

Dance Teacher and Freelance Artist Case Studies



Teaching and leading dance is a varied and fulfilling career – sometimes challenging, but always rewarding! In this Case Study Guide you will hear from a range of dance teachers and freelance artists working in schools or community settings about their journey into teaching and leading dance, with insights from those at various stages in their career. We hope their stories will inspire you!

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Ray Oudkerk

Assistant Principal for Performing Arts – The BRIT School

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I was 10 when the TV series Fame hit the screens, when Gene Anthony Ray's character Leroy Johnson inspired me to try some formal classes in ballet, tap, disco and other styles at a few local dance schools in Ipswich. Although I stopped formal dance classes after a couple of years, I continued spending plenty of time on the dance floor at discos and clubs. This love of just dancing and a typical, "what will I do with my life?" question, somehow led to me to studying for a degree in Dance & Philosophy at Middlesex University. I took an opportunity to further my dance training at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance for a year, staging Troy Game with the legendary Namron. Loving dance and education, but with little more than an idea of being a school teacher, I completed a PGCE in Dance at Chelsea College in Eastbourne (part of Brighton University).



HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

I started my teaching career as the first teacher of Dance at Dunraven School in Streatham, South London and spent the next ten years there, learning how to teach dance to those that wanted to learn and, as significantly, those that didn't think they wanted to dance.

After a family year out abroad, I landed back in South London at Forest Hill School for Boys as Head of Dance under the charismatic Headteacher Pete Walsh. I had the privilege of Pete tasking me with putting Dance on the curriculum and making it part of the school's DNA. Over 5 years that's exactly what we did, with great partnerships and links (Laban, The Royal Albert Hall, BalletBoyz, The Royal Ballet School, The Royal Academy of Dance, Boy Blue Entertainment, etc.). I was also given the opportunity to grow the department, qualify as an Advanced Skills Teacher and complete an MA in Education through the Royal Academy of Dance.

Time to move on and I took my first role in a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) at Harris Academy for Boys East Dulwich (HBAED) (still teaching Dance). Moving into an SLT was a steep learning curve to say the least, but the chance to play more of a role in whole-school decision making. During my time at HBAED I was fortunate enough to take the role of Chief Examiner for AQA GCSE Dance (currently Chair) and join the Board of Rambert Dance Company, roles I continue to relish.





Since leaving HBAED I've been Assistant Principal for Performing Arts at The BRIT School in Croydon under the Principalship of the visionary Stuart Worden. If ever there was a dream school for teachers of the Arts – this is it. I've learned so much from staff at this unique state-funded school.

Recently, I've also been appointed as Chair of Rambert Grades, I'm so excited to be part of this brand new dance qualification. It really chimes with my own belief that dance can offer all young people transformative opportunities and experiences.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Remember that young people are amazing – let yourself be amazed, keep learning from others, learn from your strengths, know your value, say yes to everything (but know when to say no!), advocate for the Arts and breathe, reflect and try to enjoy!

“Remember that young people are amazing – let yourself be amazed, keep learning from others, learn from your strengths, know your value, say yes to everything (but know when to say no!), advocate for the Arts and breathe, reflect and try to enjoy!”

Johnny Autin

**Creative Director, Choreographer,
Dance Teacher**



CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I started taking dance classes (modern and hip-hop) when I was 16 at my local dance school, having done gymnastics for several years prior. I went on to train at the Regional Conservatoire of Music and Dance in Poitiers (France) in Ballet and Contemporary Dance, while studying simultaneously at the School of Law and graduating from both in 2006. From very early on in my career I combined performing, choreographing and directing work; experimenting with a range of different styles, from contemporary and street dance to flamenco. I continued my professional development in the UK, working for a variety of innovative dance companies as a performer, rehearsal director, choreographer and/or dramaturge including Kompany Malakhi (Kwesi Johnson), Tempered Body Dance Company (London), HarnischLacey Dance Theatre (Cardiff), State of Emergency, Ydance (Glasgow), Southpaw (Newcastle), 2Faced Dance Company, Ludus Dance, Gravity & Levity.

Based in the UK for over 13 years and now living in Birmingham, I have worked and collaborated with choreographers and companies throughout Europe, as well as touring work worldwide (most recently China and Australia).

As a workshop leader and educator, I have over 15 years of experience with school projects and the delivery of dance and movement workshops with educational bodies, dance agencies and centres for advanced training across the UK. Teaching credits include The Place London, DanceXchange, Royal Opera House, Wales Millennium Centre, Southbank Centre and Sadler's Wells. I am the Artistic Director of Man Made Youth Company (est. 2014), Birmingham's first independent all-male youth dance company resident at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) and the Creative Director of the professional touring company Autin Dance Theatre (est. 2013).

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My career has developed in unexpected ways, as I never thought I would be touring internationally or managing my own dance company when I started out. I guess there are many things in this industry that are out of your control. Sometimes it's down to luck and sometimes it's sheer hard work and perseverance that get you the opportunity that you're after.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Be conscientious about your regular physical training and fitness level but pay attention to your mental health and emotional wellbeing. Develop and nurture your people skills (emotional intelligence, "read the room", networking and communication skills). Be resilient in the face of adversity, rejections and challenges, as those are the best lessons and learning experiences. Lou Platt, Artist and Wellbeing practitioner taught me that one. Follow the P.A.C.E. model -Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy.

"My career has developed in unexpected ways."

Delene Gordon

Dance teacher to Freelance Dance Artist

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

My dance education started in primary school where we had a supportive music teacher that encouraged us to create dances and move. That encouragement continued in secondary school where dance was an important part of the curriculum and was really supported within the school. We used to have an annual dance show completely student-led with direction from the dance department. Dance has always been a great escape for me and its significance grew in that time. At 14 I auditioned for Youth - now called Shift - which was a new youth company based at The Place. This was the point when dance became my everything. We would train twice a week and perform about 20 shows a year across London. I stayed in Youth until I was 18. The opportunities this afforded me led to my decision to train in dance full-time. I went to Northern School of Contemporary Dance and I really lived and loved it. It was not a decision supported by my family, but it was one I made solely for myself and don't regret for one second. The training was intense but so life affirming.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

I danced professionally with Phoenix Dance Company as it was known then and then worked in children's theatre for a while. I then took a gap year and travelled from Mexico to Brazil in that time, which was great for dance discoveries and for me to really think about what I wanted, this is when I decided I'd do my PGCE on my return to the UK. I did my PGCE at the University of Brighton and at that point Dance in Education was flourishing, I got my first job midway through the course. I worked happily for five years in my first secondary school, dance was valued and I had lots of opportunities but I noticed after a while that something was lacking so I left the formal educational setting and went back to teaching as a freelancer.

This chapter in my career has been about versatility and personal growth I went from the routine and regular to the unknown - and flourished doing so! I went from working with 11-19 year olds to any age they come! This now means I work with ages 3-100 in all kinds of settings. I now work for myself and some major dance organisations and my focus has opened out from dance as art for performance to include dance for health and wellbeing. I feel more worthwhile as an artist as I still have opportunities to take class and dance. I would never have imagined I'd have had such a varied career all related to dance.

I'm now training to become a Biodynamic Psychotherapist which really encompasses all that I have learned along the way (I also have a career as a holistic massage therapist). I would not have been ready for this journey without all that came before.



“This chapter in my career has been about versatility and personal growth.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

To know yourself so that you are not dependant on other people's opinions for your success and motivation. Understand your boundaries and know when you need to say 'enough'. That applies to your body and what others ask you to do, but also to your emotional boundaries. Be open to experiences as you never know where they will lead. Know your worth and what makes you special. Enjoy it, it's an amazing field to work in!

“Understand your boundaries and know when you need to say ‘enough’. That applies to your body and what others ask you to do, but also to your emotional boundaries.”



Jo Hodson-Prior

Dance Teacher at The Angmering School and PGCE Dance Coordinator and Professional Studies Tutor at The University of Chichester



CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I started dancing at the age of 3 and took classes in ballet, tap, modern, jazz, etc. working my way through the ISTD graded syllabi. At the age of 9 I attended a full-time stage school for a year, where I was able to develop my skills in drama, musical theatre and singing as well as consolidating my dance training. The Stage School had an agency and I was able to work professionally at a young age, which further fuelled my love of performing. However, like many parents of children in the arts, my parents were concerned about the level of academic rigour I was receiving and although devastating at the time, the move back to a comprehensive school was probably one of the best decisions that was made about my training.

I continued dancing throughout school and college at a local dance school and made the controversial choice (for me) to study French and Italian at Bristol University, seemingly turning my back on my love of dance. Predictably, this was not the correct career pathway for me and I found myself spending more time taking outside professional dance classes, then focusing on my language studies. I think this was a lesson that if you are a dancer, it's in your blood and it's very difficult to let go of something that ultimately defines who you are.

Following my short time at Bristol University, thanks to the Dance department at the University of Chichester, I was able to seamlessly transfer to a Ba Hons Dance degree and was fortunate to study under some incredible lecturers. My university training was excellent and was really my first introduction to contemporary dance. After graduation I completed multiple dance projects, performed and worked freelance with a number of paid performance and teaching projects and then decided to study for my PGCE in Dance at Brighton University.

“I believe dance teaching is the most rewarding career and I have seen first-hand the capacity dance has to change and shape lives.”

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My roles at school have shifted and changed over the years, due to my interest in different aspects of dance education and the birth of my two children. I started as the Head of Department in my first teaching post as a Maternity cover, teaching Dance and Drama and this role quickly developed into a full time dance post as the provision for dance increased.



After 3 years of being Head of Dance, I became an AST (Advanced Skills Teacher) and was able to work across Sussex developing high quality dance provision in Primary and Secondary settings. I was then promoted to Head of Performing Arts and continued in this role as well as developing my work at the University of Chichester as an associate lecturer and a moderator for GCSE Dance.

After mentoring PGCE Dance trainees for a few years, I quickly realised that my passion for high quality dance provision and Initial Teacher Training was an aspect of my career, which I wanted to pursue and I was appointed Professional Tutor at my school, working with trainees across a range of different ITT programmes and delivering school based Professional Studies. In 2013 I was employed as one of the PGCE Dance Coordinators at the University of Chichester, a role that enabled me to continue my teaching in school and ensure that the theoretical content that was delivered through the PGCE course, was based on authentic practical experience in the classroom. I also completed my Masters in Education and hope to continue with PhD study within the next year.

“It is important to remember why you became a dance teacher in the first place.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

I believe dance teaching is the most rewarding career and I have seen first-hand the capacity dance has to change and shape lives. Yet, it is hard work. Dance teachers work long hours, sometimes in a department of one and you can often feel like a solo voice trying to defend your subject. It is important to remember why you became a dance teacher in the first place, even in the most difficult of times, dance will always be within you and you have to keep believing in it's magic.

Dollie Henry

Jazz Artist, Choreographer, Creative Theatre Director, Educator, Author

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I was born in Bridgwater, Somerset in 1962 and my life dancing began at the age of four at Mollie Mayhews School of Dance in Northampton. My formal training was all classical dance; I trained and was examined in RAD and ISTD ballet. In my wildest dreams, I wanted to be the first black british ballerina, but I soon realised that wasn't going to be possibility due to the racism in the arts in the UK at that time.

At 11 I started attending a Youth Drama Hub and also participated in Dance Competitions all across the country, which allowed me to develop as a stage performer and not just a studio dancer. I attended Laine Theatre Arts, where I continued to accomplish all my various set dance examinations and achieve my ISTD teaching qualifications, LAMDA Awards for Acting. At the same time as being at Laines 5 days, at the weekends I was also training with Black American Jazz choreographer/ Director/ Educator - Charles Augins on his Creative Arts program, The American School of Performing Arts based at Drury Lane.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

On leaving Laines, I already knew that there was no opportunity for me to go into a jazz company as that's what I wanted to achieve. The commercial dance route was the only potential option at the time. However, by fortune I became assistant choreographer and soloist dancer with the of the Olivier Briac Company based in France. Choreographer/Director Briac, was one of the first employees that took me seriously. He allowed me to be all the things that I could be at that time in my life (18-21 years) and really helped formed my early career. I learnt how to light a show, how to design sets, sew a costumes, understand theatre etiquette and respect, all the fundamental things I think dancers take for granted today. What I also understood very early is it's about how you prepare yourself for your industry and understand and appreciate all the hard work that goes into creating a production and your part in it. I also think this allowed me to realise that I was not just going to be just a dancer. I was already choreographing.

From France, I returned to the UK and became a performer with Dougie Squires Second Generation which lead to becoming his Dance Captain and assistant. He prepared me further to understand how a creative team works, loyalty and what it took to be a company director, which guides me today with my own company BOP.

As a jazz dancer and burgeoning jazz artist, my journey of research and mentoring came when I took myself to America (1990-94). There I was truly able to develop my artistry and knowledge of the Jazz art form with Black Jazz creatives, choreographers, directors including, George Faison, Dianne McIntyre, Judith Jamison, Louis Johnson, Frank Hatchett and many dance role models from the Alvin Ailey Company and Dance Theatre of Harlem.



Over my now 38 year career as a Jazz creative, choreographer, director and within my position as educator and creative mentor, I have been fortunate to work with countless universities, colleges and school as well as dance companies, both here in the UK and internationally. I have developed a Jazz dance technique and creative Jazz exercise program that I share globally and have published a book *The Essential Guide to Jazz Dance*, that shares the historical lineage and contextual narrative of the Jazz Dance journey, the artistic and black aesthetic of the jazz expression. I continue to push boundaries for the artistic and creative development of the Jazz Theatre community through BOP Jazz Theatre Company (BOP), my creative company which I founded in 1996 and is still today producing, performing and educating the next generation of UK Jazz artists. As founder of one the few Jazz companies in the UK, BOP is dedicated to creating a legacy that articulates the real practice of Jazz Dance Theatre and Jazz dance education.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

I was very lucky to have parents who saw my early enthusiasm, ability, determination and fully supported my dreams to make dance my lifeline. However, I was also made very aware of the real knocks, pitfalls and discriminations, both as a person of colour and as a woman. Fair to say, this never deterred or disrupted my dreams.

It may sound cliché to say, but what I know is you have to truly believe in yourself and then be honest with yourself too. There is no getting away with it, to achieve your goals you have to put 'real time' into working extremely hard for that dream, not just at your craft but on yourself as an individual, emotionally and mentally. You have to be willing to start at the bottom and work your way up, learn from your time in training, explore your craft, learn from those you work with, even those you don't like. You can learn from any and from every situation.

We need to go back to basics sometimes and remember why we started and have a plan that you can work towards and achieve in reality. What I do know despite all the knocks, disappointments and all the 'No's' you do have to hear, before you hear that YES! ... you will be even more appreciative when the rewards of all your hard work start to come your way.

Ask yourself what you really want to achieve for yourself and be honest with yourself. As I say to myself, my company dancers and all dancers I teach ... If this is what you want to do, then you cannot treat it like a hobby! When you think you cannot work any harder on yourself, you dig deeper and there you will find your calling. dedication, commitment, tenacity and sheer hard work is what it takes to sustain and succeed and have a career in the arts. Remember to enjoy the process and the finding yourself in the process. "Don't get bitter, just get better!!"



"You have to truly believe in yourself and then be honest with yourself too."

Verity Merryweather

Teacher of Dance and Professional / Induction Tutor (Cambridge Academic Partnership) and Senior Tutor, PGCE Tutor and Specialist Leader of Education (Cambridge Teaching Schools Network)

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I began my training with The Barrett Smith School of Dance under the amazing direction of Virginia Smith and Gillian Barrett studying ISTD ballet, tap and modern. I studied both Dance and Drama at GCSE and A Level. It was at secondary school that John Kane helped guide and nurture my skills. He was inspiring; it was his dynamism, passion for the subject and creative boundary-pushing that made me want to become a teacher.

I studied at De Montfort University, Bedford under some inspirational lecturers who fostered my creativity, pushed me technically/expressively and consistently modelled outstanding teaching and learning practices. After gaining a First Class degree in Performing Arts, I continued my studies by undertaking a PGCE in Secondary Dance. I was lucky enough to be taught by Maggie Killingbeck, the Dance in Education expert. It is thanks to her educational groundings, theoretical underpinnings, guidance, direction and extensive subject knowledge that I am the teacher I am today.

After I completed my NQT year, I went back to university (part-time, whilst teaching full-time) to complete my MA in Teaching and Learning.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

I have taught at my current school, Cambridge Academic Partnership, for 13 years having started as an NQT. Creative Arts subjects are valued and supported immensely. We are lucky enough to deliver compulsory Dance, Drama, Music and Art to all KS3 students with the option of further study at GCSE and IB. My career developed to Assistant Director of Create, helping to manage the day-to-day running of the school's three sites, monitoring teaching and learning, planning and preparing curriculum and offering feedback to SLT regarding attainment. I later transitioned to Lead Teacher of Create, heading up the development of a faculty for a brand-new cluster school. Wanting to develop my career specifically in relation to Dance teaching and pedagogy, I transitioned away from my TLR to become a standards verifier and examiner for both international and UK based examination boards. I have trained successfully as a senior team leader and most recently a principal examiner – setting the international standard and training examiners across the world.

A career highlight has been becoming the Professional and Induction Tutor at my school, managing the SCITT and PGCE trainees, NQTs and their mentors. This is a rewarding position which allows me to share my passion for high quality teaching and learning with others. I am also a Specialist Leader of Education, Senior and PGCE Tutor for the Cambridge Teaching Schools Network. In this role, I am brokered out to local schools, offering support and guidance on teaching and learning, curriculum planning and assessment. I also manage a group of trainees for the provider observing their practice, developing their knowledge, skills and understanding as well as supporting their written assignments through tutorials. I hope that the roles I have undertaken over the last 13 years have given me the experience I need to move a step closer to my career goal to train dance teachers and lecture in Dance Education at university level.





WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Grab opportunities to develop your practice. Challenge yourself with new educational theories and concepts, keep up to date on new policies and developments within the local and national context and keep developing your pedagogy through CPD opportunities. Make links with other Creative Arts colleagues both locally, nationally and internationally. Establish a positive and supportive working environment in your studio. Set clear boundaries in terms of behaviour and values. Always have high expectations, lead by example and promote guided discovery and creativity. Use praise and motivation to reinforce student's positive effort, application and behaviour. Have an awareness of your students' educational needs. Differentiate curriculum planning and scaffold lesson content to suit individuals. Take into account any interventions or strategies that can be adopted to support their learning. Create a vibrant and engaging extra-curricular provision within your school; make this accessible to all and you will see clear impact upon attainment and work ethic across the wider curriculum. Get involved in external events within your region and give back to your local community. Allow students vocational experiences and live performance opportunities to share their outputs and experience the buzz of live performance.

“Always have high expectations, lead by example and promote guided discovery and creativity. Use praise and motivation to reinforce student’s positive effort, application and behaviour. Have an awareness of your students’ educational needs.”

Beverley Glean MBE

Founder, Artistic Director and CEO of IRIE! dance theatre

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

As a teenager I started dancing in my secondary school's dance group. My formal training was at The Laban Centre London (now Trinity Laban), The Jamaica School of Dance and The Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba; my training and development continued in dance & culture by working alongside artists from West Africa, Europe, America, and the Caribbean.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

After graduating from Trinity Laban - and before going on to The Jamaica School of Dance and The Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba - I worked as a freelance artist, using dance in a number of creative, social and educational settings; working in many culturally diverse communities and with a range of age groups from mothers and babies to elders. Aware of the lack of representation of Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) on stage and in training I founded IRIE! dance theatre in 1985 with a view to heighten the profile of Black dance and dancers in the UK. The company pioneered the move towards representing and promoting reggae music and its movement nuances on stage. Over the years, IRIE! has grown in stature. As well as its touring dance theatre company, it has developed a much sought-after education & community outreach programme. Since 1992 I have developed the relationship between IRIE! dance theatre and City and Islington College, delivering workshops, lectures and performance projects. During the 2000's I developed a number of performance/research projects in partnership with the College and IRIE! including; Connecting Vibes Dance Company, with the aim to give young artists at an early stage of their career performance opportunities; and the Dance and Diversity project, funded by NESTA and ACE to investigate the place of African and Caribbean dance within performance and education.

After developing and delivering a Foundation Degree Dance for 10 years I have worked to develop the new BA (Hons) Diverse Dance Styles, launched in 2018. In 2016 I received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD), now part of One Dance UK, and in 2017 I was awarded an MBE for services to the promotion of African and Caribbean Dance. I lecture in Caribbean dance on the BA Diverse Dance styles and is a guest speaker at National and International Dance Conferences.



“Approach everything with an open mind and a willingness to learn.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Be present at all times. Approach everything with an open mind and a willingness to learn, even if what you are doing makes no sense to you at the time. Be respectful and fully committed to whatever you've signed up to. Work hard and educate yourself about dance, if only to understand about those that paved the way for you.

Charlotte Tomlinson

**Artistic Director of SideKick Dance
and Healthy Dancer Practitioner**

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I had attended dance classes from a young age and at 16 decided that I wanted to take dance further as a possible career route. I knew that I'd like to help others with specific needs but wanted to develop my artistic skills first in order to do so. After my GCSEs I studied for a BTEC in Dance, and then a BA (Hons) Dance at Roehampton University which provided an incredible 3 years of learning and experience. My interest grew in two major areas, one – the dancing body, physical training and care for the dancer, and two – community dance and its many benefits both physically and mentally. I then completed my MSc in Dance Science at Trinity Laban whilst continuing my community dance experience further alongside.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

Straight after my MSc I gained a lecturer post at Chichester College where I completed my PGCE and developed my teaching practice at both FE and HE level. Following this I returned to the Midlands where I continued my teaching at Leicester College, as well as at vocational training schools and Universities and I became a listed Healthier Dancer speaker with One Dance UK. I worked as a dancer and community artist for Anima Dance Company under Sue Rosenbloom who was an advocate for dance in schools and especially for dance in SEN. Finally, I joined forces with Chairman Simon Coopey and dance leader Kirsty Clarke to set up SideKick Dance: a dance company for young people with disabilities. This soon grew and became an affiliate company at Curve Theatre with both youth and adult dancers.

A huge part of my development is due to my continuous efforts in undertaking CPD and gaining experience from other artists, not just when I was a student, but all the way through my career.

Over the years I have gained a number of fitness qualifications, I regularly attend conferences and undertake courses to keep my knowledge as up to date as possible and I read the latest in dance science research. It's from this culmination of areas that I have gained a strong working relationship with organisations such as Safe in Dance International (SiDI) and was able to write the book *Safe Dance Practice: an applied dance science perspective* (2015) with my incredible co-authors Edel Quin & Sonia Rafferty. All of this underpins my work in SEN and with elderly adults. Most recently I have been working with We Are Epic to form and deliver ID which is our talent development programme for gifted disabled dancers. This is steadily progressing to become an inclusive dance company in Leicester.



***“Never stop learning.
Network and connect
with others.”***

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Never stop learning. Network and connect with others. Be committed. Only enter the field of community dance if you have a true passion and a belief in the benefits it provides for those involved. It is this that will drive you to provide quality experiences for your participants and succeed in your career as an artist.

Hilary Seaton-Roche

Dance Teacher at Ryde Academy

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I've always had a love for movement which I gained from being a gymnast as a child, but my love for dance really flourished when I started taking lessons with the Sharon Potter School of Dance, based in Northamptonshire. I was also fortunate enough to have GCSE and A-level dance as an option at school and this is where I began to develop my interest in choreography. In my sixth form years, I was being mentored by Youth Dance England, Toby Norman Wright (DanceXchange) and Northants Dance as I took on multiple choreographic projects.

I gained a BA (Hons) in Dance from the University of Northampton and a PGCE in Dance Pedagogy and Practice from the University of Sussex. Subsequently, I gained QTS following a one-year teacher training year with the Isle of Wight Secondary SCITT and completed by NQT year the following year. In 2016, I was incredibly fortunate to be selected from a nation-wide pool of applicants for a year-long professional CPD course with New Adventures known as Overture. I am also certified as an Acrobatic Arts coach and qualified as a teacher of the iD Dance contemporary syllabus.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My job description is not easy. First and foremost, I am a dance teacher but I am also a writer, blogger, keynote speaker, consultant, mentor, private tutor and choreographer. I feel like my career and sense of direction is changing all the time. Initially I only wanted to work with students who were 16+ because I only wanted to teach students who were as passionate about dance as I was. In hindsight I can see that was a very naive perspective and this quickly changed when I became a secondary school teacher.

When I started teaching students of all abilities and levels of engagement, I realised how important it was to provide a really high-quality level of education. If I wanted students who were committed, driven and talented, I knew that was my job to create that. I wanted students to have high quality contemporary training that rivalled or exceeded that of local dance schools to ensure no pupil of mine felt disadvantaged taking GCSEs and A-levels compared to students who could afford private lessons. My extra-curricular and 'gifted and talented' provision is extensive and it allows me to choreograph and showcase pieces regularly in the southern regions. The impact of this provision can be seen through my students as they gain places at top UK schools such as Rambert, The School of Ballet Theatre UK, Laine, Laban, Bird and Performers College.

Becoming a writer was never in my vision; it just happened. Dance departments in schools always have a terrible budget so I started to sell some of my resources as a fundraiser to get costumes for my dance team. I was not prepared for the huge level of demand and how well received they would be. My brother lived hundreds of miles away but spotted a girl in his sixth form library using my resource. It really highlighted to me about how under-resourced the GCSE and A-level specifications are in comparison to other subjects. I never imagined that the success of these revision resources would catch the attention of Sir Matthew Bourne's New Adventures who then commissioned me to write a teacher/student resource pack on The Red Shoes.





My results have been the best in my school for the last 3 years in a row and the success of my blog and resources has earned me a great reputation in the dance education sector. This has opened lots of opportunities for me as I've been hired to consult privately, deliver in house CPD sessions and deliver teacher training days on behalf of Keynote Educational. I have also been awarded a certificate of excellence from the Pearson's Teaching Awards and nominated 3 times and won (2020) Outstanding Secondary Dance Teaching at the One Dance UK Awards.

Consulting and mentoring dance teachers has become a passion of mine and I've recently been promoted to Head of PE so I've had to develop my managerial and leadership skills this year. I've also qualified as an acrobatic coach to help improve the gymnastics provision in my school.

All of this has happened in 6 short years so who knows where I'll be in the next few years.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

My advice would be to use your training year wisely. Observe as many teachers as you can and embrace CPD opportunities as much as you can. Reflect on your teaching practice as often as you can with a critical eye and don't be afraid to make mistakes in your training year. Another bit of advice is simply to reflect on yourself as a learner. If you had to sit in a training session for 6 hours, what would be your idea of hell? Really place the psychology of a child at the forefront of your planning and you'd be amazed at how it can change your views on your lesson activities. If you would enjoy your lesson, chances are the students will too. The tone of your voice can really make a difference in how you interact with kids and how you/ your activities are perceived. Be open to experimenting with this as part of your behaviour management.

Shaun Dillon

Freelance Dance Artist & Artistic Director

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I was a class clown in school, way more interested in making people laugh than my work! I was never a 'bad' student but I was disruptive for sure. My dance training came very late into my teenage years and I started taking dance seriously at 16. I could always move to music, copying Michael Jackson, but hadn't ever taken a class or been in a studio. After being persuaded to take A Level Dance, I found that it was something that helped me focus my energy and express myself for the first time.

After leaving school I went to study dance at Roehampton University, where I was immersed in contemporary dance, focusing my training on release-based techniques and contact improvisation. It was here that I discovered my immense passion for choreography. When I graduated, I realised that I had really only just started to learn, finding my own way of moving and creating and teaching. My natural movement style is highly physical, with flowing floor-work, and released based contemporary techniques. I would say my 'style' has been shaped and inspired by choreographers like Hofesh Shechter, Sir Matthew Bourne, DV8, and Akram Khan. Choreographically I'm interested in things that explore social and political issues whilst also offering an emotional complexity that centres around connecting with new audiences through shared experiences. I have been lucky to work with some incredible dancers and on some amazing projects all of which have shaped the artist I am today.



HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

I tend to work in three capacities which fluctuate in frequency from project to project. When I first graduated, I spent most of my time working in bars to pay the bills and then creating small commissioned works in the free time I had. As a performer, during my early 20s, I found my interest dipping in and out. I was fortunate to perform in some amazing work with some fantastic choreographers, but I was always more interested in being a decision maker and leader. I was insanely focused on improving my choreographic practice, creating work as often as possible on professionals and youth dance companies. This progression culminated in the formation of Dillon Dance in 2015, which allowed me to condense all the work I do under the same brand. I always struggled to find a succinct definition of what I do as it constantly changes shape. I would say I'm a dancer, choreographer, or teacher. But I have found myself recently saying I am a freelance dance artist who specialises in working with young people.

In recent years I have focused my work on young people, helping them find their own voices artistically. This is the main focus of my work now and it's definitely the most rewarding. Every time I get into the studio, I have to be freshly focused and am pushed to stay 'current' with my practice. For me there is nothing more important than giving back to people and teaching allows me to really show the best version of myself whilst allowing me to impart my knowledge and experience into upcoming young artists. For me now, it's all about supporting others.



WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Stay driven and motivated, be proactive, and keep searching for new ways to learn and develop. Always try to support other artists around you also. The industry can be a lonely or isolating place so keep your community growing and positive. I would strongly advise dancers and choreographers to develop their business skills: project manage, devise budgets, bring in partners. All of these things come before the dancing itself. Don't be afraid to make mistakes or get something wrong - this provides you with a great opportunity to learn more about yourself and the artist you can become. I have made so many mistakes over the years. It has all led me to where I am now so I really wouldn't change any of it. Failure isn't the opposite of success; it is part of it.

“I would also strongly advise dancers and choreographers to develop their business skills: project manage, devise budgets, bring in partners. All of these things come before the dancing itself. Don't be afraid to make mistakes or get something wrong.”

April Brown

Dance Artist and Lecturer in Dance Practices at Middlesex University

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I was lucky enough to have access to a variety of creative subjects whilst I was at secondary school. I have dyslexia, so being able to take several creative subjects at GCSE level was a game changer for me. I went onto college where I took a BTEC in Dance, which led me to enrol onto a BA (Hons) in Dance at Middlesex University. My degree in dance was pivotal. It opened my eyes to the vibrancy and breadth of the dance landscape, allowed me to discover my potential and sparked interests in things that I did not know existed. A few years after graduating I embarked on further training where I gained a Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and a Masters in Professional Practice; Dance Pedagogy.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My employment in dance began with a 'portfolio' style career. I was a choreographer with my own contemporary dance company, a Dance Workshop Leader for the Education Group and a Dance Artist for C-12 Dance Theatre and StageCoach UK. The next phase in my career saw me return to Middlesex University where I moved through several different roles within the dance department. Starting as a Graduate Academic Assistant, I am now a Lecturer in Dance Practices and my role continues to be diverse. I teach Choreography, Performance, Professional Studies and Dance Pedagogy. I design outreach projects that partner the University with the local community, which allows me to work beyond formal dance contexts, including Museums, Libraries, Arts Centres, Primary Schools and Youth Groups. I also work with dance providers and schools to advocate for creative careers, working to empower young people to take their aspirations in dance further.

“Embrace the process of finding out, be open to opportunities, and if something isn't there be innovative and try to cultivate it yourself!”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Be kind to yourself. Dance can offer you a lifelong career and navigating the profession can at times feel overwhelming. One of the wonderful things about our industry is how diverse and fast paced it is and there are so many opportunities to contribute to and be involved in. Try to be open minded and embrace the multiplicity that dance and the creative industries have to offer. When I graduated I never expected to become a Lecturer. I was interested and inspired by so many different aspects of the profession and for a long time I felt that I 'just did' lots of different things. As I moved through different roles and worked across the profession, I have come to realise that the diversity in my experiences has offered me a network of knowledge and skills that I draw from constantly. Entering the field can feel like an enormous prospect and it is okay at times not to know where you are heading. Embrace the process of finding out, be open to opportunities, and if something isn't there be innovative and try to cultivate it yourself! Don't overlook the network that surrounds you, collaborative working has led me to meet so many wonderful people and opened so many unexpected doors.

Emma Jones

Freelance Dance Artist

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I began at a local dance school when I was just 2 years old but by the age of 6 or 7 had already decided I was going to be a 'dancer'. Apart from performing I didn't have any idea about what a career in dance could involve or may look like. I followed the RAD and ISTD syllabi in various dance genres then discovered contemporary dance by doing my A Level Dance. I did my undergraduate dance degree at Bretton Hall, but after university I still had dreams of performing so I studied a one-year programme at Laban. I quickly worked out that performing wasn't for me, but that teaching was what really inspired me. A few years later I did my Master of Teaching (Dance) a part time and distance learning course delivered by the RAD.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My career hasn't developed along a direct pathway but I don't think that's unusual. Fresh out of training, I worked as a teaching assistant in a SEN(D) secondary school for students on the autism spectrum. Working as a teaching assistant allowed me to 'learn from the back': I discovered a range of SEN(D) teaching approaches and saw how these could be adapted to support individuals. I spent 10 years at this school becoming the dance teacher after a few years and introduced dance into the curriculum across all key stages. I still work extensively within SEN(D) settings and deliver cross-curricular dance lessons in schools.

The biggest change in my career is that I relocated back to where I grew up a few years ago. I had always wanted to return home and felt I had achieved all I could in London. I created my organisation, Splatter Dance, before leaving London but am working to develop and increase dance in schools locally in the north-west.

A significant part of my practice is my use of Makaton. Makaton is a language programme that uses a combination of speech, non-verbal signs and symbols to support communication. I became a Tutor so I could teach other people and this includes supporting dance and theatre organisations with dance specific Makaton.



“Seek out work experience, volunteering or assisting experiences.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

My first tip would be not to worry if you don't immediately know the direction you want your career to go in. Have fun getting involved in lots of different opportunities; these don't always need to be dance or arts specific as the skills you will learn will also transfer into your dance practice. Seek out work experience, volunteering or assisting experiences to allow you to observe as many different practitioners and their practice as possible. Remember that your mental health and wellbeing is key. We all know the benefits of dance to our health and wellbeing but if we neglect our own, we aren't at our best for others. This may involve taking a day off without feeling guilty and enjoying interests outside of dance. Most importantly have confidence in your own abilities and enjoy what you do.

Emma Bolland

Curriculum Development Manager (Performing Arts and Music), Wakefield College

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

Born and brought up in Bradford, I began dancing at the age of 4, taking classes in jazz, musical theatre and speech and drama. I never took grades or learnt dance from a syllabus, I just loved dancing and performing, but rarely voiced it as my career aspiration as I was considered an 'academic' student and was encouraged to pursue an academic pathway. I did one year at sixth form, and during that year got offered a place at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) on their Foundation Course. From that I was then accepted onto their BA Hons in Contemporary Dance, graduating in 2007.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

After graduating from NSCD I joined RJC Dance as a dancer, and I also began dancing in the commercial sector. I spent around 7 years dancing professionally, performing all over the world and in various styles, but in-between performing jobs I would teach. This was mainly within the community sector, but with some work in formal education. I loved performing, but I found I got more fulfilment from working with young people and seeing how dance, and its benefits, enriched their lives. When I was diagnosed with a progressive back injury, it then seemed the best time to transition into a new career and teaching felt like the right choice. I studied at Bradford College, gaining a teaching qualification that specialises in the FE and HE sectors. From that I worked as a secondary school dance teacher, teaching mainly GCSE and BTEC Dance, and then onto Wakefield College where I have been for nearly 7 years now. I was a lecturer for 6 years, delivering BTEC and HND courses and now the UAL qualification, before gaining a promotion in September 2019 to a management position. I enjoy my role, as I still have some teaching responsibilities, but I now get to have a stronger say in the development, organisation and success of the departments I support.



“Be fluid with your aspirations and plans.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Be fluid with your aspirations and plans; I always knew I wanted to dance but was never fixed on the how, where or when. Don't fixate on one specific goal or plan, as other events or situations may prevent that from coming to fruition. I didn't discover contemporary dance until I was 15, and just because I trained at a contemporary dance school, I never classed myself purely as that, I was just always a 'dancer'. I would take classes in different styles outside of my professional training because I loved dance, and this resulted in making me more employable. This then meant that when I graduated, I wasn't just offered contemporary work, opening new sectors and the opportunity to travel the world. It was also never in my career plan to become a teacher (something I enjoy telling my students!) but something I discovered I was good at and really enjoyed. So, when the time came to say goodbye to my performance career, it wasn't a sad decision as I was excited for the next stage in my profession. My other advice is to always be knowledgeable about trends and styles; some of what I learnt during my professional training isn't applicable or current anymore as dance evolves with time, new dancers and new ideas. Stay abreast of this, as it makes both your dancing and teaching work engaging and relevant.

Sean Selby

Talent Development Leader and Dance teacher at CAPA College, Wakefield

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I went to a comprehensive school in Wolverhampton where I studied Theatre and Art, as Dance GCSE wasn't offered. Luckily, I had already been in a West End show and a UK tour production so I had some training and experience before I went on to train at Dudley College's Performing Arts. Here I studied a BTEC in Performing Arts where I was pushed in all three disciplines. I then went on to do my professional training at Northern School of Contemporary Dance where I focused on becoming a dancer. This really helped my technique and opened a new world of being creative, this is where I discovered my love for choreography. However, because my training was solely in contemporary and ballet, I still took commercial and jazz classes in my spare time and I was lucky enough to dance for lovedough R&B nights launched by MTV and Trevor Nelson.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My career developed into more of a versatile and varied career! Because I was already trained at the National Youth Music Theatre and did musicals from a young age, I already had experience in that field. I chose to train at NSCD to gain more experience on the dance side of things. With both types of training this has allowed me to dance for Contemporary dance companies and also to be in musicals and do commercial gigs. I moved into teaching which I absolutely loved and now work in the unique role of Talent Development Leader at CAPA College, a full-time specialist Creative and Performing Arts college, where I combine teaching students aged 16+ with developing and inspiring the next generation of performers in the north of England.



“Know what your strengths are and know how you can develop even further.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

My advice is to always push yourself - never settle! Get the most out of every single lesson and opportunity. Set your own goals your own ambitions, and as long as you are still passionate, keep developing your creative skills. Know what your strengths are and know how you can develop even further.

Claire Talbot (Grant)

Dancer, freelance dance artist and dance teacher at Pendleton Sixth Form College

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I started off my training like a lot of dancers, at my local dance school where I trained in ballet, tap, modern, jazz techniques. I experience learning exercises from varied associations, RAD, bbodance, IDTA, BTDA. At the age of 13 I was offered a scholarship with the bbodance which meant I had monthly access to training in London, Leeds and Manchester from various professional dancers and teachers in the ballet and contemporary world.

After school I went on to study at Preston College (PCD)'s Professional dancers and teachers of dance course alongside studying for three A Levels. I qualified as a teacher for the ISTD in Ballet Modern, Tap and National Dance and obtained my RAD student Teaching Certificate.

Following that I gained a place on the Degree course at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds, then moved to London to study a Postgraduate degree from The Place (EDge06). During my degree and post grad the focus was on ballet and contemporary techniques and performance skills. I had the opportunity to work with some amazing choreographers here including Trisha Brown and Siobhan Davies amongst others. In addition to this training and to support my income I trained as a STOTT Pilates instructor qualifying in in Mat-work, Reformer and Total Barre.

I am also qualified Postural Stability Instructor through Later Life Training in association with Birmingham Royal Ballet. I most recently achieved a first class Hons PGCE for ages 14 +.



HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

My teaching journey started at the age of 12. The principal of the local dance school used to ask me to teach syllabus exercises to the lower grades at Saturday school each week. I could never have imagined that at the age of 30 I would be re-staging the movement for a ROH production abroad or taking on the role of Dance Captain in Sadlers Wells' production of The Snowman.

I have been privileged to have had many performance and teaching opportunities over the years. I have worked for Essential Alston, RAD Step into Dance Programme, Springs Dance Co, Loop Dance Company, CADT at The Place, DanceXchange Birmingham, The Lowry and Birmingham Royal Ballet to name a few.

Even during my time with different performance companies and contracts, dancers were always required to teach their education work and so I was able to gain even more teaching and facilitating experience. All this experience has led me to where I am today. I was informed last month that my temporary contract at Pendleton School of Theatre (Salford City College) had been made permanent! I am now teaching A Level Dance and BTEC Dance as part of a super awesome and passionate team of ex-professional performers which is awesome because it feels like these sorts of jobs are like gold dust!

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Love what you do! If you love dancing the students will see that and be inspired by you. Share with them your passion, drive and curiosity. Nurture and celebrate creativity in your students. Be your students' number one encourager, especially the tricky learners - they are often the ones who could really excel! Do not be afraid to make mistakes in front of your students. They can learn from how you respond and deal with those mistakes. Be humanistic. Set clear boundaries and expectations from the start.

Be strict with your work life balance. Excellence not perfection! Efficiency is key. Join teacher groups online for support, be generous and share resources. With all the pressures of paper pushing and data try to keep focused on the students. Put your students' learning experience above anything else. Laugh at yourself and situations you find yourself in. Don't compare yourself to other teachers. Find your vibe and your flow! Above all ask questions, keep curious. We as facilitators are still students ourselves. We never stop learning!

“Be strict with your work life balance. Excellence not perfection! Efficiency is key. Join teacher groups online for support, be generous and share resources.”



Jamaal O'Driscoll

Choreographer, Teacher and Artistic Director of O'Driscoll Collective

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

An initial interest in street dance in 2010 led me to dance classes at Toffee Studios, Birmingham. A friend from GCSE Dance informed me about a week intensive to learn Breakin' with Marso Riviere, which I attended at the Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham. After the end of week intensive performance, we formed a small beginners crew, to train together and sought mentorship. Every day since this intensive, I have trained Breakin' in garages, car parks, open sessions, learning from workshops, masterclasses, tutorials, videos of competitions, jams and influential b-boys at events e.g. Poe One and Rabbani.

I attended Birmingham Ormiston Academy (BOA) achieving D*D*D* in BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Performing Arts. I went on to graduate in Sports and Exercise Science (BSc) in 2017. During this time, I studied the history of Breakin' and how it has grown all over the world, whilst actively competing, qualifying and winning national and international Breakin' competitions, as a soloist and with MDK (Mad Dope Krew) alongside this, I become an intern for Strike A Light, worked with Avant Garde Dance Company, Ace Dance and Music and Gloucester Rising Programme in 2016.

Since graduating, I have started further exploring hip-hop theatre and in 2019, I undertook two Artist Development Programme's led by Artists for Artists, in Birmingham and London.



HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

Achievements early on in my career were through competitions, such as Break the shire, Northampton; One two Freeze, Coventry; Floorwars International Toprock Finalist, Denmark; Boom Bap & Break solo invite Manchester; South West Got Rhythm, Bath; Back in Action, Romania; Break Mission x Just for Rockers Competition, Paris Qualifier. As my knowledge grew, I taught in dance schools, university societies and in workshops held by my crew, MDK. I also began judging in competitions held by B-side and Break District. In 2018, I performed in two performances: Neosis, Shop Front Festival based at Absolute Theatre, Coventry and T-Break, at Birmingham International Dance Festival 2018, UK Dance Showcase by Surf The Wave, Dancing' Oxford and Chisenhale, Encounter Bow.

When I lost my father in December 2018, I wanted to choreographically express and share the struggles individuals face with mental health, through Breakin'. I successfully applied for a solo Dance Hub hip hop commission for B-Side festival, which I produced, choreographed and performed my piece, 'Simplicity', at Artists 4 Artists 'Scratch Dat' showcase and D2C Festival, Dublin. My teaching continued at festivals, competitions, colleges and dance schools. As well as, judging national and international events e.g. D2C Festival and Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Got Talent. I was also awarded Artist Development Choreo Award 2020. Building on my choreographic narrative, I was commissioned by Dance Hub to choreograph an outdoor performance, One%, for Birmingham Weekender, October 2019. One% was featured in Midsummer Festival and most recently, Breakin' Convention Social DisDancing, Main Stage, Sadler's Wells London, in 2020.

In November 2019, I left my full-time job for the UK National Collaborative Outreach Program to pursue a professional career in the Dance sector. I became the Participation Producer for Birmingham International Dance Festival 2020 and DanceXchange, Birmingham. Alongside this, I set up my own company, O'Driscoll Collective, supported by BSEEN start up programme at Newman University. In our first year, O'Driscoll Collective has created a short film for BBC Arts New Creatives, delivered our outreach programme through schools and dance organisations, carried out workshops, partnered with West Midlands Police and more. A new research project, Disruption, is underway for 2021.

Throughout my career I have taken up teaching roles in a variety of settings from mentoring, sports coaching, teaching Breakin' and my personal interpretation of movement. The key focus to all of these roles was to uplift and enable conversation with people of all ages, aiming to develop key skills in some of the following characteristics: discipline, determination, self-confidence, consistency, teamwork and the ability to make mistakes. This has remained as a foundation to my method of teaching as I believe it can be applied to a majority of activities or work that makes impact far surpassing dance itself.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Love what you do, so you never have to work a day in your life. Find what's unique in you and share a bit of that in all your work. It may be tough but walking the uncommon path can be more rewarding, as long as you follow your vision of where you want to go or where you want to be. Be willing to make the first step, and enjoy every process no matter the outcome. No matter if you're performing in a massive theatre or a local community centre, they both hold the same impact if approached with passion and authenticity. Create work because you have something to say, share your voice and passion. Seek feedback, but still have your own originality, beliefs and follow your intuition. Ultimately, never forget the initial feeling of why you love dance, and continue to challenge, play and create. Dance is a journey, not a goal, so just enjoy the process.



“Find what’s unique in you and share a bit of that in all your work. It may be tough but walking the uncommon path can be more rewarding, as long as you follow your vision of where you want to go or where you want to be.”

Leanne Welland

Freelance Dance Artist

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

From the age of 5, I attended classes in musical theatre, during which I found my love for dance. I undertook GCSE and A Level and joined a youth dance company. After my school years, I attended the University of Lincoln to study BA Hons Dance where I realised how diverse the dance sector can be and the career possibilities that go with it.

Following on from graduation, I maintained my technique by attending weekly dance classes. I was fortunate enough to also be able to join a local dance company, which has provided me with many performance and networking opportunities. I also successfully applied to be a One Dance UK and Dance Consortium Ambassador, which gave me new experiences and networking opportunities. I soon discovered that I wanted to pursue a career in community dance. Whilst building my network connections, I initially started delivering after school dance classes for primary schools. As the dance industry is ever changing, I discovered there was no 'prescribed' route into becoming a community dance practitioner.

Alongside delivering my after school classes, I undertook a lot of CPD courses. I trained in inclusive dance and did a course with Para Dance UK, took many courses in community practices, such as Dance and Dementia. I researched and contacted many companies that delivered community dance and asked if they had any work, and I am now on their books for freelancing when and as needed.

I then discovered a new company, Imagination Dance CIC, an established inclusive/ community dance company. They had a new opening for a new freelance dance teacher and since then I have been teaching various dance classes for elderly in care homes, community centres, people with dementia and people with disabilities whilst still delivering dance classes for primary schools. I am still in the early stages of my career, and I am always seeking new CPD opportunities to become established and develop my career but I am always researching, and seeking out new opportunities, and I am very excited for what the future holds.



HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

Since graduating from university, obtaining my career goal has not seemed like a straight-forward route but I have developed many skills that I would not have imagined through volunteering, working and networking. From volunteering in an office at an inclusive arts organisation I obtained skills in administration, from helping out at festivals and planning events I have developed project management skills and efficient communication skills, such as public speaking, and from my time freelancing and picking up chunks of dance work where I can, I have developed budgeting skills and many more.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

Firstly, one of my main points of advice for those entering the field is don't give up! With the right attitude, networking and perseverance, you gain skills you may not necessarily be aware of and develop networks that can be helpful/supportive in the future. Also, do not be discouraged by gaining a part time job, whether it may be in a bar, cafe or supermarket. I have discovered it takes a while to establish yourself, but I have appointed so many valuable connections along the way. The money earned from a part time job can come in handy for CPD, something that is so valuable if wanting to enter the field. My advice would also be to network, network and network. Set aside a few hours and research arts companies, sports companies, charities, theatres etc and write to them to see if they any work, or if they can assist you. I would say attend as much as you can, email companies, even if they are not arts/dance companies. Also, research CPD in your areas of interest and continually take CPD, as well as maintaining your technique level by taking regular dance classes. You will discover how diverse the dance sector can be and actually may follow a completely different route to the one you intended.

“Don't give up! With the right attitude, networking and perseverance, you gain skills you may not necessarily be aware of and develop networks that can be helpful/supportive in the future.”



Eleanor Archer

Dance Lead at Brune Park
Community School

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I have always danced and absolutely loved it from a young age. I started my academic studies in Dance at GCSE and continued through to college, studying A Level and BTEC. Initially I did not think I would be able to go onto university as I had a young daughter. The prospect of having to travel and organise childcare arrangements was daunting and, being young, I thought insurmountable. At the time I was working at my old secondary school, as a tutor for their Youth Dance Company. It was my mentor there that encouraged me to apply. So I did. I applied and auditioned for a BA Hons Dance Degree at the University of Chichester and I was accepted. The University was incredible in supporting me with my home arrangements. Dancing at university was a dream, and so I embraced every moment. I was able to study full time, on a slightly adapted timetable, but this meant that I was still able to complete my degree in the three years with my cohort.

When I finished university, I went straight into a dance teaching position covering a maternity leave. I knew teaching was what I wanted to do, but my options were limited. At the time the closest university that offered a Dance PGCE was Brighton. That was not feasible for me due to the distance. I considered SCITT programmes, but nothing was available in my specialism. Then the University of Chichester announced that they would be offering Dance PGCE. I did not hesitate in applying. I was lucky enough to be given a place on the first cohort and I completed a very tough but amazing year.

“Education is an ever-changing world and you have to be very curious and flexible to move with it. There is always room to learn and grow within this profession and to find joy in the process.”

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

After completing my PGCE, I was offered the position of Dance teacher at Brune Park Community School. This was where I had covered the maternity leave a year before. I completed my NQT year and set up GFM Youth Dance Company, which has gone from strength to strength. During my NQT+1 I was offered the position of Dance Lead. This has given me the opportunity to continue to develop my knowledge and take on extra responsibilities as I lead my department - one of these being mentoring. I now mentor Dance PGCE students and other NQTs within the school, which I thoroughly enjoy. Being a part of other training teachers' journeys is wonderful.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

My advice would be to always stay reflective. Do not become complacent about your skills and knowledge. Education is an ever-changing world and you have to be very curious and flexible to move with it. There is always room to learn and grow within this profession and to find joy in the process. I always tell my students that perfection does not exist. But if you practice with passion, you will shine in the performance.

Rhian Dwyer

Community Dance Leader, Rubicon Dance

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

I graduated from Bath Spa University in July 2017 with a BA Hons degree in Contemporary Dance. In September 2017 I had moved back home to Wales and I got in touch with Rubicon Dance to enquire about an apprenticeship. I didn't have any experience working within the community but wanted to gain some experience to see if it was the route I wanted to go down. I then volunteered with NDC Wales and their Dance to Health Programme. After volunteering for a while, I then gained the role of an Assistant Dance Artist for Dance to Health working alongside the dance leader. I then decided to get back in touch with Rubicon to discuss the apprenticeship further. I applied for a community dance apprenticeship with Rubicon Dance through Jobs Growth Wales, a programme which helped fund my apprenticeship for six months. My apprenticeship finished in December 2019. I am now a Community Dance Leader working full-time for Rubicon Dance since January 2020.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

I am just starting my career as a community dance leader but already the jump from an apprentice to a dance leader is huge! Now, I have full responsibility for my own sessions which took me a little while to get used to, but I absolutely love doing what I do!

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

My advice to others would be to go into it completely open-minded as more opportunities will arise. If you go into anything narrow-minded you are limiting yourself to opportunities that are out there. When I graduated from university, I knew in order to get somewhere in life I had to change my thought process and become more open-minded - and I am so glad I did because I have discovered a new passion!

“When I graduated from university, I knew in order to get somewhere in life I had to change my thought process and become more open-minded - and I am so glad I did because I have discovered a new passion!”



Shivani Sethia

Director and Dancer of Ankh Dance Company

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

There were breaks in between due to studies but when I moved to UK at the age of 19 years I really dived into kathak training here. The style of teaching from India to here was very different, we explored the dance beyond its boundaries while still maintaining the roots of the dance! It really opened up my mind and attitude to dance and teaching.

HOW HAS YOUR CAREER DEVELOPED?

I started studying dance to satiate my desire to dance. Soon enough I started performing solos and then became a part of the group Ankh Dance Company (ANKH), performing at some amazing venues nationally and internationally. From performing to teaching happened quite organically, which I do to date.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD?

My only advice is to do it for the love of dance, not for UCAS points or Duke of Edinburgh (DofE). When one feels deflated because it becomes boring or mundane, then is the time to stick with it. Dance is worship!



“My only advice is to do it for the love of dance.”