

"In the Key of Hope"

Introduction

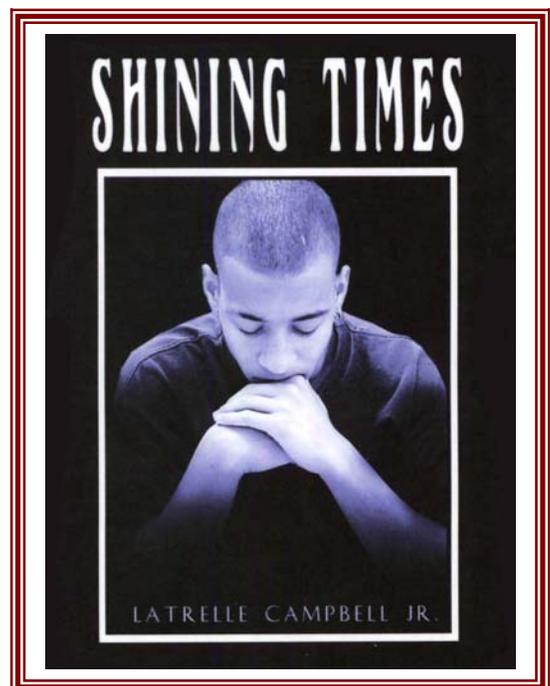
THE PERFORMANCE LAB proposes a groundbreaking experiment in interactive coaching that will link high school students in Minnesota with high school students in New Jersey. This transforming arts experience will center on the performing arts -- spoken poetry, music and song and interpretive dance. Students will contribute original work for this project. Each of four classes will build on what has been learned in one art form in the class preceding. Using student work, our Internet WEBSITE [<http://www.dancepartners.org>] will provide impetus and inspiration -- a starting point -- for each day's coaching session.

There are at least five aspects of "In the Key of Hope" that may prove startling and need some thought as we begin.

- The high school classes are 2,000 miles apart from one another.
- **THE PERFORMANCE LAB** coaching method is resolutely iconoclastic, breaking the rules of standard TV watching, so that our partners experience the arts as immediate, involving and focused. Two classrooms become one classroom.
- The high school students involved in the exchange in both states have had difficulty staying in school. They are "disabled", plagued by emotional and behavioral problems [EB/D] that have barred them from ordinary schools in their communities.
- All of the students have demonstrated an aptitude for expressing strong emotions through words, song and movement.
- The exchanges will culminate with an interactive performance that will be featured on the WEB and on CD or cassette.

This Proposal

We have wanted to give a sense of the promise in the students who will participate in this experience. That explains the pictures and text we have included -- it is student artwork and poetry.



Background

Predicting Myself

*I can't predict why I do the things I do
That's why sometimes
I end up doing something that is not cool
Like acting like a fool
In the community, home, or at school
I just hope my brain accumulates
For me to use my intelligence as a good tool
I'm burning my bridges
Like a broken door that has no hinges
I'm tired of living in this dirty world
That is cruel
And that has awful stenches*

*It is hard for me
Sometimes because I don't understand
Why I give up hope
Also it is sometimes hard to tie the rope
Instead of sitting around playing the clown
In my pity while I mope*

*I need to have a better reaction
When I feel that I am not doing well
Or getting any satisfaction
I need to encourage myself
To put these words in action*

*Stop and then drop the bad ways
Before it is too late
This can be an encouragement
For myself to chose responsible ways
Or this can be for others
Who are also loosing faith
Predicting can good if you use it
The best way that you should
But it can also be bad
The way that you use it just could*

Eric Johnson. 05/16/02

In Minnesota, Karen Kupfer Johnson, an English teacher at Harrison Education Center, has worked with her students to produce an impressive array of original poems. Often, they are presented at student assemblies and award ceremonies as songs or impassioned readings. One of her students, Latrelle Campbell, Jr., has compiled a book of 100 original poems. Other students find that they can readily express themselves in poetry and also have created a substantial body of work. These are children who, as the documentation says, "have demonstrated a documented inability to succeed in less restrictive special education programs.' Programs at Harrison mean to broaden the possibilities of self-expression for each student, and to find socially acceptable ways to express disaffection and unrest.

The performing arts have provided a key to the positive growth in behavior and personal choices for Harrison students. All too often, however, there is no money to support programs that integrate arts learning.

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In New Jersey, the Department of Education has long been an innovator in performing arts education. There are *several* Arts High Schools in the State -- in itself an accomplishment given limited budgets. Their work is buttressed by the need to establish evaluation criteria that can demonstrate individual growth in subject areas within the core curriculum linked to participation in arts programs. New Jersey educators have been able to assess academic growth in these programs, providing a model for the rest of the country.

Over the last year, students at one of New Jersey's premiere arts facilities, the Southern New Jersey Academy of Performing Arts, and their peers at the Perpich Center for Arts Education [MN] were linked by a series of interactive arts exchanges in dance [choreography and drama [acting]]. Students in elementary schools with an arts-infused program of study were also interconnected. Student involvement was complete, each session yielding new areas for extending teacher skills and student performance. These sessions will continue for the foreseeable future, serving as the core model for an eventual *network* of arts high schools throughout America. Some of the process is documented on **THE PERFORMANCE LAB's** WEBSITE as well in the *Best Practices* section of the NJ DOE WEBSITE.

<http://www.dancepartners.org/interactive/lessons.htm> • http://www.njpep.org/Educators/ProfDev/arts_interactive_seminar/index.html

Associated with the Southern New Jersey Academy of Performing Arts, there is a school -- a scant 100 yards away -- that serves students with special needs. And within that facility, there is a special unit set up for EB/D children. This school, soon to be housed in a new building, is connected via interactive technology and a teleconferencing facility to every other school in New Jersey. And to **THE PERFORMANCE LAB**. It is this unique and exemplary institution that will host our interactive sessions with our Minnesota EB/D students.

How THE PERFORMANCE LAB Operates

Expect to see teachers *drawing* choreographic patterns on the screen, students adjusting a *port de bras* as a mentor 2000 miles away "sculpts" the dancer's movement on the screen. Don't be surprised if students take over to teach their peers -- new friends --commenting on concept, exchanging ideas about performance across space and time. Marvel a bit bemused perhaps -- as student dancers, vocal students or actors dance, sing and play scenes together in *one shared space*, not two, linked through precise movement patterns and images captured by mobile, hand-held cameras.

The process is documented on the web, where interactive exchanges are illustrated in movie clips, explanatory text, lesson plans and participants' e-mail exchanges or on a bulletin board. Students and coaches may check out the web to analyze the "movement biography" of peers, study how a coach in Minnesota evokes "a cobra with a necklace" to coax feeling from a New Jersey dancer, dissect exercises in basic theatre technique, quiz coaches by e-mail. Then they can turn back to the studio to refine and work toward an energized, polished performance.

This partnership is not just an idea. It is practical and it works.

TPL has brought classical and social dance, coaching in choral music, drama and even puppetry to: communities in greater Minnesota, high school students at North High and elementary school students at Webster Open School in Minneapolis, dance students at the University of Minnesota, students of St. Mary's University/Valencia Academy for the Performing Arts in Winona, and students in Brainerd at the Mississippi Horizons School for disabled children. Working between Studio 5A or Studio 5B in the Hennepin Center for the Arts and partner sites elsewhere, these communities have worked with local performance groups, such as VocalEssence (Plymouth Music Series) and the James Sewell Ballet. Dance majors at the Arts High School (Perpich Center for Arts Education) have danced interactively with dance students from New Jersey's prestigious Academy for the Performing Arts, Ballet Arts professional trainees have translated dances composed in Labanotation¹ by students at the Ohio University School of Dance. North High dancers have coached University of Ohio college students in original choreography as part of a Laban Movement Choir. Coaches have joined us from the José Limón Foundation and the Julliard School in New York City, Dance Place in Washington D.C. and elsewhere.

TPL builds community through an alliance of technology and the arts by providing:

1. Art education (dance, drama, vocal music and other art forms) to children in schools and individuals in communities throughout the state of Minnesota using existing computer technology and videoconferencing equipment.
2. Artistic resources to Minnesota communities that do not otherwise have access to varied, challenging, first-rate arts experiences.

For some elementary school exchanges, students created "WEB movement bios" of themselves for their "movement buddies" across the country. These phrases were used as the basis of four interactive dance lessons (plans were posted on the WEB). Not only did the sessions provide dance instruction, but also addressed questions of self-esteem and confidence -- the exchanges came to a close with the creation of an ambitious group sculpture created by all 30 students from the movement ideas they had learned from their buddies.

¹ Created by Rudolf Laban. Labanotation and analysis "provides a comprehensive vocabulary and analytic framework for the description of human movement." It is essentially a "written language for describing movement." See our website for lesson plans and a description of the interactive exchanges.

Innovation and Imagination

THE PERFORMANCE LAB is the first organization in Minnesota and the country to use interactive technology as a tool to distribute dance performance and arts education across miles. Indeed, with the help of partnering organizations, **TPL** and its forerunner, DancePartners, have set a practical standard for sharing the performing arts that other art organizations in the country will surely follow. It is an *innovative* leader in the fields of art, technology, and education. (Below, please see enclosed *Chapter 10* and *Conclusion* drawn from *Networking the Land*, an article about innovative programs that use technology.)

For **THE PERFORMANCE LAB**, the case is doubly made — we are one of only a handful of arts organizations to be funded by the Technology Opportunities Program [TOP], a federal program that aims to narrow the disparity of access to technology in America. The vast majority of programs currently funded by TOP focus on healthcare or correctional services. **THE PERFORMANCE LAB** brings the performing arts and artists to those who don't often have occasion to experience the challenge and delight of first-rate arts performance. We are one-of-a-kind.

"DancePartners ... reflects the kind of creativity, commitment, flexibility and imagination required to take a seemingly outlandish idea and make it happen. Like dance itself, these qualities make experimentation with information continuously exciting and uplifting."

-- Networking the Land , Report from the Technology Opportunities Program (2001)

"In the Key of Hope"

Each of the four interactive sessions in this project will be led by teachers and coaches in the performing arts. While yet to be confirmed, on the Minnesota side, we will ask the following to participate:

- Karen Kupfer Johnson, English teacher and librarian at Harrison Education Center, advocate for arts instruction to ameliorate learning and behavioral disorders. Ms. Johnson's ideas led to the drafting of this project and her students' work forms the basis for the Minnesota contribution to the project.

- Toni Pierce, dance professional with the Alvin Ailey Company in New York City, teacher at the Company's Summer Institute and in the University of Minnesota Dance Program.

- A composer/musician yet to be selected from the American Composers' Forum roster, specializing in working with young people in modern idiom.

In New Jersey, performing artists will be selected from the region's top dance and theatre companies, to work with in-school professionals at the Southern New Jersey Academy of Performing Arts.

THE PERFORMANCE LAB, Harrison Education Center and the New Jersey Department of Education on behalf of the Southern New Jersey Academy of Performing Arts respectfully ask for your support of this important and innovative idea in arts education.

"Dropping Out of School" by Bobby Tate

**Dropping out of school,
Was the worst thing I could ever do.
Most people say I was a fool.
I'm traveling in my own thoughts,
Wondering why I dropped out of school,
Because - education is the key to my life.
Not knowing that by dropping out of school
Was like dropping a knife on my life.
For what it's worth,
I wish I could turn back the hands of time,
'Cause I needed the education to bring me through time.
So when you cry that "drop out" line,
You've lost your mind.
It will be too late to retract those steps,
Because they've already faded away.
So when you cross that line,
You're not in your time.**

"In the Key of Hope"

Plans

A schematic plan for each interactive session follows. These ideas are to be fleshed out and improved by coaches with student input.

INTERACTIVE SESSION I [POETRY]

WEB I

- Words and phrases marked by strong emotion will be posted, grouped around the following --

- Morning Blues
- Stress
- Courage
- Obstacle Course
- Temper Control
- Release
- Peace of Mind
- Education Foundation

- Students at each site are to create collectively

- a group poem

or

- clean rap
- 4 lines, twice each

- rhyme

or

- free verse

SESSION I

- When students meet, they will exchange verses, group them by theme and decide together how to construct a poem.

- The resulting collaborative poem is posted on the WEB.

INTERACTIVE SESSION II [SONG]

WEB II

- Students work with the posted poem and
 - upload fragments of song and or instrumental passages to be used in Session II.
- Students work with keyboards provided by the project to set the poem to music
- Student communicate with each other using the Bulletin Board
 - thoughts about performing
 - new ideas
 - thoughts about things that matter

SESSION II

- Composer adapts, modifies and ties together student composition ideas to create a musical setting for the collaborative poem or for part of it.
- The resulting song fragments or musical ideas are posted on the WEB

INTERACTIVE SESSION III [DANCE]

WEB III

- Students rearrange musical phrases, aiming for
 - An integrated composition that highlights the poem's ideas and can be hummed or rapped by somebody else.
- Students upload music as necessary
- Students talk about *the process* – what it means to be a “performer”

SESSION III

- Everybody works together to create movements that translate the emotions in the musical poem
 - classic dance patterns
 - modified everyday movements
 - hip-hop movies
 - elements from modern social dance
- Key movement phrases, close to final form -- but *not* final -- are posted on the WEB. Working ideas.

INTERACTIVE SESSION IV [PERFORMANCE]

WEB IV

- No new segments uploaded
- Students use the BB to exchange thoughts about how the work is going – what should go and what should stay.

SESSION IV

- All four coaches are present.
- Each group of students *teaches* their “finished” piece to the students at the other site.
- Collaboratively, students decide what elements to keep in the final performance.
- The last half of the session is devoted to *a collaborative performance* of the dance poem.
- The resulting performance is reassembled on videotape and posted on the WEB and issued as a CD for each of the students.

“In the Key of Hope”

