

auSDANCE
VIC

INSPIRE WORKSHOP RESOURCE

Ngioka Bunda-Heath



INTRODUCTION

Inspire is a dance educators professional learning program presented by Ausdance VIC. The 90-minute workshops provide insights into the recent works, processes, and dance-making skills of local choreographers Ngioka Bunda-Heath and Joel Bray.

Created in direct response to feedback from teachers, *Inspire* is designed to offer a unique opportunity for peer-to-peer collaboration and to engage in discipline-based discussions with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dance.

Participants receive a recording of the workshop, this curriculum-aligned resource and suggestions for integrating the workshop learnings into classrooms. Each participant also receives the BIG HEART Education Resource, including eight Victorian Curriculum-aligned lesson plans, created by Frances Rings and Craig Bary.

Acknowledgements

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Resource material provided by Ngioka Bunda-Heath and prepared for *Inspire* by Dr Katrina Rank
Choreographic material: Ngioka Bunda-Heath and collaborators

Disclaimer

This guide has been created to align with the Victorian Curriculum 2019-2025. Ausdance Vic does not take any responsibility for changes to the Curriculum content descriptions for the relevant year and subject.

URLs

The internet addresses (URLs) in this resource were valid at the time of publication and were chosen as being appropriate for use as an education research tool. However, due to the dynamic nature of the internet over which the publisher has no control, some URLs may have changed, may have ceased to exist since publication, or may inadvertently link to sites with content that could be considered offensive or inappropriate. The publisher does not accept responsibility for any such unforeseeable changes.

Acknowledgement of Country

Ausdance VIC acknowledges and respects the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which we live, work and dance. Sovereignty was never ceded.

We celebrate the history and contemporary creativity of the world's oldest living culture and pay our respect to Elders – past and present.

We acknowledge the right to self-determination for First Nations People and seek to develop strong and lasting partnerships with Victorian First Peoples to achieve equity and prosperity in the communities we serve across the state.



ABOUT NGIOKA BUNDA-HEATH

Ngioka Bunda-heath is Wakka Wakka, Ngugi from Queensland through her Mother and Birrpai from New South Wales through her Father.

Ngioka completed her Advanced Diploma in the Performing Arts (Dance) at the Aboriginal Centre of the Performing Arts and her Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance) at the Victorian College of the Arts. She is the first Aboriginal Women to graduate from the university in her field. Ngioka received the Hutchinson Indigenous Fellowship and Residency, the Chloe Munro AO/Lucy Guerin Inc Independent Artist fellowship, and the Brisbane Powerhouse Wandima Fellowship.



Ngioka Bunda-Heath, Blood Quantum. Image credit: Michael Jalaru Torres.

Ngioka has performed works by Mariaa Randall, Sarah Aiken and Rebecca Jensen, Amrita Hepi and Lucy Guerin Inc. Internationally, she's participated in dance conferences, festivals, and residencies in New Caledonia, France, Canada, America, and Japan. Ngioka has danced in Noumea, New Caledonia with Compine Maado, Banff in Canada as a part of the International Indigenous Dance Residency and took part of the World Dance Alliance in France. She has also performed her own work in Los Angeles as a part of the International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference and Festival and was selected as an Australian Delegate for the First Nation Dialogues in NYC as a part of the NYC Festival and APAP.

Ngioka works for Bangarra Dance Theatre in "Rekindling" their youth education program, is the First Peoples Partnership Coordinator at Chunky Move and performs and teaches in remote communities all around Australia with the Indigenous Hip Hop Projects.

Ngioka is a founding dancer for Mariaa Randall's Indigenous female dance Company called DUBAIKUNGKAMIYALK and choreographed her first work Blood Quantum for the YIRRAMBOI First Nations Arts Festival 2019 at Lucy Guerin Inc, WXYZ Studios.

Ngioka's choreographic work includes Blood Quantum (2019), Birrpai (2021) awarded Dance Best Duo/Ensemble at the Greenroom Awards, Bridge (2022) and Footprints (2022).

LINKS

Meet Ngioka Bunda-Heath, Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance) graduate from the VCA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwokKxNOV4w>

2023 Wandima Fellowship, Brisbane Powerhouse

<https://brisbanepowerhouse.org/wandima-fellow-2023/>

Creative Victoria Q&A

<https://creative.vic.gov.au/news/2023/creative-profile-ngioka-bunda-heath>

INTERVIEW

Artyarn, Dancehouse 2020

Who am I?

My name is Ngioka Bunda-Heath. I am Wakka Wakka and Ngugi from southeast Queensland through my mother; and I am Birrpai from northeast New South Wales through my father. I like pina coladas, but I don't like getting caught in the rain. I am a First Nation independent Artist- teacher, dancer, and choreographer. Last year I danced for Lucy Guerin Inc, Lina Limosani, and next weekend Sarah Aiken, and Rebecca Jensen. I am a teacher and facilitator for Bangarra Dance Theatre's youth program. I am the First Peoples Partnership Coordinator at Chunky Move. I have choreographed three full length works and one work on VCA students. I love dance so much so that when I am not doing all the above, I am also a member of Creative Victoria First People's Direction Circle, I sit on the board of Dancehouse, I was on the artist criterium for the Frame festival, and I am a dance panel member for the Greenroom Awards.

What is my driving choreographic question?

I feel like this is more of a cultural obligation and ongoing journey. As a First Nation, Women and Artist- I acknowledge my privilege and those who came before me who built bridges and kicked down doors. I aim to honour and share stories, giving back to my community. To do what I do and to have a voice and sharing that is such a blessing that I am so grateful for. I drive to reclaim stories and switch the gaze, creating a more equal world.

What is my practice?

My first two works were *Blood Quantum* and *Birrpai* where I turned my parents PhDs about our family's history into contemporary dance works.

In *Blood Quantum*, I shared the stage with my mother in a Performance Lecture exploring the storying of both of my mother's parents' being a part of the Stolen Generation and inter-generational trauma and institutionalisation.

In *Birrpai*, I shared the stage with my father in a photographic exhibition and performance conversation based around the staged photographs of my great grandmother and *Birrpai* ancestors that can now be found in museums around the world. In these photographs the subjects aren't named and are posed to depict "the dying race" and pre-colonisation 100-years after colonisation.

A recent project I'm proud of?

My third work *Bridge*. I am so proud of this work! As it was made in collaboration with three other dancers and explored our shared experiences through individual letters that we wrote to our siblings. It's dance theatre work containing a series of solos that give voice to the often silenced in society.

What I'm working on now?

Currently I am working on touring *Birrpai* too *Birrpai* country in regional NSW in August but before I do that in about two months, I am also showcasing my work *Bridge* at the world Indigenous dance residency in Banff, Canada.

BLOOD QUANTUM

Ngioka Bunda-Heath, 2019

YIRRAMBOI first nations arts festival

As a Performance Lecture, *Blood Quantum*, 2019, explores the storying of the choreographer's Maternal Grandparents' early life, relating to this country's historical practice of government-sponsored displacement and relocation of Aboriginal youth, as recorded and woven into the Choreographer's Mother's academic work. It comments on the inter-generational trauma and institutionalisation of the three generations. As Tracey Bunda states:

I remember being questioned as to the blood quantum of my Aboriginality to verify my authenticity as an Aboriginal person to the white people who asked the question. Was I half caste? Was I quarter caste? These labels were commonly used in dialogues from hurtful and hateful white peoples to many an Aboriginal person. As long as I live I will despise these labels. A politics of pigmentation, a foul vapour would come to lie on my skin in these moments, to remind me that I was less than Aboriginal, less than white, something in between – possibly a freak.

Review

Struggles for survival embodied in dance by Kim Dunphy
Sydney Morning Herald, March 15, 2019

Ngioka Bunda-Heath's solo Blood Quantum, beginning with the dancer's strongly weighted plunging to the earth over and over, was poignant and challenging. Video and voice told the tragedy of children being taken from their mother as Bunda-Heath's movement gradually intensified to thrashing despair.

The grief-stricken sequence was counterpointed by projected images of her family in both pedestrian and significant activities: three generations swimming in a river, family visits and wedding portraits, in which Aboriginal people were dressed in formal western clothing such as army uniforms. It evoked the sense that Aboriginal people's life experiences include those that are just like the everyone else's – and yet so not like everyone else's, with the ever-present risk of powerlessness in subjection to patriarchal colonisers.

BIRRP AI

Ngioka Bunda-Heath, May 2020
Blak Dot Gallery, Brunswick VIC

How do you take representation back, when you are seen as “exotic” or “other” and your image is frozen in time...Who has the power over your image? When your Great-Grandmother's image can be found in museums around the world, and in today's world of social media and selfies...who has the power over your image?

These questions and more are addressed in Ngioka Bunda-Heath's work Birrpai. Birrpai continues on from Ngioka's 2019 work, *Blood Quantum*, which interrogated her maternal lineage. As her second choreographed performance piece, Birrpai shifts the focus to her patrilineal heritage.

This unique family affair of contemporary dance and photography installation is based on staged photographs that were taken as part of the non-Indigenous 'culturist' Thomas Dick's photographic treatise to "capture the image of the dying race" (1910-1923), along with the academic research into their family by Birrpai Elder John Heath, the artist's father.

Portraying colonial photography from a First Nations' perspective, Birrpai draws parallels between the colonial gaze and today's selfie culture. By combining photography, movement and storytelling, Birrpai reclaims these stories and switches the gaze and refocuses the lenses that have until now publicly framed the artist's ancestors. The work adds to a process of Truth Telling and the repatriation of images of First Nations Peoples.

Like her father's publication, Ngioka's work highlights that Birrpai culture did not simply disappear with the establishment of the Port Macquarie penal colony but continues to thrive beyond the lens of Thomas Dick.

Links

Event page: [https://www.danceis.com.au/Event page: /events/birrpai](https://www.danceis.com.au/Event%20page%20-%20/birrpai)

Interview, Youtube, 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1feTY0aUYqM>

BRIDGE

Ngioka Bunda-Heath, March 2022

Dancehouse

"To bridge a gap is to connect things in a logical way; to have qualities of two different things; to fill in a space between two things".

Bridge extends on Ngioka Bunda-Heath's recent works Blood Quantum and Birrpai. This new contemporary dance work explores the dancer's shared and divergent experiences through self-written personal letters addressed to their siblings. Follow the series of solos that interweave, connect and oppose, giving voice to the often overlooked, silenced, and underrepresented in society. The quartet will move from displacement and longing to healing and acceptance. Bridge was made in collaboration with Theodore Cassady, Joshua Twee and Tammy Bouman.

Review: Dance review: Bridge, Dancehouse

A performance that parlays the many benefits of dance: escapism, connection, seeking a greater purpose.

22 Mar 2022, Leila Lois, Arts Hub

'The common thread in the stories was the level of devotion and connection each of the dancers felt through dance...'

'Womenjenka, meaning come with purpose', Ngioka Bunda-Heath announced at the beginning of the performance as she introduced Bridge, curated with three other dancers for Dancehouse's season one. The piece followed four dancers, in cinematic elliptical movement as they danced and narrated the stories of how they found dance, or how dance found them.

There were moments of shared experience; as each read aloud a personal letter, mentioning encounters with shame and self-consciousness but also affection and belonging. This culminated in the final scene, with séance-like chanting of 'being alone', 'failure', and 'loss'. Dance was proffered as an escape from these tragedies in life and a means of connecting with others, finding one's identity and greater purpose.

The lighting by Lisa Mibus, was both comforting, with balmy gold tones, and populated with darkness, as stark shadows were cast on the wall, which the dancers played with in tableau. The score by Daniel Nixon was warm and melodic, with occasional moments of sadness, as the dancers recounted tender childhood memories of dancing. These included being taught dance moves to Michael Jackson by a brother; being laughed at by peers and dancing around the lounge room as a fairy. The common thread in the stories was the level of devotion and connection each of the dancers felt through dance, when faced with fear and tragedy.

Each of their monologues was followed by a mesmerising dance re-enactment of sorts. One of the most striking was a voguing pas de deux between Tamara Bouman and Joshua Twee after a recount of a moving experience dancing in a club.

Bridge moved from the absurd to the sublime with finesse, as Joshua Twee sat down beside an unsuspecting audience member and enacted a stilted conversation on a tram, prefaced with 'How you going?'; highlighting the microaggressions and reactions he has received due to his hyphenated (Asian-Celtic) origin. His background in stage combat and martial arts really shone as he back-flipped across the stage with perfectly calculated abandon.

Read: Exhibition review: Sounding Grainger

At many points in this show the words and movements burned and soothed as we were confronted with the prejudices and demons of our own and others' worlds. The way the dancers smoothly tessellated and turned through their floor work, like dials of a clock or pendulums and over each others' bodies was simply beautiful.

In Bridge, these talented co-choreographers and production team have achieved a masterful work that expresses the ineffable, and has the guts to face up to the darker aspects of being young and feeling different in a society which is still so mired in discrimination and self-scrutiny. It was a pleasure to witness this work and to be welcomed, with purpose, into the space.

<https://www.artshub.com.au/news/reviews/dance-review-bridge-dancehouse-2538747/>



Bridge by James Henry

WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

Ngioka often weaves an acknowledgement of Country within an improvisational structure. The structure generally includes the elements of floor/earth, air and sky, all the while emphasising safe dance practices.

Ngioka uses accumulation and retrograde in the structuring of new movement material. In this workshop, participants will learn gestures from one of Ngioka's works and apply the dance devices, using the following structure: 01 | 10, 012 | 210, 0123 | 3210, 01234 | 43210 etc, to the value of 8, with pauses on 3 or 6 of every ascent, but not descent, with a jump on 9. Participants then apply this process to their own movement vocabulary and stories.

Alignment to Victorian Curriculum, The Arts, Dance

This workshop supports teachers' capacity to engage with the Victorian Dance Curriculum by providing information and experiences that may help them to do the following with their students:

Level	Relevant content descriptors
Foundation	Use choreographic devices to organise movement ideas and create dance sequences (VCADAD018)
Level 1-2	Use choreographic devices to select and organise movement ideas and create and practise dance sequences (VCADAD022)
	Identify where people can experience dance in the local community, for example, talking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about how dance sustains and communicates cultural knowledge (VCADAR024). <i>For instance, connect with Ngioka to take a workshop with students.</i>
Level 3-4	Improvise and structure movement ideas for dance sequences using safe dance practice, the elements of dance and choreographic devices (VCADAE025)
	Use choreographic devices to organise dance sequences, and practise body actions and technical skills (VCADAD026)
	Identify how the elements of dance and production elements are used to express ideas in dance they make, perform and view, including in dances from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCADAR028)
Level 5-6	Explore movement possibilities and choreographic devices using safe dance practice and the elements of dance to create movement ideas, sequences, and phrases (VCADAE029)
	Explain how the elements of dance and production elements communicate ideas in dances from different contexts they make, perform and view, including in dances by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCADAR032)
Level 7-8	Structure dances using choreographic devices and form (VCADAD036)
	Analyse how choreographers use elements of dance and production elements to communicate intent (VCADAR038)
Level 9-10	Manipulate combinations of the elements of dance and choreographic devices to communicate their choreographic intent (VCADAE041)
	Structure dances using movement motifs, choreographic devices and form (VCADAD043)
	Analyse a range of dance from contemporary and past times, including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to explore differing viewpoints and develop understanding of dance practice across local, national and international contexts (VCADAR046)