Connection Junction:

A Teacher's Resource for Inclusive Dance for Boys and all Learners



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Welcome to this resource designed to support teachers in making dance inclusive, engaging, and accessible for all pupils. While the original project focused on bringing mixed-ability boys together through dance, the ideas shared are suitable for any primary-aged child. The resource aims to highlight the value of dance for boys as well as for everyone.

This practical whole-school resource guides teachers to use dance to strengthen connection across differences, nurture creativity, encourage emotional expression and positive peer relationships. We hope to inspire more dance amongst boys as well as every child in your school.



Why This Matters

In 2019/2020 Statista, a global data platform, surveyed the UK finding 43.3% of girls participate in dance whilst in contrast, only 14.6% of boys in the 11-15 year old age range. As boys age, participation decreases further, due to social pressures, lack of male role models dancing, and academic pressures. Within disability dance this statistic drops even further. The Diversity Data Report of Arts Council England noted that disabled people made up just 5% of the workforce of core funded Dance organisations.

This indicates limited future prospects in dance for disabled people. Whilst 1 in 5 people in the UK have a disability, yet disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive and lonelier than their peers (Sports England, Activity Alliance). This project aims to tackle these statistics by working with two of the most underrespresented groups within dance: boys and disability.

The Story of *Connection Junction*

icandance and Acland Burghley School share a commitment to amplifying youth voice through dance, especially for boys and for disabled children and young people. Together, we wanted to create opportunities for disabled and non-disabled boys to come together, collaborate, and co-create a performance that celebrates their strengths and shared experiences.

Through this project, boys worked side by side, using dance as a way to bridge differences, build confidence, and become positive role models for younger boys who may feel under-represented in dance spaces.

The process encouraged teamwork, creativity, and a sense of belonging for every participant.

Connection Junction is the title of the dance piece the boys created. It tells the story of their busy lives travelling on the Tube around Camden moving through crowded spaces, navigating their own journeys, and discovering moments of connection along the way. The piece reflects a simple but powerful idea: we are all travelling through life, and when we pause, look up, and reach out, we can always find ways to connect.

Just like *Connection Junction* itself.



About icandance

icandance is a Camden based charity who empowers disabled children and young people through dance and performance. icandance offers a pioneering interdisciplinary approach drawing on dance movement psychotherapy, dance and education techniques which challenges perceptions of disability through dance. icandance believes that dance gives young people a voice and are specialists in creating inclusive and collaborative dance spaces.

Juliet Diener, Agnes Dewhirst and Eleonora Gatti are skilled Dance Movement Psychotherapists, dancers and inclusive dance specialists from icandance who led this project.

About Acland Burghley

Acland Burghley School are a large Camden Secondary School with a passion for the performing arts. They believe creativity is a crucial component for being an innovator of the future. They have a thriving dance department and are leaders in developing a boy's dance group at the school. Acland Burghley School are passionate about providing opportunities beyond the curriculum for their pupils.

Sean Osinlaru, a skilled dancer, teacher and choreographer was the lead teacher from Acland Burghley for this project.

icandance.org.uk

aclandburghley.camden.sch.uk

The Dancers



Calvin



Dexter



Emmanuel



Finn



Frankie



Josh



Justin



Luke



Oscar



Reuben



Romano



Valentino

Supporting Boys to Dance

- Provide regular spaces for boys only to dance.
- Personally invite boys to participate and keep encouraging them to attend. Believe in them and they will begin to believe in themselves as dancers.
- Give them autonomy by helping them to be the leaders choosing music, steps and styles of dance.
- Male role models support representation and will encourage participation.
- Have a school champion that focuses on making boys dance possible, so it remains a priority.
- Bring in guest teachers or performers.
- Introduce dance styles that have equal male participation e.g. African dance etc.
- Build towards a performance where they are celebrated.
- Watch male dancers on screen or stage.
- Create a community of boys supporting boys in dance.

Creating an Inclusive Dance Space

- Celebrate strengths.
- Identify what they CAN do before you notice what they can't.
- Work in partners.
- Use props to support connection and focus.
- Allow creative play so movements unfold naturally.
- Nurture an environment where their ideas are important.
- Relationship is key, build a dance community.
- Inclusive practice is process led. It is not focused on outcomes only.
- Meet the dancers where they are at. Do not place the 'dance' on them but shape it with their bodies and their abilities.
- Use enabling language. Always focus on what is possible.



Lesson Plan

Connection Junction

The lesson is designed for primary aged children and can be adapted for a range of abilities and stages within Primary School. Whilst the term boys are used throughout it is suitable for all children.

Lesson timing: 50 minutes

Resources needed: Music, clear space to move and screen/projector to watch videos

Lesson objective: This lesson plan supports children to think about bridging difference and encouraging inclusive practice. It explores ways we can create spaces for boys to learn and explore dance.

Links to curriculum: Innovation & Creativity, Self Knowledge, Collaboration, Communication, Emotional Expression, Responsibility & Leadership

1. Warm up

Purpose:

- To get minds and bodies ready to move together

Start in a circle with some stretches standing up (or sitting down if needed), reach to the ceiling then down to the ground, reach out sideways as if you are trying to touch the walls, whilst taking some deep breaths.

Shake, pat or rub different parts of the body to help bring awareness and start to build a connection to their bodies e.g. shake your hands, pat your stomach, rub your legs, tap your elbow. Bring in some rhythm like stamping their feet and clapping their hands to raise energy.

Teacher Tips

Use imagery like a plant growing taller

Use music with a clear beat

Use imagery such as pretend you are brushing dirt off your arms, legs, face, shoulders and feet until they are clean



2.Introduction of the theme *Connection Junction*

Purpose:

- To Introduce the theme of the lesson and project overall
- To explore different dynamics in movement and how working together can create new and exciting moves
- To develop an understanding of the concepts of inclusive dance



Share an introduction of the project and the story of *Connection Junction* (info above).

Children watch the collaborative icandance and Acland Burghley film (click video above).

2a. Discuss the film

Some questions to think about are: What comes to mind when you think of boys dancing? What dance styles do you know or enjoy? Which feel exciting? How can dance include everyone, regardless of ability? Think about how we communicate without speaking.

Some of the themes to explore are inclusion, different ways of communication, collaboration, creativity and storytelling, expressing feelings through dance and movement, boys in dance. As well as anything relevant to your dance group that they may experience when watching the performance.

2b. Watch the performance of *Connection Junction*



How did you feel watching it? What was your favourite part of the dance?

Invite dancers to explore some of the moves that they watched in the film around the room. Allow 10 min to explore and play with the different movements.

Discuss and invite the dancers to explore:

- dynamics (speed, movement qualities, energy)
- shape (wide, narrow, twisted, curved, angular)
- levels (high, middle, low)
- use of space (direction, proximity to others)
- body focus (whole body, legs, arms)

Music: use both pieces of the music from the film, how does the music change the movements?

♫ Abalele by Kabza De Small, DJ Maphorisa & Ami Faku

♫ Levels by Avicii

Teacher Tips: Use visual prompts from the film to encourage a broad range of movements. Challenge the group to try movements that don't always feel natural. Allow them time to explore a range of movements.

2c. Partner Exercise: Mirrors

Purpose:

- To introduce cooperation, eye contact, and shared decision making
- To enable dancers to work together

Pupils pair up. Take it in turns to share their preferred moves in their pair following their exploration.

Then introduce a mirroring exercise. The pair decides who is A and who is B.

Partner A moves slowly; Partner B mirrors them. Swap roles. Try again with a different dynamic like fast or high or jumping.

Then try moving together without a leader, letting the movement flow.

Notice what happens.



Teacher Tips: Encourage slower movements so both can succeed. Be thoughtful in your pairing to make sure it is a positive experience for everyone.

3.Performance



Purpose:

- To build confidence as a performer and highlight their skills
- To celebrate each other

Prepare dancers to share what they have created. Encourage the group to have a clear beginning and ending. Suggest they name their short piece. Think about the audience and ways to draw them into the story telling of the piece.

Pairs show their phrase to the group with chosen music. As the group watch each other invite them to reflect at the end of what they would like to celebrate about each other's piece. This encourages community spirit.

Music: as above

Teacher Tip: if there are dancers who are very shy, allow two pairs to perform at a time.

4.Cool Down



Purpose:

- To support a gentle transition as the lesson comes to an end
- To end the session in a calm manner

Create a circle. Dancers find a moment to ground themselves. Feet on the ground (whether they are in a chair or standing). Feel their weight into the floor.

Give their own bodies a big squeeze and gently rock side to side. They can also gently brush down their arms, stomach and legs.

Encourage a big stretch up and then flop forward breathing in and out. Do this a few times with lots of deep breaths.

Teacher Tips

Use calm and relaxing music.

Use imagery of giving yourself a hug like a teddy bear.

You can use imagery like roots growing into the earth. Making themselves heavy.

5.Reflection



Purpose:

- To conclude their understanding of the themes of the lesson
- To encourage dancers to express their thoughts and feelings

Sitting in a final circle or small groups encourage dancers to discuss:

- What did you enjoy?
- How did it feel to create together?
- What helped your partnership work well?
- How did it feel having someone copy your movement?

Teacher Tip: Summarise the lesson and themes before ending the session.

Invite the boys to continue to join a boys dance group at school (see suggestions above). Invite the group to continue to use dance to support building connections and continue the themes of *Connection Junction*.

Optional Lesson Extensions

1) Famous Male Dancers

Watch short clips of diverse male dancers, including disabled performers such as:

- Akram Khan
- Carlos Acosta
- Joseph Powell-Main
- Les Twins
- David Toole

Reflection Questions:

- What stood out to you?
- Did anything challenge what you thought about male dancers?

2) Create a larger group dance by connecting all partner phrases together.

3) Add props (scarves, ribbon sticks) to encourage creativity and diverse movements.

4) Invite pupils to suggest music for next time.

5) Set a creative writing task around the themes of the film - inclusion, working together, boys dancing.

Further resources to support teaching

RAD United Kingdom | Engaging boys in dance

Boys in Dance: Breaking Stereotypes and Building Confidence - Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

How to... get boys dancing - Arts Professional

Communication to support inclusive dance - Juliet Diener, icandance

ISTD - a process, not a destination - Juliet Diener icandance

icandance - Our work in action

To find out more contact icandance on info@icandance.org.uk

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