



Transcription of recorded conversation

Dance Dialogues w/ Teaching Dance:

Helen Herbertson, Jo Lloyd, Raina Peterson and Jo White

6 May 2021 at WXYZ Studios

Tom Pritchard - 00:00

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to this panel discussion this evening Dance Dialogues with teaching.

I'd like to acknowledge that we're gathered on the unceded lands of the people of the Kulin nation, where I feel the enormous privilege to work, live and create each day. I want to begin tonight by paying my deep respect to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend this to any other First Nations or indigenous people joining us today. I also want to acknowledge the many and varied country that our zoom audience is joining us from this evening and offer my respects to the traditional custodians of their lands too.

So, my name's Tom Prichard and I'm the Studio Program Producer here at Lucy Guerin Inc. I'm a white cis man in my mid-30s, with short brown hair, brown shirt, black trousers and black shoes. We're here tonight in Studio One at WXYZ Studios in North Melbourne. It's a large white-walled space with grey floors, and the panel and I currently sat, or standing, in front of a large black curtain.

I'll be back towards the end of the talk for that Q&A. But for now, I'm going to hand over to Jo White.

Jo White – 01:15

Thanks Tom, and thanks Lucy, for having us here for this discussion tonight. My name is Jo White, and we've got two Jo's here so yes, just to distinguish that.

I'm a white cis female, and I have on a sparkly skirt with silver sneakers and a white t-shirt. I'm a performer and teacher and dabble in small making in Melbourne. I have... my initial performance and dance experience was through a ballet framing. So in Europe, in the Hamburg Ballet, and then came back to Australia, gave up for a little while, and then decided that I still wanted to keep dancing so I came to the VCA. And through that met Philip Adams from BalletLab who I worked with for many years, and have been working as an independent artist around Melbourne.

I have always had a passion for teaching. And for me it originally started through the framing of pilates actually back in Germany when no one really knew what that was. And I started to learn that modality and realise that I really enjoyed the sharing and that exchange that happens during teaching. And so, from there, it just felt like a natural progression to kind of... to step into other teaching, or actually I think the way that I started teaching dance was when I was...after I graduated from the VCA Jenny Kinder had asked me if I could come and teach



ballet. And at that point, I was like, I don't want to have anything to do with ballet, that's another life, I don't do that anymore. But anyway, I said yes.

Through that I spent 10 years actually at the VCA. And I didn't only teach ballet, I also taught contemporary, and I taught yoga, and I was involved in teaching repertoire. And I even covered Kinesiology when Wendy wasn't there. So I had a really amazing experience and opportunity to be a teacher. Which I love. And in the Melbourne dance community I have taught here at LGI for many years, I teach ballet and contemporary and I've also taught at Chunky Move right across the program from Ballet, to contemporary, beginners. Yeah, so I think I'll hand on there, to Jo.

Jo Lloyd - 04:18

Hello, I'm Jo Lloyd. I'm a female, 45, tall, orange hair, pale skin. I'm wearing a bomber jacket that's black, and some colourful pants that have spray paint kind of patterns on them. And some sneakers.

I think I started dancing at eight and my teacher was Marilyn Byrne, and she worked a lot with imagery, which was quite interesting, and it was ballet but her imagery, and the way she taught was what fascinated me, I think. And it took me a while to realise that when I started teaching, I could feel myself doing certain things with ideas moving into action. And that was the way I taught. And that's the way I teach now. And so I want to acknowledge her, she's no longer around, but she was quite crazy in a lot of ways with her energy and almost too much for some people.

But she asked Arthur Turnbull to teach, and he was a fantastic contemporary teacher... I think you say, Arthur, some say Arthur. And he would turn up in these flares made out of lycra that went all the way up over the shoulder with a low neck, like almost like a weightlifter. I had to stay back because my sister was older, and she'd do that class, and I'd wait to get picked up after her class finished.

Classic tale. I was fascinated, he said, join in, and I was, you know, two years younger than the others or three. And I remember taking off the tights and the ballet shoes and going from turnout to turn in. And it was a whole new galaxy, you know, I was like, wow, what is this. He created this amazing work, this big fabric, at the end of the year in the concert, and they wrapped this one dancer up by running around with the fabric.

So those early experiences still play a part in what I do. And the way I teach. I think the turning point was after VCA, I started working with Sandra Parker. And she was running Dance Works, it was the first year she was the director of Dance Works in 1998. And as part of the teaching process to begin the day, each of us would teach, and I was petrified because I was the youngest, and the other dances were Michelle Heaven and Nicole Johnson and Carly Mellow. And, you know, they just seemed to understand the way they wanted to teach. And I was nervous, but I had to do it. You know, it was like you're up Thursday. So I did that. And I just taught from what I was interested in. And I think that's still my approach. And I guess what we need was my other approach, what are we preparing for?



And I think that brings us back to this week, when I started working with some dancers on a project. And I said, every day, let's all share the preparing of the day. And so each of the dancers in the process are teaching each day, and I felt happy, because I think one of them might have taught one of their first classes, maybe I'm not sure I haven't asked them. But they're in the early phase of teaching. And I think that was what I had to do. And that's what they've had to do. And they were marvellous at it.

That was Tom Woodman. He took... he went through Anna Halprin's ritual. And, you know, we commented on how it was like, you know, possibly 50 years, since that developed, since Anna developed that. So, I'll say that much. And over to you Helen.

Helen Herbertson - 07:59

Hi, everyone. I'm Helen Herbertson. Female, early 70s, I'm in blue, tonight, a blue jumper, blue trousers.

I'm a choreographer, that's how I think about myself in relation to dance. Although dancing and teaching have always been part of that, sort of, triangle. And the teaching began, just quite naturally... I think teaching ballet as a young... as one of the old girls, you teach younger girls, and for me, it was just a great way to understand what I understood, to try to help somebody else to understand. So those three things have always been part of dancing for me.

And over the years, at any given moment, one or two of them, or the three of them are in operation... Like I might be choreographing, so I'm not doing a lot of teaching, or might be dancing and making something, or really involved in... deeply involved in teaching and doing nothing else. But they...they're together for me, they're what you're making, how you're...what you're making, what you need to be able to do the making, how you're working to dance the making, they're all sort of... they're all connected.

Anyway, that's enough.

Raina Peterson - 09:48

Hi, my name is Raina Peterson. I am of English and Fijian/ Indian heritage and I am wearing black hiking boots, light blue jeans, a brown jumper with kangaroos on it, and an Indian woolen scarf that is red and brown. I've got light brown skin, facial hair, and black-brown hair in a top-knot. I am non-binary, my pronouns are they/them.

Hello, I'm a dancer, choreographer. I use my training in a form of classical Indian dance called Mohiniyattam, it comes from the southern state of India called Kerala. And so I use my training in Mohiniyattam to create experimental dance works, of which I have four and one dance film. Yes, that's my creative practice.

So I was born and raised on Gunaikurnai land. Yeah, grew up in regional Victoria, which I don't recommend. If one can avoid it, it's really hard growing up as a person of colour in the country. But that's where my dance practice began. Somehow, miraculously, there were Fiji-Indian families scattered throughout Gippsland. And we connected and formed a little community organisation. And at some point, someone was like, oh, let's get the



kids to learn some dance. And then we can like, show it, you know, perform it at Diwali. And people were like, yeah, it's a great idea. And so like, some of the kids, yeah, we were just kind of taught dances to perform it at Diwali every year. And that's how I started dancing.

And then at one point, we ran out of Auntie's who willing to take on this task. So my parents were on the hunt for a classical Indian dance teacher, but my parents don't really know that much about classical Indian dance. And there happens to be... in The Age there was an article about Tara RajKumar, who was doing a, like a show at the Alexander Theatre. And so we went and check that out and we're like, oh, that was pretty good, yeah, let's go join his school. So yeah, so I just randomly got enrolled in her dance school purely from an Age article. Mohiniyattam is like, there are several forms of classical Indian dance and Mohiniyattam is like one of the least popular forms. Like no one likes it very much.

It's beautiful. I really like it. It's...it's really slow, which I think is partly why it's so unpopular, but it's sort of defined by a slowness, and lots of deep bends from the torso. I think it's really lovely, but no one else does. It's not very popular outside of its home state. And I'm one of the few professional practitioners of this art form in Australia.

Yeah, so I do that. And I think because it's so deeply unpopular, for me, teaching is really important, because I think that, you know, more people should be, you know, be learning this dance if they have the...if they want to. Yeah, so that's...so I teach Mohiniyattam and I also teach yoga as well. And that's me. Hello.

Jo White -13:38

Thanks Raina. I forgot to say before that I'm also, I'm taking part in the discussion, but I'm also facilitating a little bit. So I'm just going to go to a question now, for everyone.

Where does teaching locate itself in an individual's wider dance practice? And what opportunities might it offer to them?

So Helen, have you got any?

Helen Herbertson -14:05

Well, I'm just back at the triangle again. Yeah, like for me, I think those three things are very connected. And there's so much kind of teaching on the floor that happens when you're a choreographer, or when you're working with other dancers or...So I just see those three things as being very integrated. And for anyone, I think trying to explain or describe what you're doing, or trying to unpick the complexities of a dance being. There's a lot to figure out. So the teaching part of it, I think, is very helpful in trying to get out what that is.

Because I think dancing, you know, it's physical, it's up here, it's in here, it's all sorts of things. I'm not really making much sense. But let me hand it on to someone.

Raina Peterson -15:47

I think I create work for people. Like, I think the audience is quite important in my work, like, I know, some people kind of like, the audience is incidental or whatever. But I think for me, the audience is people that I think... I think about how they're going to experience my work. And so I think teaching kind of connects me to community.

And I think being grounded in community is kind of important for my practice as a Mohiniyattam teacher, or as a teacher generally. And so I think having that connection to community kind of informs how I create work, because it's connected to audience as well. So I think that's something for me.

I also think, like, well, teaching, like, it keeps me fit. It keeps me grounded in my technique, because if I'm not grounded in my technique, then my students aren't. And I know that when...If haven't been teaching for a while, like since the, you know, lockdown, and everything. And my form is reflecting that. So I think that, yeah, like having a teaching practice is definitely great for my form.

I also think that, like teaching, has brought me awareness of... a deeper awareness to my form. Because I'm in...in teaching I'm...or in, you know, preparing my classes or whatever, I'm asking questions about what is essential to this practice? You know, what is important, what am I... what's, the essence of this particular technique? Or this particular step, or whatever. So I think... and also like, what is the essence of this art form in general? Like, is it just really slow? Or is there more happening to it.

But I also think that like, sometimes, like teaching exercises can inform my practice. And the best example of that is...okay, so yes, my dance practice is quite slow. But when I'm teaching, like, I'll slow it down even further, to which, you know, builds strength, takes a lot of strength and control to dance extremely slowly. And it also helps build familiarity and muscle memory with a particular step. So I really, you know, as an exercise, I'll really ham up the slowness and really drag it out. And at some point, I was like, this is really cool, I'm going to play with this a bit. And so now dancing really...like really slowly has been something I've been playing with choreographically, because I think that there's something about slowing something down to such extremes can be really interesting in awareness.

Like, what you... your awareness as a performer, like, is it...Is it meditative? Is it painful? And also the awareness of the audiences in terms of what they're noticing. Does it build energy? Or does...do you lose people's attention, and how to create that tension...So I think yeah... so that's an example of a teaching exercise that has gone on to directly inform things that I play with as a choreographer.

Jo Lloyd - 19:38

I was nodding a lot to both of you because it crosses over in my mind some of the things you said. I think the kind of feedback that comes with teaching is huge, for me. It's almost like an hour or an hour and a half class is everything. You know, it's like, I think it maybe started when I had children. And it was like...I wasn't in the studio much, not that the studio is the only place for dance practice.

But in terms of exchange, it meant that that hour and a half class on a Saturday morning after I breastfed was my hour and a half in the studio. So it became this vital hour and a half. Not to be selfish in saying that, but just that...that was going to be an hour and a half in my week. And it became really valuable, because, you know, it wasn't just...you know, the class doesn't exist without the students, right? So if I turn up and no one turns up, it doesn't really happen. So when it would happen, this feedback would be really important.

So it is that thing of yes...the relationship between dancing, performing, making...integrated in that moment. And community too it's like, I get to know people that feed back into my process or comment or, you know... I sometimes do this thing called Conference, you know, let's have a conference after the process we've been doing, and the context that I'm teaching in has to inform what it is, you know. I can't just railroad it and do it all for me, I wouldn't want to.

I think the feedback of what the content of the class is, is to do with the context, and the context is the people, and also the organisation or the housing of it. And I think those things really fascinate me in terms of what I can offer, what the feedback is, what the hierarchical slippage can be. And I guess, what is on the agenda? So are we, you know, practicing for something, maybe not, maybe we're just perceiving for that time were together, and you know, attending to our body. And if we can do that, then maybe we're preparing for anything.

Or, you know, I'm often wondering what do we need? You know, so it's almost, yeah, thinking about it now, it's almost everything, actually. Not to be corny, but you know, the class can be a performance for me. Not for me, but a performance context, you know, acting as if that moment is performance practice, as well as making sure you've got your technique or, you know...what are we training for? What are the aspects of training? You know, I think that's really fascinating.

Jo White - 22:51

I think I'm gonna segue... but you all mentioned about community, and meeting, and sharing. And I think I'm probably crossing into the next thing that we're going to chat about. But having a place where we come and take class together, I think is... taps into something very human and very... that that sense of connecting to ourselves very deeply through a sort of internal framing, but then within that context, also connecting out to the other people in the room, the teacher who's teaching.

And, yeah, I think one of the things about taking a class that is so important outside of working with our bodies, and thinking about themes and concepts that we're working with, is that sense of connectivity together. Yeah, that's a chance... from a teacher's perspective, as well, as much of it as it is a giving out, it's also very much a reflecting in through the whole process of creating the class, and then that... when you're in the class, that line that you're walking between sort of kind of having an idea... or could be very set, or you might be working with something that's not so set, but you're always walking this line of knowing and also then intuitively sensing what's coming back and what's, you know, what's in the room.



And so, that skill, of being able to navigate that space of holding the space and kind of, in that sense as the teacher but also being very attuned to the group, I think is something that informs choreographic practice and also, humaneness. I think it's a really useful skill in this world. Yeah.

All right, let's move on. This is a big one. What should be taught? Is a daily practice or a daily class, still relevant to dancers? And what skills do they need to build and maintain? Jo and I were talking about this before, and we were...it's like, such...there's so many aspects of this to unpack.

I think, just to kick it off, it's always relative to the context, and every context of teaching is a different one, even if you're teaching the same class every week. I mean the same, you know, framing, ballet or contemporary or classical Indian dance. Every time you walk into that space, it's a different group of people, it's a different day, it's a different, you know, energy in the room, that what is taught is, in any particular situation, needs to be responsive to that. And so in that way, from my perspective, even though there is a planning of what is going to be taught, it can't be prescriptive. Yeah, well, it could be, but...yeah, it can...it can't be prescriptive in the way that it's some kind of intellectual concept of, I'm going to teach you this, there's so many more, kind of, facets to it than that.

Anyone else like to add to that?

Jo Lloyd - 27:16

I think it's that thing that we tend to come back to ritual or, or rhythm... a rhythm in our, you know, practising. So whether that ritual is the same, or just the idea of, you know, going back to the body again, and whether it's this practice, or that practice, or going for a swim before something, not everyone has the same needs. So... but I think there is an overarching sense that we need a rhythm.

Last year we needed a rhythm. Last year we needed a ritual, and, you know, people found their way...like it was a sense of order. So I think that is something... it's like going again. Like I often think of like the... one of the definitions for reincarnation is to re-enter the flesh. And I think often I re-enter the studio, I re-enter the flesh. So whether I'm going to lay in constructive rest, do that practice, or that practice. So that's the only thing I tend to think of in terms of what... Do we still need class, you know?

Sometimes no, but that's up to every individual, right? Like, whatever ritual or rhythm you're in. You know, sometimes you want to sever that, and that's... the most important thing is it's available to people isn't it you know, that it's... that we can make it available to people.

Helen Herbertson - 28:46

You know, I think every day is a new day for the body. So I think you need something every day to enter into whatever that is, physically. And I think sometimes that can be something highly technical and really structured and ordered and, you know, has real goals that you're trying to get to physically and other days, it would need to



be something more imaginative, or for something less... because dance isn't just one thing. I mean, it's been a long time since I've done a daily class, but I think it's all about context in the end.

When I had a company we gathered together every day and did class. But I'm not sure that you can do without it, all the time. I think there's certain rigours and demands in the body that you need, and need a certain level of technical capacity to be safe and to work from, or against. But I don't think they can be just sort of nothing. I don't. I can't... I don't think you can take it all away. There are so many choices now of what training could be. But I still think those fundamentals, those physical fundamentals, will always be required as a place to begin. Like doing your scales, you know. Do them forever. You can do them without thinking, do them with your eyes closed, and then you could do something else. But without that, you're bumping around in the dark.

Jo White- 31:03

It's sort of that beginning point as well, isn't it. Regardless...wherever you go with it, it's accessing a beginning, wherever that is, and whatever that is. And then following the natural steps that appear. Whether it's going for a swim, or whether it's lying constructive rest, the process of sequencing a class, a warm up, a practice. The... finding the beginning, and then the sequential process of just attending to each next thing that needs to be attended to until you're warm, or you're complete, or you know, you feel it.

Helen Herbertson - 31:36

I think physically, you're always collecting things that seem to work and form something quite solid. And then you have those moments where you're going away from that, that doesn't seem important anymore, something else becomes interesting or...So it seems to go like that. Because it's a complicated thing.

Raina Peterson - 32:09

I just want to share the routine of one of my colleagues. She's like me, experimental contemporary dance, with a background in classical Indian dance. And what she does every week is twice a week, she will travel for an hour and a half to another classical Indian dances place. And for one hour, she will teach her friend steps, like the basic techniques of classical Indian dance, and some new choreography. And they'll swap and the other person will teach her like the basic steps and they'll do drills together and more choreography.

And I thought that was really beautiful. Like, sort of an intense...the kind of exchange of teaching because I think there's something about teaching, which helps you to notice what the technique requires. And it helps you to, sort of, to understand the step more, if you can see what's wrong with it, and what you need to say to articulate it better.

But I kind of like that routine.

But yeah, to answer the question, I think yeah, unfortunately having discipline is an important thing to have when you're a dancer. And yeah, I think sort of being grounded in technique is really important. And to have that consistency, as well.

Jo White - 33:45

It's interesting what you said then about the eyes, the seeing, and the...as you teach more and more, things start to appear that you can share. And yeah, that just comes from seeing. From being and seeing.

Something else that I wanted to say that slightly, again, off on another avenue, but something that I have noticed over the last little while, is that collectively, and this has been happening for a while, this hierarchical teacher student relationship is shifting, and has been for a while. I know when I came up through my training, it was very much like, there was the teacher and we were down here somewhere and there was a fear and collectively it feels like there's a shift in that. And, to a place where everyone is more empowered and there's less, kind of, it's much more of an exchange then a teacher knows all, person receiving.

So yeah, it feels like, not just in the studio, but culturally and also out in the world, that collectively a shift is/ has been happening. Yeah, certainly from my experience anyway, I kind of have that sense that people are now... the kind of personal responsibility to step up for your own experience inside of a teaching, a class. That you're not just there so the teacher can deliver what it is, and you're going to warm up, but that you actually are willing. And yeah, a willing participant in that exchange to then...for yourself create an experience within that framing.

Raina Peterson - 36:16

Yeah, can I follow on from that, that really resonated with me because I think some of my best teaching... being a student receiving teaching from teachers moments, have been from where my teachers who have been peers. I think...I don't want to air too much of my community's dirty laundry out. So there's like, around, I think, 60 classical Indian dance schools in Victoria. And I think there's this...there's a bit of a shift happening, where there's these like old school teachers who are quite punitive and quite territorial around the art form. There's some, like this yucky stuff. And I think that there's now starting to be, more teachers of my generation who are kind of being like, yeah, we don't want to do that anymore.

Like I teach at Studio J dance in Richmond. And that's...and it's... they mostly teach Bollywood kind of stuff. But there's a number of classical Indian dance forms taught there as well. And kind of teaching in that context was really cool, because the teachers are all like my age, and also it's away from that old school dynasty type of school that's really authoritarian.

But yeah, I've had amazing sort of learning experiences from you know... my dance partner, Govind Pillai, I've learned from him and he teaches, but he teaches Bharatanatyam as part of like, our company, Karma Dance, as well as at Studio J. And I really look up to him as a teacher, because he's really generous and really considered very thoughtful towards his students. And I've also had amazing learnings from Ramona Yagnik, who is my Kalaripayattu teacher that's in martial arts, and I think there's something...Yeah, it was quite exciting for me to learn from my peers as opposed to these like old more authoritarian teaching styles because there's a humility there. And there's a kind of respect for the people that you're teaching....there's kind of a... we are peers, and there's less of that intense hierarchy.

So yeah, I'm really excited about receiving more of that kind of learning, I guess, like from peers and also to, kind of ...I'm excited about new styles of teaching happening where there's you know more respect for other people's agency and boundaries and autonomy and...and stuff like that, and a greater regard for ethics. As opposed to the role of teacher being this big ego thing. Teacher as authority. Whereas I feel like, teacher as peer, you know, who has something to share with you, sounds a lot more comfortable for me as both a teacher and as a student. So yeah, I'm excited by different possibilities in teaching.

Jo White - 40:00

That might also be a question that some of you here that come to class in the morning, might want to talk to when we have questions as well about what it is that you benefit from. From the morning classes.

Yeah, thanks.

What needed for an artist to become a confident teacher?

Helen Herbertson - 40:25

Practice.

Jo White - 40:30

Yeah.

Helen Herbertson - 40:32

With your friends with people who are in different contexts. Sorry, the microphone again. To, you know, to be sharing your ideas about working with lots of different people, in lots of different contexts.

Practising...practising teaching with your friends for a while. I've got a dear friend who always tests her workshops out with her other friends. So we try them out, we give really good feedback, we come back the next week, she tries again, like just... until it sort of sifts down to something that she feels happy about, and then it goes public. Sort of context like that, where you get to try things out and articulate your ideas. And... because again, it's complicated.

Jo White - 41:38

And interesting sharing as well, you know, some people know that they don't want to be a teacher, or you know, that they're not... it's coming out in another way. The sharing is happening in it in a different...

Helen Herbertson - 42:00

And those other contexts can be great. Im trying to remember situations where I'm with a group of actors suddenly. And so I've got to try and speak about moving. Find a way to talk about it that's... that works...

Jo White – 42:07

Relative to the situation

Helen Herbertson - 42:10

You know, one example of that is trying to give a physical feedback to an actor. Which, over time, I've learned has to be just the tiniest little thing, because they make such big changes. And, you know, I'm really talking about a tiny little thing though, completely, completely changed their physicality.

Yeah, just just...to sort of grow your understanding of what your language is in talking about it and how you speak to other people about it, and how you try to articulate what it is, how it is, how it works in the body, in your body. There's a million conversations to be had.

Jo White - 42:58

Yeah, and that through Lucy Guerin Inc, I've been running this teaching mentorship program over the last five months. Well, we had a workshop and then the teachers that were taking part have been teaching. And one of the main things that we've been talking about is exactly what you were saying, summed up as investigative mind. Just that really, delving in on every level of, okay so, you know, what is it that I'm interested in? And then what's under that. And then what's under that. And then right to the point of like, Okay, I'm feeling completely nervous. I don't know...I don't want to stand in front of these people. I don't want to. So what's behind that? So this constant sense of just every little thing that's in the way, going into it.

And I think also from a teaching perspective, the ability to self-reflect without being critical. So no good/ bad paradigm, but just the sense of being able to...to know how things are going in the moment and also post the event, and then to be able to for yourself, critique that and take it as a learning growth opportunity, because that... it's just presenting itself all the time. There's always something to get interested in about how you're conveying the information. What is in it for yourself to learn from. There's just like, for me, teaching is just like, the growth, the potential for personal growth is so huge, I think. So that yeah, that framing of self reflection, I think is something that's really integral.

Helen Herbertson - 44:50

I think one thing that's great about it, is that there's bodies in the room to give you information about how what you're talking about is going in, or not going in, or is being understood. Like it's, it's a great vehicle for that, that sort of loop. It's... you're not on your own. So that's something that's really fantastic about it.

And then what worked today, might work tomorrow might not...But it can just keep... like all the information you need about what's required in the classes. It's in front of you. So anyway.

Raina Peterson - 45:40



I think having a spirit of generosity, and humility, and yeah, meeting the students as they are. I have like Survey Monkey surveys. And they're really cool because then I can get some really detailed feedback about what people are into and what they're not into. And just kind of being open for feedback. So like, being contactable if they want to share something with me, but also having the survey monkey always open so that if they want to give anonymous feedback, they can just use that to let me know. So I think like, yeah, just kind of being able to sort of, you know, read feedback in the class from people, people's bodies, but also, yeah, being able to have them communicate directly with you is really cool.

Yeah, and accountability. And I think like, I don't know, ethics is something that I've kind of...I think having a clear sense of your own ethics, and where your boundaries are in terms of how you're going to respect your self, and how you're going to respect other people is really important. So yeah, having clarity to yourself around what you will and won't do and what your limits are is pretty, pretty cool. Yeah.

Jo White - 47:18

This might be a good point for us to come to some audience questions.

Is that me?

Just wait, Tom, are you? Oh, yeah. Yes, of course, Jude. You just told me you're going to relocate, or should we? Okay. All right. Well, we'll start dude, would you like to begin? With we'll just ignore Tom relocating. He'll relocate while we chat.

Audience member #1: Judith Walton - 47:51

First of all, thank you, thank you for sharing, you know, you're really quite personal details and ways, of understanding teaching and what you share with your students.

I think when I came to this talk, I had a slightly different perspective on it, perhaps, that I was thinking about. So perhaps I'll share that and then you can see what you think about it. In a way, it's picking up on that question that was asked about how important is training. And, you know, we had a variety of sort of responses to that, I think.

And I came at that from the way of thinking, well fortunately rather than unfortunately, I think that it is vital to have some sort of physical practice that brings you into attunement with your body. And what that physical practices could be a whole range of things that you might decide to do. And I think that for a particular reason, not only I think that because I don't think you can claim to be a dancer, choreographer, if you don't have that. That's my personal opinion. But I also think it's a bigger issue about what it is that makes dance distinctive. What is it that makes dance, dance? So if you don't have technique, can you still call yourself a dancer and a choreographer? If you've never done a dance class, can you still claim that title?

So I think there's sort of a wider issue there for me anyway, about what it is that makes our discipline, particular and distinctive. And I think there's questions about technique that come into that, for me. There's a lot of other things, but because it's been raised here, I think technique, or practice, let's call it practice, because technique has all these different sorts of connotations to go... and training does to, I much prefer to think of education, that by educating people into a way of tuning themselves and being physically skilled.

So that was that was a diff... perhaps, you know, I feel like that some different... maybe a small p political aspect to the idea of having a training or having an education. And if I may, I'd like to just bring up one other thing that I think hasn't been raised here tonight that is pretty important to me as an extension... I've taught for many years, but within an institution rather than within a company, as such. But that's how... that's to what extent do you think, and this is to everyone, to what extent do you think it's important that you have knowledge about the history of dance. And that you understand and have knowledge about the context in which you're working and making work and going to a dance class, having a technique taught to?

So it's a question I guess, of history, both local, like, what you know, and what you understand about the lineage of dance in Melbourne, just to be very local. Or internationally, how you think this place of dance sits in, you know, an international global frame as well. I'd like to... I think that's a sort of a, an area of education... And I suppose I came thinking of, you know, I'm thinking very holistic about what makes a dancer you know, what makes a person a dancer, or a choreographer, and it is wide and people have said on the panel, and I think there are all these aspects that are important.

For example, and Lucy's here, so I can use it as an example. But the work that's being made for Rising you know, *PENDULUM*, I wonder how many of you have seen Forsythe's work. And, you know, there is a close, and I'm sure Lucy would agree, there is a close resemblance, or referential reset... So that these sorts of similarities and cross currents and borrowings from different things are very common in the arts. And they're good. There's nothing wrong with it.

It's more... I think, sometimes within the visual arts, it is that you acknowledge where your references are coming from. So there's a term in the visual arts, it's used quite often called 'after'. So I'm making this work 'after' Forsythe, or 'after' Cunningham, or whatever. So it's a sort of... or 'after' Loie Fuller... So it's a sort of acknowledgment that there is a historical past that you have... you are gaining from this, you know, you are a part of it. I think it's a really good thing. Some people find it, that you know, then you're not making anything that's new, but you are. You're making something new, because every time like, you know, people were saying earlier, every time you step into a class, every time you step into a studio, you're making something new and Lucy's work is very new. For a new audience, for the dances that were involved, it's a whole new concept quite different to what Forsythe was doing. And it's just... they are similarities. That's all.

So yeah, I won't go on too much longer; taking the floor. But I think it's good to have to perhaps air some of these more wider, perhaps 'small p' political ideas with you and whether you think that's important, you know, that you are educated in this way. To have discernment about what you see. To have knowledge about how it

fits in the world. And how that can be imparted in technical classes too. That doesn't need to be a lecture. You don't need to get that as a lecture. You get that from working physically with someone. You understand where they lie, where they you know, where they are placing themselves into that technical... if it's somatic practice, for example, you know, that's a whole other area it's... you understand through the act of doing it. Is perhaps what I'm trying to say.

Jo White - 55:27

Yeah. There's quite a lot of big questions there. Do you want to talk?

Jo Lloyd - 55:28

Yeah, yeah, I was just thinking...I think it's incredibly important to acknowledge. And just... by way of not being ignorant. I think it's incredibly important. I try to do that, and I sort of think I pass on as much as I can, from what I've been given, you know, fortunately been transmitted. I'm very fortunate. And I try to give. And then I think, well that's up to the students, because it's an exchange. So it's up to them what they do.

And I remember one student recorded my class, and I've never recorded my class. And I only knew because they did it secretly and then they said, I listen to it all the time, I use it all the time with it. I was like right do you. I mean, so it's that thing of like, you don't know...you don't know what's gonna happen when something gets passed on to you. But I think it's about respect and not being ignorant. So I think, and that's hyper perception. You know, that's like, what you ideally want to be working with, with yourself.

So yeah, that's just what I was thinking when you were talking. I think it's... we want to be perceptive as dancers like that's our highly tuned instrument, you know. Like, so what, whatever that is for you, I think, in whatever way you can work on that, then that's, that's many things. That's the book you're reading. That's the conversation you're having. That's, yeah, that's sort of many things. And I'm excited by those sorts of things that come into the body, that come into the class, that come into the exchange with others. They're people, they're not dancers or choreographers. We don't have to name that. I think they're people. You know, someone said to me once, oh how do you choose your dances? And I thought I don't, I don't know. And they said, maybe you should ever audition? I said, I don't know. And then I think No, it's people, that's... it's about the person. I think that's so much about what we do. So much about our dance is us.

And so I think that's part of what, made me think that... there's some of the things I thought while you're speaking, yeah.

Audience member #2: Lucy Guerin – 58:00

I think it's really complex in dance, you know, because it's not, it's, you know, each body contains so many references. Like, from, you know, the way your parents stood to, you know, your first dance teacher, to the other dancers that really impressed you, and your teachers, your choreographers that you work with. And it is something that I think we all have been talking about, you know, for a while about how to credit and how to



reference the information that we have learned. And I know that, you know, many of the teachers that teach here do reference that during teaching, just in terms of information, and where that information may have come through, the kind of lineage of that information, you know. But it is quite...it's quite hard sometimes to pull all that apart, not that that we shouldn't try, and not that there's some very clear, clear references that can easily be sourced.

Yeah, I think it's a really interesting thing. I think it's really, really important that we do try to know as much of that, you know, to pass on as...like you were saying, Jo, pass on as much as that as we can. But I just...is it alright if ... I just had another question. And I guess, as part of the reason why, you know, wanting to have this dance teaching mentorship that Jo's been leading, and also just having classes at the studio at all. I feel like... I mean, for me, teaching, you know, is about giving tools to students or dancers so that they can do something creative, I guess, or have a kind of a... the ability to work with the choreographer or make their own work or...and I guess it's also, I mean, sometimes it is just an end in itself to do a class and enjoy it.

But for me, I guess I'm interested in figuring out what is, you know... What do people need now, because it's so different when, you know, when I learned, you know, dance, and I did Graham and Cunningham and ballet. And although those skills which are now you know, in this context, not so useful, really. I mean, they are useful, because they're really rigorous, and, you know, when, you know, they teach you about rigour, they teach you about what it is to really, really understand something. But then there's just...ways of making work have just expanded and exploded, you know, so extremely. And it's very much about collaboration and improvisation and, you know, the agency of everybody in the room and, that, yeah. So when thinking about what classes to offer, you know, it's quite... it's really diverse, you know, what you could...

Helen Herbertson - 1:01:34

But I think that reflects that's happening. That, you know, everything has just gone off. Because there are just so many ways that people make work now. But, I still think you need a base level of skill to do with, you know, be able to stand on your bones and move your... you know, there's a basic level of training. That you need...and so many other things are like... and you need a lot of experience of all these different styles, there are lots of contemporary styles around, that would be great to get a grip on. That's are... So there's a ways that people choreograph... But the fundamental alignment, moving through space, being able to, you know, be able to...you know, fundamental basic...I move my... you know, I can move from here to there, because I know where my bones go, and I...You know, that sort of thing. I think you need... ballet to gives you that a ballet that doesn't have any frills. It's just, you know, that's just skills.

Audience member #2: Lucy Guerin – 1:02:50

It's really cultural too, you know, isn't it. like when you look at the alignment of western dance, as opposed to, you know, other forms of dances. Like say Balinese dance. Or you know...I don't know. Anyway, I agree with you, whatever it is, it's kind of safety isn't it.

Helen Herbertson – 1:03:00



Yeah. Yeah, safety, muscle structure. Like a way that a...the stripped fundamental body might be able to dance. And then you can put anything on top of it. Ask it to go over there, or ask it to do... ask it to do anything. Because it's safe, it knows where it is in space. It can get up and down, it can go fast, it can stop. It can imagine. You know.

[SECTION REMOVED]

Jo White - 1:03:41

I might... I want to add to what Helen said, was saying... just go backwards to go forwards again. And also in relation to what... to Lucy's question. There's...despite the framing of it, again, it's sort of sequential action. So the organising of the body in a way where there's a reference point of connectedness, which I would relate to as internal scaffolding, as a place of stability, a safe space to then be able to venture out from.

So there's something about in class that connecting to the internal, and how you organise from that place, to then move out. And you can...you can come at it from, you know, from other places, but that sense of agency, autonomy in... and the way that you know that your body is organised safely, to then access all the different realms of possibility. I think is really, really important. And I always think about that when I'm planning class. And also, the context is just so important. Who are the people in the room? What do they need in the day? What are they going on to do?

Yes, yes.

Audience member #3: Shian Law - 1:05:28

We're talking about teaching, right? So it's a fundamental discourse on knowledge. So I think there are three sort of fundamental understanding of knowledge. We can say that knowledge is or knowledge needs to... find. Knowledge is power. Knowledge is freedom. And knowledge with truth. They have to match that, in order to be knowledge... This is philosophy...

And dance is a of formal knowledge. And education is a form of delivery of knowledge, right? It can be sharing in the pedagogical, like somatic methods, all kinds of different methods, you know... teaching's a structured delivery. So when we talk about, do we need to know history? Yes, we need to know history, dance history... because if I bake a chocolate cake, but I have never tasted anybody chocolate cake, and I say this is the best chocolate cake ever, you will be a lie.

So that....this information is not applicable to anything, by myself, it's my sentiment. So that cannot be truth, and that it can't be knowledge. So knowledge has to be truth. But when we talk about truth, it's very contentious. It changes, it needs to be updated. This is what we're experiencing... it's that what do we need now? Because we're searching for truth. So what is truthful for Helen might not be true for me, vice versa, because our body can do different things, and understand different things. And then I think in the traditional way of teaching dance is to negate one....No other segment, possibilities and truth is just one. You know, I think



that's not so great about the culture of dance teaching, which is often that, you know... And I think you need authority to teach, because you have to be able to say, that as truth. Because if you can't say that, then no one will come. Because you would be telling lies... but nobody wants that so, it needs authority.

And then that leads to my question, okay...because this is my job, I need to come to every sort of talk that... is it diverse. So this question of diversity, like whether your working environment's diverse, and because I believe that diversity helps to define the truth. Because... diversity without the difference. Otherwise we're talking about just my chocolate cake. It doesn't work. That is my question, yeah, is it diverse, do you think, in your environment?

Jo White - 1:08:16

Our personal teaching experiences?

Audience member #3: Shian Law - 1:08:20

You think, is it diverse enough in your environment?

Helen Herbertson - 1:08:26

Probably, not. Probably not enough, it's probably not ever diverse enough...

Raina Peterson - 1:08:41

My classes were quite diverse for a classical Indian dance class. We had like, obviously, a lot of South Asians, but people of other ethnicities were there as well. And I think it's...I also had a range of abilities, which was interesting. And I... that's sort of something that's kind of, you know we... we're not all kind of fit, able-bodied, 20 something year-olds. And so, I think, yeah, how can dance be more accessible to different...It's not just about being able...it's not just about ability and fitness. Surely.

You know how... if it's about expression through movement, then surely anyone who isn't completely paralysed can participate in that. So yeah, I guess it's an interesting question, of how to make dance accessible for other people to practice, but also to watch, like, who comes to see these shows. And working with students who are over 50, who are children, who are chronically ill, or have a disability has been kind of interesting in making me think about movement, and what is beautiful or expressive movement. And who can access it and who can participate in it? Yeah.

Audience member #3: Shian Law - 1:10:25

I grew up watching classical Indian dance as well. It's just around my environment. So I think... I saw one of your videos like in New South Wales (*inaudible*) and then you were like...you were doing something with your eyes, basically. And it sort of sent, a sort of like, a huge signal to be me, and then it reminded me of like, different sort of scenes that I've seen in my life. like my (*inaudible*) teacher, when she was flirting with a boyfriend on the public realm. Like that image of the eyes that you have...you perform, sort of around the lesson, bringing that up, or something. And that's only... when I have that kind of experience, then I can understand in that moment,



what your eyes are doing. Do you know what I'm saying? So I'm trying to say, alternative theory is like, it takes a very sort of varied, sort of like, experience, in order to get to some knowledge. Because what I have... the knowledge I have over performance is not something that you can have, because you haven't had that...to live through that.

So what I'm trying to say is like, we have to create an environment that is quite...have different, kind of, life experience, in order to access information that we haven't known yet. Because we cannot know what we don't know. I think this is what teaching... teaching environment...you know, or even the students, like everyone has...every single he has to be diverse. In order for human progress to happen. I think.

Raina Peterson - 1:12:16

Yeah, I'd like to talk about eyes.

So in classical Indian dance, the eyes are very deliberate, like, where we look, how we hold our eyelids, everything is really deliberate, if not choreographed. And we have really ripped eyeball muscles. Apparently, that's the thing. And I actually think that one thing I find confusing about watching...I guess other forms of dance, is when they don't use their eyes. Because when I look at a dancer I'm looking at... When I look at a person, generally, I look at their eyes, and that is the same for when I'm watching dance. And so I find it confusing when the eyes aren't... when they're just like, you know, when they're not sort of in engaged, or they're not sort of connected with what's happening. and in classical Indian dance, the eyes communicate a lot. It communicates emotion, but it also communicates direction and intention and space.

So, anyway, I will say about eyes...but also wanted to go back to what Lucy was saying about... yeah I think the basics of Western contemporary dance is really different to the basics of, you know, other forms of dance. And I think there is an idea out there, that sort of Western contemporary dance is culturally neutral, when it's not. And yet it has a history and that history goes back to ballet. And I think, I don't know, I remember it was a ballet dancer who was like, yeah, I know ballet, I can do anything, I can do any dance form in the world. It's like you can not do classical Indian dance.

And it's not because you don't have the, you know, physical ability, or discipline or movement range, or any of those things, but like, the fundamentals of how we move in space is completely different. You know, ballet is about buoyancy. And classical Indian dance is about being grounded. So it's a completely different relationship with the earth. And that's, a really basic thing. So I think, if we thinking... talking about history and technique...and, you know, I guess diversity of experience and seeing things...there are very different ways of moving in space and of demonstrating good technique.

And yeah, this moving. And that's sort of cultural. Yeah.

Audience member #3: Shian Law – 1:15:12



I think technique is just something you're really good at. Like it can be anything. Like if people believe in it, then it will become technique.

Raina Peterson - 1:15:23

That's... I'm gonna write that down.

Jo White - 1:15:27

Helen, have you got any final thoughts you'd like to go to...?

We've got to...So much to mull over.

Helen Herbertson - 1:15:37

I don't really. Gee, we covered a lot of ground.

Jo White - 1:15:50

Yeah. Jo?

Jo Lloyd - 1:15:54

Look, it might be obvious, but you know, language plays a huge part in it. You know, often people refer to dance as a language. But we've sat here tonight, and we haven't danced. But we've shared language. And I think when I teach, and when I go to classes, I'm always fascinated by how people implement through language. And I think naming things is important. But also, sometimes naming things gets in the way.

So I think shifting forward. Yeah, more diversity. Yeah, I'll move out of the way for someone else, because I want to learn too, you know, like, Thomas E.S Kelly's class is phenomenal. You know, it is incredible. And when Carol came into the VCA, and she shifted things around, I thought, yeah, I'm not teaching. I'm out of there, you know, but I thought, when I did get to go and look at what she was doing, I thought these students are different. There's a difference. And I was really glad to see that. And I was learning from them. You know, they were wild. They were ready. And we were having an exchange, you know, it's...and there was bodies and difference.

And, yeah, I guess the inscriptive surface is almost one of those things that just keeps coming back. You know, it's like, within us, there's less symmetry. And there's, more difference in similarity. But on the outside, we can get caught up in the inscriptive surface. And I think it's always important to notice that.

Jo White - 1:17:35

Thanks. Yeah. And just adding to that on a bigger level. Personally, I like teaching because I like people. And that exchange with humans. It's... I find, you know, fuels me. And ultimately, we're all here for the feels and the experience of living this life on this earth. And so, yeah, within that the sharing that goes both ways, and taking



into... all the things into consideration, all the things that we've spoken about today, are all important and all valued.

And yeah, thank you. Thank you, Tom and Lucy for hosting this evening. And thank you for sharing, everybody. Thanks.

Tom Pritchard - 1:18:39

So yeah, thank you all for joining us this evening. It's true, the conversation really did cover a lot of ground. But I think all that shows is how much more ground there is to cover. So may the conversation continue. It certainly has sparked tonight and is...thank you to all those at home that have stayed with us through the audience conversation, and I hope you managed to pick up as much of it as you could, because it really was fantastic to hear different inputs from members of the audience. So thank you for your contributions as well.

Just to close it off, a few words that kind of jumped out with a talk for me this evening. Entering and re-entering, exchange, context, diversity, and that it can be everything. Those are some of the things that I feel like I'll carry from tonight's conversation.

So thanks again to our panel, to Jo, to Jo, to Helen, and to Raina. Thanks to Lloyd our tech, who's seen us through this evening, both here in the studio and online. And thanks to our audiences here in the room, and also those joining us online, some are in Melbourne, some are up in New South Wales, and we've got at least one tuning in from Berlin. So thank you all for coming also this evening,

News of the next dance dialogues will go out through our E- news and social media. If you're not signed up to those, or following those, make this your excuse to do so. Head to our website, and you can find links to all of those things on our About page. If you want to share this conversation with anyone else who wasn't able to be with us this evening, we'll post a recording and transcript of the conversation in about a week's time. So keep an eye out for that.

And that's all from us this evening. So thanks again for joining, us and see you all again soon. Good night.

END