

Promoting engagement with, and understanding of, a different culture



Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

Background to the school

Marshfield Primary School is a small village primary school with five classes. The school aims to “provide the best possible education and life experiences for our pupils” and staff seek to create a rich and engaging curriculum which opens up multiple opportunities for pupils to explore their place in the wider world. Most pupils at Marshfield are of White British heritage and there are a few pupils in the school where English is not the primary language, which mirrors the local community.

Marshfield CE VC Primary School
Key Stages 1 and 2
Creative Practitioner: Batch Gueye

Specific residency objectives:

- To diversify pupils’ exposure to influences of a culture which is beyond their own experiences.
- To involve the wider community in celebrating performing experiences from a less familiar culture.
- To develop artform skills in singing, dance and drumming.
- To ensure that the experience is universally accessible and inclusive, so that all pupils are able to fully contribute and thrive in the practical workshops.
- To develop staff understanding of how to weave more multicultural education into the curriculum in meaningful and authentic ways.

Aims and synopsis for the residency

WEMA's Cultural Education Hub worked with the school to identify and engage West African griot Batch Gueye as the creative practitioner for their residency. Across a series of twice-weekly sessions during the final half term of the 2024-25 academic year, Batch worked with the year 3 class to develop their understanding of Senegalese culture and Africa through singing, acting, dancing, percussion and storytelling. Each session had planned learning outcomes which related to developing their cultural understanding alongside specific artform outcomes. Multiple opportunities were incorporated for pupils to ask questions and explore their own perceptions.

Batch also led whole-school assemblies which involved storytelling, singing and dance and included multiple opportunities for freestyle improvisation.

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I always think back to the very first Assembly when you start and no one was really moving and by the end of that 25 minutes it was unbelievable, the difference.

Everyone was up dancing and singing, drumming along, and I felt then, gosh, if we can achieve this in 25 minutes, what are we going to achieve in a term and the end performance?

Yeah, it blew my expectations. I couldn't really believe it.

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Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher

The residency culminated in an artistic performance in July 2025, in which the whole school performed together and the Year 3 class gave a presentation of the piece they had worked on with Batch. An audience of parents and school governors attended the performance.

The process of the learning was documented through the careful preparation of a large floor book which included pictures and quotes from children and staff. The final performance was video recorded.

Across the residency, Batch delivered 11 workshops for a group of 15 year 3 students, and four weekly assemblies for all 124 students in the school, culminating in the final performance at the end of term.

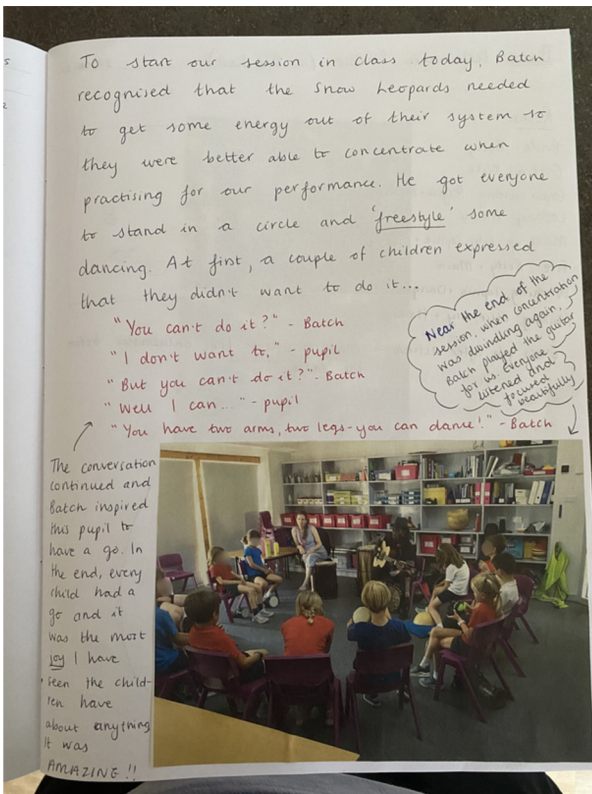


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Key outcomes

Young people

➤ Pupils in the class Batch worked with noticeably grew in confidence within the sessions. Some of the more reluctant performers and quiet pupils in the class were drawn in through the freestyle dance and drumming and this freedom positively changed their experience of performing.

➤ Some pupils maintained this confidence in other aspects of their school life, being more willing to contribute to class discussions and also to have more resilience to continue to engage when faced with challenges in their learning such as in reading or maths.

➤ Staff reported that children noticed more in the world around them as a result of taking part in this residency, seeing things that they seemed unaware of previously and noticing things about Africa, languages and the people they saw and how this related to Batch and what he had introduced them to from his culture.



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As a leader at school, I really like the way Batch unified the whole school. I think we really saw that with the chanting at the end, the 'Batch Batch Batch', you know everyone in the school was a part of that experience, even though it was Year three, working closely with him. But I think everyone would feel like they got to know Batch. They got to know something about his culture. So that aspect of it was fantastic and I think seeing people that look different to what we see in school usually is just really powerful for them, because they live in such a bubble and to have that experience is fantastic.



Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher

➤ Pupils appreciated being able to ask any questions and to explore their natural curiosity about things that were unfamiliar to them (e.g. "are those earrings attached to their clothes or their skin?" "What illnesses are in Africa?" "Does it make your hands sore when you drum?").

➤ Pupils with specific learning needs were quickly able to engage through the strategies used to learn material, including in particular the use of call and response in the early sessions. The freedom offered by the improvisatory nature of some of the tasks was difficult for some children to engage with initially but through repetition, support from the teacher and others in the classroom, pupils were able to be more free and creative with their responses over time. They gained noticeably more confidence between the first and second session and were able to be fully engaged in the final performance.



➤ Using props and wearing costumes provided by Batch for the final performance made a huge difference to how children felt about performing. The shared experience of the performance reportedly brought the class community closer together and this shared experience continued to noticeably bond the class even after the final performance had taken place.

➤ Pupils responded well to the artist talking about his emotions and how it felt to perform. The acknowledgement that he sometimes felt nervous was helpful for some pupils who sometimes feel a personal pressure to “get everything right” or to do something in front of others where they may feel exposed.

➤ The pupils in the class Batch worked with felt ownership of the piece they performed. It brought together singing, dancing, acting and storytelling, and the inclusion of aspects that the children had developed themselves, such as some of the choreography, helped to engender this ownership.

Staff

➤ Through watching Batch working with the classes and also with the whole school, some teachers now feel that they are able to confidently keep promoting the repertoire taught and lead this themselves, for example in assemblies. However, the Deputy Head candidly talked about the recognition of the importance of the authentic voice that working with a Senegalese artist has brought, and whilst they can continue to lead the repertoire, they cannot do this with the authenticity that Batch brought to the learning situation and so they will aim to find ways to keep this authenticity in the curriculum as far as possible.

➤ Staff report that they have “masses of material” that they can continue to develop across the curriculum in future years. This includes in music, dance and drama. The residency has also provided opportunities for them to think about books and resources they use across the curriculum to further explore multiculturalism and how the curriculum breadth can be developed and expanded to keep nurturing the children’s growing interest in other cultures whilst maintaining core learning at the heart.

➤ Staff recognised the power of the “authentic voice” and how important it is when introducing and discussing certain topics, experiences and cultures. They reflected upon their own strengths in this regard and also the need to bring authentic voices into the curriculum wherever possible to help children gain a deeper understanding and experience of the world in which they live. In particular, English, history and RE were areas where they are giving this even deeper consideration, following on from this residency.

“ I think the biggest point for us which will influence a lot of the direction of the school moving forward is the authentic voice. Batch has come in as an authentic voice. It's about his own culture. It's not one of us teaching about African culture, I think that's been really important because it's made it... a lot more honest. ”

Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher



➤ The school’s Assistant Headteacher reflected on the power of having external creative practitioners working in schools over a period of time and the potential impact of this on the whole school community. He noted that staff often didn’t stay for assembly but having seen and heard what Batch was able to produce with the children after just 25 minutes, this experience “blew their expectations” and some of the staff attended future assemblies.

➤ The class teacher took a full and active part in the workshops run by Batch and gained the confidence to lead activities between the sessions. She talked about how she noticed that some of the children were now “always dancing” in the playground, and how this had evolved within the residency from them initially rehearsing the dance they had been learning to them developing their own choreography, some of which was also demonstrated in the final performance, which she felt validated their work because their creativity was rewarded.

➤ The class teacher reflected on how inspired she was seeing how the pupils reacted to this authenticity in the learning and how she could develop her own practice to bring more opportunities into the curriculum for pupils to develop their own ideas when exploring ideas and contexts that were unfamiliar to them.

“Wow, it was amazing. All your singing brought so much joy!”
Mrs J Bolt, Headteacher



Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

Creative practitioner

➤ The creative practitioner reported that he gained more experience of working in a mainstream school setting and, in particular, developed his understanding of how to engage pupils with a range of learning needs within a whole-class setting. He noticed how they were supported by others in the class and the importance of structuring learning so that pupils gain the confidence to join in.

➤ He also noted his own surprise at seeing the change in pupils from week to week. In particular, he recognised the need for him not to “judge” pupils based on how they initially presented, citing the example of a girl who was distracted and a little disengaged in the first session and went on to perform her own freestyle dance once she was confident to engage in creative risk taking in front of her teacher and peers.

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ This residency unified the school - the staff, pupils and the community, particularly the parents of the children in the Year 3 class. The whole school got behind the residency and relished the opportunities to work with Batch. In a very short space of time, Batch piqued the pupils' interest and their enthusiasm for singing and dancing in the whole-school assemblies was evident.

➤ The singing repertoire that the classes learnt is becoming more and more familiar to the whole school community and is already becoming embedded in regular singing now that the residency has finished. Pupils of all ages showed no inhibitions when performing it together and felt a sense of ownership and being part of a community that was further enhanced through the excellent facilitation.

➤ Pupils' confidence to "have a go" which was developed through this residency has, at times, spread into other areas of the curriculum, for example in Mathematics and reading and being more willing to answer questions in times tables tests.

➤ A parent reported that their child spontaneously talked about the experience at home, which was unusual, and showed an interest in the music and culture beyond the sessions. One parent shared that their child had looked up examples of the music on Apple Music and still taps out the rhythms that were learnt as part of the songs.

➤ Marshfield intend to apply for Artsmark Platinum in the near future. The learning from this work, in relation to the processes and the outcomes, are part of the ongoing legacy of the residency and will contribute to this Artsmark application.

➤ Having a residency such as this was viewed as a great success which will continue to have a legacy at Marshfield in terms of the repertoire used and developed, the resources and the diversification of ways in which staff may teach in the future. The school leadership recognise the value of providing such rich authentic multicultural experiences and would like to continue to expand their pupils' opportunities to do this. However, the cost and opportunities of this are particularly prohibitive to small schools without external funding and support.

➤ The co-creation of the final piece contributed to the sense of pride and ownership felt by the pupils. There is much to think about in relation to weaving opportunities for co-creation and bringing children's own ideas more into the curriculum.

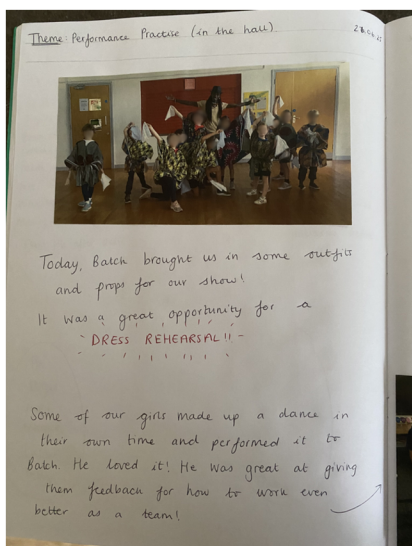


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Watch films about the project created by Batch Gueye's team:

Interview with Batch



Interview with Year 3 teacher, Nan Thomas



I think we're going to really use this idea of authentic voices, because it makes our curriculum more honest. It's not white people explaining what other cultures experience; we want to hear from the people that have lived that experience. So even things like books in English, we want to make sure we're reading books that are written by the people from that culture, so that it's the true lived experience. So I think that's the biggest impact that [the residency] is going to have for quite a few years now on the school.



Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher

Final performance



Batch Gueye:

Batch is a West-African Griot, a storyteller through his music and dance.

Singing Baye Fall chants is where Batch found his voice. Batch's songs are about life experiences: about travel, immigration, places he has lived in and people he met and is grateful to.

Batch sings his songs in the Senegalese language Wolof. However, language does not obstruct his music. The passion Batch has can be heard in his soulful voice and understood by all.

Batch's energy as a dancer is as vibrant and colourful as the patchwork clothes of his Baye Fall people. Like his music, his dance style is a collection of both traditional and modern African cultures.

In 2014 Batch formed *Sabar Family*, a community of artists dedicated to promoting arts and culture from West Africa and the African Diaspora, through education, professional practice, development and creative collaborations.

batchgueye.com

