

Beyond the “beauty full” classroom; the draft arts curriculum and teacher education in the postmodern context

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I make preliminary comments about The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum: Draft (Ministry of Education, 1999) document, interrogating it in terms of its framing of the arts as "disciplines". The notion of the "arts", which appears to take its meaning from the generic term "art" that directs us to class together music, painting, visual art, dance and other diverse activities, is examined. The idea of the arts as "literacies" is questioned, as well as the ideological nature of representing the arts as "essential skills". Suggestions are made concerning the identity and role of educators in the arts areas of the curriculum. I then take strands within the Draft document ("Communicating and Interpreting Meaning" and "The Arts in Context") and examine these in terms of the possibilities for a critical interpretation of pedagogy and what I believe to be our obligations as teacher educators within a preservice programme and a university setting.

The conceptual framework and the “disciplines”

The notion of "disciplines" within *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum: Draft* (Ministry of Education, 1999; henceforth cited as *Draft Arts*) as cultural policy is a Eurocentric conception that fits ideologically with the forces of cultural homogeneity resulting from global capitalism and neo-liberal policies. It hails the art educator into registers of identification with order, rationality, linear development and control. The *Draft Arts* identifies the arts as

separate *disciplines* of dance, drama, music, and the visual arts. Each has its own languages made up of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic signs and symbols and each has its own distinctive body of knowledge (8, my italics).

The arts are, according to the document, united in that they are "disciplines", yet separate "with their own languages". "Discipline", with its "military disciplinary eye", the panoptic eye, becomes the master signifier that "buttons down" (Jagodzinski, 1997: 84) the knowledge of the *Draft Arts* programme

Discipline and all the paradigmatic clusters of signifiers it buttons down - territory, form, procedure, formalism, obedience, self-surveillance, clarity, directionality - may be summarized as the modernist "will to certainty" (84).

Whereas "discipline" seems to assure art teachers of a granite-like indisputable body of knowledge, the emergence and development of cultural studies has implications for the traditional liberal arts curriculum and discipline-based curriculum. It implies, in fact, a dislocation and displacement of the

"traditional" disciplines. About the latter, Foucault (1972: 22) maintains that it is for only the last two centuries that knowledge has assumed a disciplinary form. Despite this, we have come to see this state of affairs as so normal or "natural" that its historical character is easily forgotten. We may, in fact, re-imagine alternatives to the production and organisation of knowledge.

Peters (1999: 6), taking up Foucault's interrogation of disciplinarity, further wants to talk of "*multiplicity* of thought, of the difference between disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking, of thinking without the disciplines, perhaps even thinking despite the disciplines". Foucault chose the notion of discipline as part of the title of his famous work, *Discipline and Punish* and was interested in the different processes through which people "are made subjects" (Peters, 1999: 6). The *Draft Arts* document places music, and visual art, within limited terms of the nineteenth century aesthetic discourses regarding music as an "art" discipline.

The *Draft Arts* hints at interdisciplinarity when it refers to "students learning across the curriculum" (76), and again when it provides examples of "ways in which students' learning" in the arts disciplines "can be linked to learning in other essential learning areas" (76). It suggests "teachers incorporate one or more arts disciplines in units ... " (76). There is, however, no hint of an acknowledgement of interdisciplinarity within the "Conceptual Framework" of the document. What account does the *Draft Arts* take of the emergence of cultural studies, which, as Peters (1999) argues, implies a dislocation and displacement of the traditional disciplines? In this vein, Art History (the history of the *discipline* of art) as "art education" might heed Derrida's statement in *Positions* (1981: 57):

The metaphysical character of the concept of history is not only linked to linearity but to an entire *system* of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc.).

Derrida particularised truth referring to "a certain type of traditionality", and a "certain concept of truth".

The generic notion

Draft Arts' lumping together and reduction of the arts will ensure once again that, for the masses, creation of art/music etc. is supplanted by mere "contemplation and perception" of objects-of-art created by *someone else*, not ourselves, and that this practice is normalised *before* students reach adulthood. The "generic" notion of the arts militates against a *critical education in the arts*. A critical education in the arts is one that exhibits a "self-consciousness about the hegemonic agenda of discursive practices" (Drucker, 1998: 252). It recognises and understands form and interpretation as embedded in social and cultural historical specifics, and understands what a practice recognising the *contingency* of artistic identity and originality means. The *Draft Arts* document does make efforts to focus upon reception and audience. However, its internal contradictions, the notion of "disciplines", and its marginal setting and status within the *Curriculum Framework* (1993- its disciplining document - still position the arts as "generic", and art as a "neutral disinterested container" (Gablik, 1991: 149). Once again, art practice is encoded within a "technology of the aesthetic", the clean and white art gallery space which enframes and isolates. Art education in the past has scaffolded art education through which ideological support is given to elitism in art. An emphasis on knowing how to *make* and *appreciate* "works-of-art" constructs art education as unconnected to human matters such as political, moral, and religious values, or its social and cultural production. A "hierarchy of taste and culture" implies that culture is the contribution of the few, "a small area of brightness and interest" (Goodall, 1995: 55).

Art education is not, in my view, to nourish an elite of *culturati*, for which art is the new religion - as a commodity, the conventional symbol of which is represented by the "Holy Rectangle", the painting (Wolfe, 1993). Disciplined by the *Curriculum Framework* (1993) the *Draft Arts* curriculum policy has positioned art, once again, in what Adorno (1997: 2) argues is "a Sunday institution" that

provides "solace" for the bourgeois, as though it is the function of education to reproduce "art-as-commodity". Thus, aesthetics is again relegated to "weekend pleasures as the complement to bourgeois routine" (333).

Art education within the *Draft Arts*, as a *generic notion*, mirrors what Adorno and Horkheimer described in *The Culture Industry* - an art in which "even the limited forms of autonomy and unpredictability represented by art have been brought under the domination of rationalised capitalism" (Connor, 1996: 349). The arts have not been able to escape the *generic chains* in which they have been imprisoned, despite the best efforts of those dedicated to their protection.

The arts as "literacies"

Given the increased marginalisation of the arts, the notion of "literacies" in the arts (intended to be empowering for students) is unlikely to operate in any way other than as a mere functional literacy, thus contributing to hierarchical notions of culture. In addition, the treatment of "arts literacies" is an essential ingredient facilitating their subjection to what Lyotard (1984) has termed the principle of "performativity".

The concept of "literacy" (and "arts literacies") functions to *bind* the arts as a generic concept and, in fact, mirrors or fits a marginalised and generic arts. Foley et. al. (1998: 33) see "the interrelated nature of the four strands in each discipline" as "central to the concept of literacy", being promoted. While the *Draft Arts* document is upholding the idea that "each art discipline has its own languages, each has its distinctive bodies of knowledge, concepts, forms, genres, processes, and means of inquiry" that "develop different cognitive skills", and that "they do not form a universal language or communication system" (Ministry of Education, 1999: 8), an appeal is still made to grand narratives of universalism and "development", albeit unwittingly, by reference to "multiple literacies" which "develop different cognitive skills". To be or not to be literate become matters for determination and measurement.

The *Draft Arts* states: "We develop literacy in dance, drama, music, or visual arts as we acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes, and understanding in the disciplines and use its particular signs and symbols to convey and receive meaning" (9). Notions of "Arts Literacies", while intended to exemplify or illustrate postmodernism in the *Draft Arts*, in fact, works to contradict the postmodern influence.

After the Commonwealth Literacy Programme (cited in Thomson 1998: 4), the idea of "Arts Literacy" hints of "literacy basics" which, given the reality of the new school time tabling for "The Arts" (see Mansfield, 1995), may lead in the direction of a new form of "functional literacy" as opposed to "critical literacy". To highlight the problematic conception of "Arts Literacies" used within the *Draft Arts*, I draw on the work of Peter McLaren and Thomas da Silva (1993) on *critical literacy* and Colin Lankshear (1994) on *literacy and empowerment* as opposed to mere *functional literacy*. McLaren and da Silva (1993: 48) argue that "pedagogies always produce literacies, which for the most part have been pressed into the service of dominant culture". Freire's project of emancipatory political praxis through critical literacy as opposed to mere functional literacy, is established by McLaren and da Silva as a way for teachers to interrogate, destabilise and disorganise dominant strategies of power. They argue that to understand how knowledge is produced we must take into account how experience is structured. Given the structuring of experience produced through the marginal curriculum space allotted to the arts within the *Curriculum Framework* (1993), "literacy" in the arts is likely to operate in little more than a "functional" manner.¹ There are clear indications in the *Draft Arts* document that any intention which might lead to "critical literacy" within a "critical pedagogy" have been *diverted* by tempering the language, thus hijacking critical possibilities. This bears out Fitzsimmon's (1999: 10) suggestion that "under the rubric of economic rationalism there are no spaces for questions about the value of liberal values".

The way the document allows the notion of arts "literacies" to be co-opted by the "skills" ideology diminishes the "critical pedagogical" element envisioned within the Background Paper by Foley et al. (1999). "Critical literacy" within a "critical pedagogy" in McLaren's terms, is not explicated within the *Draft Arts* document. "Arts literacies" have been inserted into a rhetoric of empowerment, choice and freedom - thus making invisible to teachers and students their manipulation as choosers and seducing them into thinking they are free, responsible and ungoverned in their purposes. Thus "dancing" to "*promote a product*" (Ministry of Education, 1999: 25), is offered as autonomous action.

The arts representation as essential skills

According to the *Draft Arts* document, the arts are to "engage students in learning that contributes to developing essential skills described in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework: communication skills, social and co-operative skills, problem-solving skills, self-management and competitive skills, and physical skills" (80). This framework of learning has a strong emphasis on training and could be seen as part of developing "a new peasantry" (Paul Morris, TV 1, 'Backchat' Interview, 1999).

"Ideas, feelings, experiences" (Ministry of Education, 1999: 80) are conceived of in terms of "skills", albeit communication skills. The *educational* value of "exploring symbols and notation systems to communicate meaning in a range of cultures and contexts", is hijacked by their re-framing in terms of "skills". To "choreograph, dance, script drama, compose music and make objects and images as forms of personal and cultural expression" (80) are all, according to this document, "skills". Both the *Draft Arts* (1999) and the new *Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (2000) documents are embroiled in and supported by the signifiers of new right ideology, globalisation, multi-nationalism, mastery, and excellence. For example the straightjacket of "self-management and competitive skills" for the arts is part of an instrumentalist and rationalist ideology that, apart from having nothing to do with the arts as expressive of different forms of cultural production, has nothing to do with their role in education. Yet it demands that we, as subjects, participate in the "circle of manipulation", the universal rule of quantifying thought and behaviour (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972: 121).

The representation of the arts within the forced constraints of "essential skills" appears to construct students as controlled automatons subjected to "disciplinary" measures. That is, through the arts, they are to be subjected to the development of "Self-management and Competitive Skills" (Ministry of Education, 1999: 81), and to "Physical skills" (81), the "discipline" contributing in no uncertain manner to this "disciplining". The economic rationalist character of this "generic" document, despite rhetoric to the contrary, is nowhere clearer than in this section.

Critical pedagogy and the role of art educators

The question of *identity for art educators* while not "pure", once informed by postmodern and poststructuralist theory, is central when thinking about mentoring student teachers in terms of their educational entitlement within curriculum and pedagogy. Do we want the arts in education to identify with the transgressive element in the educational text? I suggest that we do. Art has always been concerned with pushing boundaries and it is the transgressive elements that wander, that digress, that trespass, that push the boundaries and might even allow (God forbid) children time to sit and stare. Transgressive elements in education are not tidy, they cannot be contained within a frame. Transgressive elements disrupt and place in question traditional oppositions. Transgressive elements in any educational setting trace, and help students to trace, the encoded patterns of suppression (and subversion) in a *politics of representation*. This is part and parcel of *critical pedagogy* which may not only provide spaces for but celebrate alterity, difference and "otherness".

I suggest that we, as art educators, do not want to be contained within a frame or canonical readings of "the work", or to be pruned and tidied to fit in with official definitions of the knowledge

constitution in art education. This is the "short-backand- sides" version set by the Ne Right ideology, which supports by implication the reproduction of the autonomous gallery "work-of-art" notion of art education. It is not the role of art education to be feeding or reproducing a commercial or curatorial interest in art.

A cultural investigations approach takes the notion of difference, suggesting that we deconstruct the notion of art within the notion of "difference". The Western aesthetic is not the only aesthetic. We need to help teachers understand what *difference* means in terms of practice: that is, in terms of an "aesthetics of difference" (see Mansfield, 2001: vi), and in terms of a multiplicity of styles (e.g., kitsch, repetition, appropriation). The *aesthetics of difference* is a provocative and politicised notion of difference which, utilising poststructuralist and postmodernist theories and analyses, challenges and destabilises homogenising universalist aesthetic claims that would bludgeon with Western modernist prescriptions of "aesthetic validity" (Greenberg, 1939: 8-9), heterogeneous visions of quality. This means we need to be able to mentor student teachers to be able to question cultural hegemony and its assumptions about "art", about beauty. The modernist aesthetic of the importance of formal relations, originality and authenticity, self-expression, and the 'masterpiece' is thus questioned. In a pluralistic world, in which a multiplicity of styles proliferate, we need to see Western High culture as one form among many narratives of art. For that, we have to be sufficiently educated to help students fling questions at rules for imagery and narrative (see Lyotard, 1984). We need, ourselves, to philosophically challenge the prioritisation of Western High cultural notions: e.g., that a flat "painting" on a wall is "what art is", and that this is what art education should be about. Instead of the production of beautiful things evoking aesthetic attitudes and beautiful feelings, we ought, as Rizvi (1994: 66) argues, to involve students in the examination of cultural practices as signifying systems, as "diverse practices of representation". Investigating culturally ascribed values involves teachers in considerably more than merely *making* works of art.

The *Draft Arts* document includes "Communicating and interpreting meaning" ("Communicating and interpreting in the arts", in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*, Min. of Ed, 2000: 14), and "Understanding the arts in context" (14), both of which require a critical interpretation that is absent from the documents. For a truly critical pedagogy, attention ought to be paid to the broader visual culture, especially given the constant subjection of today's children to an aesthetic experience involving the convoluted and limitless circulation of signs, codes and discourses (see Freedman, 1994, 1999; Pearse, 1992; Duncum, 1994). Teaching semiotically involves students in reading messages, signs and symbols in visual images. Technology's capability for piling, stacking, and eclectically juxtaposing images from past and present creates a complex 'postmodern' experience for children. The fact that there is an image-production and marketing industry specialising in turnover time (Harvey, 1991: 289- 290) suggests a critical role and voice for art educators in the interpretation of the history and politics of representation. How, for instance does the imaging of symbols of status and wealth, fame and power, as well as class (important in bourgeois society), manipulate and condition subjectivity? Given that there are vested interests involved in the assembling, crafting, building, and creating of images which manipulate desire, art education's deconstructive role begins to gel. Art education must be concerned with whose images are accorded hyper-visibility, whose are invisible, and how the image-makers and crafters themselves contribute to this signifying chain. Visual quality in the postmodern curriculum is no longer isolated from meaning. In short, the complex 'postmodern' experience, resulting from current technological ability to juxtapose the historical with the contemporary, provides possibilities for the art educators' questioning and production of imagery and music.

In teaching a broader visual culture, which goes way beyond the "beauty full" classroom, teachers must be able to teach about the *politics of representation*. Art teachers within a critical pedagogy need to be able to help students recognise *when* traditional cultural motifs and techniques of art-making are being increasingly 1:: placed by imported materials and foreign styles, and in whose interests these processes operate, i.e., to recognise *when* cultural appropriation, siphoning out, borrowing, commodifying of images has taken place and when a diminishing of local

cultural meaning has occurred, and to be able to deconstruct such imagery and reconstitute it with a newly empowering iconography.

As part of this *politics of representation* within a *politics of difference* (Peters and Marshall, 1996), teachers in the postmodern era need to be able to teach semiotically, for example to help children recognise *when* imagery within a broader visual culture is subordinating and *when* it keeps subordination based on *difference* intact (images of age, disability, class, gender, race). Teachers need to be able to discern, and help children discern, how particular images from certain times and places have been concocted and have operated to disadvantage certain groups, that is, to construct their subjectivity. As music/dance/drama educators we need to understand our role as cultural arbiters, and that we are involved in cultural politics. How is it that we as art educators have helped to reinscribe the master's narrative and reproduce our identification with the master's signifiers in the politics of identification? These curriculum documents, I suggest, play a contributing part in this symbolic signifying chain, despite what are contradictorily culturally democratic intentions.

While the notion of cultural democracy is implicit within the *Draft Arts* document, though not articulated in such terms, I do not believe student teachers will be positioned well to put into practice its understandings *in the absence of* an understanding of critical pedagogy. The notion of critical pedagogy is not mentioned within the new *Draft Arts*. Though it was referred to in the Background papers (see Foley et. al., 1999) informing the writing of the *Draft Arts*, it was neither defined nor clarified. However, merely because this aspect has been hijacked from the document, this does not mean that in a *university* setting, we should not address the arts within a critical pedagogy.

As part of the "Beauty Full" curriculum of the past, the formal qualities of art were elevated, and aesthetic experience became an end in itself (one only needs to look at the curriculum document earlier in this century). Aesthetics is still important in education in the arts but, to reiterate, we need to insert culture into the aesthetic in what I have called the *aesthetics of difference*.

Teacher education in a university setting, and in the name of academic freedom, surely is not required to be the obedient servant of the state to the extent that it mirrors the marginalisation of the arts reflected in the *Curriculum Framework* (1993). Teaching visual culture within postmodern culture must involve teaching a *politics of representation*, and art education can no longer avoid the fuller implications of its involvement with representation. One would hope that teacher education would be a prime site for the discussion of difference. The politics of curriculum structures, the historical mental-manual split in curriculum, as well as promotional practices, have legitimated and institutionalised the marginalisation of artistic forms of leadership, as well as the rising through the ranks of many lacking in either experience, knowledge and understanding of the arts role in education. Unfortunately, if the decision-makers regarding the constitution of educational knowledge generally (which must then affect knowledge selection in art/music etc. education), disregard and - in an essentialist manner - treat issues of class, race, and gender as final, finished, "dealt with", or unrelated to the arts, much damage will be done to teacher education in the arts areas of the curriculum. These issues require constant vigilance and have scarcely even entered the discourse in the arts in education in New Zealand, partly because academic research in the arts has been rejected within a culture of anti-intellectualism (see Snook, 1998) We must resist the impulse to close such "critical" and "political" issues down before they have even begun to be discussed in art education, for in not resisting, we silence criticism; we merely flounder in a market quagmire, we countenance the closing down and silencing of criticism; we exclude postmodern and contemporary feminist approaches, which weave together and unravel historical and critical issues; we silence discussions and articulations of difference and its politics (i.e., "art that emanates from concerns with power centres, cultural critique, social activism, and societal reconstruction", Stout, 2000: 352).

We need to nurture teachers' ability to help children to discover how views of gender, race, and class, and images of the "other" generally, are socially organised and imaged within media

representations. Art, drama, dance, education too, need to embrace and be contextualised within educational philosophy, cultural policy studies, sociology, and history (see O'Neill, 1998: Snook, 1998: Codd, 1998). This is the domain of art education engaged in postmodern questioning. That is, art education must involve an examination of dominant representations of class, gender, and ethnically based images. To marginalise, resist, or exclude these aspects of art education in favour of the formal surface features of works of art (such as "line", "shading", "texture and brushstroke", "shape", "symmetry", etc.) is tantamount to censorship, and something teacher education within a university ought not to condone. Teacher's College art education programmes' level of "theory", while not excluding such modernist discussion, ought to be advancing beyond "developmental" descriptions of children's drawing (see Lowenfeld's, 1957, categorisation).

Many of the students coming into teacher education courses are unlikely to have encountered critical theory in relation to the arts. Few student teachers, teachers and school principals are likely to have had much exposure to visual art or music education beyond their own limited primary school experience. The history of these subjects in New Zealand education bears witness to this.² If student teachers in Bachelor of Education and Teacher Diploma Courses are, a) merely *exposed* to "good" primary teachers talking about children's art-making or "works of art" (i.e., "art-as-object") and classroom management and then, b) led through the new arts curriculum in its present form, they are most unlikely to be equipped to engage with this politics of representation and the vested interests which are involved in image-making. They will hardly be prepared for the "learned profession" that Snook (1998: 135) envisions, or for that matter, for being the "professional contextualist" envisaged by Codd (1998: 158).

We must assist student teachers in promoting a social aesthetic or popular aesthetic. It is *not* the purpose of art education to prepare children to observe art from the "aesthetic disposition" or the disinterested stance that is assumed when looking at art within the white cube - the gallery full of pieces, in Freedman's (1999: 10) words, "the brilliant collection, the sanctuary of the museum, the dramatised auction". The view that "how-to-make-art", or art at the level of "sunshine and rainbows", is the paramount goal of art education (i.e., the "Beauty Full" curriculum - and the beautiful, pretty classroom) is indefensible today. In such a programme, there would be few challenging or risky questions being asked. A programme which sees arts processes as neutral, as apolitical, and refuses a place for theory of art - the *why* of art - occludes reference to culture and difference in any but superficial ways and, in fact, works to homogenise art definitions into that of the dominant culture in which the "great" tradition presides. To avoid a merely pedestrian outlook in music, visual art, dance and drama education, in a University or College of Education, we will need to offer beginning teachers a well-researched philosophical and critical theoretical framework for the arts in education. It is unethical not to do so.

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Notes

1. Levine (1986) cited in Lankshear 1993: 91) argues that the idea of functional literacy that has evolved was associated with "employability", with "social integration", and "adjustment" of its possessors.

Kozol (1985, cited in Lankshear, 1993: 91) abhors functional literacy as unworthy" and minimalising to human beings. It aims to equip illiterate adults with just those skills and knowledge - no more - which ensure 'competence to function at the lowest levels of mechanical performance', as workers and citizens in a print-dominated society. Parallels can be seen here with the New Zealand state's aim to make the nation's youth technologically "literate", that is, to adjust them to survival in a technological society.

2. For the histories of art and music education in New Zealand, see Mansfield (2000).

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