



**BEEE CREATIVE**

Dance connections in Herts & Beds

## **Dancing with Light for Schools Project**

**An evaluation for BEEE Creative CIO**

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(credit Sam Ivin)

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## Summary

**Background:** Taking part in arts activities, such as dance, affects physical and psychological health. Participation can also impact social wellbeing, as it enables you to connect with others.

**Aim:** This evaluation sought to understand how taking part in the 'Dancing with Light for Schools' pilot project affected teachers' and students' attitudes and behaviour towards dance and how teachers might best be supported to enable the rollout of dance projects across schools in the future.

**Key findings:** Providing dance projects in schools that are both engaging and diverse, is likely to produce the best outcomes in terms of student experience. To encourage initial interest from schools, projects should be presented in as straightforward a way as possible, with links to things that the school is already doing. For project delivery, there is a clear preference for artists to come in and support teachers, at least for part of the project.

## Introduction

Voluntary engagement in creative arts, including choral singing; other musical activities and dance can contribute greatly to physical health and psychological and social wellbeing (1-3). Taking part in arts activities at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, whether offered remotely or face-to-face, was shown to provide both adults and young people with a challenge, to give them a safe space to express themselves and to create with like-minded individuals and to allow them to forget about everything else and have fun (4). In the BEEE Creative 'Dance for Film' project carried out with Bedfordshire schools at the end of 2021, there were indications of the importance of being part of a dance project that is meaningful and enables you to connect with others (5).

The BEEE Creative community 'Dancing with Light' project took place at the beginning of 2021 and sessions were held online, apart from the final workshop, which took place at Stevenage Museum. The project involved working with a photographer, Sam Ivin, and dance artist, Hannah Delaney. They encouraged participants to play with light and create dance movement, which combined would translate into beautiful, bold images using light painting photography techniques. Participants described how taking part enabled them to connect with others and gave them a sense of belonging and purpose during a difficult time. The project also provided them with a challenge as it enabled them to learn a new skill: learning about light and using light to create movement (6).

The 'Dancing with Light for Schools' project sought to pilot turning the community project into a schools project. It took place at Scott Primary School with Year 4 pupils between 22<sup>nd</sup> February and 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 and consisted of six weekly in person workshops. The Year 4 pupils were split into three groups, according to their English and Maths sets, so they could still continue with these without too much disruption. Central to the project was an idea of co-creation: Having a framework but this being flexible to encourage a sense of play.

The evaluation sought to explore how taking part in the project impacted teachers' and students' attitudes and behaviour towards dance in a school setting in order to understand how dance projects such as this might be developed and rolled out across schools in the future.

## Evaluation Aims

1. To understand how taking part in the 'Dancing with Light' project has affected teachers' and young people's knowledge and views about dance.
2. To understand how taking part in the project has affected a sense of connection among young people.
3. To explore whether taking part in the project has increased teachers' confidence in delivering dance in school in the future and what can be done to further support them.

## Logic model

Inputs	Outputs	Primary Outcomes	Impacts
<p>Skilled photographer and dance artist; 'Dancing with Light' resources</p>	<p>Sessions delivered; number of teachers and students taking part</p>	<p>Increased understanding of teachers and young people's views and experience of dance in schools; increased sense of connection among young people; increased confidence among teachers about delivering dance; increased understanding of what can be done to help support teachers to deliver dance in school in the future</p>	<p>The rollout of a dance project in schools that has the voice of young people and teachers at its heart.</p>

## **Evaluation methods**

Mixed methodology was used with a range of methods, surveys; observation and in-depth interview, utilised to explore attitudes about dance and experience of the 'Dancing with Light' project in a school setting.

### ***Baseline and follow-up surveys***

Teachers and Year 4 pupils completed a baseline survey before taking part in the 'Dancing with Light' project and a follow-up survey when the project was completed. Surveys included a mixture of closed and open-ended questions, which explored individuals' participation in previous dance projects, their views about dance before and after the project and what they learnt and enjoyed most about the 'Dancing with Light' project. Teachers were also asked whether taking part in the project had increased their confidence in delivering dance and what further support could be given to them in the future. Pupils were asked whether they would like to participate in future dance projects like the 'Dancing with Light' project at school and whether they had any suggestions for future dance projects.

### ***Observations***

Both teachers and artists working on the project noted down any observations they had during individual sessions.

### ***In-depth interview***

An in-depth interview was carried out with the lead teacher on the project to explore their experiences of the 'Dancing with Light' project in a bit more depth and their views about how schools might be best supported to enable them to take part in similar dance activities in the future.

### ***Data analysis***

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, with the use of inductive and deductive coding, as appropriate.

### ***Ethics and Consent***

Before completing a questionnaire or taking part in an interview, participants were clearly informed that participation was completely voluntary and that they didn't need to answer any question that they did not want to.

All data were treated with the utmost confidentiality and patient identifiable information was not passed on to the evaluator apart from contact details, which were provided with the teacher's consent to arrange the interview.

## Outcomes

### ***Increased understanding of teachers' and young people's views and experiences of dance in schools***

#### Young people and teacher participation and questionnaire responses

Ninety young people took part in the project. 83 of the young people (92%) completed the baseline survey and 75 (83%) the follow-up survey.

Across the three student groups there were a total of 6 teachers or teaching assistants. 1 teacher completed the baseline survey; 1 teacher the follow-up survey and there were 3 responses for the reflective diary form sent to teachers: 2 for week 5 and 1 for week 6.

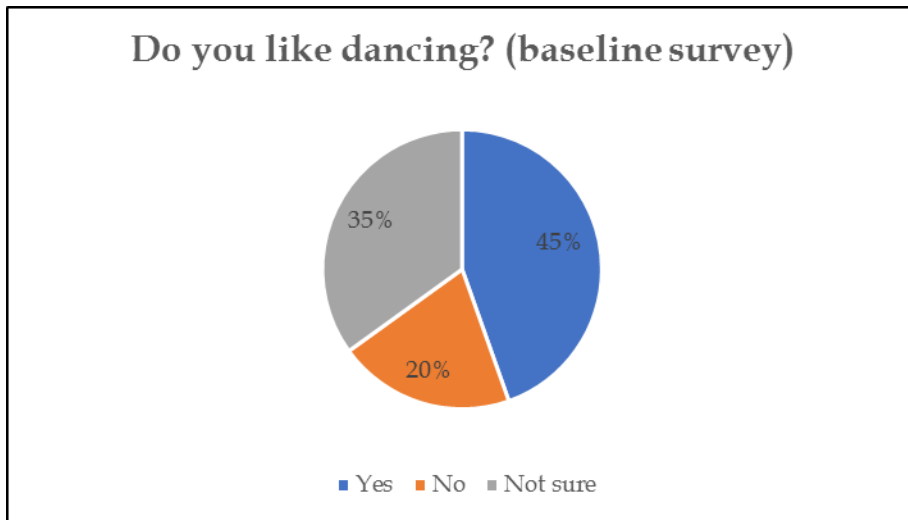
#### Baseline and follow-up surveys for young people

Seventy-eight percent of young people had taken part in dance activities at school before taking part in the 'Dancing with Light' project. Thirty-one percent of young people had also taken part in dance activities outside of school.

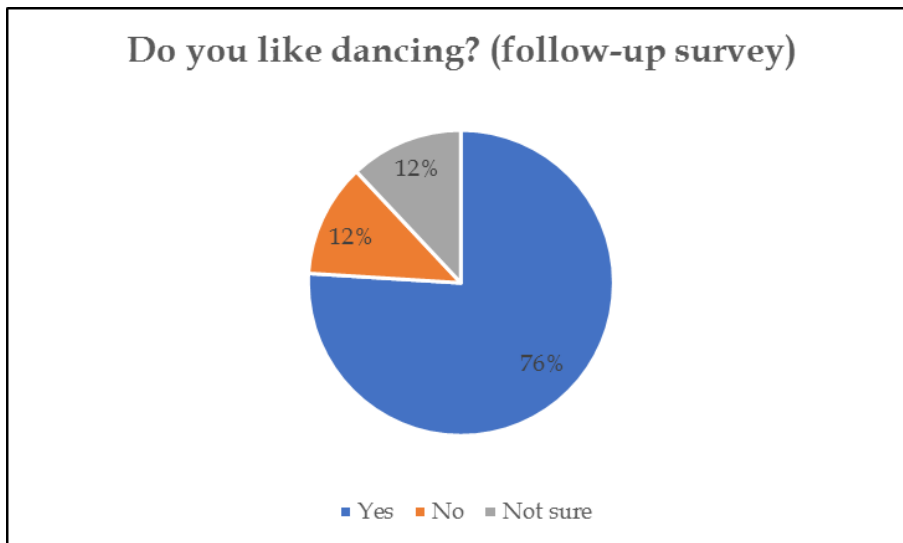
As shown in figures 1 and 2 below, there was a clear increase in the proportion of young people saying they liked dancing before (45%) and after (76%) taking part in the 'Dancing with Light' project. Descriptions of why they liked dancing were more effusive in the follow-up survey, with several young people also mentioning the 'Dancing with Light' project specifically. Reasons given for enjoying dance were that it makes them feel free; it enables them to express their feelings; it takes their mind off other things; it is fun; it makes them happy; it makes them calm; it gets them moving/means they can learn different dance moves. Aspects of the 'Dancing with Light' project that were specifically mentioned were the light painting; the different types of dancing; using the cameras; using the torches and going into the dark room.

There was a marked reduction in the number of young people saying they were not sure whether they liked dancing or not between baseline and follow-up surveys (35% to 12%) (Figures 1 and 2). Several young people in this group said they enjoy dancing but they feel embarrassed doing it in front of others. Reasons given for why young people didn't like dancing were that they find it boring; they think they can't dance and they find it embarrassing.

**Figure 1. Young people’s response to question in baseline survey about whether they like dancing or not**



**Figure 2. Young people’s response to question in follow-up survey about whether they like dancing or not**



The enthusiasm for the ‘Dancing with Light’ project was clearly reflected in the word that many young people chose to describe it (Figure 3 below). Several young people said it was amazing; fun; fantastic. The responses were also overwhelmingly positive from the young people who said they didn’t or were not sure whether they liked dancing. Two of the young people in the “No” group said they thought the project was okay and one that it was scary. One young person in the “Not sure” group described the project as bad.



**Figure 3. Young people’s response to question in follow-up survey asking them to describe the ‘Dancing with Light’ project using one word**



When asked what they liked most about the ‘Dancing with Light’ project, going into the dark room to capture final images (to be exhibited) was definitely the favourite activity. Others spoke about seeing how the light affects dance; using the light painting app and dancing. When asked what they liked least about the ‘Dancing with Light’ project, nearly half of the young people (47%) said “Nothing.” A few said coming out of the dark room and a few, the dancing.

When asked whether they would like to take part in dance projects like this one again at school, 76% said that they would; 15% that they were not sure and 9% that they wouldn’t. Really varied suggestions for future dance projects were given, including dancing in groups; dancing with art; dancing with film; using lots of different apps instead of one; working with different colours and lights; traditional dancing; Bollywood dancing; Street dancing; Break dancing and dancing that involves jumping. It was very interesting as several of the young people who said they weren’t sure whether they liked dancing or not at the beginning of the follow-up survey, gave suggestions for future dance projects that specifically mentioned music, such as dance to music and do calm dances; make own music and dance to it.

#### Teacher forms and interview responses

Children’s complete enjoyment of the different components of the ‘Dancing with Light’ project and how they talked about certain aspects for days afterwards, was commented on in teachers’

reflective diaries. It was described how most of the children became more engaged as the project progressed, with an increase in ideas and co-operation skills observed.

It was discussed how it was important to take part in a straightforward dance project such as this one, as dance is an area in which the school does not have a lot of experience. It meant that both teachers and young people could learn a new skill, using photography alongside dance. It was detailed how this is something that the teacher looks forward to using both inside school (including enabling young people in other year groups to also take part in similar projects) and outside of school, in the future. Scott Primary would want to develop their learning from the project together with things they are already doing creatively, such as oracy. They already have Avatars for different subjects and will create one in the corridor for the "Dancing with Light" project. They will have questions associated with this to prompt children to think about what they have learnt.

### Artists reflections

It was described by the artists how the children and staff reacted positively to their presence from the start. This was reflected in the feedback that the children provided at the end, where they expressed how much they enjoyed doing the project and working with the artists. An interest in what was being learnt went beyond the school setting and several children told the artists that they had downloaded the light painting app and had continued to use it at home.

However, it was detailed by artists how as time went on, some of the children became more distracted when they needed to share more and wait for things.

It was observed how some of the children were sceptical about dance at the beginning but there was actually shown to be a very positive attitude towards dance in the dance only week of the project (week 3).

### ***Increased sense of connection among young people.***

Several young people said that the thing they liked least about the 'Dancing with Light' project was the team not working well together. This was mirrored in the responses to the question about what they had learnt while taking part in the 'Dancing with Light' project, with mention of the importance of working together as a team and considering things from a different point of view. A few also said that the thing they liked most about the 'Dancing with Light' project was taking part with friends.

It was detailed by teachers how on the whole, children worked really well together. The importance of them overcoming the belief that they are not good at dance and being able to express themselves freely, was also discussed by the lead teacher on the project.

The artists also described how the groups of children, on the whole, worked very well together, with the dance only week (week 3) enabling students to connect in person more.

### ***Increased confidence among teachers about delivering dance.***

As only one teacher completed the baseline and follow-up survey, there was only one response to the question asking whether they felt the project has increased their confidence in delivering dance on the whole. However, the reply was “Yes” and in the in-depth interview with the lead teacher on the project, it was stated how Scott Primary would be able to carry the project forward now they have taken part and deliver it themselves using the provided resource.

### ***Increased understanding of what can be done to help support teachers to deliver dance in school in the future.***

Based on the discussion with the lead teacher on the project, it was detailed how, for future dance projects, it would need to be considered whether schools would give a fee for the artists to come in or the schools would be given the resources and would deliver the project themselves. If it is the latter option, it would be good for the artists to produce some YouTube videos, similar to those made for the 'Dance for Film' project. It was described how the resource pack that would go out to other schools would need to be as straightforward as possible and it would be good to get schools to think about where problems might be in advance e.g. having a spare classroom to prepare the dark area; downloading the light painting app on the ipad. It was also suggested that a bid for funding could be made to enable a central creative box to be put together so schools can borrow pieces of equipment.

The way in which future dance projects are initially presented to schools, was deemed of vital importance. It was specified that it needs to be as straightforward as possible and teachers need to be given support so they feel confident in delivering the project. Suggested ways for how the project can be presented to other schools, were linking it to topic work that the school is already doing; linking it to oracy and linking it to technology.

Based on comments from the artists, two suggestions for rollout of future dance projects were given: The first being a step-by-step guide of how to run the project and the second, that artists go in and support. It was detailed how artists could lead the introduction and first session to help with the confidence of the teacher. An additional session could also be added for teachers before the project begins, so they understand where BEEE Creative is coming from with the idea of co-creation.

Artists also detailed the importance of preparedness for the success of future dance projects. This includes having strong artistic partnerships; good support staff; accounting for differences in different groups of students in design; taking into consideration funding for equipment and how equipment might be treated; being prepared for the inevitability that some of the equipment

won't work and thinking about the physical space, such as health and safety in the dark room and the need for blackout curtains.

## **Conclusions**

Taking part in the 'Dancing with Light' project affected young people's perception of dance, including feelings of embarrassment when performing in front of others. The project gave them a safe space to express themselves, forget about everything else and have fun with friends. Combining the light painting with the dancing, provided them with a unique experience and meant that those who remained unsure about dance could still be involved and engaged.

Participation in the project also enabled teachers to learn a new skill and, although only based on limited available data, there were indicators that taking part increased confidence among teachers about delivering dance in the future. In-depth discussions with the lead teacher on the project and the artists delivering the project provided important further insight in to what can be best done to help teachers to deliver future dance projects. This included ensuring that both how the project is initially presented to schools and the resources that are sent out to enable them to deliver the project, are as straightforward as possible. Both teachers and artists highlighted the value of having artists coming in to schools to support delivery, particularly at the beginning. Where this is not possible, it is suggested that guidance videos, created by the artists, are provided.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that future dance projects are presented to schools in as straightforward a way as possible, linking it to things that they are already doing and highlighting the concept of co-creation.

Resource packs that are sent out to schools to enable them to deliver dance projects should, similarly, be as straightforward as possible and encourage them to think of potential problems ahead of the project, such as student group differences; buy-in from other members of staff; preparing equipment and being prepared for equipment failure; having the appropriate physical space.

To ensure that teachers have adequate support so they have the confidence to deliver dance projects in the future, the ideal scenario would be that artists come in to schools to help with delivery, particularly at the beginning. Where this is not possible, it is recommended that

YouTube videos are created by the artists, with the option to have an online zoom session, as required.

Funding also needs to be considered from the outset, with the suggestion that a bid for funding be made for a central creative box, from which different schools can borrow pieces of equipment.

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