Quality Agreements 2019-2024
Report of evaluation talks with educational platforms during the academic year 2021-2022
October 2022

Nell Schwan, Rosie Haward, Tessa Verheul

<u>1. Context</u>

The editorial board organised an open call in April 2021. 11 groups responded with a proposal to start a new educational platform. Based on specific criteria—urgency of proposal, feasibility, originality in either educational model, approach, or topic—the editorial board selected 2 groups to start their platform from September 2021 onwards:

- aux)

- Embodied Knowledge Bureau

Along with a budget, the editorial board supported the platforms with a coordinator, who helps the platforms to realize their activities.

Due to eased Covid measures, most activities could happen in person and only part of the programs of each platform happened online. aux) organised concerts and listening sessions, feedback sessions for students active in sound art, lectures with invited guests, audio walks and interactive workshops. The Embodied Knowledge Bureau hosted somatic and movement workshops with a regular group of participants. Other events were open to those with irregular attendance: screenings, academic lectures, writing workshops and more. Both platforms attracted participants from MA and BA programs, teachers, and people from outside the Rietveld/Sandberg community.

In the spring of 2022 aux) and EKB, with the support of the editorial board, organised a public event in the form of a hybrid symposium-party on the topics of movement and sound. The event was held at OT301 in Amsterdam and enjoyed a full audience (app. 100 participants).
At the end of the spring semester 2022 both platforms finished their programming as supported by the editorial board. The Embodied Knowledge Bureau plans on producing a publication that summarises their activities in the fall of 2022, and aux) are organising further events open to students and the public. At the time of writing the platforms are in the process of raising funds for the events, in and outside of the academy.

<u>2. Two evaluation conversations</u>

Coordinator of the platforms Rosie Haward and policy advisor Tessa Verheul organised evaluation talks with the three platforms and their participants in July and September 2022. A series of questions were prepared and shared with the platforms beforehand:
1.What were your expectations regarding the program at the start? To what extent have these expectations been fulfilled?
2. What was your most positive experience during this program? Can you describe what it was and why it was such a positive experience?
3. How did this program compare to the regular program of your department? Did they reinforce each other, was there conflict?
4. What was the average time investment in hours per week? How did you experience this?
5. Was this program of added value for your BA/MA study? If so: in what way? If not, can you explain your answer?
6. What tips and advice would you like to give to future platforms? Or if you were organizing another program, what would you do differently?

7. What do you think the editorial board should take into account when selecting new projects? Are there certain criteria that should be used?
Fragments of these conversations can be found in the attachment, see page 4.

3. Conclusions based on the three conversations

What the two platforms brought:
- A chance for students to gather around topics they are interested in, and meet others who share the same interest. The platform filled a gap that departments currently don't. "I was really happy that the academy had a platform where people who work with sound can get feedback or share information."

- Support of individual research into media and practices outside of the departmental system.

- A chance for participants to make connections with artists and practitioners outside of the academy, which in some cases led to further collaborations or work for the participants.

- A different social dynamic than what students might be able to access elsewhere. "For me it was also about creating a safe space in a field which is very male dominated. In that sense it was very fruitful. We connected people that work with very different aspects of the medium." and "For me this was a very comfortable space. I was quite new in the school, and it felt comforting to be in the program, to share and talk. As a girl I felt ok with asking questions and participating. I'm very interested in sound but it always feels like there is such a huge gap, that you are so behind that you will never catch up/arrive."

- A chance to practice collaboration, mutual skill exchange and trust outside of the teacher/ student dichotomy (despite visiting guest teachers).

- A sensory/physical/embodied approach to study, research and art making. "It wasn't just a theoretical or social experience, but more physical and emotional. This is what I really appreciate with aux). It could very easily have been driven by theory, which is also important. But there are many other aspects which are important to take into account when dealing with sound. This came through in the workshop with Julia Eckhardt, for instance. When everyone was sharing sound pieces that they've made, and sharing more emotional or deep layers of these works."

- A chance for teachers to be students again, and be inspired in how to organise their own teaching. "I'm really happy that the initiative was open not only for students but also for me as a teacher. But as a teacher, you have just as much to learn as a student. I was also interested in how people participate in this kind of workshop. You got the sense that it was more than just an event where you attend and go separate ways. It was possible to stay in contact with one another between sessions. This was really nice and taught me more about how to facilitate a good workshop for others, and how to build a group around it."

- Community building and collaboration. "Apart from everything that I've learned I also feel like we became a very small and nice community where everyone felt very seen."

- After the end of funding from the editorial board, most platforms remain active in some form.

What drawbacks the platforms experienced:

- Both groups experienced needing to spend more hours on organising the platform than what was formally paid.

- Both groups described less interest in the activities of platform from their department heads and teachers than they would have desired. Organizers consider the platform part of their artistic practice, and would prefer if this activity was taken into consideration when assessing them.

- Organizers experienced occasional difficulty accessing enough physical spaces in the academy to host their activities, especially around assessment times.

- Both platforms express a wish to continue their research past the initial year of funding. They believe that the first year is a nice start but that the project needs to grow and mature. While continuing the platform with funding from elsewhere, or in another form, is possible, making the switch disrupts their working structure and activities. They may also not be able to find support for their research elsewhere..

- The final public presentation and/or symposium overlap and create extra, unexpected work. It is preferred that the preparation for a final public presentation is integrated into the activities of the platform, thought out the year. "I don't remember being informed, when we started the platform, that we had to produce an event aside from the 'final public presentation' of our platform. Which meant that I was thinking about our final public presentation from the beginning of the platform. The ideas had time to mature, we had time to reach out to people, the production could run parallel to our platform, rather than condensing it into two months of intense work."

4. Possible solutions / advice to the editorial board
- Take more responsibility for informing the departments and the heads about the legitimacy and importance of the platforms.

- Offer more practical help when engaging the platforms in activities such as producing a symposium or participating in events. For instance: a producer, more hours for the organisers which don't have to come out of the platform budget.

- Plan to stagger the start of new platforms, so only 2 begin at once. This will make accessing facilities easier, as well as provide focus for participating students

- Share conclusions or tips from previous platforms with those starting this year.

As participating students (or staff), what were your expectations regarding the program at the start? To what extent have these expectations been fulfilled?

- Whether the expectations were fulfilled: more than yes! Apart from everything that I've learned I also feel like we became a very small and nice community where everyone felt very seen. There was freedom to explore, that that was the most important thing that happened.

- Sandberg and Rietveld have a curriculum, but what happens when a student-led platform that is concerned with embodied knowledge enters this ecosystem? How do we interact with students? There was a question about hierarchy that we were very concerned with. We didn't want hierarchy to stand in the way.

- When I first joined the group it was as a participant, and later as an organizer. When I joined I was already an alum, and it was kind of healing to have this experience, post graduation. My whole MA was during Covid, apart from the first semester. So it was very important and beneficial for me to be in a room with everyone else and discuss embodied knowledge.

- For me, the core curiosity was the meshing of the Sandberg environment and the academic approach to embodied knowledge, which I've been swimming in. Plus all the workshops and somatics — actually moving and playing together.

- Here is how I experienced the students in an art academy, compared to the university where I normally teach: in the workshops where there was a strong presence of the core group, which had already been established and had a mutual flow. In those instances there was more trust. Art students also have more inclination to play around with movement or physical interaction than university students would have. Then I would dare to ask more of the group. I've done a few similar classes in the university, but then I fear that the class doesn't want to be challenged in this (physical) way at all, while here it was very different.

- I wanted to get to know more people in the academy working with and through sound. To be able to create a meeting point or network, to share knowledge and skills. All of these things have worked out well, in my perspective.

- This community really gives comfort. I'm always looking forward to the meetings. Expectations were definitely fulfilled, and I'm really looking forward to coming back to the space of sound research. Previously, I was always collaborating with guys who would make the sound for my works, but now I feel like I have more ability to do it myself. That feels really powerful to me.

- For me, both as an organizer and as a participant of what we organized, I wanted to get to know more people in the academy working with and through sound. To be able to create a meeting point or network, and bring all these different people together through events, talks

or workshops. To share knowledge and skills.

- It was very interesting to fall into this context, with a group of people from different backgrounds. Since I am normally a teacher at the academy, I was also interested in how people *participate* in this kind of workshop. I found this very inspiring as a teacher. And it didn't matter that I didn't have any previous experience working with sound!

What was your most positive experience during this program? Can you describe what it was and why it was such a positive experience?

- The immersive concert in the gym. It wasn't just a theoretical or social experience, but physical and emotional. The platform could very easily have been driven by theory, but there are many other aspects which are important to take into account when dealing with sound.

- We had a tantric meditation in December. That workshop changed everything. Our group became so close. We were doing little exercises that led up to this meditation, which was beautiful. I've never experienced something like that.

- The skill-share towards the end of the course was also very interesting. How are the students' own practices in dialogue with what we've been working on with them?

- I feel like we succeeded in normalizing certain forms of discourse within educational environments. We really weren't looking to create a space for healing, because we're not authorized to do so, but for some students, who were diving into somatic practices, it was a space to share those in. In light of the fact that these experiences are often very lonely and very individual.

- A very strong sense of community.

- I'm really happy that the initiative was open not only for students but also for me as a teacher. The hierarchy that everybody needs to learn everything at the same time, is of course not present at the Rietveld. But as a teacher, you have just as much to learn as a student. It's valuable to meet people who have the same interests, which, as an artist, I find difficult at times.

- On the organizational level, we approached the project in a non-hierarchical way where everyone amongst organizers was able to present the people they wanted to reach out to. And for me, this non-hierarchical freedom was very nice to experience.

How did this program compare to the regular program of your department? Did they reinforce each other, or was there conflict?

- Combining this program with my department study went super well, since my department has total freedom to make our own course and schedule, as long as you let the tutors know what you're up to.

- The fact that this platform was student-led made it feel like I was working with my peers on a project. I'm in the first year of my MA. We had some people from Rietveld in the group, who have a very different approach to their practice - as they should. And we had some second year Sandberg students. Yet everyone was treated the same.

- It had tremendous value in how it has impacted my work. Firstly: I had a lot of friction with my department. My department didn't have enough familiarity with what an ExtraIntra platform is to actually help me and support me, and for it to be an integral part of my study. In that sense it was a very lonely experience.

- I don't think we can compare this program with our masters program. I think they are different structures and ways of working.

- Me being in the design department, without actually doing design, makes it occasionally hard to get feedback on what I'm doing. With aux) I found a context where I could get feedback or talk about what I'm doing. That was a big, big source of knowledge and power. I'm really looking forward to this path continuing.

- I didn't experience conflict with my program, except scheduling conflicts. That would be my tip to coming organizations: you really need to be aware of what's going on in school, and not program events for when everyone is super busy. But I feel like our program is so different from everything else that is going on in school that there isn't any conflict.

What was the average time investment in hours per week? How did you experience this?

- We were meeting bi-weekly, usually, where we had the whole afternoon planned for EKB. The bi-weekly workshops were 3-4hrs. So let's say 4hrs/week of personal time?

- For me it was definitely more than 8hrs/week, but hard to say how much. I really enjoyed it, though.

- A lot of the added work was about space uncertainties. My ambition was to work on EKB 1-2 days a week, which didn't work at all. There was a constant flow of communication with students, tutors and spaces.

- Some of these things also emerged from us not knowing what is expected of us. What is an ExtraIntra platform?

- I knew in advance that I would work more hours than paid, especially production stuff. But at certain points, when I was very busy with my other commitments, in November/ December when the platform was just getting going, that was definitely many more hours: email chains, production uncertainties, trying to make sure that people show up at the proper place at the proper time. That got a bit heavy for a while.

- In terms of hours: we would meet every week on Thursdays at 10:00 for an hour, just to discuss what was coming up and what we had done, as well as some more theoretical conversations, at times. Apart from those regular meetings everyone had their tasks to take care of.

- I was doing 3,5-4hrs weekly. We were a big team, with finite funds to pay ourselves. So we were only paid for 2hrs, and some of these projects were so much extra work. 4 people are probably perfect for this kind of project. Maybe if we were a smaller team we could get paid more? But I've also heard from platforms with a much smaller organizational team, that the amount of work very quickly becomes overwhelming.

- I also worked many more hours per week than we were supposed to. I did it with pleasure, but at the end it felt a bit much.

- There was a small conflict with time, for me. But this year I will try to better figure out what is happening and when, and maybe bring some more of my ideas. Overall the platform really reinforces my ideas and my confidence.

Was this program of added value for your BA/MA study? If so: in what way? If not, can you explain your answer?

- Yes, very. The workshops showed me different ways of working with my body. I think the most important thing I learned during this course was to listen to other voices in a space. Perhaps to be more quiet, and listen to other bodies, and how they would deal with certain workshops.

- Getting to work on these topics in other ways than speaking endlessly about them: that is, taking things into the body with people who aren't treated as being on a student level, but as peers, was really rewarding for me, and something I'd like more of.

What tips and advice would you like to give in future projects? Or if you were organizing another program, what would you do differently?
- Maybe it would be good to have it very clear, from the start, what the academy can help with (for instance, in regards to communication). If there were certain deadlines that we should meet? What kind of information does the editorial board need from us and when? That could be really helpful.

- I would just like to have more hours. I think that ExtraIntra could function as its own department in a few years, because there is so much to explore, and there are so many people who are interested. Maybe it could be part of an existing department? As a weekly thing the department is doing?

- I think it's really important to have a diversity of curriculum and of tutors, and that's something that I would re-approach if we were to do the platform again. Also in regards to accessibility.

- Something important for me is to work with local bodies in Amsterdam, which I think has to do with the idea of community, and what happens with the community after the funding ends.

- I guess it needs more time: like a full day allocated to an integrated workshop, rather than trying to do it in 3hrs.

- Checking the schedule of the academy better! We did one event where no one came, which was a pity. I remember that a document was sent out, at the beginning of the year, with the schedule of assessments etc for the whole academy, but we didn't check it. It's a bit overwhelming to keep track of everything, the events, communication, merging everything, can be a bit messy.

- Pay attention not to overwork too much, there has to be a good balance. Two of us organizers were alumni for most of the year, so the platform didn't catch us at our

graduation time. Otherwise it could have been a bit overwhelming.. It's a good mix to have both alumni and students.

-

What do you think the editorial board should take into account when selecting new projects? Are there certain criteria that should be used?

- To differentiate a research container from an event series, which the school has quite a lot of—that is something I think there could be more clarity on, from the boards' side. And how do you get students to commit to this?

- I wonder how the public facing moment could be something put towards either the reflection or the longevity of the program?

- The only way I see how this can be done differently is if the editorial board gives a clearer structure, of teams etc. Although I definitely appreciated the freedom we had.

- I think time is always an issue. I think the platforms need more time if you want to build community and have momentum, where there is a bigger conversation created. Maybe that means extra budget. But definitely time.

- I definitely think sound should be included in the projects that are selected, because it's an important medium for all departments. There should be a sound platform available for everyone, not just VAV or MediaLab people. In a video work, the image and the sound share the strength of the work 50/50.

- I'm not a big fan of theory, and I think the editorial board should give more chances to platforms that are dealing with the senses, or emotional or physical experiences. That would be super interesting. We already have a lot of theory in our study, researching and reading a lot. The sensorial/physical/emotional is important, especially after the crisis of the pandemic.

- For me, the small budget that you gave us the first time we applied, that allowed us to create a sound essay, was really important. After that I could see us working together in the future. Suddenly it became more practical. Normally we would meet to discuss the proposal, but you don't necessarily know how the real thing will be, with this group. So that was a really nice thing that led to something bigger.

How did you find out about this platform and decide to join?

- I know organizer 2 for a while. We were talking about creating something like this also before the program. When she told me that it was finally happening and asked if I wanted to join, I didn't have to think twice! I think it's necessary and urgent.

- I ran into organizer 1 and 4, who invited me to the workshop with Mint. I had seen the posters but didn't feel invited to join since I'm not a student. When they explicitly said that I could join, I did! And it was really nice. Now that I'm hearing about the other events I wish that I had joined more of them.

- When I arrived at the academy I was checking the intranet, since, in my department, you have to fill your own time. I found some lectures by people I know of, from sound art. After

the first session, which felt good, I wanted to come more frequently.

Did being active in the platform help you find work within the field?

- Being active in aux) meant I got to know more people, which opens doors. They might invite you to do things with them. That was amazing, actually. I hope that other programs have this way of bonding people with specific interests.

- It was a very special connection to later meet guest teacher Sajjra in the forest in Lithuania, and go "hi, I know you" and have him recognize me instantly. It really has the potential to generate future outcomes by allowing you to meet certain people, getting to know specific techniques.

- Organizer 4, who is not here because he is doing a residency with Sajjra in Peru, definitely established a connection with him. Also the very first guest we had, Julia Eckhardt, is someone I and Organizer 2 have admired for a long time. It was a good opportunity to establish bonds, or introduce yourself, through an institution. That definitely opened up connections and possibilities, for our own practice and work. Also in regard to the guests and events that are coming up now (fall semester 2022) are people I personally really admire.
  We've openly spoken about this within the group: let's use this opportunity with aux) to reach out to people who we have always wanted to collaborate with.

- During the time I attended the aux) platform I made my first sound piece for an animation at the Stedelijk. It felt like: "I can do this!". Which was a really nice outcome.