Article

A NARRATIVE OF BEING, GROWING AND BECOMING ACROSS CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: ART AND ART EDUCATION ENCOUNTERS WITH SELF AND OTHERS

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The political and educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in Aotearoa New Zealand required all education sectors to implement biculturalism in their curriculum. The early childhood education sector at the time congratulated itself on *Te Whāriki*[1] as the first New Zealand bicultural curriculum document, and its inherent commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Yet in 2003, Jennie Ritchie published study findings that indicated that the bicultural requirements were viewed as optional by many teachers and that there was a lack of strong commitment to bicultural development. Later research[2] appeared to indicate that, when teachers, children and family worked in true partnership, following the principles of *whanaungatanga* (relationships) and *manaatikanga* (care and respect), commitment to a treaty-based curriculum paradigm deepened in both thought and practice.

Over the last 25 years, I have been involved in early childhood visual arts education in Aotearoa New Zealand: as a student teacher, a teacher of young children and now as lecturer in tertiary teacher education. During that time I have encountered numerous, often contradictory, theoretical and pedagogical stances in visual arts and arts education: from a technocratic and formalist approach to a more child-centred, discipline-based paradigm and, in the last decades, the postmodernist and post-postmodernist viewpoints. The challenge for me as art educator has been how to respond to these different, often contradictory, perspectives while implementing an art curriculum framework embedded in the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand. Over the years, I have become increasingly aware that conflict is inevitable as, although postmodernist discourse is increasingly evident in early childhood education *research*, research also suggests that the early childhood education sector is still marked by notions of child-centered pedagogy where process, creative self-expression and self-discovery are considered more important than content and context.[3] Research, moreover, has shown that tertiary education does not equip pre-service teachers with the strategies needed to be able to challenge current practices and to promote change.[4] What has resulted is an enduring status quo with regard to art and art education, a status quo which continues to emphasise a Western pedagogical paradigm that ignores "the two worlds that in Aotearoa New Zealand describe a bicultural nation."[5]

In this paper, I aim to share my narrative of how I searched for a way to weave together the familiar and taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving of my Dutch childhood and adolescence with the unfamiliar world views encountered in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a journey centred on the construction of identity during my years of struggle to implement in my work with children and student teachers the bicultural aspirations inherent in *Te Whāriki*. The perspective within this story is wholly and subjectively that of a Dutch Pakeha woman who had to travel to (and live at) the other side of the world to develop an awareness of other "ways of conceiving, imaging and desiring,"[6] and of who she was, is and may still become.

The Dutch society of the 1950s and early 1960s, in which I was a child and adolescent, was characterised by bastions of religious and social ideologies. Each religious group had their own broadcasting channels, newspapers, churches, youth groups, playgrounds and school systems with associated curricula, and social class still determined educational

opportunities and future career options. Although there was a marked increase in participation in secondary education, few working-class children attended university as educationalists, researchers and politicians debated the asserted link between "school" success and social class.[7] Most children in my neighbourhood left school at 14 years of age; I and my brothers and sisters were an exception, as my parents wanted us to have the education opportunities they never had.

The art education model of the Roman Catholic primary school I attended was deeply embedded within a modernist paradigm where "drawing" (a core curriculum subject alongside religion, literacy, numeracy, history and geography) was valued as a contributor to physical, perceptual and aesthetic development, as well as a vehicle for teaching and learning about the doctrine and values of the Roman Catholic Church.

In my secondary school years, art and art history played an equally important role alongside the other core subjects of music, languages, history, geography, sewing and religion. Art classes consisted of weekly one-hour sessions, during which the elements and principles of design and art transmitted and perpetuated Western norms and ideals through structured tasks. This drawing of perimeters, aptly described by Kincheloe as "aesthetic policing,"[8] no doubt ensured that our art-making and art-viewing occurred within the context of accepted historical events, and the social and cultural values and beliefs systems that informed their interpretation.

I remember one particular experience that, in later life, helped me to understand that art and art education are never value-free. As a nine-year old schoolchild, I visited the Frans Hals Museum with my classmates. I had never before been to a museum and, as we walked past the formal seventeenth-century group portraits of orphanage and poorhouse governors, the teacher extolled their virtues and superiority as contributors to the well-being and prosperity of Holland's Golden Age. This experience in the end was, for me, not a lesson in religious and moral values, but more about social and personal identity. As Pere argued, "Learning is always a part of one's life experiences, and learning of formative years is particularly subject to culturally ascribed values."[9] Whereas I felt a sense of disconnectedness from these austere but privileged men and women of the past, I delighted in the painting *Farmers' Fairground* as I caught the name of its creator, Jan Steen. It was not uncommon for my mother to exclaim, somewhat exasperated, that our living room resembled "a painting by Jan Steen!" The representation in front of me affirmed the working-class world that I was a part of. Here were the children I played with in the street, the men that walked home singing from the corner pub, and the gossiping, ready-to-scold women.

A modernist, Eurocentric art-education paradigm had dominated my world for 19 years, and I brought these values and belief systems with me when emigrating to Aotearoa New Zealand. The early 1970s society I found myself in appeared on the surface to reflect the social harmony experienced in the Netherlands, with people of different backgrounds existing happily alongside each other. At the time, I did not sufficiently realise that what I was experiencing was a kind of artificially created status quo that denied the fact that Aotearoa New Zealand's sociocultural and sociopolitical past and present were founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. I had to become involved in the early childhood education sector to begin to develop knowledge and understanding of the implications of my responsibility as a partner to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. However, this entailed first of all "declaring war on [myself], of pulling up all the assumptions about culture, about time, about art, and testing their veracity."[10]

The playcentre I attended with my firstborn reflected the Dutch Froebel *kleuterschool*, with its valued notion of "learning through play" and its clearly defined core curriculum areas and activities. The hotly debated issues around biculturalism and multiculturalism in education that followed the policy and curriculum reforms of the next two decades were, as yet, not evidenced in our discussions.[11] In fact, the government at the time was not overly concerned with curriculum in the early childhood sector. Although we acknowledged the importance and value of cultural diversity, this took the form of adding culturally diverse resources and activities to our existing programme. Years later, I realised that this education approach is essentially assimilationist, as it continues to primarily emphasise Western values, pedagogy and contexts, and does not acknowledge culture as a whole way of life.

With the new policy and curriculum directions of the 1980s and 1990s, however, all those involved in mainstream early childhood education were challenged to confront these Western constructs of teaching and learning. As Locke stated at the time: "The Treaty of Waitangi has engendered much discussion, debates and unease across the whole of the Early Childhood Sector … The response to [charter requirements] has been varied and in too many centres there has been a feeling of intimidation, threat and vulnerability."[12] "Biculturalism" became a strongly contested construct, with some educators arguing that, in a multicultural, diverse society, emphasis should be placed on multicultural- rather than bicultural-inclusive arts education. Others argued that a focus on culturally diverse art forms and experiences within the existing curriculum not only continued to primarily emphasise Western models of art, pedagogy and contexts, it also ignored teachers' responsibilities as partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Others again argued that the implementation of a bicultural education programme was now a legal obligation, as a result of Ministry of Education policies and curriculum documents, and therefore "we might as well get on with it."

This exposure and participation in the deliberations on how best to define and implement biculturally inclusive education was to the benefit of my personal and professional growth. Looking back, I realise that my knowledge was more practice-based, and that a lack of a strong knowledge foundation in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and in the pedagogical and theoretical issues surrounding art and art education, stood in the way of my coming to grips with the main question that continued to occupy me at that time: What was the role of an art teacher in a bicultural society? Up till then, my early childhood education experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand had been strongly influenced by Grey's *Children at Play* and Brownlee's *Magic Places.*[13] Both texts advocated an art education model that emphasised the progressive, normative values of inventiveness, imagination and originality. "Art" was considered a medium for *individual* communication and self-expression; a vehicle for play and exploration.[14] The Department of Education supporting document *Tender Shoots* (1988), which outlined teachers' responsibility for the implementation of *te reo me nga tikanga Māori*, perpetuated these Western art and art education values.[15] Its focus on activities negated the inseparability of Māori "art" (a Western term in itself) and Māori culture, and the importance and value attached to the context, content and concepts of any work of art.[16] As a result, mainstream educators were not encouraged to examine in-depth political, cultural, social and pedagogical contexts and values. It was therefore not surprising that, for me, the debates around "biculturalism" became a "highly complex, evolving, and frequently contradictory field of action."[17]

On the one hand, government policy and curriculum directions encouraged me as a teacher to take responsibility for the implementation of the *reo Māori me nga tikanga* through specifically outlined activities in its *Taha Māori* programme document.[18] While putting these ideas into practice, however, I would be challenged by and subsequently engage in intense dialogue with a Māori colleague around issues of cultural dominance and cultural and political ownership and control. Central to our debates was the right of a Pakeha teacher to use *te reo Māori* and Māori images and stories in a programme that was essentially monoculturalist in its art education approach. My Māori colleague expressed her genuine concern that I, as a mainstream teacher, may redefine and appropriate things Māori.[19] These shared dialogues challenged the core of my personal and cultural identity; an identity that from birth had been formed around principles of individualism and independence. For me the development of a teaching and learning content and contexts that valued *te reo me nga tikanga Māori* meant that I provided opportunities for children to engage with Māori art activities and *waiata*. By doing this I thought to acknowledge, respect and reflect the unique place of Māori as *tangata whenua* and the principle of partnership inherent in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. For my colleague, however, my actions were considered arrogant, as it implied cultural knowledge and skills that I did not possess. I should have consulted with the appropriate *mana whenua* to ensure that the Māori artefacts were used within Māori and not European norms.

From 1988, it was clear that these issues were not going to go away, as government policies increasingly required the sector to address diversity, equity and biculturalism in their curriculum.[20] This political direction coincided with increased recognition of early education as the foundation for lifelong learning. In 1993, the draft of the early childhood curriculum document *Te Whāriki*[21] was published, followed by the revised 1996 curriculum document.

With the development of the document, the early childhood education sector showed a clear commitment to its partnership in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the unique place of Māori as *tangata whenua*, and its support of survival and revival of Māori culture and language.[22] *Te Whāriki* encouraged mainstream teachers to foster an [art] education approach that included perspectives of and interactions with *te reo me nga tikanga Māori*, its people, places, artefacts, stories, symbols, creative arts, crafts and activities connected to Māori children's lives.[23] As such, it provided "a basis for bicultural early childhood education in New Zealand."[24] In 2003, the Ministry of Education stressed that this was the responsibility of all educators, not just those who are Māori or those who work with Māori children and *whānau*.[25] In spite of all this, most of the policy documents and their implementation appeared to be informed by the essentially modernist, Western constructs of humanism, progressivism, and normative development theories.[26]

During those years, in my role as curriculum development advisor, the challenge of implementing the spirit of biculturalism inherent in the *Te Whāriki* document became apparent. Its open-ended framework of assessment, planning and evaluation based on children's interests, strengths and needs, and dispositions, made it easy for teachers to bypass the bicultural-inclusive requirements in a wide range of areas, including visual arts education.[27] Ritchie's study found that bicultural requirements were viewed as optional by some teachers and management and that there was a lack of strong commitment to bicultural development.[28] She argued that *Te Whāriki*'s non-prescriptive document framework, with each centre "weaving its own whāriki," may have been a factor in the marginalisation of Māori content. I would argue that its strong underpinning of a mostly Western paradigm of art and art education and of aesthetics may also have contributed to this. Moreover, such statements as the importance of meeting the *needs* of specific cultural groups through the inclusion of culturally specific people, places and artefacts within the environment and programme could be considered a "covert way of maintaining the status quo by placating minorities with superficial shows of greater social acceptance."[29] Not surprisingly, many teachers saw the document as an affirmation of what they were already doing.[30] Teachers' sensitivity and responsiveness to the "heritages, cultural values, customs, traditions, and … arts and crafts, stories and symbols"[31] of other cultures should never be a supplement to the existing curriculum. This may foster greater understanding, respect and awareness of the values, beliefs and practices of others; however, it does not necessarily lead to a reconstruction of the values and beliefs of the dominant culture and of the existing power structures.

During this time, encounters with the various theoretical, philosophical and pedagogical frameworks that have guided the visual arts education field over the years, combined with conversations with Māori colleagues on how to make curricular and pedagogical changes, contributed to my developing knowledge and understanding of how, as a mainstream art educator, I could adhere "to the principles of the treaty without promoting either tokenism or cultural stripping."[32]

The pathway I find myself on currently is considering the notion that a treaty-based pedagogy and art curriculum content and context is only likely to be achieved if I continue to examine my "belief about the nature of the world and [my] place in it."[33] This is particularly important as research outlines the impact teachers' personal beliefs about culture, and learning and teaching, have on what happens in the classrooms.[34] Dialogues with Māori colleagues around Māori visual culture education linked to issues of "power," "truth" and "subjectivity" continue to guide me on this journey.

I have become increasingly mindful of my own cultural embeddedness – certain personal constructs of art and aesthetics continue to strongly align to modernism and the aesthetic theory of formalism, no doubt due to my Dutch background. For me, the implications for future practice are twofold:

Firstly, the need to continue the process of critical thinking linked to action with the ultimate aim of achieving a treaty-based pedagogy and art curriculum content and context placed outside of a formalist, modernist model of art education. This is not easy, since a progressive-modernist paradigm continues to dominate the sector and, I would argue, has taken on ideological, dogmatic status.[35]

Secondly, the need to increase my understanding of Māori arts and cultural traditions as integral to protocols, approaches and strategies, "so as not to trample on the sacred practices and beliefs of Māori."[36] Although some may argue that the differences in Western and Māori world views make it not possible for a non-Māori teacher to teach Māori art,[37] the fact that, with few Māori teachers and a large percentage of Māori children in many mainstream settings, plus the dynamic nature of cultures, "Māori control over their own cultural domain can be problematic."[38] The role of mainstream teachers in bicultural development, Ritchie therefore argued, should be one of "facilitators of a process whereby Māori participants ultimately define what and how tikanga and mātauranga Māori are used."[39]

One art education approach that has the potential for a truly treaty-based art education approach linked to a strong pedagogical and theoretical foundation is that of "visual culture." "Visual culture" views "art" as expressions of people's social and cultural lives, rather than as an individual activity and a "self-contained object." It counteracts the modernist notion that "all the necessary resources … reside in the natural self, [not] in the collective culture and … in the specific art form the teacher was going to teach."[40] The visual cultural approach encourages both students and teachers to engage in the sharing of narratives, experiences and contexts around issues "of power, truth and subject."[41] As a result, not only are Māori knowledges, values, beliefs and practices more likely to be affirmed and normalised as part of the everyday classroom, the essentially different world views of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi are also more likely to be revealed.[42] Once these differences in values, beliefs, and practices are identified, we are then more able to identify and alter the imbalance in the "values mix" within our curricular and pedagogical documents and practices. This, however, needs to happen within a context of *genuine* collaboration, participation and power sharing, as we "cannot be expert in a culture that is not our own."[43] A failure to do so is likely to result in an "undermin[ing of] the cultural value of [Māori] concepts … [which in turn] undermine[s] the very fabric of cultural identity."[44]

A collaborative approach was used when considering ways of enhancing the treaty-based components in the Arts course in our field-based Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) programme. We also wanted to support students in the implementation of the treaty-based aspirations of *Te Whāriki* in their home centres. This ultimately led to the development of a component in which students researched *kōwhaiwhai* (patterns usually painted on the rafters of a meeting house). Students were required to develop, paint and explain a group *kōwhaiwhai*, its *whakapapa* and *kaupapa*,[45] which was to be supported by an original *waiata* or *waiata a ringa* (using *te reo Māori*) composed by the group and performed during the presentation. The relevance of the *kaupapa* and *whakapapa* to the group had to be identified as part of the presentation. It was also important that the *kōwhaiwhai* strongly reflected the value of *taonga tuku iho*; used the resources thoughtfully and respectfully; and showed extensive research and understanding of *kōwhaiwhai*, and appropriate use of *te reo Māori*. Students were further required to discuss ways in which aspects of their study could be implemented in their work with children. This discussion had to be linked to the treaty-based underpinnings of *Te Whāriki.* The group presentations took place during the *noho marae*.

This approach extended student teachers' understanding and implementation of Māori values and beliefs, and practices within their education programmes. Mainstream student teachers also increased their awareness of the need to be sensitive to the ethical issue of cultural ownership, and the need to acknowledge the cultural source of Māori art and its social, cultural, historical and philosophical contexts.[46]

My life and education experiences have increased my awareness of teaching as a social, cultural, political and subjective act, and the importance of critical examination of the content and context of pedagogy and practice. As research[47] has shown that tertiary education does not equip pre-service teachers with the strategies needed to be able to challenge current practices and to promote change, it is clearly important that I continue to consider the role I play in this, and ask to what extent I empower students to question underlying assumptions, values, norms and power issues inherent in current curriculum and practices in art and art education.

In this paper, I have shared my journey of involvement in early childhood visual arts education in Aotearoa New Zealand and my struggle to implement the treaty-based aspirations inherent in *Te Whāriki*. It was not until I came

to Aotearoa New Zealand that I became aware of how my experiences with art and art education shaped my social and personal identity. Over the years I have encountered numerous, often contradictory, theoretical and pedagogical stances in visual arts and arts education, which has ultimately led me to the understanding that, as a mainstream teacher, I am part of the system that still emphasises Western interpretations of art and art education, and of aesthetics. The pathway I find myself on currently is considering the notions of "altering the values mix" and of "visual culture" within a negotiated art education approach to ensure a true treaty-based art education programme. As a mainstream teacher, if teaching Māori visual culture, I need to be sensitive to the political and ethical issue of cultural ownership. My responsibility as an art teacher is defined by Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the principle of *tino rangatiratanga*.[48] Legislation requires me as art educator to implement a treaty-based art education programme. What is vital is that I, as a representative of the dominant culture, respect the concern that I may redefine and appropriate things Māori.[49] I therefore need to continue to be aware of my own personal world view, my knowledge base, and biases. I also need to acknowledge that I "cannot be expert in a culture that is not [my] own."[50]

Ehara taku toa I te toa takitahu

Engari he toa takimano

My strength does not come from me alone

But through the efforts of many

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