

Cultural Equity in Policy and Pedagogy: An Issue for Visual Arts Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

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The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993) and *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000) provide policy direction for New Zealand schools. Conceived in a climate of New Right ideology these policy statements largely overlook issues of cultural equity other than by token reference to New Zealand's bicultural identity, the Treaty of Waitangi, and a need to respect the diverse cultures of a multicultural society. In calling for the displacement of a monocultural view of curriculum and the importance of action for cultural equity in a democratic society, this paper focuses on the visual arts discipline in the arts curriculum. It recommends the instigation of a critical approach to policy and the implementation of a critical pedagogy that would embrace democratic responsibility as a significant component of visual arts education. This approach would give students from diverse cultures a voice by furthering the opportunities to explore the place of values, traditions and histories that recognise and embrace cultural differences.

Introduction

In his keynote address at *Nga Waka*, the 2003 biennial conference of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators (ANZAAE), Professor Graeme Chalmers claimed that there is a need for art educators to make their classrooms a place in which they consciously work against racism and exclusion in all its forms. Chalmers (2003: 260) urged teachers to:

Recognise privilege and develop art-teaching strategies to redress societal inequalities; make art that challenges both the racist beliefs of individuals, as well as societal attitudes towards target groups; implement an art curriculum that addresses historic and current power imbalances between groups, and to be increasingly aware that silence condones racism; have students notice and be sensitive to art and artists from racial, ethnic, and cultural groups other than their own; to challenge their assumptions about people who seem different; and to encourage students to ask questions that increase their understanding of another person's experiences and point of view.

Chalmers' address was presented in a country in which there is a trend towards cultural diversity in schools, which reflects a growing number of cultures within the educational environment (Education Review Office, 2000). Chalmers' position provides an argument for a visual arts education that promotes cultural equity in our schools. In its simplest form, equity means 'redress', or giving more to the less advantaged (Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill, 2004: 218). Tulloch's (1997: 498) definition of equity as "the application of the principles of justice to correct or supplement the law" is pertinent for this paper insofar as the demand for equity may question the validity of laws of the state.

Chalmers' stance¹ demands a critical examination of the relationship between schooling and socio-political concerns, a view that is supported by internationally recognised multicultural and art education theorists such as Sleeter and Grant (1987), Stuhr (1994), Freedman (1994, 2000), Boughton and Mason (1999), Neito (2000), Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001), and New Zealand art education researchers,

Grierson and Mansfield (2003). Schools need to examine their institutions and attitudes to sustain a democratic way of life where human rights are protected both within and between cultures. It follows that educational agencies of government using the instruments of national curriculum, ought to mandate policies and pedagogies that address culturally relevant issues and attend to diversity and difference. As Giroux (1992: 15) has demonstrated, “educators have a public responsibility that by its very nature involves them in the struggle for democracy. This makes the teaching profession a unique and powerful public resource”.

When the challenges presented by Giroux and Chalmers are brought together with the findings and recommendations of the Ministry of Education’s *Curriculum Stocktake Report* (2002), they provide fertile grounds for a critique of *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) and the visual arts discipline in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000). Analysis of these documents provides an incentive to advance a critical approach to policy and pedagogy and an ethics that gives priority to equity as a primary social objective (Olssen, Codd, and O’Neill, 2004). This would open the way for an active engagement of social responsibilities of justice and cultural inclusion in visual arts education for students from the diverse cultures of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Cultural equity and national curriculum policy

Where does national curriculum policy stand currently in terms of cultural equity? *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993), which is the foundation document for New Zealand schools for the 1990s and beyond, “applies to all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, belief, ability or disability, social or cultural background, or geographical location” (3). All students are to be provided with equal educational opportunities and all programmes will be “gender-inclusive, non-racist, and non-discriminatory” (7). With words like “all” and “equal”, principles of equity are suggested. The curriculum framework also acknowledges “the value of The Treaty of Waitangi, and of New Zealand’s bicultural identity and multicultural society” (1). Furthermore, the “unique position of Māori in New Zealand society” is to be recognised in the school curriculum (7) and “all students will have the opportunity to acquire some knowledge of Māori language and culture” (7). The curriculum purports to reflect the multicultural nature of New Zealand. Thus, students are encouraged “to understand and respect the different cultures which make up New Zealand society” (7) and the “place of Pacific Islands communities in New Zealand society”. As well, “New Zealand’s relationships with the peoples of Asia and the South Pacific” (7) will be acknowledged.

It would appear difficult to find fault with these statements in the curriculum framework. They continue to advocate 1970s and 1980s policies of tolerant cross-cultural understanding – typified by *Towards Partnership* (Department of Education, 1976) and Renwick’s (1984) policy statement as Director General of Education. A place for biculturalism was affirmed, while multiculturalism was a hoped-for outcome following a “biethnic” period. The latter, focusing on Māori-Pākehā interaction, was considered an intermediary step between a monocultural education system and the desired goal of “multiethnic” awareness and understanding (Irwin, 1989: 11). Subsequent history reveals, however, that policies that purport to advance tolerance and understanding have failed to alleviate educational and cultural inequities (O’Neill, Clark and Openshaw, 2004). Bishop and Glynn (1999: 11) claim that current educational policies and practices “were developed and continue to be developed within a framework of colonisation” which advantages the “monocultural elite” (12). This position is supported by the findings of the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s *Curriculum Stocktake Report* (2002), which shows that students who succeed within the national curriculum are primarily non-Māori and non-Pasifika.

Peters and Marshall (2004) claim that accusations in the early 1990s by Minister of Education, Lockwood Smith, of inadequate educational standards and an excessive focus on social issues signalled his political

intentions for national curriculum policy. Citing Gordon (1992), Peters and Marshall (2004: 115) note that “by 1992 the Minister had de-emphasised all issues pertaining to equity and empowerment” and the statutory requirement that schools include equity clauses in their charters was repealed. The subsequent *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993), thus aligns with policies based on the enterprise model with its priority for education as economic enterprise. From this perspective, education’s productivity was to be freed from the shackles of welfare provision and governmental bureaucracy (Lauder, 1987; Eagle and de Bruin, 2000). The principles of social justice and welfare provision were thus replaced by what Peters (2002: 8) refers to as “the neo-liberal political project of globalisation”, whose promotion represented the demise of the welfare state. With its focus on a prescriptive sequencing of knowledge and skills acquisition, *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) is tethered to a neo-liberal version of agency theory.² It seems designed to contribute to the production of a technologically competent work force that is obedient and accommodating to the economic demands of global markets. Accordingly, O’Neill, Clark and Openshaw (2004) claim that the curriculum framework with its focus upon the skill-based, individualised, competitive learning promulgated by the enterprise model, neglects the promotion of social responsibility.

In an international critique of the curriculum framework, included in the *Curriculum Stocktake Report* (Ministry of Education, 2002), Le Métais (2002) claims that New Zealand fails to adequately acknowledge the role education plays in teaching students about different cultures and cultural contexts. In his view, the curriculum framework thereby fails to promote positive attitudes towards diversity, to celebrate difference or make provision for diverse cultural and ethnic groups. A comparison between the ‘attitudes and values’ promoted in the curriculum framework and those recommended in the stocktake report indicates an interesting shift of focus. The 1993 *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* values of “honesty, reliability, respect for others, respect for the law, tolerance (rangimārie), fairness, caring or compassion (aroha), non-sexism, and non-racism” (21) are replaced in the recommendations of the 2002 *Curriculum Stocktake Report* by values of “equity, respect for diversity, democracy, excellence, global human responsibility, active community participation and contribution, and citizenship” (129). The change in emphasis is from an individualistic to a more public and societal responsibility and aligns closely with Le Métais’ views. Further, the Stocktake Report advocates that curricula must recognise a responsibility to use diversity as a strength. Difference must be identified and catered for if the curriculum framework is to “better reflect the future-focused curriculum themes of social cohesion, citizenship ... and multicultural and bicultural awareness” (2002: 8).

However, a critical reading of the Stocktake Report would suggest that its recommendations for a shift towards a more socially responsive and responsible curriculum still do not go far enough. For a curriculum framework to enable democratic action it needs to be open to vigorous and critical dialogue. A critical pedagogy, Giroux (1992: 4) claims, “should extend the principles and practices of human dignity, liberty and social justice by engaging in social criticism that acknowledges the serious threats faced by schools, critical cultural spheres, and the state of democracy itself”. Similarly, Freire (1971, 1985) calls for critical and liberating dialogue that engages those who are oppressed, to replace the structures designed and imposed by the oppressors. Thus, for meaningful action to occur, the dominant sectors would need to acknowledge that their policies, institutions and attitudes may be oppressive. Following that acknowledgement, a critical examination of the rights and realities of power relationships would need to take place.

Challenging the social order must be a continuing, not finite, process for the maintenance of democracy. Within the New Zealand context, Apple (2004: 13) optimistically maintains that neo-liberal, neo-conservative and new managerialist policies can be challenged, and that it is possible to seek a “truly democratic vision of education”. For that, coherent and democratic educational policies need to be

constructed and defended, and such defence would be informed by rigorous questioning that emphasises democratic and participatory schooling, and involves those sectors that benefit least from the ways institutions currently function. Giroux (1992: 18) holds the view that since schools are the prime means of educating students for public life they "should function to provide students with the knowledge, character, and moral vision that build civic courage".

If it were to respond to a democratic agenda, *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) would need to move beyond tolerance as a generalised principle of operation. Mere tolerance in social relations does not in itself prevent the continuation of practices and behaviours in and between cultures that affront democratic and humane values (Barry, 2001). A democratic education using the agency of critical pedagogy, by contrast, could assist citizens to confront inequity and debasement, wherever they occur.

Visual arts education and issues of cultural equity

Why should visual arts education address issues of cultural equity? In *Celebrating Pluralism: Art, education and cultural diversity*, Chalmers (1996: 2) maintains that cultural diversity is today's reality. Supported by the general literature on multiculturalism, such as Banks and Lynch (1986), and Sleeter and Grant (1987), Chalmers argues that:

Reluctant, grudging, or tacit recognition by one culture of another must be replaced by genuine appreciation and proactive corrective action; that equality of opportunity, in the art classroom and elsewhere, is a right that must be enjoyed by every student regardless of ethnic, cultural, or other differences.

Initially inscribed as a policy of acculturation, multicultural education began by the 1980s to move from assimilationist policies of appeasement towards commitments to offer equal opportunities for all students. Art education theorists, particularly in North America, Britain and Australia, who recognise these issues in Western models of art education, consider that art plays a significant role within multicultural education (Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr, 1996; Boughton and Mason, 1999). They argue that all societies and cultures make and use art in socially significant ways; that the art forms of all cultures are of equal worth; and that art plays a central role in the definition of identity. Others, such as Freedman (2000), Neito (2000), Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001) claim a more politicising role for art education, convinced that art can inform opinion and shape attitudes. A reconstructive multicultural pedagogy³ can employ art in the service of social justice and pluralistic democracy, and operate as an instrument for reform in pursuit of equity. Within a social-reconstructionist framework, art education can enable students to realise how power is associated with social affiliations, to deal with cultural complexity, and to initiate action towards equity.

Visual arts education, in these terms, becomes part of the democratic territory. If a nation like Aotearoa New Zealand is culturally diverse, and if a central tenet of democracy is equity of treatment and access, then its education system should take account of the art of all its cultures and critically explore the ways in which they are legitimated or rejected through curriculum policy and practice. Otherwise, visual arts education will merely pay lip service to cultural equity and may well perpetuate a monocultural way of thinking, knowing, representing and being, which disempowers the minority cultures in our schools.

Cultural equity and visual arts curriculum policy

The visual arts discipline would seem to be an ideal setting from which to enhance cultural equity in a democratic society. The curriculum authors Foley, Hong and Thwaites signalled this intention in their 1999 background paper: "In reflecting postmodern thinking, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* draft statement promotes the concept of cultural democracy and social equity in education" (1999: 14).

How, then, is cultural equity addressed in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000)? This definitive policy statement makes little reference to either cultural democracy or social equity in a postmodern context (see Mansfield, 2000). Culture is defined in the arts curriculum glossary as “understandings, patterns of behaviour, practices, values, and symbol systems that are acquired, preserved, and transmitted by a group of people and that can be embodied in art works” (Ministry of Education, 2000: 83). References to culture in the visual arts discipline are confined to one of four strands, “Understanding the visual arts in context”. Here, students are required to “investigate the objects and images and visual art styles and genres of past and present cultures” (73). ‘Investigation’ alone does not necessarily require that students examine their established views and positions regarding the visual arts. Further, the requirement to investigate past objects and images suggests that this can be done without reference to cultural contexts from which they originated.

Despite the ambitions of Foley, Hong and Thwaites (1999) to reflect postmodern thinking, the references to art and culture in the arts curriculum still align with modernist art theory. Mansfield (1999, 2000) and Grierson (2003a) argue that the modernist art historical assumptions at the base of visual arts curriculum and policy documents in New Zealand since the 1940s are being perpetuated. Modernist cultural hierarchies remain in place: The modernist canon of great works by great masters; an emphasis on aesthetic training; and a focus on learning to appreciate pictures. When cultural equity is considered, a modernist aesthetic which measures art in Western terms is of little use to explore the basis and worth of other cultures. The categorisation within the Western fine arts hierarchy of the art of other cultures as ‘primitive’, ‘folk’, or ‘tribal’ clearly marginalises those cultures (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Grierson, 1999; Freedman, 2000). Evidence from international sources (Boughton and Mason, 1999) shows that students of minority cultures experience pain and loss through constant exposure to Western fine arts images, objects, and publications which transmit racist messages of exclusion. As long as the monocultural emphases in New Zealand visual arts education persists, inequitable and culturally tokenistic practice will continue (Smith, 2001).

In the section on the visual arts discipline of *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*, any unease over the dominance of the European/Pākehā tradition is assuaged by suggestions of having students learn something about art forms of cultures other than their own. Two culture-related “learning examples” at level 5 (years 9-10 in secondary schools) illustrate this point. One suggests that students “investigate the motivations, materials, and construction methods used in the making of traditional Māori kites”, and use that information “for the design and construction of such a kite” (Ministry of Education, 2000: 78). Another suggests investigation of “traditional face painting, decoration, and adornment, examining their cultural significance and design features” (78). Students then use this knowledge to “develop designs on the theme of personal identity”, the outcome being “the construction of a papier mâché mask on which to apply the design” (78). Such approaches focus upon replication of ‘art works’ that are devalued rather than enhanced when removed from their cultural context. They can be ‘looked on at’ with curiosity, if not superiority.

The continued emphasis on ‘art works’, whether as a product of student study or as the object to be studied, provides little incentive for cultural enquiry. Instead, art becomes divorced from the actualities of daily life and art education can become an unimportant and irrelevant pastime “unconnected to human matters such as political, moral, and religious values, its social and cultural production” (Mansfield, 1999: 25). If such a view of art finds sympathy for many in a westernised society, it is very much at odds with art traditions in other societies, including Māori. Grierson (2003a: 96) claims that little attention is given to “questions of ‘why’, ‘where from’ and ‘when’”. She advocates for “moving from the image, object or artefact out into the wider world of cultural, social and political practices”, and for a critical approach to those practices (100).

It is surprising that neither Stuhr (1994) nor Freedman (1994), two United States proponents of social reconstructionist art education, were cited by the authors of *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum: A Background Paper* (Foley et al., 1999). Freedman (1994: 159), for example, had argued that equity in art education in the United States had focused on two issues, both concerned with identity – the role of “the individual as a self-expressive maker of art”, and “the reflection and reproduction of a ‘common’ culture through common experiences for all students”. The assumption was that focus on individual self-expression (the child-centred approach) and the promotion of a common culture (the discipline-centred approach) would override cultural differences and promote equity. Freedman called for a critical reconsideration of these prevailing approaches, maintaining that neither was socially relevant or culturally democratic. Nor have these approaches, which have shaped visual arts education practice in New Zealand, paid adequate attention to the realities of life in a culturally diverse society, or promoted cultural democracy (Smith, 2000). A modernist emphasis is thus evident in the visual arts discipline section of the arts curriculum, and so individuality rather than collective responsibility continues to be seen as a virtue.

The search for equity through a critical pedagogy

How could visual arts education affirm and empower communities in search of equity? If a democratically empowering visual arts education is required in a democratic society (Freedman, 2000; Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, 2001; Chalmers, 2003), then what is also required is not only a critical analysis of how and why schools are unjust for some students, but also the implementation of just action towards change. Giroux (1992: 169) states:

It is important for critical educators to take up culture as a vital source for developing a politics of identity, community, and pedagogy. In this perspective, culture is not seen as monolithic or unchanging, but as a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power and privilege. Within this pedagogical cultural borderland known as a school, subordinated cultures push against and permeate the alleged unproblematic and homogeneous borders of the dominant cultural forms and practices.

Equitable cultural provision would require teachers to take a proactive stance to combat the “overwhelming presence of whiteness” referred to by Sleeter (2001: 94) in respect of teachers and teacher education programmes in the United States. In visual arts education in New Zealand (at least, in secondary schools), a predominantly European/Pākehā teaching force is a reality (Smith, 2001). If they are to enable students to make critical explorations of how cultures operate, and not just those of the European/Pākehā majority, art teachers would need to examine their own ethnicity, the attitudes they advance and reinforce, and their own position on cultural equity. Peters provides such a starting point when he calls for “an emphasis on difference and the discussion of alternatives [that] may excite the imagination and improve curriculum discourse and practice” (2003: 23).

To address issues of cultural equity in policy and pedagogy, visual arts education in Aotearoa New Zealand would need to move beyond the confines of a modernist Eurocentric model (Mansfield, 1999, 2000) to one in which critical assessment of cultural identity is emphasised. A critical pedagogy, by displacing the current monocultural view of curriculum, could open new cultural terrain for art education. By attending to the ways in which art operates as cultural agency, a critical pedagogy could provide students in the culturally diverse societies of Aotearoa New Zealand with opportunities to find legitimisation for their values, traditions and histories. Instead of being recipients of pre-determined programming, students within a critical pedagogy become the active explorers and interpreters of information provided by sources within and beyond the school. In Giroux’s (1992: 99) terms, such a pedagogy “rejects the notion of culture as an artifact immobilized in the image of a storehouse”. It requires taking, as its point of departure, the cultural settings of which the art forms are the outcomes. Starting from a position of

analysis of culture in terms of empowerment and disempowerment, students would examine how art can encapsulate and express those conditions, and how it constructs, represents, and signifies them (Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr, 1996; Freedman, 2000; Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, 2001; Grierson and Mansfield, 2003). Given that basis, visual arts education can make visible the realities, not just of art, but of the social, political and cultural circumstances from which it arises.

Well before the conception of the arts curriculum, Freedman (1994) and Duncum (1996) argued that modernism had diverted teachers from an art education that bore resemblance to the contemporary world. They, and others such as Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, (2001), Grierson (2003b), and Mansfield (2003), continue to advocate for a more inclusive category of 'visual culture' to replace visual arts. According to Freedman (1994), visual culture includes "forms of human production that function as manifest images". Teaching visual culture, she says, "involves a curriculum that encompasses the peculiar socio-political, as well as the sensory, formal and material characteristics and effects of fine arts, and goes beyond fine art to include the expressive foundations and implications of multi-cultural and mainstream artifacts" (158). For Duncum (2001: 106), 'visual' suggests a concern with visual artefacts while 'culture' requires an interest in the social conditions in which artefacts have their being. And Grierson (2003b: 7) asks whether the term 'visual' is merely about what we see, or is it the "*discernment to see, to comprehend the layers of possible meanings beyond sight*", thereby suggesting that the visible always has a social, political, personal and cultural context.

Broadening the field of art within art education would also help to respond to the rapid development of electronic media which is part and parcel of globalisation. We are confronted with a proliferation of international imagery which confounds established interpretations of the visual arts. Accelerated immigration contributes to a society in which cultural customs and beliefs may merge, oppose or interact to produce 'hybrid' forms, ideas, processes, and practices in the visual arts. Visual sights/sites of visual culture, which range extensively from popular images, advertising, the internet, computer environments, to the representation of visual environments of diverse cultures, profoundly affect our view of ourselves and our world. Visual culture impacts upon and reflects all sectors of society and provides freedoms to cross traditional borders which reflect people's attitudes, beliefs and values (Duncum, 2001). The adoption of a critical pedagogy which takes account of the diverse possibilities inherent in exploring the broad field of visual culture may highlight the limitations of the Western fine arts canon. As Mitchell (1995: 210) says:

The genius and the masterpiece will not disappear in the context of visual culture but the status, power, and the kinds of pleasure they afford beholders will become objects of investigation rather than a mantra to be ritually recited in the presence of unquestionable monuments.

What is required therefore is a critical pedagogy which addresses the visual culture of today's world, in both global and local terms, and provides students with the means of gaining in-depth understanding of the cultures and cultural products of all students in the diverse societies of this country. An art education that actively seeks equity for all students requires a substantial shift, not always comfortable for those who determine, govern and inscribe official knowledge. It is a shift that, uncomfortable or not, is possible and necessary if we are to deal justly with issues of cultural equity in a contemporary globalised world and multiculturalised society.

Conclusion

Those involved in visual arts education in Aotearoa New Zealand – art teachers (and their students), teacher educators, policy makers and curriculum facilitators – need to take a critical stance towards curriculum policy and pedagogy. As it stands, the visual arts discipline in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000) adopts an unnecessarily restrictive focus upon skills and

predictable outcomes and ignores the essential unpredictability of art as a discursive process that engages with an unpredictable world. The visual arts discipline, with its narrow framework of modernism (Mansfield, 1999, 2000) and monoculturalism (Smith, 2000, 2001), takes little account of questions of power, identity, difference and cultural equity. A critical pedagogy is required to ensure that students are engaged in the study and analysis of the global condition of culture today, and its local interpretations, to determine its impact upon them as individuals and as members of a society, culture, or nation (Grierson, 2003b). Such action would require an examination of visual culture which stretches beyond the forms themselves, revises modernist definitions of art, and explores its emancipatory potential.

Art teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand might reflect seriously on how the existing visual arts curriculum shapes, overtly or covertly, students' views of the forms and functions of art. They need to question, resist, or even subvert a curriculum which does not embrace critically the relationships between culture and learning for all students. Any pedagogy which engages students and teachers in these ways has as its focus the development of critical abilities, so that issues of inequity can be addressed in all its manifestations. A critical examination of existing policy may convince art educators that they should play an active role in revising and re-shaping a democratic visual arts curriculum that takes account of students of all cultures, rather than the inherent privileging of the dominant European/Pākehā culture. Adopting and implementing a critical pedagogy informed by the pursuit of cultural equity as a guiding principle would require a willingness to abandon the accustomed and seemingly safe territory that the current curriculum has determined.

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Notes

- 1 The work on critical pedagogy is underpinned by the work of Freire (1971, 1985) and Giroux (1992).
- 2 Originally concerned with issues of compliance and control of the labour sector, agency theory has been applied in the public sectors, including schooling, for the promotion of accountability and performance (Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill, 2004: 160). Such an approach is designed to maintain the existing social order and sustain the hierarchies of power.
- 3 From an analysis of education and research literature in the United States Sleeter and Grant (1987) identified five approaches to multicultural education, the most radical of which is the 'social reconstructionist' model. Essentially postmodernist, this approach aims to prepare students to challenge social structural inequality and promote the goal of social and cultural diversity. Clark (1996: 56) suggests that "whereas multicultural education strives to reform schools, the social reconstructionist approach attempts to fundamentally reform society itself".