

African Dance and Social Integration in Britain

Author: Dr Sylvanus Kwashie Kuwor

Department of Dance Studies

skuwor@ug.edu.gh

University of Ghana

Abstract:

The 21st century world of technological advancement continues to experience constant human movement. This often results in different groups of immigrants in many countries. Notable among these groups are refugees who are better viewed as geographically displaced people, who have been forcefully removed from their native cultural values that define them as a people. In their new environment, they go through a process of integration into mainstream society which is often characterised with government policy and public documents of the host nation which the refugees eventually accept to the detriment of their native cultural values that define them as a people. Eventually they lose that sense of belongingness and cultural identity making them feel excluded in society. Dance is a cultural form that may be viewed as a movement system, a performance art or a complex socio-cultural phenomenon since its creation, performance and productions do not happen without people. Employing multidisciplinary technique drawing on Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Political Science, History and Dance Studies this paper examines how dance is used as a tool to provide cultural re-union to immigrant communities in Britain and other African Diaspora communities. The aim of the paper is to create the awareness of how dance as a holistic art form can be employed in celebrating the diversity of cultures in the world today.

Introduction

This paper explores my ten years of dance practice in multicultural Britain. This experience discovers how Britain is growing and becoming one of the major multicultural environments in the world. This growing diversity of cultures in Britain today may be credited to a significant number of black people particularly African and Caribbean immigrants whose cultural elements including, music, dance, clothing and food could be harnessed to enrich the country.

The European mode of creating a multi-ethnic society includes integrating immigrants into mainstream society. Under this integration, the emphasis has often been on assimilation which is characterised by public documents of government policies which the immigrants eventually adopt to the detriment of their native cultural practices that define them as a people. My

doctoral research in Britain (2013) explored some of the issues often generated by this assimilationist mode of integration and pointed out that it has the potential to alienate African immigrants from their native cultural forms in which they find the sense of belongingness and identity; and this may lead to social exclusion.

The main argument in this paper is based on the idea that integration affects and involves the whole of the British society and not just the African immigrants. It offers a constructive mode of integration which provides the platform and avenue for all members of society to integrate into the new situation of cultural diversity by sharing all the cultures that are visible in Britain and other Diasporic environments. 'African dance' which is the focus of this research basically reunites the African immigrants to their native African cultural values and also creates an avenue of socialisation for all people living in Britain bearing in mind that majority of British people may not be accustomed to living in multicultural environment. My practice uses African music and dance in community engagement workshops involving the immigrants and mainstream British communities. The ten years of this experience(2005-2015) covers about 376 schools, youth centres, pupil referral units, churches and other community engagement programmes including after school clubs, diversity day celebrations, art festivals and black history month celebrations.

The process of my recruitment and relocation to Britain for the purpose of teaching African dances in British schools was facilitated and funded by a wonderful African Drumming and Dance Company called Venavi Drums. Mr. Atsu Awoonor, the founder and director of this group became my teacher, trainer and assessor who eventually gave me everything I needed to sit my practice perfectly into British mainstream society.

Gathering Experience from other Practitioners

My first attempt to teach African and Ghanaian dances in British schools presented many issues that challenged my position as an African tradition keeper. These issues include, the appropriateness of a particular dance type for a certain year group, the relevance of historical background of the dance to the curriculum, whether or not a particular dance movement qualifies to be taught in a British school environment, the need for inclusion and expected outcomes. I had developed a paradigm in Ghana that, as a tradition keeper, my duty is to protect the values in the various dance forms by keeping their ‘original movements’ untouched even in using them to create new works. This was based on the belief that modification of a dance movement results in the loss of its meaning and significance. In my various pre-lesson discussions, Awoonor, who was very experienced in the business of teaching Ghanaian drum music in British schools, gave me orientation as to how my dance workshops could be presented to serve the needs of all pupils as well as the curriculum requirements.

Before I presented any of these African dances to the pupils, I often did all the movements in the dance while Awoonor would be watching with interest and often chose which movements would work and which ones were not needed. No matter how uncomfortable I was in this process of rearranging and modifying Ghanaian and African dances, an act that contravenes the cultural norms that see the art form as a living history of the people, the underlying point demonstrates realistically that Britain and Ghana are two different environments. Working with Venavi Drums for two years had given me the opportunity to combine the Awoonor technique with my own evolving approach.

Working with other UK based Companies

In my practice as a free-lance artist, a number of UK based groups, companies and organisations arranged and sent me to schools and communities to deliver dance workshops. They include, Agudze Dance Ensemble in East London, Wise Moves in Hampshire, Trap

Media in Milton Keynes, Afiba Arts (Efua Sey Cultural Academy) in Essex, Lingua Franca Agency in Manchester, Manchester Music Service, Manchester Arts Gallery, Youth Dance England, Noviha in London, Togo Union in London, Manchester University's Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Roehampton in London and African Arts in Knutsford. I will now present a brief overview of these organisations and the specific role I played in the workshops they arranged for me.

Agudze Dance Ensemble is a Ghanaian traditional dance company, founded in 1983 by George Fiawoo and Christine Ahiagbede after holding dance sessions initially at the Caribbean Progressive Association Centre in Walthamstow, East London in 1982. The purpose for the establishment of the group was to develop and educate the community about the cultural heritage of Africa and to positively promote diversity. Over the years, the group has grown to include work with the public, for both adults and children. The group has also organised workshops for young people to raise their performance level to compliment the adult group. Agudze Dance Ensemble has performed at various events and venues and organised workshops in schools and community centres all over London.

I featured Agudze Dance Ensemble's annual programme of drumming and dancing workshops which were held at Boundary Road Estate, Walthamstow. In these workshops, I delivered drumming sessions, dance sessions, storytelling and mask making sessions in the summer of 2007 and 2008. With regular funding provided by London borough of Waltham Forest, the workshops were held on Thursdays from 5pm to 7pm during which time I worked collaboratively with George Fiawoo and Christine Ahiagbede.

Wise Moves is a performing arts company established in November, 2000 that provides performing arts services including dance, music, drama and visual art workshops to schools throughout England and Wales. The dance workshops they offer are labeled continentally as Asian, African, Australian, the Caribbean, and European forms. Although their administrative headquarters are in Hampshire, their artists are located throughout England and Wales. I was engaged to play the role of dance specialist in African forms between 2007 and 2009. Apart from normal school dance workshops, Wise Moves launched a performance project dubbed 'Planet Steps' under which pupils from different schools would gather in one particular school to perform different kinds of choreographic pieces. I choreographed short dance pieces using Ghanaian/Ewe material in line with the company's focus of cultural education in Extended Schools, working with disengaged pupils and pupils with Special Needs to ensure inclusion.

Trap Media is a company that delivers workshops in a range of arts and cultural activities to schools as well as corporate organisations. Their activities include team building drumming workshops and dance workshops of various genres including those from India, Africa, and Australia. They also do storytelling, mask making and instrument making. My role with Trap Media was using African hand drumming as an inspiring team-building tool. These fun drumming workshops established a sense of team building and unity among pupils of diverse background in British schools.

Efua Sey Cultural Academy is an organisation based in Essex that promotes cultural diversity for social cohesion and fosters community development through African performing arts and culture. Their workshops are tailored to suit schools, libraries, play centres and other venues where children and young people of diverse cultural backgrounds are given practical lessons

on some aspects of African culture including cloth printing, cooking, drum music, dance, poetry, folksongs, games and story-telling. I offered my services as a dance and drumming workshop leader voluntarily to this organisation between 2007 and 2008 (The organisation was then known as Afiba Arts). During this period, I was occasionally invited to lead a group of young people of diverse cultural backgrounds from different local schools in African drumming, dancing and singing. Efua Sey Cultural Academy focuses on promoting a high level of appreciation of Ghanaian and African culture in order to build bridges of understanding and acceptability among children and young people within the multicultural Essex and London communities.

Manchester Music Service is a division of Manchester City Council's education service that hires music teachers to deliver a wide range of vocal and instrumental tuition that draws from many music genres including African, Asian and South American. Senior music teachers are contracted by this institution to help identify school musical needs and offer appropriate support and training where they are required. Manchester Music service offers different kinds of music lessons, from basic to advanced level with large groups and whole classes. I was hired to teach African drums and other percussive instruments in 6 primary schools and 4 high schools within the Manchester metropolis. In this role, I went further to introduce dance to these schools which brought understanding to the students about the marriage between music and dance in Africa. Between 2010 and 2011, I delivered Anlo-Ewe music and dance workshops in these schools on a weekly basis and also organised and staged performances with the students during Black History month celebrations as well as at other educational and social events including summer festivals details of which I will be discussing later.

Youth Dance England is a national dance organisation that delivers dance training programmes that inspire and raise aspirations of young and emerging dance artists in England. Their programmes provide essential platforms for engaging young people in dance from first steps to training for a professional career. In July, 2011, Youth Dance England engaged me to deliver West African/Ghanaian dance workshops to about 120 young dancers in London. The one week residency project whose aim was to increase dance opportunities for children and young people on a national and international scale took place at the University of Roehampton. My role on this project produced choreographic pieces of African distinctiveness that draw mainly on the Ghanaian and Anlo-Ewe movement vocabulary; and these were performed by the participants.

Noviha is a Ghanaian and Ewe social organisation established in London in 1981 to create a sense of belonging for members, promote well-being and advocate self-reliance for Ewes, their families and friends in Britain. In 2009 and 2012, during the celebrations of Hogbetsotso festival which commemorates the exodus and dispersal of the Anlo-Ewe from Notsie, I was invited to serve as a musician, choreographer and performer. In these experiences I rearranged Anlo-Ewe dances and put on stage using the children of Anlo-Ewe immigrants as the dancers.

Working with the aforementioned organisations presented a unique opportunity of gathering knowledge, skills and expertise from different specialities of music and dance; and this gradually enriched my own style which metamorphosed into *Hesu* Technique. *Hesu* is an Anlo-Ewe terminology referring to a creative energy that generates music and dance in particular, and performing arts in general. The choice of *Hesu* as the name of my evolving technique has

to do with its underlying cultural forms including music, movement, cosmology, philosophy, storytelling and folklore. The experience gathered from different companies and practitioners differentiates my approach from that of other African dance practitioners in Britain. The distinction here is that, while other African dance creations in London may focus on movement and its significance, *Hesu* technique extends its scope beyond that to include consideration of all the cultural elements that constitute the dance and their relationship with the custodians of the art form.

Ghanaian Dance Workshops in Britain

Ghanaian music and dance became the main activity of my school and community workshops with a special interest in two main purposes. These are, harnessing African and Ghanaian dance in British society as an art form in cultural education for pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds; and using these dances as an expression of cultural freedom, empowerment, transformation, healing and awareness to the Black and African/Ghanaian community in Britain.

With the help of the different organisations mentioned earlier, I delivered dance workshops in more than three hundred schools during the period between 2007 and 2012. I delivered workshops in mainly Ghanaian dance forms including *Kpalongo* of the Ga people, *Damba Takai* of the Dangomba people and *Kpatsa* of the Ada people. For the scope of this paper, I will discuss only a few examples of Anlo-Ewe dance workshops under three groups namely: Workshops in Primary Schools, Workshops in High Schools and Colleges and Workshops in Universities.

Workshops in Primary Schools

The dance workshops in primary schools aim to get pupils to learn about and do Anlo-Ewe dance styles under the broader term 'African dance'. In primary schools, this general term is widely used and accepted although in my practice I often stress the fact that all Africans do not dance the same way and therefore it is necessary for pupils to identify the dance form with its specific African group. *Tokoe* was the main Anlo-Ewe dance I used in most primary schools. This choice was based on the fact that *Tokoe* dance is simple to teach and also its educational nature allows it to be recreated to serve any form of educational purpose. Unlike a cult dance such as *Yeweh* dance which cannot be taken out of its cultural context, *Tokoe* provides the flexibility for modification without any cultural barriers. In Ghana, *Tokoe* is performed in its traditional context as a social dance with movements depicting activities of teenage girls going through puberty rites. In British schools, I did not only rearrange the movements but also I removed those that are considered inappropriate. For example, hand gestures in various cultures communicate to the people. However, it is important to be aware that communication by gestures tends to be culturally defined. Therefore, gestures that may communicate a positive message in Ghana may send a negative signal or a message of insult in London. I further modified the few selected movements to conform to what is accepted in the school curriculum in terms of body exercise in Physical Education which is the umbrella subject under which dance is placed in Britain.

The recreated version of *Tokoe* has five simple movements. 1. Left hand moves forward and back, signifying the employment of spirit of obedience in following the instructions of parents. 2. Right hand moves forward and back, signifying employment of spirit of obedience in following the instructions of teachers. 3 Left hand waves to the side, signifying the acknowledgment of neighbours on the left. 4. Right hand waves to the side, signifying

acknowledgement of neighbours on the right. 5. The whole body in a low position with rolling of hands in a wiggle that signifies how Africans wash their clothes by hand.

The above five simple movements in the recreated or somewhat revised version of *Tokoe* dance basically provide a medium through which children understand the need to obey and respect authority as well as look at their neighbours as part of the community. Not only do these children learn to understand these virtues, but also they practise them in school and at home with the focus on the point that without neighbours, parents and teachers, one cannot establish a community. *Tokoe* therefore, has the potential to shape behaviour patterns of the pupils in order that they may grow and become responsible adults. Additionally, the recreated *Tokoe* highlights the Anlo-Ewe practice of the employment of dance as a motivational tool in performing daily activities. In view of the fact that Anlo-Ewe moral teachings are embedded in dance, in recreating my UK version of *Tokoe* for primary school pupils, I incorporated such values into it in an attempt to speak to the pupils through the dance. Amegago (2011) notes, “Certain elements of the so-called authentic African music and dance may later be abandoned while new elements may be incorporated” (Amegago, 2011, 93). Amegago’s notion resonates in my recreation of *Tokoe*. A movement in a Ghanaian dance may contain some elements that define the dance in its cultural context but, once these ‘authentic’ elements are removed, the movement assumes a new meaning which changes the context of the dance.

In October, 2011, I introduced the new *Tokoe* dance at a Church of England Aided Primary School in County Durham as part of Black History Month Celebration. The head teacher was among the first group of people who helped offload all the 30 African drums and other materials from the van and carried them to the hall allocated to the workshop. The day officially began

with a colourful assembly led by the resident vicar who touched the hearts of the already excited children with his word of exhortation after which he introduced me as the special guest artist. Being a white dominated area, it was amazing to find pupils staring at the African drums with a good number of them asking permission to try their hands on them. The excitement culminated into a euphoric atmosphere under which the entire workshop was delivered. I worked with year two class (7year olds). The pupils loved the dance because of its historical background which I earlier presented to them in a story of how a young girl was captured by the African dwarves following her disobedience to authority. After lunch time I gave them the basic skills in drumming with which they provided the *Tokoe* music. Later, they were taken through the dance movements and their significance. At 2.30 pm, the whole school returned to the hall where they were entertained by the year two pupils in a full *Tokoe* performance; the dance, song and drumming. It all ended at 3pm with much appreciation from parents who came to collect their children.

The created version of Tokoe became a tool for integration and socialisation for many Christian churches in England including Charismatic Evangelistic Ministries UK, Dominion Chapel International and St. Chrysostoms Church of England in Manchester. The leaders and entire membership of these churches were very enthusiastic in accepting African drumming and dance as a tool for social integration.

Workshops in High Schools

Workshops in high schools took the form of an hour lecture on what is considered as dance in Africa; an hour session of warming-up exercises, using *Hesu* Technique, an hour session of singing and playing drums and other Anlo-Ewe percussive instruments; and an hour session of working in large and small groups on a selected Anlo-Ewe dance forms. The climax of the day

would be a performance either in large groups or small groups of 4-6 dancers doing Anlo-Ewe dance to an audience, including some invited parents.

Below is a sample time table:

African Dance Workshop Timetable- St. Aidan's C/E Technology College

DATE: Thursday, 13 October, 2011

THEME: Exploring and Celebrating the Culture of African People through Dance.

FACILITATING ARTIST: KWASHIE

CRB NO.001253941747

SESSION	TIME	CLASS	VENUE	ACTIVIY
1	9.00-10.00	The Whole School	The Main Hall	Introduction: An hour presentation on Music and Dance of African People.
2	10.15-11.15	Year 8 (13-14year olds)	Main Hall	Warm up with 'Hesu Technique'
3	11.15-12.15	Year 8	Main Hall	Singing and Drumming
4	13.15-14.15	Year 8	Main Hall	Learning and Doing African Dance(Gahu dance from Ghana)

5	14.30-15.00	Year 8	Main Hall	Performance
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In the summer of 2011, a High School for Girls in Manchester celebrated a multicultural day with a display of many cultures. Twenty-eight students represented Africa with drumming, singing and dancing. This group comprised of 20 % white British pupils, 5% Africans and 75% Asians. These girls did very well in the workshop sessions and were selected to be part of their big exhibition in the afternoon. All other groups displayed their paraphernalia on tables except the African group whose drums maintained a consistent blend of different rhythms while some girls were responding with the appropriate dance movements just as it is done in Africa. Incredibly, the stand allocated to the African group became a stage and all other exhibition groups became the audience, who could not stop watching the spectacular performance on display.

Workshops in Universities.

At a university level, the term ‘African dance’ without qualification was questionable; and therefore needed unpacking and contextualisation. As a result, there was the need to design it as a course with learning objectives and outcomes. At the University of Roehampton, it was considered as the African segment of a module called World Music and Dance. My experience with primary schools, high schools and colleges gave me a wealth of experience in workshop delivery but, the experience at the university was totally new to me. The difference here touches on the fact that in primary schools, I worked with pupils, who were not studying dance as a subject whereas in the university, I worked with dance students who were studying dance as an academic course in higher education hence the need for a course design with stated aims and outcomes.

In Ghanaian music and dance ensemble, members must understand the interrelationship of their parts in the performance with other ensemble members (Avorgbedor, 2001; Locke, 1978; Nketia, 1974). These scholars have explored the high level of attention performers devote to the precision of music and its corresponding dance movements. Their views find a space in the model I designed in teaching Ghanaian/African dance at a university level. Vocalisation of drum language has been used to familiarise the students with the music under which they were able to listen to fixed drum texts and respond with the appropriate dance movements. The primary purpose of the drum in African societies was communication and this has been utilised in my teachings where the drum became the commander for the dancers.

In designing a model for my practice in the university environment, I adopted the curriculum designs of Adinku (1994) and Amegago (2011) as the foundation. Adinku's Bachelor of Arts in Dance curriculum model which draws on Susan Walther's (1979) model of dance description, interpretation and evaluation has its objectives. These include familiarising students with the functions of dance within the traditional African cultures and to provide them with the basis for participation in, and appreciation and understanding of the cultural context of dance and to utilise cultural dance forms as a tool for their own creativity.

Amegago's technique offers a simple but comprehensive mode that provides deeper understanding of the theories of curriculum, art education, creativity, creative processes in Ewe music and dance. It also provides the teacher and students with analytical, evaluative and appreciative skills relating to cross cultural performing arts education; and most importantly Amegago's technique uses an interdisciplinary approach in a holistic style that conceptualises Ewe/African music and dance in both theory and practice. Drawing on these earlier works, I designed the model below which became my first tool with which I delivered sessions at

colleges and universities including the University of Roehampton in 2011, 2012 and 2013 as part of the World Music and Dance module.

Features of Hesu Model of West African Dance Course

The model provides opportunities for students to learn a variety of Ghanaian/Ewe dance and musical forms in their cultural contexts. The course combines theory and practice. Students are introduced to the cultural contexts of Ghanaian/Anlo-Ewe performances: their social, religious/ceremonial, economic, political and stylistic bases and selected Anlo-Ewe music and dance forms. They also play Ghanaian/Ewe musical instruments, such as bells, rattles and drums, sing and dance in small and large groups. Students are also required to answer questions on the various topics and keep reflective journals of their learning experiences throughout the semester. They also have opportunities to perform in the middle and at the end of the semester.

The main aims of the model are; by the end of the semester, students will understand the cultural context of African music and dance, develop skills in performing, improvising and creating African and African related dance and music, acquire analytical, evaluative and appreciative skills relating to West African music and dance, exhibit their performance skills through midterm and end of semester performances, demonstrate their ability to apply these knowledge and skills to their future education, performance, research and careers.

Students are evaluated on their involvement in the class activities, such as instrumental performance, singing, dancing and their contribution to class discussions. Dancing is evaluated on the mastery of movements (movement qualities, performance skills, attitude and progress), based on the exhibition of the appropriate posture, proper execution of movements, the flow, dynamics and timing of the movements; emotional/ facial expression and proper coordination of the movement with the music. Singing is evaluated on the proper rendition of the melodies,

personal involvement and proper coordination with instrumental sounds. Instrumental music is evaluated on the mastery of the playing techniques, proper handling of instruments, proper articulation of musical sounds, coordination with other instrumental sounds, knowledge of linguistic and cultural contexts of sounds. Materials that form the content of the Hesu model draw largely on Amegago's (2011) Curriculum Design for Teaching the African Performing Arts.

Students are given assignments in a form of written papers where they are evaluated on clarity, validity, coherence, grammatical structure and the quantity of information they contain. They are also encouraged to reflect on their learning process as part of the written assignments. The practical component of this model requires students to put together a creative piece known as 'Final Choreography'. The final choreography is evaluated on students' ability to utilise the movement vocabulary they have learned during the semester in combination with other movements to create a coherent, artistic and meaningful piece that blends together music, dance and other related components. This model is mainly a studio course and students are expected to attend all classes promptly and participate in all activities, such as dancing, singing, playing of instruments as well as written and practical assignments.

Students are allowed to wear any comfortable clothes ranging from African clothes, loose pants, leotards and T-shirts but they are expected to dance bare foot. This is not only because most African dances are done bare foot but also because there are some Ghanaian dances including *Klama* of the Ga Adangbes that emphasise movement of the toes. Jewelry should not be worn in class for they may harm students when dancing. Long hair must be tied securely off the face to enable the dancer to concentrate and move freely. These arrangements form the basic guidelines of the course and are in line with health and safety measures and risk management undertaken before the design of the model. Although this is a full term/semester

course, it has never been taught throughout the term. Two factors account for this- its location within another course and lack of funding which reduced it gradually to a one off event. While Ewe dance in the university community has struggled to make some impact, its relevance as well as acceptance in primary and secondary schools has been phenomenal.



34. Students in Tokoe dance with Kwashie Kuwor (my self)



Drumming session as part of Black History Month.

Comparing Anlo-Ewe Technique to Non-African Forms in British Schools

In the many British schools I have visited with my practice, there were many different dance forms, some of which were taught on a weekly basis, others on a monthly basis and some of them including African forms were considered as one off activities. Among these dance forms are, Ballet, Ballroom dance, Contemporary dance, Jazz dance, Modern dance, Street dance and Tap dance. In order to do a cross-cultural comparison of these non-African forms to Anlo-Ewe form, I will now adopt the views of my pupils in outlining the basic definitions and characteristics of these dances. This is not an indepth discussion of non-African forms as they are not the focus of my research. Therefore, I am very much aware that referring to them briefly in this endeavour will inevitably invite generalisations. Also, it is important to note here that although some schools had about two of these dances for example, St Aidan's Church of England Technology College in Lancashire and John Spendluffe Technology College in Lincolnshire had Ballet and Contemporary dance as part of their curriculum, no single school was found teaching all these forms.

My workshop participants in secondary schools view ballet as a formal classical dance, which originated in the Italian renaissance period and was developed further in France. Ballet utilises conventional steps, poses and graceful movements. It also includes elaborate gestures, a large amount of foot movement and suspension on the toes. Famous ballet dancers whose practices have inspired British pupils include, Maria Kochetkova, Darcey Bussell and Rudolf Nureyev.

Ballroom dance is a collection of partner dances where one partner leads and the other partner follows. There are many types of ballroom dance in British schools. These include Rumba,

Mambo, Cha-cha, Waltz, Foxtrot and swing, all of which come with their individual characteristics. Contemporary dance is a collection of modern and postmodern techniques into a creative form that works with the natural alignment and energy of the body to produce a greater range and fluidity of movement. Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham have been credited as the pioneers of contemporary dance. Jazz is an American social dance that originated at the end of the 19th century. It is a stage dance that incorporates Jazz or Jazz-influenced music. Its new style emerged in the 1950s and 60s that drew on modern ballet and tap dance. Pupils draw inspiration from practitioners including Kathrine Dunham, Jack Cole and Bob Fosse.

Modern dance is a form that broke away from traditional ballet and developed in the early 20th century. It adopts a more relaxed, free style of dance in which dancers use their emotions and mood to design their own steps and routines. Pupils are familiar with such names as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St Denis and Loie Fuller as pioneers of modern dance. Street dance is a collection of dance forms that developed outside of dance studios in the 1970s. It involves improvisation and interaction with spectators and other dancers. The common styles found in British schools are Break dancing, Popping, Locking and Krumping. Tap dance is a form that developed from American theatre dance in the 19th century and influenced by Irish clogging and African dance movements. It deals with rhythmic sound patterns.

It is important to reiterate here again that all the definitions and characteristics I have outlined on the different dance genres above are not from my own perspective, but from the perspectives of the pupils who do them and are able to talk about their experience, which reflects the diversity of dance cultures that are being experienced in British schools. Also, apart from the

West African dance forms, I have very little knowledge of the other non-African forms hence the employment of the pupils' views which also stand as the views of the participating schools.

Having outlined the characteristics of the aforementioned dances against my own technique dominated by Anlo-Ewe dances of Ghana, it is worthy of note that this does not intend to break the rule of comparing like to like. It is to understand the movement qualities participants of my workshops had been doing in their various schools. These movement qualities become the relevant previous dance knowledge of the pupils which a teacher may employ in teaching a new form. Influence of these non-African dance forms on my rearrangements is located in the area of movement component and its execution. I designed my movement vocabulary around the Anlo-Ewe torso manipulation. Dancer and scholar Patience Kwakwa (1994) observed that, "Anlo-Ewe of Ghana and those of neighbouring countries, the republics of Togo and Benin concentrate on movements of the upper torso in their dances" (1994, 11). Kwakwa's observation underscores how Anlo-Ewe dance forms are dominated by the strong contraction and release of the upper torso. In view of the fact that the majority of dances found in British schools do not emphasise the contraction and release of the upper torso, using *Hesu* technique without any modification presented a great challenge to the whole process of teaching and learning Ghanaian dance. Improvisation, which is already an integral part of African creativity, becomes the tool with which my rearrangements have been done. Tierou (1989) states, "Improvisation in Africa is not a result, as in the West, of spontaneity, but much more of the creative imagination of the improviser who applies himself to a given subject known to everybody" (1989, 19). While the employment of improvisation has enhanced my creation to an extent, the biggest challenge has been the polycentric nature of Anlo-Ewe dance where different parts of the body must collaborate in executing the full movement. Yartey (2009) explains, "even though weight and centre are established through the pelvis and manifested in

the hips, usually the various parts of the body come together to perform simultaneous movement at different times, speeds and qualities in multiple directions to harmonious organic whole”(Yartey, 2009, 256-7). These elements in Anlo-Ewe dance as articulated by Yartey’s explanation are considered as vital ingredients that make the dance complete. In effect, practitioners are always cautious of keeping these vital elements according to Anlo-Ewe traditional norms. In order not to operate contrary to the Anlo-Ewe norms, I set out two themes to be explored by *Hesu* technique namely, (a) Sticking to the rules and (b) Breaking the rules. In the first part pupils are introduced to the movements and their significance after which they are taken through the rules that constitute the grammar of the dance. Significant part of the rules is listening to drum language and responding with the appropriate dance movement. In the second part, pupils are allowed to break the rules in order to allow creativity and innovation. In the creative process the drum language is replaced with recorded music to which pupils respond with their various choreographic pieces. I argue here that African dance in the diaspora always has a contemporary element to it. Therefore, if I call the first part of my *Hesu* model as a traditional or neo-traditional dance, then what is created in the second part (‘breaking the rules’) can be called contemporary. I also recognise that, what is known today as contemporary may become traditional tomorrow if it is maintained for a long period of time.

Relevance of School Workshops

Discussing the teaching of African dance forms in North America and other diasporic communities, Amegago (2011) outlines a number of factors to consider in the notion of relevance of activities to students under the school curriculum. He asserts,

Concerning the notion of relevance, certain activities may be considered generally relevant to students’ educational levels while others may be perceived as relevant to their specific developmental stages. However, what seems irrelevant today may provide a basis for future needs or undertakings; thus, ultimately everything could be relevant to a student’s life. The notion of relevance is further challenged by students’ exposure to the hidden curriculum

(unintended or taken for granted experiences or knowledge) and other forms of knowledge through the mass media, some of which would otherwise be deemed irrelevant to specific students' educational levels. While relating the curriculum content to specific students' educational levels or contexts, a consideration should also be given to the students' past, present and future experiences and social responsibilities (Amegago 2011, 87).

Amegago's point about North American students presents a perspective that requires consideration of the past experiences of the pupils and students in Britain who are the participants in my dance workshops, their present experience and of course, their future experiences. The past experiences of ethnic minority groups in Britain may be linked to their immigrant culture which was handed to them by their parents. For example, an Anlo-Ewe child in London is likely to be immediately associated with Agbadza dance, because of his/her ethnicity, despite the fact that his /her preference may be English country dance. While their present experiences are more closely linked to the many cultures they experience in multicultural Britain today, answers to the question of how their present experiences full of diverse cultural forms can be harnessed and used in building what Prime Minister David Cameron termed 'Big Society'¹ becomes very crucial to their future experiences. It is a process involving a combination of enculturation and re-enculturation as a response to the challenges of acculturation. In other words, it involves learning their native cultures which is often considered as an ongoing process, as well as experiencing the many cultures in their new environment (Britain) in order to respond to the changes and dynamisms of the 21st century globalised world of advanced technology.

Harnessing and celebrating the diversity of cultures in Britain today can be seen as one of the priority areas of British education and this is evident in the many diversity and cultural programmes that characterise the curriculum content of their schools. The relevance of my

¹ David Cameron uses the term to refer to Conservative party policy idea that sought to emphasise empowerment of local communities in celebrating the diversity of cultures in Britain. See Cameron and Clegg set out 'big society' policy ideas (BBC News of 18th May, 2010).

school dance workshops is linked to some special programmes on the British school calendar including International Days, Art Week, Black History Month, Enrichment Days, Global Art Days, Multicultural Days, Diversity Days and Ethnic Minority Days. Although these participants were not obliged to give information on their experience, the pupils/students through their schools have presented to me thank-you notes in the form of poems and testimonies. Below are a few examples:

On behalf of all the students and staff at David Lewis I wanted to thank you for the fantastic workshops on Friday 2nd July. The students commented on how much they enjoyed the workshops and said they liked having the opportunity to play the drums. I thought that the workshops were well organised and well led and I liked the way you taught not only drumming, but dancing and singing as well. I felt this really made it accessible to all students. One member of support staff said that it was refreshing and great to learn something new (Year 10 teacher, October, 2010).

The above testimony was the integration of students' appreciation of my workshop into one piece by their teacher. To put it in context, this is a special needs school full of students with different learning abilities. Although the characteristics of my workshops as revealed by this feedback include creativity, motivation, accessibility and learning of new skills, it is worth noting here that the students were just offering their appreciation and not critical comments. It also makes us understand that these students participated in the dance workshop as an opportunity to experience something new rather than a situation where dance students will have to analyse the session and offer their own criticisms. Regardless of that, one can clearly sense one unique observation which points to the style of delivery of the workshop in a holistic form of combining drumming, dancing and singing.

I was very impressed with the workshop. The artist Kwashie was very enthusiastic and worked extremely well with the children, he was able to motivate every single child and get them engaged in the activities. The children were able to understand the history of Africa and what African culture is all about. Towards the end of the workshop the pupils were able to put together a

production which was seen by year 8 pupils. The year 8 pupils were amazed that the production was put together in one day (Josh, 22nd October, 2012).

In the above feedback the head teacher of a high school conveyed to me the views of pupils across the whole school. Although, to the school, the most important element they could point out was inclusiveness which enabled everybody to participate, this validates my argument that Anlo-Ewe dances are largely participatory with very few or no audience. Furthermore, we can see from the pupils' perspective that, dance in Africa is connected to history, geography, music and cultural studies. Therefore, to analyse African dances, one must consider history, music, geography and the role of tradition in the various dances and the culture of the people. Firenzi (2012) asserts,

One of the more useful analytical approaches to investigating dance practices in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial contexts is to look at the role of tradition in different dances, and how this connection to the past has or has not played a role in the manipulation of these dance practices for political or social purposes (Firenzi 2012, 404).

One significant outcome of these school workshops is the fact that many schools have begun using Anlo-Ewe dance as the main art form in celebrating Black history month in October and in the celebration of multicultural days, international days, and diversity days. Anlo-Ewe dance and related arts in many schools in Britain have significantly served the needs of the above special events in recent years. At a secondary school in Nottingham, I spent three days working with year 8 students (12-13 year olds) as part of their Arts Week celebrations. In this experience I worked collaboratively with different artists from different parts of the world in a range of arts including, African storytelling, Indian dance, Lion dance, Designer currency, Poetry slam and word play, Chinese numbers, Food from around the world, Kabuki masks, Aboriginal dance, Samba and Bollywood. Under the discussion of elements of storytelling in Africa, the students focused on the unique model of the Anlo-Ewe. The various segments of this model

include the opening of the story, the introduction of the characters, the main attraction which is the musical interlude and the closing of the story.

The whole school was stunned to see English students exploring the call, *Misegli loo* (listen to a story) by the story teller and the response, *Egli neva* (let the story come) by the listeners as the standard opening of *glitoto* (Anlo-Ewe story telling session). They also explored the call and response element in the introduction of the characters just as it is done in Anlo-Ewe tradition. As the story teller said *Egli tso wuu dze Ayiyi dzi* (the story falls on a spider), the listeners responded appropriately together by saying *wo dze dzi* (it falls on him). At the end of the celebration, students identified elements that differentiate the art of storytelling in Africa from other forms of storytelling in the world. Notable among these distinctive elements are; the unique role dance with its music plays as a way of keeping the listeners alive and attentive to the narrator, as well as harnessing the performing arts potential of the listeners; and the collaborative nature of the whole process that engages both the storyteller and his listeners in the narration. Students' experience in other art forms were also exhibited and the experience made it clear that bringing experienced practitioners of arts from different parts of the world has a huge potential to enrich students' knowledge about the need to appreciate each other's cultures in Britain in celebrating the cultural diversity of the country.

In other diasporic environments including United States of America and Canada, African dance has been used at festivals and black history programmes. Modesto Amegago of York University in Canada is an authority of African music and dance. Apart from his role as a professor of Dance Ethnology, he uses dance in cross cultural education and performances that highlight cultural values of the Africans. Samuel Elikem Nyamuame is another scholar and practitioner of African music and dance based at Binghamton University in New York. He also uses his arts to re-unite Africans living in the United States to their native cultural values.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored African dance as a holistic art and its use in social integration in Britain. The discussion focused on a decade of my dance practice in Britain where African dance forms under the umbrella of ethnic minority arts were accepted in schools and communities as a tool for social integration for both immigrants and mainstream society.

While the paper draws on Ghanaian/African material to exhibit the ability of dance to bring cultural re-union and sense of identity to geographically displaced people, it also reveals some challenges involved. These include, re-creating the dance forms to respond to the educational needs of the learners, removing some original elements and incorporating relevant contemporary elements into the re-creation which obviously may raise questions of originality and authenticity.

Significantly, this paper offers a perspective on how dance can be employed as an impressive tool to integrate ethnic minority groups into European society without the migrants necessarily compromising their native cultures. It also highlights how dance and its related arts can be used to create a platform for multiple voices in order to encourage collaborative creativity among African immigrant communities and mainstream British society.

In conclusion, I argue that African dance as a cultural phenomenon provides the opportunity to explore the concept of society and its benefits to multicultural Europe, America, Asia and other diasporic environments with the benefit of promoting community cohesion and peaceful coexistence in the midst of diverse cultures

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