

## ***Editor's Introduction***

# **Arts and Community Engagement: Intersect Music, Dance and Drama in Arts Education, Arts Therapy, and Arts Practice with Community Engagement Projects**

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This special edition is an eclectic collection of writings focusing on Arts and Community Engagement. The articles differ from academic research and research by practice to first voice account of engagement in different communities in Malaysia, exploring voices and positioning of different stakeholders, including marginalised community members, academics, and art practitioners. This issue acknowledges different approaches and experiences to community engagements, mostly within academia, yet with a strong critical approach and a desire to raise awareness of what is possible and provide good models for future engagements. Two articles focus on therapeutic intervention through arts (dance and music); the first examines the benefits of dance and music for breast cancer survivors, and the other highlights how music therapy enhances the cognitive function and quality of life of seniors with dementia and focuses on breast cancer survivors, and the other focuses on seniors with dementia. Another article explores the challenges and prospects of music therapists. One of the articles investigates the making of the wheelchair dance using disabled dancers. Three articles address the different facets of arts for children. One of the articles focused on teaching music through a flipped classroom, an alternative online method.

Therapeutic intervention through dance and music focuses on breast cancer and seniors with dementia. Premalatha Thiagarajan dealing with cancer survivors at the National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM) for the interventional therapy programme through dance. This interventional therapy project was carried out for three months in 2019. It foregrounded dance as a therapeutic intervention for breast cancer survivors assisted by a certified movement therapist at the NCSM. Through "check-in" and "check-out," each woman shared her expectations for the session and reflected upon the outcome of her participation. Variety in activities, uncertainties in the outcome, and freedom of exploration were some of the key factors that produced unexpected outcomes for this study. This project raised issues pertaining to sustainability. This issue, as well as the design and delivery of the project, is examined in this paper.

Poon Chiew Hwa and Cheong Ku Wing, indicate the importance of movement in engaging seniors with dementia. They investigated the effectiveness and suitability of music and movement content through action research employing two cycles of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. Poon and Cheong indicate that patient engagement levels varied based on familiarity with music selections; many patients embraced children's songs regardless of age and learned new compositions. Movement options were constrained to sitting due to the patient's physical condition. Poon and

Cheong have shown that music therapy is an important element in the recovery process. Therefore, music therapy is a significant career; we should be attentive to it. Wang I Ta and Beh Wen Fen indicated that in the West, it has emerged since the mid-twentieth century and has been recognised as a formal profession in clinical and educational settings; however, the profession in Malaysia is at the developing stage. Through the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, they found that Malaysian music therapists intended to work in healthcare. Therefore, they suggested that awareness needs to be raised among clinical stakeholders, the government, and the public to promote the profession under allied health, encourage more local training programmes, and elevate awareness and acceptance among the public and the government.

The disability stereotype is also discussed in the special issue where it should see disabled people the same as non-disabled people. Leng Poh Gee investigates the making of the wheelchair dance using disabled dancers. By taking Dua Space Dance Theatre on a wheelchair dance troupe, Shuang Fu Performing Arts Troupe, he explores the interaction between the two groups regarding dance training, performance, artistic development, and its contribution to the collaboration of international disabled dance practitioners and producers. Their collaboration promotes innovation in dance-making, advocates accessibility to dance appreciation, and challenges disability stereotypes. Through the lens of the four dimensions of social inclusion within the context of performing arts, Leng identifies the Dua Space Dance Theatre's expertise in making and performing wheelchair dance and suggests its potential for development that creates space for the visibility of disabled dancers.

Intersecting music, dance and drama in arts education, art therapy, and art practice aligns with community engagement projects involving children in kindergarten and schools. Tan Chai Chen, in her collaborative project with Malaysian kindergarten, explored and understood the value of creative dance by fostering empathy. She realised the cracks in teacher-oriented instruction. It does not allow children to move and express themselves creatively. It deprives them of holistic growth opportunities. In 2018 and 2019, she proposed that the kindergarten shift from teacher-oriented instruction to creative dance through a collaboration project by fostering empathy in the kindergarten community. It was achieved through four approaches: first, understand the needs of the principal and dance teachers through empathic listening; second, foster empathy for children among dance teachers through embodiment and reflection activities; third, foster empathy among class teachers and administrators to provide a pleasant and healthier dance learning experience, and fourth assign children as the agents in encouraging the empathic participation of their parents in their creative dance learning. Therefore, building a consensus on dance value in the kindergarten community is vital to enhance creativity among kindergarten children and teachers.

Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer supports that participation in creative work by the children is important as "active participants" who are able to express their thoughts and feelings. She claims that producing theatre with children could foster children's creative thinking and engage in meaningful reflection. The discussion is based on her two previous research projects focusing on theatre as a performative medium to explore children's creativity in communicating their ideas and opinions, understanding and reflecting meaningfully on the issues that impact them. She revealed her findings: first, children displayed a keen interest in theatre activities, showing a readiness to discover and learn; second, the exploration of theatre activities with children fostered heightened motivation to improve their task performance; and third, theatre culminates best practices whilst engaging with children, offering a "safe space" for them to exercise their rights, and acknowledged as active participants with a voice. She also stresses another significant impact of the project, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between educational theory and the practical application of theatre as a transformative tool for learning and development.

Theatre is no doubt one of the significant tools for teaching children, even though they are in the rural area. Marlenny Deenerwan supports the idea of interactive theatre as an alternative method of teaching and learning for young rural children in Ranau, Sabah. Interactive theatre is a performance that engages the audience and makes them active participants in the show. It brings the audience into the same playing space as the actors and breaks the walls separating them from the actors' world. She

compared children in urban areas with children living in rural areas, who experience a severe lack of exposure to alternative teaching and learning activities to enhance their self-potential. Therefore, her project focuses on using interactive theatre to develop teaching and learning strategies for young children in rural areas, like urban areas. With a successful story, she indicates that interactive theatre activities successfully turn passive school children into active participants. They shared the stage setting, became characters in the performance, and had the opportunity to change the direction of the play, where they explored their ability to improvise the situation and articulate their opinion critically and creatively.

Alternative teaching proved very helpful in achieving the teaching and learning process. Teaching in music, dance, and drama also requires alternative teaching, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting educators to design online teaching methods to conduct class activities, Yi-Li Chang and Mohd Nasir bin Hashim argued that not all subjects are suitable for online delivery, especially if they require practical activities, like music-ensemble classes, which have long faced the problem of poor audio latency and sound quality, unable to play instruments together and disrupt students' concentration. With this problem in mind, Chang and Mohd Nasir have created and implemented innovative strategies to improve the engagement of online music-ensemble classes through flipped teaching. With the aim to obtain more significant interaction and engagement and better learning results, the findings show that the flipped teaching approach benefitted students' learning outcomes and mindsets and reduced the problems of poor audio latency and distraction problems. Therefore, this method has inspired and improved learning motivation. They also suggest that this approach empowers other innovative delivery methods, such as podcasts and virtual concerts, which can enhance students' learning environments and positive educational outcomes.

To conclude, all the above projects have significantly contributed to the discourses on arts. It contributes to the generation of knowledge about community engagement. Although substantial research and initiatives have been undertaken, Malaysian journals have not covered this trajectory extensively. The articles are written by scholars-academicians-practitioners from different disciplines and provide various epistemologies on the role of arts in community engagement. We believe it will be of interest not only to those in academia but also to those outside academia.

Hanafi Hussin  
Guest Editor