
BOOK REVIEWS

The Arts in Education: Critical Perspectives from Aotearoa New Zealand, Edited by Elizabeth M. Grierson and Janet E. Mansfield, Palmerston North, Dunmore Press, 2003.

This is an important edited collection of chapters on *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Even though they describe and critique a situation on issues in relation to the New Zealand *Arts Curriculum* these contributions have also a universal application. Earlier versions of some of the chapters in this book have already appeared in *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Cultural and Policy Studies in Education*, Vol. 20(1), 2001.

Those who have looked at the New Zealand Curriculum Framework will have noted the priority given to mathematics, language, science and technology. The arts were excluded from the 'top four', relegated to the region of 'unimportant others', and then later their time allocation in the curriculum was reduced. This was done without a full look at the arts curricula. The subsequent introduction of a new *Arts Curriculum* in 2002 is looked at critically, for the first time, by the authors of the chapters in this edited collection. It is, I believe, an important document for New Zealand education but, also, there are universal implications.

Michael Peters, who was influential in the initial Arts Forums, coordinated by Janet Mansfield in 2000 and 2002, provides the Foreword, in which he situates the contributions in wider political and social contexts. This raises questions of national and cultural identity "which loom large under the impact of an economic and cultural globalisation" (2003: 9). The difficult question for Peters is what does it mean to be critical in arts education today? His answer, in part, is that traditional critical theories no longer 'work' in these new social, national and economic contexts. This throws down a challenge to the contributors. In general they respond very well. They are leading practitioners, mainly from New Zealand, in the field of the visual arts, dance, drama and music. Their general point is that the arts cannot just be something grudgingly added on to the 'important' top four in the national curriculum but must be fully integrated in educational, cultural, and social practices.

The editors, Elizabeth Grierson and Janet Mansfield, set the national scene - the history of Arts education in New Zealand - more fully in their editorial introduction, "Contextualising the Curriculum". They wish as editors "to locate the discussion of the arts in education within a wider social and political context" (29). This they do well, before turning to introduce the New Zealand literature.

They open their section by noting: "there has been little recorded debate and analysis of the arts in changing global conditions, and the relative paucity of New Zealand literature on the arts in education ... will have become evident to those attempting research in the field. Little has been written of a critical nature" (31), with the exception of Duncum and Bracey (2002). They make little or no apology for not attempting to define 'critical'; instead they have allowed the individual authors to 'take stock' on this issue - which I applaud. And the debate which this will cause, I also applaud. Their aim has been "to claim intellectual space for the arts, as not only creative, reflective, or expressive, but as significantly cultural, critical and discursive modes of practice" (43). This has been well achieved.

Chapter One on "Music and the Arts" is written by John Drummond from the University of Otago, Dunedin. Drummond is a capable and insightful thinker who is familiar with the New Zealand literature. Drummond's argument, in his very good contribution, is that music knowledge involves a unique way of knowing, different from the reasoning involved in the 'top four' of the New Zealand

curriculum. This is why the arts are marginalised. The problem, he argues, is not the arts *per se*, but rather an obsolete educational system. What young people need is not more immersion in ratiocination, as he calls it, but an arts education which introduces them to *contemporary* arts. Instead the *Arts Curriculum* cuts the creativity of young people with its cultural institutions. In short the *Arts Curriculum* is out of date.

In Chapter Two, "Beyond the 'Beauty Full' Classroom", Janet Mansfield takes up a similar theme talking of the *Arts Curriculum* framing the arts as disciplines. She also questions the ideas of seeing the arts as 'literacies' and as involving 'essential skills'. 'Discipline' seems to assure teachers in the arts that "their subjects represent a granite-like indisputable body of knowledge" (64). However, critical cultural studies suggest otherwise. Drawing upon Foucault's notion of discipline, she sees the *Arts Curriculum* as producing subjects who merely perceive and contemplate art objects created by others. This is not a critical arts education and does not involve a critical education. At best it nourishes "an elite of *culturati*, for which art is the new religion" (66). In addition, conceiving the arts as literacies, in the present age of performativity, will at best be a type of *functionalliteracy*, because the limited time given to the arts will prevent *critical literacy*. The conception of essential skills in the *Arts Curriculum*, involving communication skills, problem-solving skills, self-management and competitive skills, and physical skills has, she argues, a strong emphasis on training within neo-liberal approaches to education. Finally she provides an interesting and important section on an arts education which involves a critical pedagogy.

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki in Chapter Three, "Culturalisms and the Arts Curriculum", raises a series of issues for the arts and arts education. He contrasts two Ministry of Education documents: *Nga Toi I roto te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (2000), culturally specific to the indigenous, and *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*. The first, *Nga Toi*, is said to be "a resolutely monocultural Maori arts curriculum statement, culturally specific to the indigenous people of New Zealand". On the other hand *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* document is said to be "both ideologically bi cultural and culturally comprehensive and inclusive" (81). The author says there is an irreconcilable tension between the two documents. *Nga Toi* "reflects a hard-won confidence and security in asserting identity and continuity between past and present, tradition and contemporaneity", whereas the *Arts Curriculum* "has to accommodate an ever-increasing range of cultures and ethnicities" in a society "which is in a dynamic state of flux". It remains to be seen whether these two curricula can serve their constituencies; it remains an open question. The problem for the *Arts Curriculum* is that 'Pakeha' art has not been theorised (89), as it is taken as self-evident. This observation parallels much that is said in the preceding chapters.

Elizabeth Grierson in Chapter Four- "Framing the Arts in Education" - 'continues' in parallel with these themes. In making the point that the politics of difference are often obfuscated in educational practice she provides an excellent practical example which shows how a critique of 'difference' as being theoretical in a curriculum document and a corresponding demand that 'difference' should be replaced by 'similarity' or 'sameness' shows no admission, let alone recognition, that the use of such concepts in education is also theoretical. The politics of difference is therefore associated with the exercise of power. That has to be correct, in my view.

In Chapter Five, "Drama as a Way of Knowing", Janinka Greenwood argues that drama is more than a site for knowing as suggested in the *Arts Curriculum* because "it can also constitute an active agency in shaping knowing" (119). She argues that "learning is often accelerated through drama" (120). Anyone who has seen Camus' *Caligula* will learn more quickly the evils of unbridled power than through a course in political philosophy, in which one learns through argument. As she says "drama is a unique and powerful way of knowing" (132). She provides a very good bibliography of drama in education, but I would have liked some more actual examples from drama: for example in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, even if life is meaningless (absurd), this does not prevent the tramps imposing some order upon their miserable existence whilst waiting for Godot. If this drama is seen

as nihilistic then the message from Beckett (and of course Camus) is that the situation of the tramps is not the end but a beginning.

Chapter Six - "Taking the Road Less Travelled" - is concerned with developing dance literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Christina Hong, defining literacy as a social practice with specific purposes and contexts, argues for a dance literacy approach to dance education. In this way "dance emerges from the margins and enters the latticelike structure of curriculum ... as an embodied way of knowing, thinking and constructing personal and group meaning" (137). I found this chapter very interesting, especially as I returned to New Zealand in 1973 and, asking why there was no dance education in a certain college of education, I was told that there was, because there was Highland Dancing. Christina Hong shows how we have progressed in our thinking about dance since such dark days. However she is, I think, too optimistic in construing dance education "as part of a web of education that seeks to educate the whole person" (151). That is in my view an incorrect view of the New Zealand curriculum. Since the New Zealand Curriculum Framework implementation, I would argue that "education of the whole person" has been downplayed, to say the least, as notions of technological literacy and entrepreneurship have taken over. I would see *The Arts in Education* as arguing for a *restoration* of the notion that education must concern itself with the whole person.

David Lines argues in Chapter Seven, "Text and Context in Music", for an "interpretive framework and music pedagogy for future practice in music education" (161). This is also a most interesting chapter for it uses Martin Heidegger's notion of dwelling, which is akin to making or building. We seek dwelling through building. But building is not merely concerned with buildings; it is also concerned with "cultivating, preserving and caring for things as they are and to that end, working with culture" (163). Music dwells in this sense, according to Lines, in transient but important places in our lives. The objectification of music prevents dwelling in Heidegger's sense. Lines' aims are: (a) to encourage research into siting music more theoretically in the area of cultural contexts; (b) to present guidelines for artistic pedagogical action in "music; and (c) to provide interpretive grounds for responses to the *Arts Curriculum*. These aims are achieved.

In Chapter Eight, "Art Education in New Zealand", Ted Bracey is concerned about the failure of visual arts educators "to reflect critically on their enterprise, in particular, their failure to systematically and critically engage with the theory on which that enterprise was founded" (181). He points out (182) that various claims have been made about the Arts in the curriculum, such as "the Arts develop the artistic element of human experience", which he says is obvious (if not tautological), and that the Arts "are an essential element in our daily living and life-long learning". His problem with such claims is that they have not been preceded by *thinking*. Such claims as these have been made over the years with the same fervour. It is not surprising that art teachers have come to believe in them, yet art teachers have been given little or no chance, or given no encouragement to even question such 'truths' let alone answer them (182).

He continues by turning to the *Arts Curriculum*, attacking the idea that the arts are essentially like languages and that the role of education would be to develop literacy in the arts. It may be helpful at times to think of languages and literacy as *models* but most unhelpful to turn the model into reality (183). Bracey then appeals to Gilbert Ryle's 'famous' distinction between '*Knowing that*' something is the case, and '*Knowing how*' to do something. The latter is to view the arts as practices and not as languages. Ryle said that there was no necessary connection between the two and, if so, then there is no compelling reason to believe that the arts, as practices, contribute to the development of our intelligence. It is clear he summarises (186) "that the new *Arts Curriculum* has no theoretical foundation". Bracey then continues to argue for a view of art in which art is embedded in a social context, a context in which we reflect on the human condition:

... we must reflect specifically on those social practices with which we associate all that is involved in relations to the production, distribution and consumption of what we presently and conventionally call 'art works' (194).

Bracey's work should be compulsory reading for art educators and pre-service teachers in the arts.

Finally A.-Chr. (Tina) Engels-Schwarzpaul - "Ornament's Station: Curricularising cultural practice" - takes the notion of ornament, as an example of cultural forms subjected to marginalisation, to the stereotyping of both women and minority groups in the arts. She claims that many current educators take a negative view of ornament so that it has been excluded from discourse and from the curriculum. The *Arts Curriculum* does not mention ornament (200). Yet classes on style and ornamentation were in curricula until the 1920s. Engels-Schwarzpaul argues (200) that ornament is by no means a thing of the past for its use is widespread and part of the everyday experience of students and, of course, others. Also it has a well documented history, including its use to define the work of the Other, and may well be fit to tackle the marginalisation of women and minority groups as it "is particularly apt to provide experiences and insights about values, feelings and conventions" (202). What such a curriculum involving ornament might be is outlined later in the chapter. However, if ornament is conceived as an alternative way of dealing with culture and nature (217), its recognition and acceptance as a *viable* alternative to the technological world we now inhabit, as presaged by, for example, Weber and Heidegger, is I think somewhat problematic.

In conclusion I can *only* say that this is a very important collection for the Arts in New Zealand and that the editors should be complimented.

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