

Art Education In New Zealand: Framing The Past / Locating The Present / Questioning The Future

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Abstract

The development of art education in New Zealand was affected by historical moments which began with British colonisation in the 1840s. Although New Zealand is now home to not only the indigenous Maori, and European/Pakeha, but to a rich diversity of peoples from around the world, colonial history continues to influence current policy and pedagogy. In this paper I argue that consciousness of the connections between the past and the present raises critical questions about the shape of art education for the future.

Introduction

The origins of art education in New Zealand, and the continuities and changes that have occurred over time, cannot be separated from the contexts in which they evolved. As Grundy (1987) points out, "To understand the meaning of any set of curriculum practices, they must be seen as both arising out of a set of historical circumstances and as being a reflection of a particular social milieu" (p. 6). Beginning with early provincial and (non-state) missionary activity in New Zealand from the 1840s, it became evident that there were mutually constitutive relationships between culture and politics in the development of education, state and nation (Stephenson, 2000). Through framing the past, and locating present practice in two studies of secondary school art

education (Smith, 2005, 2007), it became apparent to me that policies and practices in this country are evolutionary rather than revolutionary. That influences on current art education practice are located in, or have evolved from the past, raises important questions. How, for example, might art education in the future be shaped for an ethnically and culturally diverse student population living in an increasingly multiculturalised society and globalised world?

Framing the past

From the 1840s to the 1930s, when New Zealand was developing as a nation, education policies and practices for schooling Maori and Pakeha children exemplified the politics of colonisation required to replicate the systems and values of the mother country, Great Britain. The official goal was to reproduce British society in the antipodes (Willmott, 1989). Children were taught that they were Britons as well as New Zealanders and that the Maori inhabitants were "not genuine citizens" of this country because they were different (p. 4). That the Europeans saw the Maori as being able to be 'civilised' in no way supposed that their culture would be respected. The intention of nineteenth century educationists was to detach Maori children from their roots and to educate them to be conforming, if somewhat inferior workers, respectful of the new order. The formulation of educational policies during this period demonstrated the persistence of colonising power which was to be reflected in the art education offered to both Maori and Pakeha pupils.

The 1877 *Education Act* provided the first historical marker for art education. Underpinned by a concern to create an obedient, disciplined and industrious labour force which would enhance the economic prosperity of the country (O'Neill, Clark & Openshaw, 2004), an outcome of the Act was a utilitarian schooling for settlers in the public schools. The subsequent 1878 *Standards Syllabus* (*New Zealand Gazette*, 1878), the first national curriculum in New Zealand, closely resembled the British model. Drawing, included

among the so-called academic subjects, exemplified the adoption of a utilitarian stance which originated from the 1850s South Kensington System of state-aided and controlled art schools and examinations established for training art masters and examining generalist teachers in art (Chalmers, 1990). Thus, in the 1878 syllabus, drawing followed an order of instruction for Standard 1-6 pupils ranging from outline drawing from blackboard exercises, drawing from models and other solid objects, geometrical drawing, and perspective drawing (NZG, 1878, p. 1311). Drawing from plaster casts of sculpture and fragments of architectural decoration, brought to New Zealand in the 1860s by South Kensington-trained art masters, served as a reminder of the classical forms revered within the western 'high art' aesthetic. A century later plaster casts of a foot, an ear, a hand and an eye from Michelangelo's (1501-04) marble sculpture, *David*, were still to be found in art departments in many secondary schools, including my own in the late 1960s.

While replicas from the 'fine arts' traditions of classical antiquity and the Renaissance were used in drawing instruction there was a division, reflected in art education, between the fine arts and the utilitarian arts. Fostered in the Societies of Art that were founded between the 1860s and 1890s the fine arts were the preserve of wealthier British settlers who had brought with them the nineteenth century concept of selective, academic, secondary schools run by private enterprise (Beeby, 1984). The utilitarian and practical arts, on the other hand, remained the province of the working classes. In the public schools, therefore, art education had little to do with expression or imagination (Collinge, 1978). With the expansion of secondary provision in the early 1900s, manual and technical instruction became the 'common sense' preserve of the working classes. The emphasis on skill in drawing, and the vocational application of art, continued until the 1940s.

Another factor which affected art education during the colonial period

was schooling conceived as an agent for 'civilising' Maori (Simon & Smith, 2001). The colonial policy of assimilation that was to prevail was endorsed by the *Native Schools Act*, 1867, under which a national, state-controlled system of village schools (referred to as Native Schools) was established by the government. Art education in these schools was shaped by the effects of assimilation which were inscribed initially in the attitudes and actions of British missionaries. Considering Maori taonga (treasures) to be graven images (Carline, 1968), the missionaries were opposed to indigenous beliefs and values and as a consequence were loath to encourage or include the indigenous arts in education. Their defacing of Maori carvings through such actions as the removal of genitalia, construed as obscene, represented an attack not only upon the art of the Maori but on the spiritual basis of their belief systems. Thus the colonial form of art education as was provided in the Native Schools had the specific purpose of aiding assimilation through breaking down traditional structures and belief systems in order to make Maori conforming and useful citizens. Instruction was taken out of the hands of the kaumatua (tribal elders) whose influence was seen by colonial educators and many missionaries as demoralising and regressive (Barrington, 1987).

The education regulations for Native Schools (see *AJHR*, 1880, H.-1F; *AJHR*, 1905, E.-2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 1909; *New Zealand Gazette*, 1915) provide the earliest insights into art education for Maori children. Elementary drawing examinations and a programme of handwork, which included clay and plasticine modelling, cane weaving and woodwork, imposed a Eurocentric notion of the arts as utility. Indicative of assimilationist attitudes, weaving with cane was introduced despite Maori already having an extensive weaving tradition (Simon, 1998). Moreover, there was no evidence of Maori themes or motifs being acknowledged and incorporated into pupils' work, an absence which could well convey that Maori traditions and styles of weaving and carving were less significant and less valid than those of the European.

The same conflation of art with technical skills in the public schools was evident in the Native Schools' curriculum for drawing. As further indication that the European saw the Maori as being able to be 'civilised' the drawing curriculum listed "suitably civilized and British objects for study" (Chalmers, 1999, p. 177). For younger Maori pupils these included "coloured beads or buttons (in groups), skipping-rope, hoop, wooden spoon, gridiron, wire netting, envelope, slate, kite, axe, football, toy flags, toy animals, ninepin, bow and arrow, horse-shoe, plum, apple, pansy, daffodil" (NZG, 1915, p.1170). A similar ethnocentric bias was evident in the listing for older pupils: "Picture and photo frames, toasting fork, croquet-mallet, broom, cricket-bat, tennis racquet, school-bag, tambourine, school bell, wood-shaving, clock-spring, bag of sugar, lantern, twigs and small boughs, fruits, feathers, butterflies, celery and rhubarb sticks" (ibid). Inherent in the practices of the time art was conceived as illustration rather than self-expression or art-for-arts sake.

A further historical moment that was to affect art education was the provision in the 1929 *Syllabus of Instruction for Public Schools* (Department of Education, 1929) of detailed prescriptions for each subject. When the Native Schools began to use this syllabus a move from assimilation to adaptation was signalled. Until this time official approval for schools to include Maori crafts, or to incorporate Maori themes or motifs in their drawing programmes, had not been granted (Simon, 1998). The new regulations appeared to validate aspects of Maori cultural knowledge as worthy of inclusion in the 'New Zealand culture'. From the 1930s some schools offered traditional/customary skills in whakairo (carving), raranga (weaving), and kowhaiwhai (painting). However, it was Pakeha officers of the Department of Education who decided what constituted appropriate Maori art, culture, and knowledge. More importantly, by designating it as Maori arts and crafts Maori cultural knowledge was reduced to the same inferior subject status that was, at that time, afforded arts and crafts in the mainstream system. Taught mainly on Friday afternoon when the 'real' work of the

school had been completed, it simply became a cultural addition to the mono-cultural system (Simon, 1998).

New Zealand's emergence from the Great Depression of the 1930s coincided with a number of significant events which prompted new developments, particularly in primary schools. The visit to New Zealand of a delegation of eminent educationalists following the New Education Fellowship (NEF) conference in Australia in 1937 (see Campbell, 1938) was a turning point. Two themes that were presented to teachers were the need for them to cater for the individual student, and that art should have a central place in the education of all children. The focus on academic drawing, which had dominated art education, turned to art as a child-centred experience. Its most influential proponent was Gordon Tovey, appointed the first National Supervisor of Art and Craft in 1946. Tovey embraced, through inter-curricula activities, the freedom of children's expressive capabilities and the elimination of adult rules, ideas or standards (Collinge, 1978; Smith, 1996). This approach marked a radical break from previous practices.

A change in the conception of art's function in New Zealand society following World War II was another turning point. From the 1940s the shift was towards the uses of craft, as much as art, in daily life and work. The Art and Craft Specialist Service established by the Department of Education introduced western arts and crafts into schools, particularly textile crafts, clay modelling and book craft. Paralleling this development, Tovey played an influential role in art and craft for Maori children in the Native Schools by promoting an education which drew upon Maori tradition. Thirteen Maori art advisors were recruited by Tovey between 1948 and 1961 to implement programmes that centred upon Maori arts and crafts (Smith, 1996). Traditional/customary Maori patterns were used in art and craft work and Maori songs, dances, haka, and legends formed a basis for drama and movement. By the 1960s the department had given its Art and Craft Branches responsibility for

developing a programme for the teaching of Maori arts and crafts to all pupils, including Pakeha.

It was not until the mid-1940s that a significant revision of the secondary curricula, until this time driven by academic imperatives, appeared to provide a breakthrough for art education in this sector. In 1943 the Consultative Committee on the Post-Primary Curriculum presented a report (The Thomas Report) that called for all students to receive a balanced education through a compulsory common core of general subjects, a status not previously enjoyed by art. However, in the subsequent *Education (Post-primary Instruction) Regulations 1945* (Department of Education, 1945) drawing and painting were recommended as activities essentially for those pupils with special ability who would be granted access to facilities at special art centres during after-school hours. Far greater emphasis was given to crafts and to design, with a sense of its value to the consumer society. The 1945 regulations thus encapsulated the belief, generated during the colonial period and perpetuated in the 1940s, of crafts as more useful than the pursuit of fine arts. This emphasis on the elements and principles of design and of craft (art in daily living) could in retrospect be regarded as a retrograde step for art education. Essentially, it fulfilled the spirit of the times. While craft 'clubs' thrived in many secondary schools during this time, art remained a mere addition to the mainstream curriculum (Murdoch, 1943).

Well into the 1960s the creativity rationale for art education, and the commensurate interest in children's personality development, dominated the field world-wide. During the late 1960s and early 70s a new generation of scholars and educators began to question that direction and to suggest that the study of art-for-arts-sake was worthwhile (Eisner, 1972). The new approach to art as a 'discipline' advocated art learning activities that fostered understanding of the world of art, awareness of the concepts, language, and approaches useful in responding to art, as well as activities that resulted primarily in art production. This was the climate

in which the first national art curriculum, *Art Education Junior Classes to Form 7 Syllabus for Schools*, was developed (Department of Education, 1989). Four features of the 1989 syllabus provided significant historical markers in the growth of art education. The first was its emphasis upon two major traditions, Maori and European. While other cultural groups within New Zealand society were acknowledged the document reflected the bicultural stance of the 1970s and 80s (Department of Education, 1976). The second feature was a balance between the previous focus upon making art and the need for students to understand its social contexts and significance. The inclusion of studies about art, ways of responding to art, and the motivations for making art were indicative of how far the vision for art education had moved. Aligned with this objective, the term 'craft' was abandoned in a deliberate attempt to reject the hierarchical ranking of art above craft. A third feature was the inclusion of definitions of art and art works which extended well beyond those previously articulated. Nevertheless, the examples cited in the syllabus were primarily from the western modernist art making tradition. A fourth feature of the syllabus was its modernist preoccupation with art works as the tangible outcomes of cultures, a position very different from the postmodern/poststructuralist conception of art as cultural text which has been promulgated since the 1990s (Grierson, 2003). Underpinned by these four dimensions the syllabus did, however, serve to accelerate the development and status of art education. Not only was a clear direction for teaching and learning provided and presented in a discrete document but it required art teachers to become knowledgeable in the theoretical and art historical, as well as the practical aspects of the discipline (Smith, 2007).

Locating the present

Art education in the present has evolved from a number of historical markers framed in the past. Now, as then, current policies and practices reflect economic, social, cultural and educational changes. Art education has been affected, in particular, by curriculum reforms promulgated

by successive governments during the 1980s and 90s. These changes were initiated at a time when New Zealand was becoming an increasingly multicultural society (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). The perspectives on current practice presented here are located in two of my studies on secondary art education (Smith, 2005, 2007). They are contextualised within the demographic shift in the student population and the government's expectations which reflect this diversity (Education Review Office, 2000).

General curriculum reforms have impacted on art education in several ways. Foremost is the emphasis in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) upon increasing the ties between education and paid work. This shift, in which education seen as cultural practice became subordinate to an enterprise model (Peters & Marshall, 2004), was to subsequently inform the design of *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000). Here, four arts disciplines (visual arts, music, dance and drama) are identified as significant contributors to employment and the competitive world economy. With its antecedents in the utilitarian and materialistic values evident in New Zealand as a developing nation from the 1840s, the rationale for art as economic potential is validated in terms of useful skills acquisition and individualised, competitive learning. Prominent in programming, assessment, and art department structuring are the academic and economic achievement imperatives inherent in the curriculum reforms. The framework's essential skills, which include communication, information, problem-solving, and self-management and competitive skills, are currently emphasised in art department schemes and included in reporting to students and their parents (Smith, 2007).

A further link with the past - the concept of art as a discipline, advocated in the 1989 syllabus - is relocated in the current curriculum. Here, an emphasis upon knowing about and making art is expanded to

four 'strands' through which students study the visual arts in context, communicate and interpret ideas, develop their own ideas, and apply practical knowledge of art making processes and procedures. All four strands are used to define learning objectives and assessment criteria, though the greatest emphasis remains with students making art (Smith, 2005, 2007). Reflective of the current achievement-based approach to art education time allocation for spontaneous and informal art activities that are not driven by curriculum objectives is minimal. Furthermore, programmes suggest a conscious decision to prepare year 9-10 students (mostly 13-14 year olds) for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) at years 11-13 (Smith, 2007).

The 1989 art syllabus had provided definitions of art and art works that went well beyond those previously articulated. Now, as then, the focus remains on western art traditions of painting, sculpture, design, and photography, with the addition of film and video, computer-generated art, performance art, and combinations of these forms. Although an ambition of the current curriculum is for students to "understand visual art works as social and historical texts" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 71), in current practice there is a modernist preoccupation with art works as tangible outcomes of cultures. This takes precedence over investigation of context (Smith, 2007). Moreover, the works selected by teachers for student study are drawn predominantly from a modernist western aesthetic.

Another feature of the 1989 syllabus, its focus upon the traditions of Maori and Pakeha, is also relocated in the present. While the arts curriculum, as with other government education policy, transmits messages of cultural inclusiveness and draws attention to the need for teachers to respond to the cultural diversity that marks schools and society in the twenty-first century (Ministry of Education, 2000; ERO, 2000), emphasis remains upon the bicultural partners. Not only are the diverse traditions of Pacific peoples and other cultures that make up our

nation downplayed, by comparison, but reference to the cultural diversity of students is presented in the penultimate section of the 109-page document. The brief reference to “culturally inclusive programmes in the arts [that] will encourage positive attitudes towards cultural diversity ...” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 104) confirms the ‘bicultural vision’ that continues to pervade art curriculum in New Zealand. Although art departments do include programmes with a Pacific Islands focus, the predominantly Eurocentric curriculum is supplemented by the ‘addition’ of examples of ‘other’ cultures (Smith, 2005, 2007).

Questioning the future

Consciousness of the connections between past and present policies and practices raises critical questions about the shape of art education for the future. While previous conditions may continue to influence, new circumstances of the twenty-first century suggest that art education cannot continue to tread this evolutionary path. The question arises as to whether, and how, art education might adopt a more revolutionary stance. It was anticipated that the recently published *The New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), which presents future-focused policy to be implemented by 2010, would articulate a new vision for art education. Little is offered that is revolutionary. Past emphases on the four strands, the bicultural and multicultural character of New Zealand, and specific reference to the arts of Maori, remain unchanged. While the nomenclature ‘visual culture’ has been added, and positive direction is given to the way in which students can engage in the visual arts, the curriculum continues to cite art practices as “drawing, sculpture, design, printmaking, photography, and the moving image” (p. 21). A new vision for art education for the future would require serious reconsideration of this policy and its enactment in classrooms.

A necessary part of a future vision is to not only acknowledge, but actively take cognisance of the accelerating demographic shift in the student population that is likely to continue. Questions arise as to whether art

education in New Zealand can persist in fostering the monocultural way of thinking, knowing, representing and being, which disempowers the minority cultures in our schools. Can art education continue to promote the bicultural vision that currently pervades policy and pedagogy? Can the cultural diversity acknowledged in policies and reports, and the ethnic and cultural differences of students be ignored or disregarded? Evidence from my study (Smith, 2007) suggests that ‘intuitive’ teaching, based on personal influences, experiences and beliefs, takes precedence over a commitment to offer equal opportunities for all students. This prompts the question of how art teachers can be convinced to become familiar with the writings of theorists who recognise these issues in western models of art education, and who consider that art plays a significant role within multicultural education (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Boughton & Mason, 1999). Freedman’s (1994) argument that equity in art education in the United States has focused on two issues 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” (p. 159) - were approaches observed in current practice. Can a focus on individual self-expression and the promotion of a common culture override cultural differences and promote equity? Freedman’s argument, that neither approach is socially relevant or culturally democratic, alerts us to the need for a critical reconsideration of these approaches which have also shaped pedagogy in this country.

A starting point for informed debate could be the focus upon modernism and whether modernist versions of multicultural art education, which celebrate pluralism and diversity but continue to reproduce existing political, social and cultural conditions, are adequate in a contemporary, multiculturalised and globalised world (Freedman, 1994). Proponents of postmodern approaches advocate for a more politicising role for art education (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Freedman, 2003; Grierson, 2003). This raises the question of how teachers can be convinced

that art education can be employed to emphasise difference and to challenge dominant power and knowledge structures. A more inclusive category of 'visual culture', which replaces visual arts, is also advocated (Duncum, 2001; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). While the new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) does refer to "Maori visual culture" and "New Zealand visual culture" (p. 21) the predominant study of western visual arts will need to be challenged if change is to occur.

If such a shift towards social responsibility and cultural inclusion is seen as essential there is another aspect that requires attention. Students now live in a highly complex technological world in which visual imagery, in many diverse forms, is a powerful and persuasive influence. The proliferation of local, national and international imagery with which students are confronted in their daily lives confounds established interpretations of art. Broadening the field of art in art education would serve to not only highlight the limitations of the western fine arts canon but could be a way of helping students to respond critically to the rapid development of electronic media which is part and parcel of globalisation. The adoption of a critical pedagogy which takes account of the diverse possibilities inherent in exploring the broad field of visual culture, and which capitalises on students' obsession with communication media (such as FaceBook and U-Tube), will be an essential part of a future vision for art education.

Although future policy articulated in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) is, in my view, located largely in the present there is one new dimension that has implications for art education. 'Thinking' is identified as one of five key competencies or capabilities for living and lifelong learning. In my studies it was evident that art education pedagogy is predominantly influenced by teachers' thinking. This prompts the question of how art teachers can provide an art education which actively promotes thinking as "using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information,

experiences, and ideas" (p. 12).

Conclusion

The development of art education in New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1990s was influenced by colonial policies of assimilation and adaptation, the utilitarian imperatives of a settler nation, and a growing consciousness of a bicultural environment. Classroom practices were shaped by an ethnocentrism in which the values derived from the colonisers were applied, and by an increasingly distinctive New Zealand style of curriculum, albeit with a bicultural rather than multicultural focus. I argue that those involved in art education today – art teachers (and their students), teacher educators, policy makers and curriculum facilitators – need to take a more critical stance towards curriculum policy and pedagogy. With its narrow framework of modernism and monoculturalism, art education currently takes little account of questions of power, identity, ethnic diversity and cultural difference. This raises questions of how policy and pedagogy shape students' perceptions of art, and how the relationship between culture and learning for all students could be critically embraced. I argue that a greater understanding of the theoretical arguments could enhance an art education for the future for an ethnically and culturally diverse student population living in an increasingly multiculturalised society and globalised world.

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