

Telford Culture Zone – A Cultural Hub Initiative

The Dance Mission

Summary

Telford and Wrekin Culture Zone is one of three Cultural Hubs in England. It was initiated by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), funded by Arts Council England on behalf of the DCMS, and managed in partnership with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

Cultural Hubs have been established in Durham, Bournemouth and Telford.

Dance Mission was collaboration between two of the Telford cultural partners – DanceXchange and Telford and Wrekin Libraries. They worked with four primary schools to promote the 2006 Summer Reading Challenge. This is a national library initiative that aims to encourage children to read widely over the summer holidays

Background

Telford has a population of 160,300 (up by 26% in the last 20 years). Twenty-five per cent of the population are under the age of 18. There are estimated to be 3,173 children from black and ethnic minority groups. Just over 19 per cent of the school population has been identified as having special educational needs (SEN).

The Culture Zone consists of:

- 13 primary schools
- three specialist arts colleges
- the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra
- Birmingham Rep
- DanceXchange
- Telford and Wrekin Libraries
- Ironbridge Gorge Museum
- Shropshire Archives

Key issues

Although the Shropshire partners had links with each other and colleagues in the Community Arts Team, they had not worked with cultural providers from elsewhere. The close proximity of Birmingham and links created by the MLA, DCMS and Arts Council gave them the chance to work with a nationally acclaimed orchestra, dance company and theatre company.

Early on in the project's history it was agreed that each Shropshire partner should team up with a Birmingham partner for one term. This would allow them an insight into each other's priorities and methods of working.

Telford and Wrekin Libraries were teamed with DanceXchange, and Dance Mission provided them with a focus for their interdisciplinary work.

What we did

During spring and summer 2006, the two partners set up an educational programme around the Reading Challenge's theme of spying. What resulted was a complimentary series of activities: workshops in schools co-led by a dance artist and a librarian, a celebration day at Oakengates Theatre, an author visit and an after-school performance group.

The series of four workshops took place in Key Stage 1 and 2 classes. The essential ingredient in the workshops was the presence of both a librarian and a dance artist who had created the workshop together. The workshops all included reading the book aloud as well as dance activities and dressing up, based on themes from the materials published for the Reading Mission.

The author's visit to the classrooms contributed to the excitement of the project. She not only was able to bring her work to life, but in the question-and-answer session she extended the children's understand of how to write books and the publishing process. The children were able to demonstrate dance movement that they had created from phrases taken from her book.

The after-school performance group was aimed at Key Stage 1 students. Over the course of 10 sessions, the students met after school and accomplished a series of tasks:

- devising a scenario for their 10 minute performance
- creating poetry about their experiences
- participating in dance sessions focusing on the theme of spying
- creating a dance DVD based on the scenario they created
- reading spy stories together
- incorporating live dance sequences into the performance with the aid of the dance artist

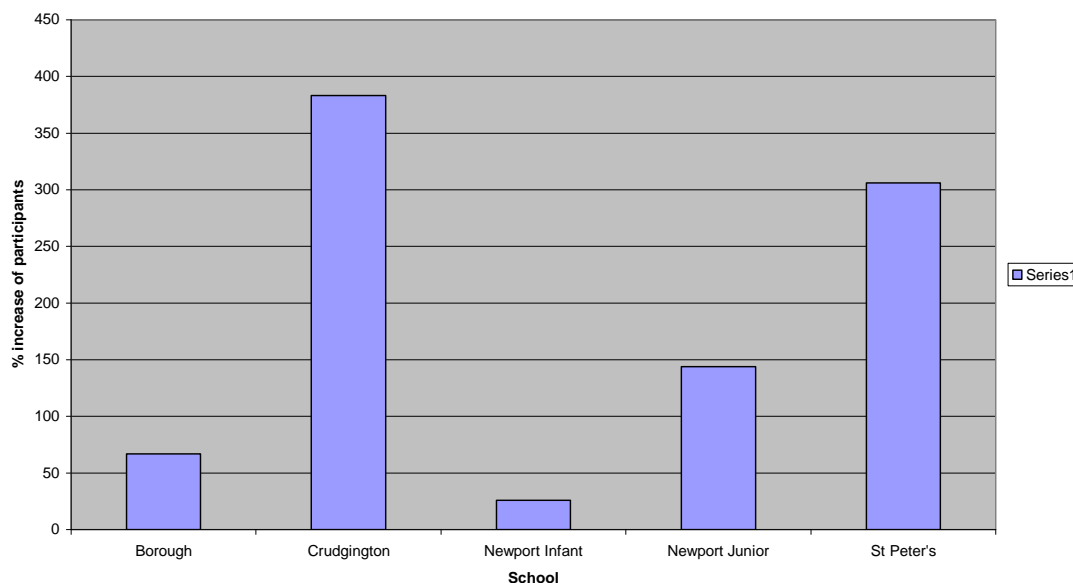
The two leaders were very keen to have the ideas for the performance come from the students themselves. This was so that students would have the chance to explore creative thinking and writing, and the physicality of dancing

Key outcomes and impact

The evaluations at the end of the project illuminated the strengths and benefits of the project. All participants stated they had read more during the process and were eager to continue reading over the summer holiday. Evidence from libraries indicated that although there had been a general increase in the number of children involved in the reading challenge in 2006, there was an even greater increase in the number of children participating who were from the Dance Mission schools.

School	2005	2006
Crudgington	6	29
Newport Infant	27	34
Newport Junior	18	44
St Peter's Bratton	17	69

% Increase in number of participants from 'Dance Mission' schools - 2005 to 2006



From the teachers' evaluations it became evident that lower ability learners improved the most with reading levels. Also, students were excited by the prospects of reading and dancing together. The project had led to boys showing increased interest in dance.

The project produced a number of spin-off activities that were managed and led by the schools. The GCSE dance class at the secondary school linked with one of the primary schools, observed the sessions and then created their own movement piece based on what they saw.

A group of students practiced their writing skills by creating letters for Barbara Mitchellhill, the visiting author.

The infant school involved held an assembly that showcased the work the students had done.

Many of the schools set-up mini libraries in their classrooms so the students could take out the books involved in the project and read them at home.

Man teachers used the material that the students created in the sessions, and customised and extended the work in their own dance classes.

The project's life after the performance has focused mainly on sharing the lessons learned with teachers in the Telford Culture Zone. A full resource pack was created by the librarian and the dance artist and a full continuing professional development (CPD) day is planned for summer 2007 for teachers wishing to adopt this approach to reading and dance. The lesson plans created for this project will also be available on the DanceXchange website later this year for any teacher with access to the internet.

Resources

A breakdown of the associated costs is as follows:

Printing costs – £40

Office costs – £120

Filming – £200
Books – £935
Travel for artists – £350
Author visit – £800
Theatre hire – £729.75
Coach hire – £325
Total – £3459.75

Who was involved

- pupils and teachers from two primaries, one infant and one junior school
- a dance artist
- a librarian
- project managers from DanceXchange and Telford and Wrekin Libraries

This make-up allowed the organisers to document the project, create lesson plans and disseminate information to other organisations

Barriers and how we overcame them

The main barrier was time. The demands of the curriculum limited the amount of time children and teachers could dedicate to the project. This was overcome by looking at how the project could be incorporated into different subject areas. In some cases 'Dance Mission' was undertaken as part of both English and Physical Education lessons. The performance group was also part of the Extended Schools Curriculum.

Time could have been a potential problem for the librarian and dance artist. However funding allowed an acceptable amount of planning as well as delivery time.

Space was also a problem. Several of the schools needed to use their hall for this project. However demands for this area meant that some of the activities had to be undertaken in classrooms.

Critical success factors

The time scale was realistic. The partners were all willing to learn from their experience and from each other. Teachers, artists and librarians tried to 'look outside the box' while remembering their objectives.

How we would do it better

The two partners hope to build on their multidisciplinary approach and work with other partners to create a multidimensional experience for children and young people.

More time could have been given to recording and evaluation at the beginning of the project. The involvement of a neutral evaluator would have been useful.

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