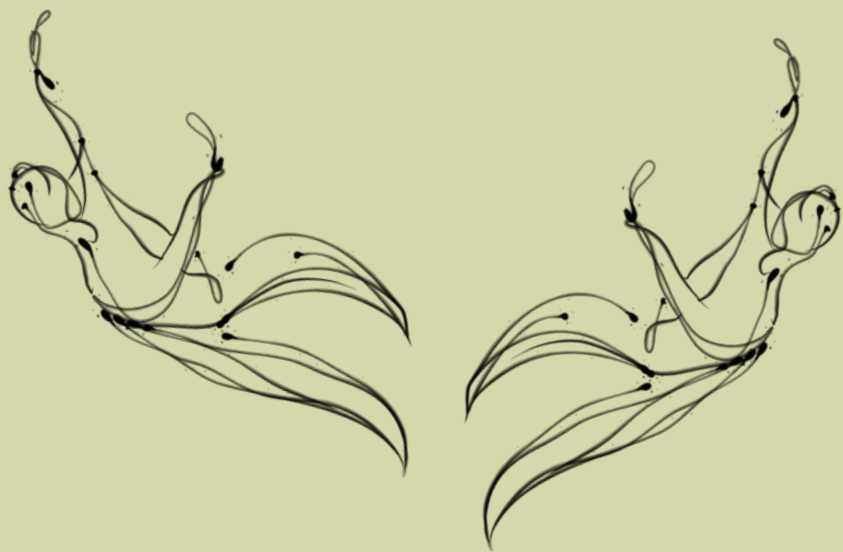


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A Legacy: Boorman's contribution to creative dance

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Abstract

This paper explores the contribution of Dr. Joyce Boorman to creative dance in schools and community. She is widely recognized as the driving force and organizer behind the First International Conference on Dance and the Child at the University of Alberta in July 1978 and the architect of the organization, Dance and the Child International (daCi). She also authored several critical works on creative dance for children, taught in the Department of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and directed the Alberta Children's Creative Dance Theatre there and presented many workshops internationally. Her work greatly impacted the teaching of dance and the development of curriculum policy in dance in schools in Alberta and across Canada. Boorman's education began in the United Kingdom with a teaching certificate from St. Gabriel's College and an advanced diploma from the Laban Art of Movement Studio, where she encountered Rudolf Laban's theory of movement. She later adapted Laban's theory to her Laban action themes, visual representation of music and language connections. The use of the Laban action themes, using related vocabulary, stressed the understanding of movement rather than an isolated physical skill. She believed that exploration of the action themes and use of story provided an opportunity to develop creative dance thematically with a combination of the children's and teacher's imagination.

Keywords: creative dance, imagination, curriculum, pedagogy

Introduction

This paper recognizes and celebrates the significance of creative dance education and the role Joyce Boorman played in sharing her knowledge and ideas about teaching dance with many students and teachers. I met Joyce Boorman in 1982 at the first Dance and the Child International (daCi) Conference in Sweden. Ann Hutchinson Guest and I presented a lecture demonstration on the teaching of Motif Writing and Structured Notation working with students from the Virginia Tanner Dance School. Joyce Boorman attended that session and in our subsequent conversations suggested that I might like to work in her children's theatre and at the same time pursue graduate work, incorporating my interest in notation and children's dance. In 1984 I moved to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and the University of Alberta where I worked in the Alberta Children's Creative Dance Theatre and began my graduate work.

In 2022 at the Toronto daCi Conference we celebrated 40 years of the organization and in my keynote presentation, I acknowledged Joyce Boorman as the driving force and organizer behind the First International Conference on Dance and the Child at the University of Alberta in July 1978, subtitled "The Child as Spectator, Creator, Performer". As we know, this conference spearheaded the development of daCi, its strong governing body and the inspiring conferences it has hosted from 1982 to the present day. Joyce's impact on dance education for the early learner is also well known through the many workshops she presented and her publications.

Joyce Boorman and I had several things in common: we both trained at Colleges of Education in the UK where Laban's principles of movement underpinned the teaching of gymnastics, dance, and sports; we both attended the Art of Movement Studio in Addlestone, Surrey; where we studied Laban's theories and their application to teaching dance; and we both loved teaching creative dance. I thought it appropriate to share her work at the daCi-Dance and the Child International Conference 2024 in Ljubljana, Slovenia and to write this paper to reiterate the impact and relevancy of her work today and the importance of dance education.

In Canada, Joyce Boorman is certainly a person who influenced many dancers and teachers, school boards and university programs to include creative dance in their curricula. She introduced classes in creative dance for teaching in both the undergraduate and graduate programs at the University of Alberta where she held a position in the Faculty of Sports Studies until the early 1990s. It was during these years that Joyce put into operation the Alberta Children's Creative Dance Theatre (ACCDT), where children from the ages of 3 to 18 danced and created their own dances. It was my honour to work in the ACCDT and develop ideas and processes for teaching creative dance in many educational contexts.

Creative dance pedagogy

Creative dance is based on the movement education concepts of Rudolf von Laban, who stressed the educational benefits of dance as an aesthetic, social, and communicative form. Through a problem solving, non-competitive learning approach students develop awareness of their motor, cognitive, and expressive abilities and through experiences in performing, creating, and appreciating dance have a comprehensive and balanced dance education.

Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) was born in Austro-Hungary. He was a dancer, a choreographer, and a dance / movement theoretician. One of the founders of European Modern Dance, his work was extended through his most celebrated collaborators, Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder. Through his work and view that the practice of dance can be a powerful social, cultural, and educational force, Laban raised the status of dance as an art form, and his explorations into the theory and practice of dance and movement transformed the nature of western dance scholarship. He established choreology, the discipline of dance analysis, and invented a system of dance notation, now known as Labanotation or Kinetography Laban. Laban's exploration of community dance and the role of dance in education emphasized his belief that dance should be made available to everyone.

Rudolf Laban's ideas were influenced by the social and cultural changes of the time and the contexts that in which he worked. The traditional western constraints against showing feeling were being questioned, opening the way for a freeing of the feeling body. Rudolf Laban believed the best way to advocate this freedom was by mirroring it in dance and the movement arts. In 1948 in the text '*Modern Educational Dance*' Laban presented educators with his revolutionary idea of "modern educational dance." This new dance technique would foster and concentrate children's unconscious dance-like movements, preserve their spontaneity, foster artistic expression. and awaken in children an open-minded outlook on human activities (p. 12). Since *Modern Educational Dance* was first published in 1948 in England, many dance educators, especially in England, the United States, and Canada, have acknowledged Rudolf Laban's influence and used his analysis of body-space-time-effort. Most notably the writings of Valerie Preston-Dunlop, Joan Russell, Betty Redfern and Sam Thornton and others supported and developed Laban's ideas about creative dance, particularly in the British education system during the 1960s and 1970s.

Joyce Boorman

The foundation of Boorman's creative dance work rests in Laban's theories of movement and pedagogy and her studies in the United Kingdom, specifically at the Art of Movement Studio. She attempted to convince teachers to provide children with spontaneous dance experiences. In *Creative Dance in the First Three Grades*, she writes that it is important 'to help children to discover new depths of creativity within themselves' and that 'the process of discovery will be different, and each will formulate his own "dance" in the way that is right for him at that moment' (p.121).

Boorman considered the contribution of the creative dance form to the cognitive development of the child and in the text, *Dance and Language Experiences for Children*, she states 'it becomes apparent that there are meanings that a child can convey and receive only through dance. These are ideas, images and feelings that can be expressed and communicated in dance that cannot be rendered in verbal language, be it spoken or written, music, the visual arts, or any other idiom' and continues that the 'this nonverbal language is important to the child's ability to express and communicate' and that children 'need a myriad of experiences to heighten and increase their movement experience' (p.64).

This focus of creative dance was to be found in the Alberta Children's Creative Dance Theatre (ACCDT). I tried to capture the energy and freedom of the classes in my journals written at the time I began my work in the ACCDT:

From the very beginning I loved the play and spontaneity of the children in their dancing and the ideas which prompted their dances. The images were carefully crafted, and children's ideas accepted and included (1985).

The classes begin in September. There is no advertising – parents find out about the classes from other parents and through the university network. The classes are held on Saturday mornings (ages four to ten years) and on Wednesday evenings (ages 11 plus).

Many of the children began at three years of age in the Parent and Child classes held each semester for a few weeks (1985).

The focus is on the experience of the children, their age, maturity, and social grouping in the class. There is a Christmas concert for all students and a Spring concert for the ten-year old's upwards. Parents are initiated into dancing with their children, firstly in the Parent and Child sessions and then later at the regular sharings held twice a term. These sharings are seen as an opportunity for the parents to see how their child is progressing, for the children to practice their performance skills as well as teach their parents their dances. Parents are excited to dance with their children and the children are overjoyed with the attempts and struggles of their parents (1985).

In the authored publications on creative dance for children Boorman reveals her philosophy. She identifies in *Creative Dance in the First Three Grades* that her dance teaching and writings stems from the writings of Rudolf Laban; much of his movement analysis has been simplified; however, and some parts have been omitted. I believe that this simplification is necessary for those who are just beginning to work with children in the field of dance.

The ideas that are fundamental to all my presentation in lesson planning are:

- to give sufficient detail for students to have some definite information from which to work,
- to allow sufficient flexibility in the format of lesson plans for students to bring to it their own ideas,
- to present a series of lessons that, while acting as a guide, do not dictate a progression. (1969, p.xiii)

In *Dance and Language Experiences with Children* she believed that 'a single word can set a child in motion' (p.1). With the idea of bringing together words and dance in a series of "word pictures" she designed many lessons described in her books.

In her own teaching of children, research and work with university students and teachers she emphasized that 'through "word pictures" which had aroused excitement, curiosity, and understanding, the children would carry these energies over into another medium of expression' (1973, p.2).

Action families

Taking Laban's work in body-space-time-effort the Action Families are described as follows:

,,, a useful categorization to work from with the children. They are not a concrete set or specific stockpile of movements because movement can have many connotations. They will be changed and developed with each idea to be danced. The families of action words must be viewed in this open way or else they will confine and limit dance

work. Overlapping, clarification, expansion, and deeper exploration of the action families in relation to creative dance themes is needed to expand the simple variety of action phrases used in our work. (1987)

The Action Families comprise Travelling actions, Turning actions, Contracting actions, Rising actions, Sinking actions, Expanding actions, Vibratory actions, Percussive actions, and Jumping actions. Each Action Family contains possibilities which can be interpreted and further words can be added to the family; for instance, in Travelling the words suggested are 'run, slither, skip, hop, creep, gallop, rush, dart and flee' (p.25).

The process of working with the Action Families involves selecting specific actions, exploring movement possibilities, then making phrases (alone or with another dancer, depending on age), altering the order, and finding different movements. Children would be guided into a dance idea – a story, an image, a poem, or music – exploring and selecting movements that connect with the stimulus. For example: using the movements explored through the action phrase: run --- dart --- sink, a dance could be created about the wind. Here is an example of a poem written after the dance lesson:

Rushing and hurrying
Mr Wind blows and rushes,
and blows leaves off the trees
they twirl off them
they float slowly down. (p.3)

In *The astronauts and other creative dance experiences for children from eight to twelve years* Boorman & Carline (1987) published dance experiences for teachers with ideas that ranged from astronauts to spiders to patterns, with accompanying music and music visualization, movement possibilities and lesson and dance structure. Children would be encouraged to record in their own way, write about their experiences, create their own dances, and share their interpretations of the structured dance or their own creation.

Conclusion

Boorman's ideas for dance education for the young child provides a possible approach accessible to teachers who may have little experience or training in dance and confirms the importance of including dance in the school curriculum. Dance is not only an art form involving creativity, but it also demands physical practice and discipline to achieve the final product. The ACCDT Sharing Days and Christmas performance provided opportunities to arrange, confirm and perform their dances for others. Children learn to understand and value how their body works and the importance of being physically active. Dance improves co-ordination and spatial awareness, expanding movement possibilities and skills. Marnie Rutledge, a dance educator in Canada explains

To have body wisdom - to be physically educated - we need to be able to attend to this multiplicity of sensory experiences and be able to translate them into purposeful movement. Dance, sport, and other forms of physical activity have the potential to confront us with our embodied knowing. (p.95)

... being with one's body, being comfortable with one's creative and expressive body, is an important element of being physically educated. (p. 96)

Many dance educators and scholars have embraced Laban's philosophy and support the importance of the creative dance form as a basis for further dance learning. They have recognized the learning that takes place in the creative dance experience, identifying the abilities to collaborate, problem solve, increase social skills, reveal creative potential, extend movement potential and produce choreography. Boorman's approach to teaching dance to the younger grades supports the thesis that movement patterns in dance appear to be learned and remembered often accompanied by a sense of enjoyment. A major goal for dance education is to enable students to understand and value dance expressions throughout life and to appreciate the historical and cultural significance of world dance. Students should also be offered opportunities to experience and view dance created by others, to create dances and to think and talk about dance.

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Biography

Ann Kipling Brown is Professor Emerita in dance education in the Arts Education Program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina in Canada. Presently, she is the Executive Director of Dance Saskatchewan Inc. (DSI). She has worked extensively with children, youth and adults in dance teacher preparation, creative/modern dance, composition, and notation. She has also choreographed for theatre productions and continues her own work in performance and choreography. Her philosophy focuses on incorporating movement in education for a complete understanding of self, involving Laban Movement Analysis, a theoretical and experiential system, for the observation, description, performance, and interpretation of human movement.

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Examining the discourse and roles of the artist-teacher and teacher-artist

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Abstract

This paper reports on a 2024 conference workshop which explored commonalities and differences between understandings of the artist-teacher and teacher-artist. Workshop participants engaged in Creative Body-based Learning (CBL) strategies to facilitate embodied sharing of perceptions about the artist-teacher and teacher-artist binary. In various teaching contexts dance teachers identify as artist-teacher or teacher-artist with responsibilities for the learning experiences of students. They often enter teaching from different positions and face identifiable challenges and obstacles. For instance, the artist-teacher perceives themselves as artist first and enters teaching with little or no experience in teaching practice, creating tensions in managing their teaching selves alongside their artistic selves. Alternatively, the teacher-artist focuses on pedagogy and curriculum requirements for teaching dance and may not have artistic experience. Workshop processes and responses are explained, drawing upon literature to discuss broader issues and raise questions pertaining to the recognition and valuing of both dance artist-teachers and teacher-artists.

Keywords: identity, artist-teacher, teacher-artist, curriculum

Introduction

This paper reports on a dance education workshop that considered dance teacher professional identities in relation to ongoing discourse that circulates around the terms ‘artist-teacher’ and ‘teacher-artist’. Acknowledging this binary - and positions between - was seen as a way of workshopping with a group of conference participants to enable sharing of perceptions and ideas in a practice-based session as part of the 2024 daCi (dance and the Child International) conference. The workshop built on ideas from dance educators’ teaching experiences, their identities and concerns arising from ‘Teachers’ gatherings’ workshops at *Panpapanpalya 2018*, the 2nd joint dance congress of daCi and WDA (World Dance Alliance) Global Education and Training Network, held in Adelaide, Australia (Kipling Brown, et al., 2022). That series of workshops was initiated by Katie Dawson whose drama work led to the term Creative Body-based Learning (CBL) (Dawson & Lee, 2018; Meiners et al., 2019), explained further as pedagogical strategies used to facilitate the 2024 workshop.

A clarification of the terms ‘artist-teacher’ and ‘teacher-artist’ was provided as follows: Teacher-artists may sometimes be viewed as guests developing choreography or teaching a specific dance genre, bringing art-making processes or technical skills directly from choreographic and performance contexts outside schools or studios. In contrast, school or studio-based teachers may bring expertise in pedagogy, child development knowledge and application of learning theory to working with dance. A caveat was provided, that the terms were not necessarily considered a binary in teacher identity but that there could be many positions between. A plethora of literature addresses teacher identities beyond the scope of this paper, for example Hattam et al. (2018). The workshop aimed to work with differences and similarities in emerging and mature practitioners’ identities, according to lived experience from teaching in education / community settings. Critiques of deficits within each of these positions may be destabilising and unhelpful, undermining teachers’ practices. Rather, the workshop sought to make explicit possible factors underpinning each of the roles and build awareness of inherent complexities.

Our positioning

As workshop facilitators, we shared histories of dance education. Through daCi collaborations, a research project sought answers to what is learned when participants engage in dance activities in wide-ranging learning contexts (Kipling Brown, et al., 2017). Research participants’ stories indicated that informal learning in dance is powerful for identity formation and becomes significant when considered in future life choices as people pursue dance as an interest or career. Subsequently, the 2024 workshop was planned to add another dimension to investigating teacher identities.

Our own careers spanned working in schools with generalist teachers and classes of all ages to develop understandings of the potential of embodied learning in and through dance as well as across the curriculum. We both designed and implemented ‘artists in schools’ projects, working with emerging and professional dance artists from diverse backgrounds, interested in learning about effective pedagogies and appropriate curricula for specific ages. Our dance education work attempted to provide authentic experiential experiences, demonstrating how dancing together can counter stigma, marginalisation and oppression. Wide-ranging projects explored how dance can provide a sense of belonging, support agency for investigating ideas, and challenge barriers surrounding dance for cultural learning.

The workshop

The 30+ conference workshop participants represented many world regions, with English as the second working language for most. As mentioned, CBL strategies were used as an embodied pedagogical approach to activating dialogue. CBL facilitates democratic participation through imaginative thinking and movement. Central to CBL is the notion of critically reflective learners, developing self-awareness of intersectionality, identity, positioning and power relations. CBL mobilises bodies as creative agents of knowledge production (Garrett & MacGill, 2019) and models how to build a constructive learning community using the creative power of body, image, game and movement as metaphor (Kohl, Bolognesi & Horvat, 2020). Teaching in English, prompted us to consider the concept of translanguaging for highlighting students' perspectives, voices, and agency as integral to workshop content (Robinson, Hall & Navarro, 2020). In this way, multilingual participants use all their linguistic resources to make meaning and engage in communication together. A starting activity titled 'Check-in' was used with participants briefly voicing their name, where they were from and completion of the phrase: 'Today I'm feeling... because...'. This strategy makes visible recent lived experiences, acknowledges each person's presence sharing space and provides an invitation to participate, as well as enabling everyone to hear all other voices.

This was followed by 'Cover the space' where participants travel through the space following directions. This activity enables people to become familiar with the space they are working in, moving close to and around others, familiarising themselves with the multiple bodies and faces they will encounter through the session.

'Activating dialogue' was then explained as a concept underpinning the workshop (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018). Activating dialogue strategies use verbal, written, and/or physical or embodied dialogue to connect participants' lived experience to topics for inquiry-based learning. Such strategies encourage people to gain insight into varying perspectives and develop 'understanding about what we value in one another, ourselves, our communities, and our world' (Edmiston, 2014, p. 306, cited in Kiger Lee, 2018). As Dawson & Kiger Lee (2018) explain, participants:

- Make thinking visible: creating opportunities to use and practise multimodal (verbal, visual, textual, and embodied) ways of knowing and expressing meaning.
- Engage with multiple perspectives: enabling participants to engage with multiple responses to a prompt, to deepen, complicate, and ground understanding.
- Author meaning: offering teachers a way to assess sensemaking and meaning-making among participants at various points in the learning cycle. (p. 57)

Sociometric continuum: I am a teacher < > I am a dancer

Subsequently an activating dialogue strategy was used titled 'Vote with your feet' as a sociometric continuum. Participants expressed their opinions by standing in different areas of a single-line continuum with the explanation that participants choose to stand anywhere on the line in between the two points. Two points at opposite ends of a diagonal line across the large space were identified with the prompts: I am a teacher < > I am a dancer at either end. The prompt was read once, giving participants time to consider a response, and then to

move when the response was read a second time. Participants were asked to move silently and place themselves on the continuum in response to the prompt.

This sociometric strategy allows students to embody and compare personal opinions to the opinions of others and to consider reasons behind different viewpoints. In this strategy, individual choices were very visible, as all students stood on a single continuum together. Once the group had positioned, follow-up prompts were provided to invite individual, paired, and/or full group reflection on individual and collective positional responses. Emphasis was given to attentive listening which included the following, suggested by Dawson & Kiger Lee (2018):

- What did you notice about responses?
- What did we learn about the group from this activity?
- How might these statements make us think differently or understand more about the terms 'teacher' and 'dancer'?

Elucidating opinions: Exploding Atom

Exploding Atom is another out-of-your-seat strategy in which participants express opinions on their own continuum with the image of a line as a spoke of a wheel emanating from the centre (as an agreement point), moving to the outer most point of the standing circle space (as a disagreement point) (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018, p. 90). The strategy allowed participants to see the range of opinions articulated within the workshop. The following statements were prepared to prompt participants' opinions:

1) Everyone likes to dance
2) Everyone is artistic
3) Teaching dance is easy
4) Dance artists can't teach
5) Generalist teachers can't teach dance
6) To teach dance you should be a good dancer

The full group stood in a circle. It was explained that a statement would be read; if the participant agreed with the statement they should come as close to the centre of the circle as possible; if the participant disagrees with the statement they should stand as far away from the centre as possible within the set boundary. Guidance included information that each participant is on his/her own continuum between 'agree' and 'disagree' in response to each statement. The first statement was read and participants were asked to vote with their bodies by moving to the place that best expressed their response between Yes, I agree and No, I disagree. Participants' responses to the statements were processed by asking those standing closer to "I agree," to please share why. Then, a person standing closer to "I disagree," was asked to share why. A further guiding direction was provided: Please turn to the person next to you and share why you are positioned where you are standing. The group was then re-set to a neutral circle between statements to prepare for the next prompt.

Opportunities for reflection were provided with a prompt: 'What did you notice about the

responses in the room?’ and other guidance:

- Remember, this is about your opinion. No right or wrong response to statements.
- Remember to be respectful of other’s opinions and positions.
- Let’s hear from where the largest group is standing first, would anyone like to share why they are standing where they are? (Ensure that smallest group has last word.)
- No one has to speak. People can say ‘pass’ or ‘it’s been said.’
(Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018).

Responses:

What makes a teaching artist? < > What makes an artist teacher?

As the workshop progressed, growing awareness between participants was noted with the development of a collaborative, supportive ambience. Space was used carefully and sensitively, some moving and responding quickly to prompts, with others taking more time. Interaction between international respondents using English included many moments where peer translations supported and clarified understanding of language and dialogue. Trust was apparent, with everyone included, along with increasing openness and non-judgment of people’s positions as they responded. A seated observer (unable to move easily at that time) felt she learned much about approaching sensitive topics through movement-based CBL pedagogy.

Key questions were posed:

- What did we learn about others from this activity? Were most in agreement? Why?
- How might these statements make us think differently or understand more about the terms: artist-teacher and teacher-artist?

Participant responses are important for hearing similar and contrasting perspectives, for reflection on learning and for moving forward from the workshop. Thus, finally in small groups, participants were asked to discuss, using a brainstorm approach to address: What makes a teaching artist? and What makes an artist teacher? Responses were recorded on large sheets of paper as below:

<p><i>What makes a teaching artist?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education in teaching pedagogy and passion to share with people. - Care or interest, curiosity of teaching, knowledge of the dance context in which you are teaching. - Inherent creativity, a focus on learning, a bigger picture view of dance. - Technical experience. - Pedagogical knowledge, willingness, time. - Experiencing, searching, covering teachings, feelings. Initiative. - Own creativity. - Openminded creative, drawn to share/teach, very strong.
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What makes an artist teacher?

- Experience in professional dance projects and choreography.
- Pedagogy; passion to share with people.
- Ability to guide, sharing, skill focused.
- Creativity, courage, ability to motivate, believe in every student.
- Knows the people's needs, psychology.
- Money, self-serving agenda (ego), pass on the knowledge, skills, create something with others.
- Requires pedagogical skills/methods, understanding where their participants are at, knowledge of students.

The workshop ended using a simple framework for evaluative reflection using a three prompts process to depart from the workshop:

- Something I appreciated
- Something I learned
- Something I'm wondering about

Later, participants responded to an email request, asking: What do you remember from this session? How have you used any ideas from the session and how were they relevant to your work? How have you used movement with learners (children/adults) to address issues? Please offer any ideas related to this work for the next daCi conference. One response is included in the conclusion below.

Discussion

The role of the teaching artist has received considerable attention with a substantial body of literature supporting this discourse and aligning with workshop responses. Risner's (2015) study investigating work satisfaction, noted '...teaching artists fill a number of empty spaces and gaps—both in arts education and community-based outreach programs' (p. 33). Booth (2009, p. 3) also focused on the teaching artist, highlighting complexity with other related terms such as 'visiting artist', 'resident artist' and 'artist educator'. He asserts that there is no consensus definition of the term, suggesting that teaching artists must have the ability to convert artistic experiences into professional and educational approaches, infusing teaching with authenticity, practicality, and depth - qualities that separate teaching artists from non-practising arts teachers.

Adding to terminology, Gerdes & VanDenend Sorge state 'Teaching is not our fallback plan; it is our passion' (2015, p. 72) explaining their primary position as 'dance educators' and as teaching artists with notable experience in professional dance performance and choreography. Addressing the teaching dancer, Cook (2020), suggests in a *Dance Magazine* article: 'There is a pervasive idea that if you are a great dancer, you are automatically qualified to teach, whether you have training or experience in education practices or not.'

From another angle, Snook & Buck (2014), found that ‘...a teacher’s pre-existing lack of confidence in teaching dance might be compounded by the visit of an expert’ (p. 18). Cubbin (2023) provides a personal reflection on her dual role as an artist teacher, and the benefits of artistic practice for herself as a teacher, her students, and colleagues. Examining the role of the artist in relation to learners, Berndt (2023) suggests that an artist teacher works upon the minds and hearts of students to aid in the formation of proper and abiding relationships. Such writings reflect multifaceted matters pertaining to this topic.

Conclusion

To summarise, this paper presents an example of dance education workshop practice with teachers attending a conference. A practical embodied approach to dealing with a complex topic was received positively as indicated by a follow-up email from a participant:

I thoroughly enjoyed the session where we explored the dynamic and often contrasting roles of artist-teacher and teacher-artist. The facilitators skilfully guided us through both reflective conversation and practical movement experiences, inviting us to physically engage with the space in response to their thought-provoking questions. This interactive approach was both enlightening and deeply engaging.

One of the most striking aspects was seeing the passion with which participants embraced their personal perspectives on the dichotomy between artist-teacher and teacher-artist. As someone who has often identified with the ‘artist-teacher’ role throughout my career, I found myself reflecting on how my evolving practice has shifted over time. In my later years, I’ve come to embrace more of the ‘teacher-artist’ approach, and I now see that these roles are not as distinct as I once thought.

This session was a powerful reminder that our identities as educators and artists are fluid, and that these roles can merge and evolve as we continue to learn and grow in our practice (and pedagogy). (Participant A)

Participants appeared satisfied and informed from the focus on activating dialogue with familiar and new colleagues. They valued embodied positioning, noting that their responses were time-based, highly personal and could change according to contextual circumstances. The dance teacher participants were highly engaged in the CBL process pointing towards further work using this pedagogical approach which might be included in future workshops to facilitate dialogue in an open, trusting learning space.

The workshop involved participants in building self-awareness and demystifying the inherent complexities of intersectionality, identity, positioning and power relations within teacher identities. Ultimately this resulted in a recognition and valuing of both dance artist-teachers and teacher-artists.

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Biographies

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Movement-Dance Activity in the Forest

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Abstract

Research shows that BrainDance (Gilbert, 2019) promotes reflex integration and improves cognitive skills while also promoting flexibility, strengthening physicality, reducing fatigue and stress, and improving attention and concentration, all of which lay the foundation for healthy brain development. This paper presents a movement and dance activity in a forest environment with a group of school children ages 6-9 years that incorporates elements of BrainDance with the socio-emotional objectives of calming, self-awareness, and concentration with movement objectives that promote motor skills and the development of artistic expression through dance. The activity involves an examination of the evolutionary development of movement patterns in the animal kingdom, which parallels the movement patterns of young children in their first year of life, as seen in BrainDance. A structured exploration of movement concepts – space, time, strength, and body which is followed by a natural transition into dance improvisation. The forest environment supports the development of this activity in a unique way, serving as inspiration and a partner in the development of the aesthetic process. Through direct engagement with the elements of nature – air, water, animals, plants, and earth, students cultivate a meaningful connection to nature, while developing artistic expression.

Keywords: Forest, BrainDance, Aesthetic development, Connection with nature, Dance concepts

How it all began

Our school is surrounded by meadows and forests, which we try to use to our advantage. We spend a lot of time outdoors, and since the 2022-2023 school year, we have been introducing weekly activities in the forest. These activities are based on the principles of forest pedagogy (Cornell, 1988), such as free play, encouraging curiosity, and responding to the children's interests. As a dancer, I integrate dance and movement activities into these outdoor spaces, such as the forest and the schoolyard, and use the natural environment to encourage creative expression.

According to Cornell (1998), the forest constitutes an ideal multi-sensory classroom for holistic development, offering multiple opportunities to cultivate enthusiasm, deepen awareness, engage comprehensively with natural experiences, and foster collective inspiration (p. 17). This natural environment is an excellent training ground for spontaneous movement activities – the children run, climb, swing on the branches, and develop social skills through group play. The forest also serves as a therapeutic space where children can calm down, focus, and develop mindful observation skills to promote their holistic development, which includes physical, emotional, social, and cognitive areas, which is just as important. By strategically integrating forest education into movement and dance, we create a dynamic, multidimensional outdoor learning experience that simultaneously nurtures body and mind.

The following details show how we implement these principles with a specific age group to demonstrate the practical application of our forest education approach.

Presentation of the group and description of the activity

Our movement activity engages 1st and 2nd grade students (ages 6-9) in developmentally appropriate activities. 15 children out of a class of 22 voluntarily participate in the creative movement/dance program – an elective offered each school year.

Our forest sessions follow an intentional three-phase structure:

1. a guided movement activity with learning about the development of vertebrates with an animal-inspired story
2. an exploration of dance concepts: space, time, force, body
3. free improvisation, ending with the child's creative expression in connection with nature.

Guided movement activity with learning about the development of vertebrates with an animal-inspired story

Life on Earth began in an aquatic environment with the fusion of two cells, which gave rise to a fertilized egg cell that constantly divided and multiplied. Human evolution began billions of years ago and led from unicellular organisms like eukaryotes to multicellular organisms, from invertebrates to vertebrates such as fish, then making a significant evolutionary leap from water to land with amphibians, reptiles, birds, and finally mammals. According to Hartley, our cells retain the memory of all these different stages of evolution (1994, p. 5). Each group of vertebrates is characterized by specific movement patterns that correspond to the movement patterns of a healthy infant in the first year of life.

By practicing specific movement patterns, we integrate the *BrainDance* approach. According to Green Gilbert¹ (2019), such exercises support brain development by enhancing connections between motor and cognitive functions. These activities have been shown to improve cognitive abilities, reduce the risk of dementia, promote flexibility, strengthen the physical core, reduce fatigue and stress, and enhance attention and concentration. *BrainDance* exercises also promote the integration of reflexes, laying the foundation for healthy brain development.

Our activity brings this science to life through:

1. learning about the evolution of life on Earth using storytelling and, at the same time, learning about the classification of vertebrates, and
2. exercises that use the BrainDance framework.

Movement patterns of vertebrates

Building on the evolutionary foundations, each vertebrate class has characteristic movement patterns (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 5) that reflect the child's motor development:

- **spinal movement:** movement from the head to the coccyx, associated with the movement of fish
- **homologous movement:** symmetrical movement of two upper and/or two lower limbs simultaneously, related to the movement of amphibians
- **homolateral movement:** asymmetrical movement of the upper and lower regions on the same side, related to the movement of reptiles
- **contralateral movement:** diagonal movement of the upper limb with the opposite lower limb, associated with mammalian locomotion.

These movement patterns are consistent with the developmental movements of a healthy infant in the first year of life and provide the foundation for BrainDance.

Movement patterns and their purpose (Gilbert, 2019, p. 3 - 16):

- Breathing promotes ease of movement, reduces stress, and invigorates the body. Deep breathing increases the supply of oxygen to the brain, releases carbon dioxide, and hydrates the cells.
- Massage or self-massage: Various kinds of touch improve proprioception or perception of one's own body and have a positive influence on behavior.
- Movement to and from the center of the body provides a sense of security and contributes to correct body alignment.
- Spinal movement raises awareness of the spine from the head to the coccyx.
- Homologous movement is symmetrical movement of two upper and/or two lower limbs, where the upper body is stabilized while the lower limbs move, and vice versa. This includes push-ups and two-foot jumps.
- Homolateral movement is asymmetrical movement of the upper and lower regions on the same side, strengthening the function of each hemisphere of the brain (e.g., crawling, hopping on one leg).
- Contralateral movement is diagonal movement of the upper limb with the opposite lower limb, connecting both hemispheres of the brain (e.g., walking, running, jumping).

- Balancing strengthens the vestibular system. Moving off balance and back to stability strengthens the vestibular system, which provides important information about movement and gravity.

BrainDance can function as a stand-alone activity task that focuses specifically on vertebrate development. However, the forest activity presented in this paper is more comprehensive. It uses the movement patterns of BrainDance as a warm-up exercise before exploring dance concepts in the forest.

Exploration of dance concepts in the forest

Green Gilbert (2019, p. 98 – 103) has adapted four main dance concepts from Rudolf Laban that take on new dimensions when practiced in nature. Below are examples of our explorations.

Space

- Place: Children discover their personal space under the canopy as they move around trees and tree stumps in shared spaces.
- Size: The movements expand to imitate spreading branches or contract like a twisting fern. Comparing the reach of saplings with that of mature oaks helps children grasp the scale of growth physically.
- Level: We explore movement at different heights (from ground dwellers to tree climbers) using stories about forest animals.

Time

- Rhythm: The rhythm matches the pace of the forest, from fast, squirrel-like scratching to slow, rooted growth movements. Observing the flow of a stream in the dry or rainy season inspires new rhythmic impulses.

Force

- Weight: Students experience natural resistance when they lean against living trees. The trunks become partners for weight-sharing exercises (e.g., headstand).
- Energy: Smooth energy (like branches moving continuously in the wind) contrasts with shaky energy (like leaves trembling on their stems).

Body

- Body parts: Students isolate movements with specific body parts and then extend these to movements inspired by the environment, for example, arm swings inspired by birds' flight.
- Body shapes: Group sculptures incorporate trees or fallen logs, creating three-dimensional shapes with straight lines, varied levels, directions, and sizes.
- Relationship: Students move in relationship with their peers, trees, the forest floor, and the stream. They also interact with forest props like leaves, ferns, and sticks.

Together, these concepts encourage a dialogue between the body and the environment, transforming the forest into a dynamic dance studio.

Free improvisation: cultivating embodied consciousness through nature

The forest environment is a muse and partner in our dance improvisation work. Movement inspiration emerges from multi-sensory engagement with tactile textures, organic sounds, earthy scents, and seasonal flavors. However, authentic creative expression begins with a connection to oneself. Only when children are attuned to their inner landscape can they fully respond to their outer environment.

Children are, as often as possible, encouraged to listen to their bodies and make decisions accordingly about how they will move within a given environment (e.g., climbing a tree in the forest). In this way, space and time for self-awareness and proprioception is created. Each child chooses their own tree, hugs it, and listens to their breath. At the same time, children are invited to visualize roots growing from all 26 bones of their feet and branches sprouting from their heads. This approach encourages children to stand firmly on their feet, while simultaneously sinking into and pushing off the ground while maintaining an upright spine and an open focus.



Figure 1: *The tree and the hand.* Photo: Tina Koščak.

Students are invited to engage with their surroundings with all their senses – to observe the meadow, the forest, the trees, the forest floor, the birds, the frogs, the stream, and feel the whisper of the wind. Through this deep sensory connection, the students can express their experiences through dance.²

As we visit the forest all year round, we can observe the changes in nature at any time of year. In winter and early spring, when the trees are bare, birds' nests become visible in the treetops, and we have fun looking for them in the forest. In March, the Mirabelle plum (*Prunus domestica subsp. syriaca*) blossoms and exudes its fragrance while we enjoy the taste of lungwort (*Pulmonaria*) and primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) and observe the catkins forming on various trees. During these explorations, we also learn to identify poisonous plants such as wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), which covers the forest floor in white, and the purple flowers of the dog's tooth violet (*Erythronium dens-canis*), which emerge from this white carpet.

Below, you will find suggestions that are used to invite children to observe their surroundings on their way into the forest:

- noticing nature along the forest path
- observing how the trees stretch out their bare branches, touching the trunks to feel the rough or smooth texture
- searching for birds' nests among bare winter branches compared to detecting sunlight through dense fall foliage
- observing plowed fields and inhaling the rich scent of freshly plowed earth
- perceiving changes in the rainy scent of the forest – how it becomes sweeter in the fragrant May air
- watching the corn grow from scattered kernels into two-meter-high autumn stalks
- smelling tree trunks and the elusive scent of wild strawberry
- walking silently through meadows, brushing hands through tall grass to feel its texture



Figure 2: A Group of Students Looking for Birds' Nests. Photo: Karolina Pavilonytė.



Figure 3: Running Hands through Tall Grass. Photo: Karolina Pavilonytė.

Through these multi-layered experiences, children develop a profound dialogue between their moving bodies and the living forest. This conversation fosters artistic expression and ecological awareness. The natural world is not just a backdrop but an active participant in their creative development. It provides endless opportunities for discovery and growth that extend beyond the walls of the classroom.

This embodied practice naturally leads children to reflect on deeper connections to nature. As Linda Hartley (1994, p. 5) says: “The cells of the body contain the ‘memory’ of the evolving states of consciousness, which were passed through during the individual’s early development and also throughout the process of the evolution of the species.” Through the movement patterns identified by Anne Green Gilbert (2019) and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (2012), which trace both vertebrate evolution and child development, students physically experience this biological kinship.

Factors influencing the performance of movement activities in the forest

Conducting activities in the forest presents unique challenges and opportunities:

1. Student enthusiasm

When working with children, it is important to maximize spontaneous movement. The forest provides numerous opportunities for natural movement that cannot be replicated in a school environment, such as climbing or walking on a fallen tree. Free play plays a crucial role in this process as it is determined by the student’s interests and what appeals to them emotionally. For this reason, the students look forward to the activities in the forest, where guided movement exercises are combined with free play. Given the popularity and importance of free play, it is important to allow sufficient time for structured dance activities and unstructured exploration.

2. Large group size

Dealing with large groups of students outdoors requires extra attention to safety and engagement strategies.

3. Changing Spaces

Changing spaces in the forest encourages creative movement experiences but can also make it difficult to maintain the group’s focus.

4. Lack of routine

Dance activities usually occur in warm, dry weather (late spring). Due to limited opportunities, a routine has not yet developed to ensure a focused and in-depth activity.

5. Preventative conversation

Before starting the activity, it is necessary to have a conversation with the students to discuss possible incidents that could occur. They are encouraged to pay attention to the forest floor and where they are stepping. Students are used to wearing clothes that can get dirty or even torn.

6. Dealing with problems

Students sometimes encounter problems such as getting stuck in thorns, touching spruce resin, getting clothes dirty, or scratching their skin on sharp bark. They can get their shoes wet in a stream, and anyone walking barefoot can step on spruce cones or needles. These incidents require individual attention and immediate treatment. Whenever possible, an additional instructor accompanies the group to address these needs.

Conclusion: the transformative power of movement-dance activity in the forest

Navigating these challenges yields rich rewards. The forest is an unparalleled multisensory classroom. Green Gilbert (2019) emphasizes that structured movement experiences, such as BrainDance, can strengthen neural connections and enhance memory. Within this dynamic, outdoor studio, students engage with and develop the dance concepts of body, space, time, and energy, while simultaneously developing:

- refined motor skills
- deepened self-awareness
- enhanced creative potential.

Most importantly, these experiences cultivate ecological embodiment – a process in which students develop not only knowledge about nature but also wisdom through nature. As they navigate rough terrain or mirror a tree's sway, they build emotional bonds with specific places and transform abstract environmental concepts into personal commitments. This aligns with Olsen's (2014, p. 228) assertion that "Art sensitizes you: as you feel, you also care. You work to save the things you value."

Our work shows how sensory-rich movement experiences bring out conservationists not through lecture, but through lived joy, where protecting forests becomes an extension of the play and creativity they have come to value. The thorn-scratched knees, resin-stained fingers, and mud-stained shoes become part of a transformative narrative that shapes both the developing bodies and environmental stewards.

¹ Anne Green Gilbert, in her book *Brain-compatible dance education* (2019), presents several studies and theoretical frameworks that support the benefits of BrainDance approach. For a comprehensive understanding of the evidence and conceptual foundations she discusses, readers are encouraged to consult the book directly.

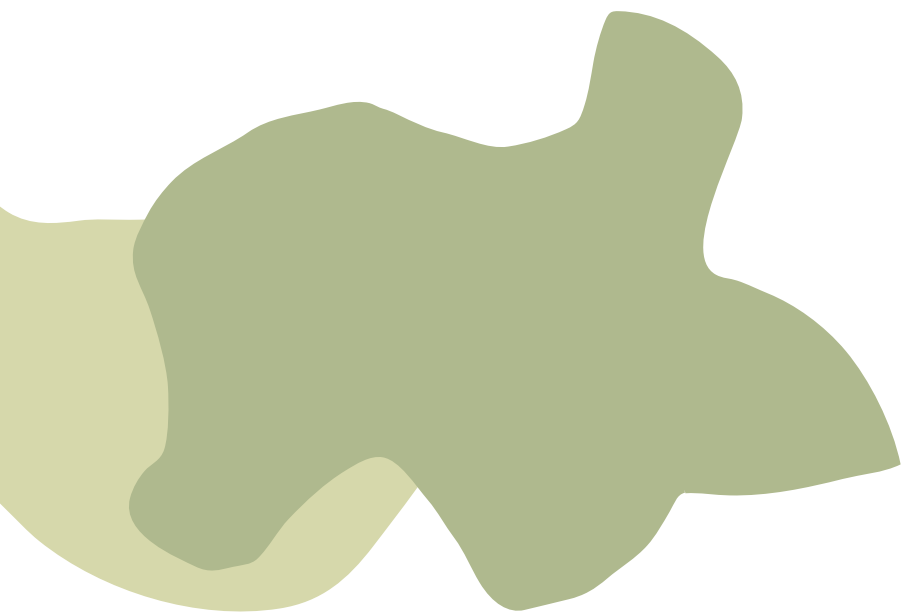
² The video available at <https://video.arnes.si/watch/gt1cswd24z5j> documents a dance-based activity carried out in a forest environment. One group of participants embodied a narrative through movement in a piece titled *From Seed to Seed*, exploring the life cycle of a seed through dance. Simultaneously, the other group observed the performance and translated their emotional and sensory responses into drawings, capturing their impressions of the experience in dialogue with the natural surroundings.

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Tina Koščak, a culturologist, pedagogue, and dancer, has been guiding children through various creative processes for many years. She is employed at a school, where she leads an extracurricular activity called Creative Movement, and on a weekly basis, she also takes students on forest explorations. She is interested in somatic approaches (BMC, Embodiment in Education), the discipline of Authentic Movement, and dance improvisation. She regularly attends various trainings and workshops; in 2024 she participated in *Introduction to Creative Dance for Early Childhood*, conducted by NDEO. She also took part in the performance *Exit* (2023) by contemporary dance pioneer Deborah Hay.

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From visual art to performing art: Integrating creative movement into the study of Early Renaissance art: A case study in embodied learning for art history education

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Abstract

This article explores the use of creative movement as a pedagogical strategy in art history education, focusing on an undergraduate course in the Visual Arts and Design program at the Faculty of Education, University of Primorska. Conducted with 12 female students aged around 20, the study integrated 90-minute lectures with 30-minute movement sessions over four weeks. Through tableaux vivants, stylized movement, and improvisation, students engaged with Early Renaissance and International Gothic artworks. The approach facilitated understanding of form, style, iconography, and iconology, while raising questions about acquisition, retention, and transfer of knowledge. Results showed stronger memory retention, deeper interpretive engagement, and higher creativity compared to non-performed artworks. The findings suggest that embodied learning can enrich art history pedagogy, bridging visual and performing arts and fostering innovative approaches in higher education.

Keywords: creative movement, embodied learning, art history, retention, early Renaissance, students of visual arts and design

Introduction

Art history teaching has traditionally relied on lectures, readings, and formal image-based analysis. While effective in conveying information, this model often produces passive learning and disengagement, especially among students in applied arts programs (Ladenson, 2010). Contemporary pedagogical theories instead emphasize participatory approaches that engage the body, senses, and emotions (Faella, Digennaro, & Iannaccone, 2025; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011; Yang, 2024).

This case study introduces creative movement into an undergraduate art history course, aiming to shift learning from passive observation to embodied understanding. The integration of movement allowed students to explore artworks beyond visual analysis, embodying stylistic and symbolic dimensions. The intervention specifically targeted processes of acquisition, retention, and transfer (Johnson-Glenberg et al., 2016), examining how embodied practices shape long-term memory and interpretive depth.

The context is significant: art history is the only theoretical subject within the Visual Arts and Design program at the University of Primorska, where most coursework emphasizes practical artistic skills. The students—12 women around 20 years old with no prior dance training—formed the first cohort of this new program.

Methodology

Participants and context

The four-week project combined lectures and embodied activities. Each weekly session included 90 minutes of lectures on Early Renaissance and International Gothic styles, followed by 30 minutes of creative movement exercises.

Phases of intervention

1. Content delivery: Presentation of artworks and stylistic frameworks.
2. Group selection: Students self-organized into groups of 2–3, choosing from ~10 artworks each week.
3. Tableaux vivants: Groups recreated postures, gestures, and symbols, then developed them into movement sequences.
4. Stylistic interpretation: Students embodied contrasts such as elegance/lightness (International Gothic) versus weight/groundedness (Flemish realism).
5. Iconological performance: Groups collaboratively represented broader meanings of artworks through performance, with peer discussion and feedback.

The study employed a qualitative, descriptive-interpretative approach, with data gathered through observation, peer discussions, written reflections, and exam performance.

Case study examples

Jan van Eyck – The Arnolfini Wedding

Two groups selected this painting. One highlighted spirituality in daily life, using elevated movement and soft vocal tones. The other emphasized wealth and status, with deliberate gestures and improvised props. Both demonstrated how embodiment deepened symbolic awareness.

Limbourg Brothers – Très Riches Heures (July)

This group focused on cyclical time. Fast harvesting movements contrasted with slow sheep-shearing, effectively embodying medieval conceptions of rhythm, labor, and nature. The lyrical and elegant qualities of the International Gothic style were reinforced through flowing gestures and temporal contrasts.

Results and Discussion

Analysis revealed that students consistently remembered artworks they had embodied, often providing more detailed stylistic and iconological interpretations than with non-performed works. These findings highlight the role of embodiment in retention.

Peer learning further strengthened interpretive skills: performances became a shared game of recognition, stimulating creativity and reinforcing collective knowledge. Props and costumes emerged spontaneously, showing investment beyond requirements.

The study also resonates with theories of embodied cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Johnson-Glenberg et al., 2016). Somatic categorization—such as differentiating between fluid/curved and direct/weighted gestures—anchored stylistic contrasts in physical memory. However, while retention was clearly enhanced, questions remain about acquisition (how knowledge was scaffolded) and transfer (how embodied insights might apply to new contexts).

Similar pedagogical experiments support these observations. Geršak, Smrtnik Vitulić, and Prosen (2020), for example, demonstrated that integrating movement into mathematics improved retention in primary school. This reinforces the potential of embodied learning beyond the arts.

Conclusion and future work

This small-scale pedagogical experiment confirmed that creative movement enriches art history education, fostering engagement, memorability, and interpretive depth. Future implementations should integrate more structured dance theory, including Laban's effort actions and use of space (Ewan & Sagovsky, 2018; Fernandes, 2015). They should also take place in dedicated physical spaces (gymnasiums, black-box theatres), include co-creation of costumes and scenography as part of learning, and recognize performance as a legitimate form of assessment.

Embodied cognition underscores the importance of bodily engagement for acquisition, retention, and transfer of knowledge (Rosa, 2025; Cappello, Anttila, & Cañabate, 2024). By merging visual and performing arts, students not only study artworks but also live them, carrying embodied insights into their broader academic and creative practices.

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Biography

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Dance and socialisation: An Australian study of arts learning online in primary schools

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Abstract

Children learn to socialise and work with others in a process largely considered a key role of schools. The development of social, emotional and communication skills is recognised as 'Personal and social capability' in the 'General Capabilities' included in the Australian curriculum. However, the COVID-19 lockdown periods of 2020 and 2021 limited children's socialisation with peers. Online learning resulted, and this paper outlines a recent Australian government-funded Emerging Priorities Program (EPP) study that explored teacher, parent and student reflections on online arts learning. The paper outlines this study, drawing upon literature from the field of learning in the arts to identify if and how arts learning contributed to well-being, engagement and socialisation. Findings specific to dance within the online learning context led to consideration of online dance resources for teachers, pedagogical implications and the development of a 'micro-credential' providing professional learning for teachers.

Keywords: Dance education, Arts curriculum, Socialisation, Primary school, Online learning

Introduction

A national research project in Australia sought to discover what arts learning occurred online during the COVID-19 lockdown period in 2020 and 2021. Funding from the Australian government through the Department of Education in a one-off special funding program acknowledged that the arts contribute to personal happiness, overcoming stress and anxiety and building social cohesion (Australia Council for the Arts, 2020). Researchers were interested in investigating how online arts learning might facilitate student interaction, collaboration and engagement, playing an important role in their socialisation and social development (Eisner, 2008; Joseph & Lennox, 2021; Lorenza, 2018) particularly in the complex times of the international pandemic, COVID-19.

The researchers, having heard anecdotes of whole family participation and unexpected student engagement in innovative arts learning tasks from primary school performing arts teachers, wanted to see if the arts could support and develop primary school-aged children's socialisation. This program called for innovative research that aimed to identify how to support children and their parents in reconnecting with schools after the COVID-19 lockdown period.

The arts provide 'critical contributions to the healing, reflection, and political transformation of the nation' (Jacobs et al., 2021, p. 31), supported by the United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) global objective 'towards a lifelong and life-wide development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviours (UNESCO, 2024, p. 4). Ewing (2011) argues that the arts improve both student engagement and well-being, contributing positively to students' self-esteem, capacity to collaborate, emotional communication and social development. Approaches to the arts in schools enable connection and communication with and between students (Coleman & MacDonald, 2020; Joseph & Lennox, 2021; Naidoo et al., 2022; O'Connor & Estellés, 2021). The arts are included as a learning area in many countries' school curricula.

The Arts learning area in the Australian curriculum includes five art forms referred to as subjects: dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts. Music and visual arts have a longer-standing history of being included in the primary school curriculum in Australia. Dance, drama and media arts are more recent inclusions. A further dimension of the Australian curriculum is the General Capabilities. These are the skills or dispositions students develop as they learn subject content. This study focussed on one of the capabilities – Personal Social Capability (PSC). PSC develops students' personal and social awareness and management. In the curriculum, it is explored by sub-elements and levels of development (ACARA, 2023a) which provide a theoretical framework through which to review the data collected in this study.

Dance in the Australian curriculum followed organisational strands used across all five arts subjects in the Arts learning area. During the COVID-19 period teachers worked with the Australian curriculum Version 8.4, in which the two organising strands were Making and Responding with sub-strand organisers:

- Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas
- Developing understanding of practices

- Sharing artworks through performance, presentation or display
- Responding to and interpreting artworks.

In the Australian curriculum, version 8 for the primary years is structured in three bands of learning, see Figure 1.

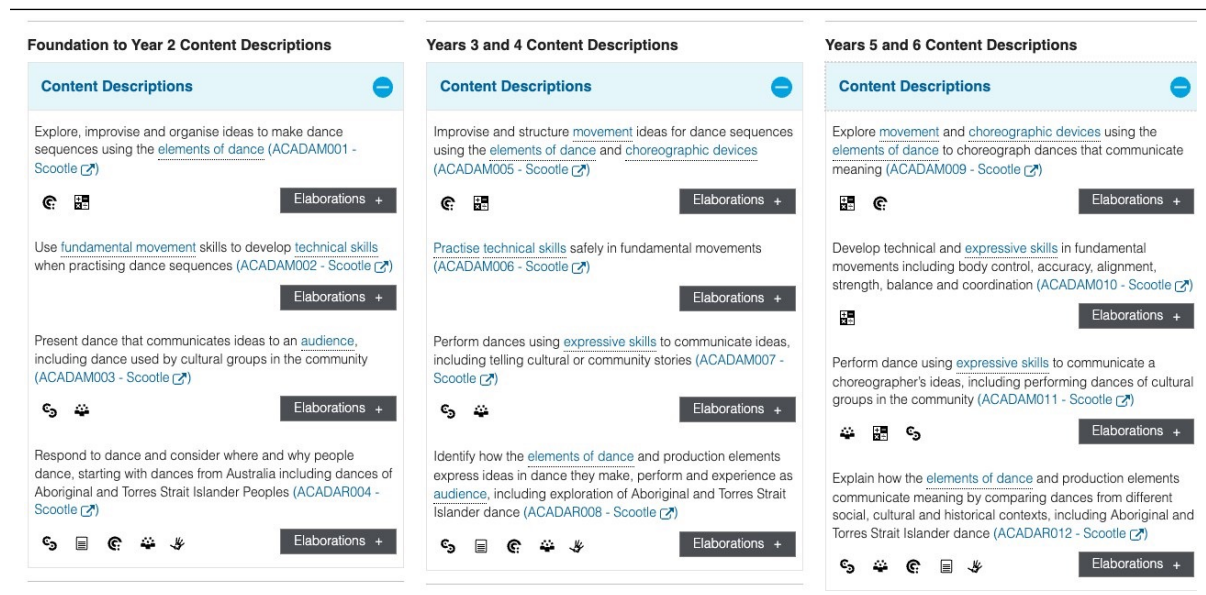


Figure 1: Australian curriculum v8.4. Dance: Scope and sequence for Primary years, Foundation to Year 6 (ACARA, 2020).

Version 9 of the Australian curriculum published in 2022 separated Foundation from Years 1 and 2 to make four bands of learning in primary: Foundation Year, Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, Years 5 and 6; and expanded the organising strands to:

- Creating and Making;
- Presenting and Performing;
- Exploring and Responding,
- Developing Practices and Skills (ACARA, 2023b).

Many generalist-primary teachers lack confidence to teach dance (Rolfe, 2001; Russell-Bowie, 2013; Meiners, 2017). This study and the resulting online learning resource are intended to give primary teachers a starting point to teach some dance.

Signature pedagogies for arts teaching and learning

Teaching the arts to primary school children is practical involving visual, aural and kinaesthetic learning. Building upon Shulman's (2005) work, Dinham (2024) explored pedagogies for teaching the arts and proposed these signature pedagogies: students' own experiences, students' learning experiences, individual and collaborative learning experiences, ethical engagement, reflection and critical review, and educator interactions with students.

The six pedagogies are particular pedagogical practices shared by the arts subjects (Dinham, 2024) providing an effective theoretical framework for teachers planning arts learning. Transferable from the online to the face-to-face classroom environment these signature pedagogies are identified in each individual learning activity developed through this research. The dance exemplar is discussed below.

The research

The research, *An examination of primary student, teacher and parent experiences of arts learning online during COVID-19 lockdowns* sought to answer these research questions:

1. What arts learning activities occurred during COVID-19 lockdown in Australia?
2. What arts learning activities do Australian teachers and students identify as contributing to well-being, engagement and socialisation?
3. What arts learning experiences can be provided as examples of practice to benefit Australian teachers and students in returning to the classroom?

Methodology

The research was organised into three stages using a mixed methods design.

Stage 1, (HREC Ethics Approval 23737) conducted in early 2023 involved a systematic literature review of arts curriculum and the PSC, and a national online survey of primary school students, teachers and parents. The literature review was a systematic-narrative hybrid literature review which drew literature from a range of databases including ProQuest, ERIC, Springerlink and Taylor and Francis Online using specific search criteria, criterion-based selection and critical evaluation. The search initially identified 350 articles published between 2015 and 2023. A further analysis resulted in 55 academic articles identified 13 relevant articles after full-text screening. Ultimately, 3 articles specifically focused on the personal and social capability in arts learning. The detail of this systematic narrative hybrid literature review is a separate publication.

Stage 2 involved the analysis of the survey data and a comparison with the findings of the systematic literature review through which to identify best practice examples of arts learning activities undertaken online.

Stage 3 (HREC Ethics Approval 243340) involved the trial of the best practice examples identified in Stage 2 to create digital exemplars for teachers. These were published in the online micro-credential: EPP Arts Learning Online.

Participants

81 teachers, 62 parents and 7 students responded to the Stage 1 survey.

Findings

Stage 1: Survey findings

We found that people in Australia are tired of responding to surveys. This low response rate from teachers and parents accompanied by the complex permission and consent process resulted in only seven children completing the survey. Data collected from parents, teachers and the limited commentary from students across all art forms and no student commentary on dance informed the Findings Reports (Lorenza, Carter et al, 2023; 2024).

Firstly, we found that different types of arts learning experiences contributed to students' wellbeing, engagement and socialisation and aligned with the signature pedagogies (Dinham, 2024) for the arts that are embedded in the Australian arts curriculum. Teacher respondents specifically identified the importance of creating an emotional connection with students and enabling students to connect with each other. Some parents reported that their child enjoyed connecting with their peers by sharing and talking about their work through platforms such as Google Classroom. Arts learning activities needed to be open-ended and student-led, i.e. the student could choose subject matter connected with their feelings and their world, particularly during lockdown. Students needed to understand that the online space was a safe space and celebrate the process rather than only the final product. These approaches to arts learning activities affected a student who commented, "I look forward to learning new things and new skills and making new friends when I go [return] to school".

There was limited evidence of dance learning activities in the survey data. Although a wealth of dancing occurred around the world and was shared online during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Herzogenrath & Patel, 2023). The survey data indicated that very little or no dance occurred in the schools with which our survey participants were associated, but students who did learn some dance were very keen to return to learning dance in person with their peers at school.

The few dance learning activities reported reflected dance continuing to be a marginalised art form in the school curriculum (Lorenza et al, 2023; Meiners, 2017). The Australian curriculum allows "for the study of the 5 arts subjects [dance, drama, media arts, music, visual arts] from Foundation to Year 6" (ACARA, 2023b). The lockdown facilitated considerable online dance activity in informal sites for dance performance – people's homes (Meiners, 2021, Griffiths, 2023; Bench, 2024). Locally and globally, people of all ages and abilities expressed their family and community identities, connecting with others through a wide range of dance activities shared via social media.

The survey findings indicated that few teachers adapted dance learning activities for online learning. Teachers tended to use existing online instructional videos and clips from which students copied movement sequences and, in some instances, developed their own series of movements. Teachers working with large groups of students online needed to provide instructional videos or links to YouTube videos students could follow independently. In large groups online teachers could not necessarily see all of the students through a Zoom or similar gallery, finding it impossible to gauge students' engagement or frustration.

Some children were motivated by dance activities online, 'My daughter would watch a video that was sent to her and follow the instructions on the video.' (Parent respondent). When children felt connected with peers and their teacher through dance learning activities online, they held positive views of the arts upon returning to school.

The stage 1 systematic literature review indicated that dance learning activities tend to enable elements of the PSC through the agency of embodied learning, although there was limited specific evidence in the articles identified through the systematic literature review.

Stage 2 and 3 findings

Arts learning involves 'embodied, practical, and collaborative learning practices', which are easier to enact in face-to-face learning than in online learning environments (Dinham, 2024, p 402). This research endeavoured to explore and represent both face-to-face and online learning opportunities.

One Australian online resource reviewed was the series of dance videos *Moving through colour* videos (Drill Performance Company Inc, n.d.). Children were energised by the opening spatially-aware warm-up led by enthusiastic arts educators. A Year 1 primary-generalist school teacher taught children about movement using Australian Curriculum dance terminology. The children enjoyed exploring and learning key dance terms in their own homes. This learning continued when they returned to the classroom. The teacher gently coaxed students to participate in exploration of locomotor and non-locomotor movement, introducing some of the elements of dance: space, time, dynamics, relationships. Children developed foundational technical skills (body control, posture, strength, balance and coordination) adding expressive qualities through facial expression. Subsequently, the students created and shared their own sequences of movements.

The Drill Performance Company Inc. and the Year 1 primary-generalist teacher provided key learning steps for primary students to start to share movement ideas for dance, to develop social interactions and develop greater awareness of space, and movement in space with or around other students. Occurring online and in small groups in one location, these developed students' awareness of relationships, and dimensions of the PSC.

Free online teacher resource

The study’s findings informed the 10 hours of professional development content across the five art forms in the Australian arts curriculum. Accessible online, the EPP Primary Arts Online micro-credential (Lorenza et al., 2024) focuses on Years 1 and 2.

The micro-credential leads teachers through the theoretical frameworks of Dinham’s (2024) signature pedagogies and the PSC in the Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2023a). The eight modules in the micro-credential can be downloaded as individual PDF teaching and learning packages, these are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Background to the study | 5. Drama |
| 2. The Signature Pedagogies | 6. Media Arts |
| 3. Personal Social Capability | 7. Music |
| 4. Dance | 8. Visual Arts |

Module 4 Dance

The dance learning activity needed to promote open-ended learning that enables students to develop their own movement sequences. Teachers can use and learn from the scaffolded dance learning activity to develop more activities of their own.

The introductory activities explore movement in response to music through learning a song from Ghana. Each learning activity contains suggested steps for face-to-face and online interaction. The feedback and reflection questions are key to developing each student’s PSC. This dance module connects to the music-learning activity in Module 7. The dance activity covers the content descriptions in the Australian arts curriculum in Table 1.

Years 1 and 2 Content Descriptions			
<i>Creating and Making</i>	<i>Presenting and Performing</i>	<i>Exploring and Responding</i>	<i>Developing practices and skills</i>
use the elements of dance to choreograph dance sequences	share dance sequences in informal settings	explore where, why and how people across cultures, communities and/or other contexts experience dance	experiment with ways to move safely and expressively using fundamental movement skills and the elements of dance

Table 1. Australian curriculum v9. Dance: Years 1 & 2 (ACARA, 2023b)

The activity enables teachers to encourage these elements of the PSC, see Table 2.

Personal Social Capability Level 2			
Self Awareness	Self Management	Social Awareness	Social Management
Personal awareness: describe personal qualities and how these contribute to growth	Goal setting: collaboratively develop goals to improve learning	Relational awareness: describe ways they can initiate and develop relationships, including identifying how others may feel in a range of contexts	Communication: use a range of skills to enhance verbal and nonverbal communication
Emotional awareness: describe the emotional responses of themselves and others	Perseverance and adaptability: demonstrate perseverance and adaptability with unfamiliar tasks		Collaboration: participate cooperatively in groups on common tasks and activities
Reflective practice: describe what they have discovered about themselves by engaging with feedback			Decision-making: practise individual and group decision-making

Table 2. Australian curriculum v9. General capabilities: Personal Social Capability Level 2 (ACARA, 2023a)

The dance learning activity encompasses all six of Dinham’s (2024) signature pedagogies as coloured in the signature pedagogies in Figure 2.

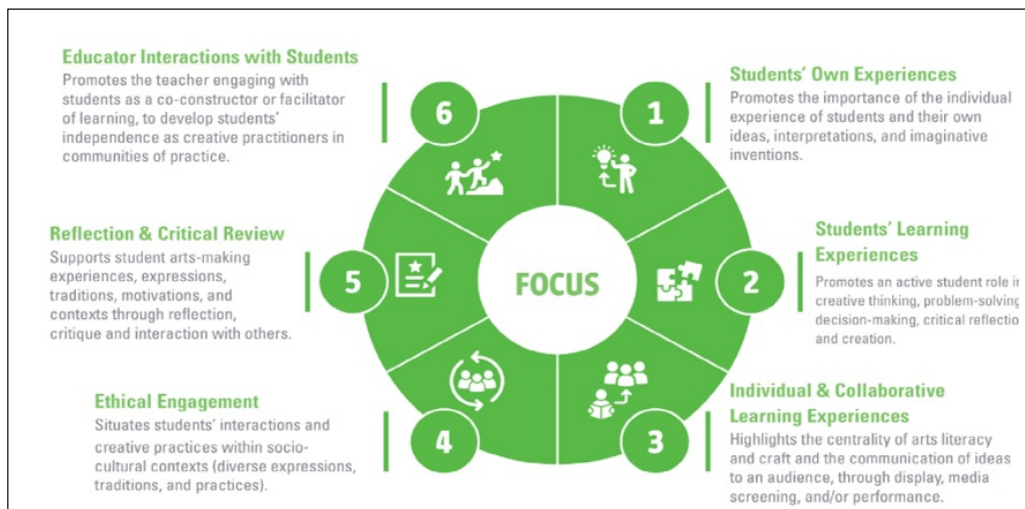


Figure 2: The signature pedagogies (Dinham, 2024) for the dance learning activity (Lorenza, Carter et al, 2024b).

Prioritising learner agency and acknowledging students' own experiences develops decision-making, imaginative interpretations, problem-solving and creative thinking essential for dance learning.

Recommendations

The study recommends teachers explore and apply the Dance module with their students. Teachers' experiences will inform further developments from this study. Students' prior experiences in dance learning from a range of contexts within and beyond schools may influence how a teacher may use or adapt these example learning activities.

The initial links between art forms: dance and music, drama and media arts, may be expanded to provide examples of links to other learning areas.

Limitations

This research study was limited by time and other unpredictable factors, including that some education jurisdictions opted to not participate reducing distribution; some people felt COVID-19 was too far in the past to warrant further exploration of what learning and teaching may have occurred; focus on post-COVID-19 phenomena of student school refusal and teacher shortages obstructed contemplation of the arts learning that had occurred in the lockdown periods in Australia from 2020 to 2022.

Acknowledgement

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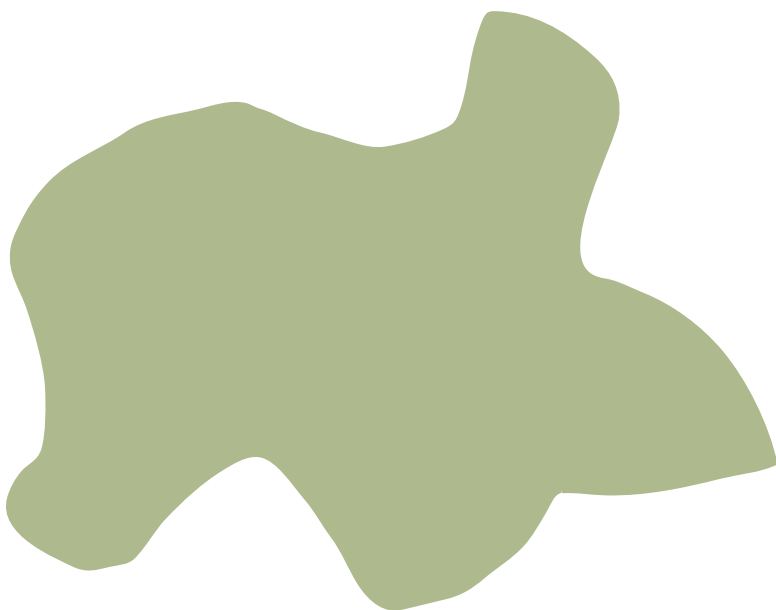
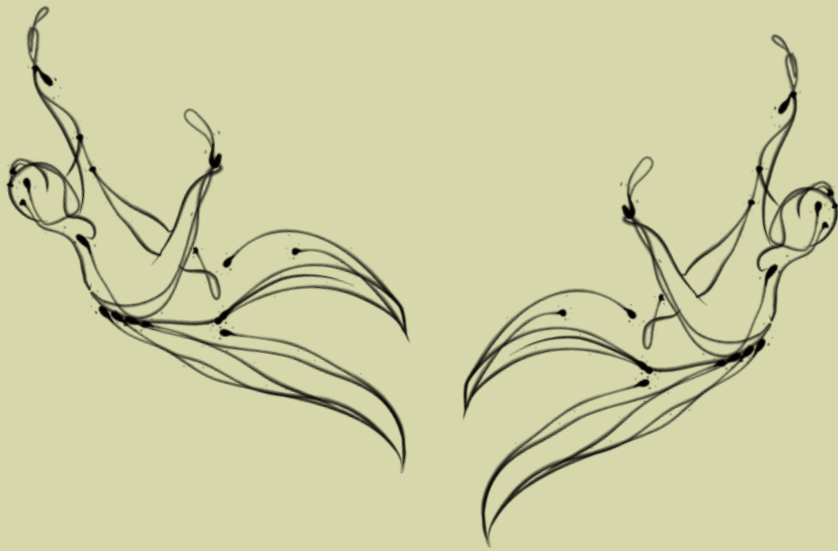
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Biographies

Dr Linda Merewyn Lorenza researches arts education and applied arts. She is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Theatre at CQUniversity. Linda's professional career spans arts industry management and education policy development, specifically leading the development of Australia's first national arts curriculum endorsed in 2015. Her expertise includes arts curriculum development and arts-based research methodologies. Her 2018 dissertation is a popular education resource. Linda's interdisciplinary research uses applied arts, cutting across social innovation and change, regionality, rehabilitation and youth. She was Chief Investigator for the Emerging Priorities Program research: An examination of primary student, teacher and parent experiences of arts learning online during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Dr Jeff Meiners is adjunct lecturer at Adelaide University and recent daCi Chair. He worked widely in schools, with artists, education organisations, dance companies and international projects. Jeff was 2009 Australian Dance Award recipient for Outstanding Services to Dance Education and dance writer for the Australian arts curriculum. Jeff convened the global dance congress 'Panpapanpalya 2018' and undertook a guest 2021 dance education teaching residency at Taipei National University of the Arts. Presentations include the UNESCO 2024 Abu Dhabi conference on Culture and Arts Education. Jeff's doctoral research focused on factors impacting an inclusive primary school dance curriculum.

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The process of creative dance becoming a firm part of the Framework Curriculum for primary schools in the Czech Republic's education system

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Abstract

In the process of the ongoing national revisions and innovations of the framework curriculum for primary schools in the Czech Republic it is necessary to agree on what is the essential curriculum content that children should take from school into their lives. Does it include creative dance as well? The team of experts involved in the national revisions led by The National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic are convinced that all children should have the opportunity to experience dance at school as well as other art forms. The paper presented in 2024 in Ljubljana offered the audience an insight into the innovation of the national curriculum for primary schools in the Czech Republic and described the process of creative dance finding its way to become a solid part of the curriculum since 2006.

Keywords: creative dance, framework curriculum, primary education

Body

The ongoing national revisions of the Framework Curriculum for primary schools in the Czech Republic opened a special opportunity for creative dance to become a firm part of it. Creative dance and movement education in the Czech Republic has a long tradition and the movement of Czech scenic dance, especially children's dance, is extraordinary in the world context in its quality, breadth and originality. However, the process of dance becoming a part of the primary education system has taken about twenty years.

In 2022 the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic initiated a working group of experts to create an innovative concept and vision of the field of art education for primary schools according to strategic documents: Strategy 2030+ (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2021), a key document for the development of the Czech Republic's education system in the decade 2020-2030+ and UNESCO documents for arts education which support the vision of multidisciplinary artistic education and equalisation of all artistic disciplines and their synergistic integration such as the Seoul Programme - Goals for the Development of Arts Education (Korea R. Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2010). Each of the art fields offers children the opportunity to experience and learn a specific way of expressing themselves and to acquire specific creative skills. The new Framework Curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education on 30th December 2024 (National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic, N.D.) is the outcome of a collaboration of five artistic fields: Music, Art, Dance, Drama and Film.

The roots of dance and movement education for children in the Czech Republic include influences such as Duncanism, Émile Jaques-Dalcroz's rhythmic-movement education, expressive dance and Carl Orff's methodology. Based on these influences, from 1960 onwards, dance departments began to be established in Elementary art schools. Thereafter, dance education has been influenced also by modern dance and classical ballet, and after the fall of communism in 1989, mainly by contemporary dance and improvisation. A network of Elementary art schools is a unique concept of art education in the Czech Republic to spot and support talented children and give them access to quality art education. The schools are not compulsory, but they are part of the system of formal education. Attendance is paid but they are affordable as the Elementary art schools are also funded by the government. These schools do not include all children, just about 20%, usually talented children and those who come from families where art and culture are considered a value. Therefore, the reality is that most of the population do not encounter dance at school, don't benefit from it, and many children are taking over a lot of prejudices about dancing from the society.

Art education in primary schools is traditionally represented by art and music, although the field of art is much wider and richer. The experts are convinced creative dance should become a part of the curriculum not only because it is obviously an integral part of the world of art and culture, but also because creative movement is a great way to improve creativity, collaboration, respect, health and wellbeing. Creative dance helps pupils to gain self-confidence and body awareness and influences the formation and acceptance of their own identity. Additionally, in a dance class children foster relationships and collaboration within the class. Especially nowadays, in this digital age, it is important that all children should have the opportunity to learn about the wisdom of their bodies.



Figure 1: A creative dance class, elementary school in Prague, the Czech Republic. Photo: Adéla Vosičková.

The history of implementing creative dance education in regular primary schools in the Czech Republic started in 2006 when the first dance projects for schools were created. They still exist today, and their outcomes and experiences played an important role in the process of approving creative dance as an accredited educational discipline for primary schools. This happened in 2010 when creative dance was included in the Framework Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2013), by order of the Minister of Education. However, not as a compulsory but only as an elective subject. The latest revisions include all arts in the basis for all pupils. Also, cultural competence has been added to the list of key competences. From September 2025 pilot schools will be teaching according to the new curriculum and in 2027 the new curriculum will start to take effect for grades 1 and 6, in 2031 for all grades.



Figure 2: A creative dance class with live music accompaniment, Prague, the Czech Republic. Photo: Adéla Vosičková.

The vision is new, and the implementation will have to face several problems of the reality in Czech schools. The biggest problem being the fact that in general the field of Art and Culture has had to fight underestimation of its importance in the curriculum as a whole. However, the Ministry of Culture is ready to support creative education in schools and is becoming a partner to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. At first the new concept was refused by Music and Art experts, who were probably afraid of their subjects losing their position in the curriculum. The dialogue has been challenging and lengthy. Faculties of Education at most universities have been reluctant to transform the education of future teachers, so university-level Art Schools and Academies play an important role here.

On the other hand, the revisions have also created new impulses for the development of creative dance pedagogy. New methodological materials and courses for dance teachers specializing in the specifics of teaching dance and movement education at primary schools are being created and published (Dětské studio, z.s., 2024; Lösli et al., 2024; Radka Kamenická, 2024).



Figure 3: A master class for teachers proving it is possible to dance in an ordinary classroom, Dance and School Conference 2024, organized by the Association of Dance and Movement Education and Dětské studio, z.s., Prague, the Czech Republic (Dětské studio, z.s., 2024). Photo: Adéla Vosičková.

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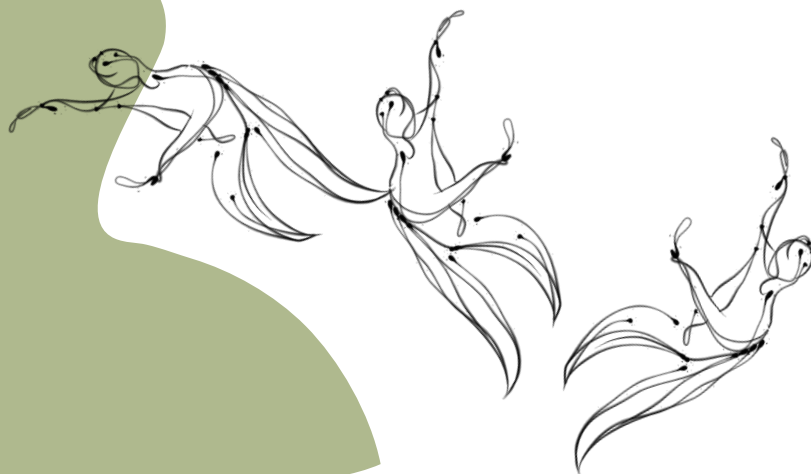
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Biography

Markéta Pucová, MA works at the National Pedagogical Institute as a guarantor and methodologist of the educational field of Dance and Movement Education in the process of the national revisions and innovations of the framework curriculum for primary schools in the Czech Republic. She participates in the development of the new concept and content of the educational field of Arts and Culture. She works in NIPOS in the department of children's scenic dance and is a member of the board of the Association of Dance and Movement Education.

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I-improvise: exploring dance through viewpoints training

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Abstract

In this article, we use concepts from cognitive psychology to examine attention and gain a deeper understanding of the experience offered by Viewpoints training. We will discuss two standard Viewpoints exercises that emphasize synchronicity and collective behaviour, which are directly related to attention processes. We suggest the Viewpoints principles stated by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (2005), as the training consists of awakening a consciousness of specific qualities of presence in time and space, usually in a more improvisatory way. Most of the exercises are done in groups and seek to enhance the practice of “listening with the whole body”. We hypothesize that the attention processes lead to experiencing the connections created with others in the room. Participants experienced an exciting and versatile ensemble exploring different ways of dance improvisation through lenses that allow the group to function together spontaneously and intuitively.

Keywords: Dance, Viewpoints training, Covert Attention, Peripheral Vision, Improvisation

Introduction

Improvisation is considered a powerful tool for artistic development and bodily self-expression, giving opportunities to explore new aspects of dance. It allows dancers to explore new elements of movement without a pre-established choreography. This process involves exploring movement and expressing oneself freely, allowing the dancer to react to the present moment, the music or the environment.

Improvisation can be defined as the act of creating or doing something that hasn't been planned, making use of whatever is available in the moment (Smith-Autard, 1996). Dance offers a rich variety of perspectives on the practice of improvisation, highlighting its significance in the art form. In general, improvisation suggests free artistic expression and encourages innovation in movements. Smith-Autard (1996) indicates the relationship between improvisation and exploration. The author states that movement exploration in dance is "defined as a systematic investigation, examination, study and search with the aim of making specific discoveries and learning about something" (Smith-Autard, 1996, p. 80). Furthermore, the author suggests that improvisation is not just an act of creativity during practice or rehearsal but can also be part of the final work or performance. This highlights that spontaneity can exist in the preparatory, exploratory, and final states.

The American dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton created Contact Improvisation in the early 1970s, a type of dance that introduced a new perspective on improvisation at that time. It is an evolving system of movement based on "the communication between two moving bodies that are in physical contact and their combined relationship to the physical laws that govern their motion-gravity, momentum, inertia" (Paxton, 2022). Thus, Contact Improvisation is an open-ended exploration of the kinaesthetic possibilities of bodies moving through contact.

In addition, dance improvisation can be a completely free and instinctive reaction to various stimuli, such as music, emotions, or the surrounding space. Alternatively, it can also occur within specific constraints or a predefined structure. Even within these boundaries, there is freedom for the dancer's individual creativity and interpretation.

To explore improvisation in dance, we proposed a workshop based on the principles of Viewpoints. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (2005) introduce these principles, which incorporate key elements of improvisation. Although the training is not only focused on improvisation, but also deeply rooted in improvisational approaches. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau expanded upon Marie Overlie's Six Viewpoints, originally created in the early 1970s, and articulated these principles of movement into nine Physical Viewpoints, five vocal Viewpoints and the Soft Focus (Wachowicz & Stevens, 2021).

The Physical Viewpoints are categorized into Space and Time. Spatial Viewpoints, relate to the use of physical space: 1) Architecture - refers to the physical environment, whether imagined or real, and how a performer interacts with it, including walls, floors, ceilings, and objects; 2) Spatial Relationship – pertains to the distance between performers or objects, which can involve proximity (e.g., near or far), and the dynamic relationships created by movement in space.; 3) Topography - defines the path or pattern a performer creates while moving through space, which may be linear, curving, or random; 4) Shape - focuses on

the body's outline or contour in space, with shapes being either still (immobile) or in motion (fluid or fragmented); 5) Gesture – includes both behavioural gestures (everyday, realistic movements) and expressive gestures (abstract, symbolic movements). Besides, Viewpoints of Time pertain to time and dynamics and include: 1) Tempo - describes the speed or pace at which movements occur; 2) Duration - refers to the length of time that movements are sustained.; 3) Kinaesthetic Response - involves performers' spontaneous physical reactions to external stimuli, such as sounds or movements; 4) Repetition - entails repeating specific movements, shapes, or actions, either by oneself or by others (Bogart & Landau, 2005).

We can suggest that Viewpoints training consists of principles that, when combined, offer a wide range of creative possibilities for dancers and performers. This approach provides tools for building improvisation, like a kaleidoscope that creates a unique image with each movement. However, sometimes the training has restrictions (focusing on specific Viewpoints) or a predefined structure.

According to the literature review, Viewpoints develops the senses to respond quickly to surrounding stimuli, highlights attention and awareness, improves the sense of aliveness on stage, develops open awareness and the responsibility to create a group dynamic (Climenhaga, 2010; Bogart, 2003; Bogart & Landau, 2005; Ravid, 2008; Wachowicz & Stevens, 2021).

Soft Focus is an essential component of the training. It allows performers to be aware of the entire space around them, including their surroundings, other performers, and their own movements, simultaneously by paying attention to peripheral vision (Bogart & Landau, 2005). It encourages performers to see and perceive their environment and ensemble without becoming overly focused on any single element.

When dancers move in the space around them in ensemble work, the concept of Soft Focus helps to provide a broader visual perspective — sometimes encompassing the entire space, whether during rehearsals or on stage. It allows dancers to maintain a connection and awareness of their surroundings without relying solely on direct eye contact, facilitating smooth collaboration and real-time responses. (Climenhaga, 2010; Bogart & Landau, 2005; Ravid, 2008; Wachowicz & Stevens, 2021).

Therefore, Viewpoints are essential tools for improvisation, collaboration, and performance creation. By focusing on these principles, performers develop a heightened awareness of each other, their relationship to space, and cohesion as an ensemble. The Viewpoints training encourages experimentation and spontaneity while fostering ensemble work, thus allowing for creative exploration and spontaneous decision-making.

Using concepts from cognitive psychology, we examine attention to better understand the experience provided by Viewpoints training. According to Rai and Le Callet (2018), the term “visual attention” is used broadly. The authors suggest that various mechanisms underlie different types of visual attention and explain that what we visually fixate on does not always indicate where our attention is focused. Overt visual attention process is the physical act of directing our eyes toward a stimulus that captures our interest. In contrast, covert attention involves a mental shift in focus without any physical movement; it occurs before eye movements and allows us to monitor our surroundings or concentrate on objects in our periphery.

Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that both overt and covert attention are strongly interconnected (Perkovic et al., 2023; Rai & Le Callet, 2018). Attention can modulate the various stages of stimulus processing, and multisensory integration can occur (Talsma et al, 2010). However, these hypotheses remain somewhat theoretical, as the degree of sensory integration in the studio cannot be measured precisely (Talsma et al, 2010).

Building on these theoretical ideas, we propose that the quality of attention is a crucial factor in Viewpoints training (Bogart & Landau, 2005; Bogart, 2007), and heightened interaction among the senses may emerge during Viewpoints training sessions.

The workshop

To explore improvisation in dance using the principles of Viewpoints, we proposed standard training exercises based on the Viewpoints book by Bogart and Landau (2005). One of the workshop's goals was to explore Soft Focus and the peripheral vision while working as an ensemble. Additionally, participants experienced the Viewpoints of Topography, Space, Spatial Relationship, Shape, Gesture, Tempo, Kinaesthetic Response, and Repetition. The group consisted of 32 participants from many different countries, some of whom were already familiar with Viewpoints, while others were newcomers.

In the workshop, we focused on two standard Viewpoints exercises that highlight synchronicity and collective behaviour through attentional processes. These exercises are directly related to the attention processes discussed earlier. In this paper we will not cover every activity and exercise from the Viewpoints workshop; instead, we will highlight specific tasks that enhance understanding of the attention processes involved during practice. After the warm-up, we instructed participants to walk around the room, observing the space and each other. The goal was to occupy the empty space while passing in between others, using peripheral vision without gazing at anyone.

Bogart and Landau (2005) propose the experience of 'listening with the whole body', which emphasizes the importance of using all of our senses, rather than relying solely on sight. Ravid (2008) refers to this notion as "embodied understanding" aligning with Bogart and Landau's suggestion.

In Viewpoints training, as in rehearsal, if one is always looking for a particular premeditated result, then many things that are happening outside of those parameters are not recognized. Extraordinary listening means listening with the whole body without an idea of the result. When something happens in the room, everybody present can respond instantly, bypassing the frontal lobe of the brain in order to act upon instinct and intuition (Bogart & Landau, 2005, p.33).

We presented the group with the "Stops and Starts" task, where everyone was instructed to start walking and then come to a complete stop together, without any leadership. This exercise helps participants experience how engaged everyone is within the group. Gradually, a sense of belonging emerges, and individuals begin to see themselves as part of a cohesive unit, where each person plays an essential role. If people are not engaged, the group will struggle to perform the "Stops and Starts" task successfully.

One of the instructions given to the participants was to pay attention to the Viewpoints of Kinaesthetic Response, which suggests that people should respond quickly to their surroundings. When one person stops, everyone should stop at the same time, avoiding the assumption of leadership. The same level of group engagement is expected during the Start component of the task. Participants will start walking around the room while using a soft focus, allowing the group to collectively determine the moments to stop and start without any designated leader.

Kinaesthetic Response is “a spontaneous reaction to motion which occurs outside you; the timing in which you respond to the external events of movement or sound; the impulsive movement that occurs from a stimulation of the senses” (Bogart & Landau, 2005, p.6).

The Stops and Starts task can be compared to the behaviour of flocking birds, which exemplify both collective behaviour and distributed leadership (Leonard et al., 2014; Dyer et al., 2009). When a group begins moving in different directions at a similar pace and then suddenly stops together, it resembles the flocking behaviour of birds. Additionally, a flock can form when individuals in the group react collectively, leading many members to adopt the same Viewpoints of gesture, shape, or arrangement in space.

To perform the Stops and Starts task, participants should use the Soft Focus and let other people’s movements influence their decision to stop or start walking. It is important for participants to avoid trying to control group decisions during this process. This task requires individuals to pay attention to themselves and their surroundings while being aware of whether their instinct is to control the group’s movement. Maintaining this self-awareness and attentiveness to the environment is crucial, as it can be challenging to resist the urge to control movement and act as a leader.

Later, we proposed another very standard Viewpoints training called High Jumps. In this task, the group was asked to form a circle of ten people standing side by side. Everyone should gaze at a point outside the circle while using a soft focus and pay attention to their peripheral vision. At the same time, they should bend their knees, jump in place, stretch their legs and feet, and land softly on the ground, all together as one.

The goal is to simultaneously jump as high as possible, to land together in the same instant, and to land on the floor with as little noise as possible. At the height of the jump the feet should be tucked up under the buttocks so that as much space between the floor and the body as possible can be achieved (Bogart & Landau, 2005, p.26).

This task suggests using a soft focus to monitor the entire group arranged in a circle. Participants were bending their knees in preparation to jump, and then they jumped. Visual attention plays a crucial role in prioritizing and processing the information they receive from their surroundings. We hypothesize the covert visual attention as the process that emerges during performing the task by using Soft Focus.

Michael Posner is a pioneer researcher of visual attention. In the 1980s, his studies about the relationship between attention and movement revealed that participants could shift their attentional spotlight without moving their eyes. This remarkable finding demonstrated that individuals could significantly accelerate their responses to stimuli located at the cued position, highlighting the power and flexibility of human attention (Posner, 1980).

More recently, Rezaei et al (2024) suggested that visual attention is a special type of selective attention that helps us focus on and deal with the most important information coming from what we see around us. Our brain is made up of many different areas, each responsible for different things. Whenever we do anything, these brain areas constantly work together, connecting and interacting in complex ways.

Furthermore, the concept of covert attention is associated with faster decision times suggesting that participants might process multiple pieces of information simultaneously using distributed attention (Perkovic et al, 2023). Thus, we suggest that covert attention — the ability to focus on objects in our peripheral vision (Schwartz & Krantz, 2018) — is likely essential for successful ensemble improvisation.

In the final part of the workshop, participants were divided into three groups to create collective improvisations using the material generated earlier. One improvisation focused on incorporating the movement sequence developed by the entire group. Then, each smaller group of ten participants explored and adapted this sequence. The groups freely practised the Viewpoints trained in the workshop, such as spatial relationships, kinaesthetic response, topography, repetition, duration, shape, gesture, and use of space.

Results and conclusion

In the Stop and Start task, the group performed better each time. People became increasingly engaged and enjoyed the task. It was a large group, with more than 30 people, and the space was quite large, so it was not an easy task to perform, as one person could not keep all the participants in their field of vision at the same time, and move around the space. Despite this, there was strong engagement with the use of Soft Focus and Viewpoints Kinaesthetic Response.

The High Jump challenge required participants to jump simultaneously, so the audience could see all their feet in the air at the same time. Additionally, the goal was to land together in such a way that the audience would hear the sound of a single landing. This task became more difficult when the participants were unfamiliar with each other or when the group is large. Each subgroup consisted of 10 people. One of the groups successfully managed to land almost simultaneously, demonstrating a high level of concentration and engagement from its participants. However, synchronization proved to be more challenging for the other two groups.

According to the literature review, people can pay attention to something outside their direct line of sight and see periphery items, without overtly indicating where their attention lies (Schwartz & Krantz, 2018; Perkovic et al, 2023; Rezaei et al, 2024). We suggest that Soft Focus and Viewpoints of kinaesthetic response are related with peripheral vision and covert attention. In Stops and Starts and High Jump tasks, we could observe whether there were a group synchronization and collective behaviour.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing connection between concepts from cognitive psychology and dance. Research in cognition enhances our understanding of perception, attention, memory, motor learning, and decision-making during improvisational movement. This area of study offers many opportunities to improve dance skills and can help dancers enhance their creativity and responsiveness during improvisation. These insights can provide innovative methods for teaching and performing dance. One critical aspect that significantly influences a dancer's performance is the quality of attention during a dance routine. By understanding the different types of attention, dancers can optimize their performances, leading to greater precision, coordination, and expressiveness on stage.

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Biography

Fatima Wachowicz is a dancer and researcher. She holds a post-doctorate from Western Sydney University, Australia (CAPES/2015). She develops experimental research and uses methods from cognitive psychology to investigate the cognitive processes that occur during Viewpoints training. She is currently an Associate Professor at the School of Dance and the Postgraduate Program in Dance at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil, and is the leader of the ARTE Research Group: Dance, Cognition and Creation (CNPq).

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