

SHIFTING FOOTPRINTS – EVALUATION REPORT

Summary

Shifting Footprints was a performance that developed principally out of an Akademi project, *Migrations* looking at issues to do with refuge and refugees.

A total of 87 young people aged between 7 and 16 were involved in the performance, which was attended by over 1000 audience members. The project was very successful – many audience members commented on how impressive they found the performance, and participants and teachers commented on how much the project had both challenged and inspired them.

I – CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Background

Migrations was a two-year education project devised by Akademi addressing issues arising around the experience of migration, funded by the Department for International Development mini grants scheme and Newham Education Action Zone. The project commenced in Summer 2000 and culminated in the *Shifting Footprints* performance at Stratford Circus in July 2002.

Over the duration of the project, Akademi worked with 10 different groups, working with a total of 290 participants. (See Appendix 1 for full details of participating groups). Project work in 2001 culminated in a performance that was also the first performance in the newly refurbished Stratford Circus. In 2002, Akademi delivered the *Migrations* project to four schools (Eardley Primary in Streatham and Gainsborough Primary, Eastlea Community School and Lister Community School in Newham). The work in three of these schools (Gainsborough, Eastlea and Lister) developed in to the *Shifting Footprints* performance. It is this section of the *Migrations* project that this report will chiefly address.

Shifting Footprints also featured work developed as part of *Dance Connect* another Akademi project running at the same time. *Dance Connect* is a two-year education project devised by Akademi to 'support the reintegration into mainstream learning at school of disaffected young people between the ages of 13 and 19'. It is funded by the European Social Fund – Department for Education and Employment. The project started in April 2000 and is ongoing until 2003. In 2002, Akademi worked in Little Ilford School, and work from this school also became part of *Shifting Footprints*. This report also draws on some of the experiences and responses from those working on the project in Little Ilford as many of the views of those working on and in response to this project support and reinforce the views of those involved in *Migrations*.

Project Leaders

The project was co-ordinated by Akademi's Nicola Froud, Education & Community Officer at Akademi. The work within each school was artist led, supported by teachers as well as by Akademi. As the project aimed to explore links between creative writing and South Asian dance forms, the artists worked in teams of a dancer trained in at least one South Asian dance technique, a writer and a musician. Akademi organised an artists' training day prior to the workshops in which groups of artists were able to look at ways of working together. In addition to this, an INSET afternoon was set up for teachers prior to the work in the schools which allowed teachers and artists to meet each other and clarify aims and objectives before they started work. Akademi worked closely with Newham Refugee Education Team throughout this phase of the project. In response to the performance, a follow up INSET for teachers in Newham was also organised in collaboration with Andi Smith of Newham Education Action Zone.

Participants

The participants in the *Shifting Footprints* phase of *Migrations* were young people attending the various schools worked at, whose ages ranged from 8 to 14. They came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including South Asian, West and East African, East European, Caribbean and Scottish. A significant number of the children involved were themselves refugees, or the children of refugees. As an illustration of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students involved, the

group of 29 young people at Lister Community School between them spoke 23 different languages. All schools involved were mixed sex, and there were a fairly even number of boys and girls in each group. The children represented a range of different ability groups, and included academic high achievers along with students about to be excluded from school on the grounds of poor behaviour. The artists worked with 32 participants at Gainsborough Primary school, 30 at Lister Community School and 25 at Eastlea Community School, making the total number of *Migrations* participants worked with in *Shifting Footprints* 87.

II - BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The artists worked intensively with the participants for a working week (5 days) from approximately 9.00 – 3.00 each day. Artists used various exercises and imagination games to engage the participants with the issues discussed and to help them to communicate creatively about these issues using words and movement. Once the artists had helped the participants to generate a body of written and movement material, they shaped the work in to a performance piece. In the period of time between the workshops and the performance, the groups rehearsed their pieces under the direction of their teachers.

At Gainsborough Primary school, kathak dancer Mayala Bracha worked with performance poet Leah Thorn, tabla player Neil Craig and sitarist Jonathan Mayer. (Two musicians were selected in this case to ensure that the music contained both a melodic and a percussive element). At Eastlea Community school, bharata natyam dancer Magdalen Gorringer worked with writer/director Parm Kaur, and the musicians, again were Neil Craig and Jonathan Mayer. At Lister Community School, kathak and bollywood dancer Chix worked with singer/songwriter Anju Sharda who covered both the writing and the music aspects of the project. The work at Gainsborough primary school also received input from video artist Roswitha Cheshire.

All the workshops took place within mid to late June 2002. There was a technical rehearsal at Stratford Circus on 4th July, and *Shifting Footprints* was performed on 5th July 2002. The performance ran twice – a matinée at 1.30 p.m. and an evening performance at 7.00 p.m., and lasted about 1 hour. Approximately 1000 people attended the performances (including the entire Gainsborough first school!)

III - PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The full aims and objectives of the *Migrations* project are as follows:

Aim

- To explore issues around refuge and refugees through collaboration between creative writing and South Asian dance forms.

Objectives

- To broaden children's perspective of the migration issue
- To educate about different journeys
- To explore what is meant by refuge and refugee

Additional aims

- To make links between participants across cultures
- To tackle inhibitions and barriers to learning through dance
- To develop pride in work and performance
- To increase understanding and appreciation of South Asian Dance and culture
- To deepen pupils' understanding of a subject in the curriculum through creative exploration
- To develop an awareness of global interdependence, their own background and reasons behind previous assumptions

IV - EVALUATION

This evaluation draws on reports and statistics compiled by Akademi, evaluation forms completed by artists and participating schools, written responses to the performance from

funders, teachers and others as well as more detailed interviews with selected artists, teachers, participants, funders and organisers.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the evaluation given by the different groups is that the project was a great success. For Nicola Froud, the project 'utterly exceeded – more than fulfilled my expectations' – and a similar sense of having outdone expectations is expressed by teachers, participants and audience members. In a letter of response to the performance, Haydn Powell, (Newham Excellence in Cities Co-ordinator) wrote:

'I regard myself as a highly competent teacher in a range of subject areas...but I am the first to admit that I would not know where to start in bringing about the quality of work that you and your organisation managed on this occasion.'

Similarly, Hayley Cruikshank, a teacher at Gainsborough school remarked that she 'couldn't have believed that seven year olds could do so much', adding that she thought the project was 'fantastic'.

While there were issues and problems that arose – almost inevitable in a project of this scale (see section V below), overall the project was able to fulfil all its stated aims and objectives (see discussion below), and engaged and enthused project participants. As a very basic indicator of this, over the course of the project, attendance and levels of punctuality improved in all schools.

How far did the project fulfil stated aims and objectives?

Each objective is addressed in turn.

Objectives

- To broaden children's perspective of the migration issue
- To educate about different journeys
- To explore what is meant by refuge and refugee

The content and quality of written and movement material produced by the participants showed a good understanding of issues to do with migration, and the reasons behind different journeys and through this, what might be meant by refuge and refugee. Audience members watching the performance were '*...left in no doubt that this was the issue at stake...*' (Haydn Powell). Tim Spafford of Newham Refugee Education Team commented

'...from the performance, one could tell how the process had led to personal engagement with the issues....the work educated us about different journeys, something of crucial importance in understanding issues to do with refuge and refugees'.

Hayley Cruikshank, remarked that it was a positive experience for the children in that they were able to '*...speak about their experiences or empathise with other's experience'.*

While the feedback from audience and teachers was very positive on this issue, the feedback from the artists leading the project suggested that there was room for improvement in this area. Artists felt that the schools needed to take more responsibility for preparing participants for the project by raising awareness of the issues to be looked at through talks and videos – they felt that educating about such issues from scratch as well as creating a performance was a tall order for a week's work. Having said this, the response from the audience suggests that they succeeded in communicating to the participants about the issues, despite their reservations. Alexandra Kenyon of East London Dance felt on the basis of observing the performance that, '*the artistic team did a marvellous job tackling a very pertinent issue in a modern way'.*

Objective

- To tackle inhibitions and barriers to learning through dance

As an indication of how the process of the project addressed inhibitions, Chix Chandaria, an artist working at Lister school wrote

'at the start of the project there was quite a lot of insecurity within the group as a whole and with many of the individuals. It was quite difficult to get them to express themselves...To try and overcome this, every morning we got the participants to work

together as a group for the first hour, playing games and doing a physical warm up...by the end of the week, it was very apparent the group had overcome most of their fears...'

Chix's perception of the participants' increasing self confidence is backed up by comments from the participants themselves. One remarked

'...at first I didn't have the confidence and had to hide in the corners, but then my confidence improved'.

Another wrote

'...at the beginning I was embarrassed to dance and sing, but coming to the end of the project I'm getting very confident, so thank you for helping me'.

Nicola Froud commented on how through learning a Bollywood routine, the young people were taught about a whole range of other things without realising that this was happening. *'They learnt about rhythm, about being creative, about another culture...You learn a whole different way of being in a more engaging way'.*

Objective

- To develop pride in work and performance

In all the groups, the participants expressed a strong sense of pride in their achievements and an increase in confidence and self-esteem. The young people from Gainsborough school 'amazed' both their teacher and themselves by their level of achievement. Hayley Cruikshank commented, *'...three months after the event, the kids are still talking about the performance – they thought it was cool. They thought it was a bit scary when they went on stage, but they are amazed that they did it. The fact that they performed in a theatre meant a lot to them. They were really proud of themselves'.*

In both Eastlea and Lister schools this sense was developed despite initial scepticism and lack of focus on the part of the young people. In Eastlea school in particular there was a stage when the group did not expect to be able to perform at all – making their eventual successful performance particularly rewarding. Christian, a participant at Eastlea School sums this up:

'it was good because everyone thought we weren't going to do it, but we did. It was a good routine. It felt good on stage'.

A similar sentiment was expressed by a participant at Lister school:

'...when we were asked to write a song in a week I thought it couldn't be done, and it wouldn't work with the chosen music, but it works really well'.

The participants' sense of pride in their work was increased by the manner in which the artists shaped the work. In all the schools the young people were given a chance to make informed choices about what they wanted to do - leading to a sense of empowerment. Linda Powell, head teacher at Eastlea School sums this up:

'Feedback from the students indicated that they felt challenged by the work that you did with them. They also felt proud of their achievements and pleased that they were able to participate actively and contribute their own ideas to the workshops...'

Objective

- To make links between participants across cultures
- To increase understanding and appreciation of South Asian Dance and culture
- To develop an awareness of global interdependence, their own background and reasons behind previous assumptions

The project served as a strong affirmation and celebration of cultural diversity. Tim Spafford of the Newham Refugee Action team felt that the performance was very positive in celebrating the diversity of the participants' backgrounds. The performance gave a

'strong assertion of their identity as a diverse much travelled group – a proud assertion in the face of middle England'.

He also commended the project for

'...allowing refugees to make a connection with their parents' cultures – which is important'.

The use of South Asian art forms meant a completely new and intriguing cultural experience from those not of South Asian origin, and a feeling of pride and identity for those participants who were South Asian.

John Rooney commented

'At Eastlea School, South Asian kids are often looked down upon – so having South Asian dance taught to them felt like an affirmation that they have something culturally to offer.'

An Eastlea school participant, Bashir remarked

'It was a good experience. I liked working with people from other cultures...'

Anne Seeley, School Development Officer for Newham appreciated seeing children

'from all over the world identify themselves with someone else's heritage (South Asian), and do it with so much respect...The South Asian community is a dominant group in the borough and it is nice to see it highlighted in the mainstream in this way.'

For her, the final performance gave the effect of

'...a kaleidoscope of identities, experiences, stories and ideas...'

Objective

- To deepen pupils' understanding of a subject in the curriculum through creative exploration

In terms of encouraging creativity, the project worked at different levels for the different groups involved. With the primary group, for example, the artists found the young people happier to work to instructions/ direction rather than through creating their own material, so for them to take any creative steps at all was a significant achievement. In both Eastlea and Lister, participants' initial shyness and reluctance was soon dispelled when they were invited to create, songs, raps, and to use elements of their own movement in their choreography.

Unexpected outcomes

In addition to fulfilling the listed aims and objectives, the project was beneficial in a number of other ways. All the schools involved remarked on the significant improvement in focus as the pupils came nearer to the performance date. The performance also served to **encourage participants to become sensitive to each other and to work as a group**. One teacher commented on how during the dance, the participants were left with no option but to synchronise with each other. As a result,

'The kids did not start as a group, but they finished as a group and gave each other much more respect.'

The experience of rehearsing and performing in a professional performance space inspired many of the participants, **encouraging them to think about the option of taking up a career in the arts**. Following the project, with the help of Singer/Songwriter artist Anju Sharda, six pupils from Lister Community school went on **to record the lyrics they had written together onto a CD which has been distributed to schools and funders**.

The performance ended up reaching many more people than originally anticipated and thereby **raised the profile of South Asian arts** in Newham. Nicola Froud feels that there has been 'a ripple effect across Newham of interest in Akademi and South Asian arts' – reflected in the interest in a post performance INSET.

Gainsborough school also had the opportunity to work with video artist Roswitha Cheshire, which generated **some great footage of the young people**. Akademi also arranged for the videoing of the whole performance to be used as a resource.

In bringing together artists from dance and creative writing disciplines, Akademi also enabled the creation of **new collaborative work on the part of the artists involved**. Performance poet Leah Thorn and dancer Magdalen Gorringer for example worked together on creating a short poetry and movement piece to perform to the participants as an example of how the art forms could work together. They have since developed this piece and performed it on a number of occasions, and are considering building upon it to create a full-length performance.

For the students of Eastlea School, another unexpected outcome was that the project contributed to them receiving a **bronze 'Shining Through Award'** given by the education authority for 'outstanding achievement'. In a letter to Akademi John Rooney wrote 'Eastlea Community School received a total of two awards this year and 'Survivors' – the piece put on by the Year 9 group who worked with Akademi – was one of them'. Pauline Maddison, Director of Education and Community Learning for Newham wrote to the school 'The Competition this year was extremely high and 'The Survivors Dance Group' should feel exceedingly proud that they have successfully achieved recognition for their outstanding efforts'.

V – OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

The feedback given by project participants and leaders points to a number of conclusions, summarised below in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Project Strengths

- ❖ A clear strength of the project was the **commitment and the professionalism of the artists** involved, and a matching level of **engagement from the teachers** of many of the schools involved. This commitment from the project leaders clearly **enthused the participants**, and many of them voluntarily worked to develop sections of their work in their own time. All the schools involved commented on an increase of focus among the students as the project progressed.
- ❖ The **concept and organisation** of the project was another key strength. The theme of 'migrations' worked to engage participants in a way that was often personally meaningful. The **opportunity to work for an intensive week with the participants** meant a lot to the artists and contributed to the sense of challenge and satisfaction that many of them expressed. The **participative process** used by the artists was another strength in terms of involving participants and increasing their sense of pride in and responsibility for their work.
- ❖ The **performance in a professional venue** was a definite strength, allowing all the groups to perform at one time, reaching a large audience, and above all getting the participants to feel like stars. As the evaluation above shows, the response to this performance was overwhelmingly positive. The **striking publicity poster and flyer** produced for the performance undoubtedly contributed to its success.

Weaknesses

- ❖ Several of the artists expressed concerns at the **unsuitable space** in which they had to work, and there were also issues to do with **health and safety**. Space was a problem at every school, as in common with many schools, for all the schools worked with, space was at a premium. Some of the issues that arose included distractions from other pupils and small, dirty ill ventilated rooms. There is obviously an extent to which great studio space cannot be expected from schools already stretched for resources. These issues do indicate, however, another factor that artists, teachers and participants had to contend with in making the work. The high quality results are all the more to be commended in this light.
- ❖ Given the size and ambitions of the project, some artists felt constrained by **restrictions on time**, and commented on not having enough planning and rehearsal time. It was also felt that

although it is nice to involve different art forms there needs to be more time available for the collaboration to work effectively.

- ❖ Another issue that came up with all groups was **the lack of preparation/ groundwork on the part of the schools**. Again this is an issue which needs to be considered in the wider context of demands on teachers' time. One thing to think about for the future might be to organise a 'pre workshop visit' to the group by a member of the Refugee Team, or preparation of the group through an appropriate video. This would serve to prepare the group without adding a further burden of work on the teacher.
- ❖ A related issue was the **occasional lack of support from school staff**. This was often not due to a lack of interest on the part of the teachers, but due to persistent demands on their time for other school activities. At one school an artist commented that while the teacher was very enthusiastic, 'due to an overload of work, she could not be around all the time, so quite a lot of the time we had no support teacher'. This is an important issue, especially given the feeling of many of the artists involved that an engaged and active support teacher is effectively the key to the success or the failure of a project, though again, given the constraints on teachers' time it is not one that will be easy to resolve.

Opportunities

The hugely positive response to the project has unsurprisingly given rise to a plethora of ideas for and interest in developing the project further.

- ❖ Many of those who had watched the performance expressed **an interest in doing further work with Akademi**. Haydn Powell of Newham Excellence in Cities remarked that *'he would like to work with Akademi in the future'*. He was interested in developing a project that might draw on the similarities between the traditions of two economically similar communities based in completely different parts of the world – a project making a link between the traditional culture of the East End Docklands, and the culture of dock workers in Calcutta, for example.
- ❖ Akademi's Director, Mira Kaushik, was inspired by the influence the project had had on opening up people's potential and developing talent. She felt that in the future Akademi could think of **longer-term projects to encourage and nurture young people**, potentially making a link with a well-established group such as the Asian Dub Foundation.
- ❖ Tim Spafford of the Newham Refugee Team felt that such performances should form a **regular feature** of refugee week, possibly linking to performances by the different community groups often put on at this time. He also commented that it would be great to see such a project **linked more integrally to the school curriculum** – possibly by linking it to Citizenship studies.
- ❖ Several people expressed an interest in **Akademi developing a resource pack together with a good quality video** to serve as a resource for teachers in other schools and youth groups.
- ❖ On a practical note, Anne Seeley, School Development Officer for Newham suggested that Akademi approach **Newham Excellence in Cities** directly to investigate further sources of funding.

Threats

- ❖ Since 'Shifting Footprints', **Newham Refugee Team has closed** – which has taken away a valuable source of support for Akademi
- ❖ While there are clear options for continuing the project on a smaller scale through small grants and through approaching schools directly to cover costs, **it is not clear where Akademi would apply** should they wish to run another *Migrations* project on a similar level

VI - CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

- ❖ For the future, projects of this nature should have **more time built in both for pre workshop planning and for rehearsal** after the piece has been created. With each art form added, the collaborative process gets more complicated and proportionately more time needs to be allowed to plan how this process will work.
- ❖ In projects such as this the teachers role is a significant one it is vital that the **teacher's presence is ensured even if this means that they have to be withdrawn from other school activities**. Future projects should build into their budgets adequate funding to provide necessary support teachers, where possible. **Schools should also be provided with resources, ideas and support so that they are able to prepare the participants** for the workshops without adding unduly to their workload. Wherever possible **Akademi should ensure that the space the school provides is appropriate for the workshops** and that avoidable issues like dirty floors and dangerous doors are addressed.
- ❖ Finally if at all possible a future project should try and **make provision for artists and participants involved in the project to be able to watch eachother's work**.
- ❖ On the plus side, clearly **the combination of creative writing and South Asian dance forms works extremely well as a means to engage young people** positively even with such sensitive topics as refuge and refugees.
- ❖ **Working towards a final performance seems to contribute to the focus and commitment of the group, and undoubtedly develops an increased sense of self esteem and pride** among participants, especially when the performance is ticketed and held at a professional venue.
- ❖ **Organisationally, projects conducted as an intensive week in schools can clearly work very well** – and give rise to high quality artistic work. The **participative approach is valued by the participants** and increases their sense of responsibility for and pride in their work.
- ❖ In common with previous Akademi projects the 'Shifting Footprints' experience reinforced the **value of a motivated and supportive teacher** for the success of the project.
- ❖ Above all, **the project emphasises the value of the arts** as a teaching tool and as a way of motivating, encouraging and engaging young people, high achievers as well as the academically less able.

This report draws on

- Written evaluation forms provided by teachers and artists about the project
- Written feedback to *Shifting Footprints* sent to Akademi
- Previous reports and reviews of the *Migrations* project collated by Akademi
- Telephone and personal interviews with the following people:

Akademi

Mira Kaushik (Director)

Nicola Froud (Community and Education Officer)

Schools

John Rooney (Eastlea school)

Bashir Christian and Francis (Participants – Eastlea School)

Hayley Cruikshank (Gainsborough Primary school)

Artists

Parm Kaur (writer)

Aya Bracha (dancer)

Naz (Costume designer)

Funders and Educational Advisors

Haydn Powell (Newham Excellence in Cities)

Tim Spafford (Newham Refugee Team)

Anne Seeley (School Development Officer for Newham)

Artistic Team

Mayala Bracha	Kathak Dancer
Kauser Butt	Journalist
Roswitha Chesher	Video
Chix Chandaria	Bollywood
Neil Craig	Tabla Player
Magdalen Gorringe	Bharata Natyam Dancer
Naz Karim	Costum design
Parm Kaur	Poet / Writer
Jonathan Mayer	Sitarist
DJ Ritu	DJ

Anju Sharda
Leah Thorn

Songwriter
Poet / Writer

Shifting Footprints

Evaluation Report
Written By Magdalen Gorringe

Funded by: The Department for International Development
Newham Education Action Zone
European Union European Social Fund
Akademi: The Arts Council of England
London Arts
Association of London Government
London Borough of Camden