Editorial

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It is timely that this edition of ACE Papers should reach publication in 2003. *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (2000) document comes of age this year and should reach full implementation within the next twelve months. This means that The Arts as an essential learning area will once again be official after languishing at the margins for almost a decade. Parallel to the development of the mainstream document, the writing of a separate Mäori language document for the arts occurred and includes toi puoro, ngä mahi a te rehia, and toi ataata. Intended primarily for Mäori immersion schools and bicultural classes, the commitment by the Ministry to *Ngä Toi* is of significance to the tangata whenua.

The mainstream document differs from the art and music syllabi (1989) it replaces in that it moves beyond the more behaviourist intent (create, re-create, appreciate in music, for example) to a more critical perspective which might be labelled postmodern. The document urges schools to view the arts as social texts: visual, sonic and gestural commentaries on societies and histories. The central aim of literacies in the arts challenges New Right notions of literacy to the extent that it has been criticised for falling into line behind neo-liberal concepts. Underpinning all this is the strong belief that arts students should be reflective and critically aware practitioners.

New curriculum documents are always fodder for hungry post-graduate students eager to hone their critical skills, and the arrival of the arts curriculum was no exception. One local commentator suggested the draft document placed "music, and visual art, within limited terms of the nineteenth century aesthetic discourses regarding music as an "art" discipline" (Mansfield, 2001: 25). This narrow view of "art" is forced onto the document and the presumptive and narrow readings of "arts literacies" which confuse and delude the so-called postmodern critique (Mansfield, 2001 and Bracey, 2001) and show the

arguments up for the contrivances that they are. Firmly entrenched in European cultural and social philosophies, and levelling a Foucault-tinted 'gaze' through the legs of the Parisians, one writer accuses the arts curriculum document of "Western high cultural notions" (Mansfield, 2001: 29). In seeing the arts curriculum as dictating how teachers must teach, these critiques fail to see its potential to empower. A curriculum outlines what must be included in our programmes but does not limit the knowledge-base nor standardise delivery modes. Views of classroom teaching as an uncritical profession, with practices of Pavlovian intent, and pedagogies imbedded with subservience, are often the mark of a limited global comprehension on the part of the researcher.

Cultural identity is an important role for the arts and the curriculum document urges teachers to take account of *all* cultures they encounter. Teaching and learning in the arts is therefore imbedded with notions of multiple identities and their resultant multiple symbol systems of meaning. Many of the writers in this volume place culture and symbol systems at the heart of their research.

The Arts and Identity

It is widely accepted that the arts are powerful agents for the growth of knowledge and understanding,[1] for the development of sensitivity and imagination, and as a rubric for socio-cultural representations of meaning and ceremony. The arts are especially important as globalised educational settings dictate that we speak the language of commerce before considering cultural expression, thus challenging the politics of identity. Education seems to present to its client-base a world full of entrepreneurial opportunities with little in the way of specifics beyond literacy and numeracy being hailed as the agents of change

New definitions of 'culture' have moved beyond what expresses the identity of a community, rather it refers to "the processes, categories and knowledge through which communities are defined as such: that is, how they are rendered specific and

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[1] From David Aspin in his report to the Education Forum (Business Roundtable) on the draft *Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* document (1999).

differentiated" (Donald & Rattansi, 1992: 4). The key being how are they different, and in this frame signifying systems reach a new importance. Williams sees "some practical convergence between: (i) the anthropological and sociological senses of culture as a distinct 'whole way of life', within which, now, a distinctive 'signifying system' is seen not only as essential but as essentially involved in *all* forms of social activity, and (ii) the more specialised if also more common sense of culture as 'artistic and intellectual activities'" (1981: 13). Due to these emphases, Williams sees 'signifying systems' as now being "much more broadly defined, to include not only the traditional arts and forms of intellectual production but also all the 'signifying practices' – from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising – which now constitute this complex and necessary extended field" (ibid).

Individual identity in a 'postmodern' world becomes a fluctuating state as individuals express varied cultural and sub-cultural beliefs and understandings throughout a 'normal' day. Normality becomes a multifaceted identity. We now begin to see culture as created by human interaction which in turn shapes how human beings see the world. 'Culture' takes on the role of filter through which we interpret our daily experiences, the 'real' being a product of negotiated and socially created meaning. This view sees humans as maintaining 'culture' and not letting it stagnate, for culture is always in a state of transition. The opposite view is to see culture as a means of control which more closely reflect the perceptions of Durkheim and Marx.

Durkheim's study of Australian Aboriginals identified forms of 'totemism' which seem to elevate culture to such a level of reverence that its immutability is unquestioned. He concluded that the 'totem' is an organising principle for the tribe and makes no distinction between humans and nature. He argues that under totemism members of the tribe share an identity with the totem. For Durkheim, "there can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which give it its unity and individuality" (Durkheim, in Giddens, 1978: 99). Seeing the sacred as the "exemplification of the power of society"

involving the "twin elements of morality: devotion and obligation" and totemism as tending to "produce an attitude of veneration towards ancestors" (ibid: 92).

A contrasting view would see culture as being dynamic and disposed to change, rather than risk redundancy. For example, Russia is not only represented by the culture of the Muscovites. Byzantium, invasions of Central Asia, and the Slavs, have all had an impact which has been acknowledged and absorbed. From around 1830, Slavophiles challenged the idea that Russia need follow the path of Western historical development and sought to re-engage with the folk cultures of the land. Likewise, Great Britain is represented through Celtic, Angle, Saxon, Danish, and French influences, not to mention the Germanic heritage of the Royals. Significantly, some present-day commentators see Britain as undergoing a crisis of national identity as a wide range of international cultures take up residence there (Colls, 2002 and Weight, 2002). Others speculate whether "England's artistic death does not reflect a wider sterility in the social and political structure of the country" (London Review of Books 23 Nov 2002: 23).

The tangata whenua, likewise, did not spring culturally pure from the waters and bush clad hills of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The migration left behind some aspects of a culture more suited to a previous social condition, while retaining those that were important to life in a new land. Culture is never totally unique, it is a way of coping with, and explaining, life in specific environments. As the environment changes, so must the culture demonstrate malleability. For some Mäori artists whose respect for traditions is such that they believe a tradition is immovable, producing cultural artefacts that use time-honoured designs and only natural materials such as wood and flax can produce contemporary works whose function or purpose does not equate to the times in which they are made. I would stress that I am speaking here of artistic works of culture and not the mass produced plastic tiki.

Identity is both a problem and a solution for post-colonial critique in that it assumes that the colonising imperial power is a single cultural entity. In the case of New Zealand, critical perceptions of nineteenth century settlers cannot be formed through a mono-

cultural lens. Great Britain was (and still is) heavy with cultural and ethnic mix even before globalisation softened its borders. One must also take into account that the rigid socio-economic stratification within Great Britain, and other European settler societies, produced alienating effects not dissimilar to subsequent racist constructs of post-colonial commentary. The addition of these other layers of colonial intent cannot be simplified merely by uttering "päkehä". Also, where a colonised society has been insular and conflict has been of a more inter-tribal nature, a lack of experience in oppression and assimilation by other cultures and ethnicities means the impact is much stronger first time around. The re-colonisation of New Zealand was inevitable, it is a part of the human condition to seek new opportunities in order to survive or improve one's lot. In the present, the practices of cloning and genetic modification form a part of the colonising heritage. In the future, the ethics of terra forming, the artificial transformation of other planets into places suitable for human habitation, is likely to become another.

Globalisation and colonisation have produced some interesting off-spring in the arts. The mixing of cultures produces hybrid art forms, which can be both exciting and culturally meaningful. In New Zealand, waiata a ringa is one example. The so-called Nuyorican communities of New York are developing their own voice, and black literary artists have coined the term Negritude. In Britain, at this time of writing, a form of music introduced by Punjabi immigrants in that country, known as Bhangra, has made it to the 'charts' in both Britain and Germany, as a hybrid form of Bhangra and house music. Similar occurrences can be seen in New Zealand, notably as Pacific Island artists express their culture and talent through the various arts, sometimes using the American hybrid of hip-hop as their vehicle.

While the arts played a significant role in the Europeanisation of Mäori, when two or more cultures actively engage in the day-to-day life of a nation, the hybrid artworks that evolve can take on the significance of the current cultural representation. Dangerously, an over-emphasis on culture can sometimes see cultural values replaced by market values, stereotypes arise, and the inclusive identity of specific groups becomes blurred. Perhaps we should see culture, not as a singular, but as layers of beliefs, knowledge, and

experiences that both interact, intersect and intercede as the requirements of daily living demand.

Biculturalism

From the 1970s multiculturalism was promoted as a panacea for cultural understanding, but it remained within "the political logic of assimilation" and "attempts to accommodate both a sensitivity to difference and a commitment to the universalistic claims of post-enlightenment liberalism became increasingly convoluted and forlorn" (Donald & Rattansi, 1992: 2).

The 1980s saw an acknowledgement that different communities have different ways of life, including those with hegemonic power, such as päkehä New Zealanders. The 1990s then questioned 'nationhood' and what a nation with many diverse immigrants should do about coping with global identity. The notion of "collective identity" again raised its head. Writer Lutz Niethammer (in Balakrishnan, 2002: 131) claims "collective identity eludes any stringent conceptual determination: Prevailing definitions, invariably vague, oscillate meaninglessly between essentialism and constructivism alleged facts and spurious norms".

I suggest that artistic and aesthetic practices can feature in new concepts of identity. This must be approached with caution, for in celebrating diversity, multiculturalism tended to reproduce the "saris, samosas and steel-bands" syndrome. The new face of biculturalism in New Zealand, if it fails to address the "hierarchies of power and legitimacy" (Donald, & Rattansi, 1992: 2), might see a new syndrome emerge, that of "kapahaka, korus and kia oras".

The Papers

This edition of *Ace Papers* contains seven papers, some reflecting the arts in general and others specific arts disciplines. Thwaites discusses the notion of multiliteracies, which reflects the 'signifying systems' referred to by Williams (1981). This paper looks at how meaning is communicated through various symbol systems, seen and heard, to help us

make sense of the world. It thus challenges positivist notions of truth through verification, claiming that truth is only a perception and often a delusion for what is, and that to engage in the world of the twenty-first century, new concepts of literacy must evolve.

Jill Smith's paper *Biculturalism: the relationship between education policy and art education practice in secondary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand* takes the view that biculturalism is a theoretical stance as much as a political one. What does it mean for art educators to fulfil their bicultural obligations with little or no training in the art forms of the tangata whenua? Collecting responses to this notion, mostly from Mäori artists, Smith presents an argument for seeing the bicultural project as one of ensuring a stable, päkehä hegemony.

Smith rightly questions the politics and theories of biculturalism and the New Zealand context but perhaps overlooks the role that Mäori themselves played in its construction. While I have no argument with it being "a deliberate Western construct", many Mäori saw the concept as advantageous to their status among Pasifika peoples and tauiwi and leapt at the chance at being a partner, albeit a junior one, to the hegemonic force. At this time of writing it is unclear how the installation of Mäori sovereignty as a counter to biculturalism would alter this status.

A key question remains unanswered: Why should all New Zealand school children engage with the cultural and artistic practices of Mäori or the cultural and artistic practices of any culture? From the bicultural perspective, is the reason for the inclusion of Mäori art in mainstream education to engender the design concepts of the cultural forms so that students can better appreciate and use these as a personal expression? Is it to teach the knowledge and skills necessary so that all New Zealanders can both appreciate and maintain the art of the tangata whenua? Or, is it, as several commentators in Smith's paper maintain, used as a ploy to "keep the natives happy"? It would seem essential that teachers know the purpose of the inclusion of Mäori artistic forms in order to give direction to their teaching and learning. Is it merely commitment to an almost two hundred year-old treaty, or to forging an appropriate national identity for the twenty-first

century. It then becomes possible for the expressive and ingenious designs of Māori to become a natural part of the identity of all New Zealanders in the same way that te reo is easing itself into our municipal and educational speech practices.

Elizabeth Anderson uses drama as a way of understanding and 'interacting' with the past, in this case, nineteenth century Britain. Using a visit to an art exhibition as a unique opportunity, Anderson reconstructs the social conditions and moods of the paintings as a series of interviews and settings to help students better understand these historical times. Cross-curricular links abound as the children discuss the world of the characters, elevating educational research into what Prendergast (2003) calls the "creative imaginative elements at play, within a social science frame" into the "construction/creation" of dramatic practices "as forms of reflective practice through an understanding of (*the*) dramatic voice".

Linda Ashley also adopts a rationale of multiple symbol systems which move us beyond the purely linguistic. Seeking to give her students a more critical role in the development of dance, she places them in the role of creator. That is, the students take on the persona of choreographer, dancer, and critical reflector in an example that many curriculum areas should take heed of. I am reminded of the words of dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, who when asked to explain why she danced, replied: "If I could say it in words, I wouldn't have to dance".

Jennie Snell's paper evolved from her studies in Contemporary Philosophies in Music Education as a fourth year student in the Bachelor of Education Music Pathway programme. Snell opens up the discussion on aesthetics and traces the pathways of arts education, and music education in particular, from its purely European origins, with its notions of aesthetic sensibility, to an often-controversial world of the present which accepts all artistic knowledge and expression as valid. She then suggests a model for music education in schools that combines, for her, the best of these concepts, one which empowers the students as well as the teacher.

Thwaites collates and analyses information gathered by his students (completing the fourth year of their Bachelor of Education, Music Pathway, studies in 2002) on the perceptions of year six students with respect to music and arts education. Using the students' words as phenomenological interpretation, we see their perceptions, values and aspirations emerge which show the significant place that the arts hold in most children's lives.

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February, 2003.

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