Invisible Connections

Dance, choreography and internet communities

Sita Popat
The key stages of devising will be identified to explain how these can be applied in the online application of this process. The role of knowledge in the application of the devising process will become apparent at this stage, raising questions about the nature of interaction communities with whom this approach to artistic collaboration could be applied. This chapter will define and establish a creative cycle to be used in the construction and analysis of the online creative collaborations approach.

Creativity

In her book, *Dimensions of Creativity* (1994), Margaret Boden describes creativity as being the exploration of conceptual spaces. These spaces are defined by our knowledge and experience of the medium in which we are creating. They are also constrained by the limitations of our understandings of that medium. For each person the boundaries of their conceptual space will lie in a different place, according to their personal perspectives. In his chapter in the same book, Howard Gardner describes creativity as the ability to associate ideas that are not apparently related, in order to find new possibilities. In a moment of creativity, we explore the edges of our conceptual spaces and sometimes extend or push them outwards by changing our understandings or learning through experiences. We make new associations between ideas or concepts that we had not previously considered to be connected. Where we have little knowledge of a subject, our creative explorations may be exciting to us as individuals. When a student realizes the connection between two apparently disparate aspects of philosophy in the first year of his degree, he is exploring conceptual boundaries at the edges of his personal understanding. As a tutor it gives me pleasure to perceive the student's learning experience, but it is unlikely to challenge my own understandings of the field. Nonetheless, it is still a creative act on the part of the student.

However, if we are knowledgeable about a situation, then the extending of conceptual boundaries may include the realization or discovery of a point that is entirely new to the collective culture. I expect my doctoral students to challenge my understandings, since they are working at the forefront of their academic field. The creativity of Beethoven or Cunningham is judged at the highest level since they are historically and publicly recognized as leaders in their art forms. This manifestation of creativity is far more rare, and illustrates how culturally recognized originality can occur. But the widening of my undergraduate student's conceptual boundaries through learning and experience may some day lead him to aspire to creativity on the level of my doctoral students or perhaps even of Beethoven or Cunningham.

The creative process begins with the creator's decision to create and the choice of medium and subject matter for that creation. The importance of these decisions is sometimes overlooked, since without them no process can occur. The subject matter may affect the choice of medium, and conversely the chosen medium may have a profound effect on the way in which the artist works and how the subject matter is portrayed. Each medium has its own specific characteristics. It is not possible to work in a vacuum, as arts philosopher David Best (1992, p. 100) explains: 'sense of creativity is given by the medium, discipline and criteria of the relevant subject or activity'. The composer's personal skills and experiences in a particular medium will be evident in the imagination and dexterity with which he or she manipulates the medium. His or her conceptual spaces provide the limits on the
possibilities that are perceivable. When one has little experience of painting either in a practical sense or through art appreciation, it is unlikely that one will create a picture of historical value. Arts educationalist Peter Abbs (1989, p. 112) describes the need for ‘a dynamic background, for exemplars and models, not only from which to learn actively but also to struggle against, to overcome, to transcend’. Even when we wish to cast aside that which has gone before, we require knowledge of what it was that actually went before as well as sufficient understanding to make that rebellion apparent.

Once the decision to create has been made, the creator begins to play with ideas within the chosen medium, generating material with which to work. This is a time of exploration, with judgement deferred so that ideas can flow freely. A sense of ‘play’ is key at this stage for the discovery of alternative routes or options, or the unshackled association of seemingly unrelated ideas. As the child plays in the sandpit, there are no constraints to bind his train of thought to particular outcomes. There are no right or wrong choices to be made. Play implies the freedom to experiment and the suspension of judgement that allows ideas to develop, as described by Gary Izzo (1997) in his book about the practice of non-digital interactive theatre. This is the period of creativity where the product is unformed and unfinished, existing as a growing library of possibilities to be considered from an evaluative perspective, perhaps at a later point. Again, however, there is the influence of the medium upon the free and open exploration. Abbs (1989, p. xiv) describes the requirement for ‘reciprocal play’ between artistic conventions and ‘the impulse for symbolic expression’. There is a tension between the impulse and the limitations that encourages a skilled creator to seek ways to manipulate the medium to express the chosen subject matter. Blakeslee (1980, p. 37) sees this as a ‘healthy cooperation between intuition and logical thought’. Complementary management of logical and intuitive responses forms the basis of this stage of the creative process.

Penelope Hanstein, in her 1986 doctoral thesis on the choreographic process, describes the creative process as ‘a pervasive problematic situation’ within which artists work. This is closely related to the idea of intuition and logic working together. If the creator feels the impulse to create an artwork based around a particular subject matter then he or she has the initial problem of how to express that subject matter within the chosen medium. The next move, in an attempt to solve this problem, might be ‘brainstorming’ around the idea for possible ways to begin experimentation in the medium. This might involve setting up a task with a view to generating material in dance or acting, or beginning to sketch an idea for a painting. As ideas or materials begin to be generated in the form of solutions to the initial problem, it is time to review the problem. This may mean setting up variations on the original problem to generate more ideas. It may also mean seeking a new problem to find ways to generate different material if the first solutions were not appropriate or suitable for the creator’s intentions. Hanstein explains that as the creative process continues, the problem-seeking and problem-solving cycle generates and refines the ideas and materials until the final decision is made that the product is complete.

As more material is generated it is necessary to begin forming it into a final product. In order for this to take place, the problem-solving side of the equation necessarily receives more emphasis. Play becomes a less prominent feature. Judgements and evaluations must be made concerning the material that has been gathered or created, to decide what will be included in the product and what will be omitted. The material that will be included must be shaped and refined appropriately so that the product is cohesive and complete as an artwork. At this point in the process, the creator may choose to reconcile
to a select audience or ‘distanced eye’ to receive feedback for further refinement of the product. The ‘distanced eye’ is so called because the viewer is distanced from the product, having not necessarily been involved in the creative process prior to this. It is hoped that the viewer will therefore view the product with a greater sense of the whole entity, rather than focusing on issues that may have arisen in the process. Responses from the viewer may lead the creator to review the artwork and make possible refinements or alterations.

**Cycles of creativity**

It is apparent from these descriptions of the creative process that there are distinct stages within it, and these can be identified for usage in the planning of an online creative process. The initial stage is the decision to make the product and the choice of impetus and medium. The second stage is the ‘play’ time, when non-evaluative experimentation produces material with which the creator can work. The third stage is when evaluation is introduced, for the purposes of selecting, elaborating and refining the material for the final product (Hanstein 1986, p. 136). The introduction of the external viewer or ‘distanced eye’ gives the creator feedback on the product for final revisions before the product is presented to the public. These stages are specifically angled towards the artistic process of creativity, and they fall within the creative cycle proposed by arts education writer, Peter Abbs (see Figure 1.1).

According to Abbs, the creator or artist moves through these phases in a cyclical manner, being able to travel between them as appropriate to the creator’s needs. In the problem-seeking and problem-solving situation, the creator may return to a previous phase or move to a more evaluative one in order to seek or solve a problem. If he or she is working in the third phase (realization of final form), and becomes aware that contrasting material is required for a section of the work, then he or she may return to the second or even the first phase in order to create or develop the required material. This flexibility is an important aspect of the creative process, as it enables the creator to explore freely ideas and concepts in the search for new associations and representations. An online approach for creative collaborations needs to support this flexibility within the cycle.

**Devising theatre and dance**

Composers in the performing arts usually create their artworks on people, and this is particularly true for composers of theatre or dance. Musicians have the advantage of a
Refinement of the concept from the product, it is hoped that the creator, rather than the viewer may lead to the following distinctions.

There are distinct stages in the creative process, the concept of devising is introduced, for the success of the product (Hanstein 1997) gives the creator access to the public, activity, and they fail (see Figure 1.1).

In a cyclical manner, the problem-seeking and movement to a more detailed and widely used notation form that enables them to work alone on a composition for a group of instruments in a fairly efficient way. In the context of dance, theatre or performance, people are usually essential to the realization of a creative work. Where a choreographer or a theatre director is creating a work on other performers, it is often effective to work through the creative process in the space with the collaboration of the performers: a process known as ‘devising’. Devising was initially developed as a creative method in the theatrical context, but it is now common for choreographers working with dancers to adopt the method also. It promotes group collaboration and ownership in the creative process, and thus it shares some important characteristics with those identified in the introduction for online creative collaborations. First devising in the studio environment will be discussed. Then the latter part of this chapter will consider its application online.

It is difficult to define devising methods in great detail as to some extent it is specific to the group and even to the work in progress. Individual groups use devising methods for particular purposes, and it is commonly found in work with community and youth groups since it promotes communication, equality, group identity and group ownership. Professional artists such as choreographer Lloyd Newson also use devising to embed particular experiences and/or personalities of the performers in the work. Yet it is possible to describe general characteristics of the process that provide an insight into its application. Since online creative collaborations are likely to involve people from both the general community and the professional or semi-professional arena, devising methods appear to offer an approach to creativity that supports a range of approaches as well as promoting a sense of community.

Whatever the context of the work, devising methods place the central emphasis on the group of performers and their creative interactions. Alison Oddey’s text Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook (1994) provides one of the most comprehensive explanations of the process, including an historical perspective on the method since its rise to popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. She offers a general definition of devising as:

... process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product [...] There is a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas.

(p. 1)

Oddey elaborates upon her definition by stating that devising is an ‘eclectic process requiring innovation, invention, imagination, risk’ but she states that the most important element is the ‘overall group commitment to the developing work’. All members of the group work together to create the product, sharing in the formation and evaluation of ideas. Clifford and Herman (1999, p. 16) write about working with young people in devising theatre, stating that it brings ‘a strong sense of participation, ownership and empowerment’. This sense can occur, and may also be reflected in the qualities of the performance, whatever the ages of the performers.

Since devising theatre involves the performers in the role of creators, communications within that group become a central element of the process. Oddey (1994, p. 9) explains that ‘group dynamics, relationships and interaction between people are a distinguishing feature of devising theatre’. Ritchie (1987, p. 17) describes a successful devising situation as one where communications will be effective and supportive enough to achieve a situation where participants feel secure to question and criticize in a positive manner.
Clifford and Herrman (1999, p. 39) describe the importance of "fostering a sense of "the group", where the individuals trust their peers and feel that they belong, creating a "safe space" where group members may speak their thoughts and respond freely.

The emphasis in devising is on the process as much as the product. Clifford and Herrman (1999, p. 17) argue that "the process is as fundamental as the product created". When devising is used in the educational arena especially, the balance may swing towards the process as paramount, since it is the experience of the person involved in the creation that is central (Cook 1980, p. 77). Odey (1994, p. 16) raises the fact that devised theatre need not always be successful as, in an ideal situation, "money is used to experiment, try out, or explore possibilities, which may eventually bring failure with the final product". Yet a task that can be described as creative results in some sort of product, and indeed the product may provide the purpose that drives the creative process forward. Yet at the same time if the deadline for the product becomes a leading factor, then the pressure can interfere with the democracy of devising situation (Ritchie 1987, p. 20). In practice the group's particular choices or situation define where the emphasis lies between process and product, and a professional group invariably needs to produce a performance in order to justify the money spent on the process.

The role of the director in devising

Earlier this chapter described the need for freedom and room to play in the early stages of the creative process. Where creativity takes place as a group effort, there is the opportunity for a wider range of possibilities to be seen, and a greater pushing of conceptual boundaries or association of ideas. Odey (1994, p. 2) agrees that the potential in devised theatre is that it can produce "more creative solutions than other forms of theatre" since the actors have so much input and their diversity offers the potential for imaginative options. Yet it should not be assumed that group-oriented devising methods never require a single composer as the director or facilitator. Ritchie mentions how in the work of the Joint Stock Theatre Company only on three occasions had projects been attempted without a designated writer, with the process completely improvised by the actors. He describes the results in all three cases as "generally considered less successful" (1987, p. 18). He explains that "it is hard to imagine a collective dictatorship working in practice, easy to see how compromising a director's control can dilute the results" (Ritchie 1987, p. 22). In order for the product to have a sense of identity and cohesion as an artwork, someone needs to take on the artistic guidance and become the final decision-maker on behalf of the group. This role is crucial in devising methods, as this individual is responsible for supporting and facilitating the group experience, which involves negotiating the problem-seeking and problem-solving element of creativity. Without this person, the whole process can degenerate into an exercise in diplomacy and compromise where the lowest common denominator may be chosen to avoid arguments.

The director of the devised project has responsibilities to the other participants to guide the developing work. The amount of guidance required varies at different stages in the process. In the early stages of play and experimentation within the medium, the director can provide structures so that the participants are able to explore conceptual boundaries for the group in a way that will support and encourage ideas without stifling them. Early decisions need to be made to provide a clear structure that supports the actors but remains flexible enough to allow them to make their input. Ritchie (1987, p. 20) describes how a workshop can be "richer and more rewarding when there is a general sense of direction but no specific destination in mind, and how far to push the material and how far to explore the creative possibilities". He states that "a work-in-progress project can provide a lane as to what might be explored in the final product, but the director or facilitator must allow the group to make the final decision" (Ritchie 1987, p. 20).

Devising dilemmas

There are many aspects of devising that are potential problems for the director. Most important is the relationship indicated in devising between the director and the actors, since that is the primary relationship that drives the process. Devising will not succeed as theatre unless the audience is involved. Before tackling this dilemma, it is important to understand how each of the three phases of devising interacts with the other, since each phase is necessary and can only be achieved through an understanding of the other. The first phase is about creating the material, the second phase is about exploring the material, and the third phase is about shaping the material. Each phase is linked to the other, and the process is a continuous cycle of creation, exploration, and shaping.

Phase I: the initial idea

The first phase of devising is where the director and the actors work closely together to create something new and exciting. The director must create an idea to take the group forward. The material may be entirely self-contained or may be drawn from an existing text, movement or structure.
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...a sense of “the destination in mind”. It is the role of the facilitator or director to decide how much to direct and how far to leave the task open to the participants’ interpretations. Chambers (1980, p. 108) praises the work of directors Mike Leigh and Mike Bradwell, arguing that “they release the imagination of their actors through a highly structured workshop process”. This may sound a little like a contradiction, but if a director presents a group of actors with a completely open situation then this can be paralyzing for the group. In the absence of any guidelines as to what one is trying to achieve, it is difficult to know where to start. Task-oriented work provides actors and dancers with ideas or concepts to explore, allowing them to unlock their creativity by focusing their attention and their imagination. Dance education writer Jacqueline Smith-Autard (1994, p. 87) describes how “rather than dampen creativity, such limitations give the imagination a start and a secure base from which to travel freely”. The boundaries or problems set by the director or facilitator serve to guide the exploration of the actors or dancers, so that they examine in depth a limited conceptual space, seeking imaginative solutions. Then later in the process, the director takes on a more definite role, becoming the “distanced eye” with the responsibility of making editorial and technical decisions in order to form a single and cohesive final product.

**Devising dance**

There are many similarities between devising methods in theatre and in dance, and this close relationship indicates that what is applicable for one context would also have implications for the other. Yet this chapter has also discussed the influence of the specific chosen medium on the creative process. The practical examples in Part 2 of this book are all based in dance since that is the particular area of the author’s research. For that reason, the process of dance devising will now be considered in detail. Chapter 7 will also consider implications for theatre and performance.

Before tackling the transition of dance devising to the online setting, the process will be explored in the more traditional studio setting. By way of illustration, reference will be made to a particular choreographic process undertaken by choreographer Sandra Fisher with students from University of Leeds. Although in devising methods there is always a sense in which the choreographer and dancers work together creatively, the level of involvement that the choreographer chooses to invite from the dancers may vary. In some cases the dancers may generate all the movement material in response to the choreographer’s instructions and their own ideas, and also be heavily involved in the manipulation and forming of that content. Other choreographers may take a short section of movement created by the dancers and then impose variations and developments of that movement that they have created themselves. Fisher devised the piece *Gutcrashin*’ (1999), using the dancers to generate all the material, but taking on much of the shaping and forming the dance herself.

**Phase 1: the impulse to create**

The first phase of dance making is the choice of theme or motivation for the dance, being closely linked with Abbé’s first phase of ‘the impulse to create’. We create because we want to create something, and that wish may be linked to the desire to express or communicate an idea to others. The word ‘idea’ is used here in its loosest sense, since that communication may be entirely self-referential and concerned with internal features of the work such as movement or structure. However, that makes it no less a communication. Any concept or...
The box also focused each dancer in space. When the dancers received the instructions, they were working individually, although they were all present in the space together. The main communication between them was laughter and a few brief comments on how each felt he or she was progressing with the task. Progress was made entirely through experimentation with the movement and its qualities, and this experimentation took place within the clear framework of Fisher’s instructions. The dancers responded with movement taken from understandings of the possibilities inherent in the movement instructions, trying out new combinations of movement suggested to them by the precise limitations.

The choreographer may choose to use a combination of free association-type stimuli and structured improvisations like those used by Fisher to create a variety of movement material. The response from the dancer requires what Bolton (1986, p. 166) describes as ‘emotional engagement with the subject-matter’. The artist, in improvising, is engaging on a personal and emotional level with the subject, and as such his or her movement responses are based in his or her intuitive responses. When a choreographer works with dancers through improvisation, it is part of the function of the choreographer to adjust the parameters of the stimuli to affect the movement that the dancers create, shaping it into the type of movement that the choreographer requires. This refining input is a skill that choreographers learn through their experiences of working with dancers and their movement responses.

**Phase 3: realization of the final form**

The next stage is the identification and selection of key movements or movement phrases from the improvised response, which will become the basis of the dance’s form. These key movements or phrases are ‘motifs’. The motif functions on a conceptual level as a primary device for the organizational part of the creative process, but its precise definition is fairly flexible. Blohm and Chaplin (1989, p. 102) describe the motif as ‘a single movement or a short movement phrase [...] that is used as a source or a spark for development into an integrated gestalt’. Smith-Autard (2000, p. 39) explains that ‘Each dance has its own motifs, and each motif has its own characteristics shared by no other’. It is the choreographer’s task to identify motifs appropriate for the dance from the movement material that the dancers create. This task requires knowledge in order to be able to perceive and evaluate the appropriateness and the potential for development of phrases and movements. Whether consciously or not, the choreographer perceives the dancers’ actions and their qualities as separable entities, and then recognizes the connections between entities that lead to motif selection. Where selection of material as motifs is carried out effectively, there will be a rich starting point for the composition process, with a ‘family likeness’ common to the motifs, even where they are contrasting, that gives the final product a sense of unity in its form.

This stage of the process shows the choreographer moving on to the beginning of Abbé’s third phase of ‘realisation of final form’. However, he or she will use the cyclical nature of the phases to return to the second phase as required, being aware of the development of final form in the selection of appropriate motifs. Once the motifs for a dance have been selected, they may be used in their original form, or they may be varied or developed. Developments may happen in a number of ways, altering the original motif slightly, but maintaining its identity as a motif. Blohm and Chaplin (1989, pp. 102–104) suggest a basic list of sixteen possible methods for developing a motif or phrase, including alteration of size, speed and levels of movement. Smith-Autard (2000, p. 69) provides a table offering similar options for development. Variations involve more fundamental alterations in the motif and may
introduce new movement material into the dance. The form of the dance grows through the imaginative variation, development and combination of motifs, finding the connection between phrases of movement that gives the dance its unity. Arts philosopher Suzanne Langer (1953, p. 126) writes that 'the essence of all composition [...] is the illusion of an indivisible whole'. The dance is made up of parts that fit together as a unit and are supported by the overall structure. There are a number of recognized forms and devices that are used in composing dances, but Smith-Autard (2000, p. 62) describes how the style and qualities of motifs and their developments 'will perhaps determine contrasting sections or sections which grow one from the other'. The choreographer identifies the concepts and the developing qualities of the work and guides the process towards the finished product.

This section of the creative process is exemplified in the second half of Fisher's rehearsal. After getting the dancers to create the initial movement with the beer crates, she went on to form a group section by selecting motifs from the solo material, developing on some of them, and grouping some into unison. She carried out all her instructions from her seat at the front of the studio, and watched the results. She constructed the section entirely visually, applying a sense of spatial awareness, complementing and contrasting movements, with an awareness of what she 'wanted it to look like'. Her initial movement selections were two different falls from the box, which included unusual ways of landing on different parts of the body. These falls became motifs, being developed and repeated by several dancers. She continued to choose motifs that involved the dancers being off balance and falling, introducing moments of unison and developments of phrases as she built on her original starting point. She did not work in a linear manner, but simultaneously worked on three groups of dancers, developing complementary and contrasting movement with all three groups, to be amalgamated into one group at a later stage.

In the third phase of Abbs' cycle (the realization of final form), the choreographer is now at the stage where the play aspect is less apparent, and more evaluative processes are being used. In the devising approach, the dancers have considerable input in the play stage (Abbs' second phase), as they are the 'players' to a large extent, with input from the choreographer to guide their play. This was clear in the dancers' experiments with Fisher's instructions around the beer crate. However, in the third phase, the choreographer may choose to receive less input from the dancers, as it is his or her task to find a sense of unity within the form of the product. In this second half of the rehearsal, Fisher was selecting, manipulating and structuring the movement material created in the earlier part of the rehearsal. She worked with the motifs, finding ways to develop and vary the movement with complementary and contrasting material. In this way, she was creating syntax for the movement vocabulary of that section of the dance, by working on developments of the original motifs.

**Phase 4: presentation and performance/Phase 5: response and evaluation**

The choreographer uses his or her knowledge of the medium and sense of the individual dancer to guide its formation. While multiple participants in the evaluative phase may be helpful in pointing out possibilities, they may be less helpful when trying to come to final decisions about the form. Again, external viewers as 'distanced eye' may offer input in Abbs' fourth phase of 'presentation and performance'. But it is the choreographer who makes any revisions to the piece in the fifth phase of Abbs' cycle, 'response and evaluation', as a result of feedback from the fourth phase. However, the external viewer is also involved.
in this fifth phase, as they influence the choreographer's decisions by giving their personal responses to the experience of viewing the dance.

The distinctiveness of the roles of choreographer and dancer

Having considered how the five phases of Abb's creative cycle are present in the devising approach to choreography, it is important now to realize that the choreographer and dancer may not be moving through the same phases at the same time. This will become a key factor when facilitating online creative collaborations, as it affects the experiences of the participants. In the first part of Fisher's rehearsal where she set up the task for the dancers with the brief, it is clear that Fisher had already passed through the first phase of Abb's cycle.

She was aware of the subject matter for the dance and had established related stimuli with which the dancers could work. Within this rehearsal, the dancers remained within the second phase of the cycle, using their intuitive knowledge of the dance medium to play with ideas and explore the boundaries of Fisher's instructions. Evaluation was not required of them as Fisher simply asked them to play until she saw some movements that she wanted to use. Meanwhile, Fisher seemed to be fluctuating between the second and third phases of the creative cycle. Her statement that she knew what she wished to see set the scene to be grasped in the third stage, as it implied evaluation. If the movement that the dancers produced did not correspond to what she wished to see, it was likely to be discarded. When the dancers did not produce corresponding movement, she returned to the first phase to seek further instructions for the dancers. The instructions that she gave defined the problem so that the dancers could play with potential solutions with the required style and qualities. Her experience of working with dancers allowed her to seek a potential that was likely to result in the desired type of movement, by refining specific constraints that fixed the dancers' conceptual boundaries in the appropriate place for this artwork. She wished the dancers to explore these boundaries, but not to break them, as that would not produce the required movement. Her understanding of the medium and the type of responses that the dancers would make to different stimuli enabled her to refine her instructions effectively.

Moving further through the creative cycle, a second rehearsal for this choreography was observed. The dancers had previously created solos based around characters that they had chosen and Fisher asked them to work with this material by selecting motifs for themselves to form their own duets. A greater amount of interaction occurred between the dancers during this process. Initially they discussed and made notes on their characters, and the interrelationship of those characters. There was much checking between groups and with Fisher, as director of choreography, to confirm the parameters within which they were working. Once the dancers began to move, the verbal interactions tended to be replaced with more movement-based ones, although there was also concern about the characters as this affected movement qualities. These are some of the comments that were made by the dancers while they worked:

Can you lift me up?
Would it be easier to move me that way?
What would my character do? How would she react?
Where's your weight? Put it over that shoulder.
These comments defined the individual problems encountered by the students within the creative process and served to supplement the movement-based decisions that were primary to the process. The dancers asked the questions, but if a movement solution was found then they frequently knew and accepted it intuitively, and did not analyse it verbally further than to say, 'That felt right.' They made decisions jointly in their pairs, both offering suggestions. They tried each option out and weighed them up, and then decided on the preferred solution. Solutions were chosen based on two criteria: aesthetic considerations and contextual appropriateness. These two criteria were the framework that the dancers were using for selection of motifs and movement that would be appropriate to the dance as a whole. But always decisions made by the students were offered to Fisher, as choreographer, for alteration or affirmation.

In this rehearsal, the dancers were working in the third phase of the cycle. They already had the material that had been created as solos, and they were selecting and forming that material into duets. In doing this they were making evaluations of the material in terms of selection and judgements about the appropriateness of the combinations that they made. They were applying a framework to make those judgements. However, they had not constructed that framework themselves. Again, Fisher had set the task, seeking an appropriate problem to achieve the movement that she required for the piece. The dancers were in the role of problem solvers again, but this time Fisher was asking them to make more evaluative decisions, thus taking them into the third phase. Fisher was clearly the director of the process, even though the dancers were working on the forming of the material. The dancers recognized Fisher as the guiding force that provided the unity for the whole work, and their constant referral to her illustrates how they understood the need for that single unifying figure. Fisher, in turn, through watching and giving responses to the dancers' work, seemed to be moving temporarily into the fourth and fifth stages of the process. She seemed to become a 'distanced eye' for the 'sub-dances' being made by the dancers for later amalgamation into the whole product.

The choreographer as director

Although the choreographer works closely with the dancers in the devising method of choreography, it is the choreographer who defines the parameters of the dance, applies the frameworks that are used in its construction and enforces the limitations that separate it as a single unit from all other artworks. The choreography may appear to emerge as a form of osmosis between the dancers and the choreographer, with the choreographer providing stimuli and instructions to which the dancers respond. Yet even where the dancers are responsible for the creation of all movement material in the dance, it is the choreographer who makes the critical decisions concerning both the content and the artistic form, by selecting, developing and structuring the movement into the final product. In a dramatic play, all the actors are likely to have an understanding of their own characters within the recognized situation. Bolton (1986) describes working with a group of school children making a drama about illegal behaviour in the school dining room. The only objective criterion that Bolton gave to the students was that each one should 'make his role credible to himself and to his classmates' (ibid., p. 174). Implicit in this criterion is the recognition that the roles or characters can be understood independently of the whole and that they can function understandably within the situation. This is highly unlikely to occur in a dance, as dance is not a directly representational art form, as theatre can be. The relationships between dancers in an
students within the is that were primary tion was found then verbally further than all offering suggested on the preferred innovations and contexts were using for example as a whole. But rapher, for alteration cycle. They already a in forming that material to terms of her that they made. they had not con aking an appropriate dancers were in the make more evaluation the director of the literal. The dancers hole work and their that single unifying means’ work, seemed success. She seemed the dancers for later

individual dance work are less predictable at any given moment, as the dancers do not communicate in a recognized representational form. Instead the language that they are using has only the syntax that is developed within the individual dance, and that development occurs as a result of the choreographer’s decisions and direction. Choreographers seem to develop individual choreographic signatures, such that works by specific artists are often recognizable regardless of which dancers happen to be performing them. This is because the choreographer’s idiosyncratic method of decision making and directing leaves his or her signature upon the artworks, through choices of movement content and the ways in which form is constructed for the dance.

In contrast, the dancer is expected to work largely within the choreographer’s parameters. In order to work towards originality and interest, Boden (1994) advocates the need to challenge and break conceptual boundaries in the medium. However, when the choreographer sets up tasks in order to generate movement material, he or she does not necessarily wish the dancers to break the limitations that he or she has imposed. The constraints are applied to shape the material, and therefore should not be exceeded otherwise the movement may be inappropriate to the integrity of the dance as a whole. The choreographer asks the dancers to use their knowledge of the possibilities inherent in the dance medium together with their imagination to explore the boundaries of the task that is set. The input from the dancers is considered and evaluated by the choreographer, but it is the choreographer who guides, informs, selects, and manipulates that input in the final event.

Knowledge of the medium

It is not possible to work with the constraints and limitations of the medium, without first knowing where they lie. Best (1992, p. 96) uses the example that ‘if one has no technique at all one cannot be creative in skiing’. A little knowledge can provide the potential to create something, but Sparshott (1995, p. 362) suggests that it is possible for anyone who knows what a piano is to invent a tune, ‘providing that it did not have to be interesting or beautiful’. A greater amount of knowledge is required to achieve a desired outcome that can be perceived as having value in some way. Li (1996, p. 179) suggests that creativity is actually an extension of knowledge, necessarily preceded by the pre-learning stage of imitation and the learning stage of understanding. This is exemplified by Boden’s description (1994, p. 91) of a child drawing a person with two arms. As long as the child sees the drawing as being a direct representation or imitation of a person with two arms then that figure will also have two arms. But if the child understands that he or she is drawing a person who has two arms, then he or she may decide to draw a person with one arm or four arms. Understanding the concept of what he or she is doing enables the child to ‘vary the variable’ or ‘drop a constraint’, thus breaking conceptual boundaries and being creative (ibid.). The deeper the level of understanding of the medium, the wider the range of possibilities that may be perceived and the easier it is for the creator to explore and challenge constraints. The knowledge of the medium fulfills the dual role of providing guidelines within which to work and placing boundaries to be explored.

Art education writer Elliot Eisner (1972, p. 80) lists skills that are necessary for the production of an artwork, including skills in management of material, inventing forms within the limitations of the material and perceiving and creating qualitative relationships and spatial order. The necessity for all those skills arises in phases two and three of Abbé’ creative cycle, where material is created, processed and formed into the product.
Without these skills, the creator returns to random processes. Jones (1972, p. 25) suggests that the teacher of arts education should give the children problems to explore with ‘nothing of the art-making process. Abbs points to the necessity of previous dance-specific knowledge that can be useful in the dance-making process. Dance is not a physical activity when it reaches the audience. Arnheim describes it as being ‘created essentially in a different medium than the one in which it appears to the audience. The spectator receives a strictly visual work of art’ (1967, p. 332). Sparshott (1995, p. 343) explains that the dance practitioner must ‘develop a mode of awareness of the dance…in which its visual qualities are primary…’ Smith-Autard (1994, p. 32) advocates the need to ‘learn to attend to the contained qualities in dance rather than the mere physicalities of bodies in action’. When the viewer watches the dance, he or she is seeing shapes, forms and pathways created in space by the bodies of the dancers. The viewer perceives dance as a visual art, and the choreographer bears this in mind when creating the dance. It is for this reason that the ‘distance’ is valued. The choreographer must stand back from the creation and re-view the dance as the audience will see it. This implies that visual arts skills are a part of the choreographer’s knowledge base. Applying this in reverse, the artists for Disney’s Fantasia (1940) were not choreographers, yet they created convincingly dance sequences through animating the qualitative forces behind the movements of dancers. They watched dancers taking poses and dancing in the studio. Then they abstracted the qualities that they perceived in the motion, and applied those perceived qualitative forces to the characters that they created (Calhane 1987). In doing so, they achieved dancing flowers, ostriches and hippopotami. The ostriches and hippopotami utilize recognizable ballet steps, but the flowers rely on movement qualities and formal properties alone as the basis of their dances. The understanding that form and quality exists in artworks in general may aid the perception of formalist characteristics in a particular artwork. Therefore, formal skills and experience from the visual arts and other art forms, such as music and theatre, might also be applicable in the dance context.

Alongside informed perception based on arts knowledge there is also another level of viewing and understanding an artwork. Even an inexperienced dance viewer may enjoy watching a dance. Langer (1953, p. 25) argues that ‘what is artistically good is whatever articulates and presents feelings to our understanding’. Arnheim (1967, p. 321) explains further that ‘meaning-based on mere learning or knowledge is at best secondary for the purposes of the artist. He must rely on the direct and self-explanatory impact of perceptual forces upon the human mind’. The viewer’s experience of the artwork operates through perceptual engagement and, according to McFee (1992, p. 147), judgement should be based on the individual’s own perception of the artwork as much as on what the individual is told by critics. All three of these philosophers agree that the viewer’s experience of the artwork in relation to his or her perception of the artwork, is necessary for the development of an ‘inside’ view of the artwork, and that the viewer’s level of previous dance-specific knowledge, and thus the viewer’s perception of the artwork, will influence his or her response to it.

Devising in online collaborations

The early part of the devising process involves identifying the creative potential of the starting point and the phases encourage and support the development of a performing arts response to the problem statement. In fact, it is circular rather than linear. As the chapter has shown, different approaches to devising in online collaboration require different teaching strategies; participants in each of the 3 phases may have to work with partners in each of the 3 phases. Abbs describes the devising process as ‘an extended creative collaboration that takes place over an extended period of time, following a timeline and a cycle of activities’. Devising supports the creation of a shared experience of the creative collaboration that is described as ‘a non-linear process’ in which the 3 phases are not necessarily followed in a specific order, and that takes place in an online environment. The process described here is not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide an overview of the various processes and techniques used in online creative collaboration.

This chapter has focused on the process of devising, for directorial guidance.
in relation to his or her personal life experience is of primary importance, with other medium-specific knowledge influencing but not dictating to perception. The only prerequisite for the appreciation to which these writers all concede is a perceptual engagement with the artwork, which implies an application of self and personal experience.

Louis Arnaud Reid (1989, p. 17) writes that all previous knowledge is brought to the perception of an artwork. Where knowledge of the art form exists in a viewer, the viewer will draw upon it either consciously or unconsciously. But both the viewer with dance-specific knowledge and the viewer without it will also draw upon knowledge gained from everyday life, which might be from many diverse experiences. Where knowledge is applied unconsciously, it may be labelled ‘intuition’, and Reid (1989, p. 15) claims that ‘all knowledge contains an intuitive element’. He explains that ‘intuition gathers into itself, as it were, much assimilated and tacit knowledge’. His argument is that intuition is far from subjective, but is in fact grounded in knowledge, although the applicant may not realize that he or she is using assimilated knowledge in the moment of application. Intuition has been mentioned as being part of the ‘play’ element of the creative process. Though the creator may feel that he or she is ‘doodling’ or creating in an intuitive manner through improvisation, he or she is in fact bringing all of his or her tacit knowledge to bear in that doodling.

Devising in online creative work

The early part of this chapter discussed the creative process in broad philosophical terms, identifying the creative cycle as presented by Abbs (see Figure 1.1). The cycle is based on the phases encountered by an individual engaged in the act of creating. It is generic to the performing arts rather than being tied to any particular medium or context. A key point is that it is cyclical rather than linear, indicating a high level of flexibility in its application. In the following chapters the cycle will be used as a central framework for the creative process in online collaborative projects. It enables analysis of the actions and experiences of participants in each of the phases, providing a structure to facilitate this normally free-flowing process. Abbs presented this cycle primarily as the process encountered by the individual artist, and indeed much of the literature on creativity concentrates on the single creator. Online creative collaborations rely on a group process where artist(s) and viewers work together, and for this reason the devising method of working is fundamental to this research. Devising supports participation, group collaboration and ownership are essential for online creative collaborations. It provides a structure led by a facilitator within which creativity can take place on an individual level as part of the group effort. Devising processes frequently follow a timeline that is compatible with Abbs' creative cycle in the way that it has been described here; starting with an agreement on the inspiration, manipulation of material through improvisation and exploration, moving towards a forming process that results in performances and feedback, first within the group and then usually for an external audience of some sort. While devising was originally conceived by theatre practitioners, its application for dance has been recognized by many choreographers and is demonstrated in the discussion of Fisher's practice. The analysis of Fisher's rehearsals has been presented within the framework of Abbs' creative cycle, indicating the compatibility of the individual-focused cycle and the group devising approach. In the design and analysis of the online process, both elements will be central.

This chapter has shown that texts describing devising methods tend to agree on the necessity for directional guidance and facilitation, both in releasing the performers' creativity and in a method to explore themes and ideas. These methods are not exclusive to creating dance works, but rather can be applied to any group working on performance, whether live or online.
forming a cohesive end product. Does that mean that the online creative process still requires the artist to take the guiding role in the collaboration? The introduction presented the dynamic proscenium as a meeting point for artists and viewers, but it is not suggested that this should be a place of total equality. Rather it is proposed that the artist should provide a structured environment in which online participants can take a creative role. Fisher's dancers were able to take creative roles within her dance work because of the specific structures that she gave them to explore. The online creative collaborations approach transposes theatre devising into the Internet environment so that diverse online participants are able to make input to the creation of a single artwork within a given structure guided by the artist. This should enable them to feel a part of a developing artwork where they can enjoy the coherence and artistry of their work together. In two of the projects described in Part 2 the participants become the performers of the final product, but the performances for the Hands-On Dance Projects are carried out by a separate group of dancers, with the creative input from participants focused on the choreographic period of the process. Both are equally valid approaches if the participants feel that they are involved in the creative process and can see how their input affects the ongoing action.

Devising methods foster a sense of 'group-ness', seeking to develop a safe space for collaboration where questioning and criticism can take place in a non-threatening atmosphere. Devising is frequently used in community environments because of the emphasis on the group experience and solidarity. The communal nature of online project work can be seen in the projects presented in the introduction, and for this reason it is likely that a community-led perspective may be appropriate in online creative collaborations. The focus of online collaborative work is likely to be on the process rather than the product, although the product will be essential as a tangible outcome of the process. If the process is facilitated in an appropriate manner then all participants, regardless of background or previous knowledge of dance, should be able to feel actively involved in the creative process. Participants with less previous knowledge or experience of the art form are likely to require greater facilitation within the group, but they are also likely to learn from the experience. Devising methods do account for differences in the participants' backgrounds and they have been successfully used in difficult community situations to create group products. Yet in these situations the devising participants are working together in a physical environment, with face-to-face communications, In an online virtual space where the community is less concrete and harder to define, will differences in participants' previous experiences lead to problems in the collaboration if the group perceives some as being more knowledgeable than others? These problems will be addressed with reference to Internet communities in Chapter 2.

Participants may employ knowledge from a variety of sources, and this chapter has described how it is theoretically possible to take visual and formal skills from other experiences and apply them in the choreographic process. This seems to hold well for the online creative experience, since all of the interaction must necessarily be visual or textual in nature due to the lack of physical contact available on the Internet. However, Myers and Myers argue that:

Your particular training has a great deal to do with what you perceive. Education is at best a process of differentiation, of learning to make discriminations. What to the untrained eye looks all the same is full of significant differences to the specialist.

(1988, p. 42)

This suggests that although visual arts skills might help in arrangement of material, without specific dance knowledge the individual viewer may have difficulty in perceiving the
The creative process still
involves production, but it is not suggested
that the director should play an active role. Fisher's
production still involved the specific structure.
but the specific structure is not preserved.
Fisher's approach transposes the tools, participants are able to be
led by the artist, they can enjoy the
process described in Part 2
performances for the
artistic reasons, with the
creative process. Both are equally
important in the process and can
create a safe space for
the online environment.
the emphasis on
project work can be
relaxed, it is likely that a
threatening atmosphere
will be created. The focus
is on the final product, although
the process is facilitated
by previous knowledge
and experience. Participants
need not require greater
experience. Devising
approaches have been
rejected. Yet in these
environment, with
creativity, it is less concrete
and lead to problems
more than others?
Chapter 2.
this chapter has
from other experiences
for the online creative
creative collaboration
the director facilitating an open approach, but might this raise problems regarding
the coherence and artistic value of the final product? Much of the devising approach is dependent
upon communication, and the way in which this is managed within the creative process. This
chapter has presented key issues for the creative element of the online creative collaboration
model. Chapter 2 will consider the nature of communication and the Internet in more detail.