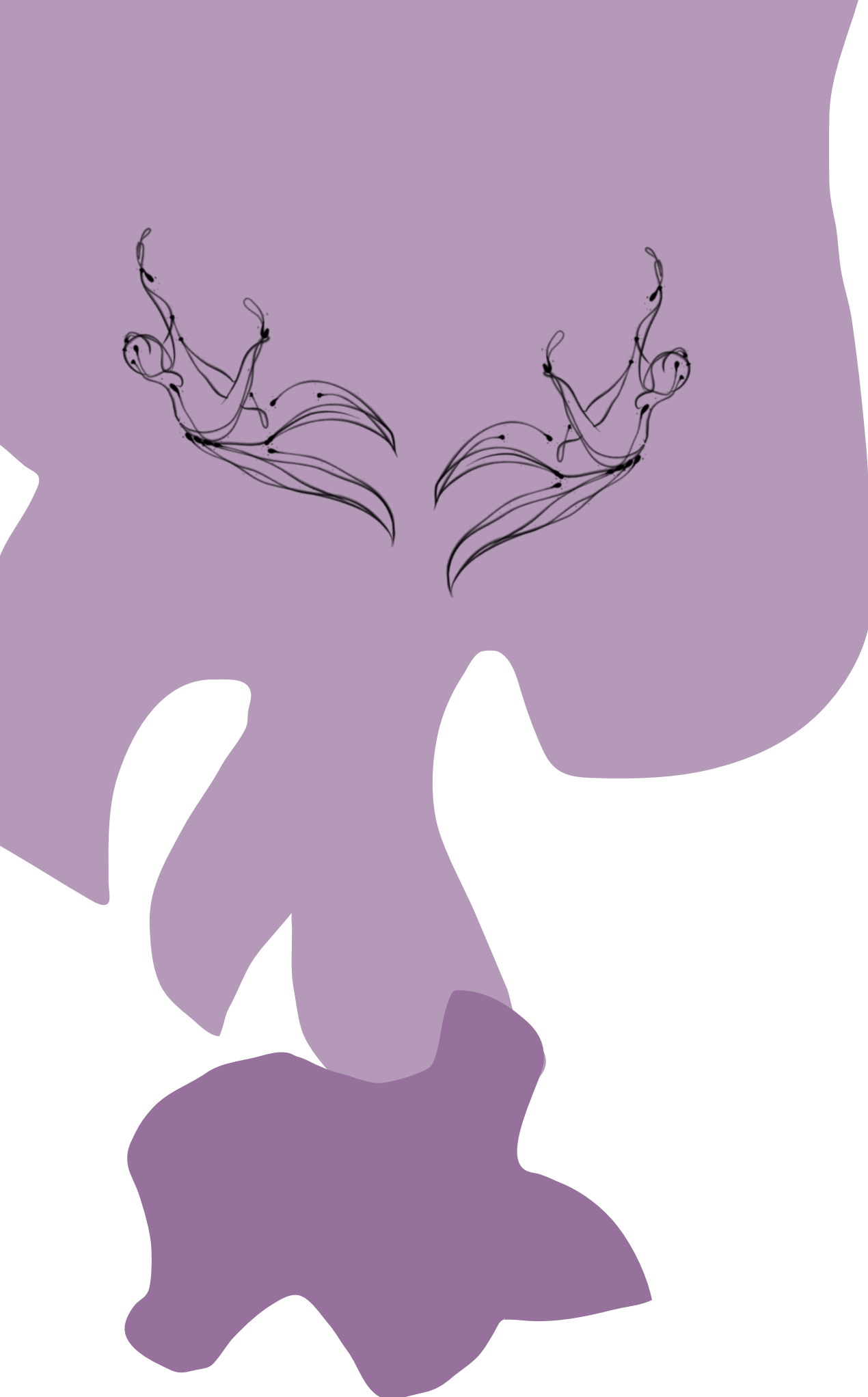


**16th conference of
Dance and the Child International**

Reports





Introduction to the Dance and the Child Ljubljana Declaration

Vesna Geršak

University of Ljubljana, faculty of Education, Slovenia

Jeff Meiners

Adjunct Lecturer at Adelaide University, Australia

Abstract

This paper presents the Dance and the Child International (daCi) Ljubljana Declaration, created during the daCi Slovenia 2024 conference as a framework for dance and arts education. Building on the UNESCO Abu Dhabi Framework for Culture and Art Education (2024), the declaration emphasizes lifelong learning, cultural diversity, inclusion, equality, human rights, and intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. It forms the basis of the daCi Strategic Plan 2024–2027 and highlights the importance of arts education in promoting justice, freedom, peace, and human dignity. The declaration continues daCi's collaboration with UNESCO through earlier declarations in Copenhagen (2015) and Adelaide (2018), as well as initiatives linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Officially signed at the University of Ljubljana during the 16th daCi conference in July 2024, the declaration was endorsed by representatives of education, culture, and UNESCO, affirming dance as a democratic and inclusive tool for children's healthy development and social well-being.

Key words: arts and cultural education, daCi conference, daCi Ljubljana Declaration, dance education, UNESCO

Context

This paper introduces the Dance and the Child international (daCi) Ljubljana Declaration made during the daCi Slovenia 2024 conference. Here we explain the context shaping the formation of the document that provides a framework for dance education. The declaration calls for respect for the diversity of cultures, plural identities and cultural expressions and for the promotion of intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and lifelong learning. It refers to the principles of inclusion, equality and human rights and forms the basis for the daCi Strategic Plan 2024-2027. It also affirms a commitment to strengthening the role of arts and cultural education, recognizing that the broad dissemination of culture and the education of humanity for justice, freedom, and peace are essential to the dignity of humankind. The declaration was proposed by Dance and the Child International (daCi) and followed the UNESCO Abu Dhabi Framework for Culture and Art Education which in early 2024 emphasised the need for lifelong learning in culture and art within all types of educational settings, and for placing culture and the arts at the heart of education policies, strategies, curricula, and programmes (UNESCO, 2024).

Two earlier daCi conference declarations supporting UNESCO were also signed, in Copenhagen, Denmark (2015) and in Adelaide, Australia (2018) (dance and the Child international website 2026). Notable too, daCi's 2022 virtual conference from Toronto, Canada, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, included an online project Exploring our Futures as a new initiative that focused on the importance of Good Health and Well-being, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Francis & Fisher-Stitt, 2023). The daCi 2024 Ljubljana Declaration was signed at the sixteenth Dance and the Child International (daCi) conference which took place in Ljubljana in July 2024. The official signing ceremony was held at the University of Ljubljana on 12 July 2024, in the presence of the Vice-Rector for the Arts, Professor Matjaž Drevenšek and Professor Dr Janez Vogrinc, Dean of the Faculty of Education. The conference Honorary Patron was the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO and the Slovenian Secretary General UNESCO Gašper Hrastelj witnessed and endorsed the signing of this new Declaration. The signatories of the declaration were the Minister of Culture Dr Asta Vrečko (Slovenia), the Minister of Education Dr Darjo Felda (Slovenia), daCi Chair Dr Jeff Meiners (Australia) and the conference convenor from the Faculty of Education and future daCi Chair Dr Vesna Geršak (Slovenia). On this occasion, Minister Dr. Asta Vrečko emphasized:

The document is timely and of great importance, as it highlights creativity within the educational process and is grounded in the principles of respect for human rights, cultural diversity, the plurality of identities and cultural expressions, as well as the promotion of inclusivity, equality, and intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. Dance also contributes to reducing inequalities; it is a democratic tool of expression, and movement is essential for the healthy development of a child. Therefore, I am proud that it was signed in Ljubljana, alongside an excellent conference that we were very pleased to support (Vrečko, 2024).

daCi and UNESCO

From the early formation of daCi in the late 1970s and 1980s, internationalism was a driving force in steering group meetings that recalled the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child

emanating from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNICEF, 1989). A connection with the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was established with daCi archival documents showing that in 1979, the Uruguayan dance advocate and UNESCO secretary Madame Susana Frugone de Basualdo brought a message from CIDD-UNESCO President Bengt Häger, Sweden, inviting 'DACI' into the CIDD (Conseil International de la Danse) membership (Meiners 2026). DaCi's specific responsibility would be the promotion of dance for children in every country of the world. In 1980, 'DACI' became an autonomous branch of the CIDD organization with the aim of promoting the growth and development of dance for children on an international basis" with a constitution ratified in 1982 in Sweden, during the first conference of the new association, Dance and the Child international (daCi) (Meiners, 2026, pp. 178/179). In an earlier article, longstanding daCi member Ralph Buck outlined the background and importance of daCi's advocacy efforts to UNESCO via 'Declarations' as developed at conferences in Copenhagen 2015 and then Adelaide 2018 (Buck, 2019). The article posed the following questions:

- Why are international arts education organisations developing such advocacy declarations?
- How are these organisation typically going about the development and ratification of these declarations?; and,
- What are we advocating for?

The first two daCi declarations addressed the *Lisbon Road Map for Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2006) which originated from the first UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education followed by the *Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2010) which developed from the second UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education.

The Copenhagen Declaration

As part of a strategy for heightening the profile of dance as a key artistic area within UNESCO's 21st Century Skills, Ralph Buck and Erica Rose Jeffrey were engaged in a week of dialogue with children, young people, researchers and teacher participants at the daCi conference in Denmark to formulate the content of the Copenhagen Declaration. This conference aimed to support an understanding of a person's multi-faceted identity through dance as an embodied cultural and social experience which formed the base for presentations (Svendler Nielsen & Koff, 2015).

The Copenhagen Declaration outlined how dance can contribute to education, in its broadest sense, in terms of sustainable development and contribute to a sense of global community. Via the Danish UNESCO national commission, the document furthered UNESCO's on-going international work to strengthen children and young people's involvement with the arts during their education.

The Adelaide Declaration

Building upon the Danish declaration, approaches were planned to stimulate future social action through dance via a dance/health project in Australia through keynotes or by

creatively workshopping action plans for The Adelaide Declaration. The conference titled Panpapanpalya 2018 connected with arts and health initiatives as well as UNESCO's goals for sustainable development as well as aligning with the Seoul Agenda for arts education (2010) ratified by 192 member states at the 36th session of UNESCO's General Conference, conference resolution 36/C55, 4 November 2011 (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/arts-education/official-texts/development-goals/>). Presenting the site specific project *Dance Epidemic* (Ausdance, 2020) at the Centre for Creative Health at the Royal Adelaide Hospital and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, Panpapanpalya considered how educators' work with dance might address pressing global environmental, societal and cultural concerns across generations, reflected in the Adelaide Declaration aligning with plans identified by the UNESCO Australia Commission.

Why declarations?

As Buck (2019) notes:

Historically, within the procedures for UNESCO policy development, non- government organisations (NGO's) have utilised the 'declaration process' as a means for stating an organisation's issue or direction or call for action. Typically, the declarations are representing a 'grass roots' community perspective and the declarations are formulated in partnership with a representative from a particular country's National Commission for UNESCO. Strategically the declaration is most valuable when it echoes or advances a National Commission's local strategic planning.

The article continues to explain arts organisations' creation of advocacy declarations through UNESCO processes along with international activism for arts education via the World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE) with a strong sense of accomplishment amongst the advocacy groups. Noting that in 2012, UNESCO launched International Arts Education week (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/arts-education/>), it is highlighted too that UNESCO shifted its priorities, and that resources provided for Arts Education were removed. Non-Government Organisations have continued advocacy for arts education finding a strategic correlation with the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (<https://en.unesco.org/sdgs>), as exemplified by actions at the daCi Canada 2022 (Francis & Fisher Stitt, 2023) and Slovenia 2024 conferences.

Lobbying for UNESCO's support and recognition via 'declarations' are seen to be part of daCi's strategic action in the face of inadequate national, regional and local government support and understanding of the benefits and value of dance as well as limited education in many communities across the world. So too, dance practices within local, indigenous informal communities are not recognised for the educational role they play in maintaining community identity, cohesion, empathy and pride. Importantly, the declarations recognise the need for better educated teachers in changing wide-ranging formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts to foster wellbeing, social empowerment and engagement in society. The declarations both support UNESCO's work and seek to influence 'top down pressure' on nation states (Buck, 2019) with 'bottom up' influence through daCi's collaborative conferences and research:

The big picture aim is that the international profile of arts education is supported by UNESCO so as local action is more sustainable. DaCi is now playing an active role as a key stakeholder in the development of such declarations that support important public awareness of the value of dance in people's lives (Buck 2019).

The declarations are prime examples of how research and practice can enrich and inspire each other in relation to developing new knowledge and future political strategies towards enactment in practice.

Development of the daCi Ljubljana Declaration

In February 2024, daCi was represented at the UNESCO Abu Dhabi Conference on Culture and Arts Education by daCi Chair Jeff Meiners, former Chair Susan Koff and Malaysian Representative Muhammad Fazli Taib Bin Saearani. Presentations were made with World Alliance for Arts Education colleagues to ensure dance for young people had a voice at this influential global event.

DaCi made a special contribution to providing *Recommendations* along with articulating *Implementation Challenges* for the new Abu Dhabi Framework (UNESCO, 2024). Discussion acknowledged inherent complexities including the need for countries' autonomy for implementation of the Framework, with arts education organisations encouraging action strategies within countries/regions. These included 'Implementation modalities' as follows (see pages 5-6 of Framework for details):

- Governance, legislation and policies
- Learning environments
- Learning experiences
- Teachers and educators
- Digital technologies and AI
- Partnerships and interinstitutional coordination
- Financing
- Research and assessment.

The UNESCO Abu Dhabi Conference on Culture and Arts Education brought together Culture and Education Ministers from around the world and united relevant UN agencies, intergovernmental-organizations, and UNESCO partners in the field of culture and education to share practices and innovative ideas, as well as strengthen a global alliance for culture and arts education. Ahead of the daCi Slovenia 2024 conference, Jeff, Susan and Fazli were also able to meet the Slovenian delegation which included Asta Vrečko the Minister for Culture.

As a result of the conference, UNESCO Member States adopted the new UNESCO Framework on Culture and Arts Education (UNESCO, 2024). The document provides a set of principles all stakeholders can follow for shaping and further institutionalizing culture and arts education. It outlines specific goals such education should pursue and concrete dimensions where synergetic links between culture and education should be fostered for the benefit of all learners.

Following the UNESCO Abu Dhabi conference, daCi members developed a draft daCi Ljubljana Declaration. Led by daCi colleagues Ralph Buck and Sarah Knox at the University of Auckland, a consultative process included opportunities for feedback leading up to and at the daCi Slovenia 2024 conference.

Another important development was that the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO accepted the honorary patronage of the Dance and the Child international conference, which took place in Ljubljana from 7 to 12 July 2024. The Slovenia conference provided daCi with an important opportunity to discuss daCi's work with UNESCO with the daCi Ljubljana Declaration thus providing a global framework for dance education and informing daCi's Strategic Plan for 2024-2027 (Strategic Plan 2024-2027, 2024).

Conclusion

We conclude with the thoughts of the Slovenian Minister of Culture, Dr Asta Vrečko, shared during her opening address at the conference (Vrečko, 2024b, p. 17):

Dance is one of the most democratic fields of art as it transcends languages and cultures. Dance exists in a wide variety of forms, dance categories and genres. It brings together people from many different social groups. Movement often precedes thought, therefore, precedes words and language. Dance is an intuitive activity. Expression through artistic movement has been intrinsic to mankind since forever; it is a way of experiencing and executing freedom. In certain circumstances, dance can even become an urgency, an inevitable way of celebrating freedom. This is why different branches of dance education, be it teaching about dance, its history and its social role; teaching dance itself, various techniques and expression forms, dance creativity or; use of dance approaches to teach other subjects, not necessarily linked to dance – these are all vital for the development of a tolerant, open society in the future. Children who get a chance to move freely and express themselves artistically since a very young age, will grow into adults capable of liberated thinking and creating; they will therefore contribute to a wider community and society. Dance offers countless opportunities for activities that connect different branches of society, it can be linked to healthcare, education, social security. A person who has had a chance to experience dance during their school years, can choose to build an artistic dance career but will also possess several skills and abilities that can be used in other professions.

Building on these reflections, the daCi Ljubljana Declaration stands as both a call to action and a shared responsibility for all those engaged in dance pedagogy. It invites educators, artists, researchers, and policymakers to continue advocating for inclusive, accessible, and meaningful dance education across diverse contexts.

At a time when education systems are increasingly challenged to respond to social, cultural, and environmental change, dance offers a unique space for embodied knowledge, empathy, and dialogue. As such, the Declaration not only affirms the value of dance in the lives of children and young people but also calls for sustained commitment to its development as a vital component of education for the future.

In this spirit, we are encouraged to continue working collaboratively—locally and globally—towards a world in which every child has the opportunity to experience, create, and learn through dance.



Figure 1, 2: Signing of the Dance and the Child Ljubljana Declaration at the University of Ljubljana. Photo: Mirjam Lamut.



References

- Adelaide Declaration. (2018). *Dance and the Child International*.
[daCi - Dance and the Child International - Rights of the Child](#)
- Ausdance National. (2020). *Dance epidemic – Panpapanpalya* [Video]. YouTube.
[Dance & Science: 'Dance Epidemic – Panpapanpalya' \(2018\). International Dance Congress.](#)
- Buck, R. (2019). Another declaration, why? *daCi December Newsletter*.
- Copenhagen Declaration. (2015). *Dance and the Child International*.
[daCi - Dance and the Child International - Rights of the Child](#)
- Dance and the Child International Ljubljana Declaration. (2024).
<https://daci.international/about/daci-ljubljana-declaration>
- Francis, N., & Fisher-Stitt, N. S. (2023). *Dancing into communities Canada virtual conference proceedings July 10–15, 2022: 15th conference of Dance and the Child International*.
<https://hdl.handle.net/10315/40811>
- Meiners, J. (2026). Critical activism for dance education: Dance and the Child International (daCi) 舞蹈教育的批判性行動主義: 國際兒童舞蹈協會 (daCi). *Taiwan Dance Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.6303/TDRJ>
- Meiners, J., & Rowlands, K. (2025). The (im)possibility of primary arts teacher education *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 15(2), 51–72.
- Price, D., Meiners, J., & Nathie, M. (2022). Panpapanpalya 2018: Dance, gathering, generations, learning: An overview. In D. Price, J. Meiners, & A. K. Brown (Eds.), *Panpapanpalya 2018: The 2nd Joint Congress of Dance and the Child International and World Dance Alliance Global Education and Training Network* (pp. 51–71). Ausdance. <https://ausdance.org.au/?ACT=73&file=2446>
- Strategic Plan 2024–2027. (2024). *Dance and the Child International*.
[daCi - Dance and the Child International - Strategic Plan](#)
- Svendler Nielsen, C., & Koff, S. R. (2015). *Exploring identities in dance: Proceedings from the 13th World Congress of Dance and the Child International, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, July 5–10, 2015*. University of Copenhagen. <http://www.ausdance.org>
- UNICEF. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
<https://www.unicef.org.au/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2006). *Road map for arts education*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384200>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2010). *The Seoul agenda: Goals for the development of arts education*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000190692>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2024). *UNESCO framework for culture and arts education*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/02/WCCAE_UNESCO%20Framework_EN_0.pdf
- UNICEF. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
<https://www.unicef.org.au/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>
- Vrečko, A. (2024a). Ministrica dr. Asta Vrečko podpisala deklaracijo o pomembnosti plesne pedagogike [Minister Dr. Asta Vrečko signed the declaration on the importance of dance pedagogy]. Government of the Republic of Slovenia. <https://www.gov.si/novice/2024-07-12-ministrice-dr-asta-vrecko-podpisala-deklaracijo-o-pomembnosti-plesne-pedagogike/>

- Vrečko, A. (2024b). Welcome from the Minister of Culture. In V. Geršak, N. Meško, H. Korošec, G. Pakozdi, & N. Jurjevič (Eds.), *I – body, I – dance: daCi Conference Program* (p. 17). Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana & Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities. <https://www.pef.uni-lj.si/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/daci2024.pdf>
- World Alliance for Arts Education. (2024). *Towards the implementation of the UNESCO framework for culture and arts education*. [WAAE side event wccae2024 - WORLD ALLIANCE FOR ARTS EDUCATION](#)

Biographies

Vesna Geršak, PhD is Assistant Professor of Dance Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, where she teaches dance pedagogy and creative movement in preschool, primary, and special education programmes. Her work focuses on embodied learning, dance pedagogy, and arts-based education. She leads and collaborates on projects connecting the arts, sustainability, and education through innovative learning environments. She is the author of numerous scholarly publications and a co-signatory of the Dance and the Child International Ljubljana Declaration. Since 2024, she has served as Chair of Dance and the Child International (daCi). She received the Congress Ambassador Award for her international contributions to dance education and for organizing the 2024 daCi World Conference.

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.

© 2026, Vesna Geršak and Jeff Meiners

Appendix 1: daCi Ljubljana Declaration

Dance and the Child international Ljubljana Declaration

1. **We the delegates and national representatives of Dance and the Child international (daCi), meeting in Ljubljana, 7 to 12 July 2024, propose this Dance and the Child international Ljubljana Declaration as per the following statutes:**
 - 1.1 We recall the UNESCO Constitution affirming that the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of humanity. We also recall Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserting that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”
 - 1.2 We note commitments made by the international community for culture and arts education, notably enshrined in relevant UNESCO international Conventions, Recommendations, Declarations and initiatives in the fields of education and of culture, as well as the three World Conferences on Arts Education in Lisbon in 2006 in Seoul in 2010 and in Abu Dhabi in 2024 whose respective documents, the Road Map for Arts Education, the Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education and the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (CLT-ED/WCCAE2024/1) laid the foundations for addressing challenges and articulating shared and evolving understandings of culture and education and fostering policy and dialogue.
 - 1.3 We recognize that education systems must be strengthened and transformed by taking decisive steps in order to rethink the purpose, content and delivery of education to promote equity and inclusion, quality and relevance, as echoed in United Nations efforts, such as the Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and the Transforming Education Summit (2022).
 - 1.4 We also recognize that culture and the arts are integral to the holistic and inclusive development, resilience, and overall well-being of individuals and societies. Culture is at the heart of what makes us human, and provides the foundation of our values, choices and relationships with one another and with nature, endowing us with critical thinking, a sense of identity, and the ability to respect and embrace otherness. We further recognize that the arts play a vital role in the flourishing of human imagination, creativity and self-expression, which nurtures exploration, curiosity, and expands the possibilities of creation, while opening up social and economic prospects for all learners, particularly in the cultural and creative industries.
 - 1.5 We recall that on 10 July, 2015, the occasion of the Dance and the Child International conference, ‘Twist and Twin: Exploring Identities in Dance’, the daCi Executive Council, Congress participants, and with respect to the Danish National Commission for UNESCO 2014-2017 Strategy, adopted ‘The Copenhagen Declaration’ providing a dance agenda for young people and educators across the globe; that on 12 July 2018, the occasion of the World Joint Dance Congress between Dance and the Child International and the World Dance Alliance, ‘Panpapanpalya: Dance, Gathering Generations, Learning,’ the daCi and WDA Executive Councils, with Congress participants, youth delegates of the congress, and with respect to the Australian National Commission for UNESCO 2016-2020 Strategy adopted ‘The Adelaide Declaration’ providing strategies for accessible and inclusive dance education across the globe.
 - 1.6 We endorse the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education grounded on a humanistic and empowering vision of culture and education, and we support the implementation of the Framework by its Member States and Associate Members, notably by providing operational guidance, as relevant; undertaking advocacy and facilitating policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and standard setting, as relevant; convening global, regional, national and civil society stakeholders for the implementation of the Framework; and monitoring progress towards the strategic goals.
 - 1.7 Recognizing the shared responsibility of researchers, practitioners, learners, policy makers in arts education and education for sustainable development and the capacity of arts education to effect social and cultural change.

2. Dance and the Child International (daCi):

- 2.1 Calls upon dance and all educators to foster learners' inclusion and equity in and through dance education in formal, informal and non-formal contexts;
- 2.2 Calls upon dance and all educators to be guided by human rights, be responsive to global challenges, and foster global and local citizenship;
- 2.3 Calls for dance education curriculum and pedagogies that respect diverse cultures and a plurality of identities and cultural expressions;
- 2.4 Calls for dance and all educators to promote intercultural and intergenerational dialogue for lifewide and lifelong learning;
- 2.5 Calls upon dance educators and all educators to provide dynamic, creative, safe spaces and opportunities for all learners to engage in, about and through dance, developing skills to shape resilient, just and sustainable futures;
- 2.6 Calls upon dance and all educators to promote interdisciplinarity through the integration of creative movement as a learning approach for teaching academic subjects;
- 2.7 Calls upon dance and all educators to broaden concepts of dance learning environments and to develop partnerships with museums, galleries, dance companies, and local community organizations;
- 2.8 Calls upon dance and all educators to advocate for all learners to be taught by professional, competent, committed, and well supported teachers at all levels of education who are able to respond to diverse learning needs;
- 2.9 Calls upon dance and all educators to promote peer-to-peer learning;
- 2.10 Calls upon dance and all educators to support the creative, ethical, and critical use of digital technologies that respects diversity and that enables participation;
- 2.11 Calls for research that may empower teachers at all levels of education to better provide dance education and support evidence-based policy making, implementation and advocacy;
- 2.12 Declares its intention to actively promote the shared goals of arts education and education for sustainable development in cooperation with UNESCO.

Proclaimed in Ljubljana, 11 July 2024, on the occasion of the Dance and the Child International Conference 'I-body I-dance' in consultation with the daCi Executive Council, Conference participants and with respect to the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO's support for the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education.

daCi
dance and the Child international



dr. JEFF MEINERS
daCi Chair



dr. ASTA VREČKO
Minister of Culture




dr. VESNA GERŠAK
daCi Chair Elect and
2024 Conference Chair



dr. DARJO FELDA
Minister of Education



Embrace: Dance and Taiwan Sign Language (TSL)

Wang Ruping

University of Taipei, Taiwan

Abstract

This report documents a dancer's experience of working with members of the Deaf community in Taiwan between 2022 and 2024. Situated within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), it explores how dance can function as a form of non-verbal communication and as a bridge between different linguistic and cultural practices. Through a series of creative workshops and the development of a performance work, the report reflects on the intersections between dance and Taiwan Sign Language (TSL), highlighting both the possibilities and challenges of inclusive artistic practice. The reflections suggest that while TSL remains a distinct and culturally embedded language, dance can enable shared understanding through embodied interaction. The report emphasises accessibility, mutual learning, and inclusive participation in the arts.

Introduction

This report documents a dancer's experience of working with members of the Deaf community in Taiwan. The project was initiated by a team of scientists aiming to develop an assistive technological device for deaf users (Appendix 1). My role was to explore performers' needs in order to inform the design process, and this report focuses on that contribution.

As a dancer, I have long been interested in how people move, particularly in the expressive qualities of sign language. The invitation provided an important opportunity to investigate similarities and differences between dance and sign language as forms of non-verbal communication.

This research took place between 2022 and 2024 in Taiwan. During this time, I facilitated a series of creative workshops, engaged with the Deaf community, and contributed to the creation of a performance work. This report presents reflections based on that experience.

Context and Key Concepts

Dance is understood here as both an artistic practice and a mode of communication. It functions as a creative, educational, and research tool, enabling participants to explore movement, expression, and interaction beyond spoken language. In this project, dance supported communication, creative exploration, and observation of how TSL users express meaning through movement.

Deaf culture refers to a community shaped by shared language, identity, and cultural practices. As noted by Friedner and Kusters (2020), it includes sign language use, collective identity, values, and artistic expression. In Taiwan, individuals may identify as deaf, hard of hearing, or Deaf, instead of hearing impaired (Chao, 1994; Cheng, 2016), reflecting diverse perspectives within the community. Taiwan Sign Language (TSL) is a fully developed linguistic system used in Taiwan. It is used by deaf individuals, children of deaf adults (CODAs), educators, and others engaged with the language.

This report focuses on interactions with TSL users in Taipei between 2022 and 2024 within the broader framework of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)¹.

¹ “To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources.” (CRPD, Article 30, 5(b))

Process

The research process consisted of three stages: establishing a creative environment, developing a performance work, and presenting the work to the public.

Stage 1: Establishing a Creative Environment

The first stage aimed to establish an environment in which participants could express themselves freely through creative dance. The process began with an introductory session involving the research team and the administrative staff of the Taipei School of the Hearing Impaired. The aim was to create a shared understanding of the project and to build trust among participants.

The administrative staff recruited 22 volunteer students aged 13–18 to participate in the workshops. Throughout the process, I worked alongside an interpreter and a research assistant. Additional participants included dance students from Department of Dance, University of Taipei, and young dancers from Shuangyuan Junior High School in order to support an inclusive artistic environment.

We began by sitting in a circle and introducing ourselves through movement and language. This approach enabled participants to express their identities in both spoken and signed forms. Their creative movements appeared naturally embedded in their everyday communication.

Activities such as mirroring, following, and group movement enabled observation of both individual expression and group dynamics (Appendix 2). Differences in communication styles became apparent, including varying levels of fluency in TSL and spoken language. Although these differences required additional time, they also enriched the collaborative process.

Stage 2: Developing the Performance Work

The second stage focused on creating a performance work with selected participants. Six performers were chosen with attention to diversity and inclusion. The selection process revealed a personal bias towards participants who responded quickly, highlighting the importance of recognising less visible forms of participation.

The work, titled *Embracing*, incorporated elements of TSL, dance, and spoken language. During this phase, the school invited me to lead additional creative dance classes, extending the scope of the project beyond the initial research framework. These sessions provided further insight into participants' engagement and creative expression.

Visits to cultural spaces, such as art museums, were also included, offering opportunities to observe how participants responded to visual art in embodied and immediate ways.

Stage 3: Public Presentation

The final stage involved presenting the work to an invited audience, including members of the Deaf community. The performance was also documented through a dance film.

Audience feedback was generally positive. However, some TSL users noted that the work did not reflect natural sign language. This feedback highlighted the complexity of translating between artistic and linguistic systems, as well as the importance of respecting the integrity of both.

Findings and Reflections

The experience demonstrated that while TSL is a distinct linguistic system, dance can provide a shared space for interaction through movement. Rather than replacing language, dance complemented it by enabling embodied forms of understanding.

This experience challenged the assumption that dance and sign language can be directly translated into one another. Instead, it revealed that they operate within distinct yet intersecting expressive systems. Inclusive artistic practice, therefore, involves creating conditions for coexistence rather than unification.

The process reinforced the idea that dance can be accessible to everyone when appropriate conditions are established. Accessibility emerged not only as a technical or institutional issue, but as a relational practice requiring time, trust, and sensitivity.

Extended engagement with the Deaf community also deepened my understanding of different modes of perception, communication, and humour. These insights emphasise the importance of long-term interaction in developing meaningful inclusive practices.

Conclusion

This report reflects on an experience situated at the intersection of dance and Deaf culture. It highlights the potential of dance as a medium for inclusive engagement while acknowledging the distinctiveness of linguistic and cultural systems such as TSL.

The experience revealed the breadth of human expressive potential and the importance of equitable access to the arts. When such access is supported, inclusive artistic practices can emerge without diminishing difference.

Future work will involve continued engagement with TSL, collaboration with the Deaf community, and further exploration of inclusive approaches in dance practice.

References

- Chao, C.-M. (1994). *Deaf culture*. Chinese Deaf Association.
- Cheng, S.-C. (2016). *A story pieced up from her hands: Life narrative of a deaf person* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Taipei.
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2022). *IDA's compilation of CRPD Committee's concluding observations: Article 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport)*. https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/article_30_crpd.pdf
- Friedner, M., & Kusters, A. (2020). Deaf anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 49, 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-034545>
- Ju, M.-C. (2018). Deaf? Hearing impaired? Why insist? <https://theinitium.com/article/20180530-notes-the-name-game/>
- Li, C.-H. (1999). *Deaf culture*. Department of Labor, Taipei City Government.

Biography

Wang, Ruping is a native of Taiwan. She is Assistant Professor, in the Dept. of Dance, at the University of Taipei and has been a full-time faculty since 2009. She has explored the fun and challenges in practicing Dance as research and implemented this idea in her academic career to create, to perform, to teach, and to share the studies of Dance. Before this academic career, Wang danced professionally with the Jose Limon Dance Company, Martha Graham Dance Company, Metropolitan Opera Ballet, and Repertory Dance Theatre among others.

© 2026, Wang Ruping

Appendix:

Appendix 1: The Team Members

Head of the researchers:

Dr. Huang, Szi-Hwa
Department of Education, University of Taipei

Researcher:

Dr. Liu, Yuan-Chen
Graduate School of Curriculum and Instructional Communications Technology,
National Taipei University of Education

Researcher:

Prof. Tseng, Ruai-Yuan
College of Dance, Taipei National University of the Arts

Co-Researcher:

Assistant Prof. Wang, Ruping
Department of Dance, University of Taipei

Co-Researcher:

Assistant Prof. Lin, Li-Chuang
College of Dance, Taipei National University of the Arts

Research Assistant:

Lin, Yi-Heng

Appendix 2:

Workshop activity plans (In order to reflect considerations under CRPD guideline, this document is displayed in its original format and content.)

聽聽異世界

臺北啟聰學校課程規劃

課程名稱：舞蹈潛能開發

課程目標：認識啟聰學生舞蹈的能力，開發舞蹈表達與創造的潛能，培育舞蹈欣賞的能力。

課程介紹：

舞蹈是人類的本能，人人皆能舞蹈，當代社會出現許多不同的舞蹈表現都是人類長年共同積累、探討、嘗試，以致於創造的成果，與人所生處的環境、思想與時代息息相關。在後現代舞蹈藝術家提出人人皆能舞蹈的主張之後，打開表演藝術創作的空間。

本課程將由臺北市立大學舞蹈學系專任助理教授 - 王如萍，帶領舞蹈系在校生共同透過舞蹈的實踐，深入理解聾啞人士的舞蹈潛能，以視覺引導或模仿的方式認識啟聰學生的舞蹈動能，開發啟聰學生舞蹈創作與展現的潛能，藉由參觀表演活動與實際參與舞蹈創作與表演，深入探討現有舞蹈發展對聾啞人士的幫助或限制。

教學方法：

*示範與引導：藉由動作示範，輔以視覺引導的方式，啟動即興舞蹈的動能；

*創作與表演：藉由教學者自編的教材主題引導學生展現個人舞蹈特色；。

*觀賞與分享：藉由觀賞同儕表現的機會以及舞蹈表演活動，啟迪學生對於舞蹈的觀察或提問，作為舞蹈創作表現的基礎。

課程規劃：(2022年三月²)

週次	主題：教學目標	課程活動
— 3/1	舞蹈的身體： 藉舞蹈即興化解人際之間的無形藩籬； 展現每個人的舞蹈潛能； 建立課堂活動模式。	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家共同舞蹈。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1 引導與跟隨； 3-2 鏡像舞蹈。 4. 共享時間：圓的聚合與分散。

2 第一次將這類課程帶進啟聰學校，現有課程規畫都將因為實際進入教學現場後的發現，適度調整。三月課程執行到第三週後，根據研究發現規劃未來課程。

二 3/8	名字的舞蹈： 深入認識課堂中的每個人； 以動作分析認識手語和舞蹈動作中的表現方法； 開發舞蹈創造的潛能。	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家伸展肢體。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1以手語和肢體描述「舞」這個字； 3-2以時間、空間、能量的變化，展現個人對「舞」的想像。 4. 共享時間：用肢體在空間中書寫自己的名字，以肢體回應書寫者。
三 3/15	舞蹈的對話： 培養舞蹈創作與表現的基礎能力； 藉由已知創造對話；	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家伸展肢體。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1 以名字的舞蹈作為對話基礎； 3-2 藉由時間、空間、能量的元素，豐富對話的可能。 4. 共享時間：自由的舞蹈對話。
四 3/22	圖文與舞蹈： 借用幾米的《擁抱》啟動舞蹈的創造； 培育舞蹈的創造力、表現力與欣賞能力； 分享參與者對擁抱的認識或期待。 *3/23將安排校外教學，參觀舞蹈班聯合展演。	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家伸展肢體。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1 以幾米的《擁抱》作為創作出發； 3-2 藉由不同的舞蹈表現，探討想像與詮釋。 4. 共享時間：擁抱。

五 3/29	綜合課程： 加強舞蹈的表現能力。	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家伸展肢體。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 表演練習： 3-1 名字的舞蹈； 3-2 舞蹈對話； 3-3 擁抱。 4. 共享時間：舞蹈圓的聚合與分散。
-----------	---------------------	--

2022年4月³

週次	主題：教學目標	課程活動
一 4/12	舞蹈的時間與空間： 藉時間與空間的元素，開發每個人的舞蹈潛能。	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家共同舞蹈。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1 時間元素的探索； 3-2 空間元素的探索。 4. 共享時間：圓的聚合與分散。
二 4/19	舞蹈的合唱： 。	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家伸展肢體。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1 以手語和肢體描述「舞」這個字； 3-2 以時間、空間、能量的變化，展現個人對「舞」的想像。 4. 共享時間：用肢體在空間中書寫自己的名字，以肢體回應書寫者。

3 因疫情因素，四月課程無法如期進行。原定時間改做創作排練之用。

三 4/26	舞蹈的對話： 培養舞蹈創作與表現的基礎能力； 藉由已知創造對話；	1. 暖身活動：由小骨助教帶領大家伸展肢體。 2. 動作的韻律：由流動的動作，引導大家練習表現動作中的韻律感。 3. 創作引導： 3-1 以名字的舞蹈作為對話基礎； 3-2 藉由時間、空間、能量的元素，豐富對話的可能。 4. 共享時間：自由的舞蹈對話。
-------------------	---	---

師資簡介：

王如萍，專職任教於臺北市立大學舞蹈學系，以舞蹈創作表演以及學術研究的方法回饋於教學。曾任 José Limón Dance Company, Metropolitan Opera Ballet, Martha Graham Dance Company, Repertory Dance Theatre, Mary Anthony Dance Theatre, 台北越界以及台北民族舞團舞者。

