



**Critical Activism for Dance Education: Dance and the Child
International (daCi)**

舞蹈教育的批判性行動主義：國際兒童舞蹈協會（daCi）

傑夫·邁納斯 MEINERS, Jeff

阿得雷德大學兼任講師

Adjunct, Adelaide University

國際舞蹈與兒童聯盟前主席

Former Chair, dance and the Child international (daCi)

Abstract

This paper provides a narrative account of the author's lived experience from engaging with the organisation 'Dance and the Child international' (daCi). The organisation recognises the right of every child and young person to dance and the preservation of the cultural heritage of all forms of dance for children and young people. Using a critical autoethnographical approach as a method for research and writing, the paper takes into account personal experience, social conditions and power arrangements. The author's involvement with daCi provides a thread to present a genealogical tracing of the organisation, its organisers and their influences. DaCi's structure, activities and features are explained with a focus on the organization's triennial conferences that have been hosted by different countries since 1978. The paper includes a specific report on the most recent 2024 conference held in Slovenia and provides information about plans for the 2027 conference to be hosted by Malaysia. DaCi is identified as a unique organization that undertakes critical activism underpinned by research for and with young people. The paper concludes with a discussion of challenges for daCi as a voluntary organization, including communication, diversity and equity, followed by a conclusion.

Keywords: autoethnography, organization, education, activism, conferences

摘要

本論文以敘事方式描述作者參與「國際兒童舞蹈協會（Dance and the Child international，簡稱 daCi）」的親身經驗。該組織主張每位兒童與青少年皆有跳舞的權利，並致力於保存所有形式舞蹈的文化遺產。本文採用批判性自我民族誌（critical autoethnography）作為研究與寫作方法，結合個人經驗、社會條件與權力結構進行探討。

作者透過自身與 daCi 的互動經歷，呈現該組織的發展脈絡、主要推動者及其影響力。文中說明 daCi 的組織架構、主要活動與特色，特別聚焦於自 1978 年起每三年於不同國家舉辦的國際會議。本文特別報導了最近於 2024 年在斯洛維尼亞舉行的會議，並介紹計劃於 2027 年在馬來西亞舉辦的下一屆會議。

daCi 被定位為一個獨特的組織，透過與青少年共同進行的研究，實踐批判性的行動主義。文章最後討論作為一個志願性組織所面臨的挑戰，包括溝通、多元性與公平性等議題，並提出結語。

關鍵詞：自我民族誌、組織、教育、行動主義、會議

1. Introduction

This paper provides a narrative account of the author's lived experience from engaging with the organisation 'Dance and the Child international (daCi). DaCi strives to promote dance for children and young people, irrespective of race, colour, gender, sex, religion, national or social origin. The organisation recognises the right of every child and young person to dance and the preservation of the cultural heritage of all forms of dance for children and young people. In creating opportunities for children and young people to experience dance as performers, creators, and spectators, their views and interests are of primary importance.

DaCi was founded after a groundbreaking 1978 conference in Canada that led beyond advocacy to ongoing critical activism for dance education across the world. The intention is to illuminate information about daCi, its purpose, challenges and considerable impact as a voluntarily managed organisation. DaCi has long been acknowledged for its conferences, publications and members' research, the organization contributing to the creation of substantial literature on many aspects of dance for children and young people (Teck, 1995). Publications are a key feature of daCi's work with a long history of research, reports and articles from the intersecting fields of dance studies and dance education including creative and performative practices as well as dance pedagogies, curriculum and policies.

The paper traces daCi's activities with a specific report on the most recent 2024 triennial conference held in Slovenia, provides information

about plans for the 2027 conference to be held in Malaysia and a concluding discussion.

2. Method

Using a critical autoethnographical approach as a genre of research and writing, the paper takes into account personal experience, social conditions and power arrangements (Reed-Danahay, 2017). I trace my involvement with daCi to present a genealogy of the organisation, as an account of its organisers and their influences in order “to understand the lived experiences of real people” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 20, cited in Reed-Danahay, 2017).

In this way I attempt critical understanding of my personal and professional journey with daCi to inform reflection and conclusions. A reflexive approach is used to map insights from the narrative journey. The autoethnographic approach draws together a personal story and self-analysis (autobiography) to explore cultural phenomena (ethnography), providing a thread tracing my journey with daCi over many years.

As a practice in academic writing, use of the first person is considered acceptable (Ellerton, 2020; Kamler & Thomson, 2006) and the autobiographical focus includes my voice, the voices encountered in a range of archival documents alongside ethnographic effects. The reflexive autoethnographic writing moves beyond insider/outsider dualism (Reed-Danahay, 2017) and involves my perspective as author as part of the analysis. As an academic I contemplate daCi as a unique organization that undertakes critical activism underpinned by research for and with young people. I offer my personal view

and present myself as the subject of my writing using both a wide lens to consider social and cultural aspects of experience as well as an inward focus on the relationship of these to personal cognisance for gaining critical insight (Ellis, 2004).

3. Autobiography and first encounters with daCi

My journey with daCi spans almost fifty years, beginning as a young teacher in daCi's first decade. I subsequently participated in conferences over the 1990s-2000s when possible, and later when able to increase my commitment, was involved in conference planning from Taiwan 2012, volunteering with the Executive Committee and serving in the seven years chairing sequence as Chair Elect, Chair and Outgoing Chair, finishing in 2025.

Initially I joined daCi UK to prepare for the third 1988 conference hosted in London, England. In the mid-1980s, I was working in East London with the London Borough of Newham advisory dance team based in an arts education centre. Such teams were a feature of UK in-service learning initiatives led by education departments to support teachers and their classes as part of professional learning for staff implementing the school curriculum (Gough, 1997). This daily work led to the provision of extra-curricular youth groups. Newham Youth Dance was invited to participate in the third daCi conference hosted by the Roehampton Institute and I travelled across London with a group of 12-13 year olds, mostly boys with a mix of Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Anglo backgrounds. They performed a dance led by upcoming

dance artist and choreographer, David Massingham, who I had invited to work with the group. Conscious that my presence in schools as a dancing male both challenged gendered perceptions and supported possibilities for younger males to participate, I was buoyed by the opportunity to collaborate with David as we had met from recent Laban studies. The work was mathematically, rhythmically and spatially complex with music by Philip Glass. David's approach notably motivated this group from an economically and socially disadvantaged part of London and also gave him new insights into teaching dance with younger students. Such collaboration between educators, dance artists and young people is an ongoing facet of work presented at daCi conferences. The performance was well-received and the young east-end Londoners were excited to be located amongst other multi-cultural teenagers and children from many parts of the world. However, I was disappointed that the group was unable to stay for the other days of workshops and performances, reflecting an ongoing funding challenge impacting participation in daCi conferences.

4. DaCi's foundation

Earlier In the mid-1970s, Joyce Boorman (who died in 2025), a British university lecturer relocated in Canada, had received numerous letters from educators working in various parts of the world with dance and children. Later, she wrote:

... we needed to remove the aloneness and isolation felt by so many people in relation to dance and the child. The letters which crossed my desk were an evidence of a reaching out from individuals in many parts of the world to share their visions, dreams, aspirations, concerns, knowledge and problems. (Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation Dance Committee [CAHPER], 1979)

Thus, daCi's genesis was at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada in 1978, where Boorman, with the assistance of the local dance and university dance community and CAHPER, led her foundational conference titled 'Dance and the Child' as 'Chairman', writing:

I was alerted to the incredible differences in our background experiences, expertise, cultures and stages of development in this field. But as the differences emerged so did a common focus, a reaching out of hands to each other. The richness in this unity was overwhelming. (CAHPER, 1979)

The conference presented "keynotes and philosophy papers pertaining to 'three vital areas of children's dance': the Child as...Spectator, Performer, Creator" (CAHPER, 1979) explained further:

The area 'Child as Spectator' was concerned with establishing 'dance literature' including performances, films, video-tapes and, artifacts. At this time dance educators were becoming aware that it was necessary to familiarise children with what we now term 'dance works'.

‘The Child as Performer’ focused on ‘the nature and role of the child as a performer’ with the intended outcome of establishing a ‘dance heritage’ for the child which included ‘ethnic, folk, or classical forms when the child performs the traditional dances of a society or culture’. Here it is evident that there was concern about which types of dance children might learn to perform. Creative and performative practices were exemplified by young children dancing, a key component of all future conferences whereby the participation of young people alongside educators and scholars distinguishes daCi from other arts education conferences.

The third area ‘The Child as Creator’ emphasised ‘creative dance’ as an art form, articulated as ‘Modern Educational Dance’, a term which had emanated from Britain. These three aspects of learning for a child had various foundations prior to 1978. They were developed from this time, articulated in many publications by dance education practitioners and scholars, and have over many years been influential for pedagogy and curriculum.

Presentations by dance scholars included eminent educators and philosophers Peter Brinson, Betty Redfern, Graham McFee, Rose Hill. Ideas focused on philosophical discussion, critical reflection on the nature of dance, definitions, conceptualisations of dance education and its purpose for young people, interpretations of creating, performing and spectating - and the relationship between these. Problems were identified and solutions sought. Rose Hill prompted ‘a call to arms’ to find appropriate approaches to researching children’s dance (Kipling Brown et al., 2012). From 1978,

the purpose of a new organisation was considered with advocacy and activism inherent in statements such as:

... it is essential to activate the essential agents of change. (CAHPER, 1979)

British writer and dance advocate, Peter Brinson emphasised the need for action thus “... the whole case rested on changing public attitudes to dance through public education” (CAHPER, 1979). It is evident that Boorman and prominent presenters at this time were from the UK and Commonwealth countries, perhaps reflecting a trace of British empirical forces from the Victorian period. However, representatives from each country who had attended the Canadian conference formed a Steering Committee. Internationalism was a key aspiration in these meetings and a possible connection with the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) sought. In 1979 at Steering Committee meetings in Worcester, prominent Uruguayan dance advocate and UNESCO secretary Madame Susana Frugone de Basualdo brought a warm message from Bengt Häger, Sweden, then President of CIDD-UNESCO inviting ‘DACI’ into the CIDD (Conseil International de la Danse) membership, where its specific responsibility would be the promotion of dance for children in every country of the world. The Steering Committee accepted the invitation thus creating ‘DACI International CIDD-UNESCO’ and in 1980, ‘DACI’ became “an

autonomous branch of the CIDD organization with the aim of promoting the growth and development of dance for children on an international basis” (letter from Bengt Häger, 21 Dec 1979). Meetings led to a draft constitution ratified in 1982 at a General Council Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, during the first conference of the new association, Dance and the Child international (daCi) (daCi, 2024a). A key goal was that daCi would present a triennial conference and the organisation has since hosted a total of fifteen international conferences, shown in Table 1:

Table 1
DaCi triennial conferences

Year	Location
1982	Sweden (Stockholm)
1985	New Zealand (Auckland)
1988	UK (London)
1991	USA (Salt Lake City)
1994	Australia (Sydney)
1997	Finland (Kuopio)
2000	Canada (Regina)
2003	Brazil (Salvador)
2006	Netherlands (The Hague)
2009	Jamaica (Kingston)
2012	Taiwan (Taipei)
2015	Denmark (Copenhagen)
2018	Australia (Adelaide)
2022	Canada (Toronto*)
2024	Slovenia (Ljubljana)

Note: *Online, postponed from 2021 due to Covid-19.

As recognised early in its development, each daCi conference draws upon the strengths of the host country (Lee, 1991) and features reciprocity and partnerships with universities as powerful institutions consistently providing support for conferences. Two joint congresses were held with the World Dance Alliance Education & Training Network, in Taiwan (2012) and Australia (2018).

5. DaCi's structure and organisation

DaCi continues as a nonprofit association and an autonomous, fully constituted branch of Conseil International de la Danse (now CID), UNESCO, with its financial base and address in Canada. With archives held by the Archives and Special Collections, University of Surrey, England. DaCi's Executive Committee and National / Regional representatives constitute the Advisory Board and are made up of voluntary members who pay membership as indicated in the Constitution.

DaCi's mission and vision include an expansive approach to dance education and a focus on inclusivity, respecting everyone's practices and creative learning through dance. Membership is for anyone interested or involved in the growth and development of dance for children and young people. As an outward looking global organization daCi connects leaders of dance for children and young people. Members include dance teachers, dance groups, artists, researchers, educators, artistic directors, choreographers, dancers, philanthropists. Members look beyond their countries to share

interests and practices in regional collaborative activities such as Twinning, Outreach and Research projects, leading to the conference (daCi website 2005).

Membership benefits include becoming part of an international network, sharing profiles, interests and work practices with opportunities to learn about others by connecting with people around the world via the website. Also a resource, the website provides access to a plethora of research papers from earlier conferences and access to more recently published online proceedings. Newsletters provide information from representatives and Twinning, along with Outreach and Research Projects provide opportunities for members to collaborate across countries and regions (daCi website 2005).

6. DaCi's activities

Some influences are clearly related to the terms articulated at the foundational 1978 conference: 'performer, creator, spectator'. So too, the Central European legacy of Laban was present then as a powerful genealogical authority upon many people who participated.

From the outset, dance education scholars involved in daCi prompted critical discourse regarding matters of injustice and inequity for children in the face of poverty, war and disease. From early conferences daCi members have expressed concern about "negative effects in the area of cultural commercialism" (Wigert, 1985). So too, developing young people's agency

through the organization has been a concern since daCi's foundation with a number of initiatives to ensure young voices shape the future in creating dance (Anttila, 2007).

As an example, Twinning projects were initiated by past chair Maria Speth at the 2012 Taiwan conference. These take place in the time between conferences encouraging an interweaving of skills and knowledge between people from different cultures and places to create dialogue and new knowledge (Speth, 2015). The concept of twinning was originally introduced after the Second World War between French and German cities and villages with the intention of promoting friendship, sharing and understanding. DaCi twinning partners not only share and exchange their ideas and views on dance; curiosity for each other's cultural backgrounds also creates strong relationships, resulting in respect and understanding. Young participants are equally involved in a creative process of collaborative learning and sharing, a foundational feature of daCi conferences: "Young people from around the world dancing for and with other is a strong aspect of daCi" (Teck, 1995).

The daCi SpringBoard is another example of critical activism introduced for the Denmark 2015 conference to encourage youth agency, designed to bridge the gap between young people who participate in daCi conferences as dancers and adult daCi members who participate as presenters and facilitators. Graduates aged 18-25 with a special interest in dance education can continue involvement with daCi through SpringBoard activity and contribute to planning the upcoming international conference.

More recently, critical action surfaced in the Canada 2022 conference

involving young people exploring UNESCO’s Sustainable Development Goals through online workshops. These addressed concerns about the future, engaging young people in dialogic meaning-making to consider ‘Good Health & Well-being’ through visual art, poetry, creative writing and dance.

DaCi activism also emanated from the USA’s Black Lives Matter movement that prompted initiatives worldwide to de-colonize practices and curriculum offerings, with members leading initiatives and publications (Koff et al., 2022).

The following Table 2 identifies some significant dance educators who have actively contributed to daCi:

Table 2
Significant dance educators from daCi

Educator/Author	Key Contribution(s) and Year
Eeva Anttila	Research directions (1994)
Karen Bond	Various publications
Ralph Buck	Models for dance education (2006)
Mollie Davies and Veronica Jobbins	Three stranded model (1994)
Ann Green-Gilbert	Brain-Compatible dance education (1980s)
Judith Lynne Hanna	Hanna (1982); various publications
Ann Kipling Brown	Research and leadership (2000s)
Susan Koff	Dance curriculum (2015)
Mary-Elizabeth Manley	The rights of the First Nations child (2015)
Isabel Marques	Context-based dance education (1997)
Liz Melchior	Culturally responsive pedagogy (2011)
Lynette Overby	Research and leadership (2000s)
Joan Russell	First daCi Chair (1982)
Adrienne Sansom	Dance and early childhood (2011)

Table 2
Significant dance educators from daCi (continued)

Educator/Author	Key Contribution(s) and Year
Wendy Schiller	Various publications
Sherry Shapiro	Transformational dance education (1991)
Jacqueline Smith-Autard	Art of Dance Education midway model (1988)
Maria Speth	Twinning (2015)
Susan Stinson	Research as art (1985)
Charlotte Svendler Nielsen	Various publications (2000s)
Liesbeth Wildshut	Children watching dance (2003)

My journey led me to planning for the 2012 conference in Taiwan which developed from discussions with colleagues about English speakers’ gaps in knowledge. Noting Japan’s early membership of daCi, we agreed that daCi should have wider representation in Asia, learning and contributing to dance education in the region. The conference hosted by Taipei National University of the Arts was one of the largest with over 1,200 participants, including new initiatives such as Twinning, creative workshops and a curriculum project (Stinson et al., 2012). This supported my research interests then in developing a genealogy of the dance curriculum, acknowledging leaders in Taiwan such as Chang Chung-shiuan’s (2012) work in dance education “regarded as key to the ideal pursuit of a holistic education” (p. 87) and leading to my collaboration in daCi curriculum research (Kipling Brown et al., 2015). Since 2012, daCi proceedings have been published online; conference programs and additional materials may be sourced from the daCi archive catalogue records available online at the National Resource Centre for Dance (NRCD) website: www.surrey.ac.uk/NRCD

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide further details from Taiwan and subsequent conferences in Denmark (Svendler Nielsen & Koff, 2015) and Australia (Price et al., 2018) for which I was conference chair, then Canada (Cheesman et al., 2022). A notable result from the 2019 Canadian interim meeting was the Advisory Board's development of daCi's first Strategic Plan 2021-24, which identified key goals for the organisation. Here it must be noted that the conference planned for Toronto 2021 was postponed. International travel prohibitions and health concerns around Covid-19 meant that this conference was presented online in 2022, an example of resilience and fortitude supporting the realization of the conference. The Canadian planners provided extraordinary leadership, creating new learnings about the delivery of a virtual conference, necessitating planning for collaboration across time zones with live, as well as recorded sessions and a curated film of young dancers across Canada welcoming participants online. Communication and access were crucial considerations over this period and continue.

6.1 Slovenia 2024

Having navigated the Covid-19 years as Chair Elect with USA Chair Susan Koff, we were subsequently involved in negotiations for a new conference location quite different from the preceding countries with considerations such as local support, potential costs, funding sources and travel/accommodation possibilities for participants. Vesna Geršak (current daCi Chair) initiated the planning process with support from her employer, the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. The conference in Slovenia in 2024 focused on young

people’s learning through the movement of the dancing body. It brought together dancers and educators as a global community united by a shared passion for dance. In 2024 I noted that the Slovenia conference was the first time we had met face-to-face since the 2018 conference in Adelaide, Australia, creating palpable excitement at the prospect of live embodied interaction.

The conference was hosted by a collaboration between the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana; the Republic of Slovenia, Public Fund for Cultural Activities, Department of Dance; Ministry of Culture, Republic of Slovenia; City of Ljubljana; the Secondary Preschool Education, Grammar School and Performing Arts Grammar School Ljubljana.

Titled ‘*I – body, I – dance*’, conference themes related to dance, are explained in the table 3 below:

Table 3
DaCi 2024 conference themes ‘I – body, I – dance’

Themes	Definition/Explanation
Imagination	The ability to connect and combine images, stories concepts and movements to gain a different “reading” from how they were first perceived and received.
Improvisation	Not only about creating new movements, but also about freeing the body from habitual patterns of movement.
Inclusion	Promotes participation opportunities for people of all abilities and has many benefits for psychomotor, cognitive, affective, and social development.
Identity	Creative dance has always been a reflection on the identity and the culture of those who practice it.
Intelligence	With creative dance we can improve interpersonal intelligence.
Interdisciplinarity	Removes the boundaries between disciplines and supports the principle that knowledge is interconnected and provides horizontal and vertical integration of knowledge, content and skills.

A conference message stated:

Let's embody dance with a common I and let's allow dance to do its work for peace and unity... let's welcome the transformative power of dance!

It proved to be a joyful celebration of the vibrant world of dance through the bodies and minds of young dancers as performers, creators and spectators alongside dance education scholars, teachers, researchers, artists and others interested in dance. The program included an opening event presented by the hosts to welcome international participants. This was followed by classes to start each day, keynotes and other presentations in a scholarly program based around the themes, including Twinning, Outreach and Research projects featuring members' work in the Caribbean, Africa, North America and Australia. Alongside, young people rehearsed for the first packed performance evenings of dance, representing their practices. Across the week they worked across countries in sessions facilitated by Slovenian dance artists. Mid-week cultural tours were organised for participants to learn about Slovenia and all were invited to join an evening 'dance for peace' at the Ljubljana castle summit. At a General Council meeting, I outlined achievements, including the appointment of a first daCi Administrator position, and presented the Strategic Plan for 2024-2027. The new Executive Committee was introduced and the week culminated in the closing event and celebration.

The daCi conference followed the February 2024 *UNESCO Abu Dhabi World Conference on Culture and Arts Education* at which I made presentations. Subsequently, daCi members worked with the Slovenian planning committee to develop the *daCi Ljubljana Declaration* (daCi, 2024b) and guide worldwide action for dance education. This was signed mid-week at the conference by myself as daCi Chair and Vesna Geršak as Conference Chair, with the Slovenian Minister of Culture and Minister of Education. The conference Honorary Patron was the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO and the Slovenian Secretary General UNESCO witnessed and endorsed the signing of this new Declaration in the presence of all invited National and Regional representatives.

DaCi introduced a sliding scale for online membership fee payment and Slovenia 2024 conference registration, aligned with international guidance on varying economic circumstances of world regions. 651 participants from 30 countries participated, including 287 young people. The young dancers' programme attracted 395 participants from 12 countries, while the scholars programme had 256 individual authors and co-authors from 25 countries. A generous grant from the USA's Cooper-Newell foundation enabled a new access initiative supporting a total of 133 registration scholarships involving participants from 12 countries. An unforgettable event was realised with the conference program message to young participants:

To our young dancers: you are the heart of this event. Your enthusiasm, creativity and boundless energy are what make this conference truly

special. You bring new perspectives and fresh ideas that push the boundaries of what dance can be. As you engage in workshops, performances and discussions over the next few days, remember that your unique voice and expression are invaluable. Embrace every moment, take risks and let your creativity fly.

Feedback is exemplified by participants' evaluative comments:

An amazing conference. You could feel the collegiality of the participants, both adults and children, what a beautiful way to experience cultural humility and global citizenship. (Adult)

The most memorable moment was when I was over at the children's program and I saw all the children creating and working together from different countries. (Educator)

Seeing all the exciting children and adults from around the world gives me great satisfaction that daCi will continue to grow from strength to strength. The avenue made available to our children in which to express themselves the best way they can speaks volumes. (Dance teacher)

Gathering as a community, the conference was an example of intercultural understanding in action, testimony to the power of dance,

transcending boundaries, fostering inclusivity and empowerment. As Outgoing Chair, I passed daCi's future to my colleagues, now friends Vesna Gersak (Slovenia) and Nicholeen Degrasse Johnson (Jamaica) who took the roles as Chair and Chair Elect, later writing:

I am heartened by the ongoing support from past daCi leaders and that daCi is expanding to become a truly diverse international organisation. This is evidenced by growing representation in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific with new representatives established in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, vital for renewal and development.
(daCi, 2024a)

6.2 Malaysia 2027

The next conference is planned to be hosted by Malaysia at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) - Sultan Idris Education University, located in Tanjong Malim, from Saturday 10th to Thursday 15th July 2027, titled *Dance education for all: Creating inclusive spaces for children and young learners*. The title is important for providing equal opportunities and an inviting setting for children and young learners to participate in dance education. It follows from the 2024 *daCi Ljubljana Declaration* and emphasises the need for governments to eliminate barriers and promote inclusivity in dance, ensuring that every child benefits from dance education. Themes will highlight the transformative force of dance in promoting creativity, self-expression, physical and emotional health, and unity in society.

In July 2025, UPSI hosted the daCi interim meeting. Members of the Executive Committee and National Representatives worked with the Malaysian organising team led by Dr. Muhammad Fazli Taib Bin Saearani, Dean, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts and Dr. Leng Poh Gee, Head of Performing Arts Department, to begin planning for 2027. The participants met with the Vice-Chancellor, and university students performed stunning dances. A new strategy – a daCi Introduction Day of workshops and presentations was led by daCi to inform local Malaysian children, students, teachers and staff about the organisation. 178 participants, including students from the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, UPSI, with participants from secondary schools, primary schools, and kindergartens, joined the daCi workshops, reported in the daCi October 2025 Newsletter.

The daCi conference will be hosted by the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, the National Child Development Research Center, and the Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University and the Department of National Unity and Integration, Malaysia. The latter is a key government agency dedicated to fostering unity and integration among the various ethnic, religious, and cultural communities in the country, aimed at promoting mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among Malaysians. By encouraging intercultural dialogue, organizing community activities, and facilitating collaborations, the department strives to build strong bonds and a shared sense of identity.

In the years leading to 2027, daCi members will work on various

projects to be shared in Malaysia as the local team continues planning and daCi provides collaborative background support. For many young people travelling to Malaysia, the conference will be a new cultural experience requiring openness and careful navigation to address potential surprises, notions of otherness and preconceptions. This is a compelling feature of each conference with potential to transform through intercultural understanding.

7. Discussion and challenges for daCi

Alongside other international organisations, daCi provokes deep contemplation about human commonalities, differences and identities. Promoting unity through intercultural understanding remains an ongoing imperative for the organisation exemplified by my engagement with daCi. This prompted me to question my learnings about race, class, gender and sexuality from my heritage as a white Anglo-Celtic male, born in England, with German ancestors, now living in Australia for the past 30 years. Serving daCi has deepened my own understanding of events, privilege and oppression, broadened my cultural perspective and influenced my research to focus on analysing how power works to prevent or support social justice in both dance pedagogy and curriculum (Meiners & Garrett, 2015; Meiners, 2017; Rowlands et al., 2022). Such insights inform practical action to stimulate transformation towards access, inclusion and diversity in cultural, educational and arts policy environments.

Clear communication is an essential component to facilitate engagement

and access for the organisation's members. From the 'letters' received by Boorman in the 1970s, technology has advanced daCi's capacity to meet across the world via online meetings, traversing the complexities of time zones. The Advisory Board is aware of the cultural dominance of English as the lingua franca. Past conferences in Brazil and Taiwan were undertaken in both English, Portuguese and Mandarin, and highlight the conflicting constraints of a volunteer organisation and aspirations for inclusion.

This leads to resourcing daCi as a volunteer organisation funded primarily through membership fees. Executive Committee members, National and Regional representatives generously contribute significant amounts of time and finances to serving daCi with minimal recompense. It is difficult to secure government and philanthropic funding for an international organisation and daCi is grateful for recent Cooper Newell Foundation support provided for projects over the next years. Facing such challenges, it is nevertheless evident that members benefit through volunteering service with daCi as an international organisation by increasing intercultural relations, working with those from different cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, volunteerism may build international social capital through developing ties, indeed friendships, from working together across the world, nurturing international understanding of matters such as poverty and human rights (Lough et al., 2014). However, in contrast to generating positive attitudes towards cultural difference, Brown (2015) warns of contradictions in international volunteering and a "modernisation model of development towards Westernisation" (Brown, 2015, p. 3) and the

dangers of ‘othering’. Such matters have surfaced in planning meetings and there is increasingly diverse representation amongst the Advisory Board compared to daCi’s early decades.

Another matter pertaining to diversity and equity is the organisation’s understanding of colonial policies that attempted to erase indigenous (or First Nations) dance cultural traditions. Recent acknowledgments position First Nations dances as foundational knowledge practices, providing insights for contemporary cultures with a new presence in Australian and New Zealand school curricula.

8. Conclusion

Critical perspectives and scholarship within daCi have identified the impact of hegemonic dance traditions and practices upon children and young people. Hooks (1994, as cited in Mackinlay, 2017) suggests that it is the lived experience of “this entanglement of thinking and experience, of reflection and action, of theory and practice” that is vital for us to reflect and take action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 2000). Bridging dance and education across the world as intercultural and interdisciplinary academics, scholars and practitioners, we imagine a future led by young people who seek peace and harmony, not conflict and war. The daCi conferences demonstrate the vital nature of active practice for developing intercultural understanding. The most inspiring dance work seen at daCi conferences reveals agentic and productive pedagogies as educational approaches that nurture young learners’ agency, strengthening

their capacity to take self-directed action and make choices that impact their learning and their world. The results of young people's participation in rich programs of weeklong conferences are to some extent immeasurable, delivering significant memorable and transformative experiences with ongoing educational and social benefits from dance learning.

To conclude, in the global context of climate change, mass migration, war, poverty and economic hardship, daCi aligns critical activism with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals and 2024 Framework for Culture and Arts Education, supported by daCi UNESCO Declarations emanating from Copenhagen (2015), Adelaide (2018) and Slovenia (2024). As daCi works towards Malaysia 2027, I recall Boorman's earlier words:

Hopefully we shall never again be as isolated or return unchanged to that place from whence we came. (CAHPER, 1979)

Hence, over almost fifty years since its foundation, daCi has connected so many of us and led change, aligning with Maxine Greene's (1995) compelling call to cultivate our own global visions for a better world - through the application of imagination for dance education.

References

Anttila, Eeva (2007). Children as Agents in Dance: Implications of the Notion of Child Culture for Research and Practice in Dance Education. In Liora Bresler (Ed.), *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*:

- Vol 16* (pp. 865-879). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-3052-9_59
- Boylorn, Robin M., & Orbe, Mark P. (Eds.) (2014). *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life*. Left Coast Press.
- Brown, Eleanor Joanne (2015). Understanding and Engaging with Development through International Volunteering. *Journal of International Development*, 30(1), 102-117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3145>
- Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation Dance Committee (1979). *Dance and the Child, Spectator, Creator, Performer, Keynote Addresses and Philosophy Papers*. CAHPER.
- Cheesman, Sue, Fisher-Stitt, Norma Sue, & Kipling Brown, Ann (Eds.) (2022). Dancing into Communities Canada Virtual Conference Proceedings July 10-15, 2022: 15th Conference of Dance and the Child International. YorkSpace. <https://hdl.handle.net/10315/42092>
- Chang, Chung-shiuan (2012). Dance Education in Taiwan. In Y. Wang & Stephanie Burrige (Eds.), *Identity and Diversity, Celebrating Dance in Taiwan* (pp. 87-103). Routledge.
- Dance and the Child International (2024a, December). daCi Newsletter December 2024. https://daci2024.org/daCi%20Newsletter%20December%202024_%2023_12_2024.pdf
- Dance and the Child International (2024b, July 11). daCi Ljubljana Declaration. *daCi*. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://daci.international/about/daci-ljubljana-declaration>
- Ellerton, Peter (2020, March 4). We Should Use ‘I’ More in Academic Writing –

- There is Benefit to First-Person Perspective. *The Conversation*. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://theconversation.com/we-should-use-i-more-in-academic-writing-there-is-benefit-to-first-person-perspective-131898>
- Ellis, Carolyn (2004). *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. AltaMira Press.
- Freire, Paulo (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Myra Bergman Ramos Trans.; 30th Anniversary Edition). The Continuum International Publishing Group. (Original work published 1968)
- Gough, Bob (1997). Teachers' Centres as Seen through the Pages of the British Journal of In-Service Education. *British Journal of In-Service Education*, 23(1), 23-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674589700200001>
- Greene, Maxine (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hanna, Judith Lynne (1982). Dance and the Child a Conference Report. *Dance Research Journal*, 15(1), 50-53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767700013887>
- Kamler, Barbara, & Thomson, Pat (2006). *Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for Supervision*. Taylor & Francis.
- Kipling Brown, Ann, Koff, Susan, Meiners, Jeff, & Svendler Nielsen, Charlotte (2015). Dance Learning in Motion: Global Dance Education. In Larry O'Farrell, Shifra Schonmann & Ernst Wagner (Eds.), *International Yearbook for Research in Arts Education* (Vol. 2, p. 203). Waxmann Verlag.
- Kipling Brown, Ann, Manley, Mary-Elizabeth, Svendler Nielsen, Charlotte, & Dance and the Child International. (2012). *Rich Returns: DaCi's First 30 Years. Volume I, In Search of Our Own Dance Knowledge*. Dance and the

Child International (daCi).

Koff, Susan R., Overby, Lynette Young, & Anttila, Eeva (2022). Dance Education Throughout the World: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Racial Justice Reckoning. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 23(SI 1.0).

Lee, Vivien (1991). Dance and the Child International Conference (University of Utah, 29 July-3 August 1991). *Dance Research Journal*, 23(2), 50-51. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767700003181>

Lough, Benjamin J., Sherraden, Margaret. S., McBride, Amanda Moore, & Xiang, Xiaoling (2014). The Impact of International Service on the Development of Volunteers' Intercultural Relations. *Social Science Research*, 46, 48-58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.02.002>

Mackinlay, Elizabeth (2017). Praxis: Wondering about Why it Comes and Must Matter in Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Work. In Pamela Burnard, Valerie Ross, Helen Julia Minors, Kimberly Powell, Tatjana Dragovic & Elizabeth Mackinlay (Eds.). *Building Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Bridges: Where Practice Meets Research and Theory* (pp. 234-236). BIBACC Publishing.

Meiners, Jeff (2017). *So We Can Dance? In Pursuit of an Inclusive Dance Curriculum for the Primary School Years in Australia* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Australia]. <https://hdl.handle.net/11541.2/130940>

Meiners, Jeff, & Garrett, Robyne (2015). An Australian Dance Curriculum for Social Justice: Potentials and Possibilities. In Charlotte Svendler Nielsen & Stephanie Burrridge (Eds.), *Dance Education around the*

- World: Perspectives on Dance, Young People and Change* (pp. 11-21). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315813578>
- Price, Deborah, Meiners, Jeff, & Kipling Brown, Ann (Eds.) (2018). Proceedings of Panpapanpalya 2018, the 2nd Joint Congress of Dance and the Child International and World Dance Alliance Global Education and Training Network. Adelaide, Australia, 8–13 July 2018. <https://ausdance.org.au/publications/details/panpapanpalya-2018> [Accessed on 20 September 2025]
- Reed-Danahay, Deborah (2017). Bourdieu and Critical Autoethnography: Implications for Research, Writing, and Teaching. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 19(1), 144-154. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v19i1.1368>
- Rowlands, Kerrin, MacGill, Belinda, & Meiners, Jeff (2022). First Nations Dance in the School Curriculum: Perspectives from an Australian University. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 23(1), 1-23.
- Speth, Maria (2015). Twinning: An Intercultural Approach to Dance Education. In Charlotte Svendler Nielsen & Stephanie Burrige (Eds.), *Dance Education around the World* (pp. 168-172). Routledge.
- Stinson, Susan W., Svendler Nielsen, Charlotte, & Liu, Shu-ying (Eds.) (2012). Dance, Young People and Change: Proceedings of the daCi and WDA Global Dance Summit. Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan, July 14th – 20th 2012, <https://ausdance.org.au/publications/details/dance-young-people-and-change> [Accessed on 20 September 2025]
- Svendler Nielsen, Charlotte, & Koff, Susan R. (2015). Exploring Identities in Dance: Proceedings from the 13th World Congress of Dance and the Child

- International. University of Copenhagen, Denmark, July 5th–10th 2015.
<https://ausdance.org.au/publications/details/exploring-identities-in-dance>
[Accessed on 20 September 2025]
- Teck, Katherine (1995). Dance and the child international — “Kindle the fire.” *Dance Chronicle*, 18(1), 115-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472529508569182>
- Wigert, Anne (1985). Young Children’s Dance: Ideological and Political Aspects. In *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Dance and the Child International. Auckland: Dance and the Child International* (Vol. 245, p. 262).