

## &amp; LEARNING

# Dancing in welly boots? P5 doesn't look convinced...

Educationalists are getting creative in a bid to tackle Scottish schools' inability to meet targets for PE.

JAMES TULLOCH looks at new interactive lessons

PRIMARY 5 files into the gym hall, passing the climbing bars, low benches and stacked blue floor-mats and settling down between the white tramlines on the shiny wooden floor. Waiting for the 22 boys and girls of Edinburgh's Preston Street School is Sheona Anderson, not a tracksuited PE instructor armed with a whistle, but a former national Ceroc champion sporting blue mechanic's overalls tucked into black rubber boots. Tied around her right boot is a string of bottle tops. Beside her, Douglas Kay cradles a djembe hand drum between his legs.

"Solutibafana! Solutibafana!" cries Anderson before bending forward, kicking out a boot and launching into a crouching routine of claps, shouts and stamps punctuated with great slaps of her boots, as if swatting away something crawling up her leg. Kay beats out a rhythm as the bottle tops jangle.

Welcome to Gumboot dance, an art originating in the gold mines of apartheid-era South Africa, which Anderson and Kay are taking to Scottish classrooms in interactive lessons incorporating social history, language, dance and music. Dancing in welly boots? P5 doesn't look convinced.

But after some warm-up exercises and a jog around the gym, sweaters end up in a heap and the children are ready to learn some boot-slapping steps. With Kay's djembe keeping time, Anderson builds the steps, and vocal chants, into a finale. The children take to the unconventional steps with gusto and giggles. Even class teacher Mrs McDowell joins in.

"The pace is good for the children," she says. "The way they set the social and historical context is very nice too."

Anderson and Kay show the children photos of South African shanty towns – "they look like they are about to fall down," offers one pupil – and the gold mines where the miners were once chained and kept silent. The bottle tops on Anderson's boots represent the chains that kept the miners at their workstations and the elaborate boot-slapping is a messaging system.

These pupils might be more used to messaging on their mobiles but Gumboot messages burn more calories. At a time when many Scottish schools' inability to meet targets for PE is a national debate, that is a serious consideration.

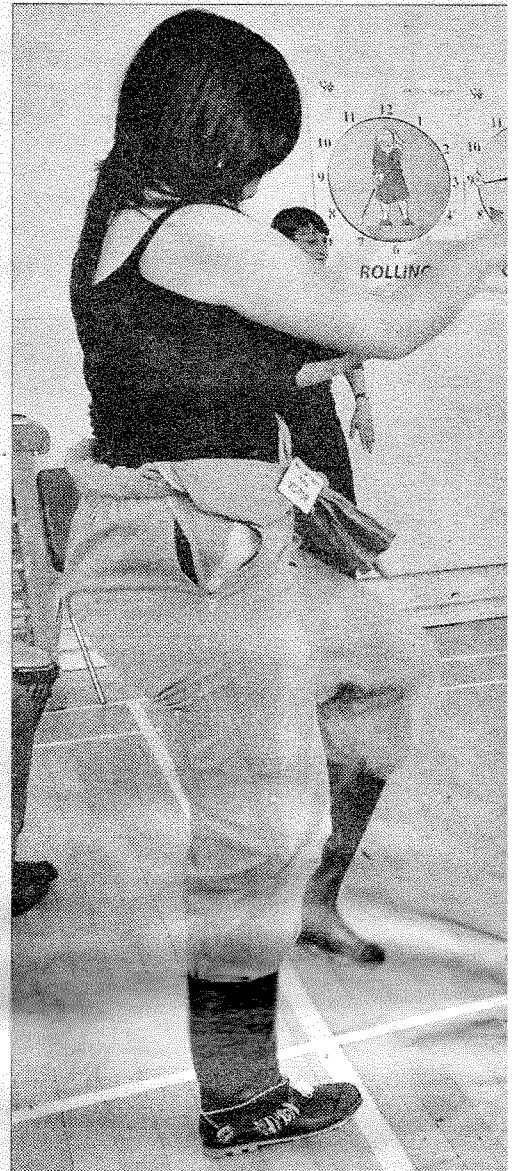
As Soundstep Workshops, Anderson and Kay are one of a growing band of specialist practitioners to whom Scottish schools are turning, in expressive arts, science and sports.

"Some schools just want us for a day, others for longer," says Anderson. "We have been getting more long-term projects."

Their work is sometimes paid for by the school out of its own budget, sometimes funded by the local council, or through the Scottish Executive-funded active schools co-ordinators, who oversee clusters of Scottish schools. Preston Street Primary also asks parents to make a contribution.

Is this trend a progressive diversification of teaching sources or a symptom of diminishing government investment in specialist subjects and teachers, an injection of fresh faces and enthusiasm into the curriculum or piecemeal substitute for dedicated music, drama and PE teachers of yesteryear?

"The provision of specialist teachers could be better. In Edinburgh, in drama especially, there are very few specialists," says Moore.



Sheona Anderson leads Preston Street Primary pupils in a Gumboot dancing workshop

Specialist music and PE teachers visit Preston Street once a week. Through the school's active schools co-ordinator, children are also introduced to tennis and golf, while girls get football coaching once a week. However, many of these activities take place outside school hours and are supplementary to the school day rather than integral to it.

Yet Moore is enthusiastic about using Soundstep and other outside contributors, such as Inverness-based Happyness Drum Circle and a storyteller from the Gambia.

"The school is doing a curriculum project