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# *More Alike than Different. To what extent can dance education develop mutual respect and tolerance, thereby promoting the British Values Agenda?*

A SLiCE<sup>®</sup> Research Report – Anne Dyer – Yarlside Teaching School Alliance

## Introduction

In the summer of 2011, a series of riots exploded onto the streets of Britain. Shocking images of violent disorder, burning buildings and widespread looting highlighted major divisions in our society and gave rise to the concept of 'Broken Britain'. David Cameron pledged that his government would address the issues and moral collapse which led to the unrest and fragmentation of our society. By focusing on creating stronger families and a greater sense of community, he aimed to rebuild our national identity and pride. These circumstances, coupled with an increase in fundamental extremism, opened up a debate on what it meant to be British and British Values were introduced in the Prevent Strategy (2011). In November 2014 these were reinforced when the coalition government directed all schools to actively promote the fundamental British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs (DfE 2014). Whilst there has been much deliberation over whether these values are truly representational of Britain today (Byrne 2016), the real dilemma for schools has been how to integrate them into the curriculum and even extracurricular provision. With the understanding that it will be a key focus during Ofsted inspections, the teaching of British Values has become a priority in schools and so it seems particularly relevant that our 2017 SLiCE research should explore how cultural education can promote the British Values Agenda.

## Context

Before designing our research programme, my cultural partner Sarah Lockwood (Ludus Dance) and I felt it was important to understand the background of the schools who would be involved. Through the Yarlside Teaching School Alliance, we were to work with four primary schools in Barrow-in-Furness as well as Arts Award students from Dowdales in Dalton. It is worth noting that the schools are situated at the end of the Furness peninsula and, as such, fairly isolated from major arts and cultural venues. All five schools have a predominantly white British heritage with very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or having English as an additional language (EAL). Pupils have little experience of multi-cultural Britain, living within the supposed Cumbrian 'bubble'. Social deprivation is high in three of the schools with Ormsgill Primary School (57.9%), Parkside GGI Academy (57.3%) and Barrow Island Community Primary School (49.1%), having a much higher proportion of PP students than the national average (25.4%).

Politically, Barrow and Furness has been a strong Labour constituency, but fears over the future of the nuclear industry and Trident has weakened the Labour majority and seen a substantial increase in the Conservative vote. The focus on perceived mass immigration and terrorist activity, together with the threat of further unemployment has nurtured an insular perspective and ensured a Pro-Brexit vote.

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Within this cultural background, there is reason to believe that pupils may be more at risk of far-right propaganda than Islamist extremism. Indeed, national statistics show that white suspects accounted for one in three terror-related incidents in the UK in 2016.

*“It’s clear that there is a growing challenge from far-right extremist individuals and groups. At the last count, one in ten Prevent referrals and one in four Channel referrals were linked to the far-right.”*

(Shashank Joshi, senior research fellow (RUSI) security think tank)

The majority of pupils in the participating schools would have had minimal direct interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds and, for this reason, we felt it was crucial to bring authentic cultural artists into schools and explore the impact this might have. We therefore agreed our research question would focus on how dance education can develop mutual respect and tolerance, thereby promoting the British Values agenda.

## Aims

- To create a bespoke dance programme which enables research and evaluation on how dance can promote British Values
- To create additional opportunities for primary pupils to participate in and appreciate dance from cultures other than their own
- To devise a programme of dance activities which would enable pupils to embody the values of respect and tolerance by working together in groups and by showing positive learning manners to both dance artists and other pupils
- To create an opportunity for primary pupils to share and celebrate work with other young people, teachers and parents
- To work collaboratively with Ludus to create a practical, creative workshop which enables pupils to evaluate their learning, explore their similarities and differences
- To deliver staff development through Ludus and by working with dance artists
- To introduce Gold Arts Award, providing opportunities for year 10 students to develop their Arts Practice by working with professional dance artists and seeing professional work
- To work with Anthony Briggs (Ludus) in mentoring Gold Arts Award students to create new pieces of work
- To enable Ludus to commission new dance artists

## ***More Alike than Different: Overview***

Over 120 pupils participated in the More Alike than Different Programme from the following schools:

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- Roose Community School (Year 5)
  - Ormsgill Primary School (Year 4)
  - Barrow Island Community Primary School (Year 3)
  - Parkside GGI Academy (Year 2)
  - Dowdales Arts Award students (Years 7-10)

Having made the decision to commission dance artists through Ludus Dance, we felt that the most cost-effective option was an intensive programme of workshops. This would enable two experienced artists to travel to the area and deliver four workshops over a two-day period; the plan would also allow time for Ludus to support and unpick the learning through creative, dance-based British Values workshops. The programme would culminate in a celebration of their work in a public venue. In consultation with English Heritage, we were granted permission to hold the sharing at Furness Abbey. As an iconic part of the children's heritage, we hoped this would prove an inspirational venue for the performance. Through discussion with teachers in introductory visits we commissioned Imani Jendai to deliver African/Caribbean workshops and Hayley Ovens of Ceyda Tanc Dance Company to deliver Turkish Dance Workshops.

We also funded Anthony Briggs, Creative Director of Ludus, to work with Dowdales Gold Arts Award students, delivering their Arts practice and mentoring them in creating new pieces of work. Some of their pieces drew inspiration from the late Jo Cox:

*"While we celebrate our diversity, what surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us."*

Jo Cox maiden speech 3.6.15

As this sentiment complemented the values we had focused on, we drew the title of our programme from it.

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## Methodology

Considering the over-arching question of whether dance education can promote the British Values agenda, there were a number of key elements to explore:

- Did the workshops enable pupils to engage in dance from another cultural background?
- To what extent did the activities allow pupils to identify and appreciate key information about another culture?
- To what extent did the activities enable pupils to explore areas of similarity and difference and to articulate their learning?
- To what extent did the activities enable pupils to develop and demonstrate respect and tolerance?

For the *More Alike than Different* Programme, my role was not purely confined to that of researcher. With my cultural partner, I was jointly responsible for designing the overall shape and direction of the project as well as the practical school-based organisation. This included promoting the programme to the Teaching School and other primaries; liaising with schools and venues; developing risk-assessments, managing the budget and timescale. I was also involved in the planning and delivery of the British Values workshop and in running the staff development session. However, as the majority of workshops were delivered by commissioned artists, this enabled both Sarah and I to act as observers, noting key moments, individual responses and overall learning. To broaden our perspective, we also asked the dance artists and class teachers to act as observers and co-researchers. Feedback from the artists' recorded interview and teacher evaluations were integral to the research. Anthony Briggs also played a crucial role, filming the workshops and celebration which added a more objective eye.

## Methods of Gathering Evidence

Evidence was recorded in a variety of ways:

- Filming and photographing workshops and celebration
- Teacher evaluations and verbal responses
- Student written responses and verbal feedback
- Interviews with dance artists
- Audience Questionnaire
- Recorded observations (Cultural Partner, SLiCE®)

Once the evidence was analysed, it was decided that the findings would be presented as:

- an action research paper incorporating key findings, photographic evidence, participant quotations
- a short filmed record of the programme

## Findings and Analysis

### Did the workshops enable pupils to engage in dance from another cultural background?

From observation in both the Turkish and African dance workshops, Sarah Lockwood and I noted that the vast majority of students were fully engaged in learning the new dance genres. For the Year 2 and 3 pupils, this was particularly evident in the morning sessions. Here the learning was broken into a one-hour Caribbean workshop, followed by a 45-minute British Values session. This model seemed to

enable the pupils to sustain their energy and focus and give them an opportunity to underpin their learning after a break. Both teachers and artists commented on the energy and enthusiasm shown by even the youngest group of pupils (Year 2 Parkside GGI) and video footage would reinforce this.

*“Our staff team felt proud of how well the children worked through some quite long sessions with Imani, concentrating and working well as a team to practise and perfect their dance. We were delighted with how well the Dowdales students interacted with our Yr2 children to guide and support them through the dance.”* Teacher, Parkside GGI School

For both schools working with Imani Jendai, it was important that the dance artist herself came from a different cultural heritage and could provide an authentic voice. This broadened their experience, as many had little experience of working with people from different cultural backgrounds.

A number of pupils with special educational needs also took part in the programme and participated well with support from teaching assistants and artists. It was pleasing to see a Year 4 boy with ADHD lead the Ormsgill group in the sharing. He had engaged well in the sessions throughout the week and showed excellent commitment and focus when performing in front of other groups. Similarly, a Year 3 pupil with visual impairment was well supported by a TA and Year 7 students from Dowdales, allowing her to participate in all sessions and perform in the sharing.

## To what extent did the activities allow pupils to identify and appreciate key information about another culture?

Imani Jendai adopted a very energetic and encouraging teaching style which motivated the Year 2s and 3s to join in fully with the African/Caribbean workshops. A practical understanding of a variety of characteristic features was evident in both groups. Year 2 Parkside pupils showed a clear rhythmic call and response and were striving to emphasise the movement of the hips and low centre of gravity. Whilst some may not have been able to sustain these features throughout, the fact that they were aware of them indicates an inherent understanding that these were important in this genre of dance (Teacher observation, Ludus More Alike than Different Film).

With the Year 3 group at Barrow Island School, the artist explained what key movements represented as the pupils were learning them. As well as helping them to acquire the movement pattern more easily, the students clearly enjoyed the narrative and discursive element of this approach.

*“I liked the part where we picked the mango and ate it and rubbed our tummy, it was fun.”* Pupil A, Barrow Island Community Primary School

It was clear from verbal and written pupil responses that those participating in the Turkish workshops had a greater appreciation of that culture than those learning African dance. This could be explained in part by the age difference, with Imani Jendai working with the two youngest classes. Nonetheless, both the Ludus team and I felt that this may also be because of differences in pedagogy and lesson design. From introduction and warm-up to learning set material and creative work, Hayley Ovens drew in references to characteristic features and the purpose of dance in the Turkish culture. Pupils at Roose School commented on the sense of community in Turkish dance, whilst those at Ormsgill School noted some key features.

*“I would like to learn more Turkish arm movements – they are really strong and different”* Year 4 Pupil, Ormsgill

*“I learned that Turkish people come together to dance. They get into big circles or lines.”* Year 5 Pupil, Barrow Island

Through written evaluations, teachers agreed that the African workshops had enabled the most pupils to identify some key cultural information, whilst those in the Turkish workshops strongly agreed that this was the case.

For the Gold Arts Award students, work-shadowing a dance artist in order to explore leadership qualities was a key element of the programme. Through engaging and assisting in the practical workshops the students were also able to develop their skills and appreciation of African/Turkish dance and practical performance skills in that genre. This undoubtedly had an impact on the students in terms of Unit 2 of their Arts Award, where they organised a primary dance festival called Diverse Nation. Two students led a Caribbean workshop for Year 5 pupils and were able to include some key dance phrases and creative ideas drawn from the workshop with Imani Jendai. Students also commented on the combining contemporary techniques with Turkish Dance and some felt this was an idea they could explore in future work. One dancer expressed interest in the fact that some key movements would only have been performed by male dancers in Turkey.

*“It’s strange to think that the steps we learned were only supposed to be danced by men, yet the girls were performing them as sharply and powerfully as the boys.”* Jasmine, Year 10

This cultural gender difference clearly intrigued the student, who went on to research Ceyda Tanc Dance Company as part of her Gold Arts Award.

## To what extent did the activities enable pupils to explore areas of similarity and difference and to articulate their learning?

All teacher evaluations suggested that the programme was successful in helping pupils to identify and celebrate difference as well as exploring areas of commonality. It was apparent from observations in the Turkish sessions that questioning had been planned carefully to enable student reflection. Pupils were encouraged to consider different types of community; occasions when they might come together to dance and the styles of dance they might perform. These discussions allowed them to see similarities between Turkish culture and their own. For example, pupils at Roose School recognised that dance is performed in Turkish community celebrations and that this is similar to their own experience, where people dance at weddings and parties (SLiCE® Observation notes). Ormsgill staff noted that pupils were able to discuss and compare Turkish music and dance movements to those they knew.

*“Listening to music from the Turkish culture, children talked about the style and compared this to music they have heard before. Some dance moves were similar to that the children had seen in their favourite videos.”* (Teacher Evaluation Ormsgill)

Whilst their observations may have highlighted fairly simple and obvious comparisons, teachers felt these would provide starting points for deeper discussion. They stressed the importance of this because of the limited prior experience pupils had to engage with different cultures.

*“The children at our school have very limited cultural experience within their community. The community is widely white British and many children have never met someone from a different culture. In school we cover many different cultural beliefs through our RE and PSHE work, but do find children have problems understanding differences.”* (Teacher Evaluation Ormsgill)

The creative, pupil-centred nature of the British Values workshops enabled pupils to think about how they are the same as others and ways in which they are different. This prompted a range of responses, with the two youngest groups focusing on physical traits, shared experiences, likes and dislikes. Year 4 Ormsgill pupils began with superficial responses but then as the artists probed deeper, they began to

comment on language differences and personality traits. The Year 5 group from Roose articulated more intrinsic values such as kindness and respect. They also identified language as a difference because two students within the group spoke a different language at home.

It was clear from teacher evaluations that the British Values workshop had been instrumental in drawing out key ideas and learning from the cultural dance workshops. Creative movement tasks, role-play and questioning also aided pupils in deepening their responses.

*“When working with Sarah Lockwood the children found it easier to find similarities between themselves than differences. They could identify many things they all had in common but were also aware of differences. The differences identified were mostly those concerning different experiences the children have had eg I have been to Spain/ You have been to France, I like apples/ you like bananas. Physical differences were also noticed eg hair /eye colour. The workshop helped to develop their understanding, through role play between Sarah and another member of the dance company. They highlighted how in many ways they were different in what they liked but that didn’t prevent them getting along and being good friends, showing respect to one another.”* Teacher Evaluation, Parkside GGI School

## To what extent did the activities enable pupils to develop and demonstrate respect and tolerance?

From a teacher’s perspective, this was a significant strength of the programme with 100% of evaluations indicating a greater understanding of tolerance and respect.

*“Emphasis was placed on respecting ideas of others in partnerwork, and also supporting each other’s performances – focusing silently, showing appropriate body language and applauding.”* Teacher Evaluation, Roose School

A positive, respectful culture was evident throughout the workshops. Indeed it could be argued that these values were integral to the activities. Learning another dancer’s movement material, copying and performing it as accurately as possible is surely a form of respect - an acceptance of another’s ideas. This was observed by staff, dance artists and student leaders in all workshops, as pupils worked hard to master the new dance sequences. Partner work also highlighted moments of tolerance where pupils had to accept different ideas, respond to the direction of other pupils and make contact. In each session opportunities were given to watch each other perform and expectations made clear in terms of expected audience behaviour. This fostered an atmosphere of respect and pride which was particularly evident at the sharing.

*“Throughout the dance children were encouraged to respect each other’s efforts and give praise to one another for always trying their best. They respected the adults from the dance companies by listening well, trying hard to please and working to their best abilities. They showed respect to the children from other local primaries and secondary students involved by watching their performances, showing enjoyment and appreciation.”*

Parent questionnaires, artist feedback and teacher evaluations strongly agreed that the children had developed respect and tolerance as a result of the project. All four primary schools participated in the sharing, collaborating with each other in an Opening Piece and Finale, as well as performing their individual pieces. Despite a long rehearsal the previous day and a change of venue, there was a palpable sense of celebration and pride. Almost all the dancers enjoyed performing for each other and sharing their work with parents. This was echoed in the audience responses.

*“A fantastic show! For such young children, I cannot believe how professional they have been dancing in front of everyone here and watching each other so well.”* Parent A, Barrow Island School

Gold Arts Award students also developed their understanding of British Values by creating new pieces of work. Each was inspired by quotes or poems which required them to think about what it really

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meant to be British and how we respond to challenging situations. 'Kindness' by Naomi Shihab Nye inspired a trio exploring the ideas of loss, support and respect. From a starting point of childhood games and friendship, it progressed to more abstract dance and support. Two dancers explored the words of Brendan Cox:

*"An act driven by hatred which has instead created an outpouring of love... We will not respond to hatred with hatred. Those who seek to divide us will face an unassailable wall of tolerance."*

This led to a duet which begins with images of violence and conflict, but develops into contact and unison.

Finally, one dancer took a line from the film Love Actually as a stimulus: "We may be a small country but we're a great one too..." This inspired a Physical Theatre piece which moved from tableaux of superficial British images to contemporary dance suggesting communities who stay together. In the context of the London and Manchester bombings, these dance works gave the students a voice and were easily accessible to the younger primary pupils who watched them at the sharing. Mentoring by Anthony Briggs challenged the students to develop their ideas and creative work further and ensure their pieces really expressed their values.

## Summary Statement:

### To what extent can dance education develop mutual respect and tolerance, thereby promoting the British Values Agenda?

From observations, feedback, film and photographic evidence, it is evident that engaging in dance activity can make pupils more aware of other cultures. In areas lacking diversity, this is enhanced by commissioning artists from a different cultural heritage.

Highlighting key features in the lesson and allowing time for creative tasks and questioning assists pupils in identifying important cultural information. This is clearly shown through teacher evaluation, pupil responses, SLiCE<sup>®</sup> notes and film evidence.

Findings strongly suggest that the British Values workshops devised in collaboration with Ludus Dance, support pupils in exploring areas of similarity and difference. By integrating dance activities, role-play and discussion, pupils are made more aware of what they have in common and are encouraged to tolerate difference. Whilst observations may be superficial at first, particularly with KS1 children, the workshops can aid pupils in deepening their responses.

Perhaps the key strength of the action-research programme is in enabling pupils to develop and demonstrate respect and tolerance. In high-quality, structured dance education these values are embedded within the activities, irrespective of style or genre. Findings indicated that the British Values workshops underpinned learning and made children more aware of where they were developing each value. Like skills, tolerance and respect must be practised; evidence suggests that giving children access to regular dance activity and opportunities to collaborate and respect each other will have a positive impact on attitude and behaviour.

### Implications for future practice/research:

In view of the positive impact this intensive programme has had on developing respect and tolerance as well as broadening cultural awareness, it would be interesting to carry out further research through a more sustained programme of dance activity. Particularly at KS1, this would certainly address issues of tiredness and allow pupils to develop greater understanding of people of a different cultural heritage. In terms of future planning, it would be beneficial to have a face-to-face meeting with dance artists involved prior to the start of the programme. This would ensure a shared understanding of the aims and expectations of roles and minimise any misinterpretation of brief.

With evidence strongly suggesting the intervention of the British Values workshop was instrumental in underpinning learning, delivering this resource more widely may be worth consideration. As a school and in collaboration with Ludus Dance, we would certainly be interested in offering it across the Teaching School Alliance.

For the Gold Arts Award students who are now working towards completion of their portfolio, we will of course track their progress in both Arts Award and future study. Having witnessed their personal journey through mentoring by Anthony Briggs and their access to professional dance artists, I will be very curious to follow their progress and development.

Our one disappointment of the *More Alike than Different* programme was adverse weather conditions making it impossible to hold the sharing event at Furness Abbey. Having developed a good working relationship with English Heritage and planned a large-scale performance, it would be fulfilling to see children perform there, albeit for a different event.

As I come to the end of my role as a Specialist Leader in Cultural Education<sup>®</sup>, I am again proud of the work our young people have created through *More Alike than Different*. It has been particularly rewarding to witness the respect and tolerance demonstrated by pupils in both workshops and the celebratory event. I feel that the partnership with Ludus Dance is one we will sustain and develop and look forward to working with Curious Minds in the future.

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