

Commonwealth Creativities in Intercultural Arts Network Forum 2: Documenting Intercultural Arts Practices

Facilitator: CIAN Fellow Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet

In Forum 2 we explored the politics, ethics and creative processes involved in documenting and interpreting intercultural arts practices. Through a series of engaging conversations around eight examples of practice, we sought to share and critique possible methods of documentation, theoretical frameworks for analysis, reflexive activities for engagement, and creative processes for the communication of this intercultural work.

Facilitation: We used a World Café concept as the overarching facilitation framework. The café served as a creative space for delegates to interact in a series of conversations that deepened with each round. These conversations stimulated collaborative dialogue, knowledge sharing and creative possibilities for thought and action. At each café table practitioners shared examples of their intercultural arts work as a catalyst for discussion. These discussions were framed by a “menu” of questions that centred on the relationships and power dynamics inherent in documenting this work, the ways in which theory, method and practice can dialogue with one another, the politics of representation in intercultural arts work, and creative ways to engage our audiences. In order to document each layer of discussion and record the key concepts and understandings that were emerging, delegates scribbled “table graffiti” in different colours during each round of conversation.



Café conversations

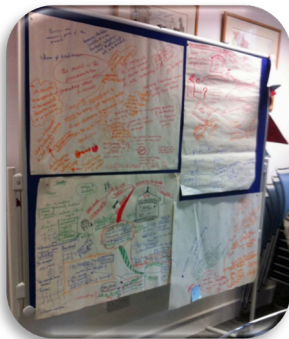


Table graffiti with key concepts

A number of additional prompts for both reflection and action decorated the room. A ‘theory talks’ wall featured key theorists, who were taken off the wall in order to join the conversations at one point. Insights from Forum 1’s mapping exercise were also displayed and delegates were encouraged to continue this conversation via post-it notes. In order to document the forum and add another layer of reflection, CIAN Forum Associate David Pomeroy captured 30-second reflections from delegates on a selection of “appetiser” questions about documentation, and CIAN Forum Frances Shih took a series of candid photographs to capture the people, interactions and dynamics of the forum.

Key themes: The following themes emerged as significant when considering how we engage with the process of documenting and analysing intercultural arts practices:

- 📌 **Respectful irreverence:** When it comes to documenting intercultural arts practices we need to be willing to challenge the processes and practices that have been used before. This means taking nothing at face value. We need to respect the work that has gone before us, but we must always be ready to challenge our assumptions and break new ground in all that we do.
- 📌 **Multiplicities:** In the documentation and analysis of intercultural arts practices we need to be mindful of the multiple subjectivities and layers involved. This means seeking to find ways of representing, documenting and experimenting with how we communicate these multiple positions.
- 📌 **Entanglement:** In intercultural arts practices lives become entwined in complex and sometimes confusing ways. This entanglement can weave perspectives together in beautiful and complimentary ways, but also has the potential to become stuck in knots. When documenting intercultural arts projects we should strive to model this entanglement, with all its possibilities and perils.

- Dialogue:** At the heart of intercultural arts processes is an exchange of ideas and an ongoing dialogue that takes many shapes and forms. When it comes to documenting this process we need to be mindful of keeping that dialogue going, continuing the process of sharing, and keeping the channels of communication with our collaborators open, and showing respect for the insights that come from this process.
- Spaces in-between:** In intercultural arts practices learning happens in the spaces in-between the multiple positions found in this work. When documenting intercultural arts practices we should attempt to embody and communicate these in-between spaces and the insights that they engender.
- Disruption:** By challenging and disrupting our assumptions we have the potential to bring about changes in our understandings about how things work. This process of disruption has great potential to be used in our performance, documentation and analysis of intercultural arts practices.



Graham and Roshi perform for their table



Implications for practice: Reflections on the eight different practices and practitioners featured in the forum revealed key insights for future documentation practices in this field:

- How the documentation might be perceived:** When considering the process of documentation, we need to consider how it might be perceived, and whether it can bring about understanding and transformation. In other words, we need to consider the unforeseen outcomes of documentation.
- The politics of representation:** When we add layers and stories to our own practices of documentation, issues of *identity*, *representation*, and *expectation* come to the fore. This brings into question whose *agency* we represent and what happens to identity when you have that agency.
- The relationship between the “live” moment and the document:** We need to carefully consider how we represent the ephemeral moment in documentation. In this process, we need to think of keeping the creativity of our arts practices “alive” in the documentation phase.
- The nexus between explicit and implicit knowledge in the documentation of intercultural arts practice:** The metaphor of an iceberg represents these different knowledge positions. We need to consider how we capture these different viewpoints in the way we document intercultural arts.
- The entanglement between “inside” and “outside” positions in the documentation process:** The metaphor of *thread weaving* with *knots* and *entanglements* is useful for thinking about the different subject positions at play in intercultural arts. We also need to consider ways of *theorising* and reflecting on these positions from the “inside” and “outside” as well as the spaces in between.
- The score as a living artefact:** This highlights the layers of meaning, multiple lenses, and multiple stories that come from a creative document, such as a score. We need to also seek a level of *interactivity* and experimentation with this score in order to discover new insights.
- The centrality of relationships:** While our conversations might centre on processes of data collection and documentation, we must not forget that people and *relationships* are at the centre of all that we do in intercultural arts practices. Our documentation processes need to reflect this.



Final “think & share” reflections for action

Many thanks to the staff of the Centre for Commonwealth Education (CCE), *CIAN Convenor* Pam Burnard, *CIAN Fellows* Liz Mackinlay, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Sam Curkpatrick, Jean Penny, Andrew Blackburn, and *CIAN Forum 2 Guest Contributors* Elizabeth Dobson, Graham Dowdall, Helen Gilbert, Nina Graeff, John Howard, Liza Lim, Sue Miller, Lis Murphy, Roshi Nasehi, Sandy O'Sullivan, Heidi Partti, Ben Sandbrook, Ylva Hofvander Trulsson, Anne-Charlotte Tulinius, and Bronwyn Carlson along with *CIAN Associates* David Pomeroy, Valanto Konstantinou, Frances Shih, Serena Juan and James Biddulph.

