



## ArtPlay Mentorship Program: Interview with Shannan Lim

Performance maker and clown, Shannan Lim, has a particular interest in broadening his experience in working with children. Here's what he has to say about his participation in the ArtPlay mentorship program.

### What was the Artist Learning Program that you participated in at ArtPlay?

I was part of an artist development program at ArtPlay which included the delivery of two workshops for children aged eight to ten in clowning, improvisation and physical comedy — *Hang Around, Be A Clown* — plus a mentorship component with artist Luke O'Connor.

### Why did you agree to participate in this program?

I think ArtPlay is an excellent organisation with incredibly diverse art and artists making cool work for kids, and I wanted to be a part of it. Plus, teaching is an important part of what I do.

### What did the mentorship involve?

I ran ideas by Luke before formally planning my workshops to get a more rounded understanding of what could work with the age group. It was encouraging to hear that they would like doing many different types of performance activities if the objectives were clear and the instructions, however complex, were communicated and practiced step-by-step. More broadly, it was good to talk to Luke about the purpose of teaching kids clowning in the first place. Playfulness is not something that you really have to encourage in them, but the main task is translating that play on stage when adults or other children are watching.

After our first meeting I observed [School with No Wall's](https://www.schoolwithnowalls.com/)<sup>1</sup> *Moon Broken*, an immersive production at ArtPlay that had children move through the narrative environment in hammock boats on wheels, steered by their adults. Afterwards, I spoke with one of *Moon Broken's* creators about its development. It was nice to walk beside the boats and see which parts of the work kids connected with and how the artists balanced story, visual and interactive elements. My team is developing an immersive theatre project for children so this illuminated how much testing and redesigning we would have to do and how distilled our concepts should be. It was very motivating, really.

I also observed *Gut Feeling* by [Born in a Taxi](http://www.borninataxi.com.au/)<sup>2</sup>. It was another new immersive work— an adventure through the digestive system. The set was impressive, and the team were still improvising and fine-tuning their performance which I found very entertaining. We talked for a while afterwards about the work and our shared interest in physical theatre.

### How did the first workshop go?

My aim in *Hang Around, Be A Clown* was to have a repertoire of varied exercises so I could modify the workshop in the moment, based on the kids' responses. They seemed to have the most pleasure in exercises that framed their play with a specific purpose. Conversely I thought that open-ended activities were less useful

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.schoolwithnowalls.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.borninataxi.com.au/>

for training performance. This is maybe the opposite case with adults. For instance, an exercise that I've now done with both adults and children is Space Walk which is simply walking around the workshop space changing speed, posture and intent. Adults like to stumble on a physicality or character without too much direction but the kids were fine with constant instructions that kept them on their toes. If they became bored, they would do what they wanted instead and it would be their own form of discovery. One feedback note from Luke was to perhaps do fewer exercises so each child could have a turn if they wanted.

### **And how did the second one go?**

Running the clown workshop for a second time was very useful because I got to work with a group that was more diverse in its age range and confidence level and I could also compare adjustments in my teaching plan between the sessions. Based on what I had learnt, I concentrated on activities that would build in performance intensity and stage time, and sequenced them in a more logical manner e.g. working on movement first and then gradually introducing voice.

### **How would you sum up the mentorship program at ArtPlay?**

I had a highly, highly positive experience at ArtPlay. The entire team, from the coordinating staff to front-of-house staff, to other artists and my mentor, were so supportive and it is a rare opportunity to be able to teach and learn how to collaborate with children in art forms that I am passionate about. I am looking forward to my upcoming workshop at ArtPlay on September 10 (check the ArtPlay website for details closer to the date). Most importantly, I thought the kids were all uniquely funny and endearing, and looked adorable in their clown noses. An excellent way to spend Sunday afternoons!

### **How can people find out more about your work?**

My collaborators and I have a [Facebook page](#)<sup>3</sup> and you can also check out my [Instagram account](#)<sup>4</sup> for updates.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/arewenormalchildren>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.instagram.com/shannanlim>