

*Original Paper*

Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy: How These Dimensions  
are Enriching Visual Arts Education for Ethnically Diverse  
Students in New Zealand Secondary Schools

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**Abstract**

*This article reports on findings from two complementary research projects conducted in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. Both projects were motivated by changing demographic statistics from a largely European-ethnic student population in secondary schools in the past, to an ethnically diverse one in the present. Each project focused upon the nature of New Zealand's national curriculum and assessment policies for visual arts education, and the pedagogical practices of art teachers. European-ethnic art teachers comprise the majority in secondary schools, thus the research in 2015 centred on how these teachers are working alongside ethnically diverse students. Given that there is a growing population of Asian-ethnic students in secondary schools, the follow-up project in 2018 focused on how art teachers of Asian ethnicity are supporting these students to engage in experiences that express their cultural identities. The findings provide evidence of how art teachers are using the curriculum, assessment policies and culturally responsive pedagogies to enrich the nature of visual arts education for students of all ethnicities in secondary schools in this country. The findings are exemplified through the 'voices' of a sample of art teachers, and 'artworks' by 15-18 year old students which encapsulate the role of images as a powerful form of data.*

**Keywords**

*New Zealand, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, student diversity, artworks as data*

**1. Introduction**

I am a European New Zealander who has been involved in pre-service visual arts teacher education in the secondary school sector for over 30 years. My teaching, art practice and research focus on the relationships between art, culture, curriculum and assessment, with a particular emphasis on issues of

culture, diversity and difference. My work is informed by the geographical isolation of New Zealand and its history of British colonisation that resulted in influences that have shaped the evolution of our national identity and its education system (Jill, 2007, 2010). Today, New Zealand remains a small nation in the South Pacific, but it has become one of the largest migrant-receiving countries in the world. This has changed the face of visual arts education in this country. The aim of this article is to report on the findings of two complementary research projects in which I investigated the effects of national curriculum, assessment policies, and pedagogical practices of art teachers on ethnically diverse students in visual arts education in secondary schools in Auckland, New Zealand. There are two key dimensions that impact on visual arts education in secondary schools—the national curriculum and national assessment policies.

### *1.1 National Curriculum for Visual Arts Education*

Visual arts education in New Zealand secondary schools is informed by *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2007). The curriculum contains eight learning areas, of which the Arts (dance, drama, music and visual arts) is one. It is stated in the curriculum that “the Arts are powerful forms of expression that recognize, value, and contribute to the unique bicultural and multicultural character of Aotearoa New Zealand” (p. 20); and that “European, Māori, Pasifika, Asian and other cultures add significant dimensions to New Zealand visual culture” (p. 21). Two of eight Principles, which embody beliefs about what is important and desirable in school curriculum, are cultural diversity and inclusion. However, a survey of 201 classrooms by the Education Review Office (2012), an independent government body, reported that cultural diversity ranked as “least evident” of the eight Principles (p. 16). The reviewers concluded that “*Cultural diversity* has perhaps been overlooked as teachers focused on meeting bicultural, Treaty of Waitangi obligations” (p. 19). This comment aligns with findings from my doctoral research (Jill, 2007) which showed that art teachers favoured a commitment to honouring the partnership between the indigenous Māori people and European “that is at the core of our nation’s founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi-the Treaty of Waitangi” (MoE, 2007, p. 6). It is stated in the curriculum that students are expected to gain “an understanding of Māori visual culture through exploration of Māori contexts” (p. 21). Thus, the art teachers at that time were more attentive to European and Māori art and culture, and the art and visual culture of Pasifika, Asian and other peoples were less prominent in programs.

An important dimension of the visual arts curriculum is that “content” (i.e., themes, subject matter, art activities) is not specified. Instead, art teachers have autonomy to design programs which are underpinned by four curriculum “strands”:

- *Understanding the visual arts in context - UC* (investigating the relationship between the production of art works and their contexts and influences);
- *Developing practical knowledge - PK* (applying knowledge of conventions from established practice, using appropriate processes and procedures);

- *Developing ideas - DI* (generating, developing and refining ideas in response to a variety of motivations);
- *Communicating and interpreting - CI* (comparing ways in which ideas and art making are used to communicate meaning).

There is further emphasis on students developing “visual literacy and aesthetic awareness” (p. 21). Theorists support development of these competencies but recommend that visual arts education should be framed around critical thinking, and not focus predominantly on formal art making skills (Alter, 2011; Duncum, 2008; Garcia Lazo, 2018). These authors maintain that inclusion of visual literacy, and a critical inquiry framework around images that expose diverse issues, is essential for meaningful art making by students. This dimension is particularly pertinent for 15-18 year old students in secondary schools whose art making processes and final outcomes are assessed through a national framework.

### *1.2 National Assessment Policies for Visual Arts Education*

At years 11-13, the final three years of secondary schooling, 15-18 year old students who elect to study visual arts are assessed through the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NCEA) (New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), 2018). Underpinned by the curriculum “strands”, students are scaffolded through NCEA programs designed by their art teachers to enable them to meet selected Achievement Standards at Levels 1-3 (Table 1, NCEA Visual Arts Matrix). At successive levels, students are expected to demonstrate understanding of artworks in cultural contexts; develop, clarify and generate ideas; and produce a comprehensive body of work informed by established practice (the study of “artist models”) in one or more disciplines of painting, design, sculpture, printmaking and photography. The study of artist models is intended to enhance students’ understanding of artists’ art making processes and outcomes. The aim is for students to not imitate or replicate artists’ works, but to enquire into subject matter that artists depict, and to draw upon their ideas, techniques and processes to make their *own* art. With the exception of Achievement Standard 1.1 at Level 1, no subject matter, content, or themes are specified. This enables visual arts teachers to provide opportunities for all students to express their individuality as they wish. Assessment is internal and external, the latter through portfolios. There are no marks or grades given in this form of assessment. Instead, for both their internally and externally assessed work for selected Achievement Standards, students are awarded levels of performance according to the criteria for Achieved with Excellence, Achieved with Merit, Achieved or Not Achieved.

**Table 1. NCEA Visual Arts Matrix Levels 1-3 Achievement Standards**

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
AS90913 1.1 Demonstrate understanding of art works from a Māori and another cultural context using art terminology.  4 credits Internal	AS91305 AS91308 2.1 AS91306 AS91309 AS91307 Demonstrate an understanding of methods and ideas from established practice appropriate to design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture.  4 credits Internal	AS91440 AS91443 3.1 AS91441 AS91444 AS91442 Analyse methods and ideas from established design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture practice.  4 credits Internal
AS90914 1.2 Use drawing methods and skills for recording information using wet and dry media.  4 credits Internal	AS91310 AS91313 2.2 AS91311 AS91314 AS91312 Use drawing methods to apply knowledge of conventions appropriate to design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture.  4 credits Internal	AS91445 AS91448 3.2 AS91446 AS91449 AS91447 Use drawing to demonstrate understanding of conventions appropriate to design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture.  4 credits Internal
AS90915 1.3 Use drawing conventions to develop work in more than one field of practice.  6 credits Internal	AS91315 AS91318 2.3 AS91316 AS91319 AS91317 Develop ideas in a related series of drawings appropriate to established design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture practice.  4 credits Internal	AS91450 AS91453 3.3 AS91451 AS91454 AS91452 Systematically clarify ideas using drawing informed by established design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture practice.  4 credits Internal
AS90916 1.4 Produce a body of work informed by established practice, which develops ideas, using a range of media.  12 credits External	AS91320 AS91323 2.4 AS91321 AS91324 AS91322 Produce a systematic body of work that shows understanding of art making conventions and ideas within design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture.  12 credits External	AS91455 AS91458 3.4 AS91456 AS91459 AS91457 Produce a systematic body of work that integrates conventions and regenerates ideas within design/painting/photography/printmaking/sculpture practice.  14 credits External
AS90917 1.5 Produce a finished work that demonstrates skills appropriate to cultural conventions.  4 credits Internal	AS91325 2.5 Produce a resolved work that demonstrates control of skills appropriate to cultural conventions.  4 credits Internal	AS91460 3.5 Produce a resolved work that demonstrates purposeful control of skills appropriate to a visual arts cultural context.  4 credits Internal

## 2. Literature Review

The literature that underpins the two research projects reported in this article focuses upon two key dimensions—teaching pedagogy and student diversity.

### 2.1 Teachers' Pedagogical Practices

New Zealand researchers, Alton-Lee (2003, 2004) and Rubie-Davies (2010), assert that teaching is the most important factor in student achievement. They argue that teachers must take responsibility for every student, value diversity, respect students' cultures, have high expectations, and build on students' experiences. Nash (2004) claims that achievement is affected by the degree to which a student's culture is respected, and the similarity between the culture of the community and the values of that school. In the context of Pasifika students, Si'ilata (2014) argues that the most important aspect for teachers is becoming knowledgeable about the languages and cultures of particular Pasifika ethnic groups, having high expectations, and taking into consideration the multiple worlds in which these students live.

For many students of Asian ethnicity, whether immigrants or New Zealand-born, there are differing pressures. One of these is the pressure to conform by "fitting in" with the dominant European culture and western pedagogies that have prevailed in visual arts education in New Zealand until the last ten years (Jill, 2014, p. 86). This acculturation points to "the imperative for art teachers to provide opportunities for all students to find their "voice", and gain understanding of the voices of others" (p. 87). A substantial body of international literature focuses on Asian students' learning styles and the role played by culture in influencing their learning (Loh & Teo, 2017). Reports focus on a lack of critical thinking skills, in-depth conceptual understanding and communication skills, and insufficient

student-centred practice (Pham & Renshaw, 2013). Wider literature suggests that a critical approach to policy and pedagogy, and an ethic that gives priority to equity and democracy as social and educational objectives, is a way forward for an active engagement in cultural inclusion (Bianchi, 2011; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2008). As Nieto and Bode (2012) argue, teachers need to understand the differences students bring to school, including their culture. Pertinent to visual arts is Hanley and Noblit's (2009) claim that "culturally responsive pedagogy and racial identity are related to achievement and resilience" (p. 81).

### *2.2 Demographic Statistics and Student Diversity*

The changing population in Auckland was driven initially by a rapid increase in immigration in the 1990s, and again since 2001. In 2014, the *New Zealand Census* (Statistics New Zealand (SNZ), 2013) reported that the population of New Zealand was 4.24 million. This government department identifies "ethnicity" as a measure of cultural affiliation, as opposed to race, ancestry, nationality or citizenship. In 2013 nearly three-quarters (74.0%) of people in New Zealand identified with European ethnicities, followed by Māori (14.9%), Asian (11.8%) and Pasifika (Pacific Islands) peoples (7.4%). In 2019 the resident population has reached nearly 5 million, and migration remains high with more than half coming from Asia, especially India and China (SNZ, 2019).

In contrast to the 2013 New Zealand-wide population statistics, young people under 20 years living in Auckland, the largest city, are increasingly diverse. Those of Asian and Pasifika ethnicities are the two fastest growing groups, comprising over half of Auckland's youthful population. The Asia New Zealand Foundation (2015) has reported that Asian people in Auckland are younger, and the number of Asian-born residents is increasing rapidly. The Ministry of Education's (2018) statistics for schools, published on its *Culture Counts* website, records school rolls by ethnicity and age, education sector and school type. Secondary sector statistics report that in 2018 European students in Auckland numbered 36,210. Collectively, however, students of Asian (20,406), Pasifika (18,325), Māori (13,181) and Other (3,356) ethnicities totalled 55,258. These statistics reflect the changes from a predominantly European student population to one that is increasingly diverse.

"Diversity" can be defined as the ways in which people are both alike and different. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and that our individual differences need to be recognised. These differences can include the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies (Nieto & Bode, 2012). In my research projects, the focus was upon the "ethnic diversity" of secondary school students, and how that diversity has the potential to enrich the nature of visual arts education teaching and art making in secondary schools in Auckland, New Zealand.

### **3. Methodology**

For these complementary research projects, the same qualitative interpretive methodological and theoretical framework and data collection methods were used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015). However, the rationale, research settings and participants differed. For both projects, The University of Auckland

Human Participants Ethics Committee required school principals to issue the invitations on my behalf, and to grant consent for access to the sites and art teachers.

### *3.1 Differing Rationales, Research Settings and Participants*

For the 2015 project, 55 state secondary schools in Auckland were randomly selected from the Ministry of Education's (2015) *School Statistics: Culture Counts* website on the basis of location across the Auckland region, school type (single gender, co-educational) and decile (a socio-economic ranking from 1-10). I approached each school principal to discuss the research project with their art department staff, and to invite one art teacher to volunteer to participate. The overarching research question was, "How are art teachers responding to the increasing ethnic diversity of students in Auckland secondary schools?" For the 2018 project, 20 Asian-ethnic art teachers from Auckland secondary schools were invited to participate. All were former pre-service art teachers in my teacher education courses between 2004 and 2017. The overarching research question was, "How do Asian-ethnic art teachers promote an Asian presence in visual arts education in Auckland secondary schools?"

### *3.2 Data Collection Methods*

For both projects, data were collected through three methods—an online questionnaire, an optional face-to-face interview, and an invitation to the art teachers to bring to their interviews examples of students' art works that they believed reflected their responsiveness to the ethnically diverse students they teach. The university's ethics process required consent from students and parents/caregivers, prior to the art works being brought to interviews and used in reporting the findings. Pseudonyms were required to protect the identities of schools and teachers, but students' art works were allowed to be labelled with their first name, ethnicity and age.

For the 2015 project, an art teacher from each of the 55 schools responded to an anonymous online questionnaire, which provided comprehensive baseline data. From the 30 European-ethnic art teachers who volunteered to be interviewed, 10 were randomly selected using the same criteria as for school selection. They taught across a range of decile 1-10 schools, some with large numbers of Pasifika students and others with predominantly European and Asian students. For the 2018 project, the Asian-ethnic art teachers were purposively selected from my year group rolls from 2004-2017. Each of the 20 teachers completed an email questionnaire, following which eight volunteered to be interviewed. Prior to their interviews, the art teachers completed a spreadsheet detailing their professional and academic qualifications, the school's ethnicity statistics, and their school's Mission or Vision statement. These data informed the interviews for both projects. Each teacher was interviewed for up to three hours in their art department, followed by photographic documentation of students' art works selected by them.

### *3.3 Theoretical Perspectives on the Role of Images in Research*

The decision to collect images as data was in response to the burgeoning literature on the theoretical grounding for using the "visual" as a powerful tool in research. It was influenced by the notion that images are an illuminating means through which meanings can be expressed in ways that words cannot

(Leavy, 2015; Weber, 2008). Stanczack (2007) argues that “Images are not merely appendages to the research but rather inseparable components to learning about our social worlds” (p. 3). Weber’s (2008) advocacy for “the ability of images to evoke visceral and emotional responses in ways that are memorable, coupled with their capacity to help us empathise or see another’s point of view” (p. 47), resonated with the phenomena investigated in both research projects. Leavy (2015) concurs that “as a persuasive social product visual art is a significant source of information about the social world, including cultural aspects of social life” (p. 227). Using images as data also brings into focus the relationship between the image and the viewer. While images have the power to portray people’s social worlds many argue that it is the viewer who applies the power of giving images their last meaning (Duncum, 2010; Leavy, 2015). Others claim that meanings of images need to be negotiated according to particular historical and social contexts (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009), or that interpreting images should be the result of dialogue between the image and an individual’s background (Sullivan, 2005). The collection of images in my projects was intended to gain insights into the worlds of ethnically diverse students in a sample of Auckland secondary schools.

#### **4. Findings**

The findings are presented as eight “vignettes”, four from each project. These are expressed through the voices of art teachers and visualised through examples of art works by their 15-18 year old students. Each vignette provides insights into how the art teachers interpreted national visual arts curriculum and assessment policies and took into account the ethnic diversity of students through culturally responsive pedagogies in their visual arts programs.

##### ***Vignette 1 - Project 1: Art teacher Jacqui and her student Vera***

Jacqui, head of the art department at her school, identified as European New Zealand-Māori. She had taught for ten years at her state co-educational secondary school with a decile 1 rating (the lowest socio-economic ranking). Of the 922 students enrolled at the school, 77% were from Pasifika ethnic groups. Māori students comprised 19%, and the other 4% included 24 European students. 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)”. Core values were “acknowledgement of Māori as tangata whenua (the first, indigenous people of the land), positive affirmation of cultures in the school, and respect for all”. The art department’s aim 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”. The examples Jacqui brought to her interview were NCEA Level 3 painting portfolios in progress by her year 13 class (see Table 1, column 3). Themes, subject matter, styles and painting techniques employed by each student were distinctly different. It was evident that Jacqui enabled them all to express their individual identities, interests and passions within the openness of the visual arts curriculum and NCEA assessment framework. Her approach was “for students to decide what they want their art to be about”, then supporting them to find “artist models” for inspiration. A notable feature of artworks made by

most girls in this class was a focus on themselves and their own image. This was exemplified by the work of Vera, a 17 year old Samoan girl, who depicted herself in successive panels (Figure 1). As Jacqui said:

Vera wanted to “speak” through her art about her dual contexts, of being born in New Zealand but longing to be at home in the island nation of Samoa. In her earlier works, like the one at left, Vera depicted herself in a reflective pose, wearing western dress, but positioned in front of a backdrop of breadfruit or taro leaves, staple foods of Samoa. At centre, her outstretched hands, overlaying an image of herself, appear to be reaching out to her heritage. Here, Vera wears a blouse decorated with traditional Samoan patterns, with a flower tucked behind her right ear to signify that she is a single woman. In her later works, Vera wanted to convey her perception of a simpler, less complicated way of life in Samoa for herself through a graphic style of lines, blocks of colour, and sensitive use of dreamlike transparent paint.



**Figure 1. Vera, Samoan, 17 Years, *Loss of Identity, Longing, and Belonging***

### ***Vignette 2 - Project 1: Art teacher Matthew and his student Brandon***

Matthew, head of the art department at his school, identified as a European New Zealander. He had taught for over 30 years, much of it at this decile 1 state co-educational school. Of the 721 students, 79% identified as Pasifika. The majority were Samoan, followed by Cook Islands Māori and Tongan, and smaller numbers of Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan. Along with four Europeans there were refugee students from South East Asia, India and Middle Eastern countries. Matthew explained that the school's philosophy focused on the wellbeing of students in this low socio-economic area of Auckland. This guided the art teachers' approaches. Matthew spoke of how students studying visual arts “want to tell stories about themselves, but in their own way”. He believed it was essential to support their ideas. A feature of the art making by the majority of boys at the school was how their stories were predominantly about physical activities that are part of their cultural milieu. I noticed that hip-hop

dancing, music, disc jockeys, wrestling, basketball, and other sports were favoured subjects, many portrayed in styles influenced by animé and artist model Jon Cattapan's depictions of the urban environment. Matthew encouraged students to take 'action photographs' of each other as a starting point, and to reference their ethnic heritage through depictions of traditional Pasifika patterns. The work of Brandon, a 17 year old Samoan boy, exemplified this approach. It was also evident that the power of visual culture was an influence on his identity (Figure 2). As Matthew said:

Brandon and the other students know I'm opposed to bullying and I don't like looking at images of physical violence. I've managed to take the fighting into animé which is much more digestible. Brandon's art works are high and low art and popular culture blending together in an animé theme, and that whole powerball thing... lots of physical contact. He's dealing with what he wants to deal with. This is his cultural milieu.



**Figure 2. Brandon, Samoan, 17 Years, *Popular Culture and Pasifika Identity***

### ***Vignette 3 - Project 1: Art teacher Kaitlin and her student Aeluna***

Kaitlin, a European New Zealander, had taught for six years. Her large state co-educational school had a decile ranking of 3 and an enrolment of 1892 students, of whom 50% were Pasifika followed by Māori (24%), Asian (15%) and European (9%). Kaitlin explained that the school's Mission Statement focused on "respecting each other, striving for academic and self-excellence, whanaungatanga (working together), sharing family values and embracing each other's cultures". Kaitlin said that student achievement was enhanced by how she, and the school, respected the students' cultures. A feature of her visual arts programs was "placing cultural diversity at the centre of planning at all levels and involving students as teachers with their peers". Kaitlin gave examples of how the Indian students taught their peers about the circular, symmetrical Indian rangoli patterns that are made on the floor using materials such as coloured rice and dry flour. Similarly, Māori students taught peers about the patterns that are woven to make tukutuku panels for meeting houses. Kaitlin's approach is "to make sure I'm using the students, their prior knowledge... they become the teachers and I become the

learner”. Kaitlin’s NCEA Level 2 students, mostly 16-17 year olds, had painted “Symbolic self-portraits” which included objects with which they identified. They were introduced to how artists, such as Frida Kahlo and Rita Angus, treat symbolism in portraiture. The art works I observed by ethnically diverse students reflected the individuality of each. The work of Aeluna, a 17 year old Middle Eastern girl, exemplified this personal approach (Figure 3). As Kaitlin explained:

Aeluna fled from Syria to New Zealand with her family. She was very shy and quite reserved. She talked to me about the importance in Syria of family, religion, education, self-discipline and respect. A possible consequence of her upbringing was that she struggled in her self-portraits to make eye contact or look out at the viewer. I reassured her that she could find other ways to represent herself. Aeluna chose to paint her self-portraits in three-quarter view, or profile, gazing contemplatively into the distance. Her use of symbolic objects was where her culture came in, such as the isotoxal star triangle and wings above it of the East Semetic God Assur... and the skull because she talked a lot about death. In contrast, she painted the dove for peace and a daisy for innocence. Aeluna said that her use of purple signified spirituality, sacred wisdom and enlightenment. The geometric Syrian patterns are complemented by the gridded pattern style behind her of her artist model, American painter Chuck Close.



**Figure 3.** Aeluna, Syrian, 17 Years, *From Syria to New Zealand, from War to Peace*

#### ***Vignette 4 - Project 1: Art teacher Yvonne and her student Lydia***

Yvonne, of New Zealand European and Dutch descent, had taught for over 20 years. Her decile 6 state co-educational school had a roll of 1900. Although European New Zealand students comprised the greatest number (47%), followed by East Asian students (18%), there were over 60 ethnic groups at the school. The school’s Mission Statement was twofold: “To inspire students to achieve educational excellence through a rich learning environment; and for students to become the best person they can be

and contribute to society”. Yvonne recalled how she used to teach from a western perspective, but had broadened her knowledge about approaches connected to various cultural groups to support students. She was intrigued by how some NCEA Level 3 students, mostly 17-18 year olds, used visual arts as a research project of their own heritage and as a means of connecting with their parents and grandparents through their art work. She noted that, for these students, “art making becomes a vehicle for research and output, rather than just output”. The work of Lydia, a 17 year old Chinese international student, exemplified this approach (Figure 4). Yvonne said:

On her frequent travels between China and New Zealand Lydia became aware of how different the air and water quality was in New Zealand compared with her homeland, thus her focus became pollution in China. She came to understand what causes pollution, what underpins it, and its effects on buildings in China. Lydia made many multi-media images to chart pollution readings, depict pollution from coal used to generate electricity, water pollution through dyeing fabrics, and consumerist forces. She experimented with actual rust, verdigris paint, and gold leaf to create potent images that echoed that decay... in the later works, the buildings became grids of decay.



**Figure 4.** Lydia, Chinese, 17 Years, *The Drastic Effects of Pollution in China*

#### ***Vignette 5 - Project 2: Art teacher Kayla and her student Jan***

Kayla, a New Zealand-born Chinese woman, had taught for six years. Her decile 3 state co-educational school had a roll of 1400 students, of whom 40% were Indian, 10% each of Māori, Pasifika and South East Asian, 5% Chinese, and a few Europeans. Kayla spoke of the school's diversity, and of a two-day Polyfest at which Korean, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Tongan and Samoan groups, and a K-Pop group, perform in traditional costumes. Celebrations take place for Mātāriki (to mark the Māori New Year) and Māori language week. Arts and Cultural awards evenings occurred annually, with a school coordinator promoting these celebrations. Kayla explained that at all year levels “we want students to be able to express their identities through art”. The 15-18 year old students studying for NCEA Levels

1-3 were given free choice with subject matter. Kayla's aim was for them "to show their personality and their character and what they want to say through their art". This approach was exemplified by a Level 1 NCEA painting portfolio by Jan, a 15 year old Cambodian student whose artworks focused on "the human condition" (Figure 5). Kayla explained Jan's processes:

Jan's starting point was examining images of Cambodia. She interviewed her grandparents who were involved in the war with the Khmer Rouge. They talked about the brutal regime under the Marxist dictator Pol Pot... and how support for capitalist or western ideology was often punishable by execution, with Pol Pot and his army of adult and child soldiers seeking to turn the country into a utopian, communist society. Some of Jan's images were about child soldiers. Others were about children losing their innocence in the war. In the centre panel, the children at play represent the transition between being controlled to go to war and losing their lives. She used the white lilies as symbols of both peace and mourning. In this sequence of paintings the aim of her subdued palette and slightly blurry brush strokes was to evoke the sadness of the past.



**Figure 5.** Jan, Cambodian, 15 Years, *The Human Condition and the Effects of War*

#### ***Vignette 6 - Project 2: Art teacher Holly and her student Jeff***

Holly was born in South Korea and came to New Zealand at 7 years. She had taught for three years at a decile 7 co-educational senior college with a roll of 600, of whom 34% were Indian and 31% of Asian ethnicity (Korean, Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Thai). The school's Vision statement was "to prepare and inspire students to achieve their very best in a global society". Because many international students come to New Zealand for short term educational experiences, the school provided personalised learning opportunities that were flexible and authentic and met each student's needs. Holly found it challenging that "these students are technically proficient at highly realistic renderings of subject matter (like flowers and portraits), but composition, understanding of artist models and artworks, and the theory side of it is really low". Assessment, in which process is as important as final outcomes, was

difficult for students who hadn't studied how and why art is made and communicated. One student who Holly worked intensively with was 18 year old Chinese student, Jeff, who was studying painting for NCEA Level 3 (Figure 6). Holly explained his approach:

Jeff was obsessed with getting his work technically perfect like he'd been taught in China. To get things right he practiced over and over again. For his portfolio, Jeff looked at historical figures, referring to Chinese artist model Wang Guangyi. Jeff began with traditional source material to denote the "birth" of China, including images of the philosopher-poet Lao Zu and the influential Confucius. He featured the lotus flower, a symbol of perfection and purity, and peonies, the unofficial national flower. Jeff's introduction of a panda warrior, Chinese warrior figures, weaponry, and clowns and monsters on the other boards hint perhaps at the "death" of China. In these panels his interest in animé manga and games are in a more animated style.



**Figure 6.** Jeff, Chinese, 18 Years, *The Birth and Death of China*

#### ***Vignette 7 - Project 2: Art teacher Harvey and his student Elena***

Harvey was born in South Korea and came to New Zealand at 9 years. He has taught visual arts, design and photography for seven years. His year 1-13, high decile 10 private school, had a roll of 1600 of whom 50% were of Asian ethnicity, particularly Chinese. The school's philosophy stressed academic achievement, driven by external examinations. This was an expectation of parents at this fee-paying school. The school offered both NCEA (internal and external assessment) and International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations. Harvey said he found it "more challenging for younger Asian students to celebrate their own culture through art due to their fear of failing... they tend to take 'safer looking' subjects". In contrast, 16-18 year old students "always refer to Asian culture through their art as this gives a depth to their outcomes". Because IB was favoured by many, there were comparatively few senior art students studying NCEA and, those who did, opted to study design and photography. At years 11-13 students drove their individualised investigation. Harvey found that "they learn all sorts of

things that they didn't know about their family and culture". A particularly potent portfolio was by Elena, a 17 year old Japanese student, in which she explored aspects of her Japanese culture (Figure 7). Elena used holiday snapshots of iconic places, such as Mt Fuji and historic shrines, as the starting point for her ideas. She drew upon the calligraphic works of Chinese artist Xu Bing, and the works of Zhang Huan, one of China's best known performance and conceptual artists who engages with cultural issues. Harvey explained that for her photographs, Elena used a friend as her model in a "performance" exploring ideas about fish in Japanese culture:

Elena initially focused on cultural stereotypes associated with Japanese food, like rice, raw salmon, wasabi and seaweed paper. She made collages then started cutting from actual objects, like seaweed paper, to create a kind of text, much like Zhang Huan who has calligraphers progressively writing messages on his face about himself and cultural issues. She then became preoccupied with the salmon and its relationship with, and for, people's survival. The messages on the third board were increasingly performative as the model lay in a bath, with real goldfish progressively added. The face morphed into water, then inside a jar. Elena wanted to talk about the stereotype of when you think about Japanese people you associate them with fishing and whaling.



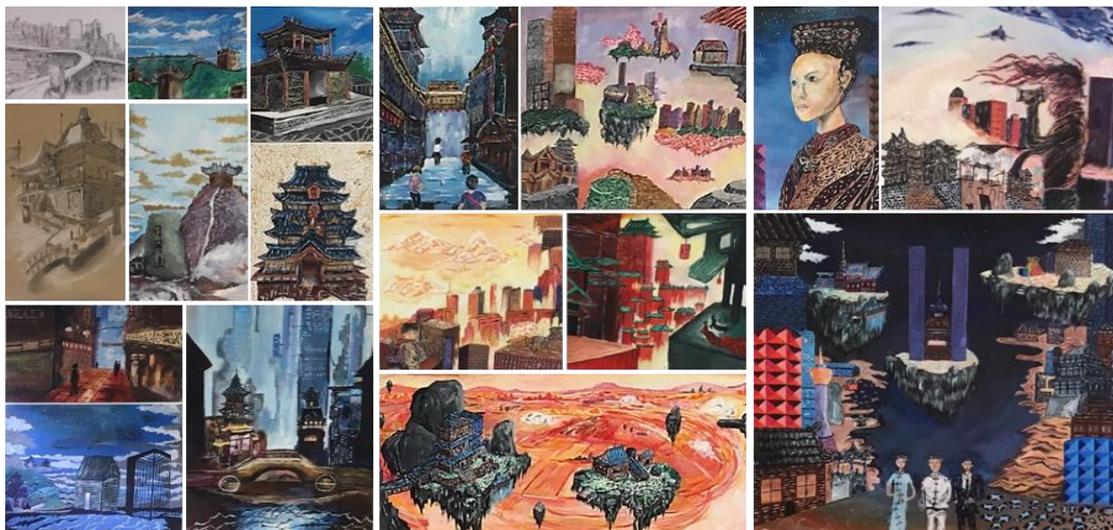
**Figure 7. Elena, Japanese, 18 Years, Cultural Stereotypes - Japanese Fishing and Whaling**

#### ***Vignette 8 - Project 2: Art teacher Alex and her student Yixin***

Alex, a South Korean-born woman, arrived in New Zealand as a 14 year old. She taught at a high decile 9 state secondary school for boys, with a roll of 2384 students, of whom 34% were of Asian ethnicity. In addition, the school had approximately 200 international students, the majority being Chinese. The school's philosophy was "to celebrate success in all its forms and achieve excellence in everything we do". There was a noticeable focus on academic and sporting success, with "Asian parents having high expectations of their sons to do well". Alex used to teach across all year levels but since 2016 has taught painting and sculpture at NCEA Levels 2-3. It was evident that her own work as

a practicing 'surrealist' artist provided motivation for a number of the boys to use highly imaginative approaches in their artworks. At year 13, Alex encouraged students to explore and express themselves and their culture. She said, "It's all about their identity, who they are, what they're interested in, and where they are coming from. I tell them to be proud of their culture". This freedom was backed up with teaching them observational and painting skills, and discussing how artist models use differing means to convey meaning. The portfolio by Yixin, an 18 year old Chinese boy (Figure 8), exemplified this emphasis on exploring his culture using meaningful subject matter. As Alex said:

Yixin's aim was to study architecture at university. He was fascinated with ancient structures and contemporary buildings, and wanted to create a fine balance between those two cultures and two different eras. He started with Beijing, its big motorway and classical pagodas, then the Great Wall of China. He transitioned into something quite surreal creating his own 'perfect world' with structures from past and present and into the future. Yixin looked at beautiful fabric patterns, the golden threads of the dragon and created a floating city hovering over the land. Yixin told me they were the spirits of ancient buildings. In the final panel he looks through a camera to introduce people to his vision of a perfect futuristic, floating world.



**Figure 8.** Yixin, Chinese, 18 Years, *From the Spirit of Ancient Buildings to a Futuristic World*

## 5. Discussion

The findings from the eight vignettes draw upon data collected from complementary research projects conducted in 2015 and 2018. These findings are pertinent to the three dimensions that impact on the experiences of visual arts education for ethnically diverse students in secondary schools in Auckland, New Zealand.

### 5.1 Dimension 1: *The Influence of the National Visual Arts Curriculum*

There is clear evidence in the findings from these projects of the influence of the open-ended nature of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) which, with the exception of students

studying Māori visual culture at some point during their schooling, does not specify themes, subject matter, or art activities. The voices of the teachers, supported by the artworks of their students, revealed that close attention was paid to each of the four curriculum “strands”. It was evident through the eight vignettes that each student, supported by their teacher, had investigated and demonstrated a “relationship between making artworks and their contexts and influences” (UC strand). This is exemplified by the influence of visual culture on Brandon (Figure 2) and the cultural context of China’s past and present focused on by Yixin (Figure 8). It was obvious that students had applied “knowledge of conventions from established practice” (PK strand), as demonstrated through Elena’s application of the performative processes and procedures used by Chinese artist Zhang Huan (Figure 7), and Aeluna’s interpretation of the unique painting techniques of American artist Chuck Close (Figure 3). Each student had “generated, developed and refined ideas in response to a variety of motivations” (DI strand) through a clear starting point and convincing sequence. This is exemplified by the stance taken on China by Jeff (Figure 6), and Lydia’s commentary about pollution in China (Figure 4). Each student has understood the “ways in which ideas and art making are used to communicate meaning” (CI strand). This is evident through the reflective position taken by Vera about her loss of identity (Figure 1) and the potent imagery conveyed about child soldiers in Cambodia by Jan (Figure 5). Above all, it was evident that each student had been encouraged to explore topics of their choice, expressed through appropriate media and techniques, made possible by the open-ended nature of the visual arts curriculum.

### *5.2 Dimension 2: The Implications of National Assessment Policies*

Each of the eight vignettes demonstrated that the art making of these students was not only linked to the four “strands” in the national visual art curriculum, but to the Achievement Standards for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NCEA) (NZQA, 2018). Although the vignettes in this article represent mere glimpses into the body of artworks for their portfolios for external assessment (see Table 1, Achievement Standards 1.4, 2.4, 3.4), each student produced a “systematic body of work that integrates conventions and regenerates ideas” within their choice of visual arts discipline. This is evident through Elena’s photography portfolio (Figure 7) and the painting portfolios of others. My familiarity with the “artist models” studied by these students show that they neither imitated nor replicated artists’ works but, rather, enquired into issues that the artists depicted, then drew upon their ideas, techniques and processes to make their *own* art. The art teachers’ comments in the vignettes align with Sullivan’s (2005) assertion that student’s artworks should be interpreted in the context of each individual’s background.

### *5.3 Dimension 3: The Effects of the Art Teachers’ Pedagogical Practices*

It was apparent that the pedagogical practices of these eight art teachers aligned with claims by Alton-Lee (2003, 2004) and Rubie-Davies (2010) that teaching is the most important factor in student achievement. Regardless of the type of school they taught in, each teacher expressed clear intentions about wanting their students to achieve. Nonetheless, those who taught in schools that were low-decile

(vignettes 1, 2, 3, 5), mid-decile (vignettes 4, 6) and high-decile (vignettes 7, 8) reported on distinctive differences that affected their pedagogical practices. These differences were apparent through contrasting aspirations. For example, Matthew (vignette 2) spoke of how the philosophy of his low-decile 1 state school focused on the wellbeing of its ethnically diverse, though largely Pasifika, student population and how this guided the art department's approaches. Painting was the primary discipline offered to students. In contrast, Harvey (vignette 7) reported that the philosophy of his high-decile 10 private school stressed academic achievement, driven by external examinations. While this affected the number of students, predominantly Chinese, who studied visual arts the two disciplines offered to students, photography and design, require more expensive specialist materials and equipment than painting. This was attainable at this fee-paying school. An important finding was that regardless of their type of school both Matthew and Harvey were committed to supporting students to succeed.

Another factor affecting the achievement of the eight students was how the art teachers' pedagogical practices aligned with the students' cultures and the culture of their schools (Nash, 2004). The examples of students' artworks I observed, such as Brandon's (Figure 2), aligned with Grushka's (2009) claim that the value of visual culture is that it contains images and issues that are relevant for adolescents because visual culture is such a large part of their lives. Both Vera (Figure 1) and Aeluna (Figure 3) explored issues of a highly personal and emotional nature. A striking feature of the artworks by students of Asian ethnicities - Lydia (Figure 4), Jan (Figure 5), Jeff (Figure 6), Elena (Figure 7) and Yixin (Figure 8) - was how their art teachers had supported them to explore issues pertinent to their heritage countries, and the extent to which the messages they conveyed were political and environmental in nature. This reflects the approach promoted by Beyerbach and Davis (2011) to engage students in global issues through the arts. Pertinent to the findings from these projects is the argument by Hanley and Noblit (2009) that "culturally responsive pedagogy and racial identity are related to achievement and resilience" (p. 81).

## 6. Significance and Limitations

The significance of these two complementary qualitative research projects, conducted in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, is that I set out to discover whether art teachers in secondary schools were continuing to privilege the art and culture of Māori and European peoples, or whether they were responding to the increasing ethnic diversity of their student populations. The first project in 2015 focused on how predominantly European-ethnic art teachers are working alongside ethnically diverse students. The follow-up project in 2018, motivated by the accelerating population of Asian-ethnic students in secondary schools, focused on how Asian-ethnic art teachers are supporting these students to engage in experiences that express their cultural identities through the visual arts.

In terms of the year in which it was published, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007) could be considered an outdated document. What I found during my research, in 2015 and 2018, is that it is still relevant, and that this pertinence continues to rest upon its open-ended approach and non-specific

content for visual arts education. What the two projects revealed is that the art teachers have moved on with the times. The vignettes in this article exemplify how both European-ethnic and Asian-ethnic art teachers are supporting their ethnically diverse students to engage in visual arts experiences that express their individual cultural identities.

However, the shape and form of these small-scale research projects highlight potential limitations. The first is that those who volunteered to participate most likely did so because they held a particular interest in the respective research questions. Second, most of those who agreed to be interviewed taught in schools with ethnically diverse student populations. Although beyond the scope of these small-scale projects, a third limitation was that students were not interviewed. Instead, the “voices” of art teachers are used as secondary data to report the intentions and artworks of their students. A fourth limitation could be perceived as the issue of validity, especially since validity of interpretations and meanings has long been questioned in debates over the legitimacy of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015). The findings of both research projects are not generalizable in the traditional sense. Rather, they have verisimilitude through “the creation of a realistic, authentic, life-like portrayal” (Leavy, 2009, p. 57).

## 7. Conclusion

As evidenced in the findings, the stories these students told through their art works encapsulate the importance of teachers supporting them to be themselves, and the capacity of images “to help us empathize or see another’s point of view” (Weber, 2009, p. 47). The findings from these complementary projects fill a gap in the literature. They have the potential to inform the beliefs and pedagogical practices of art teachers, and of the role of images as data in research, both in New Zealand, and beyond.

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