

C-DaRE Invites...

This writing is inspired by a virtual conversation in late 2021 between **Kate Marsh, Lily Hayward-Smith** and **Simon Ellis** from the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE). In keeping with the 'C-DaRE Invites...' model, they met with cups of tea, over Zoom, and reflected on what it has been so far and hopes for what it might be in the future



C-DaRE Invites... online with Dr Miche Fabre Lewin and Dr Flora Gathorne-Hardy. Screenshot: Lily Hayward-Smith.

‘**F**ailure’ and mess are important parts of our curation, we’ve never put pressure on events to be anything prescribed, so we’re really clear with ourselves and our guests that a conversation over tea and cake between five people is just as valuable and rich as an event with 70 people. (Kate).

During the conversation Simon asked Kate and Lily 4 questions, What is C-DaRE Invites?, What is the curatorial process for developing these events? How does the idea of an ‘invitation’ distinguish C-DaRE Invites... as something different? And what happens next? The text that follows are Kate and Lily’s reflections on these questions.

C-DaRE Invites... grew from a research seminar series that was initially a traditional research dissemination platform, where academics and researchers from within the Centre and external collaborators would present their research to mostly an internal audience, with some external participants joining from the local area. Kate Marsh and Lily Hayward-Smith became involved in 2018 and developed the series into C-DaRE Invites..., which has evolved into a curatorial project whereby Kate and Lily work with colleagues in C-DaRE to produce

research sharing events that nurture the interests and themes in the Centre, showcase collaborations and offer a platform for other researchers working in areas that merge with these themes. “As we took over, we started to sculpt it into what it is now, what we held onto is that and it is still a vehicle for sharing research with other academics and artists from within and outside of Coventry University.” (Kate). The way each ‘event’ comes about has now shifted from a purely organisational process to one that is nurturing and more curatorial than administrative. The first C-DaRE Invites... launch event was an invitation to all C-DaRE colleagues to share their research through some sort of artefact, an object, a photo, a book, etc., and then other academics from Coventry University were invited to come and explore these and start a conversation. This was a very informal ‘show and tell’ type of event, which was then followed by a lunch. The participants were invited to sit around the table like at a large family dinner. Conversations continued while people passed dishes of food back and forth. “What I remember is that over lunch, as we all sat around the table, there was an easiness to the conversation because people seemed comfortable with the space and each other, so maybe the food and shared eating removes some of the potential awkwardness of starting new conversations.” (Lily) The C-DaRE Invites... series then continued as individual events with internal and external invitees and the provision of food became an important focus for bringing these events together.

The key thing is the word invite and what it means to invite someone into the Centre; there’s a warmth to that offer that not only positions C-DaRE as a home for dance research but also clearly brings the work of others into the community. “So, for me, C-DaRE Invites... has a really beautiful informality in that invitation; there’s an openness in the offer. It’s also about hospitality, for instance, in how we host and the language we use in our invitation to others

that feels really important. (Kate)

There are three layers to the invitational conversations: colleagues at C-DaRE are invited to suggest who they would like to invite, then we invite that person and then the invitation goes out to others to share in the conversation, so it's not just a one-way conversation between curator and speaker, it revolves around the many ways in and out of the research. When people are invited into the C-DaRE home to share their research, there is a dialogue about how they envisage that sharing to take place. There is an understanding that each person coming to share is different, works differently and has something different to say; there is never one fixed way for that to be contained in a C-DaRE Invites... event. "It's about how we nurture relationships with people and organisations and this happens in the planning of each event and of course in the event itself. Also, importantly it's in carrying on these conversations after the event has taken place." (Kate)

In developing the descriptive text about the event, the invitee is asked to finish the sentence 'An invitation to...' "We always ask people how they want to be with us in sharing their research, [...] so that what they are sharing with people is more than just talking about their practice or research, there are layers because we're inviting others in to discover, explore and question." (Lily) The aim of this approach is to curate events that are open at all angles. "My hope is that C-DaRE Invites... makes a space for our colleagues to be out in the world doing their research and to continue with the home analogy to bring people into that home so it creates space for growing connections and relationships." (Kate)

The C-DaRE Invites... series does aim to resist the more traditional modes of research dissemination. One intention of the series is to nurture the researcher and the research, and offer a supportive space for it whilst simultaneously avoiding the natural hierarchy that forms in academic research events and making them more inclusive. "Yes, I think that speaks to our ongoing question of what it is about formal research seminars that exclude certain people and we are thinking about that more and more, for instance, what can we do to increase access, and I think very formal seminars are full of expectation and prescribed ways of doing things and that can feel very inaccessible for lots of people." (Kate)

One way that Kate and Lily do this is by disrupting the formality. For example, making food a curated part of the event and often organising the space so all participants including speakers are sitting in a circle or around a large table. This encourages the idea that the speaker is in conversation with

and not just speaking to the audience. This was easier to achieve during in-person events before the pandemic took the series online in March 2020. "We are always reminding ourselves to stay away from the symbols of regular research events; one example of this is food. [...] This is not a functional thing or an additional aspect, it's absolutely central to the curation, it sounds so simple, but it's based on our shared belief that care is a big part of hospitality and hosting, furthermore that interesting conversations happen when people are sharing food in the same way that a family might, so we actively choose food that can be passed around. [...] In this approach, it sits in this space between the formal research sharing and the personal." (Kate) Moving the series online did pose some initial problems in the way the events would be run. But soon it became clear that there was still an openness to the invitations and moving online could still operate in a similar way by inviting people to enjoy food and drink during Zoom meetings. Being online also allowed the events to become instantly more accessible.

This curational approach is finding its way to being practice-research in and of itself, which is something that Kate and Lily are interested in pursuing further, exploring how they share research and what it means to think about approaching the curation differently. "I think also bringing together food and conversation feels like a way to bring people back into their body, so hopefully they're not sitting trying to secretly eat crisps quietly or wanting a sandwich at the other end of the table. We are not separating the listening and the talking from feeding people and I think that's quite different." (Lily)

The curation process is also starting to look more at what each event and the subject relates to, who else is involved or has connections to this, etc., which is about recognising that the research does not often sit in a space all on its own. There are always connections and sometimes it's useful to bring those connections in to enrich the offering.

As C-DaRE Invites... moves forward into a future that none of us can quite imagine yet, Kate and Lily hope to broaden the invitation into C-DaRE, making space for more voices and experiences and for research and practice that intersect with one another. They aim to maintain an ethos that values hospitality and care, conversation and questions, keeping central their shared belief that when we come together informally, literally breaking bread with one another, that new relationships might be formed and new ideas brought to life.

Info

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