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September 20, 2024

Celebrating Abundance in Collabaction

Guest Curator: Bangalore Creative Circus with EkStep Foundation

This is a bi-weekly newsletter

Bangalore Creative Circus (BCC) is an urban living lab committed to inspiring and enabling sustainable systems, and a regenerative culture of living. Their physical space is a 20,000 sq.ft. industrial warehouse converted using upcycled materials into an experience centre for sustainability solutions, an alternative learning centre, a creative arts hub, a farm-to-table restaurant, edible gardens, and a community centre for events, workshops, and performances.



Sometimes, feeling alive is embracing the lightness in being. And when do you truly feel the lightness of being? When you're at play with everything and everyone around you but most crucially when you're at play with yourself.

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Circus organised a carnival: a Play themed flea market, with various play installations (listed below), a photo exhibition of **Vicky Roy's 'Bachpan'** series of photos and also film screenings of the **Bachpan Manao film** and the **Young Explorers** series from the **Urban 95** initiative by **Van Leer Foundation** to nudge visitors to engage with the idea of public spaces being play-friendly and child-friendly.

Installations Celebrating Play

- An innovative take on a **hopscotch grid** - involving both your hands and feet
- **Doodle Wall** - a large wall containing a painted landscape, inviting visitors to add more elements
- **Dancing Stairs** - On the face of each step will feature a prompt for a certain movement. By the time you have climbed the flight of steps you have done a small dance routine
- **Up-cycled Instruments** - Salvaged material turned into drums, shakers, chimes, rain stick, etc
- **Flow arts props** - an assortment of props like hula hoops, poi, dapostar, soft balls
- **Oobleck** - a material that behaves like a solid or a liquid depending on how much pressure you apply.
- **Soundscape** - a collage of old cassettes, vinyls, and CD's on a wall. Some of them will have sound pads embedded behind them and they will all be linked to a small speaker on the wall. Visitors can press the objects and play with sound.
- **Re-imagination Game** - an assortment of mundane objects inviting visitors to pair up with others and name creative uses for the objects besides their conventional use
- **Wigs, masks, miscellaneous props**
- **Board Games** - an assortment of games like Scrabble, Uno, Cards, Monopoly Deal, Ludo, Chess, Jigsaw Puzzle, Conversation Cards, etc
- **Troy Blocks** - a set of 62 wooden building blocks that come in different shapes and sizes
- **Table tennis table**



Celebrating Play: D.I.Y.

All of this was brought alive thanks to the efforts of BCC's community of staff, artists, fabricators, and volunteers. To make this celebration of Play a template that anyone can use in their own contexts, **Siddharth Lakshman**

1. A diversity of voices need to be present in making the carnival come to life:

Diverse voices rooted in core values like inclusivity, accessibility, positivity, and safety ensure a holistic approach. With regards to the production of the art and the installations, diverse contributors with the interest, intent, creativity and innovative streak, together with different skills, whether as an artist, or a volunteer, are also crucial. The other invisible forces would be project management, social media and marketing, documentation, and budgeting. It's useful to have people with specialised skills in all of these aspects so that you can get the best out of each of these things. Lastly, and very importantly, you will need one or two people that are weaving the whole thing together. They will play the role of curators or project managers,



2. A big, open space to play along with a couple of small spaces for reflection.

It is important for the spaces to be founded on the values of openness, inclusivity, and positivity. Ideally, there can be one main hall where most of the activities occur. To enable breakouts, reflection, and introspection, it is best to have one or two other spaces. It is in these spaces that we held the photo exhibition and film screenings. These spaces enable the flow of people and cater to different energies.



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have.

It's always important to plan for diverse demographics that come to the space so that everyone has something or the other to engage with. As a core aspect of that, one would be market stalls. Ideally, if these are stalls related to small and/or environment conscious businesses, it would be good to support conscious consumerism. But don't overdo the stalls because it is easy for the visitors to step into the role of the consumer. It's crucial to have more activity stalls, centred around play, than market stalls. Have different opportunities for engagement whether it is pottery, art, music, movement, drama, or anything else at all. It's also ideal to have a set of activities that people can self-guide themselves through.



These should be placed throughout the space. Food, and spaces to rest are very important too. A good-to-have is impact based experiences at the carnival. Since tons of people come, it's a great opportunity for people to interact with NGOs or others that're causing a positive impact related to the theme of the event. And, of course, it's always a good idea to have entertainment like music to get people moving.

4. The main arena should be abuzz with activity throughout the event duration.

The market stalls, and interactive installations form the foundation that enable the feeling of safety, and belonging. It's important to have these buzzing all the time so people experience these things and become more open to taking part in the entire experience. It opens them up a little bit to orient them to the space, the vibe, the energy, and vision of the whole event.



5. The idea spreads through good storytelling and the community you build.

There is potency in an idea whose time has come. So, it's about tapping into the idea of timing and space. The dissemination of the idea happens through good storytelling and broadcasting it through the press, or social media. The world should get to hear of your idea so that like-hearted people may be able to support your project. But community is also equally important - How can there be collective ownership,

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back to them in a more intentional way to see how their ideas can be brought to life. Staying in touch with people that attended the event ensures that they feel it wasn't just another event and that there's recall of the experience for them. The staying-in-touch can happen through email, or calls, which could become physical gatherings or meet ups. Eventually those people could organise, participate, and facilitate themselves. That's how it starts becoming decentralised.

6. You can get it done with amazing quality and cheap.

Waste isn't waste. That philosophy ensures that a lot can be salvaged and turned into something else. This is crucial. When it comes to human power, bring people on board for different projects in different capacities whether it is professionally or by commissioning someone. One of the best options though is through volunteering. With volunteering it becomes a win-win situation for you and for the volunteer. Request folks to donate any resources that they may not need also goes a long way in reducing costs.

Everyone resonates with something different. At the end of the day people are looking to feel safe, a sense of belonging, possibilities for connection, to express themselves, and, in our case, to play. If we can achieve all of this or some of this, people will be left with a positive experience. If there are also nooks and corners for introspection and reflection, then that's also important because they may leave asking some important questions. They may change the way they see the world or live their lives.



There were also a number of insights that **Varun Naik** from EkStep Foundation had to share with respect to the event:

1. The project manager/curator should connect with the idea, larger picture, and mission.

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that's ok as long as the curator has the larger vision intact.

2. The narrative needs to be crafted by the holder of the idea.

It is fine if others want to craft it too and work towards it, but it is very rare to see that happen as people seem to be held back by their own lens. You may paint a picture for people but you truly never know what they see.

3. ALWAYS keep it simple. People engaged with the simplest of installations like the doodle wall and the table tennis table with the most enthusiasm.

4. Stick to the intent consistently and pull people towards it.

It's very easy for people to get distracted while planning. Ideas are a dime a dozen. But always keep the intent right at the top of everything. This will really help in ensuring that the right bits always get executed.

5. Children should lead the way a lot more often.

Children engaged with all the installations with much less inhibitions than adults did. If we just let ourselves be led by them, we'd just be a much happier, and content species of life. It's a big and bold statement to make. But really, just look around you, it's adults that have really complicated things. Yes, we also have made a whole lot of positive changes and we should take credit for it. But it is about time that adults held more space for children, their experiences, and their opinions.

6. Pictures may speak a thousand words but sometimes all you need are 5 right words. The right words, the sharpness of language, questions, and prompts can really push people to engage with complex ideas very deeply yet in a simplistic manner. Powerful pictures combined with the sharpness of language are an even more potent formula though. People at the Gallery (where the photo exhibition was) spent quite some time introspecting the child-friendliness and play-friendliness of public spaces and shared some lovely wishes for wanting to see more play in public spaces.

7. Parents usually only play when their kids play. Why do adult and parent responsibilities hold us back from playing? How do we feel empowered if we first don't feel agency over the lives we would ideally wish to lead? (This, of course, is based on an assumption that all adults would wish to play more and have more time to just feel free and unoccupied)

8. Having a strong community will ensure that someone or the other will turn up for you. It pays to put time, effort, and care into the community that cares about what you do and to also provide a space for them to express themselves as they wish to. When you care for them, they care for you.



All of these insights came from planning for the event and experiencing it with a certain lightness. That lightness really helped to be fully present and to trust one's instincts. A lightness akin to the feeling of playing. A lightness that let oneself be at play. Maybe we can begin to hold space for such a kind of lightness in all that we do and let us be led by the balance of play, intent, and effort.



The Bachpan Manao Network at Play

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This [#InternationalLiteracyDay](#), **Pratham Books StoryWeaver** launched their Bachpan Manao collabaction with **EkStep Foundation** to explore what it means to spread the joy of reading! To kick things off, they asked the teams at EkStep and Pratham Books one simple question: 'What do you feel when you read a good book?' Check out the answers [here!](#) Become a Joyful Reading Champion today and [#GetChildrenReading!](#) Click [here](#) to know more.



Free play isn't just 'play time'. From empathy to communication, motor skills to goal setting - here is how free outdoor play helps every child be happier and healthier.

[Check](#) out the latest post by **Bookosmia**.

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