

# An Investigation of how Dance Can Deliver the British Values Agenda in Key Stage 2

A SLiCE® Research Report – Geraldine Carter – Sandbach Primary Academy

## Introduction

The question of “How can Cultural Education deliver the British Values Agenda?” was given to Specialist Leaders in Cultural Education (SLiCE) fellows by Curious Minds as the focus for our action research in the academic year of 2016-17.

A relationship between myself as SLiCE and Jane Mclean (Cheshire Dance) was orchestrated by Curious Minds, to establish a cultural partnership for the programme. This paper sets out to answer the initial question which, to ensure the programme remained true to this question, was later re-worded to: *An Investigation of how Dance Can Deliver the British Values Agenda in Key Stage 2.*

This report has been compiled through a reflective consideration of the process undertaken and outcomes observed.

The political and historical context leading to the publication of the British Values Agenda (BVA) (Department for Education (DFE), 2014) has developed over a long period (Halstead and Taylor, 200) and has been well documented through the works of Hughes (2016), Byrne (2016) and Hodgkinson (2017), to name but a few. These contextual elements were important and influential in the development of the current agenda, and shaped our developing understanding of the BVA. This context also remains factual and unchanged. I shall therefore continue to focus upon the process undertaken through this study.

Whilst the question posed provided the focus for the study, it also generated several problems within our initial approach to tackling this. The first of which was our - myself and the cultural partner's, - perception and preconceived ideas of what was meant and understood by the term British Values (BV). On reflection, it became apparent that individual perceptions were and remained an important element throughout. Jane brought a more personal response to the focus on BV, with an initially negative reaction as to why such a focus would be established. It did feel like I had a more natural acceptance of such from an educational viewpoint. Here the work of Maylor (2016) and Hughes (2016) helped to break down and find a common understanding between what was meant and understood by BV, for both the educator and the cultural partner. Establishing this understanding was crucial in the development of the resulting program.

However, limitations in my understanding, as a SLiCE, were not only restricted to views surrounding BV but also those surrounding action research. Brookfield (2002) argues that the lens through which we approach critically reflective practice can be limited and restricted, because of the constraints surrounding the field in which we work. As an educator, my initial response could be aligned with observations Byrne (2016) made in the approaches to BV in educational practice. Thus, I orientated towards what could be argued as a box-ticking, tokenistic approach, revolving around Shakespeare. Whilst there is nothing to say that such an approach could not be applicable to the question – this

response immediately added several layers of difficulty to the initial planning and work undertaken (see Appendix 1). These layers became particularly challenging when considering the methodology to adopt in the study and how data would be collated and analysed.

On reflection, this initial work was driven by a desire, from myself, to produce an outcome from the start, along with a misunderstood interpretation of both action research and the BVA. Here I was limited by the critically reflective lens through which I was currently immersed (Brookfield 2002). Alexander (2017) spoke of limitations in singularly focused approaches, such as those taken in Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research, for example, and suggested this may not always be the most beneficial way to measure some subjects, particularly those of the arts. Alexander (2017) suggested that the very approach I had initially adopted, that of measuring the arts within the context of a core subject, may be detrimental in finding the value of the arts subject within its own right. To answer the question posed, the focus needed to remain throughout on how dance could deliver the BVA.

It took the consideration and adaptation of several alternative perspectives and approaches, including those of my cultural partner and established researchers, for me to challenge and shift my preconceived ideas and limited lens surrounding action research. The research required a more organic and fluid approach, whilst the unnecessary complexity Shakespeare brought was removed.

The language chosen to formulate the BVA (DFE, 2014) became problematic too. Training provided by the SLiCE for trainee teachers highlighted the challenges of interpreting the meaning and implications held within such specific language. The semantics of words began to be debated; one trainee questioned the word 'tolerance'... *"Do they mean tolerate? I would hate to think that I was being tolerated"* (Trainee Teacher). In her own school-based research in Sweden, Einarsson (2017), highlighted the acute poignancy and influence of language, further reinforcing the broad flexibility in interpretation and impact of such upon learners.

Considering the quantity and ambiguity of the BVA language (DFE, 2014) and the possible variances in interpretation, we set out to interpret key vocabulary through dance. A second dancer, Clare Reynolds, was commissioned to support the dance development, planning and delivery. Appendix 2 was produced by the professional dancers as a physical interpretation of selected BVA language (DFE, 2014). It was found that not all the main points within the agenda would be appropriate for this program, such as the 'Rule of Law' (DFE, 2014), and therefore only those which the dancers felt were best translated through dance were included in the plan and subsequent sessions.

Other problems fell into a more practical context, such as who would receive the resulting dance programme, for how long and when. Such practicalities tended to be decided upon through factors beyond our control, such as the budget, availability of school halls and the classes in which the head teachers of the schools wanted the work to take place. As such, I will not dwell on these but will situate our research within the contexts in which they occurred in the next section of the report.

## Method/Data

Three half-day sessions were provided for a Key Stage 2 (KS2) class within three of the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Primary Schools. These schools were established members of the MAT, with positive and productive working relationships already established through moderation meetings and training. All three schools were of differing sizes, with varying demographics. Two of the classes were of mixed age and all classes varied between Year 3 and Year 6. An initial meeting was held with the Head Teacher and Arts Lead of the other schools involved, along with the SLiCE (leading in the third school) and the cultural partner. At this meeting, classes were selected on the basis of the needs and availability of the school/learners, and practicalities such as dates for implementation were addressed. Two of the

teachers whose classes were chosen for the programme were new to their schools and classes in January 2017, whilst one teacher was established within the school.

Time was commissioned for two dancers to interpret and plan from the agenda (DFE, 2014). Their aim was to provide a 'physical toolbox', in which key language and concepts could be explored through movement. Appendix 2 was from this, with a follow up planning meeting and half-day Continuing Professional Development (CPD) package for the participating class teachers. The dance activity was grounded in experiential anatomy and improvisational practices, with the tasks offering the possibility of practicing the BV through a lived physical experience (rather than learning them by theory or wrote). Jane and Clare (dancers) used structured improvisations, which were already familiar to them but new in the context of their work with primary age children and presented in a new light in relation to the BV agenda. The analysis of these dance tasks revealed to the dancers some of the fundamental values of their practice, which they may normally take for granted but which sit at the heart of the BV agenda (for example democracy, respect, self-knowledge, taking responsibility, showing initiative.)

Considering the reading and research already encountered (see Introduction), a qualitative, phenomenological methodology was adopted, to gather data and to ensure that the question of how the dance delivered the BVA (DFE, 2014) remained true throughout. Guidance and suggestion was taken from Jane in adopting this, as such an approach was commonly taken by Cheshire Dance in other programmes they were involved in. This naturally lent more organic approach to the research, which was very much out of my comfort zone as SLiCE. But with the support of the cultural partner, I found it to be a more powerful and realistic approach to measuring the art as art (Alexander, 2017).

Due to choosing this method, all teachers, dancers and I were presented with a blank notebook during the CPD training, to record informal observations and commentaries throughout the process. The commissioning of a second dancer for the entire process, including delivery, ensured that the teacher was not required to focus upon dance delivery. Alternatively, and because of this, the teachers themselves acted as researchers of their own classes for the sessions.

In the final dance session, parents, peers and other staff members were invited to share in a performance of the dance. This allowed for a purposeful performance and sharing of learning with a broader community (Hughes, 2016), whilst further qualitative data could be collected and considered through a wider range of observers upon the programme.

In follow up discussions and informal meetings, key aspects of what the teachers', teaching assistants', parent's, children and dancers had observed were recorded. These were then critically analysed, with the Jane's support, to look for patterns across the three school programmes and commentary produced to support this. A key selection of these are included in italics in the conclusion below.

Quantitative data was collected in the form of a sliding scale questionnaire (1 = very poor and 10 = very strong), given to the teachers before and after the dance was delivered to their class. Changes in scale points have been included below and represent the teacher's perception and self-reflection at the start and end points. Opportunity was also given on this questionnaire to provide qualitative comments, supporting the point of scale choice. Whilst the quantitative data would be considered insignificant, due to the size of the field, there were some aspects which supported key findings in the overall qualitative data and therefore this shall be considered in the research findings.

## Research Findings

Trends across the qualitative data we collected formed three key areas, which required analysis and further consideration. These were: British Values, Dance and Communication. For simplicity, they have been separated to consider significant elements within each. However, the interrelationship between the three sections remains important, with overlapping evident throughout. Perceptions were a consistent theme across each of the three areas.

### British Values



*"As dance artists Claire and I saw the children's ability to practice the BV develop throughout the sessions, they became more confident and skilled at exploring their own physicality (self-knowledge) and at successfully negotiating the improvised partner and group dance tasks (respect, celebrating difference, responsibility)."*

(McClean, dancer)

Developing an interpretation of the British Values Agenda (DFE, 2014) through a cultural partner,

as opposed to an educational perspective, allowed for an enriched and alternative approach to tackling how delivery of this agenda could be translated into the classroom.

The second plan developed to deliver the dance (Appendix 2) is vastly different in appearance, approach and interpretation when compared with the initial established model (Appendix 1). This demonstrates the journey taken by both myself as SLiCE and Jane as cultural partner in our perceptions of the BVA, as well as the unique angle offered through professional dance interpretation. This couldn't have been achieved without a professional artist, looking beyond a restricted educational lens, challenging and providing an alternative to current practices (Byrne 2016). This is further illustrated by one teacher's comment, *"This has given me some really good ideas for teaching through dance and looking at British Values in a different way."*

The notion of 'self-knowledge' (DFE, 2014) became a key element of the vocabulary, an area in education that could be argued to be less easy to explicitly teach when meeting the demands of the curriculum. This aspect was also initially overlooked by Cheshire Dance, *"we do that anyway in everything we do"* (McClean, dancer). However, this opportunity allowed for self-knowledge to become a focus, not a by-product of the dance and BV learning, offering a personalised and rooted core for children to build their BV understanding upon. How can a child understand democracy if they do not understand themselves and what they stand for, for example?

Each class within the different schools faced their own barriers and areas to develop. Due to the organic nature of the work, the dancers could be reflective and flexible, allowing for considered



adaptation and flexibility in time dedicated to specific activities. This supported the children's development from their needs and saw each program shift in different directions and focus within the original plan. For example, one of the classes had children who always wanted to be winners, neglecting the democratic approach and community values being learnt. The professional dancers could recognise and challenge this to allow others to become a leader or be the first in the activity. This resulted in more considered responses from the children: *"because it shows we are working together and depend on each other"* (Child).

Whilst in another school a *"strong sense of community in the group, already trying to help each other out,"* was observed to be successful and established. This was echoed further when recognising the children could work *"for the good of the group"* (child, teacher, dancer). Thus, in this setting, the dance could progress to focus upon another aspect of the BVA.

In another example, one school had done extensive BV work before accessing the dance. The children were very good at giving an oral definition of the language involved, but found applying this knowledge to different contexts and meaningful situations to be very challenging. Interestingly, this group found working 'for the good of the group' to be challenging too. Their dance sessions became more about interpretation into practice, as opposed to a younger class in another school who were encountering some of this language for the first time.

Whilst this is no different to good assessment for learning practices that occur in classes throughout the day, having the professional dancer's perspective ensured an organic development of the

dance practice through the BV - which I would suggest would not have been achieved without such specialist expertise.

Links and bridges beyond the direct learning within the sessions were being made. The work challenged social barriers already established in two of the three classes, with one parent commenting: *"I enjoyed watching all the children working as a team, also with people who they are not best friends with."* Whilst a child in one session observed that the activities would be *"good for communicating to people who speak another language"*. The dance impacted upon a broader and more holistic element, one parent observed when asked what impressed or surprised them: *"how they listened and behaved, seemed very grown up."*

All teachers observed a perceived improvement in both the knowledge of and the communication of BV in the classes they taught, with an average of +3 scale points recorded. Whilst confidence in the teaching of BV also improved by an average of +2 scale points. When questioned on what had helped the teachers and how, one teacher found most helpful the, *"focused time on them [the BV], background research to discuss them with the class and activities in the program which has shown them in a [physical] way."*



In the Introduction, I explicitly explored the shift in perspective of BV experienced by the cultural partner and the SLiCE. However, the challenge and exploration of perceptions of BV was also seen to evolve in the teachers we worked with and the CPD training provided for practicing, training and for Newly Qualified Teachers. Much of this CPD originated from the initial research and sculpting of understanding between the SLiCE and cultural partner, and demonstrates the informed influence that leadership through specialist professionals can have in developing policy interpretation and understanding.



A head teacher commented, after a performance in the concluding session, that *"it feels like they're just starting to get it."* This sentiment was echoed by the teachers, myself and the dancers.

*"We would have loved to do more of this work with each group to really embed and consolidate the learning – we wondered how long you would need to carry out this work for it to have a lasting impact and to see that impact beyond the dance sessions themselves?"* (McLean, Dancer)

### Communication

*"Although different classes developed in different ways and each had their own challenges which came from their own unique class make-ups and contexts – all were able to physically, and in some cases verbally, articulate the BV more fully after the three sessions."* (McLean, Dancer)

Teacher reflections in this area also showed a range of positive improvements seen in the children's ability to communicate about BV following the programme. All teachers noted a positive impact in communication, with one teacher seeing the biggest change (an increase on their self-assessment



scale of +5) and an observation that, *"They [the children] mostly use the right terminology [and] can explain what is meant by them, [the BV]."* Whilst another teacher, whose scale score here went up by +3, observed that the children were *"able discuss the activities that they did in the session."* The children were not just reciting a rote learned definition of the BV but had shifted towards expressing what they understood was meant by such a definition through the vehicle of dance.

As part of this, a debate remained (and was tussled with throughout the delivery), as to whether it should be explicitly communicated

that we were learning about British Values and how we used the key vocabulary within the documentation provided (DFE, 2014). In his own recommendations, Hughes (2016) insists that *"facilitating those values through collaborative creative action"* has the biggest impact on the learning of such and discourages direct discussion surrounding the language. This questioning of the children's and our own language, as facilitators, began to evolve and develop through the sessions.

Following further inspection, and the resulting adaptations in approach, it was consistently observed that by stripping back oracy and focusing on communication via physical expression resulted in oral

responses from the children that were strengthened: understanding and communication of specific language used within the British Values Agenda were improved. One example of this was seen in a school where initial definitions of respect were parroted by children, *“respect is listening to someone when they are talking”* (Child). Whilst the children were not wrong, once engaged in dance and forced to explore this without oral language, a more considered reflection of respect became apparent thus: *“if someone’s talking to you, you give them eye contact”, “you listen to them and listen to their opinion.”* Now the children were not just making a statement to appease the questioner or to be seen to be listening, but were actively listening and knowing how such active listening looks and feels. A relationship was made between respect and the role active listening plays in such, respect was being felt, understood and then shown because of the activity. In another example resulting from this, a child articulated the links being made between the language, the dance and the Agenda: *“because it shows we are working together and depend on each other, like the British Values”* (child).

One teacher described a strengthening element of the program to be that of children *“understanding their body better”* which made children better at *“communicating without their voices.”* On observing the performance, a child from another class commented how they were *“amazed they managed to communicate without speaking.”* Perhaps the power of non-verbal communication could be better understood and used as a tool when engaging learners in deeper learning and understanding? There appears to be a place for this presented here within the arts, and in this instance, specifically dance. Whilst there is no implication being made here that oral language is not important in learning - quite the opposite - it asks us to question further not just our teaching of language acquisition, but also the understanding and depth of such upon articulation of thoughts, ideas and concepts and the vehicles in which we choose to gain such depth.

Following the programme, Reynolds (dancer) argued that *“Schools, kids, classes NEED this: the connection, tuning in, generosity, open heartedness. Really looking, really seeing everyone.”*



## Dance

Through being able to commission a second dancer into the planning, delivery and reflection of the work, we capitalised on an unusual opportunity.

*“Having two experienced artists planning and team teaching together is extremely valuable for the artistic practice of both, enabling bespoke professional development*

*and the ability to observe practice. It also gave us the space and time to engage with our own practice in a new light – to analyse and unpick it, revealing some of the fundamental values of our dance practice that we normally just take for granted” (Jane McLean, Dancer)*

The result of this opportunity ensured “sophisticated” (Head Teacher) physical practice, which unlocked an engagement with BV that would not necessarily be the usual approach taken by educational practitioners (Byrne, 2016), but which resulted in deeper learning within the BVA.

Another impact that came from having two dancers was the explicit training and space for such training through Continued Professional Development (CPD).

Purposely focused physical approaches to activate learning are not new in education, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2017), Pie Corbett’s Talk for Writing (DFE, 2008) and Brain Gym, (Educational Kinesiology, 2014) for example, have all valued the importance of such an approach to learning for many years. Greenland (2000, p.8) supports and describes such learning as *“discovering knowledge by means of direct perception through the senses.”* The perspective in which the physicality had been presented in this program had shifted even further from this suggestion to include not just movement but also art and creativity.

*“The extent to which one is grounded in the lived-body experience affects one’s perceptions, understandings and sense of relatedness to the world.” (Coaten & Newman-Bluestein 2013, p.677)*

*“Of all the art forms, dance is unique in placing the body and its lived experience as the site of exploration and art making. Therefore, it offers opportunities for all participants to connect to their physical-selves, to discover or rediscover their bodies, to pay attention to sensation and to connect to others throughout this process in a way that no other art form does.” (Jane McLean, Creative Director, Cheshire Dance)*

As with other key areas highlighted, perceptions of dance and teaching dance were challenged. Russell-Bowie (2012: p71) observed that through *“authentic learning experiences”* confidence was increased for those engaging or being engaged in physical learning. Whilst that was in an Australian context, the same was found in this programme; teachers became more confident in delivery and engagement of dance. One of the teacher’s self-evaluation of their confidence in teaching dance raised by +5 scale points following the program. Empowering teachers to feel more confident in dance delivery was a positive result from the work done, however the *“planning of the dance”* (Teacher) remained an issue. In response to this we developed a follow up CPD session for the teachers involved and others within the schools. Here the expertise of the dance professionals could be utilised further to support and develop the planning of dance.



Perceptions of dance from the children, their teachers and the wider community were also challenged with a child’s initial view of dance being *“routines”* and another stating, *“it wasn’t what I thought it was going to be like. I really enjoyed it!”* Gender stereotypes were also challenged here, as a parent watching the performance commented on their *“surprise at seeing the older boys joining in/enjoying it.”* And several parents in two of the schools were even compelled to join in and engage in elements of the dance too.



## Conclusion

To conclude from the findings above, and in answer to the original question posed, it has been amply demonstrated that dance can deliver the British Values Agenda. There are several ways in which the program demonstrated how this can be achieved:

- By carefully interpreting appropriate aspects of the BVA into planned dance activities.
- By challenging the educational 'lens' and offering an alternative perspective for interpreting the BVA.
- By offering a cultural and artistic focus, which allows for sophisticated and rich learning opportunities that are not necessarily immediately capitalised upon within education.
- By allowing art to be delivered and measured within the context of art (Alexander, 2017), thus providing opportunities not only to demonstrate the value of such but also for the children to gain from that value.
- By allowing children to communicate and explore language through 'lived experiences' - not just knowing a word and it's possible meaning but being able to physically explore, feel and demonstrate it in different contexts.
- By challenging the perspectives of stakeholders in schools, their communities and cultural partners.

## Recommendations

Whilst there is not opportunity in this report to reach the depth needed to fully explore some of the more complex elements which surfaced through the program, the possibilities of further development are apparent.

Considering the research presented, the following suggestions are made to enable continued progress in collaborative approaches to delivering the British Values Agenda through dance.

- Development of a 'movement culture' in schools through dance CPD and approaching curriculum learning from a movement focused perspective.
- Adopting a physical learning approach will ensure children develop a "*direct perception*" (Greenland, 2000:8) of the learning.
- An artistic and creative approach will strengthen and develop knowledge and understanding and should work in collaboration with a knowledge based curriculum as opposed to an either/or approach (Alexander, 2017).
- Language acquisition, understanding and interpretation should be further explored and developed to ensure a lived experience of the language in classroom learning.
- Opportunities for collaborative work with cultural partners must be capitalised upon further to offer an alternative lens to policy and agenda interpretation into the classroom.

- Further CPD and training in perceptions surrounding the BVA and ways to interpret this through curriculum planning would benefit not only trainee teachers but also those established in the classroom.
- Further investigation of the importance and power of chosen teacher language upon creative and cultural learning would be beneficial in determining what was most and least effective in such a context.
- A cultural partnership allows for perceptions, pre-conceived ideas and unconscious bias (Holden, 2017) to be challenged and developed for the learners, educators and cultural partners.
- Arts and creativity offer a safe vehicle to explore more complex issues and agendas.

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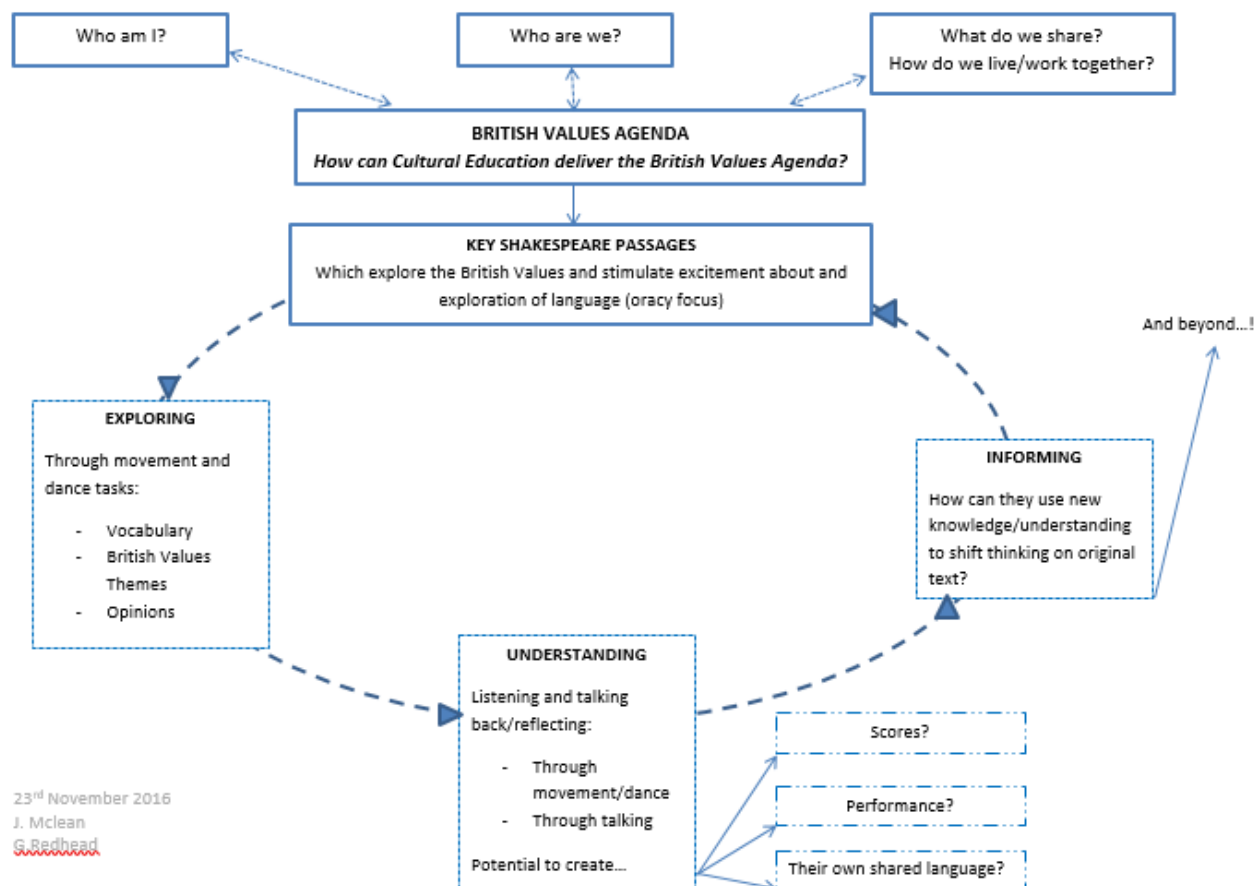
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## Appendix 1

Cheshire Dance and SPA SLICE model of practice – WORKING DOCUMENT





## Appendix 2

