

*the Arts  
in Education*  
Critical Perspectives from Teacher Educators  
School for Visual and Creative Arts in Education

Editorial by Peter Smith

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## **THE AUTHORS**

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## EDITORIAL

Peter Smith

The position of the arts within the formal curricula of westernised nations has long been controversial. There are many reasons for this: philosophical, political, religious and economic. A dominant theme, deriving from Platonist elevation of reason and intellect over emotion and feeling, allied itself to that sectarian Christian ethic of glorification of soul and spirit and the repression of bodily appetites. Paradoxically, the supposed egalitarianism embodied in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Age of Enlightenment vigorously sustained reason as the supreme faculty of mind, denying intellectual substance to the arts, suspect as they were to irrationality, emotionalism, and frivolity.

The burgeoning 19<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Revolution was to characterise the visual arts in particular as, at best, in service to economic production of goods for the ever increasing mass market. The arts in general were in a sense contaminated by assumptions that they were adornments to aristocratic life, or the vulgar and unimportant edification of the masses. Thus there was maintained, in a new bourgeois context, the Renaissance cult of connoisseurship and patronage. The aristocratic arts generated their own industry of acquisition, commissioning and self-aggrandisement. They generated, too, schools, academies and institutions which promoted strictly regulated prescriptions of what should be taught and how it should be learned.

It is not surprising, therefore, that within the academic regimes of the 'grammar schools' such arts instruction as existed, and there was very little of it, aligned with the ambitions of a wealthy upper-class. While there is today substantial evidence and significant research which acknowledges the cultural significance of the form, shape and function of the arts within the 'common' society – the so-called primitive, folk and community arts – there has been slow, if little, revision of state curricula to attend to them. Indeed, I would be so bold as to say that whilst the cultural and social significance of the arts is acknowledged within the former *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993), and its associated *Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000), those arts tend to remain within and are construed from a dominantly western perspective. Furthermore, the replacement of

separate curricula for dance, drama, music and the visual arts with a generic arts curriculum has continued to erode the time and attention given to the arts. This marginalising or relegation of the arts disciplines within state curricula persists both within schooling and teacher education, despite the research, rhetoric and protestations of both those who strenuously advocate child-centred education, the rejection of partition of mind and body, and post-modernist revisions of art and society.

With the election in 1935 of the first liberal/socialist Labour Government it was anticipated that Minister of Education Peter Fraser's determination to initiate changes in schooling, which were grounded in notions of equality of opportunity, would benefit the arts. Indeed, his innovative ideas, particularly for early childhood and primary education, were to be highly influential. For example, following the New Zealand 1937 conference of the New Education Fellowship 'new wave' educators embraced John Dewey's educational theories of philosophical naturalism which focussed upon the ability to respond creatively to constant change in natural order. The 'play-way' ideology promoted by the Progressives rapidly gained popularity, particularly amongst a younger generation of teachers who reacted to the discipline-based formality which had trickled down from authoritarian instruction of the grammar schools. The spontaneous and 'natural' behaviours of young children needed to be recognised as symptoms of enquiring and developing minds, not to be inhibited by imposition of adult models and conventions. Particularly was this stance endorsed within the field of the arts, where the spontaneous and unconventional inventiveness of young children was seen as having parallels with the rejection of classicism by avant-garde musicians, dramatists, poets and visual artists. Spontaneous movement, narration and rhyming, and apparently random scribbles, scratching, and shaping attracted the attention of educators and teachers in New Zealand, among them Sylvia Ashton-Warner and Elwyn Richardson. These educators began to perceive the child as living and creating in his or her own world, and not merely as raw material to be moulded into adulthood.

During the 1930s and 40s, while the creative child-centred approach to the arts was being enacted in primary schools, the autonomy of secondary schools enabled them to ignore progressivism and maintain traditional academic programmes. In contrast to the focus in the early years upon a pedagogy which enhanced the individual

personality development of the child, the state schooling system for secondary education was geared to the production of a useful work force. In the secondary sector the arts were unimportant; at best they could suit the unintelligent child (see Murdoch, 1943). Reinforced by the historical conservatism of teachers obedient to an authoritarian regime, secondary school educators in the arts were scathing of pedagogical practices which required the withdrawal of adult/teacher instruction or critique. Play-way became, at worst, a term of contempt.

The debates, and they are healthy, over play-way and its more sophisticated interpretations continue. But within the frame of state education in New Zealand, as in other countries, political and economic policies give priority to curricula which have moved little from the academic regime in which 'intellect' is seen as the most significant requirement. The separation between intellect and feeling, emotion and body persists strongly. It is embedded still within the popular ethos. Small wonder, then, that the arts remain on the curriculum fringe. The low weightings given them in comparison with 'real', 'hard' or 'proper' subjects persists in curriculum structuring, pedagogical assumptions and, sadly, in teacher education.

I am encouraged, therefore, by the contemporary research which questions long-held assumptions about the nature of intelligence, which rigorously questions the true functions and roles of the arts within a widening global context, and which challenges the westernised framework of academically-orientated curricula. What I find particularly significant about the articles, research report, and comments offered by teacher educators in the School for Visual and Creative Arts in Education is that they are not be-devilled by the agonising protestation, and too often plaintive claims, that the arts have been hard done by in curriculum terms and that they deserve a better place. These authors, who represent each of the four arts disciplines of dance, drama, music and the visual arts, do not indulge in self-pity nor do they make unsubstantiated claims. Rather, they open the debate in positive terms and provoke in the reader an important reconsideration of how the arts can usefully function within education.

At the heart of the papers in this monograph are two limiting side effects of the historical developments in arts education in New Zealand. First, the traditional westernised forms of the arts were largely sustained in their 'new' context of



personality development. Second, the concentration upon the psychological and emotional welfare of the individual child distracted from the recognition that the arts have, in all societies, had a primary and significant cultural function. Not to recognise, and even to ignore, that function has profound educational and social implications.

In her article, ***Visual art in the early childhood context: A critical dimension for enhancing community connections***, Lesley Pohio argues for recognition of a socio-cultural approach to learning and teaching. In doing so she does not negate the importance of the visual arts as agents of individual development, but emphasises that such development requires recognition of the 'real lives' of children and their families and communities. It is her belief that the early childhood teacher, using visual art, can by "co-constructing knowledge with the children" foster them as co-explorers of their worlds. What is significant about Pohio's approach is the carefully planned and sympathetic introduction to the work of artists who have a cultural and ethnic affinity to the children with whom she works, while recognising that the arts are deeply and inevitably embedded in a people's culture. Pohio draws the children and their community into a context of shared giving and receiving of evolving knowledge. Learning in the visual arts, in her words, can "unblock the filters" and help us see, hear, and respond to a multiplicity of voices. 'Hands off' ideologies are firmly rejected. In Pohio's view, all, children, teachers, families, and communities are active participants, contributors and receivers.

Education in the visual arts appears, if not in the research literature, in popular view and teachers' practice to have received rather more attention than the arts of drama, dance, and music. There are reasons for this but a substantial analysis is beyond the scope of this commentary. The visual arts, particularly with the advent of modernism, lent themselves, so it was claimed, to spontaneous, individual and creative expression, to use the dogma of the New Wave Education. Formal instruction and academic and stylistic conventions were rejected. In a crude sense 'anyone could be an artist'. By contrast, in the popular as well as the traditionalist view, music, dance and drama were seen as requiring preparatory technical instruction and a mastery of conventions of form. The child could not be expected or seen as capable of performance without such essentially adult training.

Such assumptions are vigorously challenged by **Adrienne Sansom** in *The interrelationship between dance and the young child*. In her article Sansom contends that dance education is an area of learning that is either neglected or misunderstood within the sphere of early childhood education. In her view, “dance as an art form and as a way of knowing needs to be demystified in order for it to be incorporated as a relevant area of learning in the early years of childhood”. In a thoroughly researched paper, Sansom distinguishes a number of key issues. Whilst she applauds the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) for its endorsement of holistic development and empowering she notes a dilemma. What in the curriculum must be emphasised that relates the learning to the child? Is it replication of traditional patterns of learning or is it necessary to shift the ground from codified language and techniques? Such possible shifts, she suggests, do not mean that we accept simplistically that young children will move spontaneously. What is required, and here she brings the teacher role into focus, is that child and teacher develop an active awareness and engagement with the body’s capabilities. She comments that “It is this active sensing of the body’s capabilities or body knowledge that gives rise to dance”.

Sansom offers some important cautions. Assumptions by teachers about what are considered to be appropriate forms of dance, including what may be construed in certain situations as the ‘right’ mode of child dance education, can be culturally insensitive. She quotes Canella (1998) that there may be those who possess powerful inhibitions about their bodies and the imposition, no matter how benign the educational intention, of some child dance programmes can be injurious in terms of self-confidence and cultural affiliation. In the end, Sansom calls our attention to the need for teachers to re-evaluate their concepts of what dance education is. She suggests that it is a process which may require the teacher to take risks and deal with their own uncertainties. But without that risk-taking dance education for young children may well remain a peripheral dimension of curriculum.

The question of how primary school teachers can assist students to learn about and respond to art works is explored by **Brad Irwin** in his article, *Learning about art in the classroom: Can we learn some lessons from art gallery practice?* At first reading Irwin’s commentary appears to align with Pohio’s emphasis upon socio-cultural interaction in early childhood education, and with Smiths’ focus upon a re-

evaluation of cultural contexts and pedagogical focus in secondary school art programmes. There is, I find, a significant difference. Irwin's paper raises substantial ideological and aesthetic issues which rest within cultural contexts. I have no difficulty with this. The current curriculum for New Zealand schools gives emphasis to cross-cultural learning and understanding. However, Irwin, it seems to me, places the concept of 'using art in the classroom' very much within the field of the 'fine arts' – essentially the collections held by art galleries. This might be an unwarranted interpretation. Certainly, there has been a move by art galleries to attend to and display the art works of other cultures, an important shift from that anthropological stance which designated museums as appropriate repositories of cultural artefacts.

Irwin's research of literature notes proposed aesthetic educations which will provide students with the language and skills that enable them to make sophisticated analyses of art works being studied. He warns that such an 'intellectual' focus may not be the most effective approach and advocates participatory learning in which the students' responses and reactions are to be seen as important, if not more so than didactic teacher delivery. Irwin opens up the debate on how students can best encounter, learn from, and contribute to diversity in the arts. I would like to see further investigation into what are construed to be the 'right' art works. Such investigation raises questions, already asked by other authors of this monograph, about the significance and function of the arts of 'other' societies and of the kinds of knowledge that teachers will require to honour diverse valuing systems. In particular, Irwin's references to theories of aesthetic enquiry, and his concerns that these may be found wanting in the New Zealand context, also raise substantial, if controversial, issues about what are understood to be the visual arts. As soon as one departs from that essentially western, modernist cataloguing of 'fine arts', 'primitive arts', 'folk arts', 'craft', 'popular arts' and the increasingly pervasive 'electronic arts', the substance of what is seen as the 'right art' for students to encounter and learn about in the classroom confronts art curriculum and pedagogical theory and policy. What cannot be ignored is that New Zealanders live in a complex society in which all of these manifestations of art are already the diet of the young.

Two significant territories of art education that have substantial implication for teacher education are explored by **Jill Smith** in her article, *How culturally inclusive is visual arts education in New Zealand secondary schools?* I have already

referred to the historical side-lining of the arts in the curriculum and that this was more evident at the secondary school level, to the point of total omission. It was an outcome, first, from the persistence of what has been called the grammar school tradition of the prime importance of the academic disciplines, and second, until comparatively recently, the independence of secondary school boards of governors. This can justifiably be called a dimension of colonisation which was, perhaps, as significant in cultural terms as imposed governmental authority. Indeed, Smith reveals in her research that policies of enforced mono-cultural education were used as instruments of cultural control. To be fair, since the 1960s with the introduction of senior school examination prescriptions in art and art history, there has been extraordinary growth and acceptance of visual arts education at the secondary level. The introduction of such examinations caused substantial concern, indeed outrage, to the protagonists of the dogma of creative free expression. Nevertheless, their induction has helped at all levels of schooling to balance 'knowing about art' and 'making art works'. Even so, the art works to be 'known about' remain within a predominantly modernist and élitist terrain.

Prompting Smith's study was her awareness of the rapid expansion of a multicultural society in New Zealand and of the educational and professional responsibility of art teachers to become aware and knowledgeable of this cultural shift, and to reshape their programmes accordingly. Her research focused, therefore, upon teacher disposition and behaviour. Smith's investigation entailed substantial observation, interviewing and documentation of what occurred in a selection of secondary school art rooms. What was, in fact, happening? What shifts were being made in secondary classrooms to attend to the ethnic diversity and cultural difference of students? Essentially, she was seeking answers to the question of how and why we teach as we do. It appears a comparatively simple question but the research reveals complex answers and raises significant issues for education. Smith notes that New Zealand's curriculum documents place emphasis upon student understanding and respect for cultural difference, but tend to define that difference in ethnic terms. In the main the teachers she observed during the field work investigation designed programmes obedient to the national curriculum, sympathetic to biculturalism, and dominated by westernised perceptions of art. Although the majority of the schools' populations were ethnically diverse, the art of 'other' ethnicities was still seen as something of an add-on in art programmes. Drawing upon a diverse range of student experience and

environment was largely absent. It is this latter aspect that I find particularly important, in so far as Smith's research into cultural theory aligns with the view that in today's globalised and hybridised world individuals possess personalised cultures which may be very different from simplistic ethnic characterisation.

In terms of the 'why' we teach as we do, Smiths' interviews reveal very clearly that it is the conscious and unconscious impact of growing up, family life, personal preoccupations, and educational training and experience, as much as curriculum directives, that shape the teaching mode. If this appears obvious we must put it, as she does, into the context of a predominantly white, middle-class and female society of secondary school art teachers. It is, in those terms, hardly surprising that curriculum interpretation and pedagogical practice remain dominantly within a modernist and westernised mono-cultural ethos. The question Smith asks herself, and which we need to ask ourselves, is whether this bias is acceptable or useful in the New Zealand of today.

In the final article, ***Designing literacy education as modes of meaning in globalised and situated contexts: Towards a restoration of the self through embodied knowing***, Trevor Thwaites makes a cogent and well-argued examination of classifications and discriminations of body and mind and their interpretation within the disciplines of education. He argues that concepts of language as 'functional literacy' and mathematics as 'functional numeracy' are not only insufficient and limiting, but that their dominance in governmental thinking is educationally dangerous. As a prime base for curriculum design they obscure personal identification and societal responsibilities and their achievement becomes an essential factor in the development of the 'knowledge economy'. I quote:

As a result, institutional activities become legitimised through the principle of *performativity*, the optimising of the overall performance of social institutions (such as schools) according to the criterion of efficiency in relation to economic benefits.

Thwaites argues for a re-examination of concepts of literacy, one which rejects separation of body and mind, with the body seen only as the voiceless vehicle of the mind. In this sense he sees all actions of body and mind as interrelated and

interactive. Thus, gesture, movement, touching, being touched, hearing, and speaking are not mere physical functions which the intelligent mind can evaluate, reject, or use. They are our true language, enabling us to know and recognise our own identity and know and respond to the identities of others. If our conditioning - our culture, histories, experiences and educations - dismisses or ignores this totality our full usage of the possibilities of our language is limited. Thwaites emphasises that what are sometimes taken to be mechanical responses to stimuli are not, in the context of human 'knowing', passive. These body/mind languages will affect and be affected by our historical, genetic, and environmental circumstances. We can grow, consciously and unconsciously, in our states of knowing. It is this process of growing which he considers has been a neglected dimension in traditional schooling, in which the arts have been seen as mere attachments to the true disciplines of the mind.

Thwaites notes that the arts are legitimate and essential forms of enquiry. Although often side-lined in westernised education systems they have always been, and will continue to be, powerful human agencies whatever form they may take. He argues that the essential totality of body and mind must be recognised in education and schooling in a world in which globalisation of economic production threatens social order and human worth. In his view, the languages of the arts are a critical agency for the recognition of one's self identity and the maintenance of self-esteem within constantly shifting social environments. Thwaites proposes a model for a music education which re-establishes an intimate relationship of body and mind. His article looks hard at those factors which have restricted the full use of human capabilities within his specialist field of music. It is an argument that has relevance to all the arts. I suggested earlier that the deliberate elevation of mental capabilities above bodily physical functions has a long and evolving history within the westernised world. That this is not the case within many other cultures and societies should alert us to the partiality and arrogant assumptions of colonialist superiority. It should also remind us that western civilisation distinguished within its own societies the 'civilised' and 'uncivilised', the educated and the ignorant, the 'brute man' and the persons of 'refined tastes'. I can only speculate that the dominance of functional literacy makes it difficult to escape from the terminology of 'body' and 'mind' but paradoxically it sustains a separation of what is at the heart of an important paper – the totality of humanness!

In her research report, *The preliminary findings of an enquiry into teaching drama and the competencies in a reciprocal arrangement: The first round – what did teachers and students think the Key Competencies meant?* Elizabeth Anderson gives an account of the first phase of a small-scale study conducted with two teachers and their students in a low-decile, multi-ethnic, urban primary school. Anderson set out to investigate how the teachers' and students' current knowledge and beliefs about the notion of the Key Competencies in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) might be changed after involvement in planned learning and teaching experiences in drama. Anderson writes with conviction that the competencies articulated in the curriculum are important human capabilities – “integrated, holistic and complex, and essential throughout life”. Framed within a strong personal belief that learning in drama could well provide a context in which two of the five competencies – Using language, symbols and texts (ULST) and Relating to others (RO) - might develop, Anderson planned a three-phase study employing a number of data collection methods. Her report focuses on the first phase, interviews with the two teachers and a group of students, which were designed to establish the baseline indicators of understanding. Anderson reports on four themes which emerged from the interviews, and which she considered held promise for further enquiry in the next stages of her investigation. The ‘good sense’ knowledge of the competencies that the teachers demonstrated signalled that they could capably come to an understanding and a collective wisdom about what the competencies would mean in their school, for their students, and for assisting colleagues. Anderson considered that the readiness with which students used symbols, and their understandings of cultural and language links, held rich promise for being extended through drama experiences. The confirmation she experienced, that drama holds potential as an effective vehicle through which the competencies may be taught, will be reassuring for drama teachers who are coming to terms with this new dimension of the new curriculum.

In a commentary, *Liam’s story: Connecting music research to musical reality*, early childhood music educator Lynne Anderson reflects upon the influences on a young child’s musical development. Adopting an anecdotal style, for the four year old Liam is a part of her extended family, Anderson makes connections between research and a ‘real life’ scenario. In this commentary she traces research findings, predominantly drawn from socio-cultural theories, on the musical development of the unborn child and the young. Taking the stance that a high level of support from

adults, including “the encouragement of significant others”, is a critical factor in children’s musical endeavours Anderson speaks of Liam’s journey from birth to four years. The anecdotes about Liam’s musical role in his whanau are charmingly supported by personal photographs of his “musiking”. It would be difficult to question Anderson’s belief that it is especially important in the early years “to foster a positive disposition as an active music maker: to sing, to play instruments, and move”.

In a second commentary in this monograph **Chris Horne** explores aspects of collaborative cross-discipline teaching and transformational learning through the question *Could drama be a catalyst for the design process?* Horne seeks out links between the curriculum and pedagogical territory of his own professional field of drama education in conjunction with design education as defined within *The New Zealand Technology Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1995). As substance for his enquiry Horne examines the creative processes of four New Zealand designers, as articulated in an unpublished Master of Education thesis by Ann McGlashan, a technology lecturer in the Faculty of Education.

In essence, Horne’s paper examines issues of creativity and imagination. ‘Creativity’ has become one of the most popular catchwords of contemporary arts education and, as such, has become so homogenised as to defy specific meaning. Nevertheless, because it so permeates the language of arts education it is timely for Horne to seek out how it is interpreted across the disciplines of drama and design. It might appear that there are only tenuous links related to fields that are apparently different in form, process and outcomes. Horne, however, does not seek to compare them as subjects of the curriculum. The focus is upon the kinds of language and the processing terminology, that though dissimilar in word form, show connections of intent. Such equivalencies, if I can call them that, are evident in my specialist field of the visual arts, where for example we can say that sculpture is concerned with mass/space relationships, both of equal importance, while painting is dependent upon relationships of delineated and un-delineated areas of the picture plane. (If there is commonality between the arts, perhaps it is the *necessary* interruptions of space and silence). Horne elaborates issues of terminology and language to suggest that discussion or argument about apparent difference prompts examination of new possibilities, not of vocabulary, but of creative processing. He suggests that this is not a time-controlled process, and notes that the designers’ commentaries about how



they work stress the significance of time-lapse, and of 'play' with ideas without consciousness of outcome. Arts educators and practitioners have resented, with good reason, simplistic curriculum amalgamations of distinctive arts disciplines under a generic classification. In his commentary Horne suggests that there are more subtle, and productive ways of talking across the arts which do not catalogue, but encourage, 'transformational learning'.

It would be difficult to imagine a School for Visual and Creative Arts in Education without practitioners in its midst. A formal expression of such creativity was presented by **Jill Smith** in her solo exhibition, *Talking my way through culture*, held at the Blue Orange Gallery, South Auckland, from 30 September-21 October 2007. In her review of Smith's exhibition **Elizabeth Anderson** writes of how the artist reconceptualised the concept of the 'talking stick' to demonstrate that art can function as a creative means of re-interpreting and re-presenting research, and as a 'voice' with which to challenge the pedagogical practices of art teachers. Anderson, herself a drama lecturer, employs the metaphor of the 'reflective circle', commenting on Smith's cyclical journey from artist to educator, to researcher, to artist. Supported by the 'voices' of other colleagues in the Faculty of Education who viewed this exhibition of fourteen talking sticks, Anderson likens the works to sharp sticks or prods, a "poke in the eye" for the observer. Judgements and prejudices about art and culture, cultural stereotyping, and a pervasive admiration for 'high' art compared with 'low' art shaped the substance of the works. Anderson declares that "Jill questions (these) assumptions, and prods us to talk about and reassess our own. In this, the talking goes beyond the walls of the gallery".

I applaud the enterprise of the School for Visual and Creative Arts in Education in compiling this monograph, *The Arts in Education: Critical Perspectives from Teacher Educators*. I am informed that this 'first' for the school is also its 'swan song'. In 2008 these teacher educators become members of the newly formed School of Arts, Languages and Literacies.

**Peter Smith**

# VISUAL ART IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CONTEXT: A CRITICAL DIMENSION FOR ENHANCING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Lesley Pohio

## Abstract

*The relationship of the child with the wider world of family and community is embedded in New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). This paper focuses on that relationship in the context of visual art education. I argue that the socio-cultural approach to learning and teaching encapsulated in the curriculum aligns with contemporary perspectives on visual art education. These perspectives recognise that learning is enhanced when the interconnecting worlds of children are acknowledged and fostered. The visual arts are seen as having the potential to strengthen and enrich relationships with family and community when integrated within the learning and teaching environment which provides opportunities for children to present, represent, and transform their ideas through this communication mode. In this paper early childhood educators are urged to consider how the 'real lives' of children and their families and communities provide a pathway for learning, via visual art, which is inseparable from people, places, and things.*

The visual arts and their position in early childhood education have been brought to the attention of early childhood teachers through recent research (see Brooks, 2004; Gunn, 2000; Kolbe, 2005; McArdle, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2007; Pohio, 2006; Richards, 2005; Terreni, 2005; Visser, 2007). Furthermore, the work of Wenger (1998) in relation to learning communities is of particular relevance to the early childhood sector where social relationships are incorporated in order to maximize the engagement of its members. Similarly, Bruner (1996, p. 84) states that learning "is best when it is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative, and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them". In addition, Beatson and Beatson (1994, p. 223) suggest that "...art is an agent of social cohesion. Its magnetism integrates isolated individuals into groups... [providing] essential building blocks for the construction of social identity". The perspectives of these authors, along with the Ministry of Education's (1996, p. 3) proposition that "the complexity of children's learning is increased when there are opportunities to participate in learning

experiences that are authentic in the wider community”, underpin my argument for creating community connections.

Throughout this article I draw on several episodes from my own practice<sup>1</sup> as an early childhood teacher to illustrate these possibilities and engagements. The examples describe how young children’s exploration of visual art propelled these experiences into the community and provided a valuable junction of interchange between the early childhood setting and the community. These episodes served to extend the learning into places that had not been pre-planned. Each experience also highlighted and strengthened the interconnections between children’s everyday lives, their families and the centre. Visual art offered a multiplicity of ways for children to reveal and construct their identities as learners (and teachers).

The visual art experiences which the children were engaged in included drawing, painting and mosaics. These episodes of practice were often interrelated and grew and evolved from each other over a number of years. My colleagues and I in the early childhood centre carefully watched and listened to the cues that emerged from these episodes, in order to recognise and respond to the discoveries which the children revealed throughout these encounters. This data resulted in the ongoing provision of relevant and meaningful visual art resources and opportunities which contributed to further enhancing the children’s explorations. The encounters both supported and challenged my beliefs about the role of the early childhood teacher co-constructing knowledge with the children, thus resulting in the creation of new learning and understandings (Hall & Bishop, 2001). Visual art became the primary mode through which children expressed and communicated their making meaning of their worlds, fostering the notion of the child as “an aesthetic researcher” (Kolbe, 2005, p. 32). However, this did not mean that the child was alone or an isolated researcher, because my colleagues and I, the children and their families were at different times “co-explorers” (p. 74). The use of graphic and symbolic languages provided the children with ways to “externalize their thinking” (Milikan, 2003, p. 37) as “visual memor[ies]” (Robertson, 2000, p. 160). These visual memories created places to

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<sup>1</sup> Several examples of assessment documentation from the centre were featured in the Ministry of Education (2004) *publication Kei Tua o Te Pae/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars*. Some of these exemplars are included within this paper.

reveal the children's images as "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all, connected to adults and other children" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10).

## **Recounting episodes of practice**

### **Toi Aronui**

The first episode involved exploring toi aronui, the Māori visual arts. In this scenario patterns which were drawn from traditional Māori art forms were of some interest to the children. For example, kōwhaiwhai patterns (painted rafter patterns associated with the meeting house) featured in many of the resources available in our centre. Māori art resources were prominently displayed throughout with a particular emphasis in the designated visual art area. Children were able to refer to an array of visual images such as photographs, posters, books and prints when designing and creating their own art works. Patterns based on toi aronui became a noticeable thread and element within the work of many of the children. Four year old Maria, for example, was especially interested in creating and recreating koru patterns (a spiral shape) utilising a range of media such as paint, and drawing and print making materials. These resources were available to Maria and the other children to utilise as they required, enabling them to pursue and investigate the properties of the different media in their own time, individually and collectively alongside peers and teachers. Maria drew and redrew these patterns wherever she was working in the centre, accessing whatever materials were available. She often shared these art works with other children, describing and recounting the stories behind the designs.

On one occasion, while reviewing the collection of visual art work in her portfolio, Maria began to examine her work more closely, noting and recalling the various processes involved and the significance of the different designs. She noticed a piece of work which from her perspective was incomplete and proceeded to rework it further. Her mother also told how Maria detected kōwhaiwhai patterns everywhere and how she thought her daughter had considerable visual art expertise and potential [see *Kei Tua o Te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004, book 7) in which our story about Maria is recorded]. Maria's mother noted that:

She is also developing her artistic skills quite well at a young age. I do believe that this is one of her greatest talents and skills and try to encourage her in

every way by buying the things she needs to help further her skills, and as Maria gets older, she will be a great artist (p. 25).

Maria's identity as an artist was strongly recognised and affirmed by her family and by the early childhood context. As teachers, we responded by ensuring an extensive range of good quality resources was always available; by documenting Maria's investigations, for example by videoing her working on a large painting over a series of days, and by actively engaging with her about the work she was currently developing. Maria's focus inspired and motivated several other children, who had not previously shown such a strong interest in visual art, to begin to explore and experiment with different media. Their subsequent explorations resulted in a series of works which appeared to be extended and provoked by Maria's designs. As Brooks (2004, p. 48) suggests, by fostering a milieu where children (and teachers) are actively encouraged to engage and discuss their visual art work, "a richer and more dialogic learning environment" can be nurtured.

An excursion to the Auckland Museum provided an ideal opportunity to view *toi aronui* in their traditional forms, and to discover and share the histories and narratives embedded within these places. This visit also showed the families that the teachers in our centre valued and acknowledged the bicultural heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand. This commitment is also reflected within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9) where it states that "...all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi". This visit is an example of how our centre strongly embedded and reflected the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi within the learning and teaching environment with visual art providing an integral way to realise this.

On this visit to the Auckland Museum, drawing materials and clipboards were available for children so that they could spontaneously begin to record their responses and impressions of these encounters. The *whare whakairo* (carved meeting house) named *Hotuni* captured the imagination of the children, provoking their thinking with many of them eager to spend time in front of the *whare*, drawing and discussing their interpretations and understandings. The parents were also keenly engaged and enthusiastically interacted with the children creating a dynamic interchange of ideas and feelings. When adults actively listen to the interpretations of children and extend

their thinking by encouraging them to make meaning of these encounters, children's learning can be significantly enriched (Piscitelli, Weier & Everett, 2003). The interest and motivation sustained by the children was also influenced by their active participation and prior knowledge. Weier (2004) advocates for children to take a greater leadership role in experiences such as these in order to encourage a more active connection and interaction within these encounters, rather than being passive receptors of information which may bear little relevance to their lives. Similarly, Gibson and McAllister (2005) describe how the provision of art materials during gallery experiences enabled children to more meaningfully interact and engage with the images that they were viewing.

To build upon the museum experience, and to continue exploring visual art, a visit to the local marae (traditional Māori meeting place) - *Tūtahi Tonu* - was organised soon after. Providing ongoing opportunities to explore ideas and investigations is more effective than a 'one off' excursion which is often planned without consideration of the children's interests and perspectives (Piscitelli, Weier & Everett, 2003). The children and families who accompanied us were able to hear and see the many stories which explained the significance of the traditional art forms within the whare (house), thus creating a sense of the rich visual and oral history of Tikanga Māori (cultural values and practices). The provision of drawing media allowed the children to express and share their ideas and opinions in a visual format, visibly reflecting their thinking (Robertson, 2000). These ideas were subsequently relayed to families who were not able to be present, thus enabling them to gain some insight into their children's experiences. Many children shared the stories that they had heard with their families, and the combination of other documentation, in the form of photographs and stories, provided a rich and visual tapestry of the event. These stories also provoked and invited families to share their experiences from their own cultural perspectives. For many this was the first experience of being on a marae, although for others it rekindled memories of recent and past experiences on their family marae. The mother of another child, Hikurangi, recounted how he recalled his previous experiences of being on a marae and how he remembered his koro (grandfather) speaking on the marae (Gould & Pohio, 2006).

The parents of another child, Sahani, were astounded at the depth and recall of their daughter's understanding of her visit to *Tūtahi Tonu* [see *Kei Tua o Te Pae*

*Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004, book 6) in which our story about Sahani is recorded]. Her mother said:

Sahani talked with enthusiasm about what she saw ... she draws pictures, paints them. I truly find her very creative. She consults with her brother when selecting colours ... she gets the cooperation of her brother, spends hours drawing, painting pictures of what they saw to take to kindergarten ...very very involved! (p. 9)

Sahani subsequently embarked upon creating a series of designs, which explored in detail the array of stories and carvings that she had experienced that day (Ministry of Education, 2004). One drawing in particular featured a carving which depicted the story of Maui (a traditional Māori story). This drawing illustrated how Sahani was able to clarify and refine her thinking in relation to these events. Her drawings contributed to the array of works which many children created prior to, during, and following the marae visit. In my view these art works offered what Pelo (2006, p. 180) describes as “glimpses into the children’s hearts and minds”. The documenting and displaying of these works or glimpses created public places where dialogue could continue and be revisited, potentially deepening the learning further. Making the work public also enabled the learning community to become more engaged by inviting opportunities for families to participate.

### **The Mosaic Story**

A second episode from my practice explored mosaic media. In this scenario children were initially introduced to the medium of mosaics as part of the redevelopment of the outdoor environment at the early childhood centre. Some form of pathway was required to connect the different spaces in the outdoors and concrete pavers, which the children could mosaic, provided an ideal solution. The resulting response of the children, their families and the teachers was such that the interest in the medium of mosaics continued to flow in many other directions over a period of several years. This interest was also sustained and maintained to some extent by the extensive contribution and participation of one family in particular who became the mosaic ‘experts’, willingly sharing their expertise, knowledge and passion with the children, teachers and the community (Ministry of Education, 2004, book 2). The mosaic interest continued throughout the year with children decorating picture frames, pots,

tiles, and eventually using river stones as a surface for their mosaic patterns and designs. At times these projects became collaborative enterprises with children working together and supporting each other as they encountered both success and challenge throughout the process. Younger and older siblings of the children also developed an interest and began to create their own unique interpretations in their home environment. The interest from the community continued to flourish with a series of workshops held for families and other interested parties. These workshops were facilitated by the 'expert' family and triggered an ongoing interest in mosaics by several of the participants alongside their children.

The following year an old table presented itself which provoked the teachers and children to consider and explore the idea of a tiled table. This idea was also drawn from, and influenced to some extent by, the grid-type patterns of the design construction of the tapa cloth or siapo (traditional printed barkcloth from the Pacific), which was an integral feature within the early childhood environment. The visit to the New Auckland Art Gallery to view an exhibition by Fatu Feu'u (a Samoan artist) provided another valuable and relevant source for children to view large scale grid-type paintings and, as a possible point of reference, to draw upon when developing their tile designs at a later stage. Fatu Feu'u's work itself was also very relevant as he explored "relationships between individual[s], family, and community" (Mallon & Fulimalo Pereira, 1997, p. 12) throughout his work and incorporated and interpreted traditional symbols in a contemporary way.

The 'table project' created and illustrated opportunities for "learning that is multidimensional" (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 23). Learning included understanding the technical processes involved in relation to mosaic work and the array and purpose of the tools and resources utilised, alongside the development of the designs and patterns which had some significance for the children. For example, this project involved painting on small white tiles using ceramic paint. As this was an unfamiliar surface to work upon, the children found it both challenging to work within a relatively small framework and to use extremely fine brushes to apply the paint. As a consequence, the children were given many ongoing opportunities to practice and execute the design of their choosing to a standard where they were fully satisfied with the finished result. The provision of sketching materials was a standard aspect of any process which enabled the children to explore how they might construct their designs



prior to applying their paint. The painted tiles were fired to complete the process before being attached to the table. It took several months to complete a very attractive table which was used in the teaching and learning environment for a variety of purposes by both the children and the teachers. Documentation in the form of photographs was prominently displayed in several commercial premises from which the materials had been sourced. These displays contributed to expanding, and maybe challenging, the public's view of young children as artists and for children to publicly see themselves as artists too. As Malaguzzi (1998, p. 67) notes, "once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors [or artists], once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explodes".

### **The art gallery encounter**

The third and final episode describes how the visit to the New Auckland Art Gallery to view the work of Fatu Feu'u invited children to explore more deeply the use of paint and to make connections with the art works and their own experiences in other contexts. In this scenario visual images in the form of photos and posters were displayed within the early childhood centre to provoke and invite children to consider the ways in which different artists' works 'tell a story' and to relate this notion to their own work. The patterns and symbols some of these artists used reflected many of the children's ethnic and cultural identities. For example, the visit to the exhibition encouraged the children to explore these images further by viewing the original work, but to also develop an increased understanding about the cultural and historical significance of Fatu Feu'u's designs. Furthermore this experience enriched opportunities for the children to make connections between the displays, photographs and resources featured within the early childhood setting and the patterns and symbols drawn from their own experiences. This visit created yet another opportunity for previous experiences to be reviewed and reflected upon.

During the visit the children were provided with sketching materials as a way to communicate their knowledge of this experience and to represent their understandings through their drawings. By reading and interpreting the paintings, and engaging in discussion with other children and adults, the children became more acutely aware of the stories the paintings were telling through symbols. This actively reinforced the notion that their own work could also provide a valued voice which could provoke conversations and engagement with others. The family members who

accompanied us, along with an interpreter who supported children and families with English as an additional language, were also encouraged to actively share their knowledge and experiences of these symbols. The strong representation of Pasifika children and families enriched this learning opportunity significantly as they were able to tell some of their stories of the past and the present, relaying aspects of their cultural identities through the meanings and interpretations of many of the traditional and contemporary motifs which were featured in the paintings. As Saines (cited in Pound, 1999, p. 6) described it, "Through their constant retelling the stories we tell ourselves become the condensed signs and symbols of our culture; they mark out the incidents along the way and they coalesce to form and transmit our cultural identity".

Upon their return to the early childhood centre several children were motivated to draw upon their experience and began to extensively explore the use of paint using large sheets of paper (A1) to formulate their impressions. These paintings were developed over a series of days allowing the children to work and rework their designs, layering and building upon the complexity and detail of their work. Several of the children incorporated techniques such as 'under-painting' which they had previously explored. The paintings reflected the children's unique interpretations of the art works they had viewed, incorporating symbols and designs which were of particular interest and significance to them. One of the children, Stanley, was inspired to create his own gallery at home, asking his parents to hang his art work in his bedroom in a similar way to the gallery. His parents recalled how enthusiastic he was in relation to this experience and how he described in detail the images which he had viewed. Stanley began to show a sustained interest in investigating visual art media and began to relay and express his ideas more fluidly and comprehensively through this medium.

### **Concluding comments**

As illustrated through these scenarios, the children's use of graphic languages, expressed through a range of different media, enabled them to reveal their thinking, as they modified and refined their working theories. It also enabled families and community to be part of these experiences in multiple ways and this created an inseparable and intertwined "weaving together of [the] three voices - teachers, children and families - as participants in a learning and teaching community" (Carr, Cowie, Gerrity, Jones, Lee & Pohio, 2001, p. 33). Similarly, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of

Education, 1996) emphasises the critical role relationships (between adults and children), the environment (places) and resources (things) play on children's learning. Moreover it is proposed that "the complexity of children's learning is increased when there are opportunities to participate in learning experiences that are authentic in the wider community" (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 3). The ongoing participation of many families featured within these episodes ensured that these experiences were relevant. Their participation included supporting the children to utilise the materials; visiting the gallery, museum, and marae with the children; attending visual art workshops evenings where adults designed and constructed their own mosaic work; contributing to and enhancing the documentation; sharing their own visual art expertise and knowledge; and engaging in and provoking discussion with the children and teachers about their understandings of the stories the art work could relay.

These scenarios show how visual art can be one way for children to more effectively participate in the curriculum, creating meaningful pathways for them and their families to have a voice when representing and displaying their ideas and knowledge visually, and as a way of making meaning of their experiences. This connection with communities may also contribute in some way to 'unsilencing' voices which, as Canella (2002, p. 3) suggests, are potentially "voices of 'silent knowing'". Canella also notes that "younger human beings are not [usually] heard without the filter of those who are older" (p. 35).

I contend that the visual nature of visual art can provide ways for teachers and communities to more readily 'unblock the filters' and to see, hear and respond to these potentially silent voices, creating sites which Rinaldi (2006, p. 67) describes as a "context for multiple listening". By connecting more closely to the families and communities of the children we teach, the early childhood teaching and learning environment may become more in tune with this multiplicity of voices. This would help to create places which are powerful for children, families, and teachers (Claxton & Carr, 2004).

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# THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DANCE AND THE YOUNG CHILD

Adrienne Sansom

## Abstract

*This paper addresses how dance education intersects with early childhood education and considers the notion of what an interrelationship between dance and the early years of learning can mean for both children and teachers. Although there is a noticeable propensity for young children to move, dance is often seen as a marginal component of the curriculum, even in an early childhood programme where there is a professed emphasis on bodily awareness. Therefore, if the body is to be acknowledged, especially from a holistic perspective, as proposed in Te Whāriki (Early Childhood Curriculum), the stage needs to be set for the promotion of the whole body in learning. This has implications for dance as well as for early childhood educators.*

## Introduction

In the profession of early childhood education there are certain emphases placed on what is considered appropriate learning during the early years, which tend to influence what is included in the curriculum of early childhood and what is not. Curriculum content is often based on the values and beliefs early childhood educators hold and is not only related to what is included, but also to how the learning experiences are facilitated. Factors such as these can impact greatly upon the possible inclusion of certain kinds of knowledge, particularly if these areas have been either limited or omitted altogether from prior educational and life experiences.

It is my contention that dance education is an area of learning that is either neglected, or misunderstood, within the sphere of early childhood education. I do not believe this is because early childhood educators or programme creators consider dance to be irrelevant to young children's learning, but rather, that there is a misconception of what dance education is in the early childhood context. Also, if dance is included, the dilemma then becomes a question of appropriateness as it relates to the young child.

For this reason, dance as an art form and as a way of knowing needs to be demystified in order for it to be incorporated as a relevant area of learning in the early years of childhood. It is important, therefore, for teachers to be cognizant of the significance of the body so as not to eliminate the more bodily pursuits from the child's daily experiences in an early childhood setting. Serious consideration needs to be given to how often opportunities are provided for children to move so as to become actively engaged and aware of their bodies. It is also vital to take into account how children can be guided through a process of a deeper, inner sensing of their bodies' capabilities. It is this inner sensing of the body's capabilities or body knowledge that gives rise to dance.

To this end, the following discussion will look at the various perspectives afforded to dance in early childhood education that can be seen to detract from the inclusion of dance in early childhood settings. Alternatively, other ways of thinking about dance as an art form and as a way of knowing during the early years will be proffered to work toward the cultivation of an interrelationship between dance and the young child.

### **Dance pedagogy**

In the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the principles of holistic development and empowerment (agency), family and community, and relationships are interwoven with the goals of well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration. These principles form the basis for a holistic early childhood programme. Despite this framework, as well as these aspirations, there is still the dilemma concerning what to emphasise in the overall curriculum related to the world the child will encounter. The choice is to either replicate the world through providing traditionalist areas of learning or to provide meaningful pedagogical opportunities that connect to the lives of learners to effectively develop other ways of thinking in order to imagine what could be (Greene, 1988). It is this latter belief in effecting different ways of knowing that challenges what a curriculum might look like in early childhood education.

Two important questions arise for consideration when it comes to facilitating learning experiences in any area of the curriculum, (including early childhood), especially if the intention is to offer meaningful learning experiences as well as the prospect of creating change. These questions are: 'What is the purpose of the learning

experience?’ and ‘What is the role of the educator?’ Furthermore, there are other questions to ponder such as ‘What methodology or language should be adopted?’ and ‘What or whose theories should be used?’ In addition, if the intention is to be contextual in nature and, therefore, meaningful so as to work or play with the children in a particular context or location (country, nationality, culture), what pedagogical practices should be drawn on? It is important to ask these questions as they pertain to dance because this is an area of learning that draws on certain codified language or techniques, (Laban, 1947; Ministry of Education, 2000). In their original form these languages or approaches may not be the most appropriate, especially in early childhood or for a particular cultural group.

In relation to these perspectives Finnish dance educator Anttila (2003) refers to Lindqvist (2001), who maintains that the influence of Rudolf Laban’s theory of movement on dance education “has resulted in a quite strong emphasis on pure movement sensations, and that this kind of movement may not always be meaningful for the child” (Anttila, 2003, p. 53). Indeed, certain practices are culturally insensitive when viewed as abstract movement explorations and for some children the approaches that are asked of them related to creative dance are far from meaningful. Moreover, Anttila (2003) remarks, Lindqvist believes that dance education is not only “too separate from play [the child], but also from drama and other art forms” (p. 53). It is a concept that requires some serious attention in education, particularly during the early years because, as Anttila (2003) continues to elucidate with reference to Lindqvist, “dance and play should be linked together and [sic] dance education for young children should originate in children’s play” (p. 53).

A notion such as this has implications for teachers because it indicates that the reason why dance is often less prevalent as an area of learning in early childhood education is because it is seen as disconnected from what is known about young children’s learning, and, consequently, from young children’s play. Common perceptions of dance, especially from a westernised or Eurocentric point of view, are that dance is too sophisticated, elitist, overly specialised, or extremely technical (Bresler, 2002; Stinson, 1988, 2002) and, therefore, unsuitable for the young child. These views come from prior conventional conceptions of what dance is, and not from what is known about dance from an educational or cultural standpoint. Hence, dance as a curriculum area may not be seen as relevant in early childhood education.



Stinson (2002) talks about the relevance of dance in early childhood from the perspective of what is considered apposite as forms of engagement for young children. They, as well as babies and toddlers, may often be witnessed moving to the rhythm of the music. From a developmentally appropriate perspective this appears to be an excellent beginning to a young child's entry into dance. However, dance is more than just moving to music because it requires attentiveness or awareness of what the body is doing both inside and out. In order to provide young children with appropriate ways to sense moving in a meaningful manner, it is useful to connect to the "real or imaginary world of young children" (Stinson, 2002, p. 159). When intimately linked with the child's lived experiences, exploration of these worlds can be promoted through understanding basic movement skills and by paying attention to the source of the movement, which emanates from the child.

### **Looking at ourselves and how we teach**

The pedagogical approach articulated above places the onus on the teacher to provide meaningful and appropriate learning experiences. As educators, we are faced in our teaching with complex multi-faceted people shaped by traditions of history, culture and environment (Cannella, 2002; Kincheloe, 1993; Steinberg, 1996; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004; Wright, 2003a). Consequently, any epistemological situation cannot be taken for granted through believing that the educators are the sole people with the knowledge. Such factors can shatter the assumption of authority (Cannella, 2002; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993) because there is a definitive shift of power where the control or agency is transferred to what is normally seen as the less competent participant in the learning process (the child). Thus, a situation is created where the teachers take "risks alongside the children" (Aitken, Price & Fraser, 2007, p. 43) as they relinquish their own positions of authority in order to embark on a new journey of discovery as a co-creator of learning with the child (Anttila, 2007; Bond, 1997).

Moreover, a change in positions of authority challenges what is taught and how it is taught. If educators are not attentive to the children they are teaching and only aware of their own knowledge and understanding, the reciprocal nature of teaching will not exist and the relationship will be ineffectual. Perhaps this is where, as Anttila (2003) states, "the teacher needs some magic, being like a magician, to spread something extraordinary, something different from everyday" (p. 94) in order to connect to the children and establish a conducive learning environment. I would also equate this

'magic' to something akin to bearing one's soul. In this way it becomes more than just the specific subject knowledge that is being imparted and shared, but also our own lives and our own stories.

Because who we are as people is integral to our practice as educators, the process of reflection is a key component (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Schon, 1987). We share ourselves in the process of teaching which relates to these words by Stinson (2002), "What we teach is who we are: the stories of our lives" (p. 157) and that becomes part of the reflective process. There is much to reflect on related to who we are as people, and therefore, as teachers, that makes the practice of reflection essential. In the field of early childhood education what is developmentally appropriate, and what are perceived as a lack of competencies, often guide us in our work with children (Anttila, 2007; Bresler, 2002; Cannella, 2002; Woodson, 2007). Children, nevertheless, do not enter the realms of early childhood as blank slates on to which to etch knowledge, values and beliefs. They come equipped with incredible achievements and qualities that should be cherished and expanded upon, rather than subsumed into a culture based on normative standards and restrictive views of what constitutes education (Kincheloe, 1993) or the image of the child (Cannella, 2002).

Contrary to the popular belief that all young children have short attention spans, Stinson (2002) points out that "my experiences with young children have taught me that sometimes their attention span far exceeds that of an adult" (p. 161). I can confirm Stinson's viewpoint through my own experiences as an early childhood educator when I have witnessed young children maintaining an interest for sustained periods of time. I have specifically seen situations of prolonged involvement when young children have been dancing and, because they have chosen, and thus, created the experience, they become fully immersed in the occasion. Children's engagement, and therefore, staying power, is guided far more by their interest in something. Hence, as Stinson (2002) continues, "we need to follow as much as lead, help them discover their interests, appreciate their creations, and give them the respect of our full attention" (p.161).

These ideas confirm giving children choices in a child-centred curriculum (Cannella, 2002; Dewey, 1959) and, with dance in mind, to provide opportunities for children to move and dance as and when they choose to. These are the times when teachers can

become attentive to what the young child is engaged in and support the process as appropriate (Schiller & Meiners, 2003; Stinson, 2002). At the same time, those aspects, which the child has not yet experienced or accomplished, need not be neglected. Rather, it is because of our attentiveness as early childhood educators, coupled with knowledge of the children, that meaningful learning experiences can be established for each child.

### **Child-centred dance**

Something that is central to the philosophy of early childhood education is a child-centred<sup>2</sup> approach. The rhetoric of being child-centred often presents teachers with some dilemmas. Teaching generally occurs in institutions, whether in early childhood or other sectors of education, which are governed by larger factors, such as time and specific structures. When these factors enter the equation educators become accountable to more than just the learners. Even in early childhood learning environments, where there is the possibility to be different, there is a tendency to create routines that can restrict how things can be done.

Being child-centred also relates to how dance experiences can be facilitated in an early childhood setting. Something that is special to dance is the significance of movement itself and an inner sensing or awareness of what the body is doing and feeling (Stinson, 1988, 2000). As previously stated, in order for this aspect of learning in dance to be achieved it is important to make available both the opportunity and time for this type of experiencing to occur. If given the time and the place to explore, through a guided kinaesthetic awareness, the young child can begin to develop a deeper inner sensing of the body beyond that of identifying parts of the body and what skills the body can perform. Experiencing dance using a heightened kinaesthetic attentiveness provides the prospect for discerning or sensing something of being whole or in touch with one's self at a deeper level; something that is often disregarded in young children's encounters (Anttila, 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> Child-centered, play-based instruction is rooted in the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, and is based on the interests, needs, and development of children. A cautionary note however is to be aware of romanticizing this notion of child-centered instruction, which tends to allude to individualism, exploration and discovery. What is often not considered is that one cannot universalize and assume that each child is capable of making choices based on their interests because this presumes that each child has a shared value and experience base (Cannella, 1998, p. 166).

As part of the kinaesthetic experience there is a sense of knowing the body from within in a concentrated way (Bresler, 2002; Schiller & Meiners, 2003) and, in so doing, understanding something of the wholeness of being human. Schiller & Meiners (2003) affirm that: "Children are much more attuned to their body through their senses and have sensitivity of the body . . . Moving naturally and using the body as a sensory site of knowing, dance has considerable potential to enrich young children's lives" (p. 94). Therefore, from this perspective the child can come to know his or her body from the inside out and, as such, become the creator of the movement that the body is to perform. Thus the child literally becomes the centre of the action (Anttila, 2003, 2007). If there is the belief that the child *is* the centre of the action, which is not just the action that the adult/teacher decides should occur, but action which the child initiates, then genuine consideration must be given to this process for it to be realised.

When the obligation is on the child, the teacher is then placed in a different position. A reversal of position enables children to experience the freedom to choose how to use the time and, thereby, the opportunity to explore the way their bodies move with more awareness. A correlation can be made here to Hanna's (1999) assertion that attention needs to be given to children's spontaneous and creative dance thereby reversing the role of the teacher-child relationship where the content is only reliant on the teacher. From this perspective there is more recognition of the child's kinaesthetic voice (Hanna, 1999); what I might call the child's agency, or the child "as an agent in dance" (Anttila, 2007, p. 865) where the child's body expresses his or her knowledge of the world.

For many teachers, however, understanding of the body as a 'voice' or as a conduit of expression is not all that prevalent. This is especially so for those who have received the majority of their education devoid of any form of bodily engagement or sensing through being the centre of the action, or the initiator of the experience. It is more likely that the majority of us have become alerted to our bodies through being forcibly corrected rather than being allowed to develop an awareness of our own bodies through sensitive pedagogical instruction within a framework of freedom (Anttila, 2003, 2004). In order for the children to experience this state of concentration and bodily sensation it would be desirable for the teacher to have some understanding of their own bodily sensing. In addition to this, the teacher needs to know how much to

guide the child as well as to what extent the child can initiate his or her own bodily experiencing.

Teachers who hold fast to the philosophy of a child-centred approach often face the quandary of whether to influence the learning through direct instruction or to allow the experience to be freely discovered (Bresler, 2002; Wright, 2003b). A directive methodology eliminates a child-inclusive approach where the learner is left to discover the bodily experience through exploration, but minimal guidance may result in no experience at all. The desire to help others experience or learn something one cares about tends to go against the notion of learners initiating their learning experiences. Yet teaching occurs because there is a belief in certain aspects and these beliefs cannot be abandoned just because others have not been exposed to particular areas of knowledge and experience (Greenwood, 2003). In dance, therefore, "we have to choose not whether to teach children skills but what and how we will teach them" (Stinson, 2002, p. 163).

Thus, discovery or re-discovery of the adult's bodily engagement through becoming attuned to what the moving body can do and feel can heighten the presence of dance within an educational setting. When coupled with providing time and space for young children to move, as well as support to allow for self-initiated exploration, children are able to experience something which then becomes uniquely theirs.

### **Multiple and emergent approaches**

If giving children the freedom to choose to make decisions is truly valued, it is necessary to provide them with the opportunities to explore and experiment with their own ideas and to share and develop ideas with others. Also, the ability of children to use time to explore their own interests needs to be offered and fostered in education and modelled in our pedagogical practices. When the possibility of different and multiple ways of learning is removed, the potential of discovery and inquiry in the learning process is limited (Bresler, 2004; Gardner, 1993, 1999; Schiller & Meiners, 2003; Wright, 2003a). Multiple approaches to learning connect to the concept of the emergent curriculum (Jones & Nimmo, 1994), which is a mainstay in many early childhood programmes. In this scenario learning is no longer viewed as linear related to "predefined aims and content" (Anttila, 2007, p. 876) but as something that

evolves and redefines itself transpiring from the participants within the learning process.

There is also a need to be cognizant of the different ways children learn so as not to perpetuate the hierarchies or disadvantages that can exist. Consideration of these factors is especially important when taking into account those who have experience, or favour the body as a mode of learning, and are, therefore, more comfortable with their bodies, over those who do not favour or have experience with using their bodies. As Cannella (2002) opines, there are people who have a "societal fear of the body" (p. 160) which can be manifested in the curriculum. In addition, how we come to know and use our bodies is also dependent on, and influenced by, the lives we live and thus the way our bodies are inscribed (McLaren, 1999; Shapiro, 1994, 1998, 1999; Tobin, 2004). It is an important factor to consider when promoting multiple approaches to learning, because different cultural backgrounds have an effect on our perception of the world and also shape the differences we bring to the teaching and learning environment.

Discussions about the emergent curriculum or multiple and child-centred approaches, or even a post-modern approach to teaching and learning, often result in an accepted belief that this is where nothing appears to be defined. According to Anttila, (2003) this can be translated into anything goes or a "laissez faire attitude" (p. 149). It is perceived that freedom equates to the removal of any real responsibility by the teacher for the children's learning above and beyond the safety and care of the children, especially in early childhood education. I have often encountered such views but see them as misconstrued conceptions of what is meant by any of the above terms. If anything, the role of an early childhood educator, or any educator who believes in following a multi-faceted student-centered and emergent approach to learning, becomes more complex. As reiterated by Anttila (2003); "the teacher's freedom, thus tied with responsibility, makes the job of teaching more complex [when] it entails awareness and follow-up of the students' multiple meaning making processes" (p. 149). Greene supports this view by stating,

To understand how children themselves reach out for meanings, go beyond conventional limits (once the doors are ajar), seek coherence and explanations

is to be better able to provoke and release rather than impose and control (Greene, 1995, as cited in Anttila, 2003, pp. 149-150).

The very young child is very capable of sourcing multiple ways of knowing as further indicated by Greene (1995) when she states; "Young persons have the capacity to construct multiple realities once they have begun to name their worlds" (p. 57). Furthermore, as Greene (1995) continues to illuminate

The young can be empowered to view themselves as conscious reflective namers and speakers if their particular standpoints are acknowledged, if interpretive dialogues are encouraged, if interrogation is kept alive. . . It becomes all the more important that they tap the full range of human intelligence and that as part of our pedagogy, we enable them to have a number of languages (p. 57).

For me, this is a reminder of the excitement found in teaching and learning where the process becomes a reciprocal affair and inclusive and authentic relationships have a chance to develop. It is also a learned process as the practices we have been taught or trained to follow need to be unlearned, in order to re-educate ourselves to relinquish authority and offer choice. In these moments of relinquishing control and going with the flow to follow the emergent instances learning becomes more meaningful, or more authentic, not only for the learner but also for the teacher because there is an absolute commitment to what *is* happening then and there.

### **Relinquishing the self and going with the flow**

The notion of going with the flow expressed above is not necessarily as effortless as it sounds, and is, therefore, an area that requires examining. Such an examination correlates with the idea of being unafraid of revealing the self (Pinar, 1994) or, as Anttila (2003) refers to, "sharing the self" and "letting go" (p. 144). An inability to go with the flow links to being prepared, being in control and, consequently, to issues of power. It is also recognised that power is not fixed, although it seems to be constructed by the particular situation or context one is in (Foucault, 1973, in Pinar, 1994). As stated by Pinar (1994), "power becomes form through discourse and language" (p. 213).

Consequently, it is how that context is challenged or deconstructed and how the traditional modes of operation and discourse are usurped that requires the utmost attention. For this reason I ask the following questions. Can educators shift their positions of power within a situation where they are charged with the responsibility to fulfill a particular role of authority? If the teacher (who has the professional background and skills in teaching) switches the roles of authority, or gives more responsibility to the student, will such an action be seen as relinquishing responsibility and making way for the possibility of chaos, or a lack of direction and purposefulness? Or is it simply the way these practices are seen because other approaches have never really been experienced? In addition to these questions, I concur with the questions Anttila (2003) asks related to trying to connect to her students and being reflective and dialogic in her approach. She asks; "How do they experience this? Is it important? Does the activity always have to be directed?" (p. 270)

The transformation into a reciprocal and dialogical approach through critical reflection is a slow process but the prolonged process also brings about a more intense understanding of "what it means to be a teacher" (Anttila, 2003, p. 275). Ultimately, this is the intention and the challenge. Provocations such as these compel educators to push the boundaries and find new ways through the process of introspective critical reflection (Ronai, 1992) in order to become more authentic in their teaching, and thereby, more fully human in their pedagogical intentions. In turn, there are connections made to teaching for the purpose of developing a viable artistic, educational, and liberating pedagogy in dance (Anttila, 2004; Shapiro 1994, 1998, 1999) where one is not afraid to embrace risk and uncertainty as well as new possibilities.

I contend that when educators are able to let go of control, or relinquish authority, the desire to shift the seat of power in any teaching and learning situation can be like lifting a heavy burden or mantle from one's shoulders. From my experience it certainly creates a space for a more reciprocal and dialogical approach. In a way senses can be heightened when becoming more involved and present in the moment because the concern of the future has been discarded, which would be otherwise designated by our control of the situation. For this reason it can actually be a relief, but the outcome certainly will not be able to be predetermined and that can be both daunting and exciting. When there is complete presence or attentiveness the relationship with



another will become further intensified and what happens in that encounter is the only thing that matters. It is in moments like these that there can truly be an experience of complete embodiment for both the learner and the teacher because when one is fully attentive to another there can be dialogue (as well as disruption) where uniqueness and difference can be both honoured and respected.

The teacher plays an important role (without denying the agency of the child) in establishing a challenging, provocative and liberating pedagogical environment for the purpose of envisaging change and creating meaningful teaching and learning experiences that connect to the lives of young children. As Greene (1995) suggests with reference to our relationships with others, so does play, arts and the imagination:

Through proffering experiences of the arts and storytelling, teachers can keep seeking connection points among their personal histories and the histories of those they teach. Students can be offered more and more time for telling their stories, or dancing or singing them (p. 42).

It is because of these beliefs in other ways of knowing and of authentic relationships that I see what is possible for dance as it intersects with early childhood education. Dance is integral to a holistic quest for knowledge about the world in which we live, as well as about ourselves and others. An authentic education cannot exist if parts of the whole are missing; the interconnecting links that connect us all to being human are crucial in an authentic and holistic education. Dance as a human activity is a necessity in early childhood education, particularly when associated with the body, play, and the promotion of imagination. Dance connects to not only ourselves, but to others, and helps in some way to establish relationships through an understanding of who we are as people living together whilst, in turn, providing a platform for appreciating difference.

I believe that finding avenues that help children explore, create and understand the complexities of relationships is essential. Dance is definitely one of those avenues, but dance in the sense that goes beyond simply moving because we feel like it. It is when attention is paid to what the body is doing that, as Schiller & Meiners (2003) posit, “[d]ancing combines technical skill with physical awareness and aesthetic and artistic

understandings. [Accordingly it] provides a unique way of knowing about oneself, other people and the world" (p. 91).

## Conclusion

Having identified the concerns above that I believe impact on the presence and effectiveness of dance within early childhood settings, it is my hope that the presentation of alternative perspectives and approaches will offer new possibilities for dance and children, as well as early childhood educators. Dance and early childhood can make complementary partners because they both have the potential to value the importance of the body in education and honour a child-centered and reciprocal approach to learning and teaching. Furthermore, dance can create that space for difference and change. Let us "receive the dance of the child" (Bond, 2000, p. 14) and help cultivate an inter-connective relationship between dance and the early years of learning.

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# LEARNING ABOUT ART IN THE CLASSROOM: CAN WE LEARN SOME LESSONS FROM ART GALLERY PRACTICE?

Brad Irwin

## Abstract

*Many researchers have recognised the academic and creative benefits associated with teaching the arts in the primary school classroom; not only does it provide a well balanced education, but it also helps to establish a lifelong interest in and passion for the arts (Callaway & Kear, 2000; Eisner, 1972; Ministry of Education, 2000). Some studies have examined the impact of using a recognised visual artist's work as a teaching and learning tool within the classroom. Tickle (1996) and Holt (in Callaway & Kear, 2000) found that when children engage with artists' work in purposeful and meaningful ways, both their own work and the appreciation for the artists' work markedly improved. Similarly, Irwin (2006) discovered that using artists' work as motivation for poetic writing in the classroom can produce high levels of student achievement and success. Although the importance of using artists' work is evident, it raises the question of how one should examine artworks in the classroom in order to create meaningful interactions. This paper sets out to examine and critique generally adopted teaching frameworks used to assist primary school children in understanding, discussing and interpreting artists' artworks. It will also examine many of the methods and didactic frameworks art gallery educators use when discussing art with children within the context of an art gallery. Finally, taking into account the lessons learnt from literature and research on art gallery education, suggestions for new classroom-bound approaches will be made.*

## Frameworks used to examine and interpret artworks

A key framework that is commonly used for artwork analysis and critique is that devised by Feldman (1970). At one time considered to be the standard for criticism in art education (Ott, 1989), Feldman likens this method of interpretation to a "critical performance". The "performance" outlines four stages of inquiry, beginning with the discussion of concrete, observable ideas through to the examination of abstract

concepts. These stages include: *description*, where viewers observe and describe what they see; *formal analysis*, where the elements, principles and techniques employed by the artist are examined, compared and contrasted; *interpretation*, where possible meanings, themes and reasons why work has been created are explored; and *evaluation*, where viewers reflect on what they have learnt, giving supported opinions about the object studied. This framework, adopted and modified by many other researchers, merges object-centred discussion with personal judgments and critiques. A similar methodological framework, incorporating comparable criteria, was developed by Eisner (1972). Eisner outlined six dimensions for viewing and discussing artwork. These dimensions included: *experiential*, examining the effect the artwork had on the viewer; *formal*, focusing on the visual art elements and principles of the work; *symbolic and thematic*, analysing and understanding the coded meanings and themes within artwork; *material*, examining the materials, tools and media used and the constraints they have; and *contextual*, examining technological contexts. Although largely promoting the role of the object when interpreting works of art, the incorporation of “experiential” criteria denotes a subtle shift towards the viewer and their emotional and affective response.

A key issue when looking at these frameworks is the tension between the object and the viewer. Although the framework provides for systemic discussion—moving from one stage to the next—its design celebrates object-centred knowledge, omitting cultural, contextual and personal imperatives. Globensky (2000) recognises that educators need to “continue to redress the imbalance and shift the significance of the object away from the artefact itself to explore more fully the social dynamics that surround and enliven it” (p. 2). Also this researcher wonders about the benefits of using methodical and systematic frameworks especially when dealing with creative and artistic products. Perhaps spontaneity of response could be taken into account when examining artworks, starting *from* the learner rather than merely accommodating the role of the teacher.

Geahigan (1998) moves away from rigid subject-centred frameworks, instead advocating the use of inquiry for effective art criticism. Recognising that students are confronted with issues of meaning and value when looking at artworks he proposed that teachers needed a variety of instructional methods to facilitate effective and meaningful inquiry. These include: *personal response to art*, where individual and peer

opinions are garnered through comparing, contrasting and examining works of art; *student research*, where biographical and contextual information can be accessed and examined; and *concept and skill instruction* where the teacher provides aesthetic concepts in order to further understand or read images.

A non-sequenced strategy for responding to artworks is Artmaps Compass (Dover, Rowe, Thompson & Turner as cited in Duncum, 1999). A series of non-linear questions that can be adapted for any school level, this framework recognises the importance of learner centred initiatives whilst allowing for flexibility and change in the teaching/learning environment. Artmaps Compass is divided into eight areas with the main questions being:

*What is it?*

*Who made it?*

*What is it made of?*

*How was it made?*

*When was it made?*

*Why was it made?*

*What is it about?*

The series of questions allows for close observations, contextual discussions, creative interpretation and student research. Similarly, Hickman (1994) recognises the importance of using a non-linear framework for viewing and discussing artwork. His criteria, which include reacting, researching, responding and reflecting, provide heavily for affective responses as well as considered systematic inquiry into an aesthetic experience. Alongside this, Hickman promoted questioning in order to elicit a multiplicity of responses. Questions included:

*How do you feel about the work?*

*What does it remind you of?*

*Having found out about the artist and their circumstances, how do you now feel about the artwork?*

*What does it mean to you?*

*How does it relate to issues which concern you?*

Hickman's approach provides for clear and distinct roles between the educator and the viewer. In this instance the role of educator becomes that of 'experiencer' rather than 'producer' of knowledge.

### **Current practice in New Zealand primary schools**

Examining and interpreting artworks has a place within New Zealand primary schools. In *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000), students learn to:

Interpret, and respond to meaning and intentions communicated through, the various forms of the visual arts. They investigate how meaning in the visual arts is mediated through art works and the ways in which these works are presented and viewed....they develop skills in analysing, interpreting, and evaluating meaning in the objects and images created by others. (p. 73)

Learning to communicate about and interpret artworks in New Zealand is supported by a series of Ministry of Education teacher resource books based around several key art making processes—painting, sculpture, printmaking, fabric and fibre and design. The Ministry of Education's ways of viewing and discussing artworks reflects Feldman's object-centred framework, as throughout the texts questions about artworks are broken into categories that encourage children to describe, formally analyse, interpret and evaluate works shown. Although the Ministry of Education does not promote one "right" way to examine works of art, these resources clearly support a particular way of working. Furthermore, Whitaker's (n.d.) Ministry of Education commissioned report on *Visual Arts Learning Progression* further reinforces this approach. Here progress indicators for student learning within and around the Communicating and Interpreting strand in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* outline children's ability to describe, interpret, analyse and evaluate own and others' artwork.

Currently little research exists examining the dialogues that occur in New Zealand classrooms around artists' work; however studies indicate that conversations are occurring. Crooks and Flockton (2003) surveyed New Zealand primary school children, asking "How often do you look at art and talk about art at school?" Responses from Year 4 students found that 14 percent of students engaged in art discussion "heaps", 31 percent "quite a lot", 49 percent "sometimes" and 6 percent "never". The results



indicate that, although large portions of children are engaging in visual art conversation, large portions are not. The research however does not indicate what these discussions are about nor does it examine the quality of these discussions. Crooks and Flockton's (2003) examination of the National Education Monitoring Project assessment results for Year 4 and Year 8 children in the visual arts indicate that children are involved in viewing, discussing and interpreting artists' artworks. However when comparing results from 1999 to 2003 it becomes evident that Year 4 children's responses show little change in their ability to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate works shown. Although results for Year 8 children show some growth in these areas, one must question why little improvement or development is evident in the earlier years.

Studies suggest that a lack of specific teacher knowledge in the arts can hinder student achievement and success. Tickle (1996) and Holt (in Callaway & Kear, 2000) suggest that teachers are often unsure and reluctant to talk to children about artists and their artwork—perhaps reflecting a lack of art knowledge or an ability to “understand” artists' work. Similarly, Price (2005) questions whether New Zealand primary school teachers have the pedagogical knowledge to interpret artists' work with children. With this in mind, we must ask whether the Ministry of Education's reliance on Feldman's framework in examining artwork is the most appropriate model to use in the classroom. Does this largely object-centred framework require teachers to become literate in another area that may require a specific knowledge base? Do teachers need to know about art and artists' work to be able to teach it? What teaching strategies need to be employed to ensure that established frameworks produce academic achievement and student success? What is clear is that more research in this area is needed in order for considered and balanced discussion to occur.

International research has been undertaken around the factors that produce quality children's discussions when looking at artworks within the context of a classroom. Wren and Haig (2006) investigated the language children used when discussing artwork after a series of ten intensive art interpretation teaching sessions. Results indicate that when teachers explicitly taught interpretive strategies in meaningful ways, children acquired language and skills that enabled them to analyse artworks at a more sophisticated level. Results also indicated that by teaching a specific discourse

to students they were also able to develop responses that were of great complexity, demonstrating a high level of understanding of visual art aesthetics. Wilks (1995) further asserts the role of effective teaching in bringing about successful aesthetic inquiry. Her investigations suggest that teachers need to step back and foster student discussion and critique rather than dominate and control the learning experience. As a result, Wilks encourages teachers to let students build on others' responses rather than doing it themselves, to not feel responsible for having the answer, to not appear to be seeking "right" answers, to not repeat or "improve" student answers, and to increase wait time to allow for detailed cognitive responses. The role of the teacher is to extract and draw out personal meaning and prior knowledge in order for students to experience a fully rounded aesthetic experience.

Ash and Wells (2006) analysed art-based dialogue in both informal and formal settings, focusing on the classroom and the art gallery. Their research revealed that although participants contributed according to their abilities, their contributions and those of others provided rich support for all as they moved to achieve their individual and group goals. Furthermore, their research asserted that effective art education should be based around dialogic inquiry where communities of interpretation are developed in order to ensure collaborative knowledge construction.

Perhaps the current Feldman-based approach (1970) is not the most effective way of fostering aesthetic inquiry in the primary classroom. Although evidence suggests that visual arts teaching in New Zealand generally provides students with stimulating learning experiences, which in turn create high levels of success and engagement, (Crooks & Flockton, 2003; Holland & O'Connor, 2004) this researcher wonders what lessons could be learned from art galleries, the very institutions where art is interpreted, analysed, and critiqued on a continual basis.

### **Art gallery-based frameworks**

Many researchers have documented the role art galleries can play in children's learning (Cox-Peterson, Marsh, Kisiel & Melber, 2003; Danko-McGhee, 2006; Durant, 1996; Rice & Yenawine, 2002; Puchner, Rapoport & Gaskins, 2001; Yenawine, 1998; Zeller, 1987). Art galleries are not just places that house works of art, they are informal learning institutions where social, historical and cultural considerations can be examined and critiqued. Although looking at reproductions of works of art within

the classroom has its value, there is much literature advocating the role and importance of context-based learning (Anderson, Lucas & Ginns, 2003; Fienberg & Leinhardt, 2000). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning as it normally occurs is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs.

Lachapelle, Murray and Neim (2003) recognise that “conversations with art” are brought about through the combination of experiential and theoretical learning. Experiential learning requires the viewer to physically encounter the work of art, whilst theoretical learning requires the viewer to cognitively engage in the experience, adding information and filling gaps in their knowledge about the work being viewed. The interaction and combination of these two types of learning is fundamental to students developing new and often more complex ways of understanding work being studied. Experiential learning is evident when the learner and object/subject being studied come into direct and meaningful contact with one another. Although defining “meaningful” can be problematic, the researchers refer to this as the learner’s active involvement in seeking out meaning.

Several researchers have devised methodological frameworks to specifically view, discuss and interpret artists’ artworks (Charman, Rosie, & Wilson, 2006; Ott, 1989; Rice & Yenawine, 2002; Yenawine, 1998). These “search strategies, or a ways of looking” (Mittler as cited in Ott, 1989, p. 177) use a variety of approaches, steps, and strategies in order to assist the viewer in effective engagement with works of art.

A key approach in fostering art interpretation within the context of an art gallery is what Rice refers to as *Information Layering* (Rice & Yenawine, 2002, p. 233). Combining viewers’ initial responses to works of art with carefully selected historical and contextual information, *Information Layering* provides a framework that celebrates the reaction of the viewer, whilst promoting the educator as an “expert other”. Incorporating elements of Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural learning theory, Rice strongly advocates the careful selection and discussion of information to affirm and then extend viewers’ interpretation. Recognising that learning experiences for children in art galleries are brief, Rice uses information to pique the interests of viewers. Incorporating elements of seduction theory in her teaching, she states: “The best thing a museum teacher can do for visitors is to help them interact with the

object in such a way that they get seduced into wanting to look more closely and to know more" (p. 294).

Although realising the role time limitations play in developing effective art gallery based learning experiences, Rice's framework (Rice & Yenawine, 2002) tends to privilege the knowledge and understanding of the educator as opposed to the viewer. Although elements of socio-cultural theory are evident in viewer (novice) and educator (expert) relationships, this approach tends to favour more traditional transmission-based teaching methods. The role of the educator becomes that of "information selector" driving meaning-making through the eyes of the "expert" rather than through the eyes of the individual. Although information is selected and discussed depending on viewer's initial response, opening up a discussion in this way has the potential to create a contradiction between what the viewer "thinks" and what the educator "knows". If the viewer's interpretation is widely different to that of the educator, building a bridge between two potentially polar opinions may prove difficult. Finally, building discussion upon emotional responses can be problematic. Hickman (1994) recognises that emotional responses to works of art are often seen to have little educational value when it comes to criticism and interpretation. However when working with children their spontaneity and honesty should be taken into account, thus making it appropriate and valid to use their initial responses, emotional or not, as a springboard to discuss and interpret art objects.

Pupil-centred imperatives are also evident in the work of Yenawine (Rice & Yenawine, 2002; Yenawine, 1998) and cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen (DeSantis & Housen, 2000; Housen, 1992). Interested in improving the development of visual skills among beginning viewers, the pair developed a framework that asserts critical thinking and reflection in order to make meaning and derive pleasure from works studied. Entitled *Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)*, the framework promotes viewers' active participation by getting students to examine, think, contribute ideas, and listen in order to build mutual understanding. A key proponent in *Visual Thinking Strategy* is image selection. Understanding that young viewers may not have the aesthetic skills to interpret particular works, a role of the educator is to carefully select appropriate and relevant pieces. Choosing works that are understandable to the viewer and based on what they already "know" sets them up to respond in accordance with the artists' intention, promoting concepts of success and achievement. Open-ended discussion

also plays a seminal role in *VTS* as this form of inquiry enables the viewer to construct meaning through peer interaction. Questions such as: *What is going on in the image?* and, *What do you see that makes you say that?* allow students to read works of art and then ground discussion in quantifiable evidence. Observation is favoured over historical art information when it comes to understanding the work. Yenawine states:

Connecting with art begins with looking at it, and my concern with beginning viewers is that when we explain it to them, we teach passive reception, not active looking. I also think for beginners to get the impression that they need to know a lot of stuff before they can connect with art actually stops them from looking and thinking on their own. (as cited in Rice & Yenawine, 2002, p. 292-293)

Another framework for interpreting art that incorporates pupil and object-centred strategies is the *Ways In* model. Developed by gallery educators from Tate Liverpool in the 1990s, the model provides a framework for children to critically engage and reflect on works of art being studied and observed, whilst at an art gallery. Charman, Rose, and Wilson (2006) stress the model sets out to encourage and support aesthetic learning as opposed to dictating it. Recognising the importance creativity plays in meaning-making, the model sets out to provide much needed scaffolding when it comes to understanding and interpreting artwork. The *Ways In* model outlines four approaches in order to provide depth to the aesthetic experience: the personal approach—examining the personal and social experiences the individual brings to the interpretive experience; the ways into the object—where analysis of colour, shape, surface, texture, materials, process, scale, space, position, environment, and time in an artwork are explored and discussed; ways into the subject—where the artworks content, message, title, genre and theme are explored; and ways into the context—where the object is related back to the wider world. The framework (refer, *Figure 1*), represented as four circles—personal, object, subject and context—places personal considerations at its heart, indicating that all other areas of learning require this approach in order to be successful.

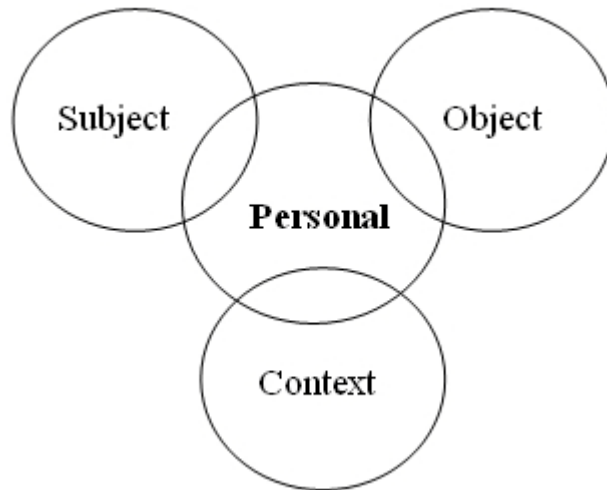


Figure 1: *Ways In* Framework (Charman, Rose, & Wilson, 2006)

With inquiry learning as a focus, the *Ways In* model asserts open-ended questioning at every stage of the process. During the personal approach students are asked to consider themselves, their world and their experience. Questions are asked such as *“What are your first reactions to the work?”*, *“Why does it make you think or feel this way?”* and *“How do your opinions reveal your attitudes, values and beliefs?”* Similarly, connecting ideas to the wider world can help students to further understand their beliefs and positions. Questions such as *“What does the work remind you of?”* and *“How does your country, family and home affect your reactions?”* can assist in students’ interpretation and understanding of works studied. The *Ways In* framework also sets out to develop knowledge and skills through active participation, rather than passive teacher-directed learning. Methods such as handling objects, storytelling, drawing, making, and role-play provide ways to get children to look at and freely talk about artworks studied. Not only do these methods support meaning-making and effective art interpretation but they also advocate the use of play and fun in learning. The Tate also promotes the use of small group teaching—often placing children in the role of investigator, uncovering knowledge themselves, whilst the teacher takes a secondary position facilitating tasks and supporting learning. Charman, Rose, and Wilson (2006) further reinforce the role activities-based learning has in the meaning-making process, stating *“the meaning-making process of engaging with an artwork begins with initial pupil responses, based upon their own personal contexts, memories and associations, then moving towards a critical analysis engendered through an activity”* (p. 85).

Although many frameworks have been developed to aid “conversations” with art, other less rigid methods and approaches have also been devised. Employing participatory approaches to learning is an effective and engaging gallery-based methodology (Danko-McGhee, 2006; Durant, 1996; Packer, 2006; Piscitelli, 1988; Sousa, 2005; Sternberg, 1989, Zeller, 1987). One of the first art education programmes in America to advocate the role of creative learning was “Art Awareness”. Developed in the 1960s through The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the programme focused on encouraging inner city youths to use music, movement and words to interpret and understand contemporary works of art. Using creative methods to unravel the aesthetic experience was an innovative and novel approach, directly opposed to transmission models of learning widely used at the time. Participatory activities such as game playing, creative drama, creative writing, self motivated games, hands-on activities, storytelling and methods of inquiry have been explored in many gallery contexts in order to make the most out of aesthetic learning experiences. Cole (in Danko-McGhee, 2006), Zeller (1987) and Piscitelli’s investigations into gallery education (1988), discovered that educators who use non-verbal and visual methods to animate sculptures and paintings for young audiences often elicit insightful and creative results. Using mime, music, role-play, props and dance to help students understand and appreciate artworks not only provides children with creative access into creative objects, but also incorporates elements of fun into an institution that may be perceived as stark and uninviting. Aware of the fine balance between children’s own interpretation of artwork and that of the educators, Piscitelli warns that gallery educators must be mindful that prompting a certain response distracts from original and individual interpretation. Piscitelli (1988) states “when a child is involved in the process of viewing and responding to art with others, the opportunities for sharing thoughts, insights, and feelings can lead to a greater understanding of the artist, the work and one’s self” (p. 49).

### **Suggestions for classroom-bound approaches**

Many researchers have agreed that socio-cultural theory and associated teaching techniques are an appropriate approach for artwork analysis recognising that learning occurs when individuals are invited to share their own knowledge and experience (Anderson, Piscitelli, Weier, Everett & Tayler, 2002; Ash, 2003; Ash & Wells, 2006; Cunningham, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Piscitelli, & Anderson, 2000; Rice & Yenawine, 2002; Wilks, 1995; Wren & Haig,

2006). Having examined the literature and frameworks associated with viewing and discussing artists' artwork, this researcher is of the opinion that regardless of the framework employed, teaching methods should follow learner-focused constructivist pedagogy. Placing seminal importance on prior knowledge, this pedagogy asserts that in order to make learning meaningful, individuals must link new information to pre-existing knowledge.

Hooper-Greenhill (1994, 2004a, 2004b) and Charman, Rose, and Wilson (2006) recognise that learning about artworks is most effective when it focuses on the learner rather than what is being learnt. Effective practice emerges when learning is experiential, active and structured. Providing students with an experience that enables them to manipulate objects, interact with learning sites, work with people and places, creates a platform where learning is exciting, realistic and most importantly learning is occurring. Students must be active in the learning experience, developing thinking skills, problem solving abilities, classifying and categorising information, whilst negotiating their own path in and through learning and achievement. Finally, for learning to be effective, programmes must be well structured and planned, whilst catering for flexibility and change. Therefore the role of the educator is to act as a mediator, one who facilitates learning experiences to ensure collaboration, discussion and interaction. Students become the researchers, whilst the teacher becomes the facilitator who sets the tasks, supports and extends discussion, guiding the learning to ensure maximum engagement and success.

When using any method or framework in teaching, general principles of effective teaching need to be taken into account. In order to reveal honest and meaningful opinions about artwork being discussed, a safe and secure environment for children to express the ideas and opinions must also be established. Irwin's (2006) research reinforces this notion as he ensured that children were made aware of the beginning of his interpretative sessions that their opinions of contemporary New Zealand artwork were to be accepted and celebrated as long as they could be justified and explained. Similarly Hohmann and Wiekart (in Epstein, 2001) recognise that children's perceptions should be celebrated, regardless of conventionality, with Holland & O'Connor (2004) suggesting that children would be more likely to be "vivid, expressive and creative when they feel free to take risks with their work" (p. 48).



Time is another factor that educators should be aware of when examining artworks with children. Irwin (2006) advocates the important role of focused looking before discussion occurs as it provides time for the viewer to independently consolidate and make sense of what is been observed before sharing with others. Similarly, Paton in *How to View a Painting* (2005) examines this notion of looking and contemplating before offering opinions and interpretations. Paton suggests that when we look at a painting, we should ask ourselves what we notice before asking ourselves what we think. In other words, our opinions should be informed through observation.

Finally, in order to ensure effective conversations and to develop engaging communities of interpretation, Globensky (2000) recognises a need to work in small groups as well as look for effective ways to encourage creative thinking and reflection. Whole class discussions on artworks may provide a quick and easy way of delivering required content, but educators must consider if this is the most effective method for children to cognitively engage with and analyse chosen works of art.

## **Conclusion**

Currently there is a dearth of New Zealand-based research into how children talk about and respond to artworks in both primary classrooms and art gallery settings. In order to stir academic discussion this researcher is currently conducting much needed research looking at the methods (both verbal and non-verbal) used by art gallery educators to help children interpret and discuss artworks within the context of an art gallery. The proposed research will therefore be valuable to New Zealand art gallery educators, art professionals and primary school teachers as it will provide a clear and specific discourse on how art gallery-based education can influence and affect children's interpretation of artwork. This research will also outline effective learning conversations in relation to understanding and interpreting art that could be used by primary school teachers when discussing artworks within the primary classroom context.

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# HOW CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE IS VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

Jill Smith

## Abstract

*New Zealand is becoming an increasingly multicultural society and as a consequence its student population is progressively diverse. Governmental education policy and curriculum documents transmit messages of cultural inclusiveness, with each drawing attention to the need for teachers to respond to the cultural diversity that will mark schools and society in the twenty-first century. Analysis of these documents, together with a critique of pedagogical practices for culturally inclusive art education, provided the framework for a fieldwork study in a sample of secondary schools in 2005. In this research I investigated the ways in which secondary school art teachers' understandings of the ethnic diversity and cultural differences of students were reflected in their pedagogical practices in year 9-10 visual arts programmes, and the extent to which those practices were shaped by personal and professional experiences. Findings from the study showed that the alignment of cultural diversity with ethnicity, a continued emphasis in curriculum policy on art forms in relation to the tangata whenua and to biculturalism, and a privileging of the values and art forms of the western aesthetic and the dominant European culture, were major influences on pedagogy. The findings raise questions about the role and value of visual arts education for secondary school students from diverse cultures living in contemporary New Zealand society. They challenge government, schools and, in particular, visual arts educators to rethink existing educational traditions, content and practice.*

## Contextualising the study

The demographic shift in the student population in New Zealand secondary schools was a prime motivation for my investigation into visual arts pedagogy. Both the 2001 and 2006 census snapshots on 'cultural diversity' (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, 2006) foreshadow the continuing changes within the ethnic composition of schools. In

2006 Europeans comprised 67.6 percent of the population and 11.1 percent stated their ethnicity as New Zealander (a new category). One in seven people identified as Māori, Asian groups grew the fastest (an increase of almost 50 percent), and those identifying with Pacific peoples' ethnic groups had the second-largest increase (up 14.7 percent). The changing composition of the population was also reflected in the 10.4 percent who identified with more than one ethnic group.

In its evaluation report, *Multi-cultural Schools in New Zealand*, the Education Review Office (ERO) (2000) emphasized the need for teachers to respond to the challenges of teaching children of diverse cultural backgrounds and to "acknowledge and respect these diverse cultures" (p. 5).<sup>3</sup> An analysis of policy and curriculum documents, which are intended to guide teachers' practice, showed that each contains messages of cultural inclusiveness. Section 63 of the *Education Act 1989* requires every school charter to contain the aim of developing policies and practices that reflect New Zealand's cultural diversity. In *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993), which currently provides the overarching direction for teaching, learning and assessment in schools, cultural policy is articulated in terms of acknowledging "the value of the Treaty of Waitangi, and of New Zealand's bicultural identity and multicultural society" (p. 1). Referring to both ethnicity and cultural diversity, it is stated in the framework that students will be encouraged "to understand and respect the different cultures which make up New Zealand society", and that "the school curriculum will recognise, respect, and respond to the educational needs of ... students of all ethnic groups" (p. 7). The framework's emphases are further encapsulated in the goals of the *National Education Guidelines* (NEGs) (Ministry of Education, 1997), which are expected to be part of each school's charter, and in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000), the key policy document which underpinned my study.

Of the five Auckland secondary schools (herein referred to as Schools A-E) purposively selected for the field work investigation on the bases of decile classification, geographical spread, and the inclusion of single-sex, co-educational, state, integrated

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<sup>3</sup> The Education Review Office is the government department which reviews and reports on the quality of education in all New Zealand schools and early childhood services. This includes primary and secondary schools, private schools, kura kaupapa Māori (Māori language immersion schools), special schools, kohanga reo (Māori language early childhood groups), and homeschooling.

state and private schools, three exemplified the demographic shift. The student population in School B comprised 60 ethnic groups. At School C nearly 50 percent of the students came from overseas, from a total of 57 different countries. In School E students of Asian (23 percent), Māori (20 percent), and Pacific Islands (14 percent) ethnicity outnumbered the 43 percent of European students. The rationale for inclusion of two less culturally diverse schools, School A with 75 percent and School D with 80 percent European students, was in response to claims by multicultural theorists that attention should be given to cultures regardless of whether or not they are represented in a school's population (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). The ERO (2000) report also stressed that many teachers in New Zealand, themselves predominantly European/Pākehā, now work with student populations more culturally diverse than when they began teaching. The selection of the ten participants in my study, the head of art department (HOD) and an assistant art teacher in each of the five secondary schools, reflected this demographic reality.<sup>4</sup> All five HODs identified variously as European, New Zealand, or New Zealand/Pākehā. Three assistant art teachers identified as Samoan, Taiwanese and Māori, and two as New Zealand/Pākehā.

Educational theorists and art educators argue that the reality of the ethnic diversity of students, the number of languages they speak, the multiplicity of cultures, and the variables within the communities of students means that a teaching force comprising the dominant cultural majority can no longer ignore or exclude 'others' from having an identity within the educational contexts of school, curriculum and classroom (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Chalmers, 1996, 2003; Hall & Bishop, 2001; Kalantzis & Cope, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). For Nieto (2004) this lends potency to the imperative for teachers to both "learn *about* and *from* their students" (p. 161, original emphasis). The dilemma of diversity means that teachers must not only address the cultural identities of learners, but also understand their own cultural identities and cultural positions (Hall & Bishop, 2001; Sleeter, 2001, 2004). Such points of view, supported by the demographic snapshot above, provided the impetus to investigate the complexities for visual arts pedagogy generated by the diversity of the population and the ERO expectations which reflect this diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> This was confirmed by a survey I conducted with heads of departments in Auckland secondary schools in 2005 in which 83 percent identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā, and 34 percent had been teaching for over 20 years (Smith, 2005).



## **The theoretical framework for the study**

The decision to posit the research methodology within a qualitative paradigm was founded on the nature of the research problem which sought answers to the following questions:

- How are understandings of ethnic diversity and cultural difference reflected in teachers' pedagogical practices in Year 9-10 art programmes?
- In what ways, and to what extent, are these practices shaped by personal and professional factors?

The methodology was based on the need to search for and interpret meanings of culture, diversity and difference, and the art of culturally inclusive art education within the framework of multiculturalism and multicultural art education. Consistent with case study research, the perspectives of the ten participants were gained through multiple data collection methods which did not privilege one method over another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Stake, 2000; Wolcott, 1994). Critical analysis of school, art department and teachers' documents was followed by a series of interviews which explored personal and professional perspectives, and by classroom observations. The photographic documentation of students' outcomes from Year 9-10 visual arts programmes included the desire to present concrete visual evidence. These 'material traces' provided alternative insights (Hodder, 2003). The interconnected interpretive practices employed in the study were correlated to explore the nature of visual arts pedagogy at Years 9 and 10 according to the interpretations and behaviours of the participants in the social settings selected. Each method informed the investigation into the inextricable link between pedagogical understanding, educational theory, and the application of these to curriculum development and art education practice. It was envisaged that the personal and professional histories of the participants would be an important element in shaping their present identities, and in contributing to their personas as secondary school art teachers (Chalmers, 2001; Palmer, 1998).

## **Findings from the investigation into visual arts pedagogy**

A notable feature of the overall findings of the field work was the correlation between the data collected from the examination of documents, interviews, observations, and the visible outcomes of the Year 9-10 students' work. The relationship between what teachers purported to do according to their art department schemes, programme

planning, and verbal accounts, and what they actually did, was confirmed in almost every respect (Stake, 2000).

### **Attitudes towards cultural policy**

Insights into cultural policy in each school were gained from the analysis of schools' documents, together with teachers' perspectives. For example, in its mission statement School A claimed to provide for students "opportunities to understand differences of race, religion and culture". The HOD noted, however, that while the school promoted "ideas of tolerance and open mindedness towards other cultures and beliefs, European dominance, as in wider society, comes through" (as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 166). She added that while the influence of the curriculum framework on equity policy was inherent in this pastoral-type school, the "emphasis is on the gifted and talented rather than on treating everyone equally" (ibid). In comparison, School B's focus was upon cultural activities which were "designed to share cultural learning" (p. 177). Described as "an increasingly cosmopolitan school" by the art teacher and as "a very safe multicultural environment" by the HOD (p. 176), School B's rhetoric was complemented in practical terms by cultural events that aligned strongly with its multiethnic population. Similarly, a feature of School C was the prominence given in its documentation, and in practice, to the creative and performing arts "within a multicultural environment that allows for students to develop confidence in relating to a wide diversity of students" (p. 185). School D, with its 80 percent European population, claimed that its cultural programme was "an active and vibrant part of the whole community" (p. 195). Cultural activities were enunciated in terms of theatre-sports, choir, drama productions, jazz, stage and rock bands, singing competitions, and a Māori cultural group. While the HOD acknowledged that the school "does not reflect the multicultural nature of New Zealand society" (ibid) she pointed to the support of a *whare* (in a classroom) for the 5 percent of Māori boys at the school. While in its staff manual, School E emphasised the "multicultural ethos of the school" and the opportunities for students "to develop their cultural talents", the HOD considered this to be "mere rhetoric" (p. 204). Without exception, the policies of the schools in the study abided by cultural policy articulated in national curriculum policies and regulations. In practice, there was variance between policy and practice in School E and in the two schools with less culturally diverse student populations.

### **Compliance with national curriculum policy**

An early finding, which became evident through analysis of school policy documents and art department schemes supported by interview data, was the marked degree to which accountability to national curriculum policy influenced the teachers' programming, assessment, and art department structuring. While value was placed on art education by all five schools, and it was positioned securely within the crowded Years 9-10 curriculum, the approach to the subject appeared to be affected by the academic and economic achievement imperatives inherent in the curriculum reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, each art department scheme reflected the emphasis in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) upon the eight groupings of essential skills designed to contribute to a highly skilled, technologically competent and adaptable workforce. Reporting systems to students and their parents/caregivers focused specifically on these essential skills, although variations in emphases reflected the character and idiosyncracies of the particular school.

### **Accountability to the arts curriculum**

Art programming was based predominantly on the requirements of *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000). The four 'strands' in the visual arts discipline of the curriculum were used exclusively by all schools to define key areas of learning, assessment, and reporting. Each strand was included in every programme observed. While research on art and artists (UC - Understanding the visual arts in context) was generally used as the starting point, the greatest emphasis was given to art making (PK – Developing practical knowledge in the visual arts). Time allocation for spontaneous and informal art activities that were not driven by curriculum objectives was minimal. All ten teachers, in contrast to critics of the arts curriculum (see Bracey, 2003; Grierson, 2003; Mansfield, 2000, 2003), maintained that it offered them freedom, independence, and a useful guide for programme development. The curriculum was not perceived by these specialist secondary school art teachers as confining or exclusive but, rather, as having a positive influence upon art education. It was evident, too, that while the art units observed during the fieldwork were designed by the teachers, with little input from the students, the latter appeared to value and have a good understanding of the programmes offered. During observation lessons many of the Year 9 and 10 students said they enjoyed art and

liked developing skills in research and art making. Being encouraged to produce high quality finished art works was identified by many as particularly important. Furthermore, the arts curriculum was seen by all the teachers as providing an essential foundation for Year 11 visual arts. A number of Year 10 students informally confirmed this. Without exception, the teachers stated that their programmes reflected a conscious decision to prepare students for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

The framing of the references to culture in the arts curriculum contributed to a significant finding during the field work. For example, reference is made to “the multicultural nature of our society and its traditions” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 7), and to the arts of other countries which “have progressively become part of the New Zealand cultural tapestry” (p. 9). However, the greatest emphasis in the document is upon biculturalism and understanding the “significance and value of *toi Māori* in different contexts” (p. 11, p. 90), “opportunities to learn about traditional and contemporary Māori art forms” (p. 71, p. 90), and learning about the “indigenous heritage of Māori” and the “the heritage of the *tangata whenua*” (p. 104). By comparison, “the diverse traditions of European, Pacific, and other cultures that make up our nation” (*ibid*) are downplayed. Of even greater concern, reference to the cultural diversity of students is presented in the penultimate section of the 109-page document. Here it is stated that “culturally inclusive programmes in the arts will encourage positive attitudes towards cultural diversity ... recognise the diversity of individual students within particular cultures ... and, recognise that knowledge bases can be culturally diverse” (p. 104). The implication is that teachers and students of all cultures, regardless of the ethnic make-up of each school’s population, should be imbued with respect for diverse cultures. The question must be asked as to whether ‘respect’ is a sufficient objective. The phrasing implies the dominance of the western view of recognising that ‘other’ cultures should be attended to.

The lack of attention to the cultural diversity of students in the arts curriculum was, similarly, a noticeable feature of visual arts programming. The HOD at School A, for example, saw little need to include the cultures of ‘other’ students in art units. She said:

I prefer not to teach about the art of other cultures because I feel like I know little about it and don't 'own' it. I do teach Māori and Pacific art units since it is an important part of New Zealand culture – and required by the curriculum – but I feel like it is tokenism because I am not directly of that culture and so my ability to teach it feels limited ... if it wasn't 'compulsory' then I would probably avoid teaching it where possible (as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 172).

Although every teacher professed to be aware of the focus in the arts curriculum upon students gaining an understanding of how and why individuals, communities and societies make art works, opportunities for them to develop “deeper understandings of cultural traditions and practices in New Zealand and overseas” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 5) was interpreted by the teachers predominantly in terms of biculturalism. Each expressed clear understanding of biculturalism in terms of the curriculum framework's declaration, consistent with government policy, of acknowledgement of the value of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi and of New Zealand's bicultural identity. While the inclusion of studies of Māori art and culture responds to a mandated requirement all but one of the participants were sympathetic to the focus in the arts curriculum upon toi Māori, traditional Māori art forms and contemporary developments and their significance in different contexts, and the requirement to understand aspects of reo, tikanga, and whakapapa. Indeed, analysis of Māori art units in schemes, and observed in one classroom, showed they mostly began with the UC (Understanding the visual arts in context) strand, from which insights gained by students were used to explore the art forms of Māori as a springboard for their own art making.

Throughout the fieldwork encounter the dual focus on Māori and European/Pākehā art and culture reinforced Mane-Wheoki's (2003) commentary that “an insistent 'bicultural' vision” continues to pervade art curriculum in New Zealand (p. 8). A move beyond the bicultural emphasis was largely confined to the art of Pacific Island nations. Every school included a program with a Pasifika focus. These consisted of a study of either the material art forms of Pacific peoples, or of symbols which could be considered cultural stereotypes of particular Pacific peoples' ethnic groups, or the work of contemporary artists as models. In contrast to the Māori art units, study of the underlying cultural significance of Pasifika art forms was minimal. There was no

commensurate study of the art and cultures of the ethnically diverse and culturally different students in the fieldwork schools. The Samoan art teacher at School A confirmed that multiculturalism was not being addressed in art programmes. "We're still not open to that as a school ... it's not at the forefront ... Asian or Indian or other students would not have an opportunity to draw on their cultures ..." (as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 167, p. 169). She attributed this to the 75 percent European student population. The art teacher at School C, alone, suggested that although the arts curriculum "is trying to expand culturally, it doesn't embrace other than Māori or Pacific Island culture" (p. 225). It was apparent from the fieldwork that 'difference' was allowed to exist and be practiced at the margins, but not at the "front and centre" (Nieto, 2000, p. 180).

### **From policy to practice**

The literature on pedagogical approaches to culturally inclusive art education, and the theoretical positions underpinning them, as possible solutions to issues of culture, diversity and difference in secondary school settings, informed my fieldwork. Explicated in the literature were the views of protagonists and antagonists towards 'modernist' versions of multicultural art education which celebrate pluralism and diversity, while serving to reproduce existing political, social and cultural conditions (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Stuhr, 1994). It was suggested that 'postmodern' conceptions, such as social reconstructionist multiculturalism and teaching visual culture, should be adopted. These approaches emphasise difference and challenge the dominant power and knowledge structures that tend to create socio-cultural inequities (Duncum, 2001; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). A critical approach to policy and pedagogy in art education, and an ethic that gives priority to equity and democracy as primary social objectives, was considered a way forward for an active engagement of social responsibility and cultural inclusion (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Grierson, 2003).

My data collection was further influenced by Nieto's (2004) findings from her case studies in the United States. Nieto claimed that while "teachers' ethnic group membership may have a very powerful impact on student learning, it is this in conjunction with teachers' cultural knowledge and awareness, and their curriculum and instructional accommodations that can make a major difference" (p. 376). Nieto

was particularly critical of the dominance of subject matter on pedagogy in secondary schools. She claimed that pedagogy is influenced by teachers' lack of knowledge concerning the diversity of their students, that teaching from the point of view of students is uncommon, and that many teachers attempt to treat all students in the same way. These findings were instrumental in shaping the interviews, observations and documentation of student outcomes in my study.

Only the art teacher at School D, who identified as New Zealand/Pākehā, professed to have some awareness of multiculturalism. Among the other nine participants there was little sign of conscious knowledge of the multicultural pedagogies in visual arts education which focus on issues of cultural pluralism, cultural diversity, and cultural difference and the theoretical positions underpinning them. Inclusion, where it occurred, was largely in terms of the assimilationist approaches identified by Sleeter and Grant (1987). For example, there was some evidence of 'teaching the culturally different', an approach that requires little change to the existing curriculum other than by the tokenistic addition of examples of other cultures which supplement the dominant cultural view. Illustrative of the 'human relations approach' the HOD at School E, who identified as European, professed to look for cultural events around which to design a unit. Here, students made Chinese lanterns to coincide with the Chinese Lantern Festival. Such approaches illustrated a lack of awareness of debates which suggest that ethnic histories and cultures are not seen as integral parts of mainstream culture and that the realities of cultural conflict can be avoided, or even not perceived.

However, in spite of their professed lack of knowledge of multicultural pedagogies, most of the teachers' programmes were based on interpretations of culture which reflected awareness of their particular students. With the exception of the HODs at Schools A and E, who professed to take little account of the ethnicity and cultural differences of students when planning, the remaining teachers felt they were attentive to "the ethnicity of students ... acknowledgement of cultural differences ... sensitivity to ethnic needs ... and the cultures and the individuality of students" (as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 227). The HOD at School B reported that the art staff was particularly aware of the 60 different ethnic groups at her school. At School C, where the

population was largely immigrant, the HOD considered that all students were treated equally. In this Year 9 class students were given opportunity to depict aspects of their cultural and transnational backgrounds, albeit through nationalistic identifiers such as kangaroos, sheep and pandas. At the integrated-state school students explored art within the cultural context of its Christian ethos. Six of the ten programs enabled students to use universal, cultural and personal symbols to represent themselves to themselves, an approach that aligned with ideas articulated by Geertz (1977). The opportunity to collaboratively express the popular cultural iconography of New Zealand was given to students by the assistant art teacher at School E, although the approach did not include a critical examination of popular forms of visual culture in a socio-cultural context (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). In other instances teachers used culture of the western art aesthetic as a starting point, based on their views that western art provides a sufficient and valid source of examples of artistic accomplishment.

The arts curriculum was considered by the majority to be the key influence on their effectiveness as teachers. Reflective of Hattie's (2003) emphasis on the importance of "excellent teachers and inspiring teaching" (p. 6), the personal and professional effect which these art teachers had on the formative and summative achievements of their Year 9 or 10 students was a noticeable feature of the fieldwork. In each case the engagement of students in classrooms over a sustained period of researcher-participant observation was due, in no small part, to the supportive environment established by the teachers, the positive inter-personal relationships between teachers, students and peers, the teachers' respect for their students, and the students' responses to their teachers in the learning encounter. These teachers reflected, albeit in varying degrees, Palmer's (1998) belief that good teaching cannot be reduced to technique, but is rooted in the identity and integrity of the teacher. That they possessed what Palmer calls a capacity to connect with their students and their subject was reflected in the level of student involvement. Of the 231 students observed in the ten art rooms only a few were not engaged or failed to complete components within units of work. Also noticeable was the implicit, rather than explicitly stated, high expectations which all the teachers had of students to perform to the best of their ability.



The pedagogical practices observed during the fieldwork aligned, however, with Hattie's (2003) assertion that "educators still make most of their practice decisions on the basis of personal belief and personal experience" (p. 12). Nine participants professed no conscious knowledge of multicultural theory, and all ten were unaware of discourses on critical pedagogy. The HOD at School D expressed an emphatic "no", explaining that she was "too pragmatic" (as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 224). Planning and teaching were based largely on the teachers' beliefs about what constituted appropriate art education, and on the broader social conditions and experiences which had shaped their practice. With the exception of one teacher, who was required to implement the department-wide Year 9 art program designed by the HOD, elements of the personal, school and tertiary education experiences of the participants were evident in their approaches. For example, positive experiences of studying art history at school and university and a passion for classical art, as well as a stated preference for traditional art, were carried over into the pedagogical practices of the HOD at School E. Students in this Year 10 class adopted the teacher's ethos of developing skills, exploring media and techniques, and understanding art styles to "achieve the pride of a good finished outcome" (p. 223). In comparison, vivid experiences at a bicultural secondary school and inter-disciplinary-style polytechnic, an early introduction to photography, interest in issues of low versus high art and art versus craft, and increased awareness during teacher training of the need to explore and place more value on other cultures and their art, were reflected in the pedagogical practices of the art teacher at another. Teaching and learning in this Year 10 class were approached from the perspective of enabling students to explore their "individual ethnicity or their culture" (p. 224) through experimenting with contemporary forms of art making.

The influence on pedagogical practices of preparing students for NCEA was particularly evident in the focus upon students researching artists' works and procedures as inspiration for personal practice. Sustaining critiques of the arts curriculum (see Grierson, 2003; Mansfield, 2000, 2003), interviews with the teachers, classroom observations and the photographic recording of students' work confirmed that the 'artist models' selected by teachers were drawn primarily from a modernist western aesthetic. While the majority of teachers expressed no bias towards 'high art', nor rejection of the so-called 'low art' of popular culture, crafts, decorative arts, and tribal

and indigenous art, the artists and art works studied in seven of the ten programmes conformed to definitions of art within the western art canon. Reflecting the historical experiences of the teachers themselves, classical forms of antiquity and the development of Cubism were studied by Year 10 students in two schools and the conventions of portraiture in a further three. In most instances emphasis was placed upon the art forms as self-sufficient products, rather than on their underlying social, political and cultural contexts. Only three programmes drew upon art which extended beyond the western aesthetic. Popular culture provided the basis for a collaborative construction of “kiwiana chairs” in one school. Study of indigenous art, which drew upon understanding of the forms and significance of Māori kākahu, inspired the construction of “personal identity cloaks” in another. In a third, “symbolic self-portraits” were underpinned by study of the cultural and personal symbolism in the works of Niuean artist, John Pule.

The autonomy of action which the teachers considered the arts curriculum provided was evident in their personal and professional search for programmes designed in the interests of their students. Culture as a political issue in education and schooling was not referred to in art department documentation nor, in response to my questions, expressed as a relevant concern. Neither was the politics of culture, the way in which curricula reflect cultural forces that are the outcome of competing interests of stakeholders, a dimension of their pedagogical practices.

### **Where to from here?**

New Zealand teachers accept employment on the understanding that they will deliver a curriculum as laid down by government statute. The curriculum framework and the arts curriculum require schools to meet a multicultural requirement responsive to the increasing cultural diversity of the New Zealand population. The literature reviewed suggested that teachers have a responsibility to make a conscious and informed commitment to a socially responsive multiculturalism (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Giroux, 1994; Kalantzis & Cope, 1999, Nieto, 2000, 2004). The question can be asked as to how far the government’s curriculum policy aligns with this position, especially since there is no substantial evidence to show any relationship between culturally inclusive art education and students’ attitudes to

democracy, culture, and each other. Much depends upon what is meant by a responsive curriculum and what pedagogical interpretations it requires.

The findings of the fieldwork suggested that all the teachers believed they were able to exercise professional autonomy within the requirements of educational policy. Programmes were driven not only by the arts curriculum but by a sincere concern for the welfare of students, in both educational and social terms. Many stated that they wanted to improve the life chances of their students, a position advocated by Nieto (2004). While admitting they held no theoretical knowledge of multicultural pedagogies, the majority believed that their art programs and pedagogical practices took into account the students in their classrooms. As exemplified in students' outcomes the art education provided by the teachers, and shaped in their own terms by the students, was vital, expressive and of high quality and was valued by their schools' communities. In the majority of cases, however, such production did not correlate with the pursuit and achievement of a visual arts education which took sufficient account of the individual differences within the cultures of students in New Zealand secondary schools. While some of the programmes enabled students to express their ethnicity this was manifested primarily through symbolic representation which drew upon cultural stereotypes associated with particular ethnic groups. There was little evidence in programmes of opportunities to study the forms of visual culture that resonate with the lives of young people in contemporary society. The question must be asked as to how secondary school art teachers can be provoked into rethinking existing art education traditions, content and practices.

It also became apparent during the fieldwork that the potent influences of the New Zealand European/Pākehā participants' own Europeanised artistic and cultural inheritances over-powered their understandings of diversity and difference. Even the five teachers from 'other' cultures maintained that their criteria for high student achievement in art remained predominantly within the western aesthetic. This alignment with claims by United States art educator Smith (2006) that excellence as a desired outcome of education rests in the maintenance of the European tradition raises a further issue for art education pedagogy. Overall, the nature of art education offered by these ten teachers maintained an emphasis on modernist art exemplars and continued to promote the predominantly bicultural position observed in an earlier study (Smith, 2001). The desire for students to achieve excellence was strong and an

imperative to prepare students for NCEA in year 11 inescapable. In combination, these factors produced a form of art education whose curriculum policy, content, and pedagogical practices remained rooted in a predominantly monocultural ethos. These findings provide a challenge for government, schools, and in particular visual arts educators.

My question – where to from here? – is predicated, not only upon the fieldwork findings, but on critiques of art education in New Zealand which press for change from the dominant European position to the adoption of a more revolutionary stance (Bracey, 2003; Grierson, 2003; Mansfield, 2003). Such a change would require a shift from pluralist multiculturalism, via the medium of modernist progressivist pedagogy, to critical (postmodern) pedagogies which specify inclusion and access and which affirm diversity and acknowledge difference as a dynamic conception of culture (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood & Park, 2003; West, 1993). Education, as advocated by such as Giroux (1994) and Bhabba (1995) and others is seen as a vital agency for informing people of the realities of ethnic diversity and cultural difference and the necessity for equity of achievement rather than mere equity of opportunity. In this context many art theorists argued that the very visibility of art, as well as its function as a metaphor of culture, can play a significant educational role in this respect (Chalmers, 2003; Duncum, 2001; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). A shift from the élitism of the fine arts, the modernist aesthetic, and the western art canon to the art of the everyday world in which students learn how to decode contemporary culture would be needed. Such decoding does not imply tacit acceptance of all aspects of the forms of what is being called ‘art’ in contemporary society. Rather, it focuses upon an equivalent critical enquiry that has traditionally been evident in the world of ‘fine arts’.

The question remains as to how, and in what degree, an enhanced understanding of the theoretical arguments would improve a visual arts education which is truly responsive to the ethnic diversity and cultural differences of students in New Zealand secondary schools today. The provision of such understanding would require recognition in both the pre-service and the continuing education of art teachers. It would require visual arts teachers to gain understanding of the importance of a transformative pedagogy and curriculum that challenges the hegemonic knowledge that perpetuates the power of the dominant culture and which operates in the socio-political context of students’ lives (see Giroux, 1994; Nieto, 2000, 2004). In these

terms visual arts education would be expected to address issues regarding group differences and how power relations function to structure racial and ethnic identities. It would challenge teachers to make a space for different student voices.

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# DESIGNING LITERACY EDUCATION AS MODES OF MEANING IN GLOBALISED AND SITUATED CONTEXTS: TOWARDS A RESTORATION OF THE SELF THROUGH EMBODIED KNOWING

Trevor Thwaites

## Abstract

*The world of the twenty-first century is one that presents humans with diverse forms of identity, loyalty, and sense of place. The nation state appears all but redundant in this time of transnationalism and transculturalism, as ongoing migrations and re-affirmations of identity produce transient loyalties which make policy development problematic in areas such as education. The new empire is a global one, reflecting corporate economic ambition and territorial expansion—a type of colonisation by capitalist interests that we might call “globalisation”. Associated with this global empire are the new technologies of trading and communication which have produced new societal structures, such as social networks, that display various formations of information and cultural amateurs who promote themselves through the voyeuristic possibilities of the World Wide Web. The preparation of students for their life in these scenarios has been guided by governments and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), convinced that the future lies in a vaporous ambition called the ‘knowledge-economy’—a further complication for education policy. Where does that leave the self as an identity requiring forms of efficacy, personal ambition, and a sense of being-in-a-physical-world? This paper explores one facet of this question which is linked both to concepts of literacy and to the embodied self as one way of demonstrating that there are strategies for responding to the new environment. This way suggests giving agency to learners through a radical and embodied means of constructing knowledge and literacy that seeks to retain the humanness in schooling and which potentially empowers learners through the possibilities opened up by these ‘new’ pedagogies.*

## Introduction

The spaces of possibilities and potential in education have become territorialised and, in some cases, canonised in the struggle for power in the school site. The Essential Learning Areas defined by the 1993 Curriculum Framework project have been



manipulated into hierarchies that often do not work in the best interests of the children schooling is supposed to serve. Language as functional literacy—the ability to read and write everyday information and communication—and mathematics as functional numeracy have become an obsession for governments, even though there is little evidence of social gain. In fact, in many highly literate and numerate, democratic countries, crime rates are soaring while involvements in electoral processes are declining, leading one to suggest that being literate and numerate is no guarantee of social responsibility. One might even venture to posit that language-based literacy and mathematics in education, rather than being instruments for social gain, have become mere accoutrements for the global ambitions of capitalism.

Society is controlled by performance, and this not only defines what counts as a good student—for example, behaviour on the school site and the attainment of suitable qualifications—but also what counts as a good university with the recent introduction of Performance-Based Research Funding (PBRF). As a result, institutional activities become legitimised through the principle of *performativity*, the optimising of the overall performance of social institutions (such as schools) according to the criterion of efficiency in relation to economic benefits. In coming to terms with a global setting for everyday educational practices, we might reflect on Lyotard's (1979/1984) proposition that the status of knowledge changes as societies become 'postindustrial' and cultures become 'postmodern'. As a result, institutional activities become legitimised through the principle of *performativity*, the optimising of the overall performance of social institutions, such as schools, according to the criterion of efficiency in relation to economic benefits. However, performance now defines a human's worth as education becomes more technologised and educational evaluations merely performance-based ideologised notions of what constitutes intelligent and creative performance.

Within the politics of performativity, even politicians have become technicians. Technocracy is replacing democracy, and in education pedagogy has become a means of controlling both students and teachers; when these are combined with the global thrust to be constantly 'wired and connected', a sinister dehumanising process can be seen to be at work. To counter this, *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13* (2007) espouses notions of *values* as performativity, put in place to deal with a society constantly at risk from failing

economies, crime and global warming. Miller (2006) reminds us that “moral panics become means of dealing with ‘risk society’ via appeals to “values”, a displacement from socioeconomic crises and fissures” (p. 312) and, as Van Tuinen (2007) wryly observes, “Most Western individuals don’t want to be revolutionised, but insured” (p. 299).

For the OECD (2006), the function of schooling is no longer just about delivery or supply; it claims that we need to shift our values and gear education from its socially oriented perspectives to where it is individualistically oriented in an educational system that is geared to its “clients” both as consumers and as knowledge-producers (pp. 12-13). This notion that students must perform as clients and as knowledge-producers provides an indication of the kinds of performativity that are likely to be required of citizens as nation states seek to engage in the global knowledge-economy.

Performativity also intrudes into the teaching and learning of the three Rs. These territories, usually called languages and mathematics, espouse knowledge and skills associated with words and numbers that are too commonplace to be limited to the narrowly defined constructs of specific subject areas. I suggest that it may be time for education to question why these tools for communicating and calculating continue to be isolated from other ways of knowing and doing-in-the-world. Debray (2007) reminds us that the transmission of the word has fallen into three ‘estates’ over the past two millennia as it proceeded through the *logosphere* (writing), the *graphosphere* (print media), to the *videosphere* (audiovisual representations) of today (p. 26-27). Associated with these ‘estates’ are such aspects as the driving force of faith, law, and opinion, with their accompanying identifying myths of the saint, the hero and the celebrity. Debray also claims that the basis for their symbolic authority has been from the invisible, to the legible, and is now the visible. Their maxim for personal authority ranges through “God told me”; “I read it”; to “I saw it on TV or the Web” (ibid, p. 26).

In this paper I challenge the limiting of literacy to written or spoken words, for these alone do not structure nature as we experience it. The confining of literacy to language in education needs to be reviewed and Sloterdijk cautions us about the ‘disciplining’ and ‘domesticating’ functions of language (in Van Tuinen, 2007). I suggest that literacy should encompass a whole realm of expressive forms and modes that enable humans to make sense of and structure their world and their experiences

in ways that might appear disparate but which are in fact intrinsically similar. I will do this using music as an example, but limiting my discussion of literacy in music to embodied ways of knowing.

### **Schooling and knowledge**

What do learners need to know and what should be taught in the curriculum? Perhaps as we consider the nature of human intellect the central question for educational thought ought to be “What is it to be a knower?” This question is crucial in order to determine the ways we educate our children for the future. How might present and future generations make contact with a world in which tensions created by local, ethnic and indigenous rights are likely to compete with the requirements of the global marketplace? It follows that educators must not only ask to what extent human intellect can be developed and what are the best circumstances and approaches for enhancing such intellectual development, but also what *type* of intellect may be required for life in the twenty-first century. Put succinctly: What do humans need to know, what are the ways that humans come to know and how do we know they know what they know?

Globally, the concept and construct of knowledge is changing and this has inevitably impacted on education, its goals and the related curricula that attempt to meet those goals. The questions traditionally asked, such as “What is knowledge?”, “What is it to know?” and “What is a knower?” now require new definitions as the meaning of knowledge itself changes. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the new 2007 curriculum document insists that schools teach towards the global knowledge-economy, albeit while still attempting to meet local needs, thus creating a tension between community and the geopolitical world. The implication is that students will be trained to serve the ‘knowledge-economy’—a global network of information gathering and cultural and intellectual property trading—and this has implications for the stability of community life and for the grounded individual. Under this regime, knowledge has to be produced in order to bring financial gain, hence the association with the economy, and we should note that ‘producers’ traditionally have to create a working class to be at the centre of production whether what is being produced is tangible materials, services, or Web-based information. What is produced becomes a form of property and its production is for the purposes of ownership, traded for financial reward.

In questioning the nature of knowledge it would seem that government strategies suggest knowledge should be of economic benefit to the nation state. It is also widely accepted that knowledge requires some form of thinking, and once again the government, through its curriculum document, has decreed that thinking should be a part of things called *key competencies* and these competencies should take precedence over practical subject knowledge. This implies a mind/body divide, a theory that has had prominence since the Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century, such as Descartes, brought the matter to importance. Philosophical and psychological theories of mind abound and this has led Robinson (2006) to repeatedly comment that many people (such as academics) see the body only in terms of its being a transport for the brain. However, contemporary philosophical thought now considers the relationship between mind and world and the embodiment of mind to have important implications for educational theory and practice. Philosophy also challenges perceptions that humans are little more than mammalian computers solving complex problems in predictable and programmable ways.

### **Learning theories**

Piaget draws our attention to the ways in which knowledge develops in humans through a *genetic epistemology*, and this invites us to think in developmental terms about the potential of the mind and its ability to put context aside and think in abstract ways. Vygotsky takes this a little further when he notes that the development of higher mental functions, such as memory, attention, perception and abstraction, are connected to our social being. He also believes that how we *feel* about what we are learning is as important as *how* we are learning. In other words, we learn through both the cognitive and affective domains. For Vygotsky (1978), language is an important factor, because for children words are the beginnings of generalisations and their meaning is located in practices that constitute that meaning, what we might call *signifying practices*. Using appropriate words in the right place demonstrates an increasing sophistication, and sometimes children use sophisticated words ahead of simple words of similar meaning. But is it only words that do this? The arts are generally left out of such debate yet in music singing tunefully or placing selected sounds in appropriate places within the time and space continuum also shows a sophisticated use of musical vocabulary.

Bruner (1990) argues that assumptions that learners proceed from simple to complex, or fragments to whole, is grounded in 'folk psychology', and does not stand up to close investigation. He suggests our acts are shaped by intentional states and that these states are realised "only through the symbol systems of the culture" (p. 33) we identify with, adding that "culture is also constitutive of mind" (ibid). It is through this process that our acts become public rather than remaining private. But while culture can both constrain and contain our actions, it is also capable of devising what Bruner calls "prosthetic devices" which permit us to transcend our basic biological limits (p. 34), such as the limits on memory or our auditory range.

To take these concepts a little further we need to realise that to be a knower we have to be capable of making judgements, and not just be simply reacting with mechanical responses to stimuli. Rather than responding to the obvious offered by particular representations, we need to take account of their inferences because human knowing is not merely expressing a behavioural response, it also involves being aware of the implications and future possibilities of our actions.

In language, utterances as defined by Austin (1962) and Wittgenstein (1953) embody many more intentions than just a request, promise, or warning. For example, the simple phrase "I do" uttered in a wedding ceremony not only performs a ritual cultural function, it requires contextual preconditions, a sincerity of transaction, and essential conditions that define the nature of this speech act. In music, the four note, two pitched, utterance at the start of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* has been likened to 'fate knocking at the door' and was used by the German high command in World War II as a code signal, but neither of these uses applies to the original conditions of Beethoven's work and his own social and cultural existence.

Freire, a central figure in the field of critical literacy education, believes emotions to be an essential force in (adult) literacy programmes. All humans think, feel and act; they also communicate with each other, therefore feelings cannot be disentangled from reason, so education can be seen as being highly political in nature. Freire believes in real life situations as sources for critical problem-solving through the mutually-created dialogue of the teacher and student(s). Freire's notion of 'banking education' which maintains "the *submersion* of consciousness", contrasts with his

concept of a critical literacy that “strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (1990, p. 54).

For Freire, humans are historical beings, living in historical settings and contexts, who possess consciousness and are in the process of becoming. They are ‘beings of praxis’—a union of reflection and action—who live authentically only when engaged in inquiry and the creative transformation of the world. Humans act on the world which then stimulates their action and in turn acts back on them, and as they objectify and problematise the world they come to objectify themselves, knowing that they know and name their world. Problematisation means both asking questions and calling into question and so is a challenging attitude. The historical and cultural world must be approached as a created transformable reality which, like humans themselves, is constantly in the process of being shaped and made by human deed in accordance with ideological representations of reality. In the literacy phase, learners must see the hidden power of print and achieve print or musical competence so they might explore and interpret print or music as a discourse.

If we see identity as a socially, culturally and, for example, a linguistically or musically mediated construct, it becomes clear that how we enact or perform in particular settings is influenced by sets of social, cultural, political, economic, and historical relations. We strategically make and remake ourselves to gain certain types of agency within communities of practice, for we all have hybrid identities and our identity and our state of being are significant in meaning making. This has significant implications for how we read, see and hear the world, especially if we bear in mind the New London Group’s premise (1996) that text becomes anything from which we can construct meaning. This also implies that, as the views of society change, so too do texts in the ways they are constructed and communicated (Healy, 2008, p. 5). Therefore, a piece of music, a carving, a haka, a photograph can all be viewed as social and/or cultural texts; they tell us something about the time they were created and what they represent and also how we might interpret them today or in new contexts just as we interpret written language texts. These interpretations enable us to either read new possibilities or affirm the old in the particular text, opening up recontextualisations leading to transcultural repositioning or transnational understanding.

Our social and cultural background forms the basis for our transactions when we encounter a text and this allows new texts to be constructed from our interpretation, just as performing or moving to a piece of music might bring about new textual revelations and this can form part of our developing literacy in music.

### **New Literacies**

This paper recognises the application of literacy as a social and/or cultural practice and that what we think of a specific text can be discussed in terms of social theory rather than through the narrow educational measurement of purely cognitive skills. The various semiotic resources would then be exposed, including verbal, visual and audial signs, as well as other modes of representation which might usually be hidden in the electronic media dominated world. Viewing literacies as social practices enables us to challenge the notion of literacy as an autonomous event within an 'approved' space (Wilson, 2000) and we need to be reminded that literacy is a lived experience. Literacy is not autonomous and cannot be detached from specific social and cultural contexts, so whatever form the literacy takes, it can still shape identities.

Freire's (1990) notion of critical literacy involves analytic habits of thinking, reading, writing, speaking, or discussing which go beneath surface impressions, traditional myths, mere opinions, and routine clichés; understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text, technique, process, object, statement, image, or situation; and applying that meaning to your own context. From the view of a functional literacy model, Freire shows that literacy teaching can be structured in ways which stimulate illiterate adults to learn to read and write not only *words*, but *the world*. Using literacy to stimulate a fundamental ontological vocation, Freire's methods helped him empower his students to begin to change their world.

There are various recent theories on literacy and most fall under the heading of 'new literacies'; the most significant being the theory of 'multiliteracies' (New London Group, 1996) and the theoretical concepts surrounding 'situated literacies' (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000). These theoretical concepts recognise arts literacy (Ministry of Education, 2000), technological literacy (Tyner, 1998), critical literacy (Freire, 1990), among others, as the basis for meaning making. The New London Group claim that literacy pedagogy should connect with the changing social environment through

multiliteracies. They argue that the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in contemporary society call for much broader views of literacy than those portrayed by traditional language-based approaches. The New London Group maintain that the pedagogical use of multiliteracies will enable students to gain access to “the evolving language of work, power, and community, and [will foster] the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment” (1996, p. 60).

In coining the term “multiliteracies”, the New London Group (1996) seek more equitable social and cultural participation in education. They claim that literacy:

[n]ow must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. This includes understanding the competent control of representational forms that are becoming increasingly significant in the overall communications environment... (p. 61)

Meaning-making in our lifeworld often requires the interpretation of several modes of representation which might be integrated with the textual, such as the aural, the visual, the spatial, and the technological. The various expressions of media, whether mass or multi, give evidence to this. This implies the necessity for the valuing of diversity and viewing the world as a multiplicity of cultures, experiences, ways of making meaning and ways of thinking.

Not all symbols need to be marks on a page, for actions, gestures, and spoken or musical sounds can also be viewed as forms of symbolic representation. In order to communicate meanings to other people the participants must be able to use the same symbolic codes. They must speak enough of the same language in order to translate, be able to read visual images in roughly the same ways, be familiar with the production of sounds they would recognise as music, interpret body language, facial expression and gesture in similar ways, and be able to translate their own ideas and feelings into these symbolic representations. “Signs stand for or *represent* our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to ‘read’, decode or interpret their meaning in roughly the same way that we do” (Hall, 1997, p. 5).



Tyner (1998) suggests that there is a tendency to oversimplify the concept of *multiliteracies* which can be problematic. She further states that:

Multiliteracies suggest a splintering of literacy into discrete parts that belie the true nature of literacy as a complex and intersecting set of social actions...Because their competencies and characteristics overlap, multiliteracies are not necessarily discrete from one another, although there may be discrete facets to each articulation of literacy... Furthermore, the goal of the teacher is to expand the number of choices available to students. An understanding of the many literacies and their uses offers opportunities for students to become as proficient in as many literacies and learning styles as possible –not only those with which the students find an affinity. (p. 64)

This suggests cross-curricular approaches to education which can only be beneficial to students as knowledge connections are made. The New London Group note that the “revolutionary changes in technology and the nature of organisations have produced a new language of work. These are all reasons why literacy pedagogy has to change if it is to be relevant to the new demands of working life, if it is to provide all students with access to fulfilling employment” (1996, p. 66). This suggests that the New London Group are committed to a schooling that prepares students for the world of work, and de facto, to the knowledge-economy, perhaps overlooking the efficacy of being-literate.

In outlining the increasing complexity and inter-relationship between different modes of meaning, the New London Group identify six major areas in which functional grammars, what they call metalanguages (the active, generative description of language as a means of representation) define, shape, and explain patterns of meaning (1996, p. 78). These are the metalanguages of “Linguistic Design, Visual Design, Audio Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design, and Multimodal Design. Multimodal Design is of a different order to the other five modes of meaning; it represents the patterns of interconnection among the other modes” (ibid). This notion of learning by design is potentially a new form of learning theory, it caters for diversity, addresses a range of texts (as social, cultural and historical practices),

explores contemporary forms of communication, and enables working across learning areas and disciplines.

The implication for the arts is quite clear. Each of the above modes of meaning is central to the portrayal of the arts in at least one arts form. Even within a single arts form, hybridity can occur. For example, in popular world music the cultural musical forms and languages come face-to-face with modern audio electronics and the global music industry itself. The exponents of forms of world music might assimilate other musical languages (e.g., hip hop, soul, or jazz), as well as incorporating visual and gestural actions from other musical styles or cultures into their performance (especially if video is involved). This potentially highlights a need to view literacy in a cross-arts and cross-curricular way, otherwise teachers will be swamped by specificities as they endeavour to meet student needs. We must therefore ask: What is appropriate pedagogically for the incorporating of the arts into modes of multiliteracies?

Reconceptualising literacy as outside the purely functional reading and writing programmes makes it possible to accept the multiple functions that literacy might embrace in a given activity, with spoken language perhaps being replaced by more suitable or pliable symbols. Situated literacies, for example, are not just skills and competencies, they are an “integral part of social events and practices mediated through social interaction in the context of particular practices and settings” (Maybin, 2000, p. 197). The notion of literacy has to be responsive to social changes such as the prioritising of the individual, how we communicate in contemporary contexts, the technologisation of many media and the global reach of new technologies. Rather than assuming language is literacy and the means through which we always communicate, our literacy should be appropriate to the situation.

Becoming more literate in the arts has the potential to develop the mind and expand the ways in which we can express our ideas, feelings, beliefs, and values to better understand those of others. *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* document (2000) states that in the arts, “literacies are as important to people who make art as to its audiences. Makers and presenters of art works need to develop literacy in order to

structure ideas and communicate meaning. So too do viewers and listeners, in order to interpret works in an informed way as they bring their own perceptions, experiences, and values to them" (p. 11). Bearing a deliberate similarity to the ways through which textual literacy is developed, the document further states that:

Students develop literacy in each discipline as they:

- Explore and use its elements, conventions, processes, techniques, and technologies;
- Draw on a variety of sources of motivation to develop ideas and make art works;
- Present and respond to art works, developing skills in conveying and interpreting meaning;
- Investigate the discipline and art works in relation to their social and cultural contexts. (2000, p. 10)

The arts are forms of representation, modes of meaning and, significantly, "modes of information" (Poster, 1996). Engaging with the arts enables students to better understand themselves through the expression of histories and values, and the reflective processes that form and reform as transformations in our knowledge, skills and understandings are established. In the arts, we do not merely stand on the outside looking in, like some spectator; we stand on the inside looking out as a creator and communicator. Importantly, the arts are forms of inquiry. In *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (2000) I wrote that "in music, emotion, intellect, and imagination are articulated through sound" (Ministry of Education, p. 52) and it is this linking of the intellect with the body's awareness and perception that gives the arts such power in the world.

Aesthetic ways of knowing encompass personal, cultural and societal values, sensory perception, imagination, analysis and evaluation; they make us more acutely aware of our self, often through our body's responses, and are a form of embodied knowing and understanding. This makes possible a climate of cultural and sub-cultural pluralism in our schools and society as global arts forms are learned and expressed, and are given value and understood. This is especially important in New Zealand with its declared commitment to biculturalism and the arts are a particularly valuable

conduit for cultural and subcultural representations and modes of understanding. As teachers we should be aware of how students' experiences, values, and beliefs are either incorporated or shut out of the learning activities and how the various identities of the participants (students and teachers) are recognised by other participants (Lewis, Encisco & Moje, 2007, p. xii).

Our identities are mediated by the social and cultural constructs in which they appear, and identity can thus become a contested site. Identity includes the power relations that fall under Foucault's (1969/2004) notion of critical discourse and within these structures of power we usually find it prudent to be constantly making and remaking ourselves as our hybrid identity is brought into play. How we shape our identity in order to belong to a particular community of practice is of significance in socio-cultural theory, and the actions of these identities are mediated by language, music, or other symbol systems within the related context—social or cultural. These codes shape our relationship with a particular text but we can never presuppose the interpretations we might make in our discursive relations with the subjects, narratives and tools circulating in the system (Lewis, Encisco & Moje, 2007).

I propose a model for literacy based on the theories and concepts put forward so far in this paper. I remind the reader that our *intentional states* are realised through the symbol systems of culture, and *metalanguages* are the active, generative description of language (including those not based around words) as a means of representation.

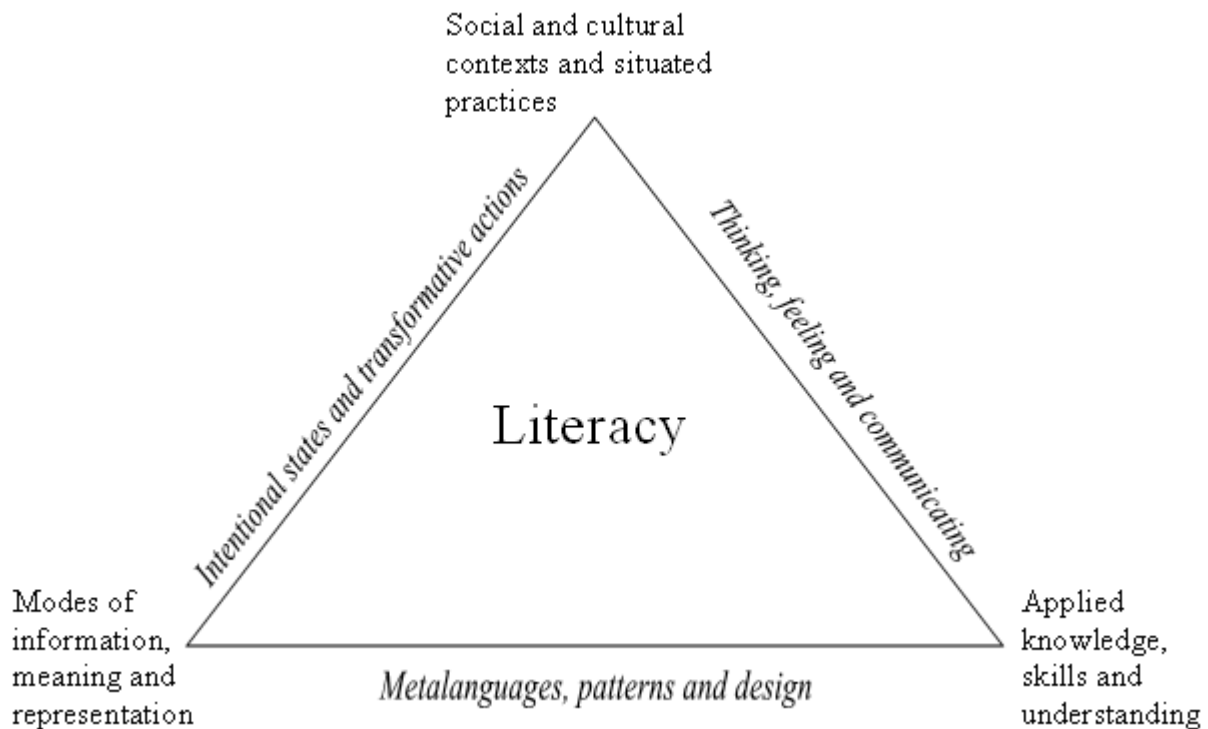


Figure 1: Model for literacy

While social and cultural theories have allowed us to explore the congruence of the social, cultural, and historical aspects of meaning-making with texts, we often find that the sensory aspects are omitted. Humans act physically upon their world through their inherent gestures, their seeing, their hearing — through embodiment. As beings in the world we recognise our embodiment in all that we do, and our body is an opening upon a world of hearing, smelling, tasting, seeing, touching—all of which have the character of being. Embodiment grounds us in the world and it “links thinking, imagining, being, doing, and interacting within worlds” (Thwaites, 2007, p. 11). The body is not some sort of bricolage that accompanies us wherever we go. It is a significant mode of praxis, informing our actions in day-to-day life and sustaining our sense of self identity.

Foucault (1977/1980) notes that the body and everything that touches it is the domain of genealogy (*Herkunft*), the equivalent of stock or descent. Genealogy is an analysis of descent and is situated within the “articulation of the body and history” (p. 148). Foucault claims the “body manifests the stigmata of past experiences and also gives rise to desires, failings and errors” (ibid). These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression and particular features and dispositions, “but

as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict" (ibid). The task of the genealogist is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (ibid).

### **Embodiment and music**

Giddens (1991) reminds us that "bodily discipline is intrinsic to the competent social agent" (p. 57) and he sees the body as transcultural in its actions as a continuous feature of daily life. Importantly, the agency of the body is integral to our "being accepted by others as competent" (ibid). The "reflexivity of the self *extends to the body*, where the body is part of an action system rather than merely a passive object... [and] awareness of the body is basic to 'grasping the fullness of the moment', and entails the conscious monitoring of sensory input from the environment" (ibid, p. 77).

We live in the world and our practical relation to space requires an explanation of the self and practical understanding. Our perceptions of the world must necessarily recognise our bodily engagement mainly because without this there would be nothingness—human beings integrate the corporeal into everything they do. In our daily interactions with the world, as we imagine, perceive, think, posit, and act, humans are embodied beings. Communication begins with gesture—this is generally followed by symbolic forms of representation and the consensus of an organisational structure, but the communicative intent begins with or reflects the highly personal—the body.

Words were originally meant to be spoken, but their need for expression has been redirected as their meaning becomes more removed from what the words represent. Newham (1994) even claims that words contributed to the loss of our sympathetic engagement with the world, "not least because the sung tones of affect and experience became appropriated by a spoken code of linguistics. The acoustic compositions of words became more and more abstracted from that which they sought to express so that eventually it was not necessary to experience and embody something in order to make it the subject of communication" (p. 24). Kivy (2006) urges educators to encourage the reading aloud of texts so that we can return to the

embodiment of text and thus break down the tensions between silent reading and the embodied performance of reading.

The role of vision, both internal and external, in imaginative behaviour is important as we also *see* the world. Whether engaged in a visionary search for some form of 'illumination', stimulating desire through ocular experience, or using mental representations in the 'mind's eye' as 'mirror reflections of reality' (Rorty, 1979), we envisage the world. Gaze behaviour, the way we look at one another, is a form of gesture of interest to social theorists, and Foucault extended this as he examined the regulation of society by various authorities.

Music used to be inseparable from the space in which it was performed—including social space. Nowadays we can listen to and physically engage with music from both a geographical distance and through the intimate space provided by devices such as the iPod. These new communicating and interpreting contexts can also affect the purpose and function of the music, even to the point that we can deconstruct, recompose, or alter music in almost any way possible simply by installing it on a computer with suitable software.

It is also important that we continue to *hear* the world, for sound has been an important transmitter of messages, warnings and emotions through time. If we only see the world, then we are open to a sensory reduction that can potentially limit artistic and creative potential. For Attali (2002), the world is not for beholding, it is for hearing; it is not legible, but audible (p. 3). Sound has a special relationship with time in that it only exists when it is going out of existence.

Our perception of the world recognises bodily engagement not merely by implication but by our embodiment in all that we do. For example, tone colours and sounds affect us and our state of mind; they present us with sensations and present meaning. Our spatial and temporal fixes establish the kind of auditory gaze that we put upon the world and this in turn establishes the possibilities available to us. The active transcendence of the subject in relation to the world comes from the experience which causes all perception to be perception of something. My body is my point of view of the world but we often only regard it as one of the objects in the world.

The acoustical phenomenon called the harmonic series, or overtone series, reminds us that all sounds are produced by vibrating bodies, which send out waves of varying frequency and amplitude. For example, any one of the strings in a piano will emit regular waves and we hear these as a musical tone. Some deaf persons with musical leanings can actually recognise musical intervals (such as a perfect fifth) simply through the vibrations they receive through their body, even though they cannot hear the actual sound. This raises the question: What does it mean to be 'deaf'? Are the ears the only way that we can 'hear'? These questions lead us to the assumption that the reception of any sound is an embodied experience, whether we hear it through the ears or via the body's response to physical vibrations, whether the sound we receive and interpret is music or language.

From the harmonic series, various cultures have derived different musical priorities, just as languages differ around the world. Musicians are affected by overtones (which produce the major and minor triads that we are familiar with today) and in Western Europe their power subsequently influenced the foundations of diatonic harmonic sensibilities. The predominance of the five-note pentatonic scale in many cultures around the world shows a different response to the harmonic series, just as the Greek modes were significant in Plato's time. The Hindu raga, with its semi and quarter tones, or the tight pitch-range of the traditional waiata of Māori, also represent other responses to the musical phenomenon from within a particular physical, cultural and geographical environment.

Our hands and gestures embody music both physically and emotionally, and our hands manipulate musical instruments through specific technical and expressive gestures to produce music as a way of being-in-the-world. In the performance of music, bodily gesture plays a significant role, both from the orchestral conductor's perspective, and from the gestures performers make on stage both as a part of their developed technique and to reinforce their musical communication. This is outside of any comment on musical gesture as a specific medium within a score or the sonic expressivities. An audience response to music demonstrates forms of gesture that are embodied activities. Our bodily engagement with the world encourages accounts of music which accommodate the gestural as a significant bodily mediated dimension at play in the reception and interpretation of music.



In performance performers access the body's potential. For example, pianists and drummers commonly use the whole body as a mode of expression, whereas a synthesiser or triangle player might not. Many vocal teachers believe that traditional singing within the mainstream art music repertoire requires the vocalist to 'reach down' into their body for tone colour, control and expression, often in ways that a pop singer using only the head voice might not. Performers in other cultural forms of music undoubtedly do the same.

The sensory-motor process might suggest that feeling represents a quality to oneself and movement suggests changing one's position in the objective world—no compromise seems possible, for they are distinct from each other. Merleau-Ponty (2002) writes that Bergson saw that the body and mind communicate with each other through the medium of time; that to be a mind is to stand above time's flow and that to have a body is to have a present. The body "is an instantaneous section made in the becoming of consciousness" (p. 91) and to feel emotion is to be-in-the-world.

Revealing a bodily basis of mind enables us to show how music and language are both a bodily and cerebral competence. In regarding the body as the corporeal centre "that integrates the entire range of human experience" (Bowman, 1998, p. 299), it becomes apparent that experiential structures learned by the body can be recognised in other embodied experiences that are similarly structured. In accepting the significance of life's experiences on the embodied mind, it becomes clear that these are not separable from music experiences. The meanings that people have lived and experienced require imagination and interpretation if they are to be communicated through music. People do not merely encounter sounds; they overlay them with meanings such as qualities, locations, and gestures (within the musical line) which reflect the lived musical experience. Tonality represents a movement of the body and music becomes a corporeal action in musical space.

The discipline of the body is an essential component of effective musical performance; the body becomes a social performance instrument that must be a pliant, yet controlled, tool for musical productivity. This control not only manifests itself through outward appearance but for many performers an appearance of complete relaxation and enjoyment becomes an embodied goal that hides the discipline and control at work within. As such, the body reflects history in the nature of the music and the

available instruments and other technologies available to it. The body is controlled by various regimes, the rhythms and silences of the music, the rising and falling of the pitches and dynamics, its harmonic and textural changes, the other performers and conductors, the audience, as well as factors such as values, diet, and states of mind.

Merleau-Ponty reasons our gaze, touch, hearing, and other senses are together by the powers of one and the same body integrated into one and the same action and this is what gives us our individuality and style. We are in a lived relationship with our body, and the “perceived world is a projection of the perceiving subject and is *relative* and *correlative* to him” (Madison, 1981, p. 30). The dimensions and structures of the perceived world exist only as correlatives of the lived body. Primordially we came to hear, see and know the world through our bodily engagement with it. This embodied knowing and understanding enabled our interpretation of the world, ensuring our survival and opening up new possibilities. I suggest that embodied experience was the first form of literacy.

### **Concluding statement**

This paper has challenged the concept of literacy education as being only the teaching of reading and writing word-based texts. The local, globalised and technological world is one that uses a wide range of signs, symbols, gestures and practices that are all ways of representing information and meaning. At the same time, education is shutting out the embodied self through pedagogical practices that appear designed to remove human participants from any sense of being-in-a-physical-world. Using music as an example, I have demonstrated that humans are physical presences in the world and it is through the body that the self comes to experience, to know and to make meaning in the world—through embodied knowing.

Bruner (1990) uses the phrase ‘acts of meaning’ to emphasise “the nature and cultural shaping of meaning-making, and its central place in human action” (p. xii). Our ontology of being, or what we might call the ‘self’, is built on a belief that certain modes of life deserve our support and endeavour. This might be in conflict with the kinds of performance that schooling, or particular schools, prioritise. But what does school performance mean outside the constructs of the knowledge-economy, credentialism, and the thrust for a homogenous learning preference?

The uses we make of our body are transcendent in relation to the body as a mere biological entity, drawing on its perception of historical ideas rather than its category within natural species. Words have meaning because they are inseparable from the world; speech possesses its meaning as the gesture does, for speech is a use the body makes of itself. This means that speech is not an operation of knowledge, but an existential function of the body as it projects itself outside in order to signify. The body is not just a thing, visible to the world, it is an opening in the world that brings to light, and through it the invisible world of meaning is made visible through the immanent use of the body itself and not through the derivative product of reason. This is not to imply that consciousness is reduced to just perception; all knowledge is reflexive knowledge, but there would be no knowledge if knowledge were not “a presence to and possession of oneself” (Madison, 1981, p. 52). Meaning does not exist apart from the onlooker, it does not exist in nature, it does not exist apart from the onlooker who perceives it; meaning is perceptual.

What does this mean for music? We must remember that music exists in time and space—terms such as high and low, fast and slow present the world through our bodies. Music is founded on bodily existence. Sound has no meaning until it receives a certain conceptual formulation of perceptual life; to become music (or speech) it requires the power of expression of the lived body. Because the body inhabits spaces “everything throws us back into the organic relations between subject and space, to that hold on the subject which is the origin of space” (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Madison, 1981, p. 29). Volume, height, depth, and the other variations of the perceived world’s spatiality, are ‘existential dimensions’ and “things co-exist in space because they are *present* to the same perceiving subject” (ibid).

The experience of our body teaches us to embed space in existence, a primitive spatiality of which “experience is merely the outer-covering and which merges with the body’s very being”, our body “not *in* space but *of* space” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 171). Space, symmetry, and line are an important feature of aesthetics, but this does not refer to some cerebral system of pleasure—after all, the aesthetic self is a combination of the theoretical and the physical.

Clearly, the body’s role in our daily lives and in our knowing is a central one. What is of concern is that in this mass-mediated age our bodies are reduced merely to actions

related to 'click and drag' functions. The body synthesises our physical actions, senses and thoughts; its role is not merely that of a physical object, and, for Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 174), it is also a "work of art".

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# RESEARCH REPORT

Elizabeth Anderson

## Abstract

*Report on the preliminary findings of an inquiry into teaching drama and the competencies in a reciprocal relationship. The first phase: what do teachers and students think the Key Competencies mean?*

## Introduction

In 2007 I planned a small scale research study in partnership with a low decile, multi-ethnic, urban primary school. In my role as teacher educator in the field of drama I was particularly interested in the proposed introduction in *The New Zealand Curriculum: Draft for Consultation* (Ministry of Education, 2006a) of a framework of five key competencies. I believed that this new curriculum element signalled that The Arts learning area and my discipline, in particular, could well provide a context in which the competencies might develop. The school I selected was interested in extending arts learning and in investigating curriculum initiatives with their staff. Thus, the researcher-practitioner partnership held potential for building useful teacher knowledge for us both.

The initial planned phases of the study were carried out, but direction and emphasis changed in response to context and situation, and the study was not completed as it had been projected. Ideas and themes that emerged from the first stages, however, were encouraging, revealing, and, most valuably, pointed the way to further investigation. This report gives an account of the process of the first phase and discusses the initial findings and ideas that emerged.

## Background to the study

Underpinning my study was a close examination of three key curriculum documents: *The New Zealand Curriculum: Draft for Consultation* (Ministry of Education, 2006a), *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000), and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). Each of these documents, in

conjunction with exploratory studies investigating the implications of the key competencies (Ministry of Education, 2006b), the findings of Boyd and Watson's (2006) studies in normal schools, and Reid's (2006) challenges to curriculum thinking, informed my interest in the key competencies as an area of research for drama education.

The inclusion of the key competencies in *The New Zealand Curriculum: Draft for Consultation* (Ministry of Education, 2006a) signalled a shift in emphasis following the revision process. It was recommended that the competencies be foregrounded, and that content be a means of mediating for the competency. For example, it was stated that the "development of the competencies is both an end in itself and the means by which other ends are achieved" (p. 29). Furthermore, learning areas are to provide contexts in which teachers will be able to observe students' progress in the key competencies as well as other aspects of their learning:

The learning areas provide unlimited contexts for such experiences. Whatever tasks the students are engaged in, teachers can observe their progress in developing the key competencies at the same time as they observe progress on other aspects of their learning (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 29).

When the *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* document (Ministry of Education, 2000) was developed, the theorising underpinning the four discipline grouping of dance, drama, music and the visual arts defined arts learning as a "way of knowing" which engaged thinking, feeling and imagining processes together. The concept of learning in this way holds connotations analogous to the holistic and lifelong dimensions of the competencies. Drama, in particular, has congruence with these aims. The arts curriculum describes its function in part:

[Drama] enables us to understand ourselves, the people around us, and the world in which we live, enriching the lives of individuals and giving voice to communities (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 36).

Drama enables students to try out responses in close-to-life situations, and to reflect on how these may apply in real life. The taking on of 'role' is central, and by seeing things from different perspectives students may come to understand themselves and

others better. Drama expresses ideas, feelings, and human experience, and its collaborative way of working fosters listening and communicating, bringing students together in a collective venture. The descriptors for the competencies in the new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) anticipate similar values.

Following extensive consultation the framework of five key competencies was confirmed as a key element of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). The curriculum draws attention to the concept of lifelong competency and to students “who will develop the competencies they need for study, work, and lifelong learning” (p. 6). It holds a vision for young people who are “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (p. 7). This direction is to be achieved through a set of supportive values working alongside defined key competencies, in turn through specified learning areas. It is also stated that developing the competencies will occur in social contexts, “shaped by people, places, ideas, and things” (p. 12). Furthermore, the competencies are to have ‘real life’ connections which “draw on knowledge, attitudes and values in ways that lead to action” (ibid).

Competencies are important human capabilities - integrated, holistic and complex, and essential throughout life. While not synonymous with skills, they do include knowledge, skills and attitudes needed across a range of life contexts. The curriculum identifies five key competencies: ‘Relating to others’, ‘Managing self’, ‘Participating and contributing’, ‘Thinking’, and ‘Using languages, symbols, and texts.’

The ways of learning and teaching practised in the arts, including drama education, are predicated on collaborative and social principles and learning is active, integrated, and holistic. In the arts, culture counts, motivation is intrinsic and, in the case of drama especially, understanding is gained in close-to-real-life situations. Arts pedagogy in this country aligns with the productive pedagogies of Australian curriculum thinking (O’Toole, 2002; Pascoe, 2002), and with theories of multimodality (Kress, 2000) and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). From the multiliteracies field, Hipkins (2006) also cites Gee (2003) who regards active participation as a requirement for literacy. Gee argued that people need to experience the world in new ways and to participate interactively (a situated cognition), gain literacy skills as a tool for learning, and acquire a critical perspective on the domain. In 2000, developing literacies in the arts was adopted as the central unifying idea for the arts curriculum in



this country which included the four separate disciplines of dance, drama, music and the visual arts, each with its own language. *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000) underscores the holistic participatory ways of knowing that are characteristic of the arts. It is stated that:

Developing literacies in dance, drama, music, and the visual arts enables students to grow and contribute to their schools, communities and cultures. It is an ongoing process of learning and participation ... (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 11).

The 2006 draft curriculum sustained that direction and wove those ideas into the framework of competencies. The 'Using languages, symbols, and texts' competency (hereinafter referred to as ULST) expresses an encompassing concept for languages which blends existing curriculum concepts, underpinning theory, and a future-focused perspective:

People use languages and symbols to produce texts of all kinds: written, spoken, and visual; informative and imaginative; informal and formal; mathematical, scientific, and technological. Students who are competent users of languages and symbols can interpret and use words, number, images, movement, metaphor and technologies in a range of contexts (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 12).

### **The aim of the study**

I concluded from my analysis of the curriculum documents and other research studies that drama and the competencies could work reciprocally, with benefit for both teaching and learning. It seemed to me a timely opportunity to build teacher knowledge about the competencies, since this was to become a new dimension to be added to teachers' work. I speculated about what the teachers and the students believed and understood about the competencies at this early stage of proposed introduction and was interested to see if working through a series of planned teaching and learning experiences in drama might shift and enhance their understandings.

**The research question was:**

How might teachers' and students' current knowledge and beliefs about the notion of key competencies be changed after involvement in planned learning and teaching experiences in drama?

**A further set of issues derived from the key question:**

- What do the key competencies mean in practice and how might they be enacted?
- How could we follow and notice children's learning in the key competencies?
- How readily might teachers accept drama as a vehicle for delivering the competencies?

**The research process**

In early 2007 discussions were held with the principal of the low decile, multi ethnic, urban primary school which I had selected for my study. The school population predominantly comprised students from Pasifika ethnic groups. The school was attracted to the possibility of exploring a small-scale introduction of competencies alongside a learning area new to the teachers' experience. Dialogue with the principal focused on the school's aspiration for its students to become more competent communicators and interpreters in the many codes in which ideas and meanings are expressed. At issue was whether and how learning through the medium of the arts might assist students' at this school to build capabilities at using, interpreting and responding to words, images, movement and metaphor. If students learned about recognising and decoding body, gestural and symbolic codes, would this let them access new knowledge and see their world from new perspectives? This aligned with my interest in drama, and our common aim in initiating a study of some aspect of the key competencies.

Together, the principal and I scaled the investigation to suit our capabilities. To make the research study manageable, and following the draft curriculum intent that "In practice, the key competencies are most often used in combination" (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 29), it was decided to focus on two competencies using drama as the subject area for learning and teaching. We also decided to work in two

classrooms, with a Year 4-5 class of 25 students who were mostly 8 to 9 years of age and with a Year 5-6 class of 26 students who were 9 to 11 years of age. Two teachers who had not previously made drama a regular part of their classroom programme elected to work with me over a two term period.

The research design was based on case study and action research methodology, adapted to fit a two term timeframe (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The process was planned for three stages—preparation, action and reflection—employing a number of data collection methods.

The first phase of the study was to investigate what teachers and their students understood about two selected competencies, 'Using language, symbols, and texts', and 'Relating to others'. The first step was a focus group interview with the two teachers. This interview established their current understandings of the notion of key competencies and how these might possibly be enacted in their classrooms. Together we refined our perceptions of the two competencies selected for inclusion in the drama strategies, and began to formulate a definition in operational terms. A parallel focus group interview with six students, made up of representatives from each class, in which they were invited to respond to a number of semi-structured questions, assessed their beliefs about the two competencies. These responses form the baseline indicator of understanding which will at a later stage provide the basis for post intervention comparison. These discussions informed the planning for the drama classroom programme.

In the second phase the two teachers and I planned drama experiences which were to incorporate the two competencies. The intention was for the teachers to then proceed with the drama experiences, linking them to the school's theme of 'Change'. During the term the teacher of the Year 4-5 class included five drama episodes which specifically addressed the competencies. The teacher of the Year 5-6 class included two episodes.

After the teaching sessions, or action phase, a third phase—reflection—was planned. This was to comprise another round of follow-up interviews, plus journal records,

teaching notes and observations from the teaching sessions. These would, we hoped, enable us to see whether enhanced understanding of the competencies had become apparent.

A further intention was for me to observe a selection of lessons and to record the drama episodes photographically. Consent was sought from, and granted by, the principal, Board of Trustees, and the teachers, students and their parents/caregivers to photograph (but not to video) the students doing drama. The examination of written artefacts made by the students as part of the dramawork was a further data collection method. Reflective discussion with the teachers about their teaching episodes provided additional data.

Being a small-scale venture, and based on case study and action research, the plan was open to adaptation—and this very soon became necessary. It was evident in the preparation phase interview with teachers that the process for the teaching episodes would need to be modified. In order to implement drama in their classrooms the teachers would require more support and mentoring than we had all anticipated. A workshop session was held in which I introduced the pedagogy of drama and modelled the approaches to be used in drama teaching. Re-planning the teaching episodes incorporated the language and process of drama education as a form of teacher professional development in action. Although the intention had been for me, as researcher, to take an observer role during teaching, the sessions were readjusted to become co-facilitated. These changes were designed to support both teachers and students and they produced some useful findings which will be reported at a later date. In one case, the series of five sessions was particularly successful, and students and teacher grew in confidence, spontaneity and competence. However, time and school pressures meant that final stages of the planned process were severely cut short. At the time of writing this report the final interviews have not been completed. Hence, this report focuses only on findings from the first phase.

## **Findings from the first phase of the study**

### **Teachers' perceptions of the Key Competencies and of RO and ULST**

The interviews were designed around the research question (previously stated). This provided substantial indications of what the teachers knew and understood at that point about the competencies in general, and about the two selected competencies, RO and ULST. The teachers revealed that they had a 'good sense' appreciation of the notion of key competencies, and of the rationale for their inclusion in the curriculum. They named the competencies and knew that they were holistic in nature, and were to be woven into the programme. For example, one teacher noted that "they're not taught isolated so every curriculum area will have these skills integrated into the programme". This teacher believed that the essential skills had been replaced by the competencies. She said, "basically it's the social and co-operative essential skill that's gone into what we call relating to others".

Although both teachers admitted that they were in the "early stages" of their understandings of the competencies, they grasped the curriculum's intention that they were part of a long term preparation for "ongoing learning and successful living" (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 29). As one teacher remarked:

[They're] key characteristics that we're wanting to build up in people so that they can function really well at the end of their school, that they're set up for success... It's a developing thing over the years...

Asked about what this innovation might mean, one teacher indicated that she could see that at times the competencies would have to be taught explicitly, and talked about, in order for children to develop a lifelong capability:

I think that for the children it will mean that they have a lot more discussion about values and that they become aware of the things that they can change in their own dealings with others... it's actually empowering in the end.

The draft curriculum outlines the competencies as "capabilities people need in order to live, learn, work, and contribute as active members of their communities" (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 11). These teachers echoed this when they expressed their sense that what they wanted was a match between the goals for their school, their community and their school culture. One remarked that:

What we would be aiming for in this school, as a school culture to have our students able to manage self, able to think, make decisions, connect with others, all those sorts of things.

However, when asked about what they would see in children as evidence of the specific competency RO, the teachers listed behaviours such as working together, taking roles and turns, understanding and accepting difference, and being able to lead and be part of a team. One teacher remarked that to notice those behaviours, teachers would need to observe children in many contexts, "different environments, giving them a variety of opportunities to show different relationships." This comment indicates that this teacher recognised that the competencies operate in a wider context than the classroom and have a more holistic significance than "a box to be ticked off on a lesson plan". While this might mean that teachers will need more time to notice and observe their students, it also reflects the intention for this component of the curriculum.

In contrast, the discussions about the ULST competency took a very different direction. Asked about the notion of ULST, one teacher cited "language symbols, maths, interpretation and communication" and "all forms of expression basically – movement, dance, art, their writing". Both teachers quickly moved the discussion towards what was uppermost in their minds – their concerns about the prospect of teaching drama, a new venture for them. One expressed a common anxiety among teachers starting out in this arts discipline. She described it as a "bit of a risky business. I think that for myself that's what sometimes is a little bit daunting about drama is that you're not sure where it's going to go." The practicalities, concern about control, and unpredictability were prominent in her comments:

For us as teachers I think it requires a certain amount of risk ...it's sort of unknown as to what the children will do, how they will respond and so if you want to ...you've got to let the rope out a little bit and allow for a little bit of looseness because it will take the children a little while to find, to be really clear about how it all works so you've got to not do it just once and give up, you've got to kind of keep on refining it, doing it, discuss, come back, evaluate, talk with the children, have another try...

Nevertheless, both teachers were keen to learn more about drama and to try it out in their classrooms. One saw common ground between children's play and creativity and drama. She noted that "they are creative... You watch them in the playground they can make up games...and that's a creative aspect that we need to tap into more as teachers..." This teacher admitted that she had much to learn about the strategies and management for teaching drama, remarking that, "we haven't actually learnt how to teach it in a structured way, group kids ... I've done sort of whole class general things and getting into this will probably help us". Both teachers were optimistic. One of them looked forward to engaging in this learning with the students when she said:

And it could change as well because you could learn from the children... Drama and creativity is about the children, what they can come up with instead of the teacher initiating the activity. I think that's the way I like to see drama, what they have to offer.

### **Students' ideas about RO and ULST**

The focus group interview with the six students was planned differently. Because the students could not be expected to have encountered the ministry's addition of competencies to the draft curriculum, the interview began with a brief description of them in child-friendly language. The students were then asked what they thought the ULST and RO competencies might mean.

For example, in relation to RO they were asked what they thought a person who was good at "relating to others" would do and be like. A number of responses included "welcoming", "making people feel safe", "getting food for them", "keeping them company", "tucking them into bed", and "helping them cross the road, old ladies". When asked how 'relating to others' might be shown at school, several mentioned "respecting and sharing", "going and asking a person to play with you", and "being honest and kind".

For the section of the student interview about ULST I had prepared symbols and images that would be representative of the language and codes of drama as the basis for discussion. This included active demonstration and conversational interpretation of photographs. These interactive components successfully engaged the students' interest. The majority of students showed that they had considerable prior knowledge about responding to the sort of gestural and symbolic language used in drama. The

questions probed their ideas about “ways of talking”, other than spoken language, that might be used in drama. Encouraged to show bodily how they might convey simple and easily accessible emotions such as strength or sadness, all eagerly demonstrated with face, gesture and stance. For example, when asked to ‘look suspicious’, they readily interpreted each other’s expressions, and could identify gestures such as “scratching head”, “staring”, and “scrunching their mouth” as ways in which suspicion had been demonstrated. To gauge their interpretations of ‘body language’ students were shown some sample photographs of others working in drama in a classroom setting. Their descriptions included: “This one is sad because she has her face down” and “He’s happy because he must have received something”. Shown a photograph of a family group cradling a jersey arranged to look like a baby, the students enthusiastically constructed a story around what they saw, piling responses upon each other:

To make it look...like a baby; because they’re all holding it... they’re trying to get a look at it; A good look at that face...; But it’s just a jumper.

To explore the students’ understanding of symbols, I presented the predominantly Pasifika students with some representative objects. Invited to describe what a ‘lei’ meant the students promptly associated it with the familiar cultural contexts of welcome, wedding, celebration, festival or family reunion. One student explained that “people come in the airport and welcoming them”. A plain candle produced three interpretations, showing that students recognised that the same symbol might have different meanings depending on context. First they cited “prayer” and “to welcome God into our house”. The next response was “The power is off and [you] have to use candles”, and the last was “Scared... because it is small”. This final response suggests that the child read metaphoric meaning into the size and solitariness of the candle. The response resonated with the draft document ULST descriptor:

Students who are competent users of languages and symbols can interpret and use words, number, images, movement, metaphor, and technologies in a range of contexts. (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 12)

These students demonstrated that while they may have had limited drama experiences at school, they brought knowledge about reading of symbol and non-



verbal language from their homes, cultures, the school and other media, including television.

### **Conclusions from the findings**

Four themes emerged from the interviews with teachers and students which begin to answer the research question, and which hold promise for further enquiry in the next stages of my investigation:

- The “good sense” knowledge that the teachers demonstrated about the competencies, showed that they could capably come to an understanding and a collective wisdom about what the competencies would mean in their school for their students. Their experiences will be valuable for assisting others in their school to implement the key competencies;
- The readiness with which students used symbol holds rich promise for being extended through drama. These students signalled that cultural and language links would be an area for further questions in drama experiences;
- ‘Using’ is the key to ULST. The interviews revealed that teachers will be challenged to show that through drama experiences students are ‘using’, and not just ‘interpreting’, the language and symbols of drama;
- My speculation that drama holds potential as an effective vehicle through which the competencies may be taught was confirmed. However, the tensions between teacher knowledge, pedagogy, and student learning are likely to be constraints on teacher actions.

Analysing the findings from the interviews has been a constructive exercise and provides useful groundwork for further investigation. The teachers’ responses were encouraging, and their willingness to build shared understandings was a positive pointer towards accommodating this change for the curriculum. They confirmed Hipkins’ (2006a) prediction that ULST would be the most difficult competency to understand, but the notion of drama teaching proved more of a hurdle than the competencies. Confidence grew with support, and one teacher, seeing her class’s

engagement in learning, was convinced of the value of the teaching approaches she had acquired. This will be ideal practitioner experience as a basis for further research.

Students' responses were heartening and illuminating. They were eager to participate in drama, they described their values of respect, honesty and care for others, and could interpret symbols in a familiar context. The students responded to the visual and gestural language used in drama, but it may be a challenge for teachers to show that students are 'using', and not just 'interpreting', language and symbols, to meet the curriculum intention that competencies be applied in ways that lead to action.

Lastly, my own educator instinct about the competencies and the arts was affirmed – and my researcher sense was awakened when I realised that the very competencies I had set out to observe were in fact embedded in the way the teachers and I had been working together. The experience alerted me to the significance of the cultural issues involved, and to the notion that our understandings of the competencies with their lifelong dimension will be culturally informed. The cultural significance of use of language and symbol will be rich material for exploration through drama. Cultural issues will also inform the very concept of competencies, and the ways that schools support their students to develop the competencies. This is a promising direction for further research.

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## COMMENT

### LIAM'S STORY: CONNECTING MUSIC RESEARCH TO MUSICAL REALITY

Lynne Anderson

#### Abstract

*The recent media interest in getting children involved in music has prompted me to reflect on the music development of a four year old boy in my extended family. This commentary is offered from the perspective of a music educator in the early childhood sector. Liam is my God daughter's son, affectionately known as my 'great God son', because I happen to think he is just great.*

#### Introduction

I contend that Liam's development does not align with Piaget's view of the child as a "lone scientist who works as a solitary agent" (Ebbeck, 1996, p.27 in Barrett, 2003, p. 67), but with social cultural theories, which see the child as one who "learns through a socially mediated process that is supported by adults and more expert others" (Rogoff, 1993, in Barrett, 2003, p. 67). Campbell (2000) also argues that "although children are musical without expert guidance, they become more so as a result of it" (p. 37). I strongly believe that the encouragement of significant others, musical or not, in children's musical endeavours greatly enhances their development in music. In my view it is not the musical ability of parents that makes the difference but the high level of support that children are given. Young (2003), for example, claims that children's sense of themselves as musical is already being formed through their interaction with adults; that children who see adults being actively musical will begin to absorb and imitate this active engagement in musical exploration. Music provides opportunities for children and families to interact, develop understanding of their heritage, and enjoy shared experiences. Music has been a powerful thread that has woven many families and children together and provided them with a special identity (Isbell & Raines, 2003).



*Photo 1:* It is within such an environment that Liam is immersed, surrounded by his whānau who on any given occasion have music as an integral part of the gathering.

### **Research interwoven in the story**

Researchers have discovered that music development occurs before birth. Zoltan Kodály, a Hungarian ethnomusicologist and educator, believed that music education of the young child should start nine months before the birth of the young child's mother (Meier, 2003 in Greata, 2006). In this story that person is Mary, my best friend since our school days. Although it could be said the Mary was not naturally musical she was an enthusiastic member of the college choir, and took part in school performances and local operatic society productions with me. Mary has supported my musical journey for over 40 years and continues this today along with the extended whānau. Mary and husband John made sure that their daughter Jac, Liam's mother, was given every opportunity to learn the piano, flute and guitar; interests which have endured.

Hearing is the first of the senses to be developed in the foetus, and unborn babies as young as 16 weeks will respond to music (Young, 2003). Babies are not only able to hear and listen to music before birth but they also remember and recognise this music after birth (Glover & Young, 1998; Young, 2003). Liam's mother sang to him throughout her pregnancy because she believed that as a neonate Liam would relax the moment he heard those songs. She reported that the child responded quite differently to these songs than to other music he was to hear later. Interestingly, Jac also told me that Liam's father, Damen, used to read stories to him before birth and the response to dad's voice, marked by vigorous kicking throughout the story, was the same each time.

Gittins (1998, in Barrett, 2003) suggests that, just as children have very different childhoods, determined by gender, class, ethnicity, and family households into which they are born, so do children have very different musical childhoods. These are determined by the socio-cultural factors mentioned above and the musical culture in which they have 'agency'. Being an active agent in their musical world, rather than a passive receiver, underlines the notion of children as musically competent, as advocated by both the Ministry of Education (1996) and Barrett (2003).



*Photo 2:* Agency for Liam included the freedom to 'play' the piano as soon as he could reach the keys, indicating the preferences for which CD-ROMs he wanted to hear, and free reign to pull out all the pots and pans from Mary/Gram's or mum's pot cupboard and turn them into a drum kit.

The musical cultures children encounter in various contexts provide rich opportunities for the exploration of their own musical capacities and the development of skills and understandings in a range of musical practices (Barrett, 2003). At two and a half years old Liam had already experienced a wedding and two funerals. Even now, at four years of age, he requests the songs sung on those occasions, although 'Turn on the Sun' was called 'Turn on the vacuum cleaner' until he better understood the metaphor!

Tarnowski (1999) contends that musical play (being an intrinsically motivating activity that is pleasurable to the participant) should be something in which the goal is engagement in a process rather than achieving a product. This claim is supported by Young (2006) who suggests that typically, in relation to singing, early childhood music education tends to focus on children learning to perform a range of children's songs, which does little to encourage children's self-initiated musical activity.

Likewise, Willingham (2002) suggests that while we might lay claim to creativity as being one of the cornerstones of our musical endeavours, we are strongly rooted in the performance tradition. This results in the virtual absence of creative problem solving processes in music education teaching and learning processes. Hansen, Bernstorf and Stuber (2004) hold the view that “what may appear to be play (when children laugh, sing and move) is in reality an active, engaging, and authentic learning experience” (p. 16). It is logical then, that if the purpose of education is to learn, play and musical play in particular, supports this goal (Hansen *et al.*, 2004).



Photo 3: Whilst singing has always been a cornerstone of our whānau gatherings, Liam has frequently organised an orchestra for the whānau, distributing the instruments, conducting us with his baton, and ensuring that we heed changes in tempo and volume according to his conducting.



*Photo 4:* Recently Liam has pursued the art of busking within the family environment; setting out the instruments and having his instrument cases and covers open for, as he says, “the money people give us when we make music”. While this could potentially become an expensive pastime for us, he is at the stage where, when finished ‘busking’, he ensures that we all get our money back. For how much longer I wonder?

Kenney (2004) talks about the affirmation we give children as visual artists. Children’s art work is displayed on the wall in early childhood centres and in photographic documentation in portfolios. The art work is displayed on refrigerators at home and sent to adoring grandparents for proud exhibiting. The young child is a budding artist, whose efforts are praised and encouraged. This raises the issue of how we nurture children as composers or musicians. From my perspective there tends to be little interest in, or support for, children’s spontaneous musical behaviours. Kenney (2007) suggests that, whereas visual artists express their ideas through paint and similar materials, media composers use sound to express their ideas. Generally, such sound exploration by the young composer is labelled as ‘noise’. According to Kenney (2004), “This natural curiosity for sound is at best tolerated and at worst not acceptable” (p. 2). I believe that many teachers do not understand children’s musical exploration as a bona fide part of their holistic development. Young (2003) suggests that direct instruction, with a sense of one ‘right way’ to play the instruments, may close down the child’s inclination. What the child needs most of all are pleasure, approval and encouragement of the sound making activity.



*Photo 5:* Liam is affirmed for his musiking. His family enthusiastically supports his sound exploration and frequently become involved in the experience, as evidenced by this photo of Liam and his dad enjoying a jam session together.



It is most important in the early years to foster a positive disposition as an active music maker; to sing, to play instruments, and to move. If spontaneous efforts and activity are largely ignored, or at worst curtailed because they are noisy, or if 'boys don't sing', then both conscious and subconscious effects drive deep into the sense of self as musical. Once absorbed, such negative dispositions are very resilient (Young, 2003). Kenney (2004) declares that:

Our knowledge of early childhood tells us that the early years are the most important for developing the foundation upon which all other learning will take place. Thinking of music in terms of basic concepts rather than specific skills will guide how we build curricula so that we can provide a broad music foundation for little children (p. 5).

I believe that young children need to experience the concepts of pitch, duration, form, dynamics and timbre. Music environments carefully prepared and facilitated by the teacher are one of the most effective ways to provide this foundation. The understanding and labelling of these elements, as well as specific skill development, will likely occur later. A supportive early home environment from the outset, one that encourages spontaneous expressiveness, is important for optimising musical achievement. Rogoff (1990) suggests that best learning is situated in a social context which she refers to as situated learning. This is based on the activity theory and social construction or appropriation of knowledge and skills rather than cognitive theory of learning based on the individual construction of knowledge.

Laevers (1996 in Niland, 2007) recognises engagement as being an essential ingredient of quality early childhood curriculum. Her research demonstrates that when children are engaged in experiences they demonstrate high levels of focus, intense mental activity, and creativity. This view is supported by Young (2003) and Kenny (2004) who maintain that children learn by interacting with their environment. They construct their own knowledge by trying to make sense out of whatever is around them, and they develop skills by manipulating what they find interesting.



*Photos 6 & 7:* This engagement with the environment was enacted by Liam at a wedding. I was fascinated by his response, at two and a half years of age, to the live music. He was captivated by the trio and stood quite still and watched and listened for a considerable time. Two years later he can recall the music he heard and saw performed at the wedding.

Wolf (2001, in Hansen *et al.*, 2004) asserts that the use of music – in particular rhythm and rhyme - enhances memory. “When used in conjunction with movement such as finger plays, this educational strategy provides an extra sensory input to the brain and probably enhances the learning” (Wolf, 2001, p.166, in Hansen *et al.*, 2004). Children often sing or chant words that they have created “to help them replay previously learned information” (Hansen *et al.*, 2004, p. 28) or simply for the joy of using language in music.

One of Liam’s favourite songs from this extensive repertoire is ‘Morning Town Ride’ when he insists ‘his verse’ be sung; “Pa at the engine, Gram rings the bell, Liam swings the lantern to show that all is well”. He demonstrates the joy of word play as he sings “Away in a manger no crib for a bed, so little Lord Jesus had to sleep in a hedge”, and then he dissolves into great laughter at his joke. I believe it is vital to understand and believe in the value of play in and through music in order to support learning and language in young children.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Research into the value of music is comparatively new (McPherson, 2006). However, preliminary studies into the influence of music on brain development (Flohr, Miller, & de Beus, 2000; Rauscher, Shaw, Levine, Wright, & Newcomb, 1997), show the positive impact of music on other curriculum subjects (Kelstrom, 1998), and the

emotional connection to music suggest that it should be given more recognition, rather than be an unnecessary frill "that gets in the way of what is deemed to be the more serious subjects" (Plummeridge, 1991, p. 7) .

With so much to gain and nothing to lose I believe that it is vital that all children should not only experience music but also be actively encouraged by significant others to sing, listen, play, move, and create.

As educators of young children, we have an opportunity to support budding young composers by providing an environment that nurtures their natural sound exploration. If we can think of these little ones as composers and can tolerate the creative fallout (noise), we might support the development of a generation of composers (Kenney, 2007, p. 2).

As Cohen (2002) says, if we "curb the urge to teach; don't interfere if there is no need; unless there are signs to the contrary, assume that the [child] is doing something that is worthwhile for him or her; treat the [child's] work with respect; if we feel impatient, work on our impatience or walk away" (p. 223), then we are giving children the very best start to their lives. Liam's musical development is testimony to the unconditional support and encouragement given to him by significant adults in his extended family.

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## COULD DRAMA BE A CATALYST FOR THE DESIGN PROCESS?

Chris Horne

### Abstract

*My role as a drama lecturer in primary teacher education at the Faculty of Education underpins the professional perspectives presented in this paper. Stimulated by the underlying principles of collaborative cross-discipline teaching and transformational learning, I have recently been challenged to explore possible links between drama and the design process of technology education. From my previous research I have noted that drama can promote playful exploration, and allows time for the incubation and refinement of ideas through reflective processing and peer collaboration. Technology education promotes opportunities to combine the aesthetic with the functional—artistic and practical solutions that meet human needs and wants through products, systems or environments that enhance the quality of life (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 6). Both drama and design encourage learning through finding multiple solutions, valuing imaginative thought and unexpected outcomes, risk-taking and personal responsibility. Both may be expressed through multi-dimensional representations: drama through moving and positioning bodies and objects in space, and design concepts expressed through drawing, graphics, models and structures.*

### Prior research underpinning new explorations

Until recently my research interest focused on how drama can influence the way students communicate meaning through visual art—from idea conception to the reflection on the finished artworks. My collaborative drama and visual art project *Putting the Drama onto Paper* (Horne, 2005) identified how drama experiences can support students to make visual art works and how effective drama-based strategies can be used by teachers to enhance visual art making. The project was based on a collegial partnership between two specialist teachers, myself in drama, and Kathie Boyd, a visual art specialist at a secondary school. Underpinning the study was our shared understanding of the complexities of each other's disciplines. As a starting

point we identified some commonalities between drama and visual art, such as the use of tension/mood, movement/rhythm, stance/form, spatial awareness/composition and the use of contrast. Both Kathie and I considered it important that we, and the class of eighteen Year 8 students involved in the project, understood the underlying concepts of each discipline and were able to use discipline-specific terminology. This enabled my colleague and I to discuss these links with the students so that they could identify and apply these shared understandings in order to develop their ideas. The art and drama sessions were alternated and linked in a seamless way so that students moved between the two disciplines readily. The aim was to provide opportunity for a holistic exploration of ideas, which promoted flexibility, problem solving skills and creativity.

### **Possible links between drama and the design process**

The concept of transformational learning, which underpinned the research project between drama and visual art, continues to influence my thinking about cross-discipline teaching. Transformational learning describes how understanding in one context can be expressed and extended in another. Bruner (1965) considered this act of learning to involve three simultaneous processes: the acquisition of new information, the transformation of knowledge to make it fit new tasks, and reflective processing. O'Toole and Dunn (2002) further describe this process as being able to express physical and emotional experiences in reflective tasks such as writing, art making and design. On the basis of these precepts, I came to the conclusion that drama could become a catalyst for transformational learning whereby its sensory, emotional and physical impact could be expressed in reflective visual art making.

To deepen my understanding of the design process I began discussions with Ann McGlashan, a Technology lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, about the findings of her Masters research project, *The Design Process: Design as an Individually Negotiated Process of Reflexive Practice* (McGlashan, 2005). McGlashan's project explored the creative processes of herself, and three New Zealand designers: David Trubridge, Carin Wilson and Dean Poole. As a consequence of reading McGlashan's research I concluded that there are commonalities between the designers' descriptions of their approach to creative processing, my own research, and the underlying principles of creativity and imagination.

## **Commonalities between the disciplines**

### **The Importance of Play**

It emerged from my discussions with Ann McGlashan that the importance of play was a common theme of both our research findings. Each of the designers in her study made reference to 'play'. This incorporated a broad range of concepts. Trubridge and Wilson discussed how playing with materials can generate ideas. Trubridge went on to reflect on the need for designers to take time to play with materials to understand their properties and how different materials can interplay with each other. Some of the designers also discussed an attitude of being willing to make mistakes and to learn from these as part of the process of play. Wilson considered that engaging in play and using an unstructured approach was fundamental to his creative discovery process. These designers valued risk-taking and 'embracing not knowing', as this created a state of discomfort where they were challenged to explore new options.

The importance of play in stimulating the imagination was one of the key findings of my own research project. Our students were encouraged to carefully observe images, objects and each other's behaviour, and to play and experiment with ideas and various media. They had the freedom to take risks and try innovative ideas in whatever activity they were involved in throughout the project. Within both disciplines students were challenged to ask questions, learn from their mistakes and make their own decisions. Students worked collaboratively to initiate, develop and communicate ideas through informal drama presentations, descriptive writing and preliminary paintings and sketches that connected the emotional, cognitive and physical domains.

Some of the conventions and elements within drama promote play within a safe environment. Drama facilitates risk-taking because the participants are protected by taking on a fictional role that "is not constrained by the child's current identity, nor by other people's expectations ... and the daily assumptions of who they are" (Atkin, Price & Fraser, 2007, p. 45). Within the distanced time and setting of drama, students can make choices knowing that they will not experience any real life consequences. Through the 'Teacher in Role' convention, the teacher adopts a lesser status than that of the students. In this role reversal of the traditional teacher/student relationship, the teacher is the person seeking advice, and the students take on the status of 'the experts', those who have the knowledge and expertise, as co-constructors of the

drama alongside the teacher (Anderson, Chiaroni, Dreaver & O'Connor, 2006). This empowerment of students gives them freedom to take risks and to take responsibility for developing solutions to the problems they are presented with.

Play also develops the ability to cope with uncertainty, to explore new ideas and to look at a problem in a variety of ways. It allows the opportunity to make new meanings and associations for actions, objects and materials (Fraser, Henderson, Price & Jones, 2007, p. 54). For example, Bruce (as cited in Craft, 2000, p. 46) describes play "as an integrating mechanism enabling us to bring together everything which we know, learn, feel and understand". Play enables us to gain information through the senses and to 'know' through practical experiences what the medium, body, instrument, or material is capable of.

### **Time for ideas to emerge**

Another commonality Ann McGlashan and I discussed is the need to allow time for ideas to develop. For her "the timeless climate significantly supported the development of more creative work" (McGlashan, 2005, p. 82). The three designer-participants in McGlashan's research claimed that it is time that is required for the incubation of ideas. For example, Poole talked about allowing time for ideas to sit. Trubridge stated that "the designer must live with the problem around him and be prepared to wait for the solution to present itself" (as cited in McGlashan, 2005, p. 39). Wilson discussed the need for the freedom to take time to allow for a slow unfolding of thoughts and observations.

One of the underlying principles of drama is that time is necessary for meaning to emerge gradually. A tenet expressed by Byron (1986, p. 135) for example is "Work slow, work deep". He suggests that students need time to grow into the experience, their role, and the language register required for the viewpoint they are adopting. Drama builds slowly in order to establish belief and comfort in the role and imagined context. By constraining the action students are given time to think more deeply and to consider different perspectives (Anderson & Dreaver, 2004).

### **The value of reflective processing**

The importance of reflection and refinement of emerging ideas, and of constantly reworking the design and the prototype, was emphasised by Trubridge (McGlashan,



2005). Poole also saw design as a series of incremental differences in making something better over a period of time. Wilson discussed how he allows the interplay of his conscious and subconscious until a solution emerges. This reflective processing is also discussed by Mawson (2001) who considered that design thinking involves a process of immersion, contemplation and reflection.

In my research project, I noted that the students used the reflective processing skills, which they initially developed and practised in the dramawork, to plan their artworks. They were asked to solve problems, negotiate a shared understanding of the purpose of their artworks, to refine their decisions, and to evaluate their final artworks. The visual art making essentially became a reflective process where students could transform their emotional, cognitive and physical drama experiences into a tangible product (Horne, 2007).

Anderson and Dreaver (2004, p. 26) state that "Reflection is crucial to learning in drama. It occurs both during the dramatic action ... and after the action has concluded ... it's the spur for further action as new questions come up for exploration". This process of reworking and refining—the cycle of action and reflection—is a dynamic process. In *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000) reflection is considered fundamental to effective teaching and learning.

### **Collaborative development of ideas**

Although most of the designers in McGlashan's study discussed their own creative impetus, Poole also elaborated on the benefits of collaboration with peers. He described how conversations between people who think differently, based on their own personal experiences, promotes new ways of thinking through the transfer of ideas. This allows for ideas to be extended and refined into concepts that bring about change.

In my drama research project Kathie Boyd and I endeavoured to foster a collaborative relationship between the students and ourselves by valuing their ideas, expertise, and questions. They were given opportunities to structure their own work, make their own decisions, and to be self-directed learners. I considered that "working collaboratively in small groups was integral to the creation and development of ideas in both drama and art" (Horne, 2007, p. 18). Grouping the students in this way facilitated reciprocal

feedback, suggestions, questions, clarifications and comparisons in order to negotiate collective insight.

According to Hatton (2001, p. 28), working collaboratively in drama “involves the participant negotiating the representation of role, narrative and symbols with other individuals. Therefore, meaning making in drama is an inherently dialogic and socially constructed process”. Nicholson (2002) also sees drama as a collaborative art form that depends on mutual trust and cooperation rather than individualised learning practices.

### **Immersion, the imagination, and creativity**

The immersion phase of the creative process is unique for each designer in McGlashan’s study. The development of their individual ways of working involved finding either a natural or a man-made space, and this became a physical or psychological environment that supported the generation and development of ideas. Each designer stresses the importance of having a place where they felt safe due to the presence of familiar objects and images, and in which they could allow themselves to be immersed and influenced by their senses and memories of people, places and events.

Similarly, drama provides an immersion experience by creating a rich sensory environment through the use of objects, sound, movement, images and role in order to build an imaginary fictional world. Within this fictional world students inquire into the reasons for and the consequences of human behaviour as a way of understanding their own and others’ lives. Drama provides students with holistic experiences that allow them to link their prior knowledge and experience with different roles and perspectives, which challenges them to think and act differently.

Duffy (1998, p. 19) defines the ability to imagine as being able “to pretend, to detach from the tangible world, to move beyond concrete situations, contemplating what is not but might be”. She describes creativity as being able to see things in fresh ways, going further than the information given and connecting the previously unconnected in a meaningful way. Duffy considers that while creativity and the imagination are not the same they are clearly linked; imagining is the ability to visualise what does not exist, while creativity turns these pictures into reality.

## **Drama as a catalyst in the design process**

Drama and design both involve the use of the imagination and creativity. Both draw upon an ongoing process of immersion where the freedom to play with materials and ideas over time and reflective processing refines these imaginative ideas into tangible creative outcomes. From my experience in linking drama with visual art making, I see a similar potential in identifying commonalities and in teaching collaboratively with design colleagues.

As Ann McGlashan and I continue to explore the links between these two disciplines it becomes a possibility that the way in which drama can facilitate the slow development and deepening of ideas may be a key influence on the design process. We plan to create opportunities for drama to be used to initiate and extend playful exploration of ideas and the potential of peer collaboration to further enhance idea development and concept refinement. We see the possibility that drama could add that 'extra something' that inspires imaginative and creative design. Using drama as a catalyst for students to think and respond imaginatively within the immersion phase of the design process may enhance the development of innovative design products.

If something has gone through the full creative process, from art to design to craft, it will have a good chance of being good design. In New Zealand we love to exalt the ordinary and extol the virtues of things that are efficient and functional...but it's the extra something that goes beyond that – the element of magic, or emotion, or a strong story or message – that makes really good design. New Zealand is not as good at valuing or expressing that as many other countries are. As a result we lack the more poetic or truly uplifting elements in our design. (Trubridge, as cited in Gibbons, 2007, p. 24)

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**REVIEW - TALKING MY WAY THROUGH CULTURE:  
AN EXHIBITION BY JILL SMITH**

**Elizabeth Anderson**

In 2007 Jill Smith reconceptualised her research as art practice, taking the academic discourse which had been the substance of her doctoral journey over the previous four years and re-presenting it as an installation of art works. *Talking my way through culture* opened at the Blue Orange Gallery, 30 September–21 October 2007. At the formal opening of this, Jill's first solo exhibition, Māori artist and former secondary school art teacher, Fred Graham, spoke of her extensive contribution to visual arts education in Aotearoa New Zealand and of his pleasure at witnessing her emergence as an artist. The attendance at the opening of so many of Jill's family and friends, former and current students, and colleagues from the Faculty of Education, was testimony to the esteem in which she is held.



*Photo 1: Jill with The ultimate cultural icon (detail)*

In the catalogue, Peter Smith, the Exhibition Curator, recorded the essence of Jill's thesis and its argument. "We all inhabit our own cultural space", he wrote, "and our life experiences and inheritances will shape our conceptions of what constitutes art" (catalogue, p. 3). As artist and educator Jill has become increasingly aware of the colonising of our New Zealand arts and of visual arts education in this country. She scrutinised the arts curriculum declaration that "the arts and culture are inextricably interconnected", and, motivated by a sense of professional responsibility towards an increasingly multicultural population, set out to critically examine visual art education practices in a field work investigation in a sample of Auckland secondary schools. Her research traversed all those questions, and her installation Talking my way through culture transposed that academic discourse and research findings into visual art. Through this process Jill completed a reflective circle - from artist to educator, to researcher, to artist.

This was a major venture – a re-interrogation of her ideas and the literature she had painstakingly researched; a selection of interpretations of art and culture which held the power and potential to provoke; the re-creation of the ideas in artistic form, and the practical making of fourteen magnificent 'talking sticks'. Presented in a ceremonial circle, re-conceptualised from the notion of the 'talking stick circle', the fourteen sticks stood tall in the circular space, and 'spoke' of art, culture, lives and traditions.



The concept of talking sticks holds a multilayered significance. Talking staffs are used in Māori marae ceremony to indicate authority and mana – the context which originally sparked Jill’s interest. The staffs are used as a memory aid for the recitation of whakapapa, and they signify an orator. In other cultures they encode messages, and are the tellers of stories, the carriers of lore and custom. The talking stick circle, Jill recorded in the catalogue, was in ancient cultures a means to assist decision making, its circularity a symbol for the understanding of life’s mysteries. For her art works Jill drew upon these concepts, to give the sticks (rather than an orator) a voice. “The sticks in my exhibition”, she said, “thus ‘speak’ of differing interpretations of art and culture and their significance for art education” (catalogue p. 6). As research, they are the means of telling and transmitting the story of the colonising of art and visual arts education. As art works, they demonstrated that art can function as a creative means of re-interpreting and re-presenting research, and as a ‘voice’ with which to challenge pedagogical practices.

These fourteen talking sticks stimulated us, drew us into conversation, and invited debate. Peter Smith had cautioned in the catalogue that while the works may at first view be “seductively attractive”, they make a sharp commentary, and challenge our assumptions, judgements and prejudices. In this sense, the sticks were more like a prod, a sharp stick, a poke in the eye for the viewer. Jill questioned assumptions, and prodded us to talk about and reassess our own. In this, the talking went well beyond the walls of the gallery. In fact, the conversations about the works have continued within the circle of dance, drama, music and visual arts lecturers in our school and with other colleagues in the faculty.

Jill’s talking sticks were mounted on pedestals, allowing us to view - and talk – from and about their many facets. Each was constructed around an underlying stick made from materials such as dowell, acrylic tubing, balusters, fence battens, and individually carved wooden forms. A striking feature of the talking sticks was the beautiful crafting of each (“so Jill”, I heard one viewer say), impeccable attention to detail (“very typical of Jill”, said another), and the deliberate selection of media and minutiae with which the messages on each were conveyed. *The ultimate cultural icon*, for example, featured eighty representations of the Mona Lisa, each in a slide mount. With this stick the artist comments ironically on the ‘projection’ of that image as a supreme example of high culture, and reproduced in so many contexts. She is

nudging us to think about how pervasive high western art still is in art and in education, and to consider how that image of its own accord has captured imagination, and has been captured in turn in the slide for the purpose of 'projection.'

The talking sticks had their voices realised in the discussions prompted around the circle. Some started a conversation. *The women's circle* – an acrylic tube containing circular bands of fragments of embroidery, lace, quilting, sewing, beading and knitting, and texts which proclaimed the crafts of women - was frequently encircled by groups of women (of a certain age!) who clearly identified with these pleasures. This stick offered resistance to the promotion of élitist forms of fine arts, and the voices of predominantly male artists and authors which, claims Jill, dominate art and art history curriculum. There were exchanges of ideas around two sticks - *Bottled Godzone* and *Hands on the land* - which challenged the way material objects have been adopted to signify culture. The first was an acrylic tube full of bottled paraphernalia (such as tiki, paua, fern, jandals and Māori dolls) and topped with a cork. This talking stick supposedly "represented" New Zealand culture. On the second stick, landscape images were inserted into the niches of an old fence batten. At one level the images could be read as a snapshot history of landscape painting in this country. On another, they raised questions of how the 'land' in New Zealand is regarded. Although the images depicted the 'managed' and the 'imagined' land, these could simply be seen as superficial representations of New Zealand culture. These two talking sticks, which provoked us to conversation on many levels, drew attention to the way in which art education addresses how our culture is manifested.

Jill's work firmly resists an easy reading, and as observers brought their life experiences and inheritances to bear on their interpretations, just as she would have predicted, lively discussion resulted. For Joce Jesson, the site of the exhibition, Tuakau, was a forceful reminder of older intersections of culture and education in that area. Tuakau College was established in 1974, under the principalship of Hiwi Tauroa, as an explicitly bicultural school in a town historically split along racial lines over land confiscations. Here was an exhibition in Tuakau making a 21st century claim through art for inclusivity and understanding. Another colleague, Robin Small, noted the inclusiveness he saw expressed in Jill's work – "a cross section of the nation's life ... from art and culture to everyday life." An unsettling look at that everyday life, if interpreted as the cultural composition of present-day New Zealand, was prompted, in



particular, by a group of three talking sticks. Set side by side, the trio of *Ukulele lady: A tourist's guide to the South Pacific*, *Blonds have more fun – yeah right*, and *I'm not a Chinese takeaway!* provoked both amusement and bemusement, and a disconcerting challenge to cultural stereotyping. One could not help but be intrigued by the collection of symbolic forms, some from Two-Dollar-Shop origins, which the artist used as conveyors of culture. But amusement soured as the disturbing and exposing messages of these talking sticks became apparent when closely scrutinised. These art works made us question our attitudes, and it was not always comfortable. The talking stick that told Jill's own story invited contemplation. *Why am I like I am?* was the most personal expression of how race and ethnicity are used to define culture. Presented in a chronology of images and objects from her ancestry to the present, accompanied by significant passages of text, this stick spoke of the artist's ethnicity, shared heritage and sense of identity, and of the social and cultural experiences that have shaped her. The mirror at the top of the stick prompted us to consider our own stories – and to challenge ourselves as educators to be inclusive of cultural differences in our students, and to allow their individual voices to be heard.



Photo 3: *Why am I like I am?* (and details)

Positioned in the centre of the talking stick circle was one art work which challenged perception, both visual and thinking in a more serious tone. A double-ended stick – *The 'best' and the 'rest'* – was mounted horizontally (in contrast to the verticality of the other 13 sticks) to present its challenge to our thinking about art, and the dominance of high over low culture. This stick tilted, turned, re-positioned – the ideas were certainly not to be taken lying down. The artist prodded us to consider our attitudes towards classifications of art and culture: black/white, where/temple, high art/low art, the work of classical antiquity/the craft work of women, the acclaimed/the marginalised. Which end would we turn upwards? The horizontal position privileged neither the 'best' nor the 'rest' - but turning it could express preference, and could provoke debate. The stick revolved, there was no easy response.



*Photo 4: The 'best' and the 'rest'*

The exhibition made us wonder – both in the questioning and the marvelling sense. In the Ministry of Education's new curriculum (2007) the arts are introduced in English with the words "The arts are powerful forms of expression that recognise, value, and contribute to the unique bicultural and multicultural character of Aotearoa New Zealand" (p. 20). Jill's work has always been hugely important in making this statement become a reality for teachers and students, and her exhibition presented those challenges in visible reality. Above this paragraph in the curriculum is a whakatauki, whose words are apt and most fitting for this artist's work. The words complete the reflective circle in that they capture with great significance the true spirit, aspiration and achievement of Jill's work as teacher, researcher, and artist:

Te toi whakairo, ka ihihi, ka wehiwehi, ka aweawe tea o katoa  
Artistic excellence makes the world sit up in wonder