

Case Study: Artscape Collaborations Project

Partner: Artscape Theatre Centre

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Introduction

The Artscape Theatre Centre is the major state-funded theatre centre in the Western Cape, and Artscape, a registered Cultural Institution, provides support for all the performing arts. Artscape is at all times keenly aware of its public value and as a part of that awareness it runs the *Artscape Collaborations Programme*.

The programme is an initiative to bring together young artists from different communities and cultural backgrounds as part of Artscape's drive to create future audiences and to build meaningful community arts partnerships. This exposes emerging talent to standards of excellence in a professional theatre environment.

The project mobilises annually some 100 young people, each with different home languages, practising different religions, and with different abilities and disabilities, into one ensemble. Together they present a vibrant stage performance which demonstrates just how easily the arts can contribute towards social transformation and nation-building.

Background

Since 1994, the new, democratic South Africa has developed one of the world's most progressive constitutions. The country is divided into nine provinces, with eleven official languages. The Western Cape has three official languages, namely Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English.

Despite the newly acquired freedom, South Africa still struggles with the legacy of apartheid. Young citizens have to find their individual character, identify their role models as well as their unique citizenship as part of the rainbow nation. The previous geographical separation between whites, coloureds, blacks and Asians and the subsequent language separation between Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English still exists, perpetuating the history of the past.

The Process

Artscape acknowledges that the universal language of the performing arts has the potential to teach values which could be applied in everyday life. The *Collaborations Project* started as a dance production, using existing dance companies from the various areas in the Cape metropole, to bridge the divide.

In combining performing companies from different geographical areas, various risk factors are also factored in to broaden other learning experiences besides race and language differences. By deliberately exposing young people to each other, where there are risk factors, they learn how to deal with real life issues such as HIV/AIDS, gangsterism, disability, or affluence.

Three highly successful stage performances have been already hosted under the titles *Collaborations 2004, 2005, 2006*. *Collaborations 2007* expands the project by including more

performing arts genres. It is envisaged that all genres will be fused into the project within the next four years.

The professional stage environment at Artscape lends itself to the teaching of life skills by combining spontaneity with discipline on stage. This tool teaches participants the basic principles of team-building and trust, mutual respect and discipline.

Impact

The artistic product, a fully fledged stage performance on the professional Artscape stage, to a paying audience, over a period of one week, is the culmination of a long process consisting of four clearly defined stages.

The first step consists of the provision of guidance to educators/teachers/instructors about the project. This includes motivational talks, informal lectures on conflict resolution and awareness of cultural differences, as well as the leadership position of teachers as role models.

The next two elements of the process, over a period of ten weeks, is the auditioning and rehearsal process. During these stages Artscape provides transport, meals, costumes and artistic direction to participants. The participating companies are thus subjected to the gruelling discipline of the professional stage.

As the various members were scattered across the Cape metropolitan area, and because most are still at school, rehearsals had to be fitted in on Saturdays. The Saturday rehearsals got parents involved, allowing them to socialise with other parents and discover multicultural cohesion.

The culmination of the process is the stage performance where the different groups perform as one ensemble. The programme of the show provides for the individual showcasing of groups and individuals, underpinned by the principle of teamwork. The audience of some 2,000 patrons, spread over four performances, travels from all over the metropolitan area to enjoy the spectacular show.

Lessons

The discipline associated with the professional stage highlights cultural difference, but also offers solutions and promotes an understanding of cultural differences:

- Due to the extra-mural nature of the project, strict time schedules for rehearsals promote discipline, as well as respect for other participants' time. The stage calling times for the final performances enforce this principle.
- During the process groups have to share transport and cafeteria facilities. These teach life skills outside the stage environment.
- Bringing together youth, teachers and parents creates a platform for them to share their cultures and experiences through informal conversations facilitated by the process.
- The surrounding publicity of the final performance instils community pride, achievement and cultural coherence.
- At the grand finale of a previous production, participants were grouped on stage and the effect of the placing of this 'rainbow nation' made a strong impact. Teachers and parents were exhilarated while watching the finale and thrilled that such a clear statement was made through the performing arts about equality and togetherness.