1. CONTEXT FOR THE APPLICATION (Approximately 300 words)

Please provide a context for your application. This should consist of an introductory statement about your contribution to learning and teaching to date. Examples of the information you might include are: the subject you teach, the type of learning and teaching activities you are involved in, how many learners are involved, your particular learning and teaching interests and an outline of your overall teaching philosophy?

I have been the Artistic Director of the Centre for Excellence in the Creative and Performing Arts (CECPA) at Queen’s since October 2005. Prior to that, I was working as a freelance theatre director, developing and directing a wide range of projects, performances, events, and workshops, working with both professional and community companies.

In my role as Artistic Director, I have developed a diverse range of learning opportunities which include:

- The development of a set of interdisciplinary arts MA pathways bringing together students from across the Creative and Performing Arts (which this application will focus upon) – approximately 10 students per year
- The development of a post-graduate performer training programme that will be the only one in Ireland and which has elements which make it unique in the whole of the UK and Ireland – approximately 20 students per year
- The development of University-wide projects for Degree Plus and Induction which explore the notion of creative collaborative play as a fertile location for the development of diverse transferable skills – currently approximately 30 students per year but with the potential for substantial roll-out.
- Extending my pedagogy beyond the CPA subject areas: for example, I am delivering a credit-bearing student-selected component in medicine in September – approximately 20 students
- Extra-curricular activities such as The Centenary Singthing which gathered 40 staff, students and graduates to sing an original acapella harmony vocal piece created under the auspices of the CECPA project by 3 PhD students working with a professional composer

My learning and teaching activities are a combination of my teaching directly and my creating learning environments into which I bring visiting professional artists to work with what are often interdisciplinary group of students.

We aim to create learning situations that:

- are highly active and interactive
- are collaborative, challenging, rigorous and enjoyable
- model professional practice with all its opportunities, pressures and constraints
Over the last three-and-a-half years, nearly 1,000 students have been involved in CECPA activities,

2. DISCUSSION

You should illustrate your discussion throughout with reference to specific learning and teaching activities and draw on relevant research, scholarship and professional practice. You should also provide examples of the influence of student feedback on your learning and teaching practice.

(a) Promoting and enhancing the learners’ experience (approximately 1,400 words)

Please discuss how you stimulate and inspire your students to learn, taking account of the diversity of learning needs.

Calling the MA modules “Adventures” was a very deliberate move and is highly resonant of Barnett’s urging for educators to

“hang onto a language of delight, wonder, care, excitement, fun, engagement and love – the language in which a student is caught and even entranced” (Barnett, 2008).

The practicalities of an Adventure (of which there are 3 for each of the modules Adventures in Interdisciplinarity and Further Adventures) are as follows:

Students are asked to prepare for the Adventure by reading, watching, listening to work as prescribed by the visiting artist(s) as well as researching the visiting artist in some detail. They may also be asked to bring an idea, an artefact, a piece of text.

The students meet with the visiting artists at 2pm on a Friday afternoon and embark upon a session that lasts until 9pm that evening which will include theoretical and historical context and a range of practical task-focussed exercises working individually, in small groups or as a whole group. This process is resumed at 10am the next morning and at 7pm on the Saturday evening there is an informal presentation/show/gig/exhibition to a small public audience. This sense of an endpoint provides an intensity of work that is exhilarating, stimulating, strenuous and very close to a “real life” working methodology (full theatre shows are often rehearsed within a four or even three week period).

Adventures have included:

- making a site-specific multi-disciplinary piece in the Crumlin Road Gaol
- creating a series of sonic art pieces
- exploring the notion of short form through photography and haiku and how two concurrently developed narratives might allow the emergence of a third narrative
- exploring the video camera as a performance partner
- developing ideas for software innovations that might provide meaningful interaction for dementia sufferers
My role in this programme is both as the inventor of the concept and the designer of the programme and its ongoing co-ordinator as well as providing the “through-line” for the students – the constant contact point in both a responsive and an active way – I will regularly email both individuals and the group with events, projects, books that I feel may be of interest to them and I also am in ongoing dialogue with them by providing tutorial support for them both as a group and as diverse individuals.

*Please outline the way you develop, organise and present your learning and teaching resources.*

My greatest learning and teaching resources are the artists I bring in to work with the students. I facilitate and manage the embedding of the work of visiting professionals into the module and am present during their work in order to be able to continue the dialogue that they have begun with the students.

We produce detailed handbooks for each of the Adventures, Further Adventures and Summer Project modules. These aim to give students a comprehensive over-view of the module and what they might expect from it and what might be expected of them. As well as giving dates of workshops/seminars, necessary preparation for these and information about the visiting artists with whom they will be working, these handbooks contain both general and specific advice, particularly about assessment. These handbooks are revised annually as a result of feedback from both students, visiting artists and staff from participating areas.

In line with the resonances around the notion of Adventure and with the sort of learning achieved by the introduction of “threshold concepts” (Land, 2006), we believe that if students know where they are going they will only ever go where they have been before. This belief is reflected in the development of the CECPA library. It’s simply a bookcase outside my office but it contains an eclectic range of books, cds, dvds that I continue to collect on the advice/request of students/visiting artists/staff as well as interesting items that I spot along the way. Students regularly browse these shelves and pick out items that they wouldn’t have known to look for in a standard library, therefore expanding their horizons in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

We attempt to have equipment resources for students that allow them to continue work begun during the Adventures. For example, we have simple digital video and stills photography equipment as well as Apple Macs with editing packages on them – all of which are available to the students. We also attempt as far as possible to be responsive to student suggestions as to how we might expand this range of equipment.

*Please discuss how you assess your students and how you know this to be appropriate. Tell us about any changes you plan to make in your assessment practices in the future and why you believe this will be better.*

Student instrumentalism driven by the teachers’ belief that students only learn when they are assessed inhibits creativity. Narrow, summatively-driven assessment practices and criteria that focus on what is known, which do not recognise the process of learning and how people come to know, or recognise emergent unanticipated learning outcomes, will smother creativity” (Jackson, 2003).

Because we want the students to explore, experiment (and “fail” if necessary), work outside their comfort zone and their own particular disciplines, collaborate generously and fearlessly, the Adventures
workshops themselves are not summatively assessed (although over the 18 hours contact time over 2 days, there is substantial formative feedback from myself, from the visiting artists, from each other and from themselves). This is something that students have reiterated again and again that is vital to the success of the workshops.

What is assessed is their response to these experiences and their reflective and critically analytical presentation of their journey through the module. They are presented with a series of, to varying extents, unrelated intensive learning experiences.

Their personal bespoke learning journey is the complex and sophisticated links that they make between

- seminal moments of those experiences
- the conceptual frameworks that they encounter during these experiences
- the theoretical frameworks that they engage with during these experiences and during other modules in their own disciplines
- their own exploration of a wider creative context, both practically and theoretically.

They are asked to present this critical reflection in three different ways:

Practical:
the creation of a research-led reflective practical piece which may include live performance, still and/or moving image, creative writing, recorded or live music, exhibition, installation, event or a combination of several of the above. They produce a short contextual statement for this piece.

Written:
the submission of a Critical Incident Log – a written articulation of these links between experimental and theoretical learning and between different conceptual frameworks and differing artistic practices

Interview:
an oral articulation of their journey, focussing particularly on their critical reflection post-practical-project.

This combination of assessment develops their ability to be reflective practitioners who can articulate in a range of ways as is necessary for future work, whether in a professional or a research context.

Both Jackson and Paul Kleiman (through personal contact) have indicated that this portfolio approach to assessment builds a rich, deep picture of a student’s learning journey at the same time as it develops the student’s ability to articulate that journey.

This is the assessment scheme that we have in place for this, the second year of the interdisciplinary MA pathways. It differs from last year’s as it has one less assessment point: last year we had an assessed discussion forum which staff, students and external examiners found problematic for a variety of reasons (difficult to mark, students feeling that they were posting “for the sake of it” rather than engaging in true dialogue, one of the externals feeling that there were too many assessment points) and so we continued with the discussion forum but on a non-assessed basis as a way of sharing self and peer formative feedback.

However, this proved to be something the students didn’t use so much and in our recent feedback session, they indicated that they would in fact recommend that we add additional contact time to next year’s cohort so as to engage in the old-fashioned real-time version of a discussion forum!
Again, at their request, we will also post online two anonymised examples of excellent Critical Incident Logs from this year’s cohort as examples of good practice and concrete exemplars of deeply sophisticated analytical writing that marries experiential learning, theory and the wider practical creative context rather than simply describing it in those terms, which can seem abstract and elusive to students.

Supporting colleagues and influencing support for student learning (650 words)

Please discuss how you contribute to the development of colleagues within your School to promote learning and teaching.

The CECPA remit is to work across the Creative and Performing Arts and so I work with colleagues from several schools.

The CECPA was given what was originally called a “Residency Fund” which colleagues could apply to for funds to bring in external artists to work with their students.

I was keen to foreground the interdisciplinary imperative that was part of the original CECPA bid and so developed this fund into our Interdisciplinary Project Fund with a key criterion being that applications came from colleagues working together from different subject areas and I continue to broker new relationships between colleagues who were previously unknown to each other.

This brings them together to share different teaching and learning styles, resources and methodologies and has resulted in a range of very exciting projects for students.

We regularly bring together representatives from all of the participating subject areas for our MA subgroup and we recently responded to a request from this group to explore issues around marking group project and invited Paul Kleiman (PALATINE, Subject Centre for Dance, Drama and Music) to lead a seminar on this subject which was attended by staff from Drama, Film, Music and Sonic Arts.

Please discuss how you contribute to institutional initiatives to facilitate learning and teaching.

CETL dissemination day – talking about the CECPA work in general and facilitating a workshop where staff collaborate to come up with their own Adventures.

I am continuing work as part of the University-wide Degree Plus programme and Induction around the notion of creative collaborative play as a fertile location for the development of diverse transferrable skills.

I have recently been invited to represent the School of Languages, Literature and (Performing) Arts on the Queen’s Educational Strategy Review Group.
I presented as part of the CED Lunchtime Forum series in 2007-08, talking both about the CECPA in general and the development of the interdisciplinary arts MA in particular.

If you are involved in any regional/national/international initiatives, please discuss your contribution to them.

I was recently asked to be Queen’s expert by Jonathan Matthew-Scott, Richard Harrison, and David Gibson on their involvement in an EU proposal – as QUB is a Partner Organisation in a 6-country consortium (led by RISEBA, Riga Latvia) bidding for a European Union Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) project on “the role of creative activities in the learning process and their impact on people’s capacity for innovation”.

I have also presented the following papers/workshops on the subject of the interdisciplinary arts MA experience:

Critical Connections Conference at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, May 07

Creativity and Employability Conference, LIPA, Easter 2008

I was also invited by Norman Jackson of the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education to both present on the interdisciplinary arts MA experience to his Centre staff and to develop and deliver the interactive elements of his Immersive Experience Conference January 2008. His comments on our work include “You are doing some wonderful things on the learning to be professional theme”.
Please discuss the ways in which you undertake professional development.

One of the core underlying imperatives behind the original vision for the CECPA was that it would bring students into direct contact with practising professional artists: Having not worked professionally since coming into post, I directed two professional shows this year: BE MY BABY for the Lyric and BRUISED for Tinderbox – the latter being highly experimental, collaborative and interdisciplinary.

I take regular advantage of the CED lunchtime seminars and, when choosing conferences to attend, often make choices that are directly linked to my desire to develop my own teaching practice.

I was very inspired by last year’s CED conference, particularly by the keynote speeches given by Ray Land (Strathclyde) and Sally Brown (Leeds Met). Ray Land’s exposition of the notion of “threshold concepts” as a catalyst for transformation within a disciplinary context crystallised my thinking about the work that I have been doing in an interdisciplinary context.

Similarly seminal was Creativity or Conformity? Building Cultures of Creativity in Higher Education, a conference organised by the University of Wales Institute Cardiff in collaboration with the HEA, Cardiff January 2007. This conference addressed how traditional education is structured in radical ways and exposed me to inspirational theoreticians who were articulating what I had been instinctively stumbling towards, thus giving me language to express my emerging teaching philosophy to both students and staff.

Please discuss how you use these professional development activities to review and enhance your learning and teaching practice.

These professional development activities affect me in three particular ways:

- continuing to make work within a professional context put me back into the position of “maker” that the students find themselves – having to create work, deal with the practical problems of its creation and articulate to a variety of audiences the process gone through and the final product achieved. It’s a first-hand reminder of the intricacies and difficulties of making practical work.
- developing a greater knowledge of the theoretical frameworks that run alongside the practical work.
- expanding my knowledge of how assessment works is particularly useful. This is an area that I’ve really struggled with and one that’s always high up on the students’ agenda and consequently one that I’ve explored in some depth and sought expert assistance on, particularly from the Subject Centre.
Please provide evidence of how this has led to improvements for your students.

- Continuing professional theatre work: a specific example was working on BRUISED which was a collaborative interdisciplinary endeavour moving into previously unknown territory for me which served to remind me of the support necessary to take risks in this sort of work.
- Further engagement with theoretical frameworks: initially the MA model was probably a bit light on theory – I definitely underestimated the intrinsic importance of this. Through the development and the first year of the course, the sense of the MA as a “marriage of theory and practice” (which is now a phrase that we overtly use to both current and prospective students) has emerged and I believe the MA is better for it. Certainly staff and visiting artists who have worked with both of the first two cohorts have indicated that they feel that the second cohort has produced stronger work because of a greater emphasis on this theoretical underpinning.
- Engagement with assessment theory and practice: assessment per se is something that I continue to wrestle with but I believe that the input from and engagement with particularly Paul Kleiman has helped me find a way through this and the development of assessment feedback grids where a full sentence represents each band against each learning outcome rather than simply “good” or “fair” has met with student approval.

Please provide some examples of how you review and reflect on your teaching to improve your practice, including your use of student feedback.

This is what some of the first cohort said about that interdisciplinary arts MA experience:

“the creativity involved in the structure of the whole course has been totally inspirational”

“There are few things more exciting than travelling to a place you have never been before. I knew that after the Adventure I would not be the same as I had been two days previously.”

“a lifestyle more than a degree”

Before even this cohort came on board, we “road-tested” the Adventures as we were aware that there represented a substantial department from traditional learning structures. We ran a free non-credit-bearing trial of 4 Adventures, where 12 current Queen’s students and young local practitioners went
through the proposed process and gave us substantial and detailed feedback which directly informed our thinking about the course development.

With each cohort, we take ongoing informal feedback (because of the substantial contact time for each module there are many opportunities for this and a rapport is built up with students which allows them to be honest and direct in their feedback) and regular formal structured feedback sessions.

We also take feedback from participating staff and visiting artists. As a result of this feedback, we introduced a further element to the Adventures modules: the “Conversations” where practising interdisciplinary artists take seminars with the cohort: this was the result of feedback from staff/visiting artists that the theoretical side of the practice covered needed further expanding.

REFERENCES:

