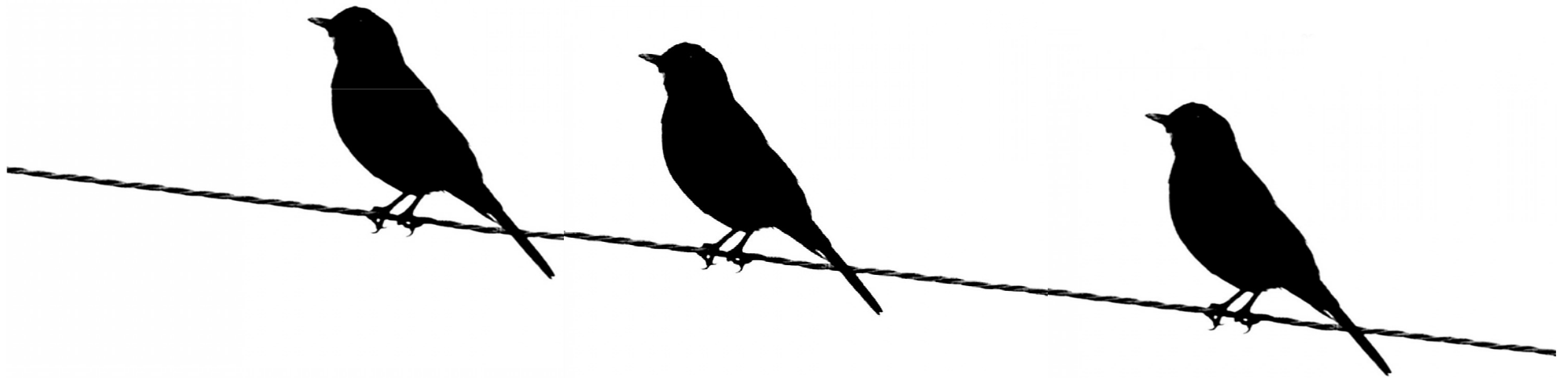


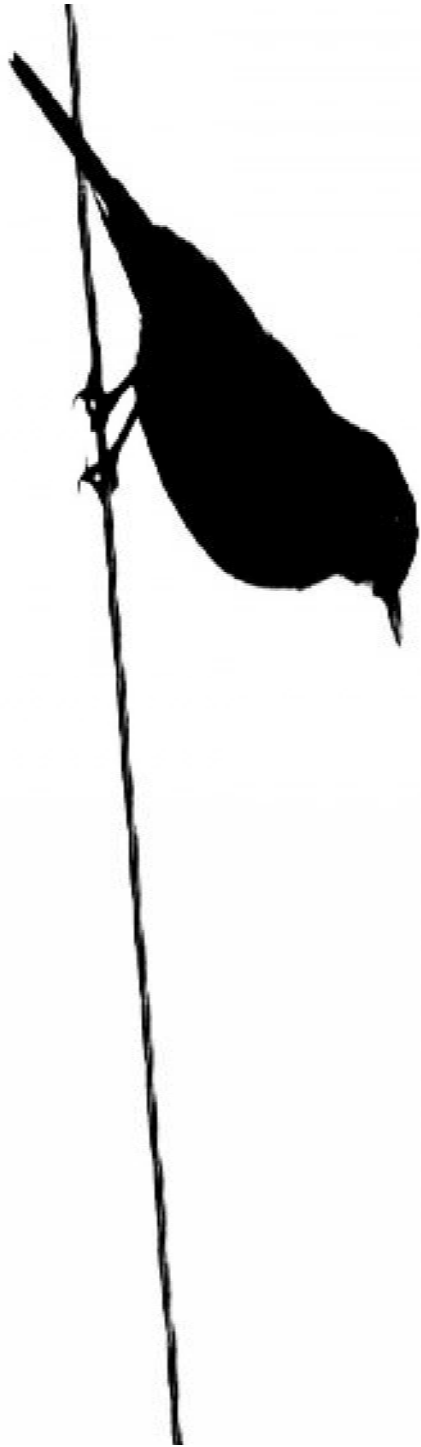
“A little bird told me...”

A reflective teaching journey.



Kym Stevens and Vanessa Mafé-Keane

Background



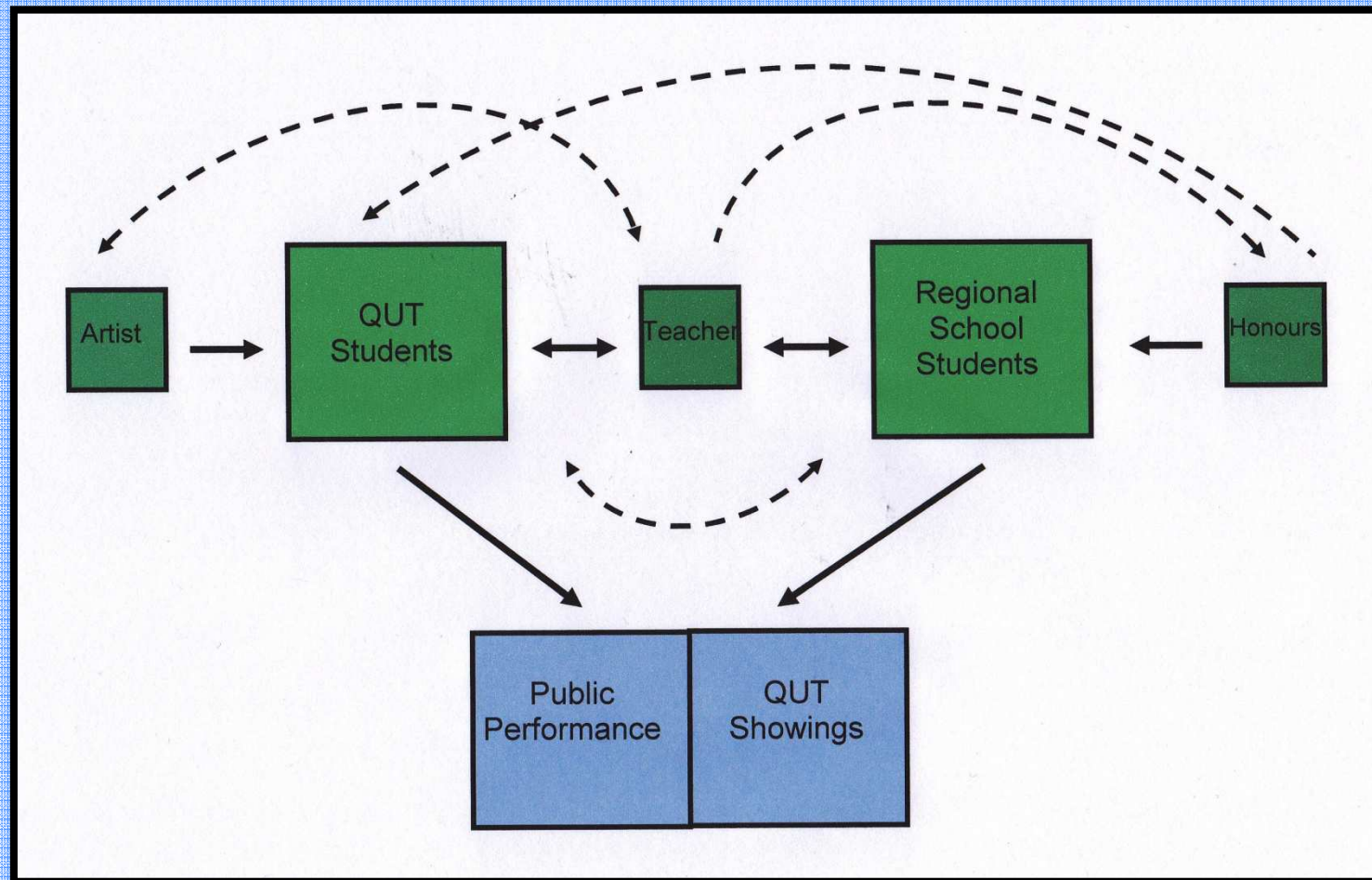
“A little bird told me ...” was a project that involved the collaboration between the 2nd year Tertiary Dance Education students and the year 6/7 students of a regional state school.

The Participants

- 2nd year Tertiary Dance Education students
- Year 6 and 7 students
- 2 QUT Honours dance students
- An independent choreographer, Vanessa Mafe-Keane
- QUT Dance Education lecturer, Kym Stevens



Model of Project



Project Structure

Choreographic tasks:

- Tweet to self
- Development of movement sequences in relation to the tweet and compositional elements
- Group work and interactions
- Development of transitions using video footage and movement

Project Structure

Artist/Teacher reflective sessions:

- Weekly discussions of students' response to tasks

Teacher/Honour students reflective sessions:

- Weekly discussions of school students' response to tasks

Honours students/Tertiary students/Teacher reflective sessions:

- Weekly discussions of school students' response to tasks

Aims of the Project

- Deeper knowledge of an artistic process in a teaching context for tertiary students
- Development of artist/teacher perspective through engagement with practicing choreographer.
- Authentic arts experience for school students
- Authentic learning experiences for QUT students
- Professional development opportunity for the artist and the teacher

Professional Development

Significant in the adoption of new teaching practices:

- Active reflection
- Joint work with fellow teachers or instructional experts

(Hawley and Valli, 1999, Porter et al, 2003, Camden, 2010)

Professional Development

Hindrance to instructional change:

- Lack of time for appropriate reflection
- Teachers practising in isolation
- Necessity of having to work with large groups of students

(Camden, 2010)

Processes of Reflection

Action Critical Reflection:

For the reflections to result in action there was a need to question the taken-for-granted assumptions and to view practice through different eyes (Brookfield 1995). There was a requirement in order to instigate a paradigm shift, to view teaching and the artistic processes from alternative perspectives (Kelly, 2005).

Processes of Reflection

For the reflections to result in action there was a need to question the taken-for-granted assumptions and to view practice through different eyes (Brookfield 1995).

Processes of Reflection

The ability to reflect deeply and to reconsider these assumptions and to articulate these tacit behaviours, becomes essential in the development of further knowledge about practice (Loughran, 2002).

Processes of Reflection

The reflections became a part of the choreographic process in a conscience way; actually planning the tasks so that we reflected 'in action' but also 'on action' (Killen 2003, Schön 1983).

Assumptions ...



Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Assumption 1: Skills versus artistry

Students are unengaged and value technique without artistry; closed rather open to the emotional connection to the art form.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Reframe:

It was not disinterest but rather than lack of knowledge and access points. It was for the students the difficulties of articulating body knowledge.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Impact on Action:

In offering students a means of understanding dance that does not disconnect movement from their experience of the body, allows dance to be *embodied* or recontextualized as movement.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Student Reflection: Amy

“I also appreciated the step-by-step instructions of what to do/change next (instead of having all aspects thrown at us simultaneously) which followed. It was less overwhelming and allowed enough time for me to give myself 'permission' to change the movement I had created...”

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Assumption 2: Body connection

The students understood the dynamics and spatial elements of choreography in their own and in relation to others' bodies.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Reframe:

The students struggled to perceive spatial connections between one another's movements and there was a degree of discomfort at physical contact and working at close proximity with each other's bodies.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Impact on Action:

Tasks were designed to create movement generated from the body, however this posed a major obstacle for the students. Rather than connecting the students to their bodily response it caused them to retract from the experience.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Student Reflection: Anthea

“At first I found this challenge almost impossible. Seeing as though my movements were initially quite gestural I wanted to somehow make them less so in this task. It was quite a challenge and I don’t think it worked quite as I would have liked. Viewing other sequences was quite hauntingly beautiful. It was another interesting technique to use for choreography.”

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Assumption 3: Aesthetic Values

That the students were aware of their emotional connection to self and how their personal insights links to the process of creating dance across their previous years of study.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Reframe:

We had to think about the students as being on a journey of personal growth rather than as developed and whole artists. This once again required seeing them as individual students rather than making generalisation about the group as a whole, acknowledging their different stages of maturity.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Impact on Action:

The challenge for educators is to offer dance students learning opportunities for personal growth and development through choreographic experiences. In many ways this project offered relevant themes and content devised directly from the students' personal experience.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Student Reflection: Lisa

“The middle school students will be able to relate to these tweets as it is a readily available technology they are growing up with. These self devised tweets will provide them with an identifiable emotional connection and establish relationships between the students fears/concerns for their future grade eight experience.”

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Assumption 4: Sharing Responsibility

The students were reluctant to engage in the process of inquiry through disinterest in the process.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Reframe:

The students' perceived disinterest was in fact a lack of trust in their own insights and general awareness of the questions they should be asking themselves. Some of this was a result of their inexperience to scrutinise their motivation for engaging in an aesthetic process.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Impact on Action:

The artist had to create a new symbol system because, as an experienced artist, the symbols she was communicating with were unreadable to the students. With no common history the artist could not assume that what she was observing was what the students were observing.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Student Reflection: Natalie

“One thing I have finally understood today is the fact that we all have a different movement vocabulary and no-one can ever be wrong in the way they want to portray a theme or idea through movement.”

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Assumption 5: Pace of Learning

The students would continue thinking about a problem if the artist did not draw attention to it.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Reframe:

The students saw the initial movement develop as a finished product rather than as a part of the cyclical progression of choreography. The choreographer was used to musing on ideas, sequences and movement construction, however, when the action stopped for her to ponder the students not only stopped moving but stopped thinking.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Impact on Action:

The choreographer had to be discerning picking a time to luxuriate and explore movement but identify when there was a need to keep the pace of the creation moving. There was a need for the choreographer to develop strategies concerning time-management and to motivate the students to engage further with the material.

Assumptions ... frame and reframe

Student Reflection: Anthea

“... Vanessa got us to be enthusiastic when we were performing in front of everyone. Normally I get quite intimidated and nervous when I perform but this technique seemed to lighten the mood and everyone was really willing to participate.

I would hope to use something similar to this once I commence my own teaching ...”

Successful Artist/Teacher Engagement

1. Common experience of collaborative practice
2. Shared choreographic direction and understanding
3. Empathetic voice and supportive engagement
4. Willingness to share depth of introspection and analysis
5. Acknowledging the unknown
6. Non-hierarchical

