



Inspire: Primary Workshop Resource

Teaching Artist: Amelia Jean O'Leary

INTRODUCTION

Inspire is a professional learning program for dance educators, presented by Ausdance VIC. The 90-minute workshops provide insights into the recent works, processes, and dance-making skills of local choreographers Amelia Jean O’Leary, Luke Currie-Richardson 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. Workshops are designed for primary teachers (F-L6) and secondary teachers of L7-10 and senior years (L11-12, VCE Dance).

Participants receive a recording of their workshop, a bespoke resource providing background information, curriculum-alignment and suggestions for integrating the workshop learnings into classrooms. Each participant will also receive the BIG HEART Education Resource, based on BIG DANCE, BIG HEART, choreographed by Frances Rings and Craig Bary. This resource includes eight choreographer-approved lesson plans, created by Dr Katrina Rank and aligned to the Victorian Curriculum.

Acknowledgements

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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 AMELIA JEAN O'LEARY

Amelia Jean O'Leary (she/they/yinarr) is a proud First Nations Gamilaroi Yinarr from Northern New South Wales currently living in Naarm (Melbourne). Their dance practice is about human and spiritual experiencing. Through complexity and adversity, they find ways to tell coded and poetically rich stories. As an independent artist, O'Leary is interested in creating their own soundscapes and projections as part of an integrated practice so that their work spans both the digital and physical realms.

O'Leary has created multiple dance works and films including Yinarr, the film, presented at Yirramboi festival 2020 and Dance (Lens) Festival 2021. After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance) from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2021, Amelia performed their first full-length work Yinarr in Adelaide Fringe and Dancehouse in 2022. She was also a part of "Collision" by Jo Lloyd presented at Junction Arts Festival and "Garabari" by Joel Bray at Arts House in 2022.

Other recent works include Sad Eyes (Dancehouse Season 1 2025), A Certain Mumble (Darebin Arts Speakeasy) and STAUNCH ASF (Melbourne Fringe), for which they were awarded Best Emerging Indigenous Artist at Melbourne Fringe 2023 and nominated for a Green Room Award for Pioneering Artistry: Breaking Ground. O'Leary also choreographed One Day as part of Melbourne Theatre Company's First Peoples Young Artists Program at Yirramboi Festival. O'Leary is currently developing multiple new works.

Amelia's link to photographs

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dbbDQDpf4rghjQfRzCI-SBVkD_5Hml1V

RECENT WORKS

Segments of O’Leary’s previous work can be found via their Vimeo channel. You can view the videos directly via [this link](#) to ensure more reliable access within changing web environments.

Sad Eyes

O’Leary’s, *Sad Eyes* ‘queries the importance of dance as a vehicle for change. What if we rebuild the engine? What if this work becomes the world we choose to live in? How can we shift the fantasy to reality? What are your politics? What do you value?’

Through dance and storytelling, *Sad Eyes* draws to the surface complex intersections of politics, identity and environmental concern, in order to disassemble structures, shift and destroy colonial narratives and ultimately to reframe a conversation on choice and action.

Sad Eyes is an ‘emotive and impactful work that makes individuals look within and feel a collective grieving and understanding of the complications that surround us and that are within us. *Sad Eyes* is a heart racing art work that speaks loudly in the hope to create space for the next generation to be louder and prouder. Politically, culturally, environmentally and also physically, this work is a well-rounded powerhouse of abstract dance and coded storytelling.’

Video links

<https://vimeo.com/user122241230>

<https://vimeo.com/907183777>

Credits

Choreographer: Amelia Jean O’Leary

Dancers/collaborators: Jiawen Feng, Keia McGrady, Katherine Lanterna / Hegman, Sam Osborn

Sound Design: Amelia Jean O’Leary

Set Design: Savanna Wegman

Costume Design: Maya Anderson

Lighting Design: Giovanna Yate Gonzalez

Stage and Production Manager: Georgina Bright

Yinarr

'Yinarr' means 'Aboriginal Woman' in Gamillaraay Language. O'Leary often returns to the ideas behind this work to create new iterations that reflect the ways in which their own perspectives and life experiences have shifted.

Previous iterations:

- Performed in Fan the Flames as part of Deadly Fringe 2019
- *Yinarr* (film) - part of YIRRAMBOI's Resilience in Isolation program, by Amelia Jean O'Leary explores the internal vortex of gender and cultures through an external exploration of physical movement
- Performed at Out of Bounds 2021 presented by Lucy Guerin Inc and Phillip Adams BalletLab.
- Full length live performance work Adelaide Fringe 2022
- Full length (live performance) at Dancehouse 2022 In this iteration of Yinarr, O'Leary provides a glimpse into their discovery and exploration of identity. This is a raw physical depiction of their internal vortex of identity and sisterhood that ripples into the physical, digital and spiritual worlds.

Video links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrLwZwjvSy8> – film, part of YIRRAMBOI's Resilience in Isolation program, 2020

<https://vimeo.com/760949509> - live, Dancehouse, 2022

Credits

Choreographer, performer, sound designer: Amelia Jean O'Leary

Projection/film: Amelia Jean O'Leary and Alliah Nival

Lighting Designer: Giovanna Yate González

Reviews:

Dance Informa (*Yinarr* live performance) 'Peering into the heart of the work: Amelia Jean O'Leary's 'Yinarr' <https://dancemagazine.com.au/2022/09/peering-into-the-heart-of-the-work-amelia-jean-olearys-yinarr/>

Dance Informa (*Yinarr* film) 'Dance (Lens) highlights dance films from Australia and internationally' <https://dancemagazine.com.au/2021/08/dance-lens-highlights-dance-films-from-australia-and-internationally/>

Arts Hub <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/reviews/dance-review-yinarr-2575970/>

CODED

Presented by Amelia Jean O'Leary, Abbotsford Convent and Midsumma Festival (Abbotsford Convent, January 23 to 25 2025) — *CODED* gives an inside glimpse of the artist's most recent creative projects. The program presented three fifteen-minute new First Nations femme queer contemporary dance works, choreographed by O'Leary. The dance works challenge ideas of belonging and identity in a world where queerness is often marked as other. These works included *Ngambaa* (Mother in Gamilaraay), a trio; *Winangaylanha ngaya nginunha* (I love you in Gamilaraay), a group work and *CODED* a duet that explores the embedding of queerness within landscapes in fear of personification of physicalised queerness.

Video link

<https://vimeo.com/user122241230>

Credits

CAST and CREW

Dancers: Emily Earther, Carmen Yih, Wendy Feng, Keia McGrady, Amelia J O'Leary & Cora Hughes

Lighting Designer: Giovanna Yate Gonzalez

Production and Stage Manager: Georgie Bright

Choreography and Sound: Amelia J O'Leary

Review

24 Jan: Andrew Fuhrmann, The Age: [** O'Leary's work strives to create space between personal and oppositional subjectivities, between her identity as a queer artist and First Nations storyteller](#)

Media

3CR interview <https://www.3cr.org.au/inynaface/episode/coded-night-queer-storytelling-amelia-j-oleary>

A Certain Mumble

In *A Certain Mumble*, O’Leary and Janelle Tan, a Chinese Malaysian dance artist, step through the sticky terrain of conviction and confusion, voice and incomprehensibility, sisterhood and lineage, being watched and being understood. In this intimate new dance work, the two choreographers invite you into the murky realm between the certainty they hold in themselves, the perils of being misunderstood, and the subterranean rumblings that try to convince you that you don’t belong here.

Video link

<https://vimeo.com/user122241230>

Credits

Choreographer, dancer, soundscape, and projection artist: Amelia Jean O’Leary

Dancer and Collaborator: Janelle Tan Yung Huey

Lighting Designer: Giovanna Yate Gonzalez

Stage Designer: Savanna Wegman

Reviews

My Melbourne Arts - “Getting the inside scoop on being an outsider with Amelia O’Leary’s new dance work *A Certain Mumble*”

<https://www.mymelbournearts.com/2023/01/getting-inside-scoop-on-being-outsider.html>

Dance Australia ‘FRAME A biennial of dance. A Collaborative and Transformative Dance Festival for Melbourne’ <https://www.dancelife.com.au/review-frame-a-biennial-of-dance/>

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

In this workshop Amelia aims to make choreography accessible and will guide you through their choreographic practice — sharing movement tasks, scores, stories, and insights to enrich your understanding of contemporary Indigenous dance and your own movement practice. Activities you may undertake:

1. Preparing your body for dance. Body-earth connection guided improvisation to ground participants and connect to place
2. Shape and space task
3. Embodying creatures and building your own.

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 local dance artists 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)