

## CONFRONTING/CONSTRUCTING CURRICULUM: CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTS AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS IN ART EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

David Bell

### THE CONTEXT

Four factors have contributed to the success of teaching and learning in visual art in New Zealand. Visual art has enjoyed core curriculum status. The art curriculum has always been founded on clearly defined conceptual foundations or rationales. Teaching practice in the visual arts has always been informed by a comprehensive preparation in formal teacher training. And implementation of an art curriculum has been supported with appropriate pedagogic strategies.

Thus drawing was a core component of the school syllabus from the 1870s. Curriculum content was founded on a utilitarian rationale. Teacher training was provided through a “pupil-teacher” apprenticeship system from 1864, and a “practising school” model at the Training Department of the Otago Normal School from 1876, with instruction from staff of the Dunedin School of Art.<sup>1</sup> The teaching model was an instructional, teacher-directed pedagogy for copyist learning practice.

From the 1940s to the late 1960s the status of visual art was maintained and invigorated under the benign leadership of Dr Clarence Beeby and the charismatic guidance of Gordon Tovey. It became a compulsory subject from 1943.<sup>2</sup> Tovey’s model had complex conceptual foundations. It drew on a range of twentieth-century theoretical perspectives, including the social reconstructivist ideals of Herbert Read, Victor Lowenfeld’s Piagetian child developmental paradigm, and the writings of the philosopher Oswald Spengler that had informed Tovey’s profound belief in the wholeness of the individual and the over-intellectualisation of Western society.<sup>3</sup> Tovey’s approach drew very much on ideals like the Canadian art educator Arthur Lismer’s notion of nurturing creative potentials: “all children are endowed by nature with a capacity for creativity which should be given every encouragement to carry through into adult life.”<sup>4</sup>

Art education enjoyed rich institutional support during the Tovey era. The importance of subject knowledge as a component in teacher training was recognised in the inclusion of discrete courses for each curriculum area in teacher training colleges. An art specialist third-year option was developed at Dunedin to train art specialist teachers and advisors for primary schools.<sup>5</sup> National art and craft syllabus statements, developed from 1945, 1950 and 1960,<sup>6</sup> were supported by a range of workshop projects, advisory services and published resources, including the Māori arts and crafts booklets published by the Art and Craft Branch of the Department of Education. For Tovey, the pedagogy was a facilitation model for developing art-making facility through motivating (Tovey himself is remembered as a charismatic figure in this respect) and supporting the development of the creative potential of each individual child. It was culturally inclusive, embracing Māori cultural perspectives into a vision for New Zealand art education, and its development of a generation of art specialist advisors informed generalist programmes in schools and supported creative innovations like Elwyn Richardson’s integrative approach.<sup>7</sup>

The faux marble classicism of the cover of the *1989 Art Syllabus*<sup>8</sup> suggested legitimacy and permanence (it lasted just over a decade). Art was compulsory to Year 10. Its curriculum was founded on understandings of art as socially constructed experience. It refined discipline-based pedagogic models into domains of “Knowing How” and “Knowing About” and understanding social contexts for art. Its implementation was supported by comprehensive pre-service training. It drew on teachers’ sound knowledge of art practice, but challenged them to extend their knowledge of understanding through contextualisation.

From 2000, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*<sup>9</sup> drew the four arts together within a single curriculum agenda. Arts – rather than just visual art – education was compulsory to end of Year 10. It clearly defined an institutional rationale of art as a socially constructed entity. It prescribed knowledge-based objectives for teaching and learning, and a structural relation to other subjects within the arts and the broader *Curriculum Framework* of 1993<sup>10</sup>, and it was supported with a range of implementation strategies including school development contracts, resource development, and the development of web-based supportive networks. It presented teachers with the most comprehensive epistemic model they had ever had. The domains of art knowledge were defined in its four strands of Practical Knowledge, Developing Ideas, Communicating and Interpreting, and Understanding Arts in Context.

In 2007, *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1–13*<sup>11</sup> embraced this subject knowledge model into a newly formulated theoretical foundation and created a systematic paradigm for all compulsory school learning for the foreseeable future. Until this point, the success of art education in New Zealand schools had always been guaranteed by the four dimensions of core subject status, strong rationale, comprehensive training and effective pedagogy outlined at the beginning of this paper. What expectations might we have for the future?

## CONFRONTING CURRICULUM

The evolution to today’s visual art curriculum structure seems logical, but is it? Do the four foundations of sound curriculum survive today? Is visual art still a compulsory subject? Does it depend on its own subject rationale? Is teaching practice still supported by comprehensive formal training? Has curriculum implementation been enhanced by positive developments in pedagogic strategies?

One distinctive feature of the 2007 document is the prominence given to the fourth condition of pedagogy. In this sense the new curriculum may be more valid than any before it. It favours a constructivist paradigm and co-constructive strategies consistent with those of arts engagements, encouraging teachers to examine anew the construction of art knowledge and negotiating learning pathways within their programmes.

The guiding principles of the art components of this curriculum are no different to those for any other subject. Learning is not formal, or restricted to the absorption of teacher-intended subject matter: Learning is interactive, negotiated, scaffolded and cumulative. Learning is a contextualised experience, and it is an interactive process, defining curriculum through developing interactions between child, teacher, subject knowledge and community cultures. This is a constructivist view in which the learner actively constructs meaning from their understandings of their experiences of their world. What is learned is conditioned by the ecology of the learning environment and the political and sociocultural contexts of the learner. In this model

programs must wrestle with how to maintain a healthy dialectic between the complementary and sometimes competing goals of teaching toward a common set of curriculum goals and teaching in ways that attend to students’ uncommon starting points and pathways.

If they are to succeed, teachers must become *learner-centered* and *learning-centered*, being clear both about what the nature of the subject matter is (why it is important and what is to be learned) and about how the particular learners they are teaching come to that content (what they know and need to know, how they learn, and what they care about) and then connecting the two.<sup>12</sup>

The 2007 curriculum thus favours co-constructive, negotiated learning pathways founded on the changing construction of meaningful relationships between knowledgeable teachers and knowing students, and developed through caring reciprocal relationships. In doing so it recognises students as its primary focus and embraces students' knowledge, beliefs, cultural and ethnic perspectives and learning interests. It fosters communication through discussion, exchange and the recognition of diverse points of view. It encourages in-depth experiences developed through sustained investigations and relationships that empower students' independent learning dispositions of critical reflection and enquiry, analytical thinking, reflection and evaluation and engagement in conversation or debate. In these ways it can recognise and inform learning as a lifelong process.

The curriculum is ethically responsible, respectful, and equitable: it is inclusive, socially just, and culturally diverse. In recognising and benefiting the participating interests of its whole community, it requires understandings of the complex sociocultural contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand. It recognises differences, both through the bicultural implications of the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi and through the recognition of the diverse multicultural experiences of all participant ethnicities and cultures, genders, classes, abilities, disabilities, or locations. Most importantly, recognition of the diversity of its learners embraces the interests of all, while providing effective conditions for developing the potentials of each.

These are principles fundamental for all healthy learning experiences, not just art. They do, however, provide fertile conditions for visual arts learning. They encourage enjoyment and engagement, play, experiment and invention. They facilitate an integration of art experiences within broader learning contexts that can in turn inform learning about art in relation to its contexts, talking about art, making critical judgements about art. This facilitates the art curriculum shift from a focus on the productive domain (the practical knowledge strand) to that of sociocultural or aesthetic engagement that will have, arguably, a more profound, long-lasting and relevant place in the humanising experience of art learning, and in the future lives of the students.

In promoting learning through knowledge drawn from personal experience and sociocultural contexts, these paradigms can nurture independent enquiry through negotiated pathways fundamental to individual invention in art. Most importantly, they found learning on skills of recognising, describing, analysing, synthesising, critically reflecting, extending, developing, inventing, and evaluation that are precisely the skills upon which art learning and art engagement are founded, and those which recur throughout the achievement objectives of the existing curriculum and the achievement standards by which we measure students' progress.

These art learning dispositions underpin the five "Key Competencies" of the new curriculum.<sup>13</sup> These embrace the competencies of *thinking* – "using creative, critical and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences and ideas;" *using language, symbols and texts* – "languages and symbols are systems for representing and communicating information, experiences and ideas;" *managing self* – to become "enterprising, resourceful, reliable and resilient;" *relating to others* – to inform "new approaches, ideas and ways of thinking;" and *participating and contributing* – within various "social, cultural, physical, and economic environments." These five key competencies embrace the fundamental dispositions that underpin engagement in the arts in developing learning into inventive practice in the visual domain and engaging in the arts as constructions of social and cultural life.

Pedagogic strategies like these correspond closely to the procedures and methods of engagement in the arts. They embrace the subjectivity of arts experiences within the broader frameworks of social and cultural educational and art-world institutions. Most importantly, they recognise the special character of arts as engagements of mind rather than simply of skill.

This is, however, a curriculum that will make far greater demands than before on teacher expertise and knowledge of subjects, students and the worlds of the educational communities they work and often live within. This immediately provokes an important question: Will the other three conditions of curriculum success be able to serve the interests of pedagogies like these?

Firstly, the core status of visual art has changed from that recommended in the 1943 Nelson Report. Although still a compulsory subject *over the course of Years 1–8*, it is no longer compulsory for students at Year 9 or 10.<sup>14</sup> There is also no guarantee that each of its four knowledge strands will receive sufficient attention. Some avoidance of assessing against the 1.1 strand at Year 11 suggests avoidance also of the *Communicating and Interpreting* and *Understanding the Arts in Context* strands, for example:

AS 90018	Investigate Maori and European artworks from established practice	5993 candidates
AS 90019	Use drawing processes and procedures	9817 candidates
AS 90020	Generate and develop ideas in making artworks	9465 candidates

Table 1: 2008 NCEA visual art entries.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, the specific rationales for a visual art education are no longer clear. In 1998, for example, the philosophical justification for a combined arts curriculum was challenged as a framework that would “effectively eviscerate art education in New Zealand.”<sup>16</sup> The problem lay partly in the invalid assumption of a common theoretical, epistemic and pedagogical foundation for all of the four different subject areas it embraced.<sup>17</sup> The 2000 document also tried to find a common ground between decades of diverse, and apparently incompatible, modernist and postmodern theoretical perspectives for visual art education within a comprehensive, if complex, multi-leveled structure.<sup>18</sup> Despite its inclusive intent, the document remained a top-down prescriptive explanation of subject knowledge. It left little room for engaging the contributing participation of local educational communities.

Thirdly, and ironically given the increased knowledge demands it makes of teachers, the current curriculum structure has been accompanied by reduced preparatory training support. Linda Darling-Hammond defines three fundamental principles of learning for developing pedagogic competencies for this kind of curriculum.

1. *Students come to the classroom with prior knowledge that must be addressed if teaching is to be effective.* If what they know and believe is not engaged, learners may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but not be able to apply them elsewhere. This means that teachers must understand what students are thinking and how to connect with their prior knowledge if they are to ensure real learning. Because students from a variety of cultural contexts and language backgrounds come to school with distinctive experiences, they present a range of preconceptions and knowledge bases that teachers must take into account in designing instruction.
2. *Students need to organise and use knowledge conceptually if they are to apply it beyond the classroom.* Memorising is not enough. To develop competence, they must understand how facts and ideas fit together within a conceptual framework, and they must apply what they are learning. This means that teachers must structure the material around core ideas and engage students actively in using the material, incorporating applications and problem solving while continually assessing students' understanding. Successful teachers offer carefully designed “scaffolds” to help students take each step in the learning process with assistance appropriate to each student's needs and progress.
3. *Students learn more effectively if they understand how they learn and how to manage their own learning.* A metacognitive approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning. Through modeling and coaching, students can see how to use a range of learning strategies, such as predicting outcomes, creating explanations to improve understanding, noting areas of confusion, activating background knowledge, planning ahead, and apportioning time and memory.<sup>19</sup>

Preparation of this kind makes significant demands on developing subject knowledge and understanding and pedagogic dexterity in student teachers. As these requirements have become more explicit however, college of education courses have experienced reductions of epic proportions in the status and time given to art education. This is evident in the loss of subject teaching departments, head of subject department positions, and dedicated advisory services. A decade ago, pre-service primary education students might have enjoyed three full art curriculum courses at 100, 200 and 300 level totaling 156 hours of class time. They might also have extended their learning in the subject to a total of 450 hours through elective papers in art. Today, the total compulsory art experience may be as low as 16 hours during the first year of study. The inevitable consequence must be the marginalisation of art within whole school programmes. This may already be evident in the avoidance of *Communicating and Interpreting* and *Understanding the Arts in Context* strand learning in secondary schools programmes noted earlier.

Teachers have not been left in a vacuum. They enjoy the support of art gallery and museum education programmes, some have engaged in teacher development contracts, and all have been able to access professional development networks and resources through published materials, tki (Te Kete Ipurangi – The Online Learning Centre), or artsonline. They can enjoy the touring art truck, Top Art shows, and the artists-in-schools programmes that in 2009 will see funded participation of 57 artists in 46 schools.<sup>20</sup> All of these can contribute to a reinvigoration of art learning, with a greater focus on art knowledge and how to develop it; yet the loss of compulsory status, clear rationales and rich teacher training may have significant implications for the marginalisation of art in schools in the future.

Perhaps the pedagogies promoted through the new curriculum statement can, in partnership with comprehensive subject knowledge, provide avenues that open to new perspectives in which we teach the students, not just the subject, so that the learner is honoured and individual and inventive learning practice is promoted. Perspectives in which sociocultural contexts of learning and their complex implications are recognised, and in which students' ideas and thinking and enquiry and risk-taking are valued over measurable product. In these ways the principles of positive learning described above, the dispositions or competencies defined for education in general, and the things we value in visual art learning, can be complementary. The broader curriculum framework can then facilitate the three key dimensions of artistic or aesthetic engagement: art as subjective experience, art as sociocultural engagement, and art as a process of mind.

## THE CHALLENGES

Since the publication of the 1989 syllabus, art education has required an increasingly diverse range of engagements, especially in its expansion from "making" into the other domains of discussion about art and artworks and their contexts, critical faculty and evaluation. This shift is consistent with a re-evaluation of the rationales of learning about art for enriching our lives beyond the narrow constraints of practice alone. These shifts are, I suggest, completely consistent with the one characteristic of art experience that we value the most, and which distinguishes it from other kinds of learning: its potential for individual engagement and invention as a realm of experience distinguished by the subjectivity rather than by the objectivity of its experience.

If the new curriculum holds some promise for art education, it also brings some challenges and raises new questions. Shifting learning away from objectively focused directive teaching towards subjectively focused co-constructive models has implications for assessment, encouraging a healthy move from assessment-focused learning to student-centred learning. Responsive rather than transmissive teaching and learning strategies, meaningful subject-integration approaches, project- or inquiry-based strategies, co-constructed learning pathways, and meeting the needs of diverse learners, require complex pedagogic skills. Are new teachers sufficiently informed to fulfill these needs? What kinds of subject knowledge do these teachers now need? Do they need more knowledge to be better able to respond to diverse needs? Do they need richer knowledge in contextual and aesthetic domains beyond "making" to meet the multilayered requirements of the curriculum? Do they need to develop strategies for accessing knowledge to

better respond to the changing needs of a negotiated pathway? How can we define and inform innovative, rather than conventional, pedagogies that embrace the principles of the new curriculum?

The success of visual arts education within the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum will be entirely dependent on the validity and effectiveness of the responses we provide to these challenges and questions.

## APPENDIX

The presentation of this paper was at the ANZAAE 2009 conference followed by a roundtable discussion in which approximately 70 teachers, mainly secondary visual art specialists, discussed the affordances and challenges of the visual arts curriculum today. This roundtable discussion was developed through the following themes:

### **In what ways can the current curriculum promise/inform/enhance better teaching and learning in the visual arts?**

- In strategies for better teaching and learning in art
- In enhancing learning through subject-knowledge integration
- In meeting the diverse needs and interests of your learning community
- Other

### **In what ways will the curriculum bring new challenges for you?**

- In meeting the challenges of the Key Competencies
- In subject knowledge for each of the four strands
- In strategies for teaching and learning – e.g., integration in secondary
- In meeting the diverse needs of your educational community
- For responding to art needs in co-constructive, integrated or inquiry-based learning approaches
- Other

### **How well equipped do you feel for evaluating the learning achievements of your students for all four strands of the curriculum?**

### **How would you like to see the challenges the curriculum brings for you met?**

- In pre-service training
- In ongoing/in-service training
- In whole-school professional development
- In personal professional development
- In whole-school strategies
- Enhanced professional networks
- Resources
- Other

### **How do you feel about the aims of the visual art component of the new curriculum in:**

- Understanding its philosophy?
- Seeing its promise for enhanced visual arts learning?

### **In what areas of art knowledge would you welcome more knowledge and resources?**

**David Bell** has a background in Fine Arts, with specialisations in Printmaking, Art Education, History and Art History and Theory. He has contributed to art education programmes at the Dunedin College of Education since 1985, and has been head of department of Art Education there since 1997. He is currently associate coordinator of postgraduate programmes at the University of Otago College of Education, and President of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators. He has regularly contributed to Ministry of Education and NZQA projects in visual arts and art history, particularly in the areas of curriculum content and structure, and the assessment of achievement in these areas.

David's research interests embrace art education and its history, pedagogy for art learning, and art history and theory, particularly in the New Zealand and Japanese visual fields. He has been a regular contributor to art education and art history conferences. He is on the editorial board of *Scope (Art & Design)*.

- 1 Carol Morton Johnston and Harry Morton, *Dunedin Teachers College: The First Hundred Years* (Dunedin: Dunedin Teachers College, 1976), 4, 9-10. The School of Art shared premises with the Training School in Moray Place in Dunedin.
- 2 The Thomas Report of 1943 recommended that all New Zealand children should enjoy learning in art and craft: *The Thomas Report* (Wellington: New Zealand Department of Education, 1943).
- 3 Carol Henderson, *A Blaze of Colour: Gordon Tovey, Artist Educator* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1998), 77-8.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 5 Documented in Roger Hardie, "...the buds of flowering:" *An Archive List of Department of Education Art & Crafts Specialist Staff 1938-1989* (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library, 2005).
- 6 Wellington: Department of Education, *An Art Scheme for Primary Schools Tentative, 1945; A Draft Syllabus: Art and Craft in the Primary School*, published in 1950; and *The New Zealand Department of Education Primary School Syllabuses: Art and Crafts in the Primary School, 1961*.
- 7 Elwyn Richardson, *In the Early World* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1964).
- 8 Ministry of Education, *ART: Art Education Junior Classes to Form 7, Syllabus for Schools* (Wellington: Learning Media, 1989).
- 9 Ministry of Education, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Wellington: Learning Media, 2000).
- 10 Ministry of Education, *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework/Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Wellington: Learning Media, 1993).
- 11 Ministry of Education, *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1-13* (Wellington: Learning Media, 2007).
- 12 Linda Darling-Hammond, *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons From Exemplary Programmes* (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 2006), 189.
- 13 Ministry of Education, *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium Teaching*, 12-13.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 20. Only two of the four arts subjects are required at Years 9 and 10.
- 15 My thanks to the National Moderator in Visual Arts, Geoff Harris, for this statistic.
- 16 Ted Bracey, "The New Zealand Curriculum Framework and the Notion of Arts Education", *Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators Newsletter*, February 1998, 2-7.
- 17 "... the Framework document does not use the term 'the arts' descriptively. Instead, it employs the term in a dumbly and simplistically denotative way which effectively relieves those who wrote the document from the responsibility of providing an intelligent account of how the concept works in language or, even, what it refers to in practice. The effect of this is to render the concept virtually meaningless." *Ibid.*, 4.
- 18 The 2000 document was developed from a depth analysis of a comprehensive range of perspectives on visual art education, drawing on the earlier 1989 curriculum and extending through the work of Lanier; Chalmers, Duncum, Bracey, Freedman et al. to embrace a range of aesthetic education and visual culture paradigms together with its existing foundation in modernist sensibilities.
- 19 Darling-Hammond, *Powerful Teacher Education*, 9-10.
- 20 In the 2009 Budget, presented several weeks after the presentation of this paper at a conference, government funding for the Artists in Schools programme was cancelled.