

## Pupils' work worthy of any art gallery

[Jul 1 2008](#) by [David Whetstone](#), The Journal

IS participation in the arts good for children? Judging by the atmosphere at Dance City yesterday the answer has to be a resounding yes.

About 2,000 children from eight North East schools are exploring the cultures of the world in a week of activities at the Newcastle dance centre.

It marks the climax of a three year, Department of Culture-initiated project called Cultural Hubs which has been piloted in three areas, including County Durham, and involves schools and cultural organisations working together to tailor activities for children.

Yesterday I watched young children dancing in a range of different styles, encouraged by tutors including Apple Xue Yang, who trained in Chinese classical dance, and hip-hop specialists Bad Taste Cru.

The children's confidence and coordination were extraordinary.

I also had a guided tour of an art exhibition which seemed to rival any of those you will see at a modern contemporary art gallery.

My host was the new artistic director of Dance City, Jordyn Dickinson, aged 10.

Actually, Jordyn was one of several children from Bullion Lane Primary School, Chester-le-Street, who were shadowing Dance City staff.

It seemed to me that Penny Rae, who normally runs the place, could safely pass over the reins of leadership to Jordyn. She was doing a grand job and will probably be running Tate Modern one day, if she hasn't become Secretary of State for Culture.

"We run a photography business at our school so we've got our own cameras and have been learning how to use them," she said.

"When we knew we were going to be doing an exhibition at Dance City we thought we would do surreal photography which is photography where things are not as they first appear.

"We had a brainstorming session and we had lots of different ideas."

Jordyn showed me Jake Husband's piece involving a dismantled chair suspended over a mirror and Jasmine Lish's photograph in which she is seen dropping her teddy from a

height to demonstrate that she is ready to move on from childish things.

Jordyn, whose photographic self-portrait is blown up huge on the Dance City windows, also took me in the Bullion Lane Tardis which is festooned with photographs.

But the highlight was the toilet hung upside down on the wall.

"It's meant to be strange," said Jordyn. "We decided to take something ordinary, like a toilet, and make it look different."

No need to ask her if she had heard of Marcel Duchamp, the famous artist who did something similar in 1917. "Oh, yes," she said. "I think that's where we got the idea from."

The Durham Hub has been managed by The Forge, a County Durham arts organisation with long experience of working with artists and schools. For Durham Cultural Hub it has worked with 10 schools and cultural institutions including Dance City, Seven Stories, Baltic, Beamish Museum and Durham County Council Library Service.

Sharon Blackburn-Maughan, year one teacher and Cultural Hub project manager at Bullion Lane Primary School, said over the three years children had experienced dance, storytelling, puppetry, poetry and photography.

"It has been very successful but we always saw this as more than a three-year project.

"We wanted to keep all the children's experiences within the school so all the year five children have been paired up with a year one child to carry on working on a one-to-one basis."

Cultural Hubs have been overtaken by a new wave of Government- inspired pilot projects called Find Your Talent, one of which is managed by the Customs House in South Shields.

A spokeswoman for Arts Council England, North East said the findings of both Cultural Hubs and Find Your Talent would inform the Government's plan to expose all schoolchildren to at least five hours of high quality culture each week.

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