

## **The Radiance Dance Project: Handout Arts Activated Conference 2007**

### **Useful Working Definitions**

**Integrated dance** is open to and actively promotes dance that involves people with and without disabilities dancing together. The view we promote is to experience each other as having and offering diverse ability.

**Inclusive dance** aims to teach, facilitate and create in ways that are appropriate for a diverse group of people with a broad range of physical, sensory and cognitive abilities.

**Community dance** is people and community-centred with a strong emphasis on the process. The approach and methods used for community dance are driven by and tailored to the needs of the participants. Performance is an extension of the process and a way for participants to share a part of their experience with others.

### **Community Cultural Development**

It is a unique practice that works creatively with communities on their own ground, on their own issues, through cultural practice. Art production is a powerful medium for change, challenge and choice, and is very much part of the work of ccd.

CCD extract taken from [www.ccd.net/about/index.html](http://www.ccd.net/about/index.html)

## **Radiance Dance Project - Summary of Approach**

**Valuing Difference** – this is an essential component of Radiance and underpins all we do. We believe that a diverse abilities group is an exciting, adventurous and rich artistic and social environment to create in. Radiance thrives on the diversity of body shape, size, age and mobility of participants and promotes the philosophy that **ALL BODIES DANCE**.

**No Right & Wrong** – this applies to the way we move and/ or dance. Radiance promotes a broad definition of dance and the unique expression of each individual within the form of dance. We encourage and support participants to move safely, extend their range of movement vocabulary and explore a variety of ways of moving and communicating.

**Active Participation** – this varies from person to person and each person is encouraged and supported to participate to the best of their ability. It may not be obvious to an outsider the degree to which someone is participating.

We ask that **all** family, support workers, carers and friends who attend Radiance Dance sessions join in the activities, rather than watching. This models that the activity is worth doing/ valued and regardless of our perceived ability we are all able and prepared to take risks, try something new and express ourselves in front of others despite our fears or resistance.

**Co-Assistance** - we encourage participants to express themselves in their own words and move their body in their own way. We avoid offering example moves or words or physically moving a participants body part, unless this is part of the activity.

**Culture of Kindness** – we genuinely care deeply about each other and right from the start approach each other with openness and love. This is something that happens naturally at Radiance and that the facilitators model to each and every group participant from day one. A loving, supportive and respectful environment is the way we found works best to alleviate fears, calm nerves and discomfort, help people feel at ease and allow/ enable the most amazing and authentic creative expressions to come forth.

## **Politics/ Philosophy**

Radiance has grown out of the lack of opportunities for people with disabilities to access and participate in ongoing dance classes, programs or projects. It has also grown out of a need for an ongoing opportunity for people with and without disabilities to dance, create, explore, collaborate and perform together.

It is as much a political statement as an artistic one.

From the beginning it has been open to all women, with and without disabilities, with the view that in order to challenge and change stereotypes towards people with disabilities, an integrated project was essential. We are always learning from each other and view everyone in the group as a learner and teacher.

### **Set of Principles:**

- We promote a broad definition of dance and want people to challenge their own ideas about what dance is and who can dance.
- We encourage originality, diversity, authentic expression and engagement with the creative process rather than technique or style.
- We like to be adventurous and explorative – savoring the journey (process) as much as the destination (outcome).
- We use dance making and movement theatre methods and approaches from a wide range of sources and depending on how the group responds to the process often a different way of doing an activity is created on the spot.
- We are constantly adapting to the environment (inner and outer) – what people are offering in each moment – this requires a fluid, flexible approach to each session without losing sight of the original intention or vision.
- We trust in the creative process and spend lots of time *allowing* things to happen rather than trying to *make* them happen. This takes a lot of time and demands patience and trust in the creative process, in yourself as a facilitator and in the group you are working with. The most inspiring and innovative moments often come when least expected.
- Most importantly is to initially create an environment of safety, support, respect and kindness. I have never met anyone in the groups I have run who hasn't responded creatively in some way once that environment has been established.

### **Observations and Learnings:**

People respond differently to the activities presented.

Everyone interprets an activity in their own way.

To an outsider it may appear that someone is not “participating” – this misconception is usually because the person does not appear to be moving very much or “doing” what everyone else is doing. We say – just because that person is not moving on the outside doesn't mean they are not dancing on the inside.

Participation occurs at many levels and each person is involved in the way that best suits them based on where they are at in that moment. Small or big movements, one body part or whole body, flexible or stiff, open or closed, dynamic or still. We are not in the business of assessing one movement as better than another.

There is no hierarchy of movement possibilities.

All movements including stillness are equally valid and are powerful expressions of self.

Movement is a way of giving voice to our inner world as well as responding to our outer world.

Communication and self-expression without words is sometime undervalued and often underestimated, yet we know from the science of the mind that humans 'read' and communicate with each other all the time through body language and facial expressions.

Radiance offers an opportunity to connect with others without the need for verbal communication or the written language. This is why it can be so hard to define and explain to others without experiencing it for oneself.

All movement languages are equally powerful. The opportunity to connect with others without words can be profound.

It has taken a long time for me to feel confident in incorporating physical touch into the methods, approaches and activities at Radiance – we now do this very successfully.

This has been done with sensitivity, individual choice and respect.

Everyone needs space and dancing together like having a conversation requires sensitivity to the other person's needs (listening and speaking).

Participants make individual choices about whether or not they are comfortable with an activity or partner/ people while also being encouraged to step out of a comfort zone to experience something unfamiliar.

The facilitator and support worker (if the participant brings one) need to be especially sensitive to how a participant is responding to a particular activity and how they are working with others.

There are occasions when the facilitator may need to intervene and make changes/ decisions about people working together or the way an activity is being approached but these are rare and done in the context of artistic process/ outcomes or for the sake of group well-being.

Ultimately the facilitator is responsible for the needs of the group as a whole and occasionally decisions need to be made which an individual may not agree with but is important for the group as a whole.

### **What We Need**

- Money! Funding to cover direct costs of the program and further operational costs if possible.
- Willing participants who have hopefully made the decision themselves to attend because they want to be there.
- Committed and enthusiastic support workers/ carers/ families/ organizations/ departments who support and value the project.
- A suitable venue (wheelchair accessible, refreshment facilities if possible, close to public transport and suitable parking, adjustable heating & cooling, sprung or cushioned floor, as little distractions as possible in the immediate area e.g. other sights & sounds)
- A good sound system
- Interesting/ diverse music for sessions
- Volunteers who can sew (if making costumes/ props)

### **Successes**

- Women with and without disabilities are creating and collaborating together, getting to know each other personally and finding ways to relate to each on an equal basis that may never have happened otherwise.
- The broader community experiences a positive example of integrated and inclusive dance that challenges preconceptions and prejudices about what dance is and who can dance.
- Women with and without disabilities are given the space to express themselves in the way they want to.
- Women with disabilities who have traditionally been excluded from learning, creating and performing dance are given the opportunity to do so.

### **Challenges**

- **Funding**

Projects like Radiance are expensive in terms of community arts projects. Ideally there are two skilled facilitators present at each session and their planning and evaluation times are factored into their fees. At Radiance we have never had enough money for this. My co-facilitator is paid at a trainee facilitator's rate this year and prior to this was a volunteer.

Participants at Radiance are predominantly unemployed and on fixed low incomes. Any cost to attend could prove prohibitive (not including transport). Over the last three years I have been able to find funding to subsidise the cost

of the program and make it free for participants to attend. I have done the math repeatedly and as an independent art worker running the project it can never be viable on a user pays system that would be affordable to participants.

If the project is going to be performative like Radiance has been, costumes and/ or props need to be factored into the budget and subsidised for participants. If there is not enough sewing expertise in the group, volunteers from outside the group need to be found to assist with this aspect.

Transport is not included in the project so participants need to arrange this for themselves. Most people come by private transport with a support worker or family member and some come by public bus. In the first year we received funding to subsidise transport costs for individuals, especially those requiring specialist transport e.g. wheelchairs. The cost of doing this for a group of people is prohibitive and we have never been able to offer that assistance since.

- **Understanding of the project in the disability sector (organizations/ government departments involved in the project) & in particular by people directly involved with the weekly sessions e.g. support workers/ carers**

We have been really lucky to have attracted support workers to the group who have understood, appreciated and seen the value in what the project is about and has to offer. However, we have also met support workers and managers of organizations/ teams who have found it difficult to understand/ support the way we run the project e.g. consistency of support staff, commitment to the project's duration and regular attendance, our methods and approaches e.g. co-assistance, no right and wrong, active participation, the value of community arts experiences for individuals and communities etc...

Write down everything in terms of the project's values, methods & approaches, philosophy and what you expect when people commit to the project and why. Give this to interested participants and organizations before they commit (I never did this and in the third year it became apparent why one should do it)!

Create enrolment forms, media release consent forms etc... and use them.

Document as much as you can about the project, session plans, and your observations/ thoughts/ feelings. This includes successes and challenges.

Self reflect often on your own practice and discuss with your co-facilitator or if you don't have one, someone who works in community arts. Find someone to de-brief/ discuss/ reflect with regularly.

- **Evaluation (the thing I find hardest to make time to create and implement).**

There are plenty of tools out there to help you create your own evaluation tools or adapt existing ones, however I have found creating and implementing appropriate evaluation tools for people living with intellectual disabilities very challenging. To date I have not found the answer and I still believe the measure of the projects success is in each individual's experience of the project in the weekly sessions; smiles, laughter, feeling good, making connections with other people, experiencing the freedom to dance ones own dance either alone or with others, the opportunity to be seen and valued as a person with something to offer the community, sense of pride in achievements and obstacles overcome and many more.

Funding bodies usually expect you have a plan for how you will evaluate the project. I keep a project diary and write in after each session. Take photos and video footage when you can. Use evaluation forms for participants that use a combination of visuals and written word. Keep a record of attendance at weekly sessions and performances. Have a comments book at open sessions/ performances where visitors can write something to the group and leave their contact details if they want to. Create more in depth evaluation forms for support workers/ carers and family members (the people they see regularly) of participants if you want someone else's perspective on a participant's learning journey throughout the project.

Most of the women I work with are unable to articulate verbally or using the written word their experience of Radiance. We try and take photos when possible and video performances but I would have to have a video running through every session each week for the whole project to even begin to communicate to others what the feeling is like in the room when we are all dancing together and how each participant (including myself) has grown in terms of the skills we have learned, the experiences we have shared together and our sense of self as a valued human being.

## **What's Out There? (not exhaustive by any means)**

### **Dance/ Movement Related**

<http://www.stopgap.uk.com>

<http://www.adambenjamin.co.uk/>

<http://www.anjali.co.uk/>

<http://www.axisdance.org/>

<http://awakenings.horsham.net.au/>

<http://www.candoco.co.uk/>

<http://www.inflightdance.com/>

<http://www.magpiedance.org.uk>

<http://www.personimages.org/>

<http://www.restlessdance.org/>

<http://www.clubwild.net/>

<http://www.artsaccessaustralia.org/dance.htm>

<http://www.merrymakers.com.au/>

<http://www.blueeyedsouldance.com>

**Benefits to Individuals & Communities (in no particular order) we are aware of through our observations, lived experience, anecdotal conversations and recorded information from evaluation sheets, photos and video footage.**

- People who have traditionally been excluded from or had difficulty in accessing dance and opportunities to perform are provided with a space in which to do this.
- Participants make individual creative choices and decisions about how they express themselves through movement (planned and unplanned) and collaborate with others in small and whole group dance making.
- Participants use and develop skills in creative thinking and problem solving, collaborating with others, effective communication and expression, confidence in performing in front of others, organising ideas, public speaking, cooperation, successful risk taking, coordination, balance, spatial awareness and muscle control.
- Participants experience a sense of belonging to a group where each individual's differences are genuinely valued and celebrated.
- Friendships and shared understandings are cultivated.
- Barriers are dissolved between people – non-verbal & verbal connections are made.
- The group communicates a positive message about accessible arts to the broader community through open workshop sessions and performances – challenging, changing and inspiring the broader community.

## **Background Radiance**

Morgan Jai-Morincome (Independent Community Arts Worker) received funding in 2005 to create a performance project inclusive of women with disabilities with an Innovations grant through Disability ACT. The project began in February 2005 with a pilot program of dance classes for women with disabilities in partnership with CAPS (Community Programs Association) and continued with weekly dance sessions throughout the year open to all women in the ACT. In 2005 the group performed at an inclusive sports and recreation expo, a cultural exchange with The Chinese Disabled Performing Arts Troupe, The Belconnen Community Festival and culminated in a two-hour public performance in November at the National Museum of Australia.

The project ran again in 2006 on surplus funding from the previous year. In 2006 the group performed at a family governance workshop, The Belconnen Community Festival, The Belconnen Community Theatre and The National Museum of Australia.

In 2007 the project received funding from The Department of Education & Training through an ACE (Adult & Community Education) grant. The group held two open days as part of Australian Dance Week & Adult Learners Week and received the ACT Adult Learners Week award for outstanding program. The group will be sharing their own practices/ processes through improvised performances in November at The Belconnen Community Theatre and in December at dna studios, Gorman House Arts Centre.

## **Background Morgan**

**Morgan Jai-Morincome** (BA Educational Theatre, Grad Dip Ed. Drama, MA Cultural Performance) is an independent community arts worker who draws on her skills and experience in creative dance and movement, sound and drama to facilitate shared creative experiences between people of all ages and diverse abilities.

Between 1998-2000 she was the Education Officer for Oxfam Community Aid Abroad in the ACT managing an in school performance program raising awareness in young people about social justice issues through the arts, delivering professional development sessions for teachers and developing and performing role plays in schools.

Over the last eleven years she has birthed two beautiful boys and worked with a range of community organisations as well as the ACT Department of Education as a teacher and facilitator. She has also been involved in a wide range of community arts projects as a performer (singer, dancer, actor) and event coordinator.

In 2005 she founded a community-based women's integrated dance project now known as Radiance Dance providing inclusive dance experiences for women with and without disabilities. She is indebted to the women of

Morgan Jai-Morincome (The Radiance Dance Project)  
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Radiance Dance over the last three years for sharing their heartfelt creative expressions and for their contribution to inclusive dance making in Canberra. This group, its' development and growth have become Morgan's consuming passion.

Morgan currently works part time in a school for young people with disabilities and divides the rest of her time amongst independent community arts projects she initiates and implements. She is also in the process of incorporating Radiance into a non profit organization in an effort to access a wider range of funding options, develop and grow the range of accessible community arts experiences offered (programs/ projects for men and women in dance/ movement, drama and sound) and attempt to create some sense of stability and sustainability for accessible community based performing arts in the ACT region.

### **Radiance Performance Dates 2007**

Thursday November 8<sup>th</sup> 11.30am-12.30pm  
Belconnen Community Theatre  
Swanson St, Belconnen  
No bookings required

Saturday December 8<sup>th</sup> 1-2pm **or** 2.30-3.30pm  
dna studio/ Ralph Wilson Theatre  
Gorman House Arts Centre, Ainslie Ave, Braddon  
Bookings Essential – Contact Morgan on 61611192/ 0400455965 or  
enquiry@expressivearts.com.au

### **Everyday Movement Language**

- Building on and extending participants own movement vocabulary
- Participants drive the content/ direction of sessions
- Use of everyday movement language as the basis for creative movement exploration

### **Rudolph Laban**

“Rudolph Laban (1879-1958) was a pioneer in movement education and modern dance, and had a significant impact on the development of dance practice in the early to mid-twentieth century, initially in Europe and the United Kingdom ... As Laban investigated the underlying patterns and forms of human movement, he identified various aspects which together revealed the rich range of possible movement combinations” (Dunphy & Scott 2003).

My movement theatre training and much of my dance exploration have been underpinned by the work of Laban. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is an accessible way of approaching improvisation and choreography and an easy starting point for finding common ground with which people can participate in exploring dance and as a basis for creating dances together.

### **The Role of Facilitator**

- Observation - watching what participants are doing with their bodies
- Listening - to what participants are saying/ sounds they are making
- Sensing - noticing/ being aware of/ feeling the energy of the group
- Encouraging & supporting individuals and the group at all times
- Ensuring participants have equal opportunity to participate in all activities

## Resources

### Books

**Freedom To Move: Movement and Dance for People with Intellectual Disabilities** by Kim Dunphy and Jenny Scott 2003 MacLennan + Petty Pty Limited

This book is the one I recommend as the most comprehensive book you can get if you want to start your own group or dance project. I didn't get this book until recently and it will save you a lot of research, trial and error. It's theoretical and practical. A must have!

**Free Play: The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts** by Stephen Nachmanovitch 1990 Jeremy P Tarcher incorporated

All the reasons why improvisation is an incredible process to engage in artistically and personally.

**Making an Entrance: Theory and Practice for Disabled and Non-Disabled Dancers** by Adam Benjamin 2002 Routledge

Brilliant theory and practice book but more geared towards working with people with physical disabilities who do not require support to attend dance sessions and who can grasp abstract concepts easily.

**Moving from Within: A New Method for Dance Making** by Alma M. Hawkins 1991 a cappella books, incorporated

Choreographic processes (theory and practice)

**The Artist's Way: A Course in Discovering and Recovering your Creative Self** by Julia Cameron 1994 Pan Macmillan

If you still doubt that everyone is an artist then read this book.

**The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy: Working with Movement, Metaphor and Meaning** by Daria Halprin 2005 Jessica Kingsley Publishers

A more in depth exploration of theory and practice behind movement and improvisation. The context is mostly therapeutic but the principles are the same used in non therapeutic settings.

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