

## **Exploring Circus Educational Opportunities: Reflections of our Education Kōrero.**

Nick Davies and Kahurahki Bronson-George (writing in Purple)

I couldn't help but feel a ripple of nervous excitement logging in to our ANZCA community Kōrero. Having brought together teaching institutions and developments from around Aotearoa and Australia, we were blessed to have such a line up of people working towards better educational opportunities for our circus community.

Since losing our tertiary circus program in 2019 at Whitireia Polytechnic, the gap has been felt by our whole industry, with less opportunities for aspiring professional artists. Over the past two years I have been advocating on behalf of the industry with Toi Mai / The Workforce Development Council to retain our circus qualification. The real challenge has been to find the people, resources and time required to start a new tertiary program.

Alongside Toi Mai and other keen people including Peter Burley (from the original CPIT 'Circo Arts' program), I have been connecting with trainers, providers and organisers in the hope of gathering all the parts needed for a new tertiary program. Upon discovering that many people on one side of the country did not know what was happening on the other, we decided to bring everyone together in this kōrero to bring everyone up to date.

Ko kōrero te kai o kā rakatira - Conversation is the food of leaders. In a hui/Māori meeting, kōrero is how the kaupapa of the day gets addressed. The nature of kōrero

usually goes very deep, allowing the thought of the speaker to reach its farthest natural extension. Then, everyone gets to “feast”/benefit from the findings.

While we usually prefer to go deep in a kōrero, this event was a quick fire five minutes from several key players in circus education around New Zealand and Australia that had a relationship with tertiary circus programs. In this line up we were blessed to get updates from:

**Natasha van Etten.** School Manager, Te Kura Maninirau.

**Jenny Ritchie.** General Board Member, MOVE.

**Rosalie Ducharme.** General Manager, The Wellington Circus Hub.

**Simona Jobbagy and James Brown.** Director and Head of Circus Studies, National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA), Australia.

**Mary-Jane Duffy.** Te Ringa Hanga, Qualifications Development Facilitator, Toi Mai.

It turned out to be very informative with specific presentations about programs, venues in development and issues we are facing in getting new programs off the ground. A recording of the event is available at: <https://fb.watch/nlMnFRi-dN/>

## **Speaker Highlights**

Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu - Give the bird feathers that it may soar to great heights. This is about facilitating others to accomplish their very best in life. Such facilitation includes things like new beginnings, such as those listed below.

It was so exciting to hear about the strong start of Te Kura Maninirau. Aotearoa's first kaupapa Māori circus school is being held in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Classes have begun and they are in demand by keen students. Find out more at:

<https://www.tekuramanirau.nz>

Jenny Ritchie gave an overview of the MOVE centre that is currently in development in Parakiore, Ōtautahi/Christchurch. The space will include circus arts studios and could be a potential venue for future tertiary programming. Jenny also shared frustrations over construction challenges. This space is still at least 2 years away from completion. More information about this space at:

<https://uat.ccc.govt.nz/rec-and-sport/projects/parakiore/>

Rosalie Ducharme shared the journey of the Wellington Circus Hub and how they had been struggling to make ends meet. Rosalie shared how difficult it would be to develop a new program while trying to cope from the loss of income associated with the closing of the previous one. The management team and the community have all been working hard to find new solutions. You can help towards these solutions by signing up for classes, or becoming a sponsor partner: <https://www.circus.org.nz/sponsorship>

Simona Jobbagy from NICA shared their offerings and the potential to bring a level 3 or 4 circus certificate to us while we find our feet with our own program.

<https://www.nica.com.au/certificateIV>

Mary-Jane Duffy from Toi Mai reflected on the previous year of profiling our circus industry. Her reflections were positive, but realistic: She expressed that while the circus industry was viable and passionate it also lacked some of the resources it requires to grow. She also noted how some of the circus community is isolated and does not always know what else is happening around the country.

While there was plenty of hope for new tertiary programs, it was also evident that we don't yet have the resources, funding and trainers all in one place. There are still a lot of plans and progress being made for development in the next few years, especially associated with the new 'MOVE' studio space in Ōtautahi.

Moving forward I will be communicating with the review outcomes at the Tertiary Education Commission regarding our existing tertiary program standards. My impression is that we will retain the bit of paper (Qualification), but it is the resources, people and specific programming that are going to determine whether we can get something running on the ground.

## **Discussion Ideas**

Nā tō rourou, nā tōhoku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi - With your basket, with my basket, the people will thrive. This is about valuing each others' contributions to the kōrero. Nobody accomplishes anything great alone.

Following the presentations, community members came together for a chat. Here are some of themes that came up:

### **The importance of an internship for aspiring performers**

Takata anō ana i te whare, te tūraka ki te marae, tau ana - A person who is taught at home will stand collected on the marae. In this context it means creating a time and space for budding performers to find their feet, such as their first ongoing professional engagement.

It was raised that since COVID19 our country's only big top touring circus, Circus Aotearoa, has stopped touring due to financial constraints. They have traditionally hired emerging artists and tertiary graduates and have provided an internship opportunity and access into the industry. With Circus Aotearoa not currently touring this presents another barrier to growing our industry. (This will be the subject of an upcoming blog).

<https://circusaotearoa.co.nz>

Some members mentioned how they have come from overseas programs that followed a model of graduates being placed in touring performances for shows that helped fund new students to join first year programs.

### **What we should teach and how we should teach it**

Ko Rakinui e tū nei, ko Papatūānuku e takoto nei, ko Tānemahuta kai waekanui - The Sky Father stands above us, the Earth Mother lies below us, and the Great Forest stands in between. This is about recognising the place we are teaching in, and building a uniquely Aotearoan Circus identity which we can share to the world.

Many had input on what should be taught in our future courses. The big theme was there could be more education in business skills. The majority of circus performers find themselves as sole traders, and are left to work out the business aspect of performing arts independently. These skills included: Filling funding applications, effective processes, and marketing and promotional training.

It was not just the *content* of what we should teach that was raised, but also the *ways* circus could be taught. Many acknowledged the neurodiversity commonly amongst circus performers and how they do not always respond to traditional teaching methods easily. There were suggestions around rethinking how we educate and considering new approaches around our pedagogy (practice of teaching) and kaupapa.

## **What's Next?**

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua - I walk backwards into the future with one eye fixed on the past. This is about being mindful of what didn't work in the past so as to avoid repeating past mistakes, so that the mistakes we make in the future may be far more original.

I left feeling inspired about the amount of projects, ideas and passion found in this hui. It seems pretty clear that bringing people together and sharing ideas about the how, what, and why of circus education in our country could be a wonderful thing.

While the tertiary program works to gather the necessary resources, we have decided to shift our focus to supporting the youth circus talent currently rising through the community. Our next steps are compiling resources, building networks, and focusing on circus education across schools and pre-tertiary environments. Through sharing ideas and resources we will be developing a library of available documents and ideas on how

to share circus, write programs, and inspire ways of circus to better connect more with our culture and place.

If you would like to be involved in the working group, be open to sharing your knowledge or would like to give some feedback please touch base with me in the email provided below.

Ngā manaakitanga / Best wishes

Nic Davies