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## Place as the Aesthetic: an Indigenous Perspective of Arts Education

The moving body remains encoded with distinct value systems that can be inaccurately defined in Arts Education for the purposes of aesthetic competence and influence (Ballengee-Morris, 2008; Hindle et al., 2011). The ways the body looks, moves and feels differ and the cultural weight of the relationship between the *mover* and *watcher* can be laden with underlying assumptions and dispositions. How difference is valued in Arts Education therefore remains a complex narrative where aesthetic privilege can be hierarchical and guarded by culturally specific metaphors that are exclusive of Indigenous knowledge systems (Cruz Banks, 2010; Salter, 2002; Smith, 2007).

When using the term Indigenous I refer to people who have inhabited land before colonisation and “maintained distinct, nuanced cultural and social organizing principles; and claim a nationhood status” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 944). This use of Indigenous does not engage in cultural or ethnic clumping where experiences of colonisation, capitalism and shifting connections to language, land and identity often mean homogenisation and being pushed into ‘otherness’ by the dominant culture(s) (Smith & Wolfgramm, 2021).

Indigenous people are consciously engaged in the “articulation of the features of the natural world into the activities of the culture” writes Māori scholar Charles Āhukaramu Royal (2004, p. 4). This short paper considers such interconnectedness between Indigenous community, the moving body and the environment as means to re-imagine the cultural interface of artistic integrities. It spotlights place-based praxis as a way to support the validation of Indigenous aesthetic values and consider their ongoing reconceptualisation in Arts Education.

### An indigenous aesthetic

For indigenous communities throughout the world the creative and performing arts interconnect with all areas of life (Ballengee-Morris, 2008; Moncada, 2016; Royal, 2007). This interrelationship is demonstrated through the storytelling that exists

alongside a genealogical knowledge system. Thus, the embodiment of the environment is a conceptual realm within which to make aesthetic meaning of the world. Attentive to the multiple truths of the indigenous aesthetic in relation to identity and cultural consciousness, Christine Ballengee-Morris (2008) writes,

Indigenous Arts is informed by multiple, distinct systems of Indigenous aesthetics *across* tribal, national, geographic, and cultural borders. [...] Nature is expressed through indigenous art that connects place and spirituality, which provides the conceptual basis for understanding place and space within traditional Native cultures. In other words, spaces, music, dance, or visual arts, is the celebration of human continuity with the earth and identity. (p. 31)

In relation to Arts Education, Ballengee-Morris (2008) explores the intersections of embodied knowledge that happen in an Indigenous world view. She argues compellingly that a distinct Indigenous collation may also become marginalised even when the interface of environment is confidently recognised in the moving body, yet often in opposition to dominant artistic philosophies. Therefore, advocating aesthetics that are definitive of the *tribal, national, geographic, and cultural borders* from which they have originated is fundamental to holistic integrity in how arts education is conceptualised.

## Place

Locational landscapes as means to engage with indigenous aesthetics in Arts Education demonstrate the significance of place-based praxis as a palpable and tangible necessity. Penetito (2009) advocates the landscapes we inhabit as ways to connect “place with self and community [that include] multi-generational and multi-cultural dimensions as they integrate with community resources” (p. 7). Resisting Western constructs of kinaesthetic knowledge, Grau (2012) writes that it is important to note “how human beings conceptualize the body, how they carve it into distinct body parts, and how they use it to create metaphors are culturally specific” (p. 6). As such, when working with Indigenous informed arts practices it is important to adhere to specific sites of place and their historical memories as means to invoke cultural distinction.

Here within the autonomy of Arts Education, aesthetics intrinsic of Indigenous landscapes may also disrupt and relocate Eurocentric understandings of place. As Johnson (2012) states, Western philosophies of landscape have become a “taken for granted relationship [that] has allowed specific places to become only thinly conceived or erased entirely. Placelessness ... is a primary component of our modern Western condition” (p. 830). Reconciling place through Indigenous Arts practices will shift the focus and situate the importance of this knowledge more equitably within wider global arts theories and methods.

## Arts education

UNESCO (2006) acknowledges that culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education. Indigenous culture is often relegated to the zone of preservation with the result that Indigenous approaches to arts and creativity have been neglected and subsumed in dominant modernist understandings and practices of art (Eriksen, 2001). As noted by Arts academic Elizabeth Grierson (2003), “It is now a given that the arts as defined by western epistemologies are grounded (and) tied to western systems of evaluation and recognition” (p. 27). As such, the concept of Indigenous arts and aesthetics is yet to be foregrounded as a cultural practice and knowledge/pedagogical system (Faik-Simet, 2021; Hindle et al., 2015; Mabingo, 2015).

The need to interrogate the way in which Indigenous creativity and aesthetic ideologies are validated in Arts Education remains pressing. Susan Wright (2002) argues for education that fosters “experiences that move us and reach the deepest part of our interior world – our human spirit – which is liberated through the integration of visual, spatial, aural and bodily kinaesthetic ways of knowing” (p.11). These embodied *ways of knowing* may then be relocated, reclaimed and reconciled in the environments, localities and genealogies to which they *belong*, cultivating an authentic relational discourse.

This ideology of belonging that is reflective of genealogical knowledge promotes the importance of *place* as an essential element in engaging with the world. The artistic process is realised through an awareness of location established and maintained through a sense of, and relationship to place. Where are we? Where are you from? What is this place? Such provocations become a way to equitably discover the aesthetics of the moving body as a reflection of relationships to human localities, location, community and histories (Penetito, 2009).

To reconcile the activities of creative practice and aesthetic analysis as they are shaped by and translated in human lived experience is to commit to the disruption of hegemony in Arts Education. In declaring the cultures that hold us in the world, the role of place is pivotal. The *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education* seeks to encourage critical reflection upon ideologies that create binary perceptions of how Arts Education is perceived and lived by people. Engaging with how we think about and *enact* arts education praxis, and the dominant theories and methodologies that frame aesthetic meaning, is paramount. The relationality of an authoritative indigenous perspective that is realised through material embodiments in actions, performances, ceremonies and events will expand traditional scholarship and re-imagine culturally inclusive and equitable aesthetic practices.

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