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Supporting Ethnically Diverse Students to ‘Be Themselves’: Culturally Inclusive Practices of Visual Arts Teachers in New Zealand

By Jill Smith

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I. INTRODUCTION

New Zealand's 2013 Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2014), and subsequent migration statistics, provided prime motivation for research that I conducted in ten Auckland secondary schools in 2015. The research was informed by data from an earlier study (author, 2007), which showed that while New Zealand was becoming increasingly multicultural, bicultural obligations remained the major focus in visual arts education. In 2015, my aim was to ascertain whether competing tensions between biculturalism and multiculturalism persisted (author, 2010); to determine the influence of cultural policy in national curriculum and assessment; and to discover whether teachers were using culturally inclusive pedagogies in the visual arts. Underpinning the data collection were theoretical perspectives on using 'voices' and the 'visual' as powerful tools in research (Leavy, 2015; Rose, 2012). Oscar Wilde's words, displayed in the art room of one teacher, encapsulates the key finding from this small-scale qualitative study; that European ethnic teachers are supporting their ethnically differing students to 'be themselves'. I posit that the multiple means through which students expressed their individual identities in powerful ways through their artworks signals a positive direction in culturally inclusive visual arts education in New Zealand.

Author: e-mail: j.smith@auckland.ac.nz

II. ISSUES INFORMING THE RESEARCH

a) *The Widening Gap: European Art Teachers / Ethnically Diverse Students*

Demographic contrasts between visual arts teachers and their students was a key issue underpinning my research in 2015. By 2013 New Zealand's population had reached 4.24 million people of whom 74% identified with European ethnicities, followed by 14.9% Māori, 11.8% Asian, and 7.4% Pasifika peoples (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The population of Auckland, the largest city, was 1.42 million. While there were fewer adults of European ethnicities living in Auckland (59.3%), compared with nationally, this city had gained a very diverse youthful population. Students of Pasifika (35.7%) and Asian (20.6%) ethnicities comprised over half of young people under 20 years (56.3%). European youth (19.6%), along with Māori, Middle Eastern, Latin American, African and Other ethnicities comprised the remaining population. The increasing demographic contrast between visual arts teachers and students was evident in my earlier research (2007), aligning with a world-wide phenomenon in Western societies (Feistritzer, 2011; Landsman & Lewis, 2012). An aim in 2015 was to ascertain whether this gap had widened further.

b) *Competing Tensions: Biculturalism And Multiculturalism*

In the 1970s, while other former British colonies were introducing multiculturalism as national policy, cross-cultural understanding in New Zealand was advocated in terms of biculturalism, with multiculturalism a hoped-for future outcome (Hill, 2010; Irwin, 1989). Although New Zealand has become an increasingly diverse society since the 1990s, the bicultural commitment founded in its postcolonial history affected multicultural education for ethnically differing students (Hill, 2010; Singham, 2006). My research in secondary schools in 2007 confirmed that visual arts curricula and pedagogical practices emphasised biculturalism over multiculturalism. I found that visual arts teachers prioritised European and Māori art and culture, adopted a token obligation to Pasifika, and ignored an Asian presence (2010, 2011). A priority in 2015 was to ascertain whether competing tensions between

biculturalism and multiculturalism persisted, or whether this situation had changed.

c) *Pedagogical determinants: Cultural Policies In Curriculum And Assessment*

Visual arts education is informed by *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007), which contains eight learning areas, of which the Arts (visual arts, dance, drama and music) is one. It is stated that "The Arts are powerful forms of expression that recognise, value, and contribute to the unique bicultural and multicultural character of New Zealand" (p. 20), and that "European, Māori, Pasifika, Asian and other cultures add significant dimensions to New Zealand's visual culture" (p. 21). The curriculum cites 'cultural diversity' as one of eight principles that embody beliefs about what is important in education. However, an evaluation by the Education Review Office (2012), an independent government body, found that "cultural diversity ranked as the 'least evident' principle underpinning school decision making" in 201 primary and secondary classrooms (p. 19), and that bicultural obligations took precedence. This finding resonated with my research in visual arts programs in secondary schools in 2007, reported above.

In their final three years of secondary schooling, 15-to-18 year old students who elect to study visual arts have their artwork assessed through Level 1-3 Achievement Standards for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* [NCEA] (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2014). Informed by the curriculum, visual arts teachers design NCEA programs to enable students to meet the achievement standards. At successive levels students are expected to demonstrate understanding of artworks in cultural contexts; develop, clarify and generate ideas; and produce a cohesive body of work informed by established practice (the study of 'artist models') in one or more fields of painting, design, sculpture, printmaking and photography. The intention is not for students to imitate or replicate artists' works, but to inquire into their ideas, techniques and processes to inform their 'own' art making (Duncum, 2002). In 2015, I wanted to ascertain whether students received opportunities to express their ethnic identities within the framework of curriculum and assessment policies.

d) *Culturally Inclusive Pedagogies: Understandings Of The Visual Arts Teachers*

Nieto and Bode (2012, p. 124) claim that "subject matter dominates pedagogy in secondary schools"; that... "teaching from the point of view of students is uncommon... and many teachers attempt to treat all students in the same way, reflecting the unchallenged assumption that "equal means the same"" (Nieto, 2004, p. 106). Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined by Gay (2010, pp. 26-27) as "teaching to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths, their

intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments" ... premised on "close interactions among their ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement."

New Zealand researchers argue that teaching is the most important factor in student achievement (Alton-Lee, 2003; Rubie-Davies, 2010). This requires teachers to take responsibility for every student, value diversity, respect students' cultures, have high expectations, and build on students' experiences. Nash (2004) agrees that student achievement is affected by the degree to which a student's culture is respected by the school and the similarity between the culture of the community and the values of that school. These international and local perspectives provided a foundation for the research. In 2015, it was essential to ascertain visual arts teachers' understandings of culturally inclusive pedagogies, and whether these affected their students' art making.

e) *Validation of images in academic research: The 'visual' as a powerful tool*

By the 1990s arts-based practices constituted a new methodological genre that "posed serious challenges to methods conventions, thus unsettling many assumptions about what constitutes research and knowledge" (Leavy, 2015, p. 11). While traditional modes of academic discourse have questioned the validity of images as 'data', the decision to collect examples of students' art works was influenced by theoretical perspectives on the 'visual' as a potent tool in educational research and the notion that images are an illuminating means through which meanings can be expressed in ways that words cannot (Rose, 2012; Weber, 2008). Stanczack (2007, p. 3) stresses that "images are not merely appendages to the research but, rather, inseparable components to learning about our social worlds." Pertinent to the 2015 research, Leavy (2015) states that while imagery is created and produced through art making, it is "the way that visual art opens up multiple meanings that are determined by the artist and the viewer that is important" (p. 224). Her view is that visual images provide "a significant source of information within which researchers can discern patterns pertaining to individuals and society" (p. 225). Sindling, Gray and Nisker's (2008) reminder to researchers that they should enable research participants "to engage with the images before they are put in the public domain" (p. 465), was adhered to as part of the university's ethical requirements for this research.

III. THE SHAPE OF THE RESEARCH

Fifty-three state secondary schools in Auckland were randomly selected from the Ministry of Education's (2014) *School Statistics: Culture counts* website on the basis of location, school type (single gender, co-educational) and decile (a socio-economic ranking from

1-10). A visual arts teacher at each school was invited to participate in the research, for which the research question was: "How are visual arts teachers responding to the increasing diversity of students in Auckland secondary schools?"

The research was conducted in two stages: an anonymous online questionnaire and an optional face-to-face interview. Rich baseline data were gathered from the questionnaire. Although not reported in this paper these data informed the interviews. Of the 28 teachers who volunteered to be interviewed, 10 were randomly selected using the same criteria as for school selection. I invited these visual arts teachers to bring to their interviews examples of students' art works that they believed reflected their responsiveness to those they teach. The university's ethics process required consent from students and their parents/caregivers, prior to art works being brought to interviews and used in reporting the findings. It was beyond the scope of this small-scale research for me to interview students, but I anticipated that interviews with their visual arts teachers, together with examples of art works, could provide important insights.

a) *The Visual arts Teachers and their Schools*

Six of the ten visual arts teachers who brought art works by year 11-13 students (15-to-18 year olds) to their interviews, feature in this paper. Their secondary schools, hereafter referred to as Schools 1-6, ranged from decile 1-10, were different in type, and located across Auckland. The visual arts teachers taught across the range of schools. Four were European-New Zealand, a fifth was European-New Zealand Māori, and the sixth was New Zealand-Dutch. In accord with the university's ethics process pseudonyms were required to protect the identities of schools and teachers, but I was able to identify students' art works with their first names, ethnicity and age. Prior to their interviews, teachers completed a spreadsheet detailing their professional and academic qualifications, the school's student ethnicity statistics and a copy of their school's mission/vision statement. These documents provided rich introductions to the schools and participants and informed the interviews.

b) *Data collection through interviews and students' art works*

The three-hour semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with teachers took place in their school's art department, followed by photographic documentation of students' art works. Interviews were informed by the research question and the underpinning issues presented above, the influence of each school's philosophy and mission/vision statement and decile ranking, and whether the teachers were enabling ethnically diverse students to 'be themselves' through making art works.

IV. FINDINGS: ENABLING STUDENTS TO 'BE THEMSELVES'

The findings are presented through the 'voices' of six visual arts teachers and 'visual' examples of their students' art works completed for the Level 1-3 Achievement Standards for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* [NCEA] (NZQA, 2014). Each example illustrates the teachers' commitment to their schools' philosophy and vision statements; their pedagogical beliefs and perceptions of what constitutes culturally inclusive approaches; and their desire to enable their ethnically differing students to 'be themselves' through depicting their identity and social life (Meyers, 2004).

a) *Kaitlin and her student Aeluna*

Kaitlin, a European New Zealander, had taught visual arts at School 1 for six years. This large state co-educational school had a low decile 2 socio-economic rating and a roll of 1892 students of whom 941 were from Pasifika ethnic groups (50%). The next largest groups were Māori (24%), Asian (15%) and European (9%), with 2% from Other groups. Kaitlin explained how the school's mission statement focused on respecting each other, striving for academic and self-excellence and embracing each other's cultures. She said, "Although we may come from different cultures we belong to one family." In accord with Nash (2004), student achievement at School 1 was enhanced by the way in which the school and Kaitlin respected the students' cultures. A feature of her pedagogy was placing cultural diversity at the centre of planning at all levels, and encouraging students to share knowledge of their cultures with their peers. She said, "By planning around that we get results because students have a sense of empowerment and buy into it." Kaitlin's program for year 12 students, mostly 16-to-17 year olds who were engaged in NCEA Level 2, focused on 'Symbolic Self-Portraits'. As the starting point students began with items or objects with which they identified, and were then introduced to how a range of artist models treat symbolism in portraiture. The aim was for students to bring themselves to the forefront of their art and to celebrate who they are.

Kaitlin's approach is evident in the art works of Aeluna, a 17-year-old Middle Eastern girl who had fled from Syria with her family and came to New Zealand. Kaitlin described Aeluna as being "very shy by nature and quite closed and reserved about how she presents herself and when she meets people." Aeluna had spoken to her about the importance in Syria of family religion, education, self-discipline and respect. Kaitlin perceived that a possible consequence of Aeluna's cultural upbringing was that "she struggled in her self-portraits to make eye contact where she looked straight at the

at the viewer. I reassured her that she could find other ways to draw the viewer in."



Figure 1: Aeluna, Middle Eastern, 17 years

Aeluna's 'other ways' were to present her face in three-quarter view, or profile, gazing contemplatively into the distance. Kaitlin explained that "Aeluna's use of symbolic objects was where her culture really started to come in. She has the isotoxal star triangle, and above it the wings of the East Semetic God Assur ... and the skull because she talks about life and death a lot." As the 'viewer' of her images, Aeluna provided me with a significant source of information (Leavy, 2015). I was captivated by the strong contrasts between the skull, the dove as an emblem of peace and daisy as a symbol of innocence and perceived Aeluna's use of purple as a sign of spirituality, sacred wisdom and enlightenment. A hint of geometric Syrian patterns coexist with those drawn from the paintings of her artist model, American painter Chuck Close, in which she used his gridded application of individual colour squares to add depth to her self-portraits. Kaitlin remarked, "At the end I said to Aeluna, your technique is absolutely wonderful and your art works are reading so much like your personality."

When asked if she thought teacher disposition was a significant part of teaching at School 1, Kaitlin was adamant that "if a teacher's attitude is narrow, if you're not open to new ideas and learning from students, it's not going to work at this school." She concluded, "The year 12 program is like a self-identity unit in some respects because I don't think students realise exactly who they are until they start doing this." Kaitlin saw her role as one in which she grew "really good relationships with students", supporting them to be themselves.

b) *Matthew and his student André*

Matthew, a European New Zealander, had taught at School 2 for over 30 years. This low decile 1 state co-educational school had a roll of 721 students of whom 570 identified as Pasifika (79%). Along with four Europeans, there were a number of refugee students from South East Asia, India, and Middle Eastern countries. Matthew emphasised the strong culture of Pasifika languages, spoken at home and in school, and determination that all students should have opportunities to succeed. One of his key roles was countering the low English language literacy among Pasifika students by giving students confidence to 'be themselves' and express their individual ethnicities through visual arts. This ambition was the driving force behind his year 11 NCEA Level 1 program, with mostly 15-year-olds. Matthew explained that what the students are interested in is of utmost importance: "They want to tell stories about themselves and their cultural milieu ... and they know what they want to do. I've learnt to accept the student voice... I've had to let go and let them have a shot in their own way." For boys, "it's mostly about rough and tumble ... any bodily contact, fighting, wrestling, dancing, and sports, especially basketball. Culture works really well as a strand, and so does religion." Because of his anti-bullying stance, Matthew said he had managed to take fighting into animé which he found more acceptable.

Matthew's approach is embodied in the art works of André, a 15-year-old Cook Islands Māori boy. One of his strategies for motivating students to generate work is for them to take photographs of each other in action, doing leapfrogs, hip-hop dancing, shooting goals and interacting with one another. A second strategy is to select artist models whose approaches resonated with themes students wanted to explore. A favourite is Jon Cattapan who generates his work on the internet to make political and social representations of the urban environment. But it is the artist's techniques of using dots and lines and blocks of colour that students use to give a sense of dynamism to their work. These pedagogical strategies were evident in André's paintings. Matthew spoke of how André used elements of movement and dramatic contrasts of light and dark to express his cultural milieu: "It's high and low art and popular culture blending together in an animé theme, and that whole power-ball thing ... lots of physical contact ... he's dealing with what he wants to deal with." I was particularly impressed by 15-year-old André's use of perspective, dramatic foreshortening and scale, and painterly techniques, all of which added intensity to what he wanted to say.



Figure 2: André, Cook Islands Māori, 15 years

When asked about his relationship with Pasifika students, who comprised the majority at his school, Matthew said they accepted him as a New Zealand European ... "they're not critical of difference." I could see that Matthew was at home in this environment and had a deep understanding of the students. "I'm actually quite strict in the way students have to behave, but I'm gentle with them, too, and it works." This was apparent in the warmth with which he talked about working with, and for, all his students and encouraged them to be themselves.

c) *Martin and his student Roberta*

Martin, a European New Zealander, had taught at School 3 for twelve years. This low decile 1 state co-educational school had a roll of 1268 students of whom 72% were from Pasifika ethnic groups. Māori students made up 10% and the remaining 8% included only four European students. In its vision statement, School 2 described itself as "a dynamic learning community that is meeting the needs of its student population while maintaining the awareness of living in a rapidly changing society with diverse cultural needs." Martin explained that the school emphasized curriculum expectations that address cultural diversity. He said, "You wouldn't survive in this school if you were culturally ignorant, couldn't pronounce the students' names, and if you didn't have some awareness of the life they lead." Although Pasifika students "are the real force" in his NCEA Level 1-3 classes with 15-to-18 year olds, Martin provided opportunities for all students to learn about the art and culture of the indigenous Māori people, including the significance of whakapapa (genealogy), whenua (land) and place (turangawaewae). "We go up Mangere Mountain, one of the largest volcanic cones in Auckland. It used to be the site of a major pā (Māori village or defensive settlement). The students sit in this fabulous amphitheatre with the whole of Auckland cut off from them, drawing Pohutakawa and other trees, and the landscape from the internal crater." Whatever their

ethnicity, Martin's style of teaching is to encourage each student at NCEA Level 3 to "follow their own dreams, their own pathway."



Figure 3: Roberta (NgāPuhi-TeHikutu, NgātiWhatua-Te Uri o Hau), Māori, 18 years

This approach is exemplified by the art works of Roberta, an 18 year old Māori girl. Roberta's artist models were Star Gossage, a Māori (NgatiWai) woman with French, English and Portuguese connections, and John Walsh (Aitanga a Hauiti). Like Gossage and Walsh, whose art works are influenced by ancestry and whanau (family), Roberta adopted a similar approach to locating figures on the land, and within the land. Whereas Gossage's raw and intuitive work features blurred transitory figures, Walsh brings a human-like face to his paintings of carved forms. Martin explained that Roberta had "substituted human figures with the Māori female frontal 'tiki' ...carved pendants that were worn as talismans of fertility and childbirth. Together with the tiki, Roberta used its profile form, the 'manaia', to speak of her whakapapa and ancestry." In her mixed media art works, inspired by being on Mangere Mountain with its crater, volcanic peak extending 106 metres above sea level, and the wind-swept Pohutakawa trees, I sensed that Roberta's dream-like portrayal of images were a reflection of her place as tangata whenua, the first people of the land in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Within this school, where Pasifika students were dominant, Martin had supported Roberta to explore her Māori-self ... to be herself.

d) *Sandra and her student Hyemi*

Sandra, a European New Zealander, had taught at School 4 for ten years. Her high-decile 10 state co-educational school had a roll of over 1700 students, of whom European New Zealand students comprised

49.68% and other European students 30.89%. Chinese (5.33%), Māori (4.93%) and South East Asian (1.72%) were the next largest ethnic groups. Sandra said the school's mission statement focused on "striving for our students to do their best and to achieve good academic results, but we also want students to be good all-rounders." She added, "There is definitely care for students of different ethnicities and wanting the best for every student no matter where they come from."

The art works of Hyemi, an 18-year-old Korean girl, reflected Sandra's pedagogical approach of supporting students to be themselves. Hyemi was educated in Korea and New Zealand and had a clear vision of the "issues she wanted to convey" in her NCEA Level 3 artwork. She spoke to Sandra about the Korean education system; that "schools are like factories that produce skilled individuals like a manufacturer." The issue for Hyemi was the "strict education system in East Asian countries, the enormous pressure to succeed, and the social problems students face as a result." Sandra discussed how Hyemi had used her own image to convey her messages in a particularly powerful way. Inspired by the blue-tinged paintings of Ivan Alifan, and the painting 'The Death of Marat' (1793) by Neoclassical artist Jacques Louis David, Hyemi portrayed her feelings of drowning, of "sink or swim," of keeping her head above water, and the notion of art education as a conveyor belt. Hyemi's view was that "you either remain in a restrictive system or you break out of it."



Figure 4: Hyemi, Korean, 18 years

For me, Hyemi's art works represented "inseparable components to learning about our social worlds" (Stanczack, 2007, p. 3). For Sandra, Hyemi's expression of ideas through the visual arts was indicative of her pedagogical approach to supporting NCEA Level 3 students (mostly 17-to-18 year olds) to "have their say about what concerns them most."

e) *Jacqui and her student Nimo*

Jacqui, a European New Zealand Māori, had taught at School 5 for ten years. This low decile 1 state co-educational school had a roll of 922 students, of which 77% were from Pasifika groups. Māori students comprised 19% and the remaining 4% included 24 Europeans. The school's mission statement was "To nurture in each individual a belief in the self, a commitment to achievement and the spirit of aroha (caring)." Jacqui explained that the art department's vision was "to inspire in each student a creative outlet that will develop their confidence, support their wellbeing and help shape their personal identity in a positive way." In Jacqui's NCEA Level 3 painting program, emphasis was placed on the students' individuality. She said, "It is at this level that my 17-to-18 year old students really want to make art about them selves ... and they want to place themselves in their own personal and cultural contexts." Jacqui explained that when each student has decided what ideas they want to explore, what messages they want to convey, and what artists' styles and techniques they are attracted to, she helps them locate artist models for inspiration. The school's intranet is used for this purpose because "for families in this low socio-economic area buying books is a low priority."

Jacqui's approach is illustrated by the paintings of Nimo, a 17-year-old Samoan boy. I was immediately struck by the sense of sadness that pervaded his work. Jacqui explained that the focus of Nimo's paintings was his two siblings, an older brother who perished in a house fire and the love he has for his little sister, Orchid. Jacqui helped him find artist models whose art works used techniques that would help to make his story more potent. Nimo drew upon David Schnell's illusions of architectural and foreshortened constructions through lines of perspective, to convey "a sense of drama, of being here and no longer there." He drew upon aspects of paintings by street/graffiti artist Connor Harrington, applying the subdued side of Harrington's work. A dark palette, painterly gestural style, and juxtaposition of sharp lines alongside realistic self-portraits were the means through which Nimo conveyed his personal story. I assumed that the New Zealand ensign, with its Union Flag on the canton and the white stars of the Southern Cross, indicated Nimo's country of birth. Jacqui considered the black silhouetted images of Nimo holding Orchid's hand as they walked towards, and stood before their brother's coffin, his most powerful painting. This student's art work supports Weber's (2008) advocacy for "the ability of images to evoke visceral and emotional responses in ways that are memorable" (p. 47). They illustrate Jacqui's pedagogical approach to providing opportunities for her students to be true to themselves and make art that was most meaningful to them.



Figure 5: Nimo, Samoan, 17 years

f) Yvonne and her student Jeeun

Yvonne, a New Zealand-European with Dutch connections, had taught at School 6 for over 20 years. Her mid-decile 6 state co-educational school had a roll of 1900 students of whom European-New Zealand students comprised 47%. While Indian and East Asia students formed the next largest groups, there were students of 60 differing ethnicities at the school. Yvonne described how the school's mission statement was twofold: "To inspire students to achieve educational excellence through a rich learning and social environment, and for students to become the best person they can be and contribute to society." She believed her school was "multicultural in a harmonious way, in an environment of acceptance and respect." It was on a large poster in the art room at School 6 that students were alerted to Oscar Wilde's words: "*Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.*" Part of Yvonne's learning as a visual arts teacher had been to broaden her knowledge, through research, of the art and culture of students of differing ethnicities at her school so that she could support them to express their individual identities.

The art works by Jeeun, a 17-year-old Korean girl who had immigrated to New Zealand with her family, embody an approach that a number of Yvonne's year 13 NCEA students pursued; an examination of issues related to their particular culture. Yvonne noted that students educated in China or Korea had experienced a more traditional academic approach of observational drawing, rather than the emphasis in New Zealand's NCEA "on developing and expressing ideas, communicating and interpreting." The issue Jeeun chose to explore was how a large percentage of young women in Korea undergo surgical interventions for their face, and even equipment interventions to lengthen their legs. Jeeun talked to Yvonne about the role of women in Korean society and how "they gain value in the world by looking after the physical body ... that it's also linked to

how people in Korea talk about 'reading the face'". She spoke of the particular meanings attributed to facial features; "that it's preferable to have a 'happy face' and more likely to lead to employment." Yvonne and I agreed that Jeeun had created a very potent story about the manufacturing of beauty. Yvonne added, "Jeeun's work has tracked the research. She started off kind of anti but now that she's researched it more ... this might be a possibility for her eighteenth birthday. About 80% of young women have this done, and that was part of the conversation."



Figure 6: Jeeun, Korean, 17 years

V. DISCUSSION

The findings that emerged from conversations with the six visual arts teachers, in conjunction with examples of artworks by their 15-to-18 year old students, encapsulate their school's philosophies and the teachers' professional beliefs. They reflect the teachers' pedagogical approaches informed by curriculum and assessment policies, and their desire to support students to 'be themselves' through the visual arts in a range of Auckland secondary schools in New Zealand.

a) *The schools' philosophies*

The mission statements of each school reflected their educational philosophy and cultural perspectives in relation to their student population. At the lowest decile Schools 1, 2, 3 and 5, where students were the most ethnically diverse, and included Pasifika student populations ranging from 50% to 79%, emphasis was given to embracing diversity and affirming each other's cultures. At Schools 4 and 6, the mid-to-high decile schools, at which European students ranged from 47% to 49.68%, prominence was given to striving for academic excellence. Not with standing these emphases, all six schools promoted a culture of care for their students and wanted the best for them. These positions align with Nash's (2004) argument that student achievement is affected by the degree to which a student's culture – whatever that may be – is respected by the school and the values of that school.

b) *The teachers' pedagogical practices*

Albeit small, this sample of six visual arts teachers aligns with international research that teachers continue to be white while students are becoming increasingly diverse (Feistritzer, 2011; Landsman & Lewis, 2006). All six teachers were European New Zealanders, with two identifying their Māori and Dutch connections. In accord with Alton-Lee (2003), Nash (2004) and Rubie-Davies (2008), their culturally inclusive practices were grounded in their school's mission statements and enacted through their positive teaching "to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths" ... premised on "close interactions among their ethnic identity, cultural background, and students achievement" (Gay, 2010, pp. 26-27). The 'voices' of the six teachers exemplify how each took responsibility for their students, respected their cultures, had high expectations, and supported them to express their identities and individuality through art works. This contradicts Nieto and Bode's (2012, p. 124) claim that "teaching from the point of view of students is uncommon." Rather, these teachers' pedagogical practices were underpinned by *The New Zealand Curriculum's* (MoE, 2007) declaration that "European, Māori, Pasifika and other cultures add significant dimensions to New Zealand's visual culture" (p. 21). They were driven by the Level 1-3 achievement standards for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NZQA, 2014) through which their 15-to-18 year olds were given opportunities to demonstrate understanding of art works in cultural contexts, develop, clarify and generate ideas, and produce a cohesive body of work informed by established practice (the study of 'artist models'). The finding from my earlier research (2007) that visual arts curricula and teachers' pedagogical practices emphasized biculturalism over multiculturalism, was no longer evident in 2015.

c) *The students' art works*

The students, whose art works were selected by their visual arts teachers, were ethnically diverse. Two were Korean, the others being Middle Eastern, Cook Islands Māori, Samoan, and New Zealand Māori. Their art works (Figures 1-6) justify my decision to collect art works as data. They visually depict how the students' culturally responsive teachers contextualized their teaching in ways that resonated with their students. As Weber (2008) expresses it, "Images help us to adopt someone else's gaze, see someone else's point of view, and borrow their experience for a moment" (p. 45). They carry what Becker (2002, p. 11) refers to as "real, flesh and blood life" and are used not just as evidence, but as persuasive statements about the individuality of each of these 15-to-18 year olds.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research sought answers to the question: "How are visual arts teachers responding to the increasing diversity of students in Auckland secondary schools?" This paper reports specifically on how six European-New Zealand visual arts teachers supported their ethnically diverse students to 'be themselves.' The shape of the research highlighted potential limitations. First, the visual arts teachers who volunteered to participate probably did so because they held a particular interest in the research question. This could account for the fact that the majority taught in low-to-mid decile schools with ethnically diverse students. A further limitation, although beyond the scope and timeframe of this small-scale research, was that the 'voices' of students were not sought. The issue of validity could also be considered a limitation especially since validity of interpretations and meanings has long been questioned in debates over the legitimacy of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research is not generalizable in the traditional sense. Rather, it has verisimilitude through "the creation of a realistic, authentic, life-like portrayal" (Leavy, 2015, p. 57), as evidenced in the findings.

I contend that the knowledge generated by this research is significant in its own right. The data collected through teachers' 'voices' and 'visual' examples of their students' art works highlight the importance of building relationships between predominantly European-ethnic teachers and the increasingly diverse student population. The art works illustrate that "culturally responsive pedagogy and racial identity are related to achievement and resilience" (Hanley & Noblit, 2009, p. 81). They encapsulate the importance of teachers supporting students to be themselves. This research has the potential of transferability of the teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices, and the role of images in research, to other settings within and beyond visual arts education.

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