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First Nations Dance in the School Curriculum: Perspectives from an Australian University

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Abstract

From the rallying call of the USA's Black Lives Matter movement, three Australian university teacher educators present perspectives on First Nations dance in the school curriculum. The Australian education system has emerged from the devastating impact of European colonisation upon the continent's First Nations peoples resulting in trauma, resistance, and resilience. Theory/praxis approaches to matters of Indigenous marginalisation within the school system are presented in relation to the context of public interest in "truth telling" about past colonial injustices. We draw first upon genealogical research to track the prohibition of Aboriginal dance in schools from the early years of colonisation to the later *White Australia* policy until now. Next, the complexities of embedding a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures' Cross-Curriculum Priority are considered. Third, we explain research into teachers' enactment of First Nations dance in schools. Finally, a summary suggests ways forward from past wrongs.

Introduction

This paper presents perspectives relating to First Nations dance in the school curriculum from teacher educators – Bindi, Jeff, and Kerrin - working in arts education courses within the same university. We found commonality in our Australian location with its ongoing legacy of colonisation alongside our solidarity with First Nations peoples and a changing understanding of historical truths.

In this writing, we use the term *Indigenous* along with *First Nations*, recognising an ongoing emancipatory discourse which foregrounds Australia's first peoples, known as *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders*, and the continent's Indigenous culture (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021). Indigenous as a term is usually associated with "native" or "original features" according to the Oxford Dictionary (2014) and has been commonly associated in earlier discourses around dances of the original or first people in particular countries (Buckland, 2006).

This introduction also acknowledges the complex intersectionalities of our identities that influence our labour as tertiary educators with pre-service teachers (PSTs) who are becoming teachers within the early, primary, and secondary years of education. Each is aware of our differing heritages from White, Jewish, and differing family dynamics, conscious of binary gendered experiences being brought up as male, female, feminine or masculine. We each have differing experiences of family economic circumstances, positioning us as relatively privileged or less advantaged, impacting upon our development in communities as arts-engaged young citizens. These foundations led us through professional journeys in widely

varying educational circumstances as teachers with young people while our careers progressed. Emerging as tertiary educators from different beginnings, our interests nevertheless converge as advocates of social justice who seek equality of access to arts education. We work within conventional societal systems as policy/practice actors who challenge power hierarchies, aligning with First Nations' focus for a more just society that embraces those experiencing inequality of opportunity.

Contextual Framing

Australia's population is almost 25 million, with First Nations peoples one of the world's oldest continuous cultures estimated to be over 60,000 years (Klein, 2018). First Nations people make up around 2.5 per cent of the population and one in four people were born overseas (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). During the past two hundred years, people have come from all parts of the world to live in Australia.

We are conscious that 95 per cent of PSTs in the university teacher education program come from Anglo-Australian backgrounds and have limited understanding of cultural knowledges apart from their own. Many define themselves as culture-less, which tends to perpetuate race blindness (Aveling, 2004). Yet our work reveals that non-Indigenous students connect their Australian identities with a range of Aboriginal images, symbols, colours, sounds, and dance movements. The student cohort also includes smaller numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, along with students from diverse migratory heritages and international students from across the globe.

We are aware too that 18 per cent of Australians surveyed reporting they had experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). Hence, a key practice in our arts education courses is that PSTs navigate their own location as we resolve to unpack race-blindness and use the arts as a vehicle for this work and at the same time let art teach what there is to learn. A pedagogy of care plays a pivotal role in unpacking PSTs' understanding of their own standpoints through centralising relational ethics as an embodied and reciprocated engagement with each other in a community of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Making visible the colonial narratives and omissions in western cultures that perpetuate the central location of whiteness creates discomfort on multiple levels (Zembylas & Boler, 2002).

An Australian education system is informed by colonial epistemologies that were operationalised within the broad schema that made invisible First Nations 80,000 knowledge systems and pedagogical practices. Consequently, a major concern is tackling the powerful authoritative influence of white privilege in the regime of knowledge production that continues to operate through a systemic and technicist approach to learning.

Dance Education

Dance education has a long history across the world of re-enforcing the colonial narrative. In Australia, dance education continues to rely on a western approach that draws upon modern dance as a foundational genre to inform students' creative and cultural knowledge. Recent developments have led to a new acknowledgment of the 250 First Nations approaches to dance as foundational for Australian dance (Australia Council for the Arts & Ausdance National, 2008, p. 14). However, many non-Indigenous teachers struggle when they are required to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their curriculum as such content was absent in their own schooling. Thus, there is a general lack of knowledge about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and the history of colonisation (Baker, 2018).

The subsequent sections explain work undertaken by each of us in relation to matters of Indigenous marginalisation within the Australian school system alongside public interest in "truth telling" (Reconciliation Australia, 2018) about past colonial injustices and Aboriginal resistance aligned with the Black Lives Matter movement. We begin by considering research which identified a notable absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dance in Australian school curricula since the advent of mass schooling.

Tracking the Past: First Nations Dance in the School Curriculum – Jeff Meiners

The current position of First Nations dance in Australia is reflected in an affirmative statement by Bangarra Dance Theatre artist Frances Rings:

... there exists a fundamental belief that 'dance is a characteristic ingredient in the social, political, and artistic bloodline of our country, and that respect, understanding and promotion of its ancient cultures lies at our foundation of this belief, giving resonance and spirit to the creative force. (Australia Council for the Arts & Ausdance National, 2008, p. 4)

However, within the history of British colonisation and associated injustices dealt to First Nations peoples, Indigenous Australian dance appears absent in school curricula. I undertook research to trace the unequal and changing position of Indigenous dance in Australian schools.

Foucault's (1984, 2011) conceptualisation of genealogy provided the stimulus for tracing generative sources of truths, knowledge, and rationality for dance in schools. A genealogy was created to identify key influences and contestations upon the location and construction of dance in the Australian curriculum (Meiners, 2017). The genealogy investigated how dance found a place within Australian schools, with theories and practices pertinent to dance education reviewed and critiqued. Thus, a framework based upon Foucault's genealogical

approach to the concept of discourse and to history (McHoul & Grace, 1993) sought to reveal the past and present discursive terrain from which dance in the curriculum has emerged.

The intention was to illuminate processes and accounts that allow particular types of dance and related practices to achieve legitimacy for learning and teaching within the curriculum proposed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2011). Hence, through examination of published texts and dominant discourses circulating at particular times, the development of certain truths about Indigenous dance were traced. Attention was given to how discourses around Indigenous dance emerged, how these are manifested within the written curriculum, and how they are enacted in dance education as everyday technological practices of the self (Foucault, 1988; Rose, 1996) that shape the conduct of dance educators and students.

The scope of this genealogy included reviewing some familiar writing from the dance education field in order to consider which discourses have been naturalised and become features of common usage (Janks, 1997). A range of literature from theories, practices, and research related to the wider field of dance studies was examined to provide insights into the absence of Indigenous dance in the school curriculum. Literatures around dance within broader agendas revealed positions that lead to privileging some and marginalising others by providing or undermining socially just approaches to dance in schools.

Indigenous people were first viewed as part of “flora and fauna” in a land considered “Terra Nullius” by the colonisers (Connor, 2005). Discriminatory influences on the first peoples’ lives began with Britain’s occupation of the continent earlier named Terra Australis and the 1788 First Fleet’s arrival. Subsequent establishment of six self-governing colonies led to unification as federated states of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. Displaced often violently, forced to submit to colonial rule and cultural practices, along with deep loss of sovereign rights to land, family, and cultural practices including education, most Aboriginal people regard Britain’s colonisation as an invasion and dispossession (Creative Spirits, 2014; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

In a discourse around *Aborigines*, earlier homogenous labelling categorised kinship groups together (Bern & Dodds, 2000). However, mainland Aboriginal peoples identify with numerous languages and mainland “countries” of origin established prior to colonisation (Creative Spirits, 2015). These countries include cultural traditions with distinctive dances. The invisible diversity of Australia’s First Nations’ peoples may be attributed to immigration policies led by colonial Anglo, Irish, and European interests towards a “White Australia” as a plan for population growth (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). This is highlighted by *The Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, also known as the White Australia policy which affected

migrants who came to Australia between 1901 and 1958. Favoured by such immigration policies, the field of dance as part of Australian culture was dominated until the later part of the twentieth century by discourse reflecting overseas influences from Britain, America, and Europe.

Early twentieth century political interests in eugenics also purported to prevent race degeneration of the Anglo-Celtic stock, and policies promoted colonial perspectives that privileged the cultures of particular races and ethnicities in schools (Rodwell, 1999). Indigenous people were positioned as an underclass (Kirk, 1998; Rodwell, 1999), and associated discourses located Indigenous people as a “problem” since the arrival of White people (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Earlier government agency discourse privileged European orientations towards dance, illustrated as follows: “... although the present-day aboriginal re-enacts ritual movements passed down to him through 40,000 years, it is from Europe that Australia inherited the theatrical traditions enjoyed by audiences today” (Australia Council, 1981, p. 9).

Influential for framing curriculum developments, earlier Aboriginal resistance and macro post WWII socio-political trends towards a more equitable society led to changing public views about First Nations peoples in Australia (Reconciliation Australia, 2018) and awareness of the structural discrimination of Indigenous peoples and the need to address this via differing levels of political action (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Thus, a significant reconciliation discourse circulated reflecting a changing relationship between the first peoples and immigrants (Reconciliation Australia, 2018). Furthermore, contemporary social justice concerns for humanising relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and wider communities stimulated discourse that called for recognition and respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The history of British colonisation is complex and contentious, exemplified by the “history wars” discourse (Macintyre & Clark, 2003). Consequently, discourses of European colonialism, racism, resistance and emancipation (Burrige, 2012) have framed and influenced the location of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance over time in the Australian school curriculum.

The existence of inequitable government policies and resistance campaigns paralleled an early twentieth century Anglo-Celtic search for Australian nationhood (Burrige, 2012). As Kirk notes in his historical account of “physical training, medical inspection and sport in schools between the 1880s and the 1940s in Australia,” the “...record of schooling bodies during this period almost completely omits reference to Aboriginal bodies” (1998, p.2). Such discursive trends are important for understanding the absence of an orientation towards the first peoples’ dances in children’s education whilst British, and later folk dances from around the world, claimed territory in the dominant colonial quest for an Australian identity (Meiners, 2017).

An apparently complete omission of Indigenous dance within major publications spans around seventy years. British colonising interests are apparent in documents with lists of folk dances from Britain, Europe, America, Scandinavia, and even Mexico. A continuing orientation away from Indigenous dance re-enforced its absence and disregard within Australian dance education. However, reflecting social change in the twentieth century, references to Aboriginal dance start to appear in documents led by educators often regarded as activists. Aligning with broader Indigenous education policy discourses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance content appears in some state curriculum documents from the 1980s. In the early 1990s, a national curriculum statement foregrounds “The arts and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies” as a “cross-curriculum perspective” (Australian Education Council & Curriculum Corporation, 1994, p. 8). Later, federal policy documents shaped Australia’s education policy for Indigenous peoples (MCEETYA, 1998; MCEETYA Taskforce, 1995) with a key outcome that “all Australian students have a knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures” (MCEETYA Taskforce, 1995, p. 6). This statement aligns with UNESCO (2014) global discourse “to promote the use and survival of indigenous cultures, languages, knowledge, traditions and identity” (p. 1).

Now in the twenty-first century, a discourse of reconciliation incorporates social justice interests by following Indigenous cultural protocol to locate traditional and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices within the curriculum. This includes developing students’ “...appreciation of the need to respond to artworks (including dances) in ways that are culturally sensitive and responsible” (ACARA, 2015, p. 15). Supporting this textual discourse of inclusion, a federal government publication provides advice for interacting with First Nations cultural material (Australia Council for the Arts, 2007). In a twenty-first century context that increasingly recognises injustices caused by colonisation, the guidance supports the continuation of traditional practices and ongoing contemporary Indigenous culture. Indigenous dance has thus recently been located in the curriculum as an homogenous area of practice that recognises diverse dances of contemporary and past Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities for learning in all primary schools (ACARA, 2015). Structurally, the new presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the most recent Australian curriculum settlement is presented as one of three “Cross Curriculum Priorities” (ACARA, 2021). The next section provides a perspective on teaching this aspect of the curriculum.

Working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority– Bindi MacGill

In this section, complexities and challenges of embedding the recently introduced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) are discussed. With the intention of providing an “opportunity for all young Australians to gain a

deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, knowledge traditions and holistic world views” (ACARA, 2015), this knowledge, understanding, and connection with the world’s oldest continuous living culture aims to help learners to participate in practices of decolonisation within the curriculum.

Specifically, I explain challenges PSTs encounter as they transition epistemologically, both collectively and individually. I outline how making in the arts provides the possibility of *un-learning* normative assumptions about education broadly. I also consider the framework of a pedagogy of care that supports PSTs as they move towards decolonising approaches to curriculum design which encompasses the affective, cognitive, and aesthetic domains built within a framework of trust and care (Rankin et.al., 2020).

The pedagogical approach emerged from feminist Ethics of Care theory that focuses on interpersonal relationships between the carer and cared for (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002). However, the positioning of care was routinely demonstrated by the mother/child, teacher/student, and patient/doctor dichotomy that positioned White middle-class caring structures as universal. Thompson (1998), Roland Dow (2005) and others who explored Black ethics of care highlighted how such a positioning of care erased Black and Indigenous models of care and associated pedagogical practices.

Care is part of the fabric of pedagogy and is routinely made absent as educators focus on transforming the student rather than supporting the student to find their voice and agency. An ethics of care in arts education enables exploration of a different encounter in the teaching/learning cycle through material and embodied strategies. For example, these strategies can support PSTs’ transition from sites of unknowing about cultural heritage, colonial violence, and its associated corollary of knowledge production towards understandings of the world and ways of being. This epistemological and ontological work is disruptive and unsettling (Zembylas & Boler, 2002) and requires a strong ethic of care grounded in dialogic meaning-making.

My practice focuses on decolonising the teaching and learning framework that utilises a Communities of Practice (CoP) model that is informed by a pedagogy of care where student engagement and participation is created by the validation of students’ funds of knowledge and explored through embodied strategies (Hoffmann & Stake, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Centralising students’ standpoints, supporting their learning journey, providing critical guidance and providing space for student agency builds the social fabric required to create a relationship that is grounded in reciprocity. A pedagogy of care in this context is not soft, but instead relies on the emotional intelligence of all those involved in the CoP to manage and support complex political, social, emotional, religious, environmental and cultural learning journeys.

This journey involves intellectual and emotional work where students navigate their own standpoints (Harding, 2004) as they create artworks and design curriculum material in preparation for their role as future educators. In my courses, I use Creative and Body Based Learning (henceforth CBL) that employs embodied relational and creative strategies. CBL is an extension of drama-based instruction developed by Dawson and Kiger Lee (2018) and includes game-play, image work, role play, and dialogic meaning-making strategies to engage students in learning. Further, students are required to present their political, social, and emotional positioning around provocations through socio-metrics where students declare their standpoints through their bodies on a continuum. They share what they feel and know about certain histories and knowledges, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and how un/comfortable they feel in relation to embedding such knowledges into the curriculum. This work makes visible the intersections of White race privilege and knowledge production and therefore reveals how deferred responsibility is a choice and at the same time an ethical decision. That is, students become cognisant that by making these histories invisible as an enactment of deferred responsibility they are actively perpetuating race blindness. This process is not bound by guilt but instead hinges on the question: What has been made absent in my own schooling that has erased multiple knowledge systems such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and histories, and what am I going to do about it when I become a teacher?

Many non-Indigenous PSTs are indignant about their lack of knowledge in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and they asked why. In close alignment with this conversation is a sense of how they will build such knowledges into their arts curriculum in the future. This moves to another set of issues where non-Indigenous students report anecdotally that they don't want to "get it wrong" or "don't know how" to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum. Through the CBL strategies, I explore the intersection of deferred responsibility that erodes equality and the action and learning required to learn how to do this work despite neoliberal agendas of schooling.

We work on curriculum design for their assignment and outline the impact of appropriation, stereotyping, and homogenising. Students are encouraged to research deeply to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, context, and artwork are at the centre of their curriculum design. The artwork and the stories teach. The PSTs' curriculum design is assessed on the ways they build an arts sensibility with their students informed by a culturally responsive pedagogical approach with the inclusion of their Arts Making and Responding learning activities (ACARA). First Nation sovereignty, imperialism, and settler notions of belonging, as well as the privilege of whiteness and the ethics of building a socially just

education (Tannoch-Bland, 1997) are explored within the tutorial room through embodied strategies.

When students engage in CBL strategies they embody a new way of teaching and learning that allows them to let go of embedded assumptions that they were trained to know as real and universal. The *encounter* (Deleuze, 2004) that precedes cognitive transition towards new understandings ruptures epistemological patterns. Art and art making facilitate new ways of thinking that are informed by aesthetics (Greene, 1995) and allow for new knowledge regarding the deconstruction of colonial representational fields in art.

CBL strategies provide a framework for students and teachers to co-create through dialogic meaning-making that is made explicit in the final steps of deconstruction as a critically reflective evaluation process. In the deconstruction of strategies and its content knowledge, students articulate their positions through interpretation and thereby “‘announce’ their interest as a new beginning” (Biesta, 2014, p. 143). This new beginning is consciousness about pluralism within ideas for future curriculum design, demonstrating the practice of integrating the CCPs.

I make explicit how knowledge is produced within the curriculum and support students in their discomfort rather than ignoring or circulating around it. I begin with how and why many non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not know these histories and make explicit how these omissions and erasures in their own curriculum are produced through a colonising curriculum. Visual Thinking Strategies (Harvard Graduate School of Education Project Zero, n.d.) enable new ways of interpreting art works conceptually that I connect with the CBL strategies. An example is 3D Model (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018), which requires learners to make a 3D object out of a range of materials to explore their teaching philosophy. This sculptural practice of 3D model making is contemplative as participants wrestle in silence with materials whilst considering their philosophy as educators. Once students complete their 3D model about their teaching philosophy, they use a VTS strategy to interpret each other’s works and then they discuss how their interpretations make visible certain values and the choices they have made regarding their pedagogy.

Another guided strategy used is called Constellations and its strength is its dialogic meaning-making process that makes visible multiple standpoints which are encased within a shared aesthetic through visual art language. This strategy allows participants to develop a sense of community, identity, and belonging by making interpersonal connections visible (See <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/>; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018, p. 93). Using such dialogic meaning-making strategies helps un-fix students understanding of “the canon” and how it produces and fixes culture in a power/knowledge nexus, and it highlights the ways in which

the production of knowledge through grand narratives operates within dominant cultures. Evidence of these shifts occur through dialogue, somatic representations of information by the body, and written work in the form of “poster dialogue” and “graffiti wall” that unveils students’ understandings and standpoints (See <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/>).

Within an ethics of care framework, there are conversations that emerge from nascent ideas leading students towards taking responsibility as future educators regarding the discursive regimes of knowledge production. This work is what Giroux calls border crossing (2005) to unknown sites of both content knowledge as well as standpoints. Students are challenged to understand ways to teach in areas that they themselves may have not yet learnt. They begin to understand the complexities of difference without othering and reproducing power hierarchies that privilege one set of knowledge over another.

Students unpack how their knowledge systems have been produced and what has been erased. Understanding that we construct images in our mind through organised and hierarchical mental maps that have been powerfully mobilised through the “circuit of culture” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 45) is useful as it makes visible semiotics patterns through particular codes. Whilst this process has elements of discomfort, it is precisely used to “draw students into dialogue with the world” (Biesta, 2019, p. 15). A “pedagogy of discomfort” (Boler, 1999) invites students to re-examine their values, beliefs and assumptions in order to become allies of liberal citizenship education (Callan, 1997; Kumashiro, 2002). Such critical, affective, and aesthetic work requires an ethics of care that demands understanding of one’s standpoint and structural privileges. Embodied and dialogic meaning-making strategies are useful as they enable students to feel and think differently. These strategies also provide space to unravel divergent voices, concerns, and blocks. Visual thinking strategies provide an opportunity to think and see in conversation as a community of learners. CBL offers ways students can represent and describe how they operate within an ethical framework as they prepare for their future roles as teachers in super-diverse classrooms.

Future Research: Teachers’ Enactment of First Nations Dance in Schools – Kerrin Rowlands

Finally, this section presents commencing research into the potential enactment in schools of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority. Whilst I approach dance teaching from culturally diverse perspectives, my observations are that university non-Indigenous PSTs lack confidence and are reluctant to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their plans. Routinely, they claim they do not want to offend and have limited knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Working without curriculum guidance, teachers wonder how to appropriately teach young people dance practices from cultures that are different from their own.

Though tensions exist between dominant western forms of high art and local cultures (Stinson, 2007), dance can offer teachers a unique space to explore culture and identity with young people. Growing public awareness, respect for and inclusion of the oldest living form of continuously practiced dance has led to developing interest in First Nations dance as an entitlement for all young Australians (Australia Council for the Arts & Ausdance National, 2012; Meiners & Garrett, 2015; Meiners, 2017; Sykes, 2012). Yet, the earlier sections of this paper along with recent studies highlight the challenges brought about by policy reforms that direct the embedding of Indigenous knowledges in the Australian curriculum (Morrison et al, 2019).

Considerable research is devoted to a call for culturally responsive pedagogies that disrupt the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and histories (McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Morrison et al., 2019; O’Keeffe et al., 2019). However, little attention has been paid to how non-Indigenous teachers enact First Nations dance content in schools. It is thus not yet understood how teachers are responding to the complex cultural challenges of curriculum enactment. While few investigations into the topic currently exist, there lies a danger that, without culturally safe pedagogies, teachers may reinforce cultural stereotypes and essentialism. Utilising an ethnographic case study methodology, my doctoral study from the University of South Australia aims to investigate how non-Indigenous teachers respond to curriculum policy imperatives and enact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance at eight South Australian primary schools across a period of six months.

The research investigates the lived experiences of teachers as they move towards deeper understandings about critical work to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives can be appropriately included in the curriculum. The key question guiding the research is:

How are non-Indigenous teachers responding to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP within their dance practices in South Australian primary schools?

Research outcomes may provide evidence to support a better understanding of non-Indigenous teachers' approaches to teaching First Nations dance in schools. A review of literature developed as part of the research proposal for the doctoral study and discussed below highlights that while international research shares similar goals to de-colonise western-dominated dance education (McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Melchior 2011; Reihana-Morunga, 2020), contributions from Australia appear absent from the field.

Australian literature examines the significance of the oldest living and continuously practiced forms of dance (Sykes, 2012), entwined with Indigenous meanings of dance, not purely from

historical and traditional perspectives but also as new and living systems of knowledge, culture, and identity (Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.; Burridge, 2012; Langton, 2019). Dance is regarded as integral to Indigenous cultural practices and largely reflects discourses within the field of Australian arts education that propose “the centrality of arts for meaning-making in Indigenous culture and learning” (Ewing, 2010, p. 19). This is exemplified through Bangarra Dance Theatre’s (n.d.) rich education eResources for teachers, from a contemporary Indigenous dance perspective that reinforces the position of Indigenous dance in the field of Australian dance education. Winhanga-rra (hear, think, listen) is a professional learning program for classroom teachers that explores processes and practices for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in an educational context (Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.). A valuable institution for contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and cultural identity, this company also offers educators access to workshops. Societal awareness, respect for and inclusion of First Nations culture has led to increasing interest in Indigenous dance in education, “the only form of dance, old and new, that Australia can claim as its own” (Sykes, 2012, p.1).

The global discourse on a child’s right to his or her own cultural identity, language, and values has a long history and is codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Cohen, 1989). Additionally, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) codifies the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain and revitalise their culture, and for global communities to promote the use and survival of Indigenous cultures, languages, knowledge, traditions, and identity (UNESCO, 2014). This fundamental feature of a democratic ethos is a necessary component of quality education (Gay, 2015).

Democratic policy objectives of equity and access to a high-quality culturally responsive dance education seem reflective of global arts education goals, as evidenced in the Seoul Agenda (UNESCO, 2010). Therefore, I now consider Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) as an approach to First Nations dance. CRP is an approach to teaching and learning that uses “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

The term Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Villegas, 1991) correlates with similar concepts such as culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002), culturally relevant dance education (McCarthy-Brown, 2017), and critical dance pedagogy (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). CRP is underpinned by Vygotsky’s constructivist theory of sociocultural learning and development as a socially and culturally mediated process that relates to students’ life-worlds (McInerney, 2013). Such approaches draw on students’ cultural “funds of knowledge” (González et al., 2005), which affirm cultural identities, position

students at the centre of education, and nurture sense-making through inclusive pedagogic relationships and interactions in school communities (Moll et al., 1995, as cited in O’Keeffe et al., 2019).

Foundational CRP scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) outlines the key principles that underpin CRP as: (a) an ability to develop students academically, (b) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and (c) development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Accordingly, Ladson-Billings describes culturally responsive teachers as those who: believe that all students are capable of success; see their teaching as an art; see themselves as members of the community the school serves; see teaching as a way to give back to the community; and believe in “teaching as mining,” a process of pulling knowledge out (McInerney, 2002, p. 341). Further, Villegas, and Lucas (2002) identify CRP teachers as having the commitment and skills to act as agents of change. Developed in the context of the USA civil rights movement, CRP has proven relevant globally across diverse cultural groups, including the Indigenous Australian context (Morrison, et al., 2019).

Some acknowledge that “dance culture” does not always equate with culturally responsive pedagogies (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Traditionally dance pedagogies use a transmission model of teaching, with the teacher as “expert,” modelling movement for students to learn via reproduction. However, a focus on learning as a social meaning-making process rather than transmission activity aligns with Paulo Freire’s influential education model (1970) and challenges teachers’ conceptual understandings of dance education (Melchior, 2011). Shapiro (1998) acknowledges that teachers need to recognise student diversity and relate movement vocabulary to their experiences. This requires an interactive approach where teacher and students co-construct meaning through relationships they develop with each other, and with the curriculum. Similarly, CRP involves designing content and approaches to engage all students, rather than privileging a dominant Eurocentric perspective in dance teaching to the exclusion of others (Meiners & Garrett, 2015). CRP teachers seek diverse voices for an expansive understanding of dance (McCarthy-Brown, 2017).

Conversant with CRP, in the USA, Nyama McCarthy-Brown (2017) offers critical dance pedagogy as an activation of critical race theory to examine the systems of power in dance education. Distinct from CRP, which focuses primarily on members of minority cultural groups, critical dance pedagogy works with diverse cultural and demographic groups, including homogeneous communities, to investigate power systems, structures, and relationships (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). In New Zealand, professional learning programs for culturally responsive pedagogies such as the Te Kotahitanga educational reform initiative (Bishop, 1999) have reshaped curriculum and educational research to improve the educational outcomes of Maori students.

Leading New Zealand scholarship includes a variety of culturally responsive dance pedagogies that investigate dance and sociocultural discourse firmly grounded in Maori culture. Legge (2011) examines *Te ao kori*, a Maori dimension of the physical education curriculum, embracing language, values, and movement through games, music, medicine, and art. Melchior (2011) utilises MacFarlane's Educultural Wheel (2004) of five cultural concepts in the primary classroom including:

1. Whanaungatanga – building positive relationships
2. Rangatiratanga – teacher effectiveness
3. Manaakitanga – ethics of care
4. Kotahitanga – ethic of bonding
5. Pumanauratanga (the beating heart) – establishing a culturally safe and positive learning environment.

Reihana-Morunga (2020) employs *Kaupapa Maori whakawhanaungatanga* to guide the creation of culturally appropriate relationships in her investigation of the delivery of Maori secondary dance content by a non-Maori pakeha teacher workforce. This research recommends CRP methodologies to explain how teachers who lack confidence to teach Maori content may develop culturally safe approaches that include reflexive practice involving histories and standpoints of both teachers and students. These New Zealand examples align with those who argue that a culturally responsive approach builds inclusive and equitable learning environments and that teachers who belong to a dominant Western European heritage can use critically reflexive, culturally responsive pedagogies to create culturally safe learning environments.

Similarities exist between discourses in the field of New Zealand CRP methodologies for dance education and in the context of Australian dance education. To enact First Nations dance, it would seem necessary to develop a culturally responsive and critical dance pedagogy for the Australian context that will disrupt and prevent the further marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (O'Keefe et al., 2019). I therefore propose a culturally responsive and critical dance pedagogical approach, with CRP as the main lens through which knowledges are embodied both epistemologically and ontologically.

Conclusion

This writing provided three perspectives from our work in an Australian teacher education program, with insights into our humble attempts to move forward from past injustices. We are

aware of our standpoints as non-Indigenous educators working in a space of distinct cultural knowledge, conscious of responsibilities as we support mainly non-Indigenous PSTs to bring about educational change and make schooling more equitable (Aveling, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). We heed the resonating call of the Black Lives Matters movement from the USA in our efforts to raise awareness, challenge, and disrupt fixed ways of being influenced by a cultural legacy of colonial power.

Following increasing global awareness of colonial impacts and the significance of losing Indigenous knowledges, Australia has a new focus on all young people learning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. There are thus potentially considerable implications for the realisation of this curriculum. Indigenous leaders are generous in enterprises that provide starting points for all teachers to access First Nations dance and develop rich understanding of Australia's ancient foundations. Research is required to investigate how learning about this foundational dance for Australia is operationalised by teachers in authentic, appropriate, and respectful ways that contribute to reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.

We conclude, hopeful that such ways forward may stimulate new discourses around traditional and contemporary manifestations of First Nations dance within Australian school cultures. This includes aspirations for widespread First Nations cultural knowledge, intercultural understanding and a renewed twenty-first century post-colonial Australian identity.

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