

Clogging as an educational experience

Alex Fisher, community clog dancer and a member of Instep Research Team, introduces ClogNet – a sustainable clog dance initiative for schools.

The aim of ClogNet is twofold; to enable primary schools to deliver clog dance as part of their PE programme, and to encourage schools and the clog dance community to work together to sustain interest and enthusiasm in clog dance.

Like many other of our nation's traditional dance forms, clog dance has the potential to give schoolchildren a wide range of skills and experiences. It offers physical challenge and achievement and enhances balance, co-ordination and musical awareness. It can incorporate creativity, teamwork and individual expression and, in addition to this, by just putting on a pair of clogs, there is a tangible link with our industrial heritage.

I have been working as a freelance community clog dancer in the north west of England since 2002. As a dance educationalist, I was particularly keen to promote clog dance in primary schools but soon realised that existing clog dance repertoire was not accessible enough for whole class groups. Pupils are always inspired by watching clog dance but in a one-off workshop or extended project, they need to be able to achieve something that feels like and looks like the real thing. I needed material that was fun, dynamic, challenging but achievable so pupils would be encouraged to learn more.

Several years of trial and error eventually resulted in an effective teaching module for primary school clog dance. With appropriate support and training, I realised this could be delivered by the teachers themselves. My next task was to find teachers willing to try it.



Children clog dancing at Moss Side Primary School.



Alex Fisher.



Moss Side Primary cloggers.

ClogNet Lancashire - early beginnings

The first school to adopt ClogNet was in Lancashire; they started teaching clog dance as a PE module in 2008. Two years before, the school had taken part in Clogmania – a clog dance project with three other schools. In each school, I had worked with a class for eight weekly sessions to develop a choreographed dance piece. Teachers were encouraged to take part so they could learn the different clog dance skills and see how they could be developed into a polished performance with live music.

During this project, Cathy Heaton, a teacher from Moss Side Primary in Leyland, expressed an interest in teaching clog dance as a curricular subject. This was music to my ears. With additional support and fundraising by my clog dance group, Eccleston Heritage Clog, we purchased a set of clogs. By January 2008, Cathy and her Year 6 class had started their clogging module. Ten years on, she reflects upon her experience:

“Since starting teaching clog dance some years ago, it has become a very successful activity which now forms part of our PE curriculum. All the children enjoy it, including boys who might be reluctant to perform any other dance style. It’s not only great exercise but also a memorable shared activity; it has become firmly established as one of our school traditions which the younger pupils look forward to doing as they move up the school.”

At Moss Side Primary, the topic of clogs and clog dance is explored enthusiastically by each Year 6 group in other curricular areas. The school is so committed to teaching clog dance that they have now bought their own set of clogs.

I hope this article is helpful in offering a positive way to promote clog dance in schools and to the wider community. For further information, help and advice, please contact me: alexclog55@gmail.com, phone 07858 456787 or visit clogdance.co.uk

ClogNet Lancashire takes shape

The success of clogging at Moss Side Primary encouraged me to find other interested schools and to create a clog dance network to help sustain interest and enthusiasm. ClogNet Lancashire now includes primary schools in Leyland, Blackburn, Darwen and Leigh. The schools regularly visit each other and have performed in regional dance festivals, school productions and local care homes. In collaboration with Eccleston Heritage Clog, we offer support to these schools in the following ways: we oversee the maintenance of the clog bank; help with the organisation and funding of inter-school visits and enjoy going into each school to share dances and swap steps. ClogNet teachers are appreciative of this support and often emphasise how much they enjoy teaching clog dance and how inspired the pupils are, as Laura Butterworth of Roe Lee Primary in Blackburn explains:

“It has been incredibly touching to see how passionate the children are about their clogs and their dancing and it’s wonderful to see them practising at playtimes. Last year, three Year 6 boys were so enthusiastic that they choreographed their own performance to enter a talent show – and won.”



Pupils at Roe Lee Primary School.

How to set up a ClogNet

Having set up a ClogNet in Lancashire, I am currently involved in the early stages of developing a ClogNet in south Cumbria. On reflection, I have identified some factors which could enable similar initiatives to be developed in other parts of the country:

- Clog dance taster sessions to identify potential schools
- Creating and delivering a suitable clog dance module for pupils and teachers
- The existence of a local clog dance group willing to manage and support the initiative
- Access to a set of clogs for schools to use; approximately 50 pairs for a Year 5 or 6 class.