

Abstract

More widespread knowledge and appreciation of d/Deaf culture and sign language in Australia could enhance creative opportunities for collaboration and foster allyship. In this research, I consider shared performance and comprehension skills of visual communication users, specifically dancers and signers, and the opportunities they provide each other and the communities around them for creative collaboration. I ask: what are culturally appropriate integrations of dance, Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and screen media that could provide improved access to language and education for children and their families? My aim is to generate popular and culturally appropriate children's entertainment that educates by seamlessly integrating Auslan into shows and screen media, and provides access for all children, particularly deaf children, and their parents. By working closely with deaf cultural consultants, content creators, dancers and academics to develop creative integrations of visual communication, this research has produced:

- processes for embedding culturally appropriate use of sign language and gesture in children's entertainment
- creative Auslan engagement options for families of deaf children
- opportunities for artistic approaches to sign language integrations in media.

The thesis comprises a written document outlining the theory, methods of research, and discussion of concepts explored; and multiple visual forms of documentation of the action research and its practical outputs.



Figure 1. Dancers [applauding] in sign language on the *Emma Memma Twirly Tour 2023*
(Image credit: Jared Lyons)

Emma Watkins –

Renowned children's entertainer with a focus on integrated accessibility through visual communication combined with creative children's screen media.

Dancer and filmmaker, Emma Watkins, began her performance career early from the age of 3, nurturing her love of dance and movement, performing ballet, Irish, hip-hop, tap and contemporary dance at The McDonald College for Performing Arts and ED5 International in Sydney. Emma found a love for film editing during her time at Sydney Film School and completed her Masters in Media Arts and Production at UTS. After dancing in productions around Australia, France, India, Canada, China and New Zealand, Emma joined Australian children's entertainment group, The Wiggles in 2010, becoming the first female Wiggle in the main line-up.

Emma's passion for movement and body expression expanded to an interest in sign language and raising awareness of Australia's Deaf community since she was young. Ever since, Emma pursued studying sign language, with a Diploma of Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and Diploma in Interpreting at Deaf Connect. She currently sits on the advisory board for the Australian Government, the 'Early Years Strategy' focusing on children's needs and family services for future policies.

Emma has recently completed her PhD at Macquarie University combining all her passions, focusing on the affective and artistic integrations of sign language, dance and film editing. Currently, Emma is touring the nation and abroad with her new children's entertainment venture 'Emma Memma', winning the ARIA award for Best Children's Album in 2023. 'Emma Memma' features Emma and Deaf dancer and artist, Elvin Lam (Elvin Melvin) highlighting visual language for preschoolers and their family network to give them the skills to communicate through sign and gesture.