



Diversity in the National Curriculum—Dance



Dance anthropologists maintain that dance is a cultural manifestation and a vehicle through which culture can be understood. In the sense that it is a conspicuous component of the complex and

dynamic culture from which it originates, it could well bring fresh insights into the general understanding of a particular culture. Since all dances have a cultural context, dance can therefore make a potential contribution towards the teaching and understanding of cultural diversity within the educational setting.

Through learning about the way people dance and by physically experiencing dances of a range of cultures, it is possible to investigate the historical and socio-cultural origins of the dance, the people who create and/or perform it, their past, their beliefs, their ideals, their customs, their music and even their lived context. For many people, dance is still an integral part of the way they live, although it should be noted that the term 'dance' is founded on concepts that are peculiar to only a few cultures and societies. Indeed, there is no word or even concept for 'dance' in the Western sense within some societies, and a 'dance' should be recognised as such by the performer(s) and the observing group members.



As dance teachers in the West, how can we therefore avoid falling into the tokenism trap when we present dances of a range of cultures? We certainly need to be wary of the 'steel bands, saris and samosas'¹¹ approach, and should not therefore aim to collapse an intricate non-Western dance form into a 'one lesson wonder' in the dance-as-art model in Western education. We should also avoid presenting something in dance

as 'representative' of a culture/society, as we would be effectively stripping it of its cultural distinctiveness and setting ourselves up as an authority in unfamiliar non-Western dances. If we remain conscious of such issues and pitfalls, then diversity doors can be opened in, through and beyond the dance space. Dance is a rich moving tapestry in any culture or society, and its threads can be unpicked, interpreted, reinterpreted and woven back together again through the sensitive, thinking bodies of the teacher and the children.

In Western education, the teaching of dance is primarily conceived through a three-strand framework of **composing (creating)**, **performing** and **appreciating**. Each



element can be studied in isolation but in schools these are usually interrelated processes, enabling students to develop expertise as dancers/performers, choreographers and knowledgeable viewers. A selection of ideas is detailed below using these three processes, with recommendations for a cross-curricular approach that draws upon a variety of stimuli when teaching dances of Western and non-Western origin. Notwithstanding the cultural origin of the dance, this type of approach is an integral part of high quality dance education, for it encourages a real breadth

of teaching and learning strategies.

Inspiration and stimuli could thus derive from music, photos, images,



paintings, sculpture, movement, video, film, professional performance, text, poetry and the like. A combination of these will help us respond to and cater for the diversity of our learners, since some pupils are more inspired by the spoken word, whilst others prefer tactile sensations, visuals or moving images.

Example



A Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11 years) topic about Egypt in Humanities could be brought to life through dance by looking at artefacts and images of the way they lived. What do

the images on their pots or in tomb wall paintings tell us about the way they dressed, travelled, worked, and amused themselves? What do the pyramid findings and artefacts tell us about their rituals? Look at film footage of Eastern dance today. Read Egyptian legends.

Ideas: create a dance which tells the story of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld and of vegetation. In small groups create freeze-frame images from artefacts. Bring them to life. Use working actions for building a pyramid. Create a celebration ceremony.



Teaching and delivering Dance Ideas from a range of non-Western Cultures

Dance from a non-Western culture could be taught in a variety of situations, depending upon the knowledge/experience of the teacher and the purpose of the lesson. As long as the complexity of non-Western dances is acknowledged, some of the elements of the dance genre might be experienced by children in the following ways if a session were delivered by:

- a specialist dance teacher with an in-depth knowledge of their art form:



A Kathak dancer working with a group of able 16 year olds who have been studying Akram Khan's 'Rush' on DVD could help them to learn some basic elements of the genre with a view to creating their own Kathak inspired dance.

- a primary class teacher who has learned some basic dance moves at a series of workshops given by an African dancer:



An African inspired dance with Year 5 students could be created to accompany their study of an African village and the way people live and work – cutting down a tree, chopping the wood, making

the fire, building a hut, hunting for food (see extracts from a range of works by Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble for visual stimuli).

- a visiting professional dancer working alongside the class teacher:



A dance work could develop from looking at North American Indian history and lifestyle – worshipping a god of nature, circular patterns, dreamcatchers, exploring myths and legends based on dreams and North American

folklore, war dance rhythms, rain dance (see extracts of dances from Dances with Wolves for visual stimuli).

An example of Developing a Lesson Idea for KS1/2 (ages 5-11) using Flamenco Dance

Stimuli:



- studying the origins and history of flamenco dance
- drawing and designing costumes used in flamenco dance
- listening to traditional

flamenco music

- investigating body percussion: different hand claps, finger snapping
- exploring fiestas and traditional Spanish celebrations

- looking at a map of Spain and learning where flamenco dances originate and are situated

- learning about weather patterns, climate and vegetation in Spain

- examining Spanish architecture, food, customs

- YouTube – use the search words 'flamenco dance' and a wide variety of footage is available

- Opening ceremony of the Barcelona Olympic Games (1992) - observe videos and photos online as visual stimuli for dance positions, shapes or movements (YouTube & Google Images)

- show arm and feet positions in Spanish dance from books on 'Spanish Dancing' - available from Dance Books Ltd (www.dancebooks.co.uk/)

- Riverdance, The Show (1995) – two flamenco dances. 'Fire Dance' is available on YouTube



- Carmen Flamenco, Ballet Teatro Espanol de Rafael Aguilar. DVD available from Dance Books Ltd.

Developing Ideas using Composing, Performing, Appreciating

1. Teacher selects video footage and shows to students. Discuss the actions, spatial patterns (floor/air), and energies (dynamics) used.

The qualities evident in flamenco dancing are:



- strong, defiant, spring-loaded, explosive energies
- expressive/emotional face
- arching upper body movements
- sharp angles of the body and arms
- arms shaped around the body's personal space
- wrist rotations and splayed fingers
- deep seated knee bend (plié), out-turned leg position
- percussive foot patterns
- rapid barrel turns
- limited use of general space

2. Solo. Teach a simple clapping rhythm to the whole group. Then teach two static flamenco arm positions (with optional feet) from the visual resources. Pupils copy and practise them.

3. Solo. Let children explore joining their 'flamenco statues' together with 2-3 travels/turns in a flamenco style. Look at the videos of flamenco dance and select some simple foot patterns or turns with younger children. Older children can select their own travels/turns and practise them.

4. Duo. KS2 children can join with a partner, using the clapping rhythms and movements they have worked on to create a 'new' sequence. Try to encourage children to explore different relationships such as side-to-side and back-to-back. One can move and then the other (canon), one can move high while the other moves low, or they can meet, part, mirror or follow.

5. Group. Whole class performs their clapping rhythm then their solos (KS1) or duos (KS2) altogether. Repeat performance with half the class watching the other half and vice versa. The observers must try to remember one movement that they really enjoyed and why. Talk with a partner and describe it to them, or the children could try to draw the movement when they return to the classroom.

An example of Developing a Lesson Idea for KS3/4 (12-16 year olds) using Australian Aboriginal Dance

Stimuli:

- understanding their heritage and present position in Australian society through looking at their



- past history
- studying their art work
- reading their dream-time journeys and legends
- studying the envi-

ronmental landscape where they live

- listening to their didgeridoo and percussive music
- observing the indigenous animals from which they draw their dance inspiration
- You Tube - two particularly interesting ones performed in their country of origin can be viewed by using the search words: 'Bird and Fish, Rowella, Tasmania', and '3 Dances by David Gulpilil, Blanesi'.

- Opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games (2000) - observe photos online as visual stimuli for dance positions, shapes or movements (Google images: Sydney Olympic Aboriginal Dance). Read descriptions of the 2000 Olympic arts festivals at: www.australiadancing.org/

- Stamping Ground documentary made by Jiri Kylian (Netherlands Dans Theater) when he visited Australia in 1980 and the new dance of the same name that he created with his company in 1983 after his return.

- Authentic aboriginal didgeridoo music



Developing Ideas using Composing, Performing, Appreciating

1. Teacher selects video footage and shows to students. Discuss rhythms, shapes, foot stamps, style, body shape, centre of gravity, use of hands and more.

The qualities evident in their dancing are:

- stamping in a variety of ways as a group
- stepping into the ground with bent knees (low centre of gravity)
- using high springs and jumps on the spot

- using their hands
- having a physical centre of strength in their stomach
- counter movements which extend the body shape
- expressing feelings or stories in an abstract way, often about animals, hunting or war

2. Solo. Ask pupils to select four still shapes from the footage. Copy and practise them.

3. Solo. Look at the travelling steps and stamps. Copy, select and practise.

4. Solo. Link together their shapes and travels in keeping with the aboriginal style.

5. Duo. Look at each other's solo and decide how they might be joined at three moments - Focus? Time? Space? Unison? Then select a jump and decide where it should be added. Practise. Perform together.

6. Group. Whole class look at each others' duos. Decide how they could be joined together to make an interesting group dance with a beginning, middle and end. Aboriginal dance rarely uses Western choreographic forms so to make the resulting dance more realistic it should look random, yet all dancers should know what they are doing and when!

¹Bhavani & Bhavani in Chatterjea, A. 'Towards Creating a Variegated, Multilayered Fabric'. *Impulse*. July 1995. 3:3. p. 149.

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**The National Dance Teachers Association
 (NDTA)**

This article has been co-written by members of the editorial team of *dancematters*, the termly publication of the NDTA. *dancematters* is published three times a year and promotes best practice in the learning and teaching of dance in education. It is distributed free to NDTA members, who can access articles and resources from back issues of the publication at www.ndta.org.uk/

NDTA seeks to ensure that all children and young people in the UK have equal access to a high quality dance education. It is the only national subject association whose sole remit is dance in education. Members include teachers, schools, colleges, dance companies, education centres and dance agencies.

For more information on how to join, contact the NDTA, PO Box 4099, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 6WX. Email: office@ndta.org.uk Tel: 01543 308 618 Website: www.ndta.org.uk/

The Council for Subject Associations has created a new publication, *Primary Subjects*, designed to support teachers in schools. The NDTA has created practical resources for dance. These pages can be downloaded by any teacher from the NDTA website as a PDF file.

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Additional Resources

The **Real Histories Directory** has a number of resources that might help with the teaching of Dance.

Several dance companies are featured, many of them offering workshops, performances or INSET for schools.

Irie Dance Theatre (www.riedancetheatre.org/), based in south-east London delivers a range of creative, educational and artistic activities, based on stimuli derived from Africa and the Caribbean; the company aims to promote culture and diversity through training, outreach, performance and inspired partnerships. It can offer varied and exciting residencies lasting from one day to several weeks for educational institutions throughout London and the regions. Dance workshops explore the use of African, Caribbean and Contemporary movement showing the strong links between modern techniques and African and Caribbean dance. They use a variety of music including calypso, reggae and dub music.

Nzinga Dance (www.nzingadance.org.uk/), also in London, facilitate classes, workshops and residencies in African and Caribbean traditional dance, African Fusion/Contemporary Dance, and Drumming/Percussion

Drum Roots (www.drumroots.org.uk/) provide West African Drumming workshops and performance in Greater Manchester and across the North West. Specialising in the Djembe tradition, Drum Roots is a co-operatively run business, embodying the spirit of togetherness fostered by the music.

Iroko Theatre Company (www.irokotheatre.org.uk/index.html) is a theatre-in-education company that works mainly in schools, colleges, libraries, community centres, hospitals, young offenders' institutes, etc. The company uses interactive performances and/or workshops in the art of oral storytelling, drama, music and dance to help educate and enhance the creative potential, self-confidence and self-esteem of children and young people from varied backgrounds and abilities.

You can find out more about **kathak**, the classical Indian dance form at www.kathak.net, where there are also details of classes held for students aged 7 and up.

Akademi's (www.akademi.co.uk/) Education & Community Programme creates imaginative, enjoyable and artistically challenging projects for people of all ages, ethnic origins, backgrounds and abilities. Workshops and residencies take place in a wide range of settings including schools, colleges, youth clubs, day centres, residential homes, hospitals and prisons. South Asian dance and related arts are used as a resource for learning, creativity and well-being, while raising awareness of the diversity and richness of South Asian culture

DanceIhayami (www.danceihayami.org/) is the first cross-cultural professional company of its kind in Scotland, dedicated to the art of Indian classical dance and its rich complexity of rhythm, posture, gesture and expression. They offer classes and outreach workshops as well as touring nationally and internationally.

India Dances (www.indiadances.com/) in Ealing, London, have classes ranging from Bollywood for Beginners, to Bolly-Fusion, Kathak Dance, Kathak Yoga, Bolly Aerobics, Bolly-Bhangra, Aqua-Bollywood and Mehndi Choreography Classes. Classes are available for all levels, and ages.

Art Asia (www.artasia.org.uk/) aims to develop South Asian arts, music and dance across the Southampton area.

India Dance Wales (www.indiadancewales.com/) is the only professional Indian dance company in Wales, with extensive experience of working in education at all ages.

Based in Leeds, **South Asian Arts UK** (www.saa-uk.org.uk/) offers South Asian dance and music classes as well as organising performances and workshops for the public.

Nusantara (www.nusantara.co.uk/), based in the East Midlands, is a group of professional dancers who deliver education and workshop programmes exploring the culture of South East Asia

Fèisean nan Gàidheal (National Association of Gaelic Arts Youth Tuition Festivals) - www.feisean.org/bf/site06003/home.htm - have existed in Scotland since 1981, when a group of people on the Isle of Barra organised a tuition festival aimed at reversing the decline of traditional Gaelic music, song and dance arts.

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The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (www.realhistories.org.uk) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: realhistories@runnymedetrust.org.