports the student’s own practice and allows for assessment through exhibition. This model is one that the Performing Arts team are also keen to develop. The intention is that this would be a practice-based option, supporting artists with their practice development

Challenges and Opportunities

Some of the issues around the perception of participatory – or community arts – practice have already been mentioned, and the solution UEL has found is working well. However, there continue to be discussions about the approach that UEL takes with regard to its ethos and approach to courses such as these, with particular reference to the level at which it is appropriate to offer them.

There is a strong question over the prior learning or experience that prepares students for participatory arts practice based study and whether this is suited to an undergraduate course, or whether at that level the focus should be on the development of students’ understanding of their artform practice. There currently isn’t an educational route at level three (BTEC/A level) that introduces students to community or participatory arts and prepares them for an undergraduate programme with a community arts focus. This may have an impact on the notion of readiness, or level of awareness about what this practice involves.

The academic readiness of some students at undergraduate level was also raised as a concern, for example tutors have noted that students have been unable to complete some basic tasks such as writing formal letters when setting up a placement, and have required a high level of support.

The University is considering the development of an MA which will cover performance and visual arts, with a focus on people, place and participation. Aimed at practising artists, with a passion for socially engaged work, it is hoped that this will provide both a theoretical and practical base for artists to test and explore their practice.

UEL is very strong on its commitment to work with organisations within the cultural sector, and is keen to see itself as an 'anchor institution' that can allow networks and projects to develop. For example the prospect of developing a theatre-in-residence project would enable the buildings and resources that UEL can offer to support a cultural organisation, while linking students and community members to high-quality professional practice. This is an area of work that UEL are keen to develop, and would welcome an opportunity to further strengthen its networks.

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