



Editorial

Enabling the Arts to function as a transformative experience in early years education

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Murray Schafer (b.1933) once said that for a child at five “art is life and life is art.” However at six, “art becomes art and life become life. They will then discover that ‘music’ is something that happens in a little bag on Thursday morning while on Friday afternoon there is another little bag called ‘painting.’” (1975: p. 15). Here Schafer highlights an essential of early years pedagogical practice. In the early childhood setting, a child can engage in ‘art’ as a transforming experience of making and play. This aspect of children’s experience is the focus of the first He Kupu ‘special edition’ on Arts education. The areas of Arts included in this edition are: visual art, music, dance and drama. As the context is early years education naturally these boundaries are seen to overlap and complement each other.

The contributors are Susan Young from the University of Exeter who writes on music and play, Lesley Pohio from the University of Auckland writing on art and early childhood education, Sophie Alock from Victoria University in Wellington who writes on drama and play and Adrienne Sansom from the University of Auckland who has contributed an article on dance and play. Robyn Trinick from the University of Auckland has contributed an article on music and the first year of school and Lucy Bainger, a PhD student at Monash University, has added a useful commentary on developing music in an early childhood centre.

Susan Young, who has worked on many exciting projects with children, has presented a case study examining children and their own play with music. Her focus is on singing and the ways in which the child develops songs through a number of permutations, re-making the song according to their own perception of the world. Susan makes the point that singing activity is not seen by the children as a linear time based structure but as structure that they can ‘play’ with. The context of the complete song, Susan observes, is usually held for the adults not for the child and their own renditions. This characterisation of what music is, according to a child, questions the adult gaze contemplating music seen only in the ‘mat time’ ritual. This is seen as indicative of the culture of the centre that will determine what may or may not transpire in terms of how the child may be encouraged to use their voice.

Lesley Pohio takes visual art in early childhood education and considers the adaptation of Reggio Emilia in the New Zealand context. She puts forward the idea of the *atelier* and *atelierista* or dedicated art space and art teacher specialist, as being valid in New Zealand. She suggests that as educators we have to acknowledge New Zealandness in the process and content of children’s work and not try to imitate Reggio Emilia. In looking at process, Lesley suggests that teachers should recognise the art work not as something that is a ‘one off’ event but as a process that links to a wider context. Advocating a project based approach, the onlooker, the teacher, is recommended to engage and discuss the art work with the child. In this way art becomes part of a moving assemblage in the children’s lives – a kind of ‘aquarium’ – revealing an interpretation and message from the children about their lives and living.



Just as Susan Young and Lesley Pohio refer to the role of the teacher adult, Sophie Alcock, looking at drama and play, sees the importance of the teacher as advocate for children's dramatic play. Referring to Chaiklin (2001) Sophie utilizes the psychological framework of contextualising children's dramatic play through participation in "societally-organised practices" (p. 21). The ways in which children act themselves within the play is vividly recorded in a dramatic sequence illustrated by a box being used in a series of children's dramatic encounters. Sophie refers to the disposition of the teacher being one who has to: mediate between the needs for space for the play to continue, create the conditions for the play to be respected within a centre and at the same time be a player within the imagined space. Adrienne Sansom also discusses play from a variety of viewpoints. In considering the 'paradox' of play Adrienne sees the place of dance in the curriculum. In a carefully worded discussion Adrienne puts dance within a praxis that is by its nature inclusive of fun. The integration of play with dance is strongly advocated by Adrienne seeing the link between the real and imagined worlds as discussed by Sophie Alcock.

Robyn Trinick also looks at music focusing on two different approaches to teaching. Robyn highlights the dilemma facing teachers as to how they might interpret their role within the context of the first year of school. By examining two contrasting approaches to learning and the arts Robyn shows two ways in which teachers may develop work within music. One approach sees the teacher as the director of operations, much like Schafer's comment above, the other approach allows for the child's own choice of activity being accepted as part of classroom culture. The dilemma for the teacher is summed up in the conclusion where Robyn suggests that difficulty in equating curriculum outcomes with the arts should not be allowed to stand in the way of an open and 'democratic' experience.

Lucy Bainger has contributed some useful ideas for developing child initiated musical activities. Lucy outlines many ways in which a centre might also develop play with sound objects using 'mat time' as a space for discussion and exploration as well as composition of ideas around narratives. These relate to many of the sentiments expressed by the other authors where children are encouraged to develop their thinking while teachers need to be conscious of how to manage the arts in a busy centre.

This Arts special edition sees a development of He Kupu journal in providing for the wider readership a series of in depth studies in early childhood education. The authors have provided a theoretical as well as practical means to reflect on the arts, relating very different ideas as to ways to perceive children's learning in context. The development of enactive learning in the arts plays a powerful influence in children's lives, and the means to develop and enhance such experiences are seen as relying on teachers and centres who wish to respond to the children and not succumb to the pressure of teaching equating to curriculum 'delivery.'

Chaiklin, S. (2001). The institutionalization of cultural-historical psychology as a multinational practice. In S. Chaiklin (Ed.), *The theory and practice of cultural historical psychology* (pp.15-34). Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.

Schafer, M.R. (1975) *The Rhinoceros in the Classroom*, New York: Universal Edition.