

# The YDance “Dance-in-Schools Initiative” (DISI) Final Evaluation Report



## Executive Summary | February 2008

This report presents the findings from an evaluation undertaken by the Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit (CAHRU) at The University of Edinburgh of the ‘Dance-in-Schools Initiative’ (DISI). The DISI consisted of a five-week programme of dance, delivered to primary and secondary school pupils across all 32 local authorities in Scotland between 2005 and 2008.

The content of the dance workshops was based on the 5-14 National guidelines for PE and involved warm-ups, games, co-operative work with partners and observation of each other’s work in small groups. In-service training sessions were also provided for teachers, based on two previously developed CD-ROMs: 321Go! and ABCD (AnyBodyCanDance).

The aims of the programme were to increase participation in physical activity among school-aged children, promote positive health and well-being, improve motor skills and development and promote sustainability of dance in school by equipping teachers with skills and resources. Active Schools Managers were the key contacts within local authorities and their teams of coordinators liaised with schools and were responsible for the logistics of delivery and coordination.

The evaluation consisted of a longitudinal pupil survey and two case studies. The quantitative data, representing the upper primary and lower secondary age group (P6 to S2) are drawn from three pupil surveys; the first administered before the DISI, the second immediately after the workshops and the final follow-up six months later.

In total, a cohort of 880 pupils from seven local authorities completed a questionnaire at all three time points. Qualitative data from activity sessions, interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, teachers and pupils (P3 to S2) are also presented from two local authority areas. Secondary school pupils were under-represented in the survey; 24% of the 880 pupils were in S1/S2 within two secondary schools.

### Before the workshops...

Pre-DISI, girls were engaged in dance to a far greater extent than boys; they participated more frequently, opted in to dance more often, had tried a greater variety of dance types and were more likely to have attended a dance class or club. They also expressed far more positive attitudes towards dance and their confidence and feelings about their ability to dance were stronger.

By contrast, many boys reported never having tried dance and secondary boys in particular expressed more negative than positive feelings about participating. Before participating, secondary girls were more likely than primary girls to express anxiety about the dance workshops.

## The impact on girls

- Amongst **primary girls**, there were immediate positive effects as a result of participating in the DISI workshops. Enjoyment was greater than anticipated, they felt happier and more confident participating than they had imagined and taking part eased feelings of nervousness or worry. Attitudes towards dance were more positive and the frequency of informal participation in dance increased. They were more likely to cite dance as a favourite physical activity afterwards, to want dance lessons in school the following year and express greater confidence and self-efficacy in relation to dance. Increased feelings of competence in physical activity and an increase in moderate physical activity in school were also found. As anticipated, given the duration of the programme, positive effects were short-term; most changes were not retained at the six month follow-up. However, a decrease in shyness after the workshops was retained.

### An activity used in the P3 pupil workshops

**Wall of words**

How did you feel in the dance lessons?  
Tick the words that tell us how you felt. Add extra ones if you like

		Good about myself ✓	
	Happy ✓		Bored
Nervous ✓			Shy ✓
		Strong ✓	
Pleased ✓			Sad
	Angry		

- The survey data for **secondary girls** suggest that the DISI was less successful in reaching this group, although the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they mostly represent girls from one secondary school. Moreover, a number of atypical issues arose at the implementation stage in this local authority (relating to class size, disruption as a result of staff illness and lack of continuity); therefore the findings are not necessarily indicative of the programme's overall impact.

- Secondary girls in this school did not enjoy the DISI workshops as much as they had expected and had less positive attitudes towards dance afterwards. Compared with primary girls, they were more likely to feel embarrassed after participating, although feedback from the focus groups suggested more positive experiences among some girls who described the workshops as 'energetic', 'great', and 'enjoyable'.
- It is clear that self-consciousness is a barrier to engagement in physical activity among girls in the early secondary years and this may be exacerbated in mixed-sex or large groups. Negative changes that were retained at the six-month follow-up may reflect an age effect, given the many physical and psychosocial changes occurring among girls of this age. This may also link with a reported increase in perceived barriers to engaging in physical activity and the known decrease in physical activity participation among girls during the early secondary years.

## The impact on boys

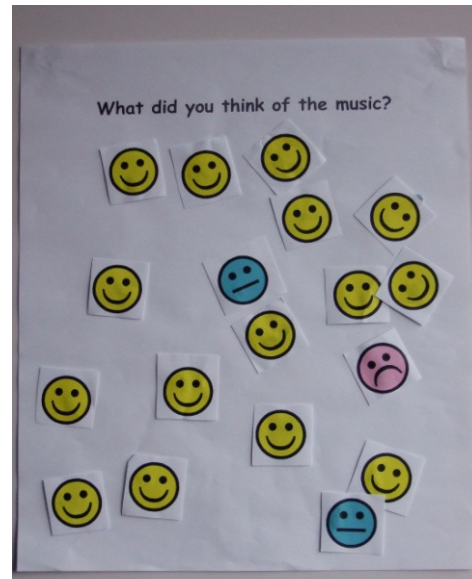
- Post-DISI, **primary boys** were far more positive about dance than they had been beforehand. The DISI was therefore successful in challenging male pre-conceptions of dance. This was most evident in boys' attitudes towards dance and self-efficacy; positive changes were still evident six months after the programme. Actual enjoyment of the DISI workshops surpassed expectations and they felt happier, more confident and excited than they had anticipated. They also felt less worried, embarrassed, nervous and sad taking part than they had expected to. Immediate changes were also found in relation to enjoyment of dance, confidence when dancing and the desire for further dance lessons in school. There was also an increase in boys' overall confidence. However, these were short-term effects, as they returned to baseline levels six months on.

- Amongst **secondary boys**, the findings suggest that there was little impact on the outcomes assessed. After taking part, boys felt happier about the workshops than they had expected. However, feedback from the focus group discussions reinforces the notion that it is difficult to engage boys of this age and overcome some of the preconceptions in relation to dance being a “girlie” activity. Boys seemed to enjoy the music most and, by contrast with the girls, aspects of the workshops that were perceived to be competitive.

### Adult perspectives on impact and implementation

- Teachers who observed the dance in action were wholly positive and very enthusiastic about the programme. The professionalism and skills of the DISI tutors were commended, as well as the content and structure of the workshops. The programme appeared to be most successful where curricular links could be made. Being taught by a ‘dancer’ was perceived to have enhanced children’s experience.
- Confidence featured heavily in discussions with teachers and key stakeholders. This was discussed not only in relation to the lack of confidence amongst teachers to attend training and deliver dance in both the primary and secondary sector, but also in terms of the impact of the DISI on children. An increase in confidence was perceived across all age groups in primary school.
- From pupils’ and teachers’ perspective, the music was one of the most positive aspects of the workshops. Primary teachers and the Active Schools teams also highlighted other positive and key elements of the DISI: its appeal to young people; the inclusive nature of the workshops and its ability to reach the boys; the style, approach and skills of the DISI tutor and the structure and pace of the workshops. Teachers of younger pupils felt the workshops facilitated cooperation and encouraged creativity. Having an expert in the school was also seen as a benefit, although this may be a barrier to sustaining dance in the longer-term.

### P3 pupil perceptions of the music



- Implementation and delivery appeared to be most successful when there was: a clear commitment to promoting dance at local level; prior knowledge of the provider (e.g., through participation in previous programmes delivered by YDance); clarity about the aims of the DISI; established partnerships at local level to support dance; adequate time for planning; good communication between relevant partners, and integration of the DISI programme with curricular objectives and wider initiatives in the school and local/ neighbouring community.

### Sustainability in primary & secondary schools

- The Active Schools teams felt that the DISI had been a huge success in terms of reaching *children*, but there was an issue concerning sustainability and reaching *teachers*. The difficulty reaching the latter was discussed mainly in terms of a lack of confidence among teaching staff and the importance of providing ongoing support rather than initial short-term training. This is particularly important in primary schools where class teachers are unlikely to have much experience of dance. PE is also organised in ‘blocks’; therefore teachers may not return to dance for two or three terms. More information is needed in advance in order for schools to fully integrate the programme and ensure connections with training opportunities are stronger.

- Key stakeholders raised a number of issues that relate to sustainability and particularly concerned the in-service training. They recognised that the training (consisting of two sessions per authority) had missed potentially important people; an issue that is more problematic in rural areas where people have to travel a significant distance. Key stakeholders who had been dance trained in the past, as well as Active Schools Coordinators, held different perceptions of the in-service training to teachers and felt that the emphasis on participation required physical skills some primary class teachers do not possess. A focus on how to use the CD-ROM in order to plan and deliver a lesson was perceived to be more beneficial.
- Whilst Active Schools noted the prohibitive costs associated with buying in dance tutors and extra training or support, this may represent a reluctance to invest in dance compared with other physical activities. Alternatives are perceived to be cheaper and easier to provide, in spite of recognition that the quality of provision and the expertise of tutors are different.
- The enthusiasm of teachers, the CD-ROM, the structure of the workshops, further training (following observation of the workshops), familiarity with the material or dance, and links with other school activities/projects were all identified as potential facilitators of continuation.
- Potential barriers to sustainability include a lack of teacher confidence/ability; limited access to CD-ROMs; lack of training; the difference between the class teacher and DISI tutor role; negative associations of street dance; limited access of pupils to dance classes and the cost of further support. Importantly, the CD-ROMs do not appear to be sufficient as stand alone resources. Although fully printable, the absence of a resource pack (with detailed lesson plans and music) appears to be a barrier. It is not clear how many teachers will use a CD-ROM if it is not accompanied by material that is in the preferred (paper) format.
- The perception teachers held of the DISI tutors as 'dancers', 'experts' or 'specialists' was a significant barrier to them continuing with dance in school. Not only did they compare themselves unfavourably (highlighting lack of physical ability or natural rhythm as insurmountable barriers), but they were also concerned about taking on opportunities for further training in an area they perceived to be difficult. Teachers, they argued, tend to sign up for CPD (Continuing Professional Development) in areas with which they are familiar, as they are often treated as 'the expert' once back in school. YDance has always presented the in-service as training to help teachers become 'choreographers'. However, a greater focus on this idea, explicitly addressing teachers concerns that they are not 'dancers' and therefore cannot be 'instructors', might help to move teachers away from this way of thinking.
- Poor uptake of follow-up opportunities provided by YDance (in the form of summer school events or after-school clubs) warrants careful consideration. According to key stakeholders, uptake of new after-school clubs is generally poor (particularly in rural areas as a result of transportation constraints); therefore curriculum time may be the most realistic way to introduce children to dance.

**For the full report or further information, please contact:**

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