

Akādemi

Reach Out and Reveal: Artist Brief

Funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, *Reach Out and Reveal*, is a new 'test and explore' project looking at how South Asian dance vocabulary might support the physical and communication needs of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

Akademi is seeking highly committed **South Asian dance education practitioners** to work on this project in two special educational needs (SEN) settings.

The selected artists will work 'in residence' with young people at the partner schools over a period of 12-15 months.

We are inviting **expressions of interest** in the roles and would like to speak to artists at a range of experience levels. There will be opportunities for emerging artists to observe and work alongside more experienced practitioners. The selection process will include a micro-teach 'audition'.

If you would like to put yourself forward for these paid roles, please write to Joe West (joe@akademi.co.uk) outlining why you are interested in the project, any relevant previous experience and what you feel you can bring to it. Please also include your CV.

Expressions of interest should be received by **Wednesday 28 June 2017**.

What are we looking for?

The nature of the project is grounded in a 'test and explore' concept, which means that we are looking for highly reflective individuals interested in contributing to a learning and knowledge transfer between professional dancers and SEN teachers.

This project is about using creative concepts and the rich vocabulary of South Asian dance to bring movement repertoire to meet the needs and aspirations of young people who have little experience of dance or movement.

The successful practitioners appointed to the project will also need to work alongside experienced, open-minded teachers to devise joint approaches to models of participatory dance. The first phase, roughly a term, will be concerned with piloting ideas and research and development. The second substantive phase will be about delivery and evaluating outcomes.

Given the exploratory nature of the work, an important element of the project is to be able to devise content collaboratively, pilot this out in conjunction with teachers and observers and be able to draw

out the best examples of successful practice. The practitioners will also be able to articulate to a wide 'action learning' group about what works in these settings.

The artists will also be able to deliver peer seminars, demonstration lectures and talks, leading peer-teaching to explain to and consolidate the teachers' understanding of South Asian dance styles and the potential of working with mudras, abhinaya and other non-verbal communicative choreographic devices to portray and purvey meaning to the young people.

They must be open to research, note-taking, sharing models, contributing to evaluations and be able to adapt their practice readily and willingly.

Our partner schools are in the London Borough of Sutton and Tadworth, Surrey and the selected artists will need to be able to travel to these locations on a weekly basis.

What the project aims to achieve

We have drafted a list of potential changes we could engender that will start conversations around the project:

- Translate how students and staff use movement into a positive, creative experience, away from typical control and restraint interactions used daily.
- Develop skills where students can initiate expressive movement from within themselves and find playful ways to enliven social interaction and relationship formation.
- Use movement and facial expression to better first understand the person behind autism, to join them, and then to help modify/revisit their communications so that repetitive restrictive behaviours become channelled, the nervous system settles, and social engagement grows.
- Deepen the sense of community, connection, through moving together: help staff to build useful skills to integrate movement into teaching, learning and assessment as well as increasing creative curriculum on offer.
- Build a sense of confidence in students, showing them that others can recognise, access and use their own spontaneous movement vocabulary as a way of understanding who students are, what they think and communicating through their bodies and faces more effectively.
- Improve eye-contact and students' understanding of facial expressions to help them with appropriate new ways of being with each other and a range of people now and later on after school.
- Finding new ways of eliciting empathetic responses towards each other to help prepare students to better recognise emotion and respond to others as a life-skill.
- Improve the parent-child and teacher-child experience, building social reciprocity from children with autism, reducing behavioural disturbances and language deficits, reducing stress and difficulties in classroom and at home, and over time, in interactions with the world.

Some of the things we feel we can test and explore are set out here to prompt ideas for evaluation measures.

- Can South Asian dance help students to recognise and cope with expressions, use body language to clarify intentions, as well as building creative responses as release and sharing/ illustration of own feelings?
- Could changes in movement qualities help evaluate the development of students in terms of how they cope with communication and interactions?
- If there is a progression in students' body stature: perhaps shy and physically-closed at start, is there an observed physical progression to open stance; subtle changes in use of body and expression? Is eye contact better, eye-lines and sight lines expanded? Freer sustained movement and momentum?
- Do teachers find they can encompass movement skills in alternative, non-verbal ways of encouraging individuality and expression?
- Does South Asian dance help to enhance gesture alongside Makaton and other communication systems? Do students learn action-words through dance: by physically doing them, understand new terms better?
- Does dance help learners feel understood: a biological imperative for all of us, but which is heightened in autism.
- Does feeling more understood start to counter the way this sometimes presents as poor behaviour and tackle others' prejudices or misconceptions about autism?
- Is it feasible to strengthen neurological connection between minds and bodies with dance?