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idea journal

co-constructing body-environments

vol. 17, no. 02

2020

the journal of IDEA: the Interior design +
interior architecture educators' association



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**the journal of IDEA: the interior design +
interior architecture educators' association**

about

IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators' Association) was formed in 1996 for the advancement and advocacy of education by encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture education and research within Australasia.

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1. Objects

3.1 The general object of IDEA is the advancement of education by:

- (a) encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research globally and with specific focus on Oceania; and
- (b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

3.2 The specific objects of IDEA are:

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- (b) to support the rich diversity of individual programs within the higher education sector;
- (c) to create collaboration between programs in the higher education sector;
- (d) to foster an attitude of lifelong learning;
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- (g) to foster, publish and disseminate peer reviewed interior design/interior architecture/spatial design research.

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**co-constructing body-environments:
provocation**

Presenters at *Body of Knowledge: Art and Embodied Cognition Conference (BoK2019)* hosted by Deakin University, Melbourne, June 2019) are invited to submit contributions to a special issue of idea journal "Co-Constructing Body-Environments" to be published in December 2020. The aim of the special issue is to extend the current discussions of art as a process of social cognition and to address the gap between descriptions of embodied cognition and the co-construction of lived experience.

We ask for papers, developed from the presentations delivered at the conference, that focus on interdisciplinary connections and on findings arising from intersections across research practices that involve art and theories of cognition. In particular, papers should emphasize how spatial art and design research approaches have enabled the articulation of a complex understanding of environments, spaces and experiences. This could involve the spatial distribution of cultural, organisational and conceptual structures and relationships, as well as the surrounding design features.

Contributions may address the questions raised at the conference and explore:

- + How do art and spatial practices increase the potential for knowledge transfer and celebrate diverse forms of embodied expertise?
- + How the examination of cultures of practice, Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity, neurodiversity, disability and social justice issues?
- + How the art and spatial practices may contribute to research perspectives from contemporary cognitive neuroscience and the philosophy of mind?
- + The dynamic between an organism and its surroundings for example: How does art and design shift the way knowledge and thinking processes are acquired, extended and distributed?
- + How art and design practices demonstrate the ways different forms of acquiring and producing knowledge intersect?

These and other initial provocations for the conference can be found on the conference web-site: <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/bok2019/cfp/>.

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introduction: unknowingly, a threshold-crossing movement

Julianna Preston

Executive Editor

idea journal

It is in this special issue that the editorial board holds true to our promise to expand the horizons and readership of *idea journal* while reaching out to associated and adjacent art, design and performance practices and drawing connections to seemingly distant disciplines. The articles in this issue have provenance in a 2019 conference event, Bodies of Knowledge (BOK), which was guided by a similar interdisciplinary ethos. With an emphasis on cultures of practice and communities of practitioners that offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity/neurodiversity and disability, this conference, and this subsequent journal issue, aim to increase knowledge transfer between diverse forms of embodied expertise, in particular, between neuroscience and enactive theories of cognition.

This brief description suggests that there are shared issues, subjects and activities that have the potential of generating new understanding in cross-, inter- and trans-disciplinary affiliations and collaborations. My experience in these modes of inquiry points to the importance of identifying what is shared and what is not amongst vocabulary, concepts, pedagogies and methods. Holding these confluences and diverges without resorting to strict definition, competition or judgement of right and wrong often affords greater understanding and empathy amongst individuals to shape a collective that is diverse in its outlooks, and hopefully, curious as to what it generates together because of that diversity.

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The breadth of the knowledge bases represented within this issue necessitated that the peer reviewer list expanded once again like the previous issue. It was in the process of identifying reviewers with appropriate expertise that the various synapses between scholarly and artistic practices became evident. It is these synapses that shape sturdy bridges between the journal's existing readership, which is predominantly academics and students in interior design, interior architecture, spatial design and architecture, and the wide range of independent scholars and practitioners, academics, and students attracted to BOK's thematic call for papers, performative lectures and exhibitions. At the risk of being reductive to the complexity and nuances in the research to follow, I suggest that the following terms and concerns are central to this issue, aptly inferred by its title, 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments': spatiality; subjectivity; phenomenology; processual and procedural practice; artistic research; critical reflection; body: experience. All of these are frequent to research and practice specific to interiors. In this issue, however, we find how these terms and concerns are situated and employed in other fields, in other ways and for other purposes.

This is healthy exercise. To stretch one's reach, literally and metaphorically is to travel the distance between the me and the you, to be willingly open to what might eventuate. Imagine shaking the hand of a stranger—a somatic experience known to register peaceful intent, respect, courage, warmth, pressure, humour, nervous energy, and so much more. This threshold-crossing movement is embodied and spatial; it draws on a multitude of small yet complex communication sparks well before verbal impulses ensue. This significant bodily gesture sets the tone for what might or could happen. Based on my understanding of the research presented in 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments,' I propose that this is a procedure in the Gins and Arakawa sense that integrates theory and practice as a hypothesis for 'questioning all possible ways to observe the body-environment in order to transform it.'⁰¹ I call this as *unknowingly*—a process that takes the risk of not knowing, not being able to predict or predetermine, something akin to the spectrum of 'throwing caution to the wind' and 'sailing close to

the wind'. My use of the word 'unknowingly' embraces intuition where direct access to unconscious knowledge and pattern-recognition, unconscious cognition, inner sensing and insight have the ability to understand something without any need for conscious reasoning. Instinct. The word *unknowingly* also affords me to invoke the 'unknowing' element of this interaction—to not know, to not be aware of, to not have all the information (as if that was possible)—an acknowledgement of human humility. I borrow and adapt this facet of unknowingly from twentieth-century British writer Alan Watts:

This I don't know, is the same thing as, I love. I let go. I don't try to force or control. It's the same thing as humility. If you think that you understand Brahman, you do not understand. And you have yet to be instructed further. If you know that you do not understand, then you truly understand.⁰²

Unknowingly also allows me to reference 'un' as a tactic of learning that suspends the engrained additive model of learning. Though I could refer to many other scholarly sources to fuel this concept, here I am indebted to Canadian author Scott H. Young's pithy advice on how to un-learn:

This is the view that what we think we know about the world is a veneer of sense-making atop a much deeper strangeness. The things we think we know, we often don't. The ideas, philosophies and truths that guide our lives may be convenient approximations, but often the more accurate picture is a lot stranger and more interesting.⁰³

In his encouragement to unlearn—dive into strangeness, sacrifice certainty, boldly expose oneself to randomness, mental discomfort, instability, to radically rethink that place/ your place/ our place, suspend aversions to mystery—Young's examples from science remind us that:

Subatomic particles aren't billiard balls, but strange, complex-valued wavefunctions. Bodies aren't vital fluids and animating impulses, but trillions of cells, each more complex than any machine humans have invented. Minds aren't unified loci of consciousness, but the process of countless synapses firing in incredible patterns.⁰⁴

In like manner to the *BOK2019* conference which was staged as a temporally infused knowledge-transfer event across several days, venues, geographies and disciplines, I too, ingested the materials submitted for this issue in this spirit of unknowingly. The process was creative, critical, intuitive, generative and reflective—all those buzz words of contemporary research—yet charged with substantial respect and curiosity for whatever unfolded, even if it went against the grain of what I had learned previously. For artists, designers, architects, musicians, and performers reading this journal issue, especially academics and students, this territory of inquiry may feel familiar to the creative experience and the increasing demands (and desires) to account for how one knows what one knows in the institutional setting. 'Explain yourself,' as the review or assessment criteria often states. If you are faced having to annotate your creative practice or to critically reflect on aspects that are so embedded in your making that you are unaware of them, I encourage you to look amongst the pages of this journal issue for examples of how others have grappled with that task such that the process is a space of coming to unknow and know, unknowingly.

Figure 01:

Meeting the horizon; A still image from *Shore Variations*, a 2018 film by Claudia Kappenberg that reimagines *Waning*, a 2016 live art performance by Julieanna Preston. <https://vimeo.com/user11308386>.

There are a few people I would like to acknowledge before you read further. First, huge gratitude to the generosity of the peer reviewers, for the time and creative energy of guest editors Jondi Keane, Rea Dennis and Meghan Kelly (who have made the process so enjoyable and professional), for the expertise of the journal's copy editor Christina Houen and Graphic Designer Jo Bailey, and to AADR for helping to expand the journal's horizons.

Okay, readers, shake hands, consider yourself introduced, welcome into the *idea journal* house, and let's share a very scrumptious meal.

acknowledgements

I am forever grateful for what life in Aotearoa/ New Zealand brings. With roots stretching across the oceans to North America, Sweden, Wales and Croatia, I make my home between Kāpiti Island and the Tararua Ranges, and in Te Whanganui-A-Tara/ Wellington. I acknowledge the privilege that comes with being educated, employed, female and Pākehā, and the prejudices and injustices that colonialism has and continues to weigh on this land and its indigenous people. I am committed to on-going learning and practicing of Kaupapa Māori.

notes

- 01 Jondi Keane, 'An Arakawa and Gins Experimental Teaching Space; A Feasibility Study,' *INFLeXions* 6 (2012), accessed 29 October 2020, http://www.inflexions.org/n6_keane.html.
- 02 Alan Watts, *Creating Who You Are* (Video) (n.d.), accessed 29 October 2020, <https://vimeo.com/76888920>.
- 03 Scott H. Young, 'The Art of Unlearning' (2018), accessed 29 October 2020, <https://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/2018/04/12/the-art-of-unlearning/>.
- 04 Young, 'The Art of Unlearning.'

dance as a social practice: the shared physical and social environment of group dance improvisation

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abstract

This article explores an ongoing group dance improvisation practice which, while primarily an artistic practice, could also be considered a social practice which is brought about by the physical, embodied and intersubjective environment in which it exists. Among others, the ideas of Tim Ingold, Hannah Arendt and Hanne De Jaegher are used to explore the implications of what happens when individuals share a dancing practice. The article will also describe how the ongoing dance practice has been drawn upon to develop dance workshops for children with disability. The workshops were developed to include a variety of dance activities such as learning movement material, dance improvisation and supported group movement generation (choreography). Through the principle of intersubjectivity, described by cognitive science philosopher, Hanne De Jaegher, as 'perspectives that are influenced by and co-created by more than one subject,' dance will be discussed as a social practice as well as a situation in which one participates physically and creatively.

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introduction

This article explores an ongoing group dance improvisation practice which, while primarily an artistic practice, could also be considered a social practice which is brought about by the physical, embodied and intersubjective environment in which it exists. Among others, the ideas of Tim Ingold, Hannah Arendt and Hanne de Jaegher will be used to explore the implications of what happens when individuals share a dancing practice. The article will also describe how the ongoing dance practice has been drawn upon to develop dance workshops for children with disability. The workshops were developed to include a variety of dance activities such as learning movement material, dance improvisation and supported group movement generation (choreography). Rudolph Laban's Movement Principles⁰¹ within the framework of Body, Space, Energy, and Time were employed as a structure for dance teaching and choreography, in order to develop a transferable and scalable program. Through the principle of intersubjectivity, described by cognitive science philosopher, Hanne De Jaegher, as 'perspectives that are influenced by and co-created by more than one subject,'⁰² dance will be discussed as a social practice as well as a situation in which one participates physically and creatively. Rather than co-opting dance to the service of social study, my emphasis and interest is in the dance itself. Without asking our dancing to be anything other than dancing, we are able to disclose ourselves as individuals, to observe what is going on and to work towards understanding each other.

a dance practice

My work as a dance practitioner is based on a weekly dance improvisation practice which I undertake with a small group of dancers. The group practice in its current form emerged from a practice that I developed during my PhD project.⁰³ I have been working in the same way, once a week, for nearly ten years. The group of dancers has, of course, changed over the years but many are or have been long term members participating in the practice for seven years or more.

My practice is based on improvising with 'scores,' so named as a result of my work with (and study of) other dance improvisers. The term score is not taken lightly, but is a deliberate choice as a result of careful trial and consideration.⁰⁴ A score, as I use it, is a proposition, usually a set of words, sentences or phrases, which I bring to each session in a written form but that I convey verbally.⁰⁵ I write the scores in the same book each week and bring it to the session. My current book contains just over three years of weekly scores. I 'find' the scores through various means. Often my reading, thinking, dancing or teaching during the week feeds into my score choice. Sometimes I use the thinking of someone else as a context or background to my scores, sometimes the scores are just a list of words. The words don't instruct us how to dance, rather they allow us to enter into a supported dance without necessarily knowing what we will do. The words and phrases are often ambiguous, abstract or even poetic. The following is a list from the book that I wrote without referring to other practitioners or authors. My intention was to write phrases

that were conundrums, impossible while also being full of possibility:

2.11.18

Fragments of distraction

The will behind immobility

The weight of waiting

The impetus of remorse

Iterative belonging

Calculated undoing

Shifting catastrophe

Impossible surges

Stillness in becoming

Slippage of indifference.⁰⁶

The practice has the same structure each week. We begin with a solo warm up⁰⁷ which lasts for a fake nine minutes. I name it fake because, during our dance, I periodically call out the length of time we have to go, and then call the end, without really knowing how long we are dancing for. It probably takes between twenty minutes and half an hour. We then work with a partner in a situation in which we touch a still dancer who gradually begins to move and ultimately leaves the toucher behind. We then set up a structure in which we dance as a group. At the end of each of the section we discuss our experience of

dancing in relation to the score(s). It is usually the case that a dancer will choose one part or a few aspects of the scores to work with. There is no obligation to work with the scores, but we tend to work with them nevertheless, as a result of the tacit agreement reinforced over years of practising in the same way. At the end of each of the sections of the practice session, we talk about our dancing experience. We each tell the group what we worked with from the list, and how that affected our dancing, our noticing in our dancing or the implied 'meaning' in some way. There is always the option not to talk, but for the most part, each person shares what they experienced.

Below is a description of my solo warm-up with words from a list including *taking stock of* and *pressure*:

I began with thinking of pressure in my body, pushing with my body and seeing where I felt pressure. I then began to think about air pressure and how weather events are affected by air pressure. I confess to having no real understanding of how air pressure and weather work, but I imagined that my movement could change the pressure of the air around me. I thought I could increase the air pressure in one area of the room (say, in front of me) through moving forward and making movements with various body parts in a forward direction. I imagined that at the same time, the air pressure was decreasing in my wake. I imagined my dancing was creating an air pressure

system in the space, and that might even affect the other dancers.⁰⁸

My description of my dancing to the group at the conclusion of the nine minutes was something along the lines of the above, verbally conveyed. As each member of the group describes her experience in relation to the score(s) she danced with, embodied experiences are shared, and we begin to shape the meaning of our (shared) dancing experience. Our discussion often affects each other's subsequent dancing. I may

have described my experience of pressure, but another member of the group may have described a very different dancing experience using the word pressure. When we move into the next section of the sessions, we may adopt or experiment with and experience an emerging meaning that one of the other members of the group has described. The other way in which our dancing experience is shared is through watching each other. As with verbal description, it is possible to deliberately or non-consciously adopt another's dancing experience into our own.

Figure 01:

Participants in the AllPlay Dance program. Still image capture by Olivia Millard from video footage by Victor Renolds 2019.

a social practice

As previously mentioned, my practice is an artistic practice. The weekly sessions that we undertake do not directly lead to performance or other outcomes, although they certainly support my participation in other projects that do lead to performance outcomes. Over the last year or so, I have begun to consider what purposes, other than artistic, my practice might have, particularly because it is regular and ongoing but without a tangible artistic result. I have come to believe that my practice is also a social one. I make this connection tentatively, not least because I am reticent for this claim to overshadow my artistic concerns, which are my primary intention. In his article, 'Dancing and its Others,' Randy Martin describes a 'social kinaesthetic' that exists because space and time come into being through the expression of idea borne on an 'elaborate series of preparations.'⁰⁹

Martin writes that stories can be told *through* dancing but also *about* dancing, and that the social kinaesthetic comes about through the 'capacity to move an idea in a particular direction through the acquired prowess of bodies in action.'¹⁰ Martin is referring to dance performances often described as 'concert dance' in America;¹¹ however, his social kinaesthetic is also applicable to my practice. Not only can a story be told about our dance and dancing through the dance that we do, such as in the way we dance with a score, but the prowess of our bodies in action, and the communicating we do to create that dance, also bring forth a story that sits *in between* our dancing bodies and their interactions. We have both an individual and shared experience of the coming into being of our dancing.

Social practice in art has its roots in social movements in the 1960s. Tom Finkelpearl, past director of Queens Museum in New York, discusses 'socially cooperative,' 'participatory,' and 'relational' works that sit across the spectrum of social practice.¹² Described by Finkelpearl as an 'event...that engages in some sort of social interaction,' works in this canon are broad ranging in their intention and their manifestation.¹³ In acknowledging this significant field and its extensive discourse, I am not necessarily suggesting my work draws directly upon it. Instead, consideration of my practice as social may allow it to be seen in another light, an example of which I will discuss later in this paper. In the following paragraphs, I use the ideas of Arendt, Ingold, and De Jaegher to think through my practice in terms of its social implications, what they might mean.

In her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt proposes that *vita activa*, the active life, consists of three elements: labour, work and action. According to Arendt, labour, along with consumption, corresponds to the cyclical, biological process of life.¹⁴ Work involves the fabrication of durable objects, the production of human artifice. Action, the disclosure of oneself in the world, is not instrumental but rather a non-deliberate yet unavoidable part of the interactions between individuals. Arendt writes that 'Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech has the twofold character of equality and distinction.'¹⁵ Each human is distinct from all others and it is this distinction that creates the need for acting and speech. If each person were the same, they would not

need action in order to understand one another:

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world... It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose.¹⁶

Action is not the wilful doing which is associated with the deliberate making of work, but rather the disclosing of the distinctness of an individual, the results of which are open ended. An individual, according to Arendt, is the agent in her own appearance. That appearance does not have a known result or effect: '...the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent but this agent is not an author or producer... nobody is its author.'¹⁷ In acting in our improvisation practice, each dancer discloses herself in the open-ended interactions of our practising. The fact that the practice is an improvisation practice, rather than a dance practice in which we are all aiming to achieve the same physical goals, such as a set or choreographed dance, is significant. Arendt writes that 'without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others.'¹⁸ The very nature of improvisation, and the particular way of our practising, is that we have agency in our own dancing and the way we communicate about it, even when we are participating in a (tacitly agreed upon) set of approaches to dancing.¹⁹

To reuse my *pressure* example from above, none of the other members of the group had arrived at considering the weather or the air pressure in their solo warm-up. Although none of them adopted my exact approach (something that would be both undesirable and impossible), the idea of air pressure was taken into consideration to varying extents by other members of the group in subsequent parts of the dancing session.

Philosopher of mind and cognitive science, Hanne De Jaegher, has an interest in the relationship between how we understand each other, our interactions, and how we see and understand the world. Intersubjectivity, defined by De Jaegher as 'participation in the investigation of how experience transforms when examining it together,'²⁰ enables the development of perspectives that are affected by more than one participant. They are co-created.²¹ De Jaegher describes particular conditions in which intersubjectivity is 'graspable'. She writes that those kinds of interactions involve '...two or more autonomous agents co-regulating their coupling with the effect that their autonomy is not destroyed, and their relational dynamics acquire an autonomy of their own.'²² Examples De Jaegher uses are conversations, collaborative work, arguments, collective action and dancing.²³

As described above, in single sessions, and over several weeks and months of dancing together, we affect how each other dances and how we experience and talk about our dancing, although we are not intending to directly or instrumentally do so. When we

describe our experience of dancing with a common set of scores, we are describing a shared experience that is also unique to each individual. As described by De Jaegher, we examine together our experience, which, although autonomous, is also shared. Our perspectives are 'influenced and co-created by more than one subject.'²⁴ Our shared examination allows an intersubjective understanding to emerge.

In his book, *Being Alive*, anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests that rather than aiming to be part of or 'mak[ing] a mark in' a society that exists as a whole, one could consider an action to be a single action which has an open-ended result.²⁵ He describes humans existing in a community as a 'tangle of threads or life paths'²⁶ that are not confined by a boundary but open. 'These lives are not social because they are framed but because they are entwined. All life is social in this sense, since it is fundamentally multi-stranded, an intertwining of many lives running concurrently.'²⁷ The act of participating in our dance improvisation practice alongside others is social, not because something in particular is happening, even if there may be some artistic outcomes, but because we are there, dancing together, interacting with and communicating about our dancing through the common elements of the practice itself and the scores.

In observing a situation, while also being part of it, Ingold describes a 'graphic anthropology' which does not aim to completely describe that situation, nor does it recount what has taken place already. Instead, this graphic

anthropology would 'join together with persons and other things in the movements of their formation.'²⁸ Through this joining together, a particular kind of observation is possible. It is a way of observing that is not removed or particularly analytical but comes about through the interactivity of the observers and their interaction with the environment. Ingold writes that:

To observe is not so much to see what is out there as to watch what is going on. Its aim is thus not to represent the observed but to participate with it in the same generative movement.²⁹

I would suggest that the kind of noticing of our own experience of dancing and communication about our experiences is similar to Ingold's graphic anthropology. We are observing our own dancing experience, while we are in it. We undertake this observing both as part of the dancing experience and in order to recount it later. We are also (deliberately or non-deliberately) making that observation of our dancing in relation to the environment (space, time, other bodies) in which it is taking place. In order to communicate about our dancing, we do not need to represent what we have observed or even decide that it is something in particular. Because our practice is improvisation, we do not even need to observe in order to remember what we did so that we may repeat or represent it at a later time. Our observation and discussion are purposeful, nevertheless, as a part of the participation with and alongside other members in the group.³⁰

The questions we ask and discuss are about what our dancing is and becomes and how we experience our dancing bodies. Without asking our dancing to be anything other than dancing, we are able to disclose ourselves as individuals, to observe what is going on, and to work towards understanding each other, particularly because of the social and intersubjective nature of our dance improvisation practice.

a dance/social practice for children with disability

In 2018, I was approached to work on a project as part of the AllPlay Dance program³¹ in which we were to teach dance for a group of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP). I had had some experience with working with people with disabilities over recent years, including with Weave Movement Theatre, a disability dance and theatre company,³² and The Delta project and dance company with deaf and hearing dancers.³³ From my experience of working with people with disability, I understood that working with these children would require me to find ways not only to

Figure 02:

Participants in the AllPlay Dance program. Still image capture by Olivia Millard from video footage by Victor Renolds, 2019.

include them but also to give them a dance experience in which they felt that they were its centre, that they were the dancers. The program involved four sessions of workshops, culminating in a final performance of a dance that was co-created by the participants in the program. Following the CP program, in 2019, AllPlay Dance worked with a group of children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Although this project was also a 'pilot' with aims to develop preliminary findings, it was much larger in scope than the CP program. We had two groups that had eight dance sessions culminating in a performance for their family and friends. There was more time for me to develop the second program, particularly in terms of how we would approach it and what we would teach. I was able to take the time to develop teaching approaches and describe them in order to receive feedback from experts in both Dance and Psychology.

The children with disability in both of the programs were between 7-12 years old. We also had participants who were 'buddies.' For both programs, the buddies were older, (ranging from 14-25 years old) than the children with disability, and they had existing dance experience. Many of the buddies were in vocational dance programs or were hoping to work in the area of dance teaching. The buddies were far more than 'helpers.' They were a very important part of the program, playing many roles, including dance supporters, collaborators, and intersubjective social partners.

I included three interrelated approaches to the development of the program I would teach: dance improvisation, based on my practice as outlined above, the opportunity for the participants themselves to create their own movement material, and the use of some set or taught movements and movement sequences. Rudolph Laban's Movement Principles within the framework of Body, Space, Energy and Time were employed as a structure for dance teaching and choreography, in order to develop a transferable and scale-able program.³⁴ Rudolf Laban was a dancer, choreographer and movement theoretician and one of the early pioneers of European Modern Dance. Laban developed a method of movement or dance analysis and a dance notation system. The movement analysis framework developed by Laban is frequently used in dance education and dance creation, although it is often adapted for the situation and not always attributed to Laban. The terms and approaches of Laban that we chose to use as a starting point for the creative aspects of the AllPlay Dance programs are familiar to many dance teachers and practitioners. Our reasons for using them were both because they are still very comprehensive and adaptable principles which support naming, analysing and generating movement, even seventy years after their publication, and their ubiquity means that the program we developed using them would then be in terms that are familiar for many teachers of dance. We used these terms and structures as open starting points, removed from their aesthetic considerations, and their eurocentric and expressionistic origins. I came to understand that the organised structure of Laban's work

was very useful for working with children and a good substitute for the more abstract and poetic nature of my score development in my usual practice.

Given my existing dance improvisation practice, it was a natural fit for me to employ improvisation in a range of dance situations in the program, from warming up to performing. There were large ranges of movement experience, confidence, and physical availability in the workshop groups. Improvisation allowed all of the members of each group to 'enter' into dancing from their own unique set of possibilities. Adam Benjamin is the founding Artistic Director of the UK professional dance company Candoco, which challenges ableist notions of dance. Benjamin writes that dance improvisation has the capacity to enable the dancing of diversely abled bodies and that its lack of pre-determined movement specifics makes it 'highly accessible.'³⁵ Contact improvisation, a dance form that developed in America in the early 1970s, has a history of challenging the notion of what dance can be, and includes varied bodies.³⁶ Contact Improvisation pioneer, Steve Paxton, describes the work of Alito Alessi performing with dancer with Cerebral Palsy, Bruce Curtis: 'the spirit of the performers take over to convey us through the moments they are there to perform.'³⁷ Describing a study in which 'different' embodiment of children with Autism is explored, Carolien Hermans writes about the usefulness of dance improvisation as a method:

Dance, specifically dance improvisation, can be seen as a unique form of participatory sense making. Dance is a way to express inner (im)pulses; to explore movement material; to engage in imitative, rhythmic and repetitive movement games; to seek for bodily musicality; to physically cooperate together; and to invest in recurring elements of pulse, quality and narrative. We attune to each other's movements in dance: we make sense together in and through movement.³⁸

In order to enable the participants to know 'how' to dance/improvise I took part in the dancing myself, while sharing scores (adapted from Laban ideas) verbally. As in the description of my approach to my practice above, the scores did not suggest how anyone should dance, instead they acted as a proposition or a support to dancing. To begin with, we tried out various 'energies' in our dancing bodies. We then built on that work through asking questions about body parts, speed and direction in conjunction with dancing with a certain energy. The energies we used initially were: suspended, percussive, vibratory, collapsing, and exploding. Once dancing, options for variation and change become more available. Inserting my own body in the dancing situation was also crucial in offering an embodied suggestion of how one could dance. I began by introducing an energy and then very briefly discussing how that might play out in dancing before launching in to moving myself; trying out what that energy might mean in my own dancing body. I talked while I was dancing, sometimes

describing what I was doing, sometimes making suggestions, or asking questions about what might be possible. I encouraged the dancers to move continuously. They did not need to stop dancing to listen to my suggestions or to think of what they might do next, rather, they could add to or change their dancing in response to ideas that arise.

The following questions (adapted from Laban's principles) were asked while improvising:

- + Which part of the body moves?
- + In which direction or where in the space does the movement take place?
- + What is the speed of the movement?
- + How much energy is used? What kind of energy is it?³⁹

Improvisation was not only used as a warmup method. We also used improvisation while making small dances in groups. Improvisation was also included in the final performed dance, often as a way for dancers to travel from one part of the performance space to another.

Adjusting my practice to develop a program for children with disability was not straightforward. There were times during the program in which I needed to work carefully to adjust my approach or to make room for the needs of participants that I hadn't understood was necessary. Following are descriptions of a few aspects of the program and the thinking I have done in relation to them, both while the program was running, and retrospectively.

In one of the groups we had a discussion over several weeks about what the dancers should wear for the final performance. To a certain extent, all of the members of the group had suggestions and desires about what they might wear; the themes and ideas were many and varied. Over time we developed a very complex framework for organising what the group would wear which somehow fulfilled all of the desires in the group. What was important was not the framework we came up with, or even what the dancers wore for the performance. As the facilitator of the group and organiser of the performance I felt very keenly that I needed to enable all voices to be heard and fulfil a desire in some dancers to dress for the occasion of the performance, particularly considering that some of the dancers had never had the opportunity to perform before. I was trying to support each dancer to feel that they could really wear whatever they wanted while also helping them to feel part of a group. If I had suggested that each dancer could just wear a costume of their own choosing, not only would there not have been any cohesion in the costuming (which the dancers evidently desired) but there would have been no need for a discussion or to come to an agreement. Although I did not entirely understand the significance of the situation at the time, what seemed important was that each member of the group contributed their ideas to the conversation, that all suggestions were heard and acted upon, and that each was treated as important as the others. In reflecting on this situation retrospectively, I have come to understand that each individual needed a chance to act, in Arendt's terms, to disclose themselves as individuals in the

group. Arendt writes, 'This revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness.'⁴⁰ Although the expression as an individual could have taken place through wearing an individual costume, the discussion and interactions were the real situations in which that disclosure of plurality could take place.

At times some members of the group struggled to participate in the activities, and it was not always easy to understand how to help them join in. One individual, for example, went to do something else, such as hide behind the curtain, go to get a drink, or play with toys, whenever a certain part of the session came up. Considering that there were many factors that may have accounted for this behaviour, and listening carefully to their parent's description of challenges the child usually faced, I believed that it was my role in the situation to do what I could to enable the child to participate, otherwise the program would not have been 'inclusive' for this child. It is important to note here that I am not suggesting that I asked a child to do something that they really did not want to do. Rather, I was noticing that, seeing as it was the same activity each time that they were choosing to not participate in, that there was something in the activity itself that was precluding the child's participation. In Ingold's terms, I needed to 'join together' with this person to understand what was 'going on' rather than to draw conclusions or decide upon an understanding that 'represented' the situation.⁴¹ One thing that I was able

to observe about this particular child was that they enjoyed having a fluffy toy within touching distance. I also observed that despite suggesting that dancing was 'easy' and 'boring,' they did not actually attempt to execute the movements. While I could have concluded that the movement in question was 'too hard' for the child, I thought a more inclusive way of considering the situation was to observe that the child felt more comfortable with dancing with the toy, so I asked if they could do the movements through the toy, that is the toy could do the dance. Although this was not an immediate and all-encompassing solution, the child was able to participate with enjoyment in the final performance, dancing with their toy.

The generation of their own movement material was taken up by the dancers with great enthusiasm, which carried them into the performing of it. Working with improvisation and with scores was an important preparation for this, as was the naming of movements as we executed them. This was not so that the participants knew that a movement had a name, but so it was established that a movement and a word could share a meaning, even if either one was changeable. The buddies were very important in this work, as they had the capacity both to offer suggestions when needed, but also to validate the suggestions made by their less experienced partners. The activities the group undertook were often in pairs or small groups, which meant that although making the dance was at the centre of the interaction, an interaction had to take place in order for the dance to be made. What made the

movement generation tasks possible was a tacit understanding that a word such as *twisting* had a large range of possibilities for what it could become in movement. These possibilities were set up through the use of open-ended scores while improvising, and with the approach whereby participants were able to share with each other verbally and through physical demonstrations of options for what was possible in terms of movement. Autonomous agents, that is, individual dancers, were able to assert their authority in order to participate collaboratively in the making of dance material. The fact that a *twisting* movement could be anything meant that each individual could suggest and agree (or not) through discussion and interaction to collectively create the dance. De Jaegher describes social interaction as a 'co regulated coupling between at least two autonomous agents.'⁴² Without the situation being overtly social, intersubjective interactions were taking place.

a dancing social practice

As I have stated above, keeping dance itself at the centre of my practice is extremely important to me, primarily because I consider my practice to be an artistic one. In order to consider my practice as social, I do not believe I need to change that focus. In fact, having a practice that has its own integrity, as I have discussed it above, enables it to be perceived, experienced, and even studied from another point of view. De Jaeghaer writes:

When we engage in interaction, not only the participants, but also the interaction process as such modulates the sense

making that takes place. This means that intentions can be truly understood as generated and transformed interactionally.⁴³

In order for any kind of interaction to take place in this dancing social practice, the imperative to dance, to generate dance, to communicate about dancing, and to collaboratively make decisions about dance, that is, the dancing itself, needs to be the primary purpose. We are sharing a physical, embodied and intersubjective space through which we assert and disclose ourselves as individuals. The requirement to negotiate and share ideas both for collaboratively creating dance and to decide upon aspects of a dance, including the dance material itself, as well as elements such as costumes, supports intersubjective interaction. We share our experiences through physical and verbal communication, and we can observe and respond to what, according to Ingold, is 'going on.'⁴⁴

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I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where I live and work and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

author biography

Olivia Millard worked as a lecturer in contemporary dance at Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, (Edith Cowan University) from 1999-2006 and as sessional lecturer at Deakin University from 2007-2012. Her PhD was conferred in 2013. Olivia has created over 20 dance works, both funded and commissioned. In addition to non-traditional research outcomes, Olivia has published several articles in Dance and Arts journals and was the editor of Australian Dance journal *Brolga* for issues 40 and 41. Olivia's current research projects are various collaborative projects centred around improvisation in dance performance, including the AllPlay Dance project looking into the benefits of inclusion in dance activities for children with disabilities.

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