

CARGO wrap

By participating artist: Stephen Noonan

CARGO is a Carclew Youth Arts project that connects artists and regional schools. It hooks up South Australian school students with professional artists through a weeklong workshop program that culminates in a community celebration.

In June, eight artists over four weeks took up residency in eight regional primary and secondary schools. The artists' practices included physical theatre, dance, digital animation, sculpture, digital music, ceramics and photography.

With two artists in each school, I was working alongside the talented choreographer and dancer Kelly Alexander. My practice is in the area of physical theatre and together we were presenting a weeklong dance theatre workshop titled *Transformation*.

Having never worked together before, Kelly and I discovered we both generate and teach from task-based exercises. That is, we set tasks for students and they respond with material that is then shaped into a performance.

Transformation explored the complexities of change through a roller-coaster of dance and theatre workshops. Conceptually we started with the premise that 'one constant thing in your life is that things will always change.'

What brings about change and most importantly how do you deal with change? Change is constant in our natural environment, school, community, friendships and families.

In the first week we worked with 60 very excited Year 6/7 students at Port Pirie West Primary School. In the second week we worked with two groups of students at Stuart High School, Whyalla. The first group comprised 30 Year 8-10 students and the second group comprised nine Year 8-10 students with an intellectual disability.

Prior to our arrival we had all the students write responses to our request of 1) list 5 things you can change 2) list 5 things you wish you could change and 3) list 5 things you can't change.

Each project began with the students discussing what and how they dealt with change on a personal level. Their responses were personal, fascinating and varied.

Things you can change included; the way I think about problems, my future, my attitude, my weight, how I always lose things, how much water I use, my confidence, the way people with a disability are treated, racism, how I love and who I love.

Things you wish you could change included; my dad's death, my name, my hip disease, supermarkets having cheaper food, what people think about me, the Prime Minister, global warming, my brother and me fighting, mum and dad being separated, my grand dad's lung cancer, my ex-boyfriend and my friend's mind.



Things you can't change included; my past, my nana's house, the colour of the sky, my age, there being more sea water than fresh water, bringing my grandpa back to life, how far we are from Adelaide, my need to be a daredevil, my reflection, the sun and my virginity.

Kelly and I shaped the above responses and ideas into dramatic scenarios, choreographed whole and small group movement sequences and even staged a scene for one student and his daredevil personality. Choreography came out of their actions and improvisations. The performance was a success with the students bouncing off the walls with excitement, class teachers thrilled at seeing another side of their students and parents stirred by their child's artistic endeavours.

With the ongoing challenge of balancing the inextricably linked process and product, in this environment, I often favour the process. In the area of arts education I believe this is vital. The process and journey that the students undertake are rich social and educational learning opportunities. It is in this time that I learn the most, as I did with the students from Port Pirie West Primary School. They modelled confidence and courage as they talked about, improvised and finally performed their personal stories of change. They taught me, and other audience members that I talked to, about humour and resilience.

At the end of the performance, one of the student's science teachers said it was fantastic seeing the students enjoying and being proud of their performance. He said enjoyment and a sense of pride was too often lacking in their work and that it was a special thing to see them doing what they loved.

CARGO was a great arts education experience for students, artists and teachers. It reminded us that regardless of age, background or ability we all have stories to tell. And as change is constant in our lives, it continues to be a strong catalyst in helping to bring all our rich stories to the stage.

Further Information on CARGO:

Developed specifically to provide opportunities for artistic residencies in the Upper Spencer Gulf and Roxby Downs from 2007 - 2010, Carclew's CARGO project is supported by the newly established BHP Billiton Youth Arts Fund in partnership with the South Australian Youth Arts Board and Arts SA.

For more information about CARGO contact Angelina Zucco at Carclew Arts and Education on 8333 3400.

Top left
Stephen Noonan

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Stephen Noonan and Kelly Alexander with students from Port Pirie West Primary School