More Similarities than Differences

Searching for New Pathways

Researchers
Beverley Glean
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Dance and Diversity Phase 2

More Similarities than Differences

Introduction

Dance and Diversity is an action based research project that looks at the place of cultural diversity in dance education and practice with particular reference to African and Caribbean dance forms. The project was designed to take place in three phases and is directed by Beverley Glean the Artistic Director of IRIE! dance theatre and Rosie Lehan Dance Lecturer at City and Islington College. Phase One (2004-2005 funded by NESTA) of the research focused on practice in the UK and is summarised in the report Taking Stock and Making it Happen' produced by IRIE! dance theatre and accompanied by a DVD. Phase Two (2006-2008 funded by ACE) looked at cultural diversity in an International context and aimed to broaden the appeal of the work. Phase Three (2009 onwards) has focused on disseminating the findings of Phase Two by collaborating with strategic partners such as ADAD to debate material at National and International events, celebrating the work of artists, educators and young people promoting cultural diversity in dance.

This paper concerns Phase Two and focuses on a research trip made by the directors in 2007 to the USA, Jamaica, Cuba and Ghana viewing examples of good practice in dance education and practice. Representing very different levels of resources and political engagement with the arts, the directors felt that each country would be able to offer an insight into the development and survival of African and Caribbean dance forms in a multitude of arenas, all potentially insightful for the purpose of the research.

The USA with its extremes of wealth and poverty, home to large numbers of the Diaspora, who define themselves as African/Americans, has carved out its own history of dance. Within this context the directors thought it would be interesting to research how this manifested itself in terms of an equality of dance forms. Jamaica with its focus on the development of the traditional and contemporary within Caribbean forms appears to struggles with resources and political commitment; however as we were to discover there are many moves afoot to change perceptions of the arts. Cuba politically committed to celebrating the status of its unique cultural mix uses dance and the arts to define its identity, making a strong statement that defies levels of resources. 2007 was an important year for Ghana as it celebrated fifty years of Independence; with its strong tradition of African dance it became an interesting year to look at the development of forms and the new departures taking place within education and performance.

Taking the research forward into Phase Two, necessitated returning to the dominant findings of Phase One, revealing a lack of African and Caribbean dance forms within formal education, particularly Higher Education. The main reasons cited for the lack of presence include; the absence of discourse on the forms with a lack of participants and teaching expertise. This surely represents a circular situation; the absence of training routes will result in a shortage of expertise, and prevent progression for the forms in the UK. Therefore the most crucial element in the debate has to concern training; in order to build a viable infrastructure for the development of African and Caribbean dance as an art form in practice and theory.
Before we embarked on our travels, it became crucial at the end of Phase One to connect with Higher Education institutions in the UK. This took the form of a focus group held in October 2006, attended by key representative from HE, facilitated by Dr Vivien Freakley, the external evaluator and a strategic voice behind the organisation of Phase One. The focus group set the tone for the research in Phase Two allowing the two phases to naturally follow on from each other.

Priorities highlighted by the Focus Group include the idea of partnerships in the UK and abroad, combined with the development of the African and Caribbean Diploma Course structured by IRIE! dance theatre, validated by Birkbeck College, London University (1998-2001) and franchised to City and Islington College. Alongside the development of the course, the value of linking with International institutions to examine the infrastructure of similar courses was discussed. Whilst recognising that there would be many areas that are not transferable due to the specific cultural context, valuable partnerships could be formed to strengthen the case for the inclusion of African and Caribbean dance within the mainstream curriculum. HE and vocational institutions could use the development of the course as a blueprint for the creation of modular or singular pathways. Since the Focus Group met there have been some interesting developments regarding the Course, which has been developed into a Foundation Degree in Dance, working as a three-way partnership between IRIE! dance theatre, City and Islington College and London Metropolitan University.

Phase One confirmed that it is generally accepted that dances derived from Europe and America are deemed to be of a higher artistic and cultural significance within education in the UK, the dominance of Ballet and Contemporary bears witness to this fact. ‘Nevertheless the long established presence of African and Caribbean people in the UK combined with government policies promoting inclusion, diversity and equality present a case for re-evaluating the context in which arts education, in this case dance, has developed. The late Peter Brinson in his book Dance as Education promotes this worldview,

“The UK today is a multi-cultural and multi-racial society within this world. Its education system must serve the particular needs of such a society and equip young people to live within it. This means adjusting present educational provision to help all students understand the cultural diversity they will meet in life and the way diversity enriches British society today as it has done in the past.”

The commemoration of the Bi-Centenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 2007 provided a fitting advocate for culturally diverse forms such as African and Caribbean dance to become part of the core dance curriculum in schools, colleges and universities in order to promote equality. This is the goal, which we sought to share with the many international artists encountered during Phase Two. The project seeks to establish International links with partners in the UK and provide a forum for the sharing of best practice.

The work of university departments, individual artists and dance companies has become central to this discussion. Links were made with many remarkable individuals who have resolutely built up departments, companies, designed courses and individual performance programmes. They have acted as linchpins for their organisations, without whom much of the

1 Glean. B. Lehan R. Taking Stock and Making it Happen Section 3 Pg 10 2005
2 Brinson P. Dance as Education Appendix D pg 181
work would still be in its infancy. Each country provided a very different perspective, which will provide an interesting arena for debate, however issues of funding, gender, status, and survival dominate the agenda and find common links throughout the world.

The intention of this report is to highlight examples of good practice found amongst selected artists and institutions, in order to draw attention to positive ways of working and provide insight into the value of diverse training and experiences. This is an observational report, which will conclude with a series of recommendations to move the Dance and Diversity Project forwards. Following a general description of practice, the attention will be focused on individual case studies, which will be used to highlight the potential for international partnerships.
Section 1

USA

Universities, Vocational Institutions, Dance Companies and organisations formed the basis of this study in the US travelling from New York, through Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington DC and Baltimore.

The USA was exciting on many levels, entering a Country where there is a very diverse range of dance provision including, a major black dance company that is equal in status to the Royal Ballet in the UK, namely the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (AAADT). Sadly the Dance Theatre of Harlem another company equal in status now focuses on training as financial difficulties have suspended their activities as a Performance Company since 2004. The new building created for AAADT currently houses the main company, Aliley 2, the Schools with many training routes, a theatre and studios for open classes; with the founder Alvin Ailey being perceived as a national icon even featuring on a postal stamp. The organisation is a corporate entity covering all aspects of the profession including an extensive countrywide outreach programme. AAADT has performed for an estimated 21 million people in 48 states and in 71 countries on six continents, including two residencies in South Africa.  

When viewing the building and interviewing personnel it becomes clear that the issue of status becomes the key question when reflecting on practice in the UK. Since the demise of Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble there are no large-scale companies of an equivalent nature currently flourishing in the UK. National companies are only one part of the equation but what they serve to do is establish status for the art providing encouragement for the many different forms of presentation that may exist under the umbrella of one genre.

It appears to be true to say that both AAADT and Dance Theatre of Harlem have struggled to establish themselves and have conformed to a western aesthetic concerning physique strongly grounded in the tradition of classical ballet. The legacy of these companies appears to lie in the presentation of excellent technique, disproving the racially stereotyped theory that black dancers do not have the right physique or aptitude for classical ballet. The repertoire of AAADT is contemporary based with influences from Jazz, supported by a foundation of ballet, which reflects the experiences of African-Americans. The dancers are viewed as highly technical and renowned throughout the world setting a president for black dance that is not visible in the UK.

The founders of both Companies Alvin Ailey (AAADT 1958) and Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook (Dance Theatre of Harlem 1969) strived to change perceptions and create repertoires that would establish their companies as world-class. Both organisations have established schools catering for all ages and stages of progression. From their onset both companies had a collective vision of what they wanted to achieve, which is something we could learn from in the UK. Achieving cultural diversity in dance is a challenge, which needs to meet the demands of the 21st century but in order to progress, dance artists, educators and managers need to collectively work together towards a cohesive vision of equality.

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3 Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre Website www.alvinailey.org
“Diversity should not be a problem, a challenge but not a problem, an opportunity to understand texture; it helps you to understand the world. Dance teaches you about life it is a language where different languages are spoken”.

The presence of role models in the USA does much to encourage and foster the development of Black Dance. Artists, particularly young artists need to be inspired through living contact or accessible archive material. Positive role models in the USA include Pearl Primus, Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey who stand as icons. What is interesting is the energy with which their legacy is being preserved by dance companies and university departments, which encourages the progression of new forms such as Hip Hop as status for the art form is developed. In contrast Phase One revealed the lack of resource material on Black Dance in Britain, particularly that which is devoted to the individual contribution of artists and companies past or present.

Generally in the USA the connections to business appear to be embedded into the arts culture, companies routinely engage with the commercial world in order to survive. AAADT are supported by a foundation, which arrange sponsorship and organise the promotion of the building as a venue for performance and studio space. Activities are designed to support the work of the organisation, giving them more flexibility for their performance and out reach work. The fact remains true that in order to survive dance organisations need to combine artistic vision with business acumen. There are many examples of successful business partnerships, which include smaller companies such as Urban Bush Women, which is described under the forthcoming Case Studies.

Formally linking a dance company and a university appears to be a potentially positive way forward and both organisations have much to gain as the industry becomes supported by the infrastructure of the academic, in turn giving students an insight into the profession. Examples of this type of relationship exist with Forces of Nature, a company working in a fusion of Ballet, Contemporary and traditional West African dance forms; based at Princeton University in New York. Dyanne Harvey a founder member has for the last seven years been involved in delivering an African dance course to students at Princeton, currently being developed for delivery to other universities.

The Alvin Ailey School works in partnership with Fordham University who organise the academic side of the degree programme so that students attend two institutions, which exist in close proximity. The potential for building partnerships between dance companies and universities in the UK, which may exist formally or informally is an area to be debated at a later point in this research.

Returning to the field of education a range of universities were visited across the USA. (See Appendix A) Through a range of courses there appears to be a dominance of ballet with a multitude of contemporary techniques coming under the genre of modern dance. The first university dance course was launched in 1927 at the University of Wisconsin, since that time a variety of undergraduate and post-graduate courses have become part of American higher education. Interestingly enough many course leaders claimed that a vast number of their students opted to take two major subjects at degree level in order to satisfy parental concerns.

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4 Rex Nettleford Dance and Diversity Interview Kingston Jamaica, 13/02/07
5 Glean B. Lehan. R Taking Stock and Making it Happen Section 3 Pg 10 2005
around dance. Mistrust of dance seems to be the same the world over, even in a country with a longer history of dance in HE.

Many of the universities organise modules in culturally diverse forms as part of the courses. Modules rather than core curriculum practice may not sound ideal but within this framework the directors found innovative practice and developing philosophies around the area of cultural diversity. It will be interesting to see how cultural diversity in this context expands in the next few years.

Culturally diverse modules are often not restricted to dance students but offered across the university, encouraging a broader range of people to become involved in dance and cultural activities. Witnessing a class in Berkeley University California led by Professor C.K Ladzekpo brought the directors back to the research conducted in Phase One where we were asked whether there was a demand for African and Caribbean dance. Two hundred participants of many diverse nationalities joined together in an African Dance/Music class and on that afternoon it became clear how important it is to offer choice, without this the question will never be answered.

There was a feeling amongst some university lecturers that contemporary urban forms, such as Hip Hop needed to be recognised as a practical and theoretical subject. It was felt that if they were introducing Hip Hop it needed to be seen in context with an examination of the history and exploration of the lyrics. This approach guarantees that dance is able to embrace new forms and move forward rather than remaining static.

At Coppin State University in Baltimore, the dance department under the leadership of professor Vanessa Jackson strive to present all dance forms as cultural with an attached cultural heritage. Their programme mainly consists of Ballet, Jazz, African and Afro Cuban presented with modules such as cultural rhythms, stressing the importance and validity of each form. Jackson describes herself as a Hip- Hop historian, another example of the credence that can be given to contemporary urban culture by integrating the form into the mainstream curriculum. The department here was indeed forward looking, interested in promoting a view of dance more in line with the developing needs of the 21st century.

**Case Studies**

**Urban Bush Women**

Throughout the research trip, we were concerned to look at as many different forms of African and Caribbean dance as possible through training and performance. In New York we visited Urban Bush Women to review the work of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, who created the Company in 1984. Having previously seen the Company in London in the 1980’s, it was pleasurable to view them once again on their own territory and witness the testament to their survival going way beyond their 20th birthday celebrations. Performing "Walking with Pearl" for the Martin Luther King Day celebrations at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, the company connected with their large audience, which was as diverse in cultures as it was in age. Creating a piece focused on the American dance icon Pearl Primus demonstrates once again the legacy of Black Dance, clearly evident through the presence of historical role models.
Their mission statement reveals that they ‘seek to bring the untold and undertold stories of disenfranchised people to light through dance…’ Further more they go on to say,’ we have changed perceptions about body types and approaches to performance in both form and content.’

Politically motivated, UBW has made their home in Brooklyn, grounding their work in the community. In terms of style, they utilise contemporary dance, music, text, history and culture alongside the spiritual traditions of African/Americans and the African Diaspora. They have actively used the tools of dance to engage and empower young women, such as with community hair and batty parties, built upon favourite works, “Hair Stories,” and “Batty Moves.” They produce an annual Summer Leadership Institute, which connects dance professionals and community-based artists in a learning experience to leverage the arts as a vehicle for social activism and civic engagement and to strengthen the national network of community arts practitioners. The company attracts public and private sponsors for its work, which includes national and international tours. Recently the Company toured on behalf of the U.S. Department of State to inaugurate an international cultural diplomacy program based on dance, called DanceMotion USA.

Looking at their work in rehearsal, it was interesting to reflect on their unique style. The dancers are technically excellent and performed the seamless fusion of techniques with ease. They have created their own style, their own artistic expression, which connects with their history as African Americans. There are similarities with IRIE! dance theatre in the UK. Both companies have survived for over twenty years creating work that has been influenced by Contemporary, African and predominantly Caribbean themes and techniques. IRIE! dance theatre has created a host of works that are reflective of the African and Caribbean influence on the Black British cultural experience. Both companies work extensively with their local communities and use their cultural history to create new forms relevant to their work as artists.

In terms of ideals and work, the companies are similar but in terms of support, UBW is able to exist within a stronger infrastructure. UBW is able to employ the same tactics as the much bigger organisation of AAADT, in their connection with business and strategic links with education. These elements will help them to survive and is part of a general philosophy of survival present in the USA, which leads on to the question of partnerships. UBW partners with other non-profit organizations to produce the Summer Leadership Institute and its monthly culture and community series, “Being Bushified.” In addition, Jawole can call upon her experience as the Nancy Smith Fichter Professor of Dance, at Florida State University and can experiment in the studio with her students who may go on to audition for the company.

**Barbara Bashaw**

Within this broad spectrum of work it becomes useful to focus on practitioners who in the context of this paper and the focus on cultural diversity have the potential to become strategic links for the future. The first Barbara Bashaw when we interviewed her in 2007 was the coordinator of PK -12 Teacher Certification Dance Education Programme at the Steinhardt School of Education, New York University. She has since become the Coordinator at Rutgers

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6 www.urbanbushwomen.org
University, Mason Gross School of the Arts/Graduate School of Education, responsible for developing the new EdM in Dance Education with PK-12 Certification degree.

Bashaw in developing her work at New York University fostered an innovative approach to teacher training. One of the most interesting things about the work was the evident commitment to working with the cultural forms that the students brought with them, rather than imposing a standard contemporary training that must then be replicated in the schools. Research has indicated that this demonstrates a change of emphasis from teacher training in the UK, where contemporary is represented as the dominant form with cultural dance forms being seen as advantageous but not essential.

“The schools are diverse so it’s very important that the teachers are embedded in cultural practice, which tends to change their teaching and learning practice even if they are modern dancers. You are creating culture and community when you teach which has to be understood. We are interested in offering diverse forms” 7

This philosophy is geared towards the promotion of individual voices, which works towards the empowerment of teachers with ultimate ownership of their own practice. This in turn will filter through to students as they find their own voice within different dance forms.

With regards to contemporary urban culture, Bashaw recognised the need to provide resources that would help the trainees to connect with their students.

“We brought in Hip Hop because it belongs to the youth, we get the students into many cultural resources, we are in the cultural dance capital of the world…some of our students come from dance companies Hip Hop, African, modern based.” 8

In bringing in Hip Hop, Bashaw was also concerned to address the cultural history and take the students beyond what they know; challenging perceptions that it is a form without a significant history.

By connecting with current trends Bashaw provided the students with valuable communication tools giving them a starting point for their work with young people. Students also had to complete one hundred hours of fieldwork, examples of which, include an outreach dance group and a three-week project in Uganda.

“In New York we have thirty two languages in a single school so we have to cater for a diverse population. Some undergraduate students come with no experience of cultural practice which needs to be addressed.” 9

In a recent catch up with Bashaw it was interesting to see that her concern for the practical application of cultural diversity in dance education appears to have followed her to her new position at Rutgers, from an examination of established dance theories to the practical interaction with diverse communities in New Jersey. If dance is to be seen as a progressive art form then it needs to constantly re-examine established training methodologies, particularly if it wants to nurture a wider spectrum of society to participate and contribute as practitioners.

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7 Barbara Bashaw Dance and Diversity Interview- New York University USA 17/01/07
8 Barbara Bashaw Dance and Diversity Interview-New York University, USA
9 Barbara Bashaw Dance and Diversity Interview.
The broad training of dance educators is therefore vital to this quest and evident with the EdM dance programme. Within the curriculum ‘cultural receptivity’ is presented from several perspectives from courses run at the Graduate School of Education, where dancers participate with students from other subjects, to the dance education courses at Mason Gross School of the Arts.

‘In additional courses, students will take educational ethnographic stances in several classes as they make inquiry or practice research methodology; they will consider the different learning values, styles and preferences students may bring with them from their family/community culture; they will examine dance as a poly-cultural phenomena and will examine their own inherited dance beliefs; they will examine issues of race, class, gender, etc.’

Practically during their first year of study students work on placement for the entire year with different Schools, Community Centres and Cultural institutions, an aspect of which is linked to a project with the New Jersey Department of Education and NJ Network Television to develop units of study based on the choreographic work of two diverse artists, NaNi Chen (Chinese American artist) and Carolyn Dorfman (Jewish heritage) Future projects include engagement with the Latino Community in 2011 through the Latino Community Symposium and with East Asian artists, a high proportion of which are present in the surrounding community and teach at the Mason Gross Extension Division.

It appears to be evident from this programme that teacher training is being designed to cater for a diverse twenty first century society, which must lead to the examination of cultural philosophy and the entrenched views that often exist around the issue of dance education. Undergraduates must obtain sufficient credit for the EdM programme and may themselves, have come through a traditional dance route. However, Bashaws’ continuing desire in her new appointment, is that as the programme challenges existing dance theory and facilitates innovative practice, this in turn will lead to changes as students progress in their careers as practitioners.

‘EdM students will be the generation that challenges the very status quo that shaped them’

**Professor Kariamu Welsh-Asante**

Kariamu Welsh-Asante is the Chair of the Boyer School of Dance and Music at Temple University. She has had a long career as a dance practitioner fulfilling many roles as a dancer, choreographer, company director and renowned academic. During her career she has worked with two icons of African/American dance, Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham. Against this background Welsh has sought to establish African dance forms within a university structure. Welsh has designed four African Dance courses for the department of which students must pass at least one in order to graduate.

“Having the African Dance courses is a significant step because all the students have to take at least one course and within that they have to learn about Africa, they have to understand there

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10 Barbara Bashaw 2007 Dance and Diversity Update information.
11 Barbara Bashaw 2007 Dance and diversity Update Information.
are thousands of traditions. African Dance gives me the opportunity to impart knowledge that they would not gain in other parts of the University."  

Welsh openly challenges the view of the department that ballet is the dominant form but within that context she works to stabilise the place of African dance. Author of several books on dance and its impact on world culture she has developed the Umfundali technique, a Pan-African contemporary technique since 1971.

“My use of the Umfundali technique as a pedagogical and creative tool has created a niche in the dance department for students who want to study African dance, learn more about African cultures and find new and varied vocabulary for their choreographic expressions.”

In developing her own technique Welsh is following in the footsteps of the pioneering American modern dancers. She has created a technique, which practically formulates her ideas, utilising her experience of African dance to firmly place it in context with her cultural heritage as an African/American.

During the interview she expressed her hopes and concerns for the survival of the work beyond her tenure at the university. This factor alone hints at the ephemeral nature of dance and its dependence on the presence of strategic individuals. The goal must be to provide stability for each form in a variety of contexts, which can become ultimately sustainable. To support her work she has worked extensively in the local community fostering the potential of young people who have then progressed onto the university, hopefully safeguarding the legacy of this pioneering work. During many other interviews on the research trip the work of Welsh was mentioned as a major influence and guiding force by a range of practitioners. Formal Structures need to be evolved to preserve culturally diverse forms in the same way that Ballet and Contemporary techniques have been preserved by organisations across the globe.

Welsh in line with the work of Bashaw in New York also recognises the need to be flexible with the presentation of dance and adapt to the cultural needs of young people. She is currently working on a certified teaching programme for African dance confirming that:

“... Many of the students are going out into Schools with predominantly black populations and if they want to relate to the students then they need to be able to offer African dance....”

Similarly with regards to contemporary urban culture, Welsh like Bashaw has introduced modules in Hip Hop, both the practice and theory, recognising that there is a need to engage with young people and contextualise contemporary forms. George Washington University also includes the history of Hip Hop recognising the strength of its influence in America. Dance needs to be supported by its history through the resources of living artists and historical books. The lack of resources was highlighted as part of the findings in Phase One. The living work of artists needs to be documented alongside the developing contemporary dance forms, in order that all cultural forms are recognised and take their rightful place in the canon of dance history.

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12 Dr Kariamu Welsh Asante Dance and Diversity Interview Temple University, Philadelphia USA 22/01/07
14 Dr Kariamu Welsh Asante Dance and Diversity Interview Temple University Philadelphia, USA 22/01/07
Summary

Throughout the research in the USA the directors met with enthusiasm and a willingness to share ideas, conforming to the ethos of the Dance and Diversity Project, which will hopefully propel the work forwards. Classes and performances viewed were attacked with real enthusiasm and passion, a raw energy that was appealing and awe inspiring. In summary the key areas of good practice included:

- The presence of major black dance companies e.g. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem with associated schools to provide a legacy of training.
- The presence of black dance icons Pearl Primus, Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey provide role models for forthcoming generations, supported by an infrastructure of visible documentation.
- Strategic links to the business world which provide stability for dance organisations
- Working partnerships between universities and dance companies.
- New and developing teacher training techniques in culturally diverse forms
- Recognition of the value and importance of contemporary urban culture
- The development of African dance as a strategic part of the degree programme in selected universities
Section 2

The Caribbean
Jamaica

Our travels to Kingston, Jamaica connected us with the University of the West Indies, The Edna Manley School of Dance, L’ACADCO—A United Caribbean Force, the Jamaican Cultural Development Division and Creative TV. Through these organisations we were welcomed into many diverse arenas by artists, teachers, administrators and creative enthusiasts.

The sense of National excitement on the island at this time was intoxicating due to the widely anticipated Cricket World Cup only weeks away. This energy and cultural pride supports Jamaica’s drive in establishing a strong, infra structure for dance, enthusiasm is high but the battles are large as dance remains a voluntary activity with many rehearsals taking place in evenings and on weekends. Sadly this is also the case for the National Dance Theatre Company. Established in 1962 the company has formed a mutually beneficial relationship with the university of the West Indies, who guarantee their survival. Further to this is the relationship with the School of Dance at Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts. Sheila Barnett, Barbara Requa and Bert Rose members of the National Dance Theatre of Jamaica established the school of Dance in 1970 as a feeder for the company. Aside from this national institution who engage in National and International touring, there is a wealth of dance activity to be found in schools and companies.

Throughout our research the question of status returned again and again, inextricably bound up with political commitment and level of resources. Why is dance one of the few professions where its survival and existence is often dependant on goodwill and further more why is this often deemed acceptable? Despite this low status Jamaica continues to produce world-class dancers and choreographers, such as Tony Award-Winner Garth Fagan, as well as attracting dancers, musicians and researchers fascinated by the diverse cultural impact it has had on the international creative landscape. The following case studies give examples of the building of the infrastructure and the individual contribution made by selected individuals.

Case Studies

Rex Nettleford and the National Dance Theatre of Jamaica

Professor Rex Nettleford (who sadly passed away in 2010) remained a veritable force in the cultural life of Jamaica as founder of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, whilst also fulfilling the role of Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. This practice continues today although there are now wider career avenues open to the students. The university has provided status and stability for the company providing it with an infrastructure, which is often difficult to sustain in the dance world. Professor Nettleford was integral to both
organisations as Vice Chancellor of the university and Artistic Director of the Company. Judith Palmer in an article for ADAD described him as;

"A brilliant scholar, a compassionate and strong-willed Artistic Director as well as one of the world’s few existing custodians of the cultural heritage of Africa’s Caribbean Diaspora”

The School of Dance and the University run a joint BA course. The School itself also offers a degree course, where students can spend their final year in New York at Brockport University. The aim of the link is to take the students further by expanding the horizons of their knowledge. The curriculum consists of traditional Caribbean dance forms, modern dance, performance and choreography. The relationship with music is integral with all classes being accompanied by a team of drummers. The intrinsic link with music is central to the study of dance.

The relationship then is three fold, a university, a dance company and a vocational institution all complimenting each other with the range of their skills. The ideal and the recipe for longevity are to be found in creative partnerships where the organisation of skills and resources can provide an all round service for students, artists, academics and audiences. Dance has to find many different ways to survive and develop, which comes back to the question of diversity and the need to cater for a twenty first century society in a multitude of innovative ways.

L’Antoinette Stines and L’ACADCO – United Caribbean Force

One of the main advocates for change is L’Antoinette Stines, Artistic Director of L’ACADCO-United Caribbean Force who previously brought the company to the UK to appear at the Ancient Futures dance festival and Conference organised by IRIE! dance theatre in 1998. Subsequently moving onto work with the company as a guest choreographer. Stines describes the work of her company as a synthesis between ballet, popular and ancestral dance forms. These styles have been blended together to form her own technique, which she names L’Antech. In celebration of the company’s 21st anniversary in 2004 journalist Tanya Batson-Savage wrote in the Jamaican Gleaner:

“In keeping with this theme the season surrounds much of the connections between African and Caribbean dance, explores both cultures and also looks at the Caribbean in the present. As such, the show retains Stines’ technique of fusing modern dance techniques with African and Caribbean dance vocabulary, which often creates some intriguingly unique choreography”.

During our interview Stines informs us of her current project, the daunting task of choreographing the opening ceremony for the cricket World Cup. Performers were invited from all the professional companies in Jamaica with contributions from numerous community groups from all over the Island. This was a Pan Caribbean experience, which meant that many of the other Caribbean islands had to work together to make the occasion a success. Campaigning tirelessly for a living wage for dancers in Jamaica, Stines negotiated fees for the professional

15 Judith Palmer in conversation with Rex Nettleford ADAD 2001
16 Tanya Batson-Savage Jamaican Gleaner-Published 15/12/04
dancers; many of whom received payment for the first time in their career, usually such an undertaking would mean juggling other jobs with their commitment to dance.

“I have campaigned for dancers to be paid so that dance is thought of as a profession, which will raise its profile. I think the message is working its way through and the dancers are changing their attitude.”

We were invited to a rehearsal held at the YMCA in Kingston. There were up to sixty-five professional dancers working on an exciting fusion of dance and music styles relating to the Caribbean and all its cultural influences demonstrating the cross fertilisation of movement vocabulary influenced by Africa, Asia, America and Europe. It was very exciting to witness cultural diversity in action. Jamaica has embraced its cultural roots, one that reflects its national motto, “Out of Many One People”

**Barry Moncrieffe**

Barry Moncrieffe was one of the founding performers of NDTC and is now Senior Tutor in Modern Dance and Folk Forms at the Jamaica School of Dance. At the time of this interview he was the Associate Director of the National Dance Theatre Company and has since become the Artistic Director of the Company. Using his vast knowledge and experience of both contemporary dance and Jamaican folk forms he works with the first year diploma students providing them with the necessary grounding in order to develop the dance forms. Although there is no formal path way for students training at the school through to the performing company, the majority of NDTC dancers are graduates. He is a self-confessed, hard taskmaster; he is passionate about dance in Jamaica but is aware that the path to becoming a professional performer on the Island is a difficult one.

“...My aim is to teach them to such a high standard that by the time they get to the second year they must look like third years. Most of them just want to perform but it is very difficult to just perform in the Caribbean unless you are going to work in the tourist industry”.

Moncrieffe also teaches internationally in New York, Canada and on a number of occasions in the UK. He feels that there is an interest, which is untapped in these countries for Caribbean dance training. On the other hand, his vision for the School of Dance is to see the curriculum broaden, introducing students to other directions that a career in dance could take them. He wants to see dance develop in a more social context addressing disability, ex-offenders and elders. Moncrieffe maintains:

“It is not just about being on stage. Dance can connect on many levels. The older generations sometimes find it difficult to understand how dance and the arts can help troubled young people”.

A career in dance in the Caribbean comes with its challenges. There are dancers who are prepared to have a second career and continue performing. Equally, there are many talented dancers and educators leaving Jamaica after formal training in order to pursue professional

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17 L’Antoinette Stines Dance and Diversity Interview Jamaica 14/02/07  
18 Barry Moncrieff Dance and Diversity Interview Jamaica 19/02/07  
19 Barry Moncrieff Dance and Diversity Interview Jamaica 19/02/07
development and/or a professional career as a dancer. This trend appears to be a big plus for the country economically and creatively as many return and feedback into the sector. Nevertheless, the majority of people interviewed would prefer a change in the status of dance. Moncrieffe himself would like to see dancers paid, stating that it would demonstrate that the dancer is valued in the same way as cricketers and footballers.

**Neila Ebanks**

When reflecting on the progressive nature of dance it is interesting to look at contemporary urban culture currently evolving in Jamaica. Neila Ebanks a young dancer formerly with NDTC who is currently teaching at the School of Dance was excited about the contemporary scene, mainly the development of Dance Hall, which has become synonymous with Jamaica. Currently a lot of contemporary choreographers are using Dance Hall to create a Jamaican form. Examples include Christopher Walker, currently Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Madison, Wisconsin and L’Antoinette Stines who by incorporating Dance Hall into her work has tapped into a whole new market, encouraging those involved with Dance Hall to attend dance performances in the theatre.

Ebanks is part of a young generation of dancers who appreciates the impact and wants to explore contemporary urban culture further, an exciting trend in Jamaica that has led the export of young choreographers such as Tanisha Scott choreographing and appearing with artistes such as Sean Paul, Shaggy and Ne-Yo on their videos. Jamaican urban dance culture is ‘out there’ with the potential to develop new audiences across the world stage. Again, attitudes towards these emerging grass roots dance forms need to change as evidenced by the final comment made by Ebanks.

‘Neila Ebanks wholeheartedly encourages this change so that the practitioners of Urban Dance Forms can be seen as legitimate contributors to dance history.’

**Maria Smith and The Jamaican Cultural Development Commission (JCDC)**

Maria Smith is the Performing and Visual Arts Co-ordinator of The Jamaican Cultural Development Commission (JCDC). The commission is government-supported with a vision to unearth, to train, to preserve and to showcase the best of Jamaica’s culture and heritage. JCDC appears to be the chief advocator for the preservation of Jamaican folk forms. Alongside the folk form there is a drive to include and embrace the wealth of other dances and dance cultures that have presented itself on the island. The essence of Jamaica’s national culture is rooted in the ceremonies and traditions of their folk forms. These forms are sustained through the commission’s annual festival of performing arts. Each district has an opportunity to showcase forms such as the British influenced Quadrille and Maypole and the African influenced Dinki-Mini, Gerreh and Kumina. The festival lends a sense of value, importance and dignity to these traditional folk dances affording them a rightful place in the consciousness of Jamaican society.

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20 Neila Ebanks Dance and Diversity Interview Jamaica 19/02/07
Smith feels that it is essential to have full representation from all performing/professional dance companies to support this process. This is mainly through senior representatives or the Artistic Directors. The School of Dance and the University of the West Indies is also involved. This has proved to be a very effective way of working as the profession become involved in variety of creative, social and community events, keeping them informed of dance within the community and vice versa. This team also takes the shape of an advisory body for the JCDC dance department, supporting and advising Smith on policies, training needs and development.

“We have a body of people who understand dance…they help to train people in the zones and parishes for the festival…the network also provides employment and ensures that the dance will always be there. To me that is the strongest part of the JCDC”. 21

Maria Smith’s admits that her job is both challenging and rewarding. From what we witnessed initiatives and programmes that are in place are there through consultation, need and preservation. She is aware that there is still much to do but we believe that the JCDC is a vital component in the development and survival of dance in Jamaica. Each person we interviewed as part of this research paper in Jamaica mentioned the JCDC and the work of Maria Smith.

Summary

There are clear concrete partnerships that have been established as with the previously mentioned work of professor Rex Nettleford. Jamaica has a strong developing dance culture and is continually striving to build up the status of dance. Many people attend the International Summer School held annually at the School of Dance. International exchanges need to be built upon if the enormous expertise in Caribbean dance forms is to be harnessed. The UK has everything to gain from tapping into this valuable legacy of Caribbean dance through its cultural history and specialist knowledge of Caribbean dance forms. The Principal of the School Nicollen DeGrass-Johnson was keen to make sustainable links with the UK:

“An exchange programme would be good because it broadens our perspectives and gives access to International practice”. 22

The key examples of good practice are:

• The housing of the National Dance Company within the university structure
• The three way partnership between a University, Vocational Institution and a Dance Company
• The development of contemporary urban culture through Dance Hall
• The presence of a Summer School with a strong international exchange programme
• The strong emphasis placed on the partnership with live music.
• The work of the JCDC as a central body for the preservation of the traditional folk forms.

21 Maria Smith Dance and Diversity Interview Jamaica 20/02/07
22 Nicollen DeGrass-Johnson Dance and Diversity Interview Jamaica 15/02/07
Section 3
The Caribbean
Cuba

Positioning ourselves in Havana and travelling to Santiago we were fortunate enough to interview individual dance artists and observe the performance work of an established dance company, Compaigne de la Danza Caribe and observe training at the Institute Superior de Arte.

Dance in Cuba is valued and respected, endorsed by the former President Castro it is an element that forms part of the national cultural identity. There is no need to bemoan the lack of status or fight for recognition. Dance is embedded into the culture, an intrinsic way of life evident on the streets and in the school curriculum.

“Dance has essential meaning in Cuba, as part of popular culture, social, religious and family life, and as a historically significant art form.”

Manifestations of this support can be seen in the establishment of a folkloric institution in each province. Castro saw the preservation of the traditional dance forms as a way to create a national cultural identity, an important factor in the forging of a revolutionised country. In discussing the presence of a national cultural identity Sylvina Fabers Gelall, a member of the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba and teacher at the Folkloric School in Havana states:

“It is our national identity, our mission is to pick up all the manifestations in all the countries here and make it our own. We embrace all cultures and make it a diverse community; this is what we are aiming for.”

Dance is part of an approach to the arts, which strives for excellence in all fields, apparent through rehearsals and professional classes. Walking past a music school the cacophony of sound was incredible. Young people practicing a variety of stringed, wind and percussion instruments spanned the balconies of the buildings spilling out and up onto the roof. Such dedication seen against often-harsh economic conditions has to be admired; the constant justification for art as witnessed in the UK appears to be unnecessary in Cuba.

There are ample opportunities for young people to formally study dance within the state system, which is not dependent on class or wealth. This availability of training has the ability to change the landscape of dance affecting; participation, appreciation and choreographic output. After completing their elementary studies at eleven years old students may elect to complete their secondary studies in a specialist dance school. Further progression is offered through a superior level school providing they obtain good academic grades. Training is completed through two years of National Service with a dance company; equivalent to an apprenticeship.

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23 Levine, A. Contemporary Dance in Cuba Now, www.cubaupdate.org
24 Sylvina Fabers Gelall, Dance and Diversity Interview Folkloric Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Cuba 20/02/07
scheme this is designed to assess their suitability for the company. The foundation of the curriculum is traditional folkloric, ballet and contemporary. Classes in the historical and religious context support practical classes in folkloric forms. Music is seen as integral with many dancers developing advanced skills in both areas. The technical training in Cuba is of a very high standard attracting international students who must compete with dancers who have been studying intensively since the age of eleven. Dancers are therefore able to join companies at a young age.

..."The dancers that come out of the national dance schools are some of the most talented and well -trained I have ever seen. As professionals, they work committedly and are supported and respected by their government despite financial constraints. Their audience is knowledgeable, and their profession is respected as an essential part of society and culture".  

With the emphasis on technical excellence it is difficult to ascertain the level of creative experimentation but away from the mainstream there are some independent choreographers and companies working to explore new ways of working with associated risks. This in common with other cultures is more likely to exist outside the remit of government funding.

The argument for diverse training forms finds weight in Cuba as the dancers travel between traditional and contemporary techniques with ease. Evidence was provided not only on this trip but a few years ago when connectingvibes* dance company performed at the Grenada National Dance Festival in 2000. Connectingvibes* is a partnership project between IRIE! dance theatre and City and Islington College, providing professional work experience for young dancers. The Cuban group, Narciso Medina Dance Company also performed at the festival demonstrating supreme versatility as they performed contemporary and traditional pieces with equal fluidity and ease. The work in Cuba demonstrates that studying more than one dance style equally does not necessarily mean that styles will be watered down; merely that the dancers will be able to utilise a broader base of knowledge both physically and intellectually.

Case Study
Eduardo Rivera and Compaigne de la Danza Caribe

Technical agility was supremely evident through the work of Eduardo Rivera, Artistic Director of Compaigne de la Danza Caribe who arranged for us to view his company of dancers and musicians. Eduardo is an international artist whose visits to the UK include work as a guest choreographer for Union Dance Company. He has also worked extensively in Jamaica with the National Dance Theatre Company. Based in Santiago the company has links with the National School of Arts in Santiago who provide a feeder for the company. Rivera acts as an advisor for the school who follow a national dance curriculum. His company is government funded, providing stability for the work.

The rehearsal was an impressive event; the dancers in command of their trained bodies presented a seamless fusion of African and Contemporary techniques with work influenced by African rituals. The dancers were able to make smooth transitions between styles, as they inhabited different genres. The dancers were accompanied by an impressive group of live musicians.

25 George Cespedes cited in Contemporary Dance in Cuba Now.
Dance and Diversity Phase 2

musicians working in close partnership with the dancers they were integral to the performance. The relationship with music and live performers is built into the fabric of training in Cuba.

The regime in Cuba has established a national identity for dance; a style that is essentially Cuban, combining traditional folk forms with Contemporary and Ballet. The styles are interlinked and influence each other. The modern dance in Cuba has been influenced by American modern dance techniques, such as Graham, originally imported by artists such as Lorna Burdsall and Ramiro Guerra over forty years ago, demonstrated by the company Danza Contemporanea de Cuba. With a sense of their history and identity the dancers are versatile crossing genres or fusing techniques effortlessly. Rivera discussed the idea of a national identity when talking about his company:

“ Our repertoire is very African and Caribbean influenced, we have many strong sources on which to base our work, our culture, our history, our national identity which is very strong”

Although Rivera has previously worked in the UK he was keen to create sustainable links, citing it as a way to learn and exchange knowledge. The strength and identity of his work could prove to be a motivating and inspiring force in the diversity debate.

Adrian Wanliss

Whilst in Havana we were shown around by 18 year old student Adrian Wanliss, a Jamaican studying dance at La Escuela Nacional de Artes because he believed, alongside many other International students that he would receive the best training in Cuba. Battling with a lack of Spanish and money he had developed survival tactics to help him get through what seemed to be a very confusing landscape. The strength of his determination enabled him to learn Spanish and orientate himself within a few months; all guided by his belief in the training which he was able to enthuse about at length, explaining the value of diversity:

“Dancers need to be versatile, dance tells a story and has a history. If you become a diverse dancer you are able to face many challenges”

Adrian was determined and ambitious, at 18 he was acutely aware that he was competing with dancers who had been training since a young age to reach an advanced level of technical proficiency. He valued the seriousness of the training and had formulated a number of career paths, one clearly influenced by a strong role model:

“ I admire Alvin Ailey for overcoming stereotypes about black people doing ballet. I would love to dance for the Ailey Company”

The other reflects a desire to return home and make a contribution through the arts:

“ I am hoping to open my own school and company in Jamaica and build a brand new theatre for the performing arts. In returning to Jamaica I want to bring a larger pride to the arts, in Jamaica people think of the arts as a second choice it is not considered as a profession”

26 Eduardo Rivera Dance and Diversity Interview Santiago, Cuba 23/02/07
27 Adrian Wanliss Dance and Diversity Interview La Escuela Nacional de Artes Havana, Cuba 24/02/07
28 Adrian Wanliss Dance and Diversity Interview Cuba 24/02/07
The journey brought us into contact with many spirits to admire, Adrian being one of them, his sense of adventure providing a sharp contrast to students in the UK who often find it very difficult to leave London and their familiar territory. International connections would perhaps open doors for them, demonstrating in time that the world is full of a wealth of opportunities.

Summary

Bearing in mind the multitude of nationalities and styles prevalent in Britain it is not possible to conceive of a national style in the same way that it has been developed in Cuba. The prevalence of ballet before the emergence of contemporary dance may have been considered as a national style but in light of the changing demographics it is no longer feasible to give dominance to one or possibly two styles. However what needs to be developed is a respect for all dance forms particularly diverse cultural styles, which has implications for funding and the education system. The political commitment to the arts evident in Cuba strives to give dance the status it deserves.

The key examples of good practice are:

• Dance and all the art forms enjoy a high status within the society
• Dance is evident in the society on the street and in the curriculum
• There is equal access for all young people to high quality training through the state education system, a very important factor that has to be the core value when seeking to devise an equitable dance education system.
• Traditional Folkloric, Ballet and Contemporary provide a solid foundation for training and are equal in status
• Historical referencing and the relationship with live music are integral to training
• Dance has become a means of creating a national identity endorsed by the government.

29 Adrian Wanliss Dance and Diversity Interview Cuba 24/02/07
Section 4  
West Africa  
Ghana

March 6, 2007 marked for Ghana 50 years of independence from Great Britain. Needless to say on arrival at Kotogo airport Accra, late into the evening of March 4, 2007 preparations were well on the way for mass celebrations. We looked forward to meeting our host, visiting the arts/dance department at the University of Ghana, Legon; connecting with George Dzikunu, Founder and Artistic Director of the recently demised London based Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble (1984-2004) and travelling the 165 Kilometres west of Accra to Cape Coast where we would meet Dr Isaac Amuah at the University of Cape Coast.

March 6, 2007 came and went. The festival to commemorate 50 years of independence included little of Ghana’s rich creative and cultural heritage in terms of music and dance. Dance professionals and enthusiasts alike echoed this sentiment, as it was felt that organisations such as the Ghana Dance Ensemble had done much to unify the country but were absent from the celebrations.

The Ghana Dance Ensemble now based at the National Theatre in Accra and originally known as the National Dance Company started life in 1961 at the Dance Department of the University of Ghana at Legon. Under the directorship of the late Albert Opoku its aim was to preserve and develop black African Dance. Unfortunately, for us, the company were on tour in China on our visit. An infrastructure for dance education in Ghana is still at a fledging stage despite, the work being done by practitioners and educators on the national and international stage.

Like the deliberate cultural political stance taken in Cuba in terms of the arts, after gaining independence from its colonial master, Great Britain in 1956; Kwame Nkrumah the then Prime Minister of Ghana, in line with his nation-building policy and programme for the cultural emancipation for Ghana targeted the arts.

“He wanted to convince Africans that they had a past civilization worthy of emulation, and through that dance had a role to play in achieving racial reassessment...a mandate was given by the Government to establish a National Dance Company in order to preserve aspects of ‘dying’ traditional dances while at the same time using them as models for creative development.”

Our research led us to believe that in many ways dance appears to have taken a step back from the cultural plans envisaged by Kwame Nkrumah. Findings from Phase One and the body of research gathered throughout the tour support the view that conventional subjects appear to dominate the agenda when it comes to formal education. Therefore, the case for serious investment in dance financial or otherwise is for the most part challenging when it comes to Ghana. Particularly, as dance and drumming is seen as an intrinsic part of the nations cultural expression.

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30 Fon Tom – Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film- (matatu 21-22 Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Editions Rodopi 2000
Case Studies
Dr Willie Anku & Dr Newman

Dr Willie Anku and Dr Newman from the Performing Arts Department at the University of Ghana, Legon, within their interview shared a vision to train strong performing artists as well as teachers of dance. Working to fulfil the departments’ vision, Anku and Newman were clear that they wanted;

“...To train professionals in the Performing Arts and to provide cultural leadership for the university”.31

They were also keen to formalise the strategic connection between accredited training in dance and the artist’s relationship with the wider creative, social and economical infrastructure. Interestingly, the National Dance Company now known as Ghana Dance Ensemble was attached to the research activities at the University as a means of gaining validation as part of the British influenced education system respected all over Africa and the Caribbean.

Both men were open to realigning the dance programmes in order to provide better access, progression routes and develop international partnerships. They also wanted to explore other related areas such as dance therapy as Newman explained:

“It is in our tradition but it needs to be applied” 32

It is true to say that Ghana has made a significant impression on the diverse landscape of dance via the migration of a number of dancers and musicians to Britain and America; many of whom have had either a formal or casual relationship with the University or Ghana Dance Ensemble. Ironically, the contributions made by Ghanaian artists outside of the country do not seem to have resonated in Ghana. Newman recognised this and was seeking to redress that balance.

Historically routes into the university for anyone interested in teaching, administration or research in dance is a relatively easy process, with a large intake of mature students. For those wishing to become performers the route in is a little more difficult as progression routes for performers are unstructured. The need to develop a culture for the arts affecting the whole country is a goal being discussed by the team.

There is unease that social and economical constraints contribute to skilled artists leaving institutions without developing the culture. Dr Newman stated that the trend is changing as the university are starting to focus on the needs of the national company.

“The school is starting a programme to train people who are very young (aged 18) on a BA programme who can graduate at age 22/23 and be employed as a performer. There is now a need to look at the school of young graduates for potential dancers. One is hoping that soon

31 Dr Willie Anku  Legon University Dance and Diversity Interview  Accra, Ghana 08/03/07
32 Dr Newman Dance and Diversity Interview, Accra Ghana 08/03/07
the companies will look to replace their dancers and instead of going to the traditional settings, come to us for dancers”. 33

The university was also eager to encourage students to form their own companies in order to provide a more varied dance scene. They were aware of the move by Nii Yartey, former Artistic Director of the National Company to introduce a more contemporary approach to the repertory. The dance department is open to the effect that other popular dance styles may have on the culture. For instance, Salsa is making an impression therefore the department were seeking to engage a specialist to run master classes. Although Dr Anku admitted that overall,

...‘The department could be a little conservative’.

Dr Isaac Amuah

When interviewing Dr Isaac Amuah, Head of the Department of Music at the University of Cape Coast, his initial response to the first question put our general thinking of the culture of dance education in Ghana and perhaps the rest of Africa into perspective.

“We have a wealth of dance materials left to us by our forefathers, which have been overlooked by the colonial educators. The colonial educators were largely missionaries who felt that the dances were pagan in origin and they did not want them mixed with academia. All of those teachers were educated in Europe in Western dances”. 34

Amuah admitted that dance education does not have a long history, unlike music within the performing arts at the university. Not dissimilar to our approach in the UK, there is a struggle to integrate diverse dance styles particularly African and Caribbean traditional forms into the structure of existing courses. Nevertheless there are a number of dance and music specialists working to address this concern. Dr Richard Amuah himself studied at Cape Coast University, where his music professor, whom he describes as an Africanist, proved to be a great influence on him as he attempted to incorporate African traditional forms into the programme.

Returning to the university after furthering his training in the USA Amuah reviewed the departments’ study of African materials, he was aware that music holds the dominant position and acknowledges that this will probably remain. In spite of this, he believes that he is capable of ensuring that at least 70% of the courses will be devoted to the integration of African music and dance. Amuah stated that his vision was to

‘Get our indigenous materials well established in the university and within the school system’. 35

He stated that realistically this would be a five- ten year plan.

Joined up local, national and international initiatives have to take place for this plan to be realised. He mentioned the need for a shift in parental attitudes, training in schools, the call for Ghanaian professionals abroad and government support. For example, Panafest is a biennial festival that takes place in Ghana promoting Pan Africanism through arts and culture. The

33 Dr Newman Dance and Diversity Interview, Accra Ghana 08/03/07
34 Dr Isaac Amuah Cape Coast University, Ghana Dance and Diversity Interview 12/03/07
35 Dr Isaac Amuah Dance and Diversity Interview.
festival first took place in 1992 and in recent years the hub of the festival has moved from the capital Accra to Cape Coast. The Centre for National Culture (CNC) is situated opposite the University of Cape Coast and houses The Centre for National Culture Folkloric Company (CNCFC) who is an 18-member resident dance company. Panafest has had an important impact on both the profile of the company and dance in the region. The festival has encouraged the development of a number of smaller dance troupes, which Amuah feels will benefit students studying dance as part of their music degree as involvement will add to their professional development. He stated that CNCFC was in a position to become a positive role model for dance; this should be encouraged and formalised. He claimed that private investors have had to support Panafest after the government withdrew support. He feared the lack of support for Panafest but felt that the booming tourism industry could provide the best form of survival. A culture of thriving dance projects would encourage a greater intake at the university, as potential students would begin to see the developing opportunities in the subject.

George Dzikunu

George Dzikunu is a prime candidate for the call to Ghanaian professionals abroad that Dr Isaac Amuah discussed. Unfortunately, resettled in Accra Ghana after 20 years as Artistic Director of Britain’s leading Pan African Dance Ensemble-Adzido (1984-2005) George Dzikunu has laid down his artistic hat to focus on his new electrical business.

In conversation with Dzikunu we wanted to get a sense of his contribution to diverse dance in the UK, examining what we gained and what we may have lost as a sector. It has to remain a very disappointing factor that George Dzikunu with all his experience and expertise has possibly become lost to African Peoples Dance (APD) forever.

George’s vision for Adzido once the company’s funding status to Regular Funded Organisation (RFO) from the Arts Council was confirmed was to “create a professional company that would compete on the international stage, alongside any other dance company”.  

He explained that he had no desire to develop an education programme.

“My view was that by presenting traditional African dance the younger generation could then take it and develop it, as they wanted”.

It was envisaged that all training would happen and be more affective on site and with the company, especially as he was keen that black dancers of African & Caribbean descent born in the UK had the opportunity to audition for the company. Adzido’s legacy of twenty-one years has been to leave a number of ex members (approximately 20%) to remain involved mainly as freelance artists in dance. However access to the company’s archive remains difficult to attain.

George Dzikunu Accra Dance and Diversity Interview 09/03/07
George Dzikunu Dance and Diversity Interview 09/03/07
George Dzikunu talked passionately about the pressures put on the company by the Arts Council to conform and somehow be comparable to better-funded and longer established dance institutions, such as the national Ballet and Contemporary Dance Companies.

Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble may well have been the victim of the director’s vision operating within an infrastructure that was unprepared for a large-scale traditional African dance company which lacked the necessary understanding and resources to secure its existence. It will remain important for the history of the company and its demise to be accurately documented, in order for lessons to be learnt and the company’s contribution to the history of Black British Dance to be formally recognised.

**Summary**

On reflection Ghana’s Silver Jubilee celebrations represented a fair reflection of where arts and culture in relation to dance is positioned in Ghana. The exhibition of the country’s development bore heavy colonial overtones. Although there is a very strong sense of creative and cultural identity there is a plan that needs to be put in place that demonstrates how Ghana is going to create a strong infrastructure for dance and how that will filter into the wider national and international dance communities. Although Ghana has a National Dance Company based in Accra Dr Willie Anku is concerned that dance graduates from Legon University are not finding employment in the company.

There are many dance troupes all over Ghana doing traditional dance performances in a number of different settings. Few have come via formal training however, similar to many of their contemporaries working in traditional dance forms in the USA and the Caribbean it appears that working within traditional/folk forms performing in hotels, clubs, restaurants and festivals can become a main source of income.

“We have a national dance company but those in the dance company are not products of the dance school, there should be a way for us to channel students into the company”.

This is just one example of the mammoth task to be undertaken. Every one we encountered shared this vision of cohesion; therefore we have no doubt that change is on the horizon.

**The key examples of good practice are**

- A willingness to address the short falls within existing courses
- Realise the potential of tourism for the students in this respect
- Classes in traditional dance are prioritised
- Recognition of the importance of emerging dance styles
- The inclusion of popular dance styles in university programme
**Conclusion**
**The Way Forward**

Taking the Dance and Diversity research forward to Phase 2 was exciting on many levels as it gave the directors the opportunity for comparative reflection on UK and International practice. The research has confirmed that the potential for developing equality through the promotion of cultural diversity is infinitely possible, providing that strategic contacts in education and performance are willing to actively engage in the research.

To summarise the key issue appears to be once again, the status of dance, in particular African and Caribbean forms, how they are perceived as art forms by governments with implications for funding and resources. This impacts on the recognition of the forms amongst educators, artists, managers and those in positions of influence who have the power to determine the future directions of dance.

Returning to the question of training and the presence of African and Caribbean dance within H.E. it becomes crucial that effective partnerships between National and international Institutions are developed, in order for the benefits of best practice to be shared. On a National level HE Institutions in the UK need to be persuaded of the value of including African and Caribbean dance, ideally as an equal partner within the core curriculum, which may manifest itself as modules in the beginning stages. In particular the work of Professor Kariamu Welsh at Temple University is testament to the viability of including the forms as part of the core curriculum. Links with the professor and Temple University would be extremely valuable in laying down broader foundations for courses in the UK.

Survival remains a key issue for the dance sector and the practice of forming strategic partnerships with business as witnessed in the US has to be a pathway worth pursuing. Although this practice does take place in the UK it could be more widespread, thus easing the burden on the arts funding system. Partnerships between dance companies and universities also aid the quest for survival as people join together to pool resources in the pursuit of common goals.

With regards to teacher training there appears to be much to be learnt from Barbara Bashaw at New York University, which may involve a re-framing of ideas. Catering for culturally diverse populations of young people involves developing their voice through the inclusion of a range of dance styles, which does not necessarily assume that contemporary is the dominant form.

Viable training in African and Caribbean dance in schools and through HE Institutions will provide an infrastructure of skill in the forms. Alongside practical training, academic skill levels needs to be nurtured and recognised in order to provide much needed material in the documentation of the forms. This includes recognition of artists currently working, a practice that has begun to be addressed by ADAD in their 2007 publication 'Voicing Black Dance: The British Experience 1930s-1990s’. The UK suffers from a lack of visible icons both historical and current which need to take their place in the canon of dance history. Contemporary urban forms such as Hip Hop need to be more widely recognised and analysed within academic circles, again to give status to the form and attract a new generation of young people to dance. Since this research was completed the University of East London has launched a new and innovative
programme ‘BA Dance: Urban Practice, which hopefully signifies a change in the perception of new forms. In the USA there are some dance practitioners who label themselves as Hip Hop historians, thus giving credence to the work.

Returning to the question of performance the UK would benefit from a major scale dance company to replace Adzido, putting it on a level with the existence of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. This investment could then provide an umbrella of support for a range of companies to exist within the genre of African Peoples’ Dance. Traditionally the poor relation dance companies struggle to survive, however the existence of large scale companies afforded to other genres such as contemporary and ballet improve the status of the forms.

Travelling leaves impressions, the strongest of which was perhaps that received in Cuba of the high status and political commitment to Dance. It is worth reiterating the fact, that dance has been used as a tool to create a national identity, celebrated as a profession and on the street. Classical, folk and modern combine to form this national identity. Status is reflected in the infrastructure of a developed dance education system. It would appear that all things begin with training, if that is carefully structured the rewards will be felt across the whole profession. While it may not be possible to create a national style in the same way the lessons have to be in the recognition of dance as a diverse art form. Thus pressure needs to be brought to bear on the government, as seen by the presentation of the Dance Manifesto to David Lammy, Minister for Culture in 2006. The manifesto was produced after a national consultation process, clearly outlining the nature of the profession and the factors that are needed to safeguard its future. Since that time festivals such as ‘The Big Dance’ have done much to highlight the popularity of dance and engagement with a large and diverse population. The Foundation for Community Dance together has done much to research into the area of national standards for the profession and recognised qualifications for a diverse range of teachers.

The key then lies with addressing the underlying low status of dance in particular African and Caribbean forms. There is much work to be done but on a positive note there are many things that will aid the aspiration of equality. To summarise they include International and business partnerships, a re-examination of current teacher training methods and the accessibility of culturally diverse training. These factors need to be enhanced by raising the status of the forms through the development of academic scholarship.

All of these things need to be debated nationally and the findings of this international research discussed through extended Focus Groups and through engagement with strategic organisations to debate the findings at key events. Our short term objective is that once the National debate has taken place and strategic partnerships have been formed the ideals of the project can begin to be practically realised through a series of pilot projects in schools and HE organisations. Initial projects will then be able to generate their own survival and longevity supported by a developing infrastructure, aided by graduating students from the newly constructed Foundation Degree in Dance.
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Appendix 1

Abbreviations

AAADT: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre
ACE: Arts Council England
ADAD: Association Dance of the African Diaspora
HE: Higher Education
NDTC: National Dance Theatre Company
NESTA: National Endowment Science, Technology, Arts
UBW: Urban Bush Women
Appendix 2

Interviews Conducted in the USA Universities

Dyanne Harvey, Professor Dance, Founder Member Forces of Nature
Princeton University
New York

Dr Kariamu Welsh Chair Dance Department
Esther Boyer College of Music and Dance,
Temple University
Philadelphia, USA

Ronnie Reddick, Professor Hip Hop
Hala Fauzi – Middle Eastern Dance Specialist
Stanford Dance Division, Stanford
San Francisco, California, USA

Professor CK Ladzekpo
University of California Berkeley,
Berkeley
San Francisco, California, USA

Professor Vanessa Jackson,
Emily Berry (Dance Specialist)
Coppin State University
Baltimore, USA

Professor Mary Buckley
George Washington University,
Washington, USA

Vocational Schools/Arts Organisations

Natasha Thomas- Co-Director, Arts in Education and Community Programme
Ex- Company Member
Alvin Ailey
New York, USA

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar- Artistic Director
Amy Cassello – Company Manager
Urban Bush Women
New York, USA
Company viewed in rehearsal and performance.

Rima Faber- Director National Dance Education Organisation Washington, USA
Appendix 3
Interviews Conducted in Jamaica

Universities

Professor Rex Nettleford
University of the West Indies
Kingston, Jamaica

Vocational Schools/Dance Companies/Arts Organisations

Nicolleen DeGrass Johnson- Director
Barry Moncrieff – Senior Tutor/Associate Director National Dance Theatre Company Jamaica
Nelia Ebanks- Lecturer
Edna Manley College of Performing Arts
Kingston, Jamaica

L’Antoinette Stines Artistic Director
L’ACADCO-United Caribbean Force
Viewed preparations for dance celebrations for opening ceremony of Cricket World Cup.
Kingston, Jamaica

Creative TV- Kirk Buchanan Director
Kingston, Jamaica
Appendix 4
Interviews Conducted in Cuba

Universities

Dreisser Durruthy Bombale- Teacher of Afro-Cuban and Folkloric Institute Superior de Arte Havana, Cuba

Vocational Schools/Dance Companies/Arts Organisations

Sylvina Fabers Gelall/Maria Elena Gomez – Dance Teachers/Company Members Folkloric National de Cuba Viewed Company Rehearsals Havana, Cuba

Adrian Wanliss Jamaican Dancer Studying at La Escuela Nacional de Art Havana, Cuba

Eduardo Rivera Walker General and Artistic Director Compaigne Teatro de la Danza Caribe Santiago, Cuba
Appendix 5
Interviews Conducted in Ghana

Dr Willie Anku - Performing Arts Department
Dr Newman - Dance Lecturer
University of Ghana, Legon
Accra, Ghana

George Dzkimu
Ex Adzido Artistic Director (London)
Accra, Ghana

Dr Isaac Amuah Head of the Department of Music
University of Cape Coast
Cape Coast, Ghana
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