
How can we promote educational and cultural encounters that truly value diverse bodies and minds?

Louise Aylward – SLiCE® Fellow

Introduction

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasises the need for governments to ensure the equal access to education systems at Primary and Secondary levels. This is to ensure provision of reasonable accommodations and support required within the general education system and to facilitate effective education of children with disabilities and identified additional needs. (*Disability and Inclusive Education, Global Partnership for Education 2018*)

The Inclusion Agenda brings together all the services and support for young people with disabilities and additional needs under one umbrella, encompassing the full range of barriers to learning. It takes a holistic approach to meeting pupils needs and recognises, for example, that if a pupil has a problem at home this can affect learning at school, if a pupil has difficulty accessing facilities in the school due to additional physical needs this can affect their learning journey or if a student has social or emotional needs this can affect their access to a challenging and substantive curriculum in school. (*The National Inclusion Agenda 2006*)

On March 29th 2018, the Children and Families minister Nadhim Zahawi stated:

“We want every child to have the support they need to unlock their potential, whatever their background and no matter what challenges they face. Our new Education, Health and Care Plans are putting the views of young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families at the heart of the process, so they can help shape the support they receive.”

Six months earlier in an address to the Cabinet, Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Heywood said:

“In order to serve the country to the best of its ability, the Civil Service must ensure that it reflects the diversity of the UK. Having a diverse workforce is not enough though, if it is to be truly brilliant, the Civil Service must strive to be inclusive and must create an environment where differences of thought and outlook are not only respected but expected.”

It is clear that Inclusion is high on Government Agenda through education and employment. Wider research shows that this has always been this case. In 2001 then, Prime Minister

Tony Blair commissioned a White Paper on 'Valuing Diversity' a strategy for the 21st Century. The White Paper published prior to this was conducted in 1971, 'Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped'. An interesting choice of words for a White Paper based on promoting equality and inclusion and in some ways, this change in use of vocabulary between 1971 and the present day highlights the progress that has been made to date by the Inclusion Agenda. Within the White Paper 'Valuing Diversity' it was identified:

“Education, as a key service for children, must be characterised by its inclusiveness and its high expectations for all children, including those children with special educational needs, and those who are disabled. The Government’s aim is to encourage disabled children to reach their full potential.”

One of the key actions from this White Paper, published 17 years ago, was to develop “a more inclusive education system”. We could ask the question of how successful has this key action been? Are we more inclusive than ever before within our schools? Do our learning experiences truly champion inclusion, in all its forms? Or are schools restricted by Progress data, League Tables and annually reducing financial constraints. In John Harris’s article for The Guardian in April 2018 he passionately expresses the value of inclusions. As a secondary school Headteacher he actively welcomed children with a wide range of complex needs and felt that the school benefited enormously. Within the article he offered one example of how this worked within the school.

“Clive (not his real name) had Asperger’s. Everyone got to know him, everyone recognised his difference. By educating all about Asperger’s, it was possible for Clive to be himself and be accepted. We learnt more about the autistic spectrum than any course any of us could have attended. He blazed a trail so that staff and students could welcome the alphabet soup of conditions that demand inclusion but are so often met with intolerance and exclusion”

Harris then comments on the impact league tables have had on schools forcing them to feel the pressure to reduce the curriculum offer to ensure 'positive data' and how funding cuts have forced the school to cut the level of support available to ensure an inclusive school.

“My successor, due to curriculum changes and budget restrictions, cut back on the availability of courses appropriate to need and removed the support network integral to the success of inclusion.”

The Inclusion Agenda, first introduced in 2002, is an increasingly important part of the government’s agenda and it is committed to ensuring that all pupils are integrated as far as possible into the daily life of schools and the local community. The Department of Education stated that

“Inclusion is a process by which schools, local authorities and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all pupils.” (DFES 2002)

At this point inclusion was predominantly focussed on the issue of special educational needs (SEN) within schools and local authorities (LAs). Services and support have been provided for pupils with a range of specific, identifiable needs such as:

- Learning difficulties
- A physical disability
- Hearing or visual impairment
- Speech and language difficulties
- Significant behavioural and emotional needs
- Those who have profound and complex needs

The DFES then issued several principles schools and LAs should abide by to ensure an 'inclusive education' through their development of policies, culture and practice:

- With the right training, strategies and support nearly all children with special educational needs can be successfully included in mainstream education.
- An inclusive education service offers excellence and choice and incorporates the views of parents and children.
- The interests of all pupils must be safeguarded.
- Schools, local authorities and others should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation.
- All children should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential.
- Mainstream education will not always be right for every child all the time. Equally just because mainstream education may not be right at a particular stage, it does not prevent the child from being included successfully at a later stage (Inclusive Schooling – Children with Special Educational Needs – DfES, 2002).

As the social and educational landscape has changed over-time the focus of the Inclusion Agenda has shifted from solely considering pupils with SEN to those with a wide range of barriers to learning. These include:

- Disaffection
- Mental health issues
- Ethnicity and cultural issues
- Transition and pupils who move frequently
- Gender
- Human rights issues
- Learning difficulties
- Significant challenging behaviour
- Young carers
- Pupils from a community which has a disregard for education
- Unstable family circumstances
- Attendance and punctuality issues
- Drug-dependent young people

The developed prescribed list gives acknowledgment to the wider recognition that schools and other agencies need to take a holistic approach to meeting the varying needs of pupils, depending on the individual circumstances. The result has been that SEN is now set in a much wider context and encompasses a far greater range of barriers to learning. This expansion of the inclusion agenda has led to a wider range of staff and services now being provided within mainstream schools along with new approaches to integrating pupils. A revised SEN Code of Practice took effect in 2002. The revised code sets out five principles:

1. That children with SEN should have their needs met
2. That their needs will normally be met in mainstream schools
3. That the views of children should be sought and considered
4. That parents have a vital role to play in supporting their children's education
5. That children with SEN should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum in the Foundation Stage and later years

The Code highlighted the need for the statementing process to fall within strict time limits, and the roles and responsibilities of the LA, schools, voluntary sector and the independent parental supporter. This gave clear lines of responsibility and accountability to schools to properly implement inclusion in all its forms.

The use of creative practice to promote inclusion has been widely implemented and its benefits researched. There is a clear link between creative practice and inclusion. This can be found in the plethora of research including but not exhaustive to:

- *The Creative partnerships? Cultural policy and inclusive arts practice in one primary school Christine Hall* and Pat Thomson University of Nottingham, UK*
- *The persistence of cultural divides – Reflections on the audience for culture and the arts in Norway Arild Danielsen, Department of Social Science, Vestfold University College, Tønsberg, Norway*
- *The function of music education in the growth of cultural openness in the USA, Roderick Graham, Department of Sociology, City University of New York Graduate Center, New York, USA*
- *Anxiety and niceness: drawing disability studies into the art and design curriculum through alive brief, Nicole Matthews, Department of Media, Music and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia*

One of significant interest is research completed by The Anglia Ruskin/UCLAN Research Team in 2007 which explored Mental Health, Social Inclusion and the Arts. The research identified that engagement in arts practices benefited their participants. These benefits included increased self-esteem, self-worth, positive outlook and empowerment.

Context

For the purposes of this paper the Specialist Leader in Cultural Education will be referred to as 'the SLiCE®' or 'SLiCE® practitioner'. The aim of the SLiCE® role is to develop,

strategically support and increase access to cultural education in their own school/academy and across their alliance schools/academies.

This project involved four academies across Liverpool City Region as well as the Manchester based Dance Company 'Company Chameleon' in the capacity of the cultural partner.

The project was born with 'Inclusion' as stimulus and led to the creation of a youth arts leadership programme for delivery and a collaboratively commissioned set study created by the youth leaders involved in the project and Company Chameleon. The students selected to take part in the project were aged 10-18 across Years 5-13. The initial youth leader's cohort who featured as the provocation for the programme totalled 12 students across the 4 academies/schools. The students selected to take part in the leadership programme were identified as having social, emotional and physical barriers to learning by the schools they attended. The youth leaders then delivered the performance work they created to over 250 students within their own settings. The lead staff involved in the project were Performing Arts teachers and Primary teachers responsible of Arts education within their setting and their associated ITT students who were on placement at the alliance schools during the project. This totalled 19 staff.

Alliance Schools

- Rainhill High School
- Lord Derby Academy
- St Anns Primary School
- De La Salle School

SLICE®

- Louise Aylward

Cultural Organisation

- Company Chameleon

Rainhill High School (Stephen Multi Academy Trust)

Rainhill High School Media Arts College is larger than most secondary schools with over 1650 students on roll. The school is oversubscribed and increased Y7 intake to 300 from September 2017 due to demand. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is similar to the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by pupil premium funding is lower than the national average.

Rainhill's project involved 4 Y12 dance students taking part in the youth leadership project, 47 Y10 dance students 30 Y8 students and 30 Y7 students of mixed ability. Each group learnt the commissioned set study created by the youth leaders. The workshops in which the choreography was delivered was led by the youth leaders. Each group could, if desired, develop the piece further to embrace the overall theme of Inclusion from their perspective

and interpretation. The piece shared with an invited audience of their peers, cultural partner 'Company Chameleon', community and alliance school participants and staff.

Lord Derby Academy

Lord Derby Academy opened in February 2014. It is part of The Dean Trust, a group of schools and academies. This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school with 843 pupils but is continually growing and has been oversubscribed in recent years. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is more than double the national average, but the proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who receive support through the pupil premium funding is more than double the national average.

LDA's project involved 4 Y10 dance students taking part in the youth leadership project and 45 Y7 students of mixed ability. Each group learnt the commissioned set study created by the youth leaders. The workshops in which the choreography was delivered was led by the youth leaders. Each group could, if desired, develop the piece further to embrace the overall theme of Inclusion. The piece shared with an invited audience of their peers, cultural partner 'Company Chameleon', community and alliance school participants and staff.

De La Salle School

De La Salle is a 11-16 non-selective mixed gender Catholic school. There are currently 1190 pupils on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those with Special Educational Needs is lower than national average.

De La Salles' project involved 4 Y10 dance students taking part in the youth leadership project and 15 Y10 students of mixed ability. Each group learnt the commissioned set study created by the youth leaders. The workshops in which the choreography was delivered was led by the youth leaders. Each group could, if desired, develop the piece further to embrace the overall theme of Inclusion. The piece shared with an invited audience of their peers, cultural partner 'Company Chameleon', community and alliance school participants and staff.

St Ann's Primary School

St Ann's is part of the Three Saints Academy Trust. It is a non-selective mixed gender school for children aged 4-11. The school has 420 pupils on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged and students with Special Educational Needs is lower than national average. St Ann's project involved 49 Y5 dance students. Every student learnt the commissioned set study created by the youth leaders. The workshops in which the choreography was delivered was led by the youth leaders. Each group could, if desired, develop the piece further to embrace the overall theme of Inclusion. The piece shared with an invited audience of their peers, cultural partner 'Company Chameleon', community and alliance school participants and staff.

Company Chameleon

Company Chameleon produces inspiring and original dance theatre productions in Manchester, which tour across the UK and the world. Company Chameleon started when

Anthony Missen and Kevin Edward Turner met at Trafford Youth Dance Theatre in the mid-1990s. Two ordinary lads from Manchester, they shared an ambition to dance professionally for a living. After developing their talent at Trafford, they trained at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, and after graduating travelled extensively to work with some of the most innovative dance companies and choreographers in the world including 'Of Man and Beast', 'Pictures we Make' and 'Push'.

They returned home to Manchester in 2007, to achieve their goal of setting up their own dance company, and Company Chameleon was born. Today, Company Chameleon tour internationally to wide acclaim and perform over fifty indoor and outdoor performances a year. Through the development of the Company they have created 'Chameleon Youth' a dance programme to nurture young talent. Throughout their tours they offer dance classes and workshops to all. As a result, they've introduced thousands of young people, from countries all over the world, to a different side of dance and movement. This was the 2nd year that Company Chameleon had been part of the SLiCE[®] programme.

Methodology

The study focuses on data gathered during the project including student/staff/audience/cultural partner voice, attendance to the programme and school, attitude to learning, and dance skills assessment. All data gathering methods had a focus on inclusion.

These surveys also sought to explore each participants' view of the project; thoughts about the creative approach to inclusion, use of collaboration, leadership opportunities and teacher practice development and their reflection of progress from beginning to end.

The views expressed are personal views that represent a subjective response to the issues associated with inclusion. In this regard, the "data" collected is not conclusive as such but designed to promote further discussion about productive approaches to engaging all students through creative practice fulling the inclusion agenda to its fullest.

Specific outcome focussed areas were:

- Improved Mental Health
- Increased Social Inclusion
- Improvement in Dance Skills (performance/choreography/appreciation)

The indicators within these focussed areas were:

- Increased levels of mental wellbeing, decreased levels of mental distress, decreased levels of primary care services in school used (pastoral support).
- Higher levels of social contact likely to build relationships within school to build social capital, reduced levels of perceived stigma, higher levels of wider school and cultural engagement.

- Increased levels of confidence and self-esteem, enjoyment of arts participation, learning new skills, pride in their own work and the works of others they have had influence upon.

Analysis of findings and recommendations

The project commenced with an audit and discussion with staff and students within participating alliance schools about how inclusive their school experience was and how they accessed arts and culture.

The responses evidenced that the use of inclusion and provision of cultural arts was approached in two ways:

1. Through specific delivery for marginal groups.
2. Teacher led workshops, trips, activities within whole classes or year groups with levels of controlled autonomy.

352 students across the schools were surveyed. The student range included equal proportions of students identified by the school as having a range of barriers to learning, as listed in the Inclusion Agenda.

The most repetitive response by the students at 86% was that students stated that they had rarely if at all been given the opportunity to lead an activity over time and often were overlooked for leadership roles in creative and cultural settings. 92% of students also stated that they rarely if at all had been able to create meaningful creative work that had a legacy across the school (artwork displayed, theatre pieces performed, scripts shared, music played publicly, dance pieces created and shared amongst peers). The students interviewed felt that these opportunities often went to “other” students who did not have the barriers to learning they presented. 74% of students stated that they were offered leadership opportunities, but these were often low stakes, leading short-term tasks. The students commented that they “never felt like they had real responsibility”, “we can be creative but only to a limit”. This raised the question that to be fully inclusive and develop creatively the students would benefit from a true leadership experience and that in an effort to support students, schools had in fact “capped” their student’s potential. This idea of developing an authentic creative leadership opportunity was the key focus for the project.

Discussions then developed between the SLiCE® practitioner and Company Chameleon as the cultural partner to explore this identified thread. The forefront of this was to create innovative and exciting ways ensure inclusivity and engage students in a way that would have a long lasting impact on themselves, their school and their understanding and experience of Arts and Culture. It was evident that students had a desire to take leadership roles and explore their understanding of leadership at differing levels, where previous inclusive practice had not given them opportunity to do this. We would also focus upon the wider benefits arts participation would have on mental wellbeing as identified in the Secker research paper.

Several proposed ideas were shared with the core students within the Alliance schools and were developed through a number of conversations between SLiCE® and Company Chameleon. The SLiCE® pitched the ideas to the youth leader's cohort who then discussed and selected one to pursue further. This was their first leadership responsibility and it gave way to how the project would develop over time. It was evident from initial conversations that the youth leader's cohort had little or no leadership experience as they found challenge in working as a team, decision making, listening and voicing opinions, formulating and presenting ideas. These initial conversations became part of the project process as this was essential to developing emerging leaders through inclusion. As SLiCE® and cultural partner to give the students a true leadership experience we had to hold back and allow them to make mistakes and find solutions thus developing essential organisational and communication skills. The students wanted the research project to be based on a student led dance set study in association with Company Chameleon. The youth leader's cohort within the Alliance schools then collaborated with Company Chameleon to create a bespoke Dance set study on the theme of inclusion through an inclusive process.

The students across the schools then took the set work and developed their own "Inclusive" response. Accompanying the set work the students created a tutorial video (performed by the student choreographers), teachers guide and audio guide. The project culminated in a celebration and sharing of work between all schools, networking of staff across the alliance schools including pastoral and arts staff and the cultural partner. INSET was issued to staff within the Alliance school and their ITT students at all schools to promote further networking practice and breakdown how they could replicate the project within their own setting. To track the skills development of the students and ensure sufficient levels of challenge for each through Cultural Arts, in this case specifically Dance choreography and performance as creative assessment tool was used. Spencer, Lucas and Claxton existing research on assessing creativity formed the basis for this. This methodology was implemented on the assessment of learner progress throughout the project to gauge their individual development. This focussed on measuring the skills development of the following 5 areas:

- Inquisitive (wondering and questioning, exploring and investigating, challenging assumptions)
- Persistent (sticking with difficulty, daring to be different, tolerating uncertainty)
- Imaginative (playing with possibilities, making connections, using intuition)
- Collaborative (sharing the product, giving and sharing feedback, cooperating appropriately)
- Disciplined (developing techniques, reflecting critically, crafting and improving)

The dance company delivered a provocation to the students so they could experience the workings of creating professional dance. Teachers observed this practice for their Continuing Professional Development. This workshop developed the student's leadership skills as they were challenged to make every decision about choice of movement, musical accompaniment, intention, concept, style, pattern and formation. The students struggled with this which highlighted the students lack of experience in leadership opportunities. This

supported our initial research audit outcomes as students highlighted that they felt they had not received “authentic and meaningful” leadership experiences.

The students then led subsequent sessions and discussed a range of ideas and musical accompaniment that they would use to create the set work. The students had to work to a tight time frame in order for the set work to be completed and shared within their own settings. Following the final workshop and creation of the set work the students had 6 weeks to share and develop the work within their own setting. The students were responsible for leading this work. During this time, I undertook a number of visits to the Alliance schools to observe the practice and record any development points. At week 2 the development of the piece had stalled and feedback from staff and student voice exposed that this would usually be the point at which the teacher would step in and take leadership control of the project. Following a number of discussions with the staff and cultural partner we made the decision to have the students to continue to lead the project without any external interference as this would have compromised the integrity of the project and contaminated the data. By week 4 the students had successfully overcome their creative issues and choreographed their set work. Company Chameleon completed an additional workshop to support the student leaders in refining the work before it could be taken back to each Alliance school to be taught to other students. This was a successful workshop as the self-confidence, self-esteem and enthusiasm of the students was visible from the outset. During student voice taken at this point the students expressed a significant sense of ownership and achievement. They looked forward to delivering the set work in their own setting. Pastoral data that came in at this point and showed a positive increase in attitude/effort to learning for all students within the leadership group. Reports from Pastoral managers within each of the settings describes a distinction reduction in the use of “in school pastoral support mechanisms”.

The work was then developed in each setting by the leadership group. For the celebration event, each Alliance school brought 2/3 groups and staff to share their original performance or developed performance of the set work. At this point the cultural partner gave feedback and recognition to the journey the students had undertaken within the project. Additional students and staff voice was collected along with pastoral and progress data.

Upon reflection with the cultural partner we identified that a huge positive to come out of the programme was working with the young people as the ‘creative’. The project pushed the young people out of their comfort zones to absorb an idea, be involved in its early stages, take it through a creative process and achieve a final product. This was a new way of working for the young people and whilst you could sense the challenge at the beginning, the experience of having creative ownership over the work, allowed staff and peers to witness an incredible amount of growth and confidence in all the participants involved. The cultural partner’s involvement in the project encouraged wider thoughts around inclusion and we appreciate that inclusion can be applied to entire models of working, learning environments and creative practice and thought. Through participation in the project Company Chameleon were encouraged to assess their own learning and participation work and address its inclusivity and what can be done to improve this.

Across the schools it was reported that:

- **Attitude/Effort for Learning** – A/ETL scores have increased in students that received scores lower than expectation prior to participation in the project.
- **Wellbeing** – Students commented on a number of positive aspects to participation including increased confidence and self-esteem, developing friendships and positive mind-set.
- **Transferable skills** – Teachers commented that students transferred skills developed and assessed through Claxton wheel of creativity were evidence in other subjects and areas across the school.
- **Active participation** – Student involved in the provocation workshops began to take a more active role within the life of their school.
- **Teaching practice** – Staff involved in the project have developed their teaching methods to allow all students opportunity to take the lead and giving them time to make and learn from mistakes before stepping in.... they discovered that they are more capable than they thought.
- **Teacher networks** - have developed and schools have engaged in a wider number of subsequent cultural opportunities after taking part in the SLiCE project.
- **Creative practice** – Students and staff reported being more confident in experimenting with their creative practice following working with Company Chameleon.
- **Students understanding of careers in the creative industry** increased as a direct response of the involvement of the Cultural partner. Company Chameleon shared their experience of life as a professional dancer, choreographer, direction Arts officer broadening the horizons of the students that took part in the project.
- **Schools developed a partnership with Disability Arts Warrington** and have carried this working practice through the next academic year, performing dance works in one another's showcases
- **The Lead school engaged with 4 other secondary schools** to support the delivery of cultural education due to the SLiCE[®] project.
- **Teachers involved in the SLiCE[®] project** felt that it was excellent form of CPD and developed their teaching, subject pedagogy and inclusive practice. This led to promotion for 3 teachers involved in the project.
- **All schools involved are going to continue to deliver the project** to subsequent groups and in some cases encompassing additional art forms.

Summary of Recommendations:

On the basis of the findings above I have presented the following recommendations for the consideration of those wishing to have a creative response to Inclusion.

1. A student led approach. Opportunities for students to autonomously lead projects with teacher purely in role of facilitator. To allow opportunities for peer to peer teaching

overtime and ensure that students can make mistakes, problem solve and apply levels of meta cognition to resolve issues independently. Learners thrived on an arts-based leadership opportunity, especially the opportunity to positively impact others through their own practice. Allowing those with barriers to learning to access leadership and personal development through a low stakes high reward creative process.

2. A student consulted approach. The use of student voice throughout planning, delivery and reflection of projects to establish if the intention of inclusion is successful. This allows immediate action from school leaders and cultural practitioners to ensure students are accessing and benefitting from inclusive projects in their fullest sense.
3. To embed multiple and significantly profiled opportunities for students to share their work with each other and their local and wider community in informal and professional settings. This gives students a sense of self-worth, accountability, pride and opportunity to learn from others through either collaboration or observation. Thus, increasing their levels of perceived inclusion to their own community, school or peer group.
4. Develop consistent and strong links with cultural institutions that offer opportunities for all ranges of students to participate and share their work. The most successful engagements included learners observing the cultural partner during site specific performance works. Working with dancers and choreographers of multiple physical, social and emotional make up had a profound impact upon the way the students perceived themselves and others.
5. Arts Award to be integrated to the delivery of arts-based leadership projects, with a focus on the contribution of all learner groups within the school.
6. Artsmark to be utilized as a vehicle to promote and monitor the success of creative inclusive practice.

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