

## Boy's Dance Lab

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### Abstract

*This article discusses the media through which I submitted work for a 'Praxis' project as part of my Masters degree in Contemporary Arts.*

*This MA course engages students within a framework of 'practice as research' whereby more significance is placed upon the process of art creation as opposed to product. Although 'products' such as performances, films or writing for example will inevitably form due to the nature of a creative process, as students and artists, we are encouraged to document our journey with the aim of offering insight and illumination for the viewer into our artistic process.*

*The term 'praxis' refers to a mode of research where the student engages with their work from two perspectives; from the inside, or subjective position of being the artist creating, and additionally from the outside, or objective position. When submitting work for assessment, we devise our own criteria outlining the way in which we would like tutors to assess our work, thus providing flexibility across the range of arts disciplines explored on the MA.*

### Boys and Dance

As a dance artist working within the community I became curious and somewhat cynical about styles of delivery designed to engage boys in dance practice.

Crucial to the development of boys and dance has been the need to find learning and teaching strategies that motivate and encourage boys to participate in and enjoy dance.

(Jobbins, V in *Animated Community Dance Magazine*, 2005)

Of the work I have observed throughout the city in my role as Dance Artist, I have not yet come across a boy's dance club that is not a street or break dancing group. I have also never seen a performance by a group of boys that does not address a social issue such as gang culture or bullying through overtly aggressive movements, nor one that does not simply arrange a series of football skills alongside music and label it as 'dance'.

In response to these observations, my research inquiry took the approach of co-ordinating and artistically directing a voluntary dance project for boys and young men of the Stoke-on-Trent area. The intention was to insist that the project should be marketed as a contemporary dance project with aspects of creative movement.

There were ten male participants in the project and it consisted of thirteen weekly workshops followed by a performance from the group at the local city theatre in a youth dance festival. The project itself and the performance were used as the basis for my assessment.

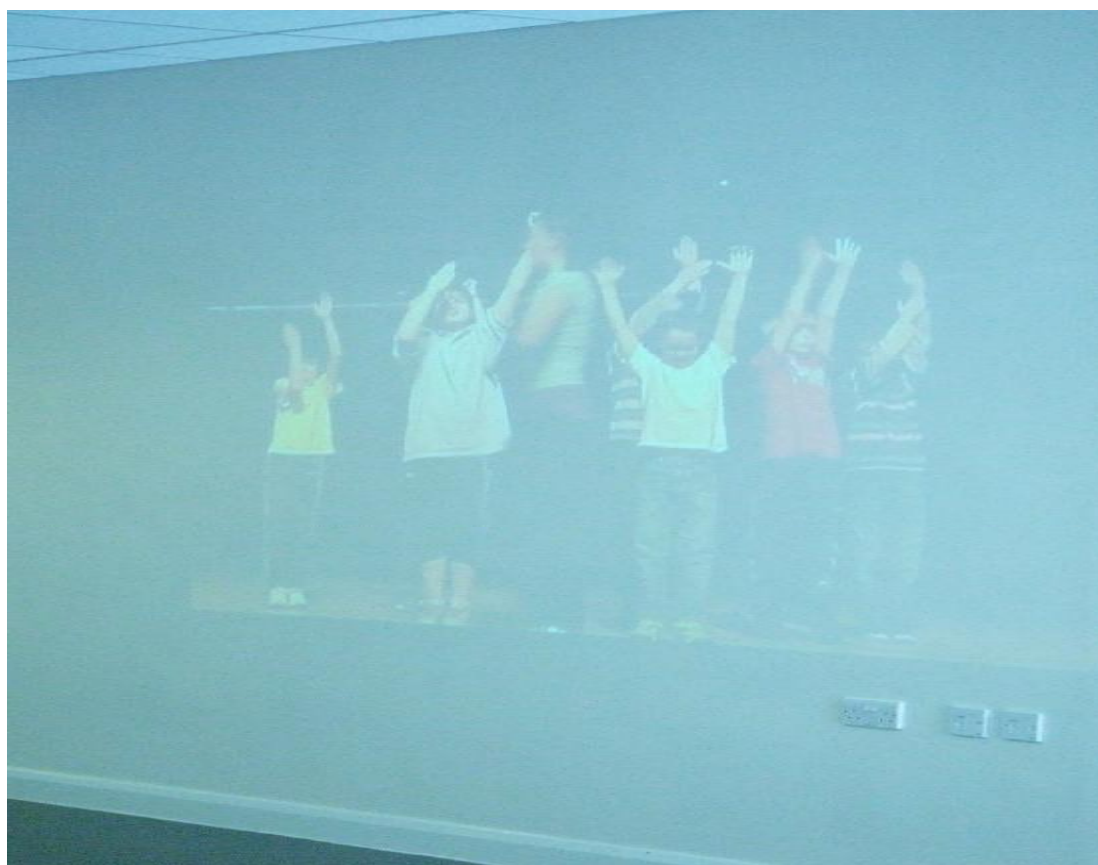
### Documenting Process for Assessment

There were four ways in which I chose to document and articulate my research process. The first was an online Creative Archive which was presented as part of my own website ([www.rachelrimmer.com](http://www.rachelrimmer.com)) and acted as a way to disseminate my research findings on a universal level. There were several entries to the archive, each discussing different ideas related to aspects I felt it important to consider when working with boys in this context. There were no 'clear-cut' answers or solutions to the issues brought about by male engagement in dance, only observations and ideas. For example, suggestions of appropriate exercises to prepare the body for contact work with a partner, ideas for reflective tasks on practical work. It was however stressed throughout that what may have been successful with my individuals may not be with others, but the information was there to be accessed by other practitioners if needed. During the assessment period, the Creative Archive was viewed by tutors and public members on laptops in the style of an Internet café on the university premises. People could browse the work at their leisure and I perceived this setting to be reflective of the type of context in which other people and even the boys themselves might be accessing and experiencing this work.



*Photos of people interacting with the online Creative Archive in the café*

In addition to the Creative Archive, a video artist documented the workshops on camera and created a DVD diary chronicling the project process on a week-to-week basis. This footage was useful in terms of providing me with a way in which to progressively evaluate my workshops. I also regarded it as a useful visual tool and a creative resource for other dance practitioners who may have wanted access to seeing how the group responded to the different creative tasks. For the assessment, the DVD diary, which was approximately an hour in length, took the form of a large-scale projection in a gallery space and played on a loop allowing public members to interact with it at different moments. Interestingly to me, the large-scale projection gave a sense that the group were really there in the space with us; although not a deliberate artistic intention, this happened to work well within the context of my work giving a real sense of playfulness.



*A photograph of the DVD diary projection onto the wall in the open space*

On the opposite wall of the projection, I had arranged twelve framed photographs. The photos were again documents from the process and the twelve that I chose to display in the gallery space I felt reflected many different stages from the process. For example, there was one of a boy engaging with a written reflective task which was something I specifically wanted to promote, several of boys in motion, one of a group discussion and one from the final performance.

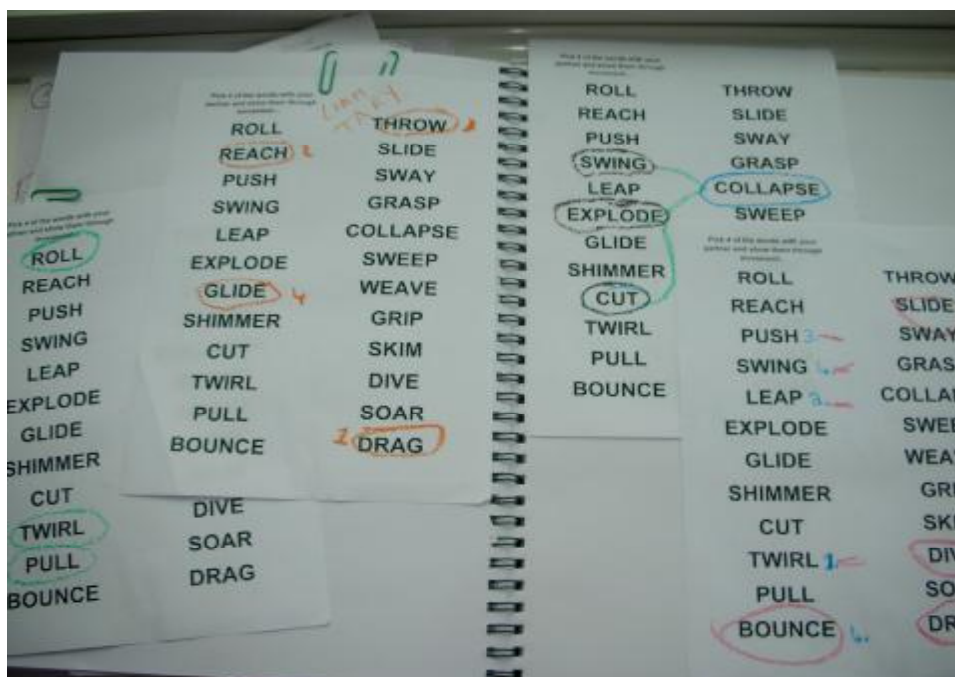


*A photograph of the wall-mounted photos accompanied by the A3 journal*

Accompanying the photographs was a large A3 journal that I had been gradually creating throughout the process. Things included in the journal were workshop plans, evaluations, more photographs, elements of research including interviews I had conducted with male dancers and my own brainstorming on the subject. However, the most important content in here in my own opinion were documents I had collected from the boys themselves such as written responses to reflective tasks, pictures they had drawn, questionnaires and work-sheets that they had completed about their work. I feel that these documents are irreplaceable and provide the greatest insight into the experience of the individual boy through his personal encounter with dance.



*Photographs of pages from the A3 journal*



*Examples of work-sheets I designed for the group which are located in the journal*

Although I had created a dance piece with this group of boys, it was not this that I requested to be assessed on. Due to the nature of the practice as research model, presenting documented aspects of my creative process in the context of a gallery space interestingly changed the status of my documents and transformed them into artworks themselves.

Often in community arts practice, although worth is placed upon a product of some form, equal value is invested in one's journey of discovery; thus the model of practice as research complimented the nature of my project excellently. It allowed me to articulate my own discoveries through media that I have never previously explored and the emphasis on documentation means that my research findings will be accessible for dissemination and reference when required.

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