

**Using dance to teach history in primary schools**

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*Please note that this four page document provides a summary of the information included in our Full Report (FR) for this project written by External Evaluator Emma McFarland (submitted as an additional attachment).*

**1. What we did**

From July 2016 – March 2017 dance company Made By Katie Green undertook a research project exploring how dance might be used to teach history in primary schools, informed by the company's extensive experience of using dance in heritage and museum contexts since 2013. The project took place in the following schools:

- St Mary's C of E Primary School in West Byfleet, Surrey – Year 4 pupils (2-form entry; Autumn term 2016)
- Boxgrove Primary School in Guildford, Surrey – Year 5 pupils (3-form entry; Spring term 2017)

**151 children** participated in the project over **55 sessions**.

**Project structure**

- A taster session was held for each class at the end of the term preceding the start of the project.
- The project then comprised a weekly dance session with each class designed to introduce pupils to themes, ideas and knowledge covered in the week's classroom-based history session.
- St Mary's explored the Romans and Boxgrove explored the Tudors.
- Site visits took place as part of the project. St Mary's visited Butser Ancient Farm whilst Boxgrove visited Tudor ship, the Mary Rose, and Hampton Court Palace.
- The project in each school culminated in a performance for family, friends, teachers and fellow pupils.
- Weekly dance sessions were led by Lead Artist, Katie Green, supported by Assistant Artist, Hannah Grainger Gibbs. The Lead Artist was also supported throughout the project by mentor Elsa Urmston.

The format differed across the two schools:

- At St Mary's, a 90 minute session was scheduled for each class each week including a dance session and classroom-based history task. The dance part of the session varied in length from 30-60 minutes each week. Class teachers attended the dance session and the Lead Artist and Assistant Artist attended the classroom sessions. Two Year 4 classes took part at St Mary's.
- At Boxgrove, a 45-60 minute dance session took place each week for each class which was usually but not always attended by class teachers. The classroom history teaching took place two days later and was not attended by the Lead Artist. Three Year 5 classes took part at Boxgrove.

**2. What progress we made on the key objectives of our work**

The key questions we set out to 'Explore and Test' were:

**a) Can dance be used to teach history in a different way?**

Our research indicated that **most pupils found the dance sessions and site visits helpful in terms of their engagement with and learning of history** (83.3% at St Mary's and 77.2% at Boxgrove) (FR; p.19). Teachers described some of the impacts of the dance-based learning on the children:

- Clearer understanding of task so pupils could be more purposeful in their approach
- Develops embodied knowledge - using physical actions helps pupils understand and remember words and concepts and reinforces learning
- Improved confidence and engagement in history lesson due to a clear foundation of knowledge to build on
- Pupils came to the history class engaged and inspired following the dance session (FR; p.20)

Importantly, our research showed that the project impacted positively on most pupils' **enjoyment** of dance and history, and the sessions were successful in **closing the large gender gap between enjoyment** scores from the beginning of the project (FR; p.23).

**b) How does teaching history through dance impact upon the children's self confidence?**

The project indicated the potential of this way of working to help pupils feel more confident, **with 51% of participants at both schools stating that the project had helped them feel more confident** (FR; pp.26-27).

However, the research also raised interesting questions/challenges around the development of confidence, including:

- the disparity between the children's confidence as observed by their teachers/Lead Artist/Assistant Artist and their own perception of their confidence, indicating that at year 4 and 5 this was a difficult concept for some of the children to grasp, as was the practice of self-reflection for some pupils.
- many of the children seemed more able to express their increase in confidence by making observations about some of the other skills upon which their confidence impacted, such as their capacity to work well as part of a team or their listening skills, rather than about confidence itself
- the great variety of ways in which the children expressed their confidence (e.g. some very quiet children considered themselves to have high levels of confidence), challenging traditional assumptions of how confidence is manifested and requiring a greater diversity of strategies for evaluating and nurturing confidence
- the challenge of translating the confidence, independence of thought, motivation to learn and engagement with the task in the dance setting to written tasks in a classroom setting for some pupils
- reported confidence levels were impacted by nervousness about the performance element of the project (including rehearsal for the performance), although many children also expressed their enjoyment of/excitement about the final performance

### **c) How can we support teachers to develop their skills in order to be able to continue this work in the future?**

Teachers from both schools, particularly at St Mary's where there was consistent teacher/Lead Artist exchange in both hall and classroom-based sessions, reported that **the project had given them confidence to embed more physical / movement based approaches within their classroom work** (see FR; pp.39-40 and p.88 for in depth teacher reflections).

Particularly at St Mary's, teachers agreed that to develop their skills in planning, creating and leading a dance class, **they would benefit from continuing to team-teach and plan in collaboration with a Lead Artist**, rather than continuing their development through independent use of a resource pack for example, which was originally one of the key ways in which we thought we might take this work forward.

### **3. How you monitored/evaluated and learnt about your work** (also see FR; pp.7-9)

The evaluation was planned and overseen by experienced external evaluator, Emma McFarland, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools designed to support evaluation of the aims of the project:

- initial and end of project questionnaires for all pupils
- mood-o-meters completed by all pupils weekly
- self-evaluation semantic scales completed by all pupils every 2 weeks
- Case study (20 pupils total) initial and end of project group interviews
- Case study matrix, completed by teachers and by Assistant Artist after every session
- Teacher initial and end of project interviews
- Teacher short weekly reflection, completed after every session
- Lead Artist reflective journal, completed after every session

Emma introduced the tools to artists, teachers and pupils and provided guidance on their use. Artists and teachers oversaw their completion each week working with pupils. The tools were also reviewed on an ongoing basis (see FR; pp.47-53).

### **4. What difference the work made and what you learnt from the experience**

**By the end of the project, our research indicates that the children** (also see FR; pp.12-13):

- were more engaged in their history topic
- were remembering things better, including historical terms and ideas
- changed their mind about dance and about history, becoming more positive about both
- enjoyed what they were doing
- developed their dance skills
- showed some improvement (on the whole) in reported confidence levels
- were given an outlet to express their emotions (which in turn gave them an opportunity to become more aware of their feelings) and a new way of thinking about things that developed a more imaginative response
- (on the whole) improved team-working skills
- showed improvements in concentration and listening skills

- enjoyed having opportunities to create their own movements and (on the whole) to perform their work for other people

See FR; pp.19-37 for more details about the proportions of the group showing these differences.

**By the end of the project, the teachers** (see FR; pp.39-40, 83):

- had developed skills to integrate kinaesthetic learning through movement and/or dance into their curriculum teaching, including:
  - modelling movements or actions for the children as a way to help them understand words or ideas that were new to them – not simply asking pupils to create movements, but doing it themselves
  - using props and other visual aids laid out in the physical space to support learning
  - keeping sessions positive and fun
  - giving the children more ownership over ideas and learning (e.g. asking them to create their own 8 counts of movement with a partner)
  - building up movement material in stages with simple steps repeated/developed
- had observed the potential impacts of this movement-based approach on the children’s history learning as outlined above (p.2), understanding ways that it could reinforce their learning and support their written work
- had changed their perception of dance in the curriculum, learning that it ‘could be about more than steps and learning routines – it can be more movement and narrative based’ (FR; p.88)
- whilst less confident about their ability to create a topic-based dance routine from scratch without the support of the Lead Artist, felt more confident to integrate movement, including role-play, into classroom teaching for different topics
- had been surprised by the level of engagement of the children in the dance sessions, including those who were initially reticent

See section 6 below for more discussion of **the impact of the project on the Lead Artist’s practice.**

**Key challenges** we faced concerned:

**The disruptive behaviour of a minority of children who were resistant to what we were doing**

In both schools, there was a “small resistant group” who did not respond as well to the dance-based learning approach. In St Mary’s, in particular, this group was comprised of most of the same individuals who were identified as ‘challenging’ by teachers in their classroom sessions. Reasons for the challenging behaviour in the dance sessions included preferring/needing more structure; preferring classroom-based work; Special Educational Needs such as dyspraxia which meant they found the dance sessions challenging due to coordination and balance issues; finding listening, concentrating or team-working hard or finding it hard to express themselves. The behaviour of this resistant minority at times became distracting to other pupils, but the impact of this decreased as the project progressed.

**Difficulties delivering the project within a school environment due to pressures on space and time, including.**

- Availability of space, and often having to change venue for the sessions at short notice
- Similarly, sometimes having to cut sessions short unexpectedly
- Ensuring teachers and support staff understood the project from the very beginning, particularly where they were not part of the early planning (e.g. due to staff changes between different year groups)
- Ensuring the consistency of the conditions for the data we were collecting across schools e.g. teachers cited pressures on their time as the reason for not completing some of the evaluation tools on a weekly basis

**5. The strength of the evidence generated: how could it be improved, what are the gaps and areas for further exploration?**

The evaluation presented in the attached Full Report is based on analysis of all data from St Mary’s School informed by findings from selected elements of the Boxgrove School evaluation including a 33% sample of self-evaluation semantic scales, end of project questionnaires, case study end of project interviews and end of project interviews with all three class teachers at Boxgrove.

The reason for this approach is that the differences between the way the project was implemented in each school meant it was not appropriate to ‘merge’ data from both schools. Independent evaluation of each school was therefore required and the decision to focus the evaluation primarily on St Mary’s was taken due to the fact this project best met the intended structure / format of the project, in terms of the integration between history and dance planning, the level of dance artist / teacher exchanges in dance and history lessons and the strong buy-in of teachers to the evaluation process.

Unfortunately baseline assessment data for classes was not provided by either school despite several requests. This impacts on our ability to judge the 'distance travelled' by case studies on this project in terms of their history learning, compared to their learning in more traditional lessons. Ensuring schools are aware of the need to provide this data is essential as part of the set-up of any future projects.

Please see FR; pp.47-53 for an in-depth analysis of our evaluation tools/findings for this project.

## **6. Please also reflect on what you learnt about how to deliver the work**

Key impacts on the Lead Artist's delivery/practice are explored in more detail in FR; pp.41-44, including the need for:

- clear structure, and school/topic-related behaviour management strategies
- positive reinforcement (which has to be supported through positive reinforcement from all sides e.g. teachers, school, Assistant Artist, parents) for those children who draw attention and those who do not
- an integrated set up of dance/history sessions (as in the St Mary's model), maximising the potential for the dance learning to reinforce the history learning
- development of a broad variety of ways for using an embodied approach to learning history; essential as the company continues to bring dance to new contexts such as museums and heritage sites
- innovation around how to develop the children's ownership of their ideas in an environment in which there are continual time pressures and specific outcomes that must be achieved
- exploration of other ways for the children to share their work – the children and teachers like the performance element, but it does have a detrimental impact on confidence and, in some cases, motivation
- relativity of approach, and responding to the individuals in the room, because whilst some things come easily to some children, they may be extremely challenging for others

## **7. What you plan to do next as a result of this work**

We have already found that this research has provided us with a new, more rigorous way of talking about the benefits of our work with dance in the history curriculum with other schools/museums seeking to work with us on future projects.

We have gone back to the teachers at St Mary's School, who would be keen to work with us again to explore a modified version of the project that could:

- take place over a longer period of time i.e. more than one term, therefore enabling us to work on things that take longer to develop such as the children's capacity to self-reflect, their ownership of what they are doing and their confidence
- enable us to expand on the possibilities for partnership with a heritage site and integration of more interactive/object-handling activities to deepen the children's embodied understanding of their topic work
- trial a different way of the children sharing their work e.g. through a workshop sharing rather than a formalised performance
- develop more of a mentoring relationship between Lead Artist and teachers so that teachers are sometimes required to lead the danced part of the session with support from the artist, as a way to build their confidence
- be situated more clearly within history rather than PE, which impacts on perception and understanding of the project e.g. by the children, teachers, school and parents

We are also in discussions about potential partnerships with:

- Surrey Arts (to support our work with St Mary's and with other schools in the area who are part of Surrey Arts' Cultural Education Partnership)
- a consortium of heritage sites/primary schools in three areas across the UK linked to the Mayflower narrative (Lincolnshire/Nottinghamshire, Hampshire and Plymouth) with whom we are proposing to work over a period of 3 years (meaning sustained contact with the schools in each area) to respond to themes associated with the Mayflower story. This would provide us with an opportunity to work with schools in a very heritage site-led way, with unprecedented access to handling collections, which would be of great value to our school-based sessions.

## **8. How the grant was spent**

Please see attached spreadsheet for breakdown of income and expenditure for the work funded.