BFA Senior Project Portfolio

Bullying: A performance piece addressing emotional and verbal abuse between children

Performance Title: Cause to Effect

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Included in Portfolio:
1. Project Proposal
2. Letter to schools
3. Script to connect with schools
4. True story used as script
5. Feedback form for adult audience
BFA Senior Project Proposal

Introduction

I would like to work with a modern dance performance piece that inspires change from the audience. When studying abroad in London, I had the opportunity to experience a wide selection of dance work. One piece stood out, however, as it truly questioned the audience members and encouraged the individual to think and assess their actions. *Border Tales*, choreographed by Luca Silverstini, looked at multiculturalism in London, as well as the way one addresses differences in others. This work inspired me to work with dance in a new way, to influence change and reaction within the audience. This project has the potential to change my perception on how I personally view art, as well as the artistic process. I would like to bring this type of dance to younger students, and study how dance can relate to a child’s life and challenges. The plan is to create a dance performance piece that focuses on bullying in the form of emotional and verbal abuse, and perform this work in at least one elementary school. This will be performed in an auditorium or gym, most likely at a school assembly. There will also be a chance for students to ask questions about the piece after the performance.

Overview

For this performance piece, six dancers will be used. I would like to keep the cast small and intimate in order to create a trusting environment. I will not hold auditions, but rather approach dancers on an individual basis. I feel confident knowing which dancers in the department will be able to handle this material. Personal history and stories will enhance the possibility of a truthful piece of choreography, thereby involving the dancers in the creative process. Thus, the project will demand a high level of maturity. This will involve the dancers in the process, however I believe this will add a personal feel to the work that is required for this type of performance.

I will look at the psychology behind bullying as well as the reactions that occur within the individual. This piece will go deeper than simply telling students not to bully. I would like to show the effects an individual could have on another. It will require research in the form of articles and books as well as real life experiences from teachers at the elementary level. I will also contact school counselors and therapists who have experience in dealing with this type of abuse. This will accompany stories from those who remember bullying at this age level. The projected audience will be for grades four through six, depending on the elementary school, as I feel these students will be at a level to understand the content.

The music will include instrumental, soundscapes of children, and the spoken word of dancers in order to use stories. My only technical production requirement will be a stereo to play the music in the auditorium or gym. I have not set a time limit at this point, as I would first like to see how the story develops. A good deal of this project is about the creative process, rather than just the final performance. Costumes will include everyday clothing in solid colors. I will compile pieces through the dancers and my own collection rather than buying new clothing.

Rehearsals will start after the spring show finishes in April so the dancers are not overwhelmed. Rehearsals will be two hours long, around three times a week. I will start to choreograph and plan over the course of the semester, however, in order to use time wisely in the spring. I plan to take the piece into the school system at the beginning of the fall school year, 2015. Thus I will need to begin contacting the schools within the next month.
Goals and Objectives

I would like to push myself as an artist and create something new that will make a
difference to the audience. My goal for the performance is to influence the audience to question
the way they act or approach a situation. Although this piece may not change the way the school
looks at bullying, if the student even starts to think on the subject, it will begin to change the
situation. This project will give me experience with choreography, as well as working with
others in a professional setting. I will need to interact with the cast as well as the school systems.
I want to work at creating a safe environment for the dancers, as this work will be about them as
much as the students we perform the piece for.

Conclusion

This will be unlike anything I have ever worked with before, yet it presents an
opportunity for me to grow as both an artist and a person. It will be challenging and will most
likely change along the way, but I believe the process can create a piece of art that will show the
affects and dangers of emotional and verbal abuse for young students. This venture will help me
transition from a school setting to a professional career over the next year and a half, as I prepare
for graduation. I am excited to begin on this journey, working with a variety of people and
learning from their experiences. No matter what happens or changes, I would like truth to remain
the guiding factor within the project.

Timeline:

March 5th: Dancers Chosen
March 13th: Contacted schools
April 10th: Begin rehearsals
May 15th: All choreography set
April 15th, 2015  
Superintendent Kessler  
Albany County School District One  
Phone: (307) 721-4400  
Email: rkessler@acsd1.org  

Dear Superintendent Kessler,  

I am a junior in the Theatre and Dance department at The University of Wyoming. I am working on a dance performance piece that presents bullying and its implications for grades three thru six. It addresses verbal and emotional abuse in an attempt to ask the audience to think about their own actions. I understand this request would typically go to the assistant superintendent; however due to the changes within the district, I am sending this proposal directly to you.  

Accompanied by six dancers I would like to present this to schools next fall, 2015, in an assembly format to grades (3-6). It will be an opportunity to expose students to the arts, while introducing an old topic in a new way. Verbal and emotional bullying is becoming increasingly common in younger generations, however many are unable to recognize it at such an early age. It is also common for students to witness the actions without knowing how to help and stop the abuse. I hope to address all of these topics and dilemmas in this performance venue. The work will not exceed fifteen minutes and can be followed by a short question and answer with the dancers and myself.  

This piece is open to all Albany County Schools within Laramie. We will come to the schools that are interested in order to present our work. We will only require a space to perform, such as a gymnasium, as well as a sound system to play music.  

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to working with the school district in order to bring this important topic to the students.  

Best Regards,  

Julia Cooper  
970-222-5372 (cell)  
jcoope22@uwyo.edu
Script used to call and connect with schools:

Hello, my name is Julia Cooper and I am a Junior in the Theatre and Dance Department at the University of Wyoming. I am currently working on my senior project, which is to create a dance performance piece on bullying designed for students in 3rd thru 6th grades. I called several weeks ago explaining this. I also sent a letter via email to the principal. I am just calling to follow up and see if the school is interested in the project coming during fall of 2015.

I would love to bring this piece to Laramie elementary schools next fall of 2015. I have written a letter explaining this project and am sending it the principal now via email. But I am just calling first to introduce myself and my project before you receive the letter.
True story used in the spoken section of the work:

In school I thought I was friends with everyone. Then as we grew up, people started to find cliques, but I didn’t seem to fit into one in particular. That’s when the bullying started. Everyone started to care more about looks and appearances. Suddenly it mattered how you dressed, acted, or even how you spoke. My voice was higher, so I didn’t sound the same as everyone else. Everyone started to see me as different. People didn’t want to spend time with me. It sounds cliché, but I was picked last whenever we played games in gym. They thought I couldn’t do sports because I was different. Everyone called me names and made fun of me all of the time. It never seemed to stop. It seemed like everyone wanted to get the attention off of their own flaws, and on to someone else. All the attention fell on me.
Julia Cooper’s Senior Project Response  
Tuesday October 27\textsuperscript{th}  
Spring Creek Elementary  

What are three points that worked for you or that you enjoyed about the piece?  

What are three points that did not work or could be improved?  

The focus of this project is outreach to elementary ages; how do you feel this worked?  

How do you believe the kids responded to the piece?  

Do you think this piece would work in other schools? If the answer is no (and please be honest), is there something that needs to change before it will work?