

TAKE FLIGHT
**DANCE AMBASSADOR
TRAINING REPORT**

Brunel
University
of London

NEW/ADVENTURES

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TAKE FLIGHT

DANCE AMBASSADOR

TRAINING REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and objectives

Dance offers potential wellbeing and health benefits for young people from different genders, ages, socioeconomic histories, ethnicities, and disabilities in diverse places and spaces. This report examines the recruitment, training, impact and legacy of Regional Dance Ambassadors in the New Adventures Swan Lake Take Flight outreach programme. It explores the role of Regional Dance Ambassadors (RDAs) in supporting and enhancing a culture of wellbeing in the programme.

Evaluation methods

The data was collected in-person at the dance training using dance-along research methods, observations and informal conversations. Three days of RDA training, totalling 21 hours, with additional insight drawn from a Dance Artist preparation day (7 hours) were evaluated.

Key findings

Thematic analysis of data identified seven key processes in the design, delivery and experiences of RDA training at New Adventures that are likely to enhance wellbeing in those who take part.

- Who you are
- What you could bring to [placemaking venue] and New Adventures in this role
- Self-expression, interpretation and immersion in dance movements
- Negotiating wellbeing emotions through practices and processes of dance
- Autonomy, experimentation and personal growth in the New Adventures method
- Meaning-making, positive social relationships and movement practices
- Professional movement facilitation
- Inclusive movement spaces and dance practices (including a participant-centred approach, empathetic facilitation, fluidity and dynamic processes, cocreation, and a focus on diversity and inclusion)
- Dance Ambassador reflective practice and reflexivity

Conclusion and next steps

Participants are likely to experience a range of wellbeing outcomes including joy and pleasure, confidence, self-esteem, and personal achievement. The approach also has potential for transformative change at a personal, community and societal level. This includes strategies reflecting a public pedagogy approach and supporting participants to develop a critical self-awareness. The methods of delivering dance movement activities demystify established ideas of the inaccessibility of professional dance through movement practices that can be more self-determined. Next steps within the Take Flight project include site visits to workshops in Southampton, Norwich, Newcastle, Canterbury, and Bradford. Data collection for Plymouth occurred in October and November 2024. Also upcoming are interviews with RDAs, Strategic Decision Makers at New Adventures, and Placemaking Venue Stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

New Adventures and Brunel University of London (BUL) researchers are conducting a collaborative evaluation of the expanded *Take Flight* activity around their flagship production of Matthew Bourne's iconic *Swan Lake*. The performance of *Swan Lake* celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2025. BUL researchers in the *Centre for Health and Wellbeing across the Lifecourse* (CHWL) proposed a qualitative research strategy for this work which has been reviewed and agreed with key experts at New Adventures. The research programme aims to develop a programme theory of wellbeing for the *Take Flight* activities. This will identify the conditions and mechanisms by which *Take Flight* achieves its wellbeing outcomes and will build evidence of the impact of an extensive programme of movement and dance activity with placemaking venues. The proposed work will ensure the development of an evidence-led framework for supporting the values of New Adventures in ensuring wide accessibility for a diverse range of people in different places to watch adventurous performances, take part in creative movement projects and become part of the New Adventures family of performers, professional practitioners and participants.

This report consists of six sections. (1) background and rationale, (2) recruitment and training, particularly of Regional Dance Ambassadors, (3) research objectives and methods, (4) preliminary and emerging findings, (5) conclusion, and (6) next steps. References are listed at the end of the report.



SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Dance offers potential wellbeing and health benefits for young people from different genders, ages, socioeconomic histories, ethnicities, and disabilities in diverse places and spaces (Mansfield et al., 2018). The

performing arts more broadly, as a set of creative practices including dance and movement performance have long been associated with affording people experiences which allow them to ‘feel good’, improve their quality of life, and obtain a sense of accomplishment, self-esteem and meaning (Sheppard and Broughton, 2020). The relationship between dance, health and wellbeing is known to be complex and multidimensional including intersecting aspects related to embodiment, identity, belonging, self-worth, aesthetics, affective responses and creativity (Chappell et al., 2021). Yet, little is known about the precise mechanisms by which dance and movement are effective in enhancing good wellbeing in diverse population groups across the lifecourse. There is also important work to be done in enabling important findings about the dance-wellbeing nexus to be translated into policymaking and community wellbeing and health practice.

The commissioning of primary research to produce an evaluation of the outcomes, processes and impact of New Adventures’ expanded movement and dance activity around the flagship production of Matthew Bourne’s iconic *Swan Lake* is therefore timely and innovative. Our proposed approach provides a unique, coproduced perspective paramount in creating and sustaining an evidence-led approach.

1.1 Wellbeing and Creativity Terminology and Definitions

Subjective wellbeing is a multidimensional construct defined and measured in a range of different ways (see Huppert, 2017; Diener et al., 2009). A starting point for understanding wellbeing in this project is to take it to mean how we are doing as individuals, communities and as a nation, and how sustainable that is for the future. This conceptualisation of wellbeing includes reference to peoples’ sense of satisfaction with life, how worthwhile life is, and day to day emotional experiences of happiness and anxiety. It also includes consideration of the significance of factors such as quality of life, sense of purpose, self-esteem, self-confidence, mood, empowerment and identity. This conceptualisation directly connects to the definition of wellbeing identified by New Adventures which proposes that wellbeing is about feeling happier and healthier through creativity, connection, joy and wonder, and we have used this framing of wellbeing to inform the analysis of the Dance Ambassador training in this report.

The evaluation offers a preliminary analysis of the relationships between learning to deliver New Adventures community dance, wellbeing and creativity. The work will help to develop understanding of the ways in which the *Swan Lake Take Flight* activities bring people together to make them feel excited, inspired and enriched through their movement. Like wellbeing, creativity is also a contested concept which can be defined from multiple perspectives (Kaufman et al., 2022; Mansfield et al., 2024; Rhodes, 1961; Sternberg, 1999; Walia, 2019). Following the range of literature exploring conceptual definitions of creativity we will take creativity to mean an act or process including originality (or novelty/uniqueness) and one or more characteristics including functionality (or effectiveness, usefulness, value creation), self-expression and flow/immersion. This definition reflects a conceptualisation that encompasses ways that creativity may lead to a range of wellbeing outcomes including physical, emotional and psychological. This way of exploring creativity directly reflects New Adventures intentions to value creative processes and outputs and give participants a chance to flourish as a way of improving wellbeing. We have considered the Dance Ambassador training in terms of the complexity of creativity by including a holistic framing to understanding the person, the process and the environment in which creativity takes place (Puryear et al., 2020).

1.2 New Adventures Terminology and Abbreviations

Table 1 summarises the terminology and abbreviations used in this report to describe the New Adventures *Take Flight* programme.

Table 1: Terminology and Abbreviations – *Take Flight* Programme

Term	Definition
<i>Take Flight</i> programme	A body of community movement and dance outreach work attached to the New Adventures Swan Lake 30 th Anniversary tour, occurring in the regions of six New Adventures placemaking venues.
Placemaking venue	A touring theatre selected by New Adventures due to their long-term partnership and aim to support the dance ecology in their region. See section 2.1 for further details on placemaking venues within the <i>Take Flight</i> project.
Regional Dance Ambassador (RDA)	A freelance professional dance creative working in the region of one of New Adventures' placemaking venues, specifically hired by New Adventures for the <i>Take Flight</i> programme. They will lead the community workshops and support the <i>Take Flight</i> days. See section 2.1 for further details.
Dance Artist (DAR)	A freelance dance artist who has previously performed with New Adventures, is passionate about facilitation, and continues to lead outreach sessions for New Adventures. Dance Artists will lead the <i>Take Flight</i> days at the placemaking venues.
Community workshop	Hour-long dance and movement sessions led by RDAs, designed to introduce young people to movement inspired by New Adventures' Swan Lake. They will ideally occur in the regions of the RDAs in the two months preceding the Swan Lake tour visiting that location and will target existing community youth groups whose members have little or no dance experience. Capacity is 25 and ten sessions will occur in each region, with the option for community groups to sign up for multiple sessions.
<i>Take Flight</i> day	Three-hour dance and movement sessions led by DARs, offering a rich experience for young people already interested in New Adventures' Swan Lake. Capacity is 30 per <i>Take Flight</i> day, and participants will be recruited after they have experienced a community workshop. <i>Take Flight</i> days will be supported by RDAs and New Adventures office staff, particularly the Take Part team. Two sessions will occur in each region, typically one for ages 10-14 and one for ages

	15-18, up to 24 if disabled. They will be held onsite at a placemaking venue, occurring while the Swan Lake tour is in that placemaking venue, and participants will each be offered two tickets to watch the show after the <i>Take Flight</i> day.
Dance Ambassador training	Three-day residential training for the RDAs, focusing on New Adventures pedagogy and learning how to lead the <i>Take Flight</i> community workshops.
Dance Artists <i>Take Flight</i> Preparation Day	One-day training for the DARs, focusing on New Adventures pedagogy and learning how to lead the <i>Take Flight</i> days.

SECTION 2: RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

2.1 Regional Dance Ambassadors Recruitment

The recruitment of Regional Dance Ambassadors is a new and developing strategy for New Adventures. Traditionally, the company has only worked with creatives who have previously performed for New Adventures. However, the *Take Flight* programme itself is a novel project, and required innovative community-focused ways of working, delivered by local specialists. New Adventures recruited expert professional dance creatives already working with young people within communities in their specific regions, recognising the significance and value of deep community connections in the delivery of local dance projects.

In June and July 2024, New Adventures advertised for six Regional Dance Ambassadors across six regions, each attached to and recruited through a placemaking venue (see Table 1 for definition). These six regions and venues are: Plymouth (Theatre Royal Plymouth), Southampton (Mayflower Theatre), Norwich (Theatre Royal), Newcastle (Theatre Royal), Canterbury (the Marlowe Theatre), and Bradford (the Alhambra Theatre). RDA applications consisted of a CV, an equal opportunities form, and a cover letter, presentation, or video addressing the following:

- Who you are
- What you could bring to [placemaking venue] and New Adventures in this role
- Your suitability to be a Regional Dance Ambassador in [region] and specifically how your experience is aligned with this role.

Successful applicants were then invited to interview days held at the six locations. These consisted of interview panels of both New Adventures and placemaking venue stakeholders, and an observation of practice, where candidates worked with a group of participants aged between 12-18 years, and ranged between 2 and 20 participants. Successful candidates were employed as freelance dance facilitators.



The six Regional Dance Ambassadors on the *Take Flight* project.

2.2 Training (Dance Ambassadors and Dance Artists)

The three-day residential Regional Dance Ambassador training was held from 19th-21st September 2024. The training was held in a studio at The Talent House, East London Dance, attended by various project stakeholders and followed the schedule detailed in Table 2. Lunch breaks were included as well as time for reflection at the end of each day 5.30-6.00pm.



Table 2: Schedule of training

Date	Times	Content	Details	Attendees
19/09/2024	10am-10:30am	Meet & Greet New Adventures Team (Session 1)	Introductions to everyone in the room.	RDAs (n=6) DARs (n= circa 5) Mentors (n=2) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer
	10:30am-12:30pm	Take Part in a New Adventures Workshop (Session 2)	An example New Adventures workshop, with content that will feature in the community workshops and <i>Take Flight</i> days. Led by the Take Part Creative Director, and several DARs including the mentors.	RDAs (n=6) DARs (n= circa 5) Mentors (n=2) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer
	1:30pm-5:30pm	Understanding Behaviours with Dance United Yorkshire (Session 3)	Behaviour-focused session to understand challenging behaviours in young people, led by industry experts Dance United Yorkshire.	RDAs (n=6) DARs (n= circa 5) Mentors (n=2) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer
20/09/2024	10am-1:30pm	New Adventures Values and Workshop Environment (Session 4)	More example workshop activities, such as Location Stations and Sign and Describe, but with a greater focus on values and curating a workshop environment aligned with wellbeing.	RDAs (n=6) DAR Mentor (n=1) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer
	2:30pm-5:30pm	Swan Lake Workshop Content, Movement Vocabulary and Creative Tasks (Session 5)	Continuation of Session 4's activities, with a focus on the Swan Lake show. Participants learnt a short motif of repertoire from the production, and the history of Swan Lake was delivered by the Associate Artistic Director of New Adventures.	RDAs (n=6) DAR Mentor (n=1) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer
21/09/2024	10am-1:30pm	History of Swan Lake and Structuring Workshops (Session 6)	Focus on the community workshops themselves. RDAs were led in an hour-long example community workshop by a DAR mentor, with reflection activities.	RDAs (n=6) DAR Mentor (n=1) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer
	2:30pm-5:30pm	Practice Examples, Safeguarding and Support (Session 7)	RDAs planning example community workshops, with different scenarios to interpret.	RDAs (n=6) DAR Mentor (n=1) Take Part Creative Director Swan Lake <i>Take Flight</i> Producer

In addition to the RDA training, a Dance Artist *Take Flight* preparation day was held on Thursday 24th October 2024, at a British Ballet Organisation studio, also attended by researchers. This was aimed at preparing content for the three-hour DAR-led *Take Flight* days (see Table 1) and was led by the same team as the RDA training with additional input from the *Take Flight* Assistant Producer. Observations and analysis from the Dance Artist training day will also be drawn into this research, as they were very similar in tone and goals, only working towards different sections of the same project.

Additionally, New Adventures also hosted wider inclusivity training shortly after the RDA training, to which the RDAs were also invited (see Table 3). These were held online, and attendance was optional for RDAs.

Table 3: Equality, Diversity, Inclusivity Training

Date	Times	Content
24/09/2024	5pm-6pm	Trans and Non-Binary Allyship with Global Butterflies
25/09/2024	5pm-6pm	Unconscious Bias with Creative Access
26/09/2024	5pm-6pm	Disability Equality

SECTION 3: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

3.0 Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this project is to develop a collaborative research partnership and conduct research which will explain the conditions and mechanisms as well as the impact of building evidence of the Swan Lake *Take Flight* programme on participant engagement and wellbeing.

There are three proposed objectives:

1. To develop an initial Programme Theory of Wellbeing for Swan Lake *Take Flight* activities
2. To assess the recruitment, training, impact and legacy of Regional Dance Ambassadors in the New Adventures programme
3. To produce qualitative evidence about the conditions for and processes by which participant engagement and wellbeing outcomes are achieved through New Adventures placemaking community dance and movement programme

In this report we focus on our assessment of the recruitment, initial training and potential impact of Regional Dance Ambassadors in the New Adventures programme which will inform the delivery of objective 2. The objectives overlap. The evidence in this report will contribute to developing a programme theory-of-change

(objective 1). It does so by producing preliminary qualitative evidence about the conditions for and processes by which participant engagement and wellbeing outcomes are achieved through the New Adventures placemaking community dance and movement programme (objective 3).

3.1 Evaluation Approach and Methods

Researchers drew on participant observation methods involving actively participating whilst making observations (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Researchers attended the full 21 hours of RDA training, in addition to 7 hours of participant observation at the Dance Artist preparation day. The principles of mobile methods were also used in a dance-along strategy for data collection (Merriman, 2019). This allowed researchers to move and to be moved by other participants, to reflect on the role of the research, identify preliminary findings and to become tuned into the organisation, delivery, teaching and overall (co)experience of the RDA training and DAR prep day (Buscher et al., 2010).

3.1.1 Dance-Along Observations

Dance-along research methods were used to collect data about the experience of engaging in the New Adventures RDA training and the dance movements that participants would likely take part in. This was a method enabled researchers to quickly understand the training content and the dance experience in a real and authentic process. Taking part with the trainers and Dance Ambassadors allowed researchers to being to build a rapport with stakeholders involved in the project to support future research methods and evaluation plans. It provided a method for understanding the potential wellbeing outcomes of the New Adventures approach. (Buckland, 2010).

3.1.2 Observation and Informal Observations

During the training sessions, researchers engaged in informal conversations with leaders and participants. This was an invaluable method for highlighting key questions, thoughts, and themes arising within the training sessions (Bernard, 2017). Reflecting the principles of ethnography, observation and informal conversation with people provided a pragmatic and natural opportunity for researchers to 'get to know' New Adventures staff, RDAs, and DARs, build rapport, and explore key aspects of the training that could inform our understanding of wellbeing (Swain and King, 2022).

3.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the handwritten and typed field notes. This approach allowed patterns or themes in the data to be identified and explored (Braun and Clarke, 2008). Field notes totalled 6,405 words, which were repeatedly read for familiarisation processes and to generate analytical memos (n=271). The overall theoretical focus on wellbeing informed our analysis. An iterative approach to analysis was employed including ongoing discussions with researchers and New Adventures collaborators.

3.3 Project Ethics

All research and evaluation processes have been approved by Brunel University of London Research Ethics Committee (Approval 49858-MHR-Oct/2024- 53041-2), to be carried out between 21/10/2024 and 31/07/2025.

All choices and processes were also created, reviewed, edited, and amended in consultation with New Adventures.



SECTION 4: PRELIMINARY AND EMERGING FINDINGS

4.1 Experiencing Bodily Movement, Creativity and Wellbeing

Several interlocking mechanisms of creativity enable a range of potential wellbeing outcomes to be achieved when participants engage in bodily movement and expression through the methods by which New Adventures work. Through their training, Dance Ambassadors learn to develop and embed a culture of wellbeing into the delivery of dance-based movement activity, creating a movement space in which participants can begin to flourish and thrive. Participants engaged in the programme may feel happier and healthier and/or joyful and inspired, gain a sense of achievement and personal pride, experience improved confidence and self-esteem, and feel a sense of purpose and meaning as well as be more positive about relationships with others.

4.1.1 Self-expression, interpretation and immersion in dance movements

A key focus of the movement activities in the training workshops was on encouraging and supporting self-expression and connection to the moving body. It is highly likely that participants taught by the Dance Ambassadors will experience positive psychological and physical wellbeing feelings like joy, happiness and pleasure through engagement with dance-related movement activities. Dance movement in the New Adventures methods can be seen as an unfolding creative bodily experience and expression (Elisondo and Vargas, 2019).

Processes of scaffolding enabled a layered approach to building up movement knowledge and bodily understanding so that participants could be enabled to feel a sense of dance competency. Central to the New Adventures training was the importance of valuing any kind of movement as a self-interpretation of a theme that was introduced, be that a particular swan motif or a more imaginary idea. Throughout, the focus was on building self-expression and this is a likely mechanism of individual wellbeing outcomes such as confidence, self-esteem, autonomy and achievement.

Warm-up activities for example encourage participants to breath and move freely in and around the space available with short, direct commands like 'walk around', and 'change direction'. The use of Swan Lake motifs provides a unique feature of the New Adventures method, offering a direct connection to the Swan Lake performance but delivered and taught in an accessible way which focused on engaging participants more in the process of movement and creativity rather than a performative product. This was evident in the way that broad instructions were given by workshop leads which enabled and encouraged self-interpretation. There was no judgement or assessment of the way participants were creating the 'beak' of a swan with two hands held flat together, forming a 'bunch of bananas' to symbolise tail feathers with hands held behind the back or creating the wings and walking patterns of a swan. An immersive strategy of bodily movement, one in which participants were encouraged to feel and sense their own bodies framed instructions to create swan-like shapes. The focus on swan motifs, and variations on the themes and scenes in Swan Lake reflects a flexible framework for sharing dance movements that is likely to enable participants to psychologically and physically put themselves into a creative process of moving and feeling good.

It is possible that some participants may experience much deeper feelings of escape and freedom in the creative endeavour (Rampley et al., 2019). Immersion in the process of bodily creativity is a defining feature of wellbeing outcomes (Mansfield et al., 2024) and is embedded into the content of the New Adventures methodology. How far participants become immersed in dance practice and the extent to which they feel a sense of freedom and escape is likely to be shaped by individual personalities or social circumstances and possibly by the degree to which participants connect to the dance experience. In the training workshops it was evident that dance expertise is characterised by the capacity to immerse oneself in a creative process. In activities that included an element of group choreography in which participants connect together a repertoire of individual dance moves, the ability of professional dancers to quickly and expertly immerse themselves in the creative art of dance performance was evident. Beautiful, innovative, personal and collective choreography was created from a series of individual dance moves through the ability of dance professionals to engage in a kind of habitual creative freedom. However, it is possible for participants with little experience of dance to have positive experiences of imagination and escapism. The dance activities provide all participants with a form of bodily freedom, a space to be creative through personal interpretation and time to explore the movement of one's own body, movement through space and in relation to others no matter what one's level of dance training.

4.1.2 Negotiating wellbeing emotions through practices and processes of dance

The positive emotions associated with wellbeing and creativity in the context of community dance will not always be felt by all participants. Such feelings may also not endure during a workshop or spill over into wider life. Subjective wellbeing involves cognitive and emotional evaluations of experiences and in the movement activities in New Adventures workshops and participants are likely to feel a range of positive emotions like joy, pleasure and wonder alongside more challenging feelings of nervousness and discomfort (psychological and physical). As researchers observing and participating in the workshops these feelings came to the fore immediately and strongly.



Despite having some physical capital built up through sporting engagement, a lack of experience and expertise in dance for one researcher elicited strong feelings of doubt about whether it would be physically possible to do the movement required. This feeling was further reinforced by the knowledge that others in the room were professional dancers with direct experience of New Adventures or dance expertise that could be 'applied' to the workshop activities. Whilst such feelings were not eradicated completely through the experience, it became clear that the apprehension and uneasiness that will commonly be felt by participants at New Adventures workshops who have little or no experience of dance, or for whom the New Adventures approach is new, may well be countered by engagement in dance movement activities. Dance offers opportunities for overt and often spontaneous emotional engagement alone or with others (Stark et al., 2018). Particularly when working with others, the dance activities in the training elicited a type of collective effervescence or group charisma (Tiryakian, 1995) reflecting heightened positive emotional states of happiness and joy which certainly take place in the sessions themselves but may have a longer lasting effect if people engagement in dance elsewhere in wider life.

4.1.3 Autonomy, experimentation and personal growth in the New Adventures method

The element of self-expression and self-determination that characterises the style of teaching and nature of the dance activities delivered in the training workshops creates mechanisms of autonomy as participants engage in the practice of dance. There is a kind of choice and self-direction which plays an important part in wellbeing outcomes because it enables participants to have some freedom of expression and a place to experiment with the moving body. Time is given for people to make sense of instructions and guidance, to reflect on what is possible for them and others and to create movement through experimentation and curiosity.

In one activity, participants worked in small groups to use their bodily expression of something that brings them joy (performed as an individual and shared in a circle activity) to choreograph a collection of joyful activity. For

those not well versed in choreography, this could seem like a daunting task. Linking individual expressions of joy with others required the group to try ideas out, think about possible movement themes, refine the ideas and performance and practice the routine before performing the piece to others in the session. The act of experimentation is likely to illicit some aspect of resistance as a fear of failure is a common barrier to such a creative process. However, a focus on creating an environment that is safe, respectful and empathetic as a condition for meaningful experimentation to take place was a central feature of the approach. Every idea was treated with value and respect and every dance movement was acknowledged in an environment where spontaneity, originality and difference were included. Experimentation is an important feature of creativity with positive consequences for wellbeing. It can come with feeling a sense of a pride at achieving something from an unfamiliar practice, engaging beyond one's comfort zone and building resilience.

The development of autonomy in the dance activities was further evidenced in the way 'flocking' was identified and delivered as a movement practice when participants had become familiar with some of the swan motifs. Flocking involves groups of participants who are asked to gather in a V shape or chevron to represent a group of flying swans with one leader located at the tip of the chevron. The group is asked to move through the room, together, as one in close formation, following the leader as they adopt, perform and express their interpretation of the swan motif movements. As the flock turns, a new leader emerges and takes on the leadership role. The development of leadership skills, even in one short activity, can be associated with a sense of achievement and confidence and there is potential in this kind of activity for personal growth in understanding and developing individual skills of leading and building positive social relations.

4.1.4 Meaning-making, positive social relationships and movement practices

The act of engaging in a creative process of movement in the New Adventures workshops is directly connected to making meaning through the story telling character of dance. The warm-up activities in particular illustrate the way in which creative movement incorporates reflective and contemplative activity enabling the expression of personal meaning (Brewster and Cox, 2018; Hegarty, 2009). As participants gathered in a circle to introduce themselves by name, they were asked to add a movement – any movement – to the name. Movements ranged from a tiny finger movement to a large dance move, but all reflected an individual connection between the phrasing or dynamics of a name, and the move being made. Further reinforcement of the story telling character of bodily movement was demonstrated in the circle activity which started with a leader creating a series of movements, expressions and mimes to produce 'something' from their pocket. The 'item' was passed to the next person who reinterpreted the meaning in the object, again through the movement and expressions of the body and the face. These examples illustrate the capacity of dance movement to enable those who engage to express personal meanings and/or to create and represent real stories about themselves or fictional accounts in dance form. The way that dance enables a unique form of communication with and through the body is evident in the New Adventures approach to training dance artists to deliver workshops. Movement, imagination and sensory engagement combine in the dance activities to allow a place for making sense of the self and others in a storied way. The sense of purpose and achievement that is likely to be felt contributes to positive wellbeing outcomes in the dance experience.

Creating, choreographing, performing and observing provide opportunities to tell a story but also go beyond the story to reflect on one's own personal experience and in relation to others. The dance activities provided a blend of individual and collective and creative experiences with group relations central to wellbeing outcomes. The movement and breathing that takes place in group dance activities creates a kind of synchronous rhythm that supports participants to develop meaningful physical and cognitive connections to those they are working

creatively with in the workshops. Whilst more closely associated with dance and music therapy, the New Adventures techniques are characterised by what has been defined as a rhythmic entrainment; a process by which music and dance can help people to become more in tune with their own bodies and identities and with those of others around them (Bingham, 2020).

This was evident in group activities requiring collective creative thought. In one activity participants are asked to form small groups (5-6 people) and to each think of and choose a swan motif learned during a session. The activity is then to connect the personal chosen motif physically to another person so that a pattern of swan motifs move with different styles and pace across the room. In doing so there is a palpable sense of creative thought as people seek to remember a movement. Little conversation takes place. Rather people embody a movement, others see it being practiced and automatic nods or smiles or imitations of the move take place as reciprocal confirmation. From individual remembering and showing, a more collective and rhythmic organisation and connection between people takes place across the room. Such rhythmic tuning-in to the self and others is perhaps more visibly obvious in the technique of flocking, as described above as a process of autonomy, leadership and experimentation. Moving synchronously in the V shape formation requires attention to the rhythm and pattern of the group and one's own place within it. In both the connected swan and flocking activities, participants must notice other people and work to connect to them physically, cognitively and creatively.



4.2 Principles and Practices of Dance Artist Facilitation: Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in the New Adventures Methodology

Through their training, Dance Ambassadors learn to develop and embed a culture of wellbeing into the delivery of dance-based movement activity, creating a movement space in which participants can begin to flourish and

thrive. Likely wellbeing outcomes from engagement in New Adventures *Take Flight* workshops are interconnected with the type and style of professional facilitation of creativity that Dance Ambassadors embrace. Three core principles were evident in the Dance Ambassador training that provided the foundation for them to deliver bespoke *Take Flight* workshops to a range of participants which are likely to combine to optimise the wellbeing outcomes of the programme. These principles were (i) professional facilitation, (ii) inclusive practice, and (iii) dance artist reflexivity.

4.2.1 Professional movement facilitation

Professional expertise as a dance artist, combined with the skills and passion to translate and share creative movement practices with community participants are at the cornerstone of the New Adventures approach to Dance Ambassador training. Through the training workshops, tacit knowledge about dance as a movement practice and a high level of teaching competency was combined with learning and sharing specific elements or motifs from the performance of *Swan Lake* to provide the context and mechanisms by which creativity through dance can lead to a range of wellbeing outcomes.

The rigour in the recruitment process ensured the appointment of the highest quality of dance educator to the Dance Ambassador role and the most appropriate workforce for the New Adventures *Take Flight* programme. The strategic intention for the Regional Dance Ambassador role at New Adventures was established to create a relationship with an artist that lives and works in the local area, to deepen the connections that are made with community groups in the *Take Flight* programme and to enable the delivery to be authentic and long-lasting. As a regional touring company, New Adventures is based in the South East and strategic decision makers are working with venues spread across England to deliver outreach to their local regions. Six Dance Ambassadors were recruited to lead the *Take Flight* programme in Plymouth, Southampton, Norwich, Newcastle, Canterbury, and Bradford (see section 2.1 for further details on placemaking venues within the *Take Flight* project). Each Dance Ambassador has deep and varied professional experience within the dance industry, with up to ten years of specialist facilitation work. Amongst them are artistic directors of their own dance companies, vocationally trained performers, specialists in SEND teaching, and site-specific choreographers. Several of the Dance Ambassadors have also previously participated in *Overture*, New Adventures' own professional development programme to support dance and movement creatives across the UK.

The training team included the Take Part Creative Director, and Dance Artists with established and long-term expertise as dancers with New Adventures, and a collective experience of performing New Adventures *Swan Lake*. Professional dance facilitators embody a form of embodied and unspoken dance knowledge, skills and abilities developed through their experience that is deeply engrained. This means they do not need to put into words how to dance, choreograph or interpret and express meaning through their own moving bodies. The professional expertise that the Dance Ambassadors come with and then develop through the New Adventures *Take Flight* training equips them with the ability to empower and support participants to be creative because they can translate their expert dance knowledge through inclusive movement spaces and dance practices.

4.2.2 Inclusive movement spaces and dance practices

In the delivery of dance movement activities, creative processes certainly include the ability to teach dance. However, professional facilitation in the *Take Flight* workshops is more than teaching a repertoire of traditional dance movements. The inclusion of *Swan Lake* motifs encourages a bespoke and holistic approach to imagination and emotional release that connects the ground-breaking creativity of the professional performance to a personal

and everyday creativity, accessible to diverse participants. Being enabled to produce movements that are in a professional production of Swan Lake including the representation of a swan's beak, or tail feathers, or wings and swan feet brings participants into an imaginative space in which there is potential to let go of any negative perceptions of dance and physically, psychologically and socially engage in a creative and fulfilling process.



The overarching strategy for engaging participants in the New Adventures workshop was on moving the body through inclusive approaches to dance activities and a *participant-centred* approach. It was clear from the training activities that processional dance facilitators focus on understanding the participants they are working with and creating a shared space for experiencing the moving body through dance. Dance ambassadors were encouraged to harness their expertise to create environments of respect, trust and safety in processes of *empathetic facilitation* (Aldrup et al., 2022). Empathy plays a crucial role in New Adventures method of experiencing dance. It requires Dance Ambassadors to respond to both positive and negative emotional expressions but without necessarily being required to do anything, bringing a challenging requirement for a degree of facilitator-neutrality into the process. This does not mean Dance Ambassadors are disinterested in how people are feeling or impersonal in their approach. Rather, empathy requires facilitators to engage in a type of conscious emotional flexibility working to manage one's own emotions and recognise and value those of the participants at the same time in providing an inclusive environment for participants to display their own emotional and bodily expression.

The dance activities delivered in the New Adventures training embraced a facilitatory strategy which focuses on ensuring that movement activities are not overwhelming for people who do not have extensive experience of dance through *scaffolding*, *self-interpretation* and *creative freedom* previously explored in this report, and ensuring Dance Ambassadors can support in situations where participants may feel they are not creative or do not have the skills to be creative. This was largely achieved through the rhythm and pace of the organisation and delivery of activities which circumvents the potential for participants to psychologically dwell on feeling pressured

to perform. The dance activities require continual movement and a physical and psychological engagement that leaves little room to doubt what one is doing. *Fluidity and dynamic processes* of creative unfolding and self-expression take the place of self-doubt. There is a continuum of moving moments that encourage imagination and self-expression. Rather than directly instructing participants, Dance Ambassadors are trained to orchestrate participant engagement in the dance movement building skills, competency and confidence through their sessions.

In activities which take place in pairs or small groups, a process of *cocreation* of expression takes place. There is potential in this approach for participants to engage in a shared learning process, learning about others and ways of interacting as well as learning about difference and diversity in self-expression. This was evident in the Sign and Describe activity. Participants are asked to imagine an outfit they might wear to a party and the facilitator demonstrates by miming the shape of the outfit, such as a wide-brimmed hat with a feather, or a dress with a big bow. The facilitator asks the group to individually imagine three items and create movements that would communicate these outfits to someone else. Then, participants pair up and take it in turns to demonstrate one move at a time. There is a silent conversational aspect to this, and participants are encouraged to add characterisation or relationships to their movements to continually draw out elements of creativity and self-expression. Sharing, presenting and performing ideas to a partner or a group provides a tangible creative product; likely one that participants did not have a sense of or even believe they could create. Such experiences are central to the potential positive wellbeing outcomes from engagement in dance movement including a sense of achievement, pride and satisfaction especially if one has overcome a degree of apprehension in the process.

The dance activities shared in the workshops require some element of bodily control and a respectful approach to the tactile requirements, spatial awareness and the need to make eye contact. Instructors in this regard must be alert to inclusivity in terms of the sensitivities of touch and relationships in group-based bodily movements. They are encouraged to ensure participants ask each other for permission to touch and respect and adapt to individual differences in this regard. In addition, the environment and processes and practices of dance movement in the New Adventures method are framed by attention to *diversity and inclusivity*. Attention was continually paid to the use of inclusive language in the training including consideration of whether traditional movement commands such as walk or jump could be replaced with move or rise up. This strategy can help to address a range of issues including those associated with stigma, marginalisation and complex emotion management and therefore ensures an inclusive space for engagement where positive wellbeing outcomes can be felt by all those who participate (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

A full training session on dance as a mechanism for promoting inclusion and social justice was delivered by Dance United Yorkshire. DUY train dance artists and create bespoke dance programmes to people living with and in challenging circumstances including domestic abuse, situations of poor mental health and those in the criminal justice system. In this training session DUY provided training which explored the context and teaching and learning strategies for addressing disengagement and difficult or volatile behaviours that may occur during workshops delivered by the Dance Ambassadors. The work presented examples and enabled discussion and exploration of key ways to present the value of dance in promoting wellbeing for diverse participants including a focus on confidence building, physical and emotional health, and creativity. Such work placed a strength-based strategy for wellbeing at the heart of community dance delivery. The focus of this aspect of the training was to enable Dance Ambassadors to use techniques that encourage participants to broaden their views of themselves and others and be open to engaging in unknown or new activities. This approach reinforced the importance of promoting wellbeing by using teaching strategies that enable self-determination through a challenge approach to

building physical and emotional autonomy, movement competency and positive relationships with others (Woodman et al., 2020).



4.2.3 Dance Ambassador reflective practice and reflexivity

Reflective practice is a well-known foundational component of dance professional training and of most dance teaching methods. The New Adventures methods for Dance Ambassador training embed a reflexive approach to facilitation which is characterised by a context and opportunity for Dance Ambassadors to systematically consider the impact of themselves (as dance facilitators) on and within the relationships they have with participants, workshop trainers, New Adventures colleagues and the wider network of the dance ecology in which they are working including in their place making venues and communities. Whilst reflection is the act of simply thinking about something, the idea of reflexivity indicates a constructive strategy of self-critical awareness and taking action about one's own assumptions, behaviours and impacts in relationships with others (Mansfield, 2017).

Embodied and individual reflexive activities took place continually in the New Adventures training sessions because practice-based learning or 'learning through doing' was a core feature and employed a somatic approach to autonomy in the learning process (Leigh et al., 2019). Each time the group were asked to create a movement to represent who they were, or imagine and mime how something might look or feel, an act of self-reflection immediately took place which involved thinking about one's own identity and experiences. It also involved the need to draw on whatever bodily knowledge one might have to express meaning through movement. In this form of individual self-reflection participants come to show and share something of themselves through dance and learn and develop their movement knowledge. This takes place irrespective of one's dance ability and experience. In this sense, the kind of habitual reflection that occurs when participating in New Adventures workshops is likely to underpin feelings of achievement, positive emotions and self-confidence.

During the training sessions, there were several examples of Dance Ambassadors engaging in more formal acts of reflexivity, involving conversational approaches between themselves and the workshop trainers. Towards the end of the training, Dance Ambassadors were set scenarios and asked to work in pairs to codesign and demonstrate delivery of a workshop for particular participants in a specific context. As they planned their sessions discussions took place about which activities would support the participants they would be delivering to, and about the balance of demonstration and verbal instruction, getting the right 'flow' of activity and movement and ensuring time and freedom for participants to engage. Dance Ambassadors talked through their ideas together and when they delivered their session to the rest of the group, they were able to identify and critically explore the potential strengths and challenges in their approach. One Dance Ambassador noted the real value of being a participant in this way and putting oneself into the shoes of who might be in the sessions.

Reflexive moments stimulated a range of discussions about who participants might be, what the teaching environment might look like and questions about the need to adapt to behavioural and social challenges that might arise. The need for eye contact in dance performance and the activities being delivered to participants, for example was discussed at length. It was noted that eye contact is usually a natural and habitual part of stage performance; an unconscious, embodied dance act. However, Dance Ambassadors highlighted the challenge for some participants if eye contact was required because there are cultural and gender differences in the meaning of eye contact, and the ability of some neurodivergent participants to engage in eye contact. Critical reflexive discussion led to suggested alternatives to eye contact including looking in someone's direction or at someone's shoulder or hand or simply noticing someone with a short nod rather than holding contact with the eyes. Reflexivity then has a role in developing facilitation skills and knowledge through shared critique and learning.

Informal opportunities for reflexivity also took place in the session breaks. The opportunity for the Dance Ambassadors to sit, drink coffee, and eat lunch in the outdoor space at the dance training studio or to walk out of the building in the surrounding area provided important moments of solitude and self-reflection. It also afforded Dance Ambassadors time for collective reflexive discussions about the content of the training and wider experiences of delivering community dance sessions. In the final opportunity to offer reflexive thoughts about their training experiences, Dance Ambassador post-training notes identified that there are positive wellbeing outcomes for themselves as well as participants including feelings of 'joy', 'passion', 'inspiration', 'personal growth' and 'empowerment' through the creative processes embedded into the New Adventures methods and movement toolkit. The sustainability of reflexive practice was evident through the inclusion of a mentoring process in which Dance Ambassadors were allocated a New Adventures mentor. The mentors were expert and highly experienced dance artists who had a wealth of knowledge about professional dance, New Adventures, Swan Lake and other performances. The process of mentoring involved formal and informal contact and conversation and was an ongoing part of the New Adventures training.

One of the DUY activities involved a reflexive analysis of a series of principles by which DUY work with all their participants. The principles were written out on laminated cards and laid out on the floor. The Dance Ambassadors review them by walking around and reading each one and then selected one or two that they felt they wanted to explore further. In a circle discussion, each principle which had raised a question or query for further discussion was considered. One notable discussion was about the principle that stated that all participants at DUY workshops must eat the food provided and must eat together. On discussion this made clear sense because DUY are engaged in work with participants who are more likely to come from challenging social backgrounds in which food may be limited and likely not to be healthy. For DUY this principle ensures that all participants receive healthy meals at their sessions, are not embarrassed by not being able to bring food and are not encouraged to

bring less nutritious food including high energy drinks. The principle reflects the broader context for DUY's work that is focused on improving the lives of those living in marginalised and difficult conditions through dance.



SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

The central focus of the New Adventures approach to delivering dance movement was to encourage more people to move their bodies and to experience the potential physical, mental, emotional and social benefits of bodily movement. The broad aim of the outreach work in the six different places across the UK is to collaborate and support venues to expand and deepen their local relationships by tapping into communities that have little or no access to dance. In this way, regional Dance Ambassadors offer an expert local workforce and enable New Adventures to invest in the wider dance ecology for long-term delivery of dance provision in different places and with diverse participant groups. Different participants are likely to be affected by the New Adventures workshop experience in many contested ways which reflect a range of wellbeing outcomes including joy and pleasure, confidence, self-esteem, and personal achievement.

As well as the potential for enhancing individual wellbeing through creative bodily movement, the approach has potential for more transformative change at a personal, community and societal level. The content and delivery strategies offer a space and set of creative practices and processes that reflect a public pedagogy approach; one in which informal shared learning can take place about the self (Hochtritt et al., 2018). The New Adventures work also offers a relational form of dance pedagogy supporting diverse young people to develop a broader and deeper understanding of social life, dance, identity and their place in the world. The emerging evidence in this report has shown that creativity is associated with the capacity of New Adventures dance experiences to enable critical self-

awareness of participants. The methods of delivering dance movement activities demystify established ideas of the inaccessibility of professional dance through movement practices that can be more self-determined. The New Adventures methods offer a form of empowerment through dance framed by a critical pedagogy in practice. The emerging evidence of New Adventures methods of training Dance Ambassadors for delivering the *Take Flight* programme illustrates a holistic strategy of promoting bodily movement which is generative of a range of wellbeing outcomes.

SECTION 6: NEXT STEPS

This report offers a preliminary account of emerging findings about the development of a culture of wellbeing and wellbeing experiences through New Adventures *Take Flight* Programme. The next steps for the evaluation include:

- Site visits (for observations and informal conversations) to New Adventures workshops in Southampton, Norwich, Newcastle, Canterbury, and Bradford. Data collection for Plymouth occurred in October and November 2024, consisting of 14 hours of observations and informal conversations at community workshops and Take Flight days.
- Interviews with Dance Ambassadors, including creative storytelling output
- Interviews with Strategic Decision Makers at New Adventures
- Interviews with Placemaking Venue Stakeholders

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