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INTERCONNECTEDNESS, INTERGENERATIONAL AND IMPROVISATION: CRITICAL ASPECTS OF CURRICULUM ADVANCEMENT IN THE ARTS

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Abstract

In 2021 Professor Papaarangi Reid^d, at The University of Melbourne, shared the ancient proverb “I ngā rā o mua”, translated to mean “before we know where we are going, we must know where we have come from”. This proverb sets the tone for discussing the Arts in the New Zealand curriculum, as during radical upheaval and social change as being experienced in the pandemic, we are forced to examine activities to reflect and discover anew the road ahead (Lindley, et al., 2021; Wood, et al., 2021). This is a critical inflection point for redefining the future of New Zealand Arts Education, as it coincides with the current New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007) refresh (MoE, 2021). This research informed paper advocates for mātauranga Māoriⁱⁱ and te ao Māoriⁱⁱⁱ in the Arts curriculum to ensure distinctive, bold transformational learning opportunities are experienced by learners within the education system. This article suggests the values of interconnectedness, intergenerational purpose and improvisation can dismantle disciplinary boundaries and offer a critical frame to reconsider a forward-focused Arts curriculum.

Keywords

Arts curriculum; mātauranga Māori; learning; education

Introduction

The existing structure for Arts education in New Zealand is fragmented into discrete entities of dance, drama, music – sound arts, and the visual arts. Guided by four interrelated strands: Understanding the Arts in Context, Developing Practical Knowledge in the Arts, Developing Ideas in the Arts, and Communicating and Interpreting (MoE, 2007) specific skills, literacies and knowledge are taught through discrete disciplines. Within each discipline, content choice and delivery remain the responsibility of the teacher and while meaningful, purposeful and intentional learning experiences are facilitated, cross-disciplinary programmes that move into other curriculum areas are likely to be the exception, not the rule (Dewey, 2015). Given many teachers of the Arts are still grappling with cultural competencies and how to enact them, only small slivers of mātauranga Māori are evident within the themes of identity, in place-based curricula, motifs, narratives and as Hindle et. al. (2011), argue this is a missed opportunity. Driven by teachers who have capabilities and interest, rather than a centralising curriculum focus, the inclusion of te ao Māori values and approaches are likely sporadic, haphazard and variable. The Arts curriculum can lead educational transformation, by locating mātauranga Māori at the forefront and centre of revitalisation.

Existing systemic failure

In evidence of Report no.Wai 2180, The Taihape: Rangitīkei Ki Rangipō District Inquiry (2019), Iona Holsted and Jann Marshall provided evidence on behalf of the MoE:

... the Crown acknowledges that Māori learners have consistently experienced inequitable outcomes in comparison to other learners and that the state education system has been a contributing factor to these disparities ... The state education system has not sufficiently valued Māori cultural understandings and has had consistently low expectations of tamariki and rangatahi Māori. The failure to respond to the identity, language and culture of Māori has harmed Māori and has contributed to poor education outcomes over generations. (p. 3)

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The admittance by the Crown of systemic failure of Māori begins the persuasive argument that the past and existing structures of education are not fit for purpose (MoE, 2017; 2020; Office of the Auditor-General, 2016; Law & Hernandez, 2021). There is an urgent necessity to address the systemic components of the Arts curriculum and radically redesign education systems, not only for Māori students but all those that have *turangawaewae*^{iv} and share in a sense of place within New Zealand. Many discussions that explore Māori knowledge systems justify and pivot on promises made with the Treaty of Waitangi as an agreed aspiration for a shared society and an unwavering symbol of unity, hope and commitment between two cultures (Dorsett, 2017; Erueti, 2017; Orange, 2004). The Waitangi Tribunal shares:

New Zealand was founded on the relationship between these two cultures. Meeting as equals, their representatives reached an agreement, in the Treaty of Waitangi, that gave each of New Zealand's founding peoples a form of authority relevant to its culture. The Crown won *kāwanatanga*, the right to enact laws and make policies; *iwi* and *hapū* retained *tino rangatiratanga* over their lands and settlements, and “*taonga katoa*”. In this way, the treaty provided a place for each culture in the life of this country. (Wai 262, 2011, p. 14)

Problematically, the contract was aspirational, and in the years following, Māori values and ways of knowing were silenced, unseen, actively oppressed, abused and assaulted within the education system (Mikaere, 2011; Mulholland & Tawhai, 2010; Ruka, 2017; Smith, 2012). However, expressions of self-determination and partnership between the Crown and Māori collectives belong as part of an ever-evolving story. In recent years activism, deeds of settlement and partnership agreements^v, key pieces of legislation and policy^{vi}, MoE Strategy^{vii} and public opinion have contributed to new versions of what contemporary New Zealand culture may become. This revitalisation is summarised by Brown (2009, p.15):

The lengthy repression of things Māori was reinforced by the official government policies of assimilation followed by integration – assuming that Māori would eventually disappear as a language, culture and identity. But this did not happen and over the last century there has been a remarkable revival of language and culture.

Interconnectedness

The Arts play a key role in revitalising Māori concepts within society and there is responsibility to ensure heritage is protected, maintained, kept active and alive. The education system has a unique opportunity to nurture and embody the historic promises made in the Treaty of Waitangi. The Arts curriculum has been criticised for its self-centred tendency to see human production and expression as the primary focus and placing its emphasis upon individual mastery rather than interconnected collective aspiration (Boyask, 2004; Brown, 2006). Neoliberal, production-like ideologies are embedded in curriculum designs that encourage learners to perform in an individualised system.

Although Māori arts have an element of disciplinary practice, such as *whaikōrero*^{viii}, *raranga*^{ix}, *whai*^x, *waiata*^{xi}, *karanga*^{xii}, *kōwhaiwhai*^{xiii}, *haka*^{xiv}, *tukutuku*^{xv}, *poi*^{xvi}, *tī rākau*^{xvii}, *tīpare*^{xviii}, the action and process of making and performing are enmeshed. Art was functional and purposeful and served as a demonstration of the interconnections between the maker, the place, its communication, the past and the future. Artforms were entangled as part of the culture and embedded within ritual and ceremony. Ceremonies include *tangihanga*^{xix}, *pōwhiri*^{xx} as traditional marae-based practices maintaining *tikanga*^{xxi} in accordance with specific kinship groupings and the needs of society. *Pōwhiri*, for example, blended discrete art subjects, such as dance, movement, performance, *whaikōrero*, *karanga*, *waiata* and *haka*, with oratory, recall and poetry to fill space with an immersive place-based experience. This entwined action seeks not to separate but instead congregate in shared purpose. Furthermore, as *pōwhiri* expressed *whakapapa*, the audience becomes entangled within an intergenerational story, belonging and contributing to the body of knowledge of place, active and part-of the experience. Art forms are not learnt by the practitioner to outshine or compete with another but rather to contribute. These shared capacities enhance experience, build on family expertise and grow a wellspring of vibrancy to collaboratively maintain customs and ensure rituals respond in a manner that is most suited to the ceremony aims and intentions. Judgement does not come in the form of a singular person assessing its worth but rather the collective knowing of entangled experience that can and does transcend generations.

This understanding and the values of traditional Māori arts differs significantly to the assessment approaches currently seen within the Arts curriculum.

A further aspect for consideration is that the Arts curriculum must move beyond present narratives to recognise that centralising mātauranga Māori has intergenerational potentiality. Although expression and expertise can be developed in this lifetime, impressions, marks and thoughts each have their own mauri^{xxii} which extend into the future and beyond.

To illustrate this point, down an unmarked road, nestled inside a pine forest, carved onto the surface of stone is a site called Kaingaroa, which holds some of the first written and drawn records by Māori (Hamilton, 1925; Nelson, 1991). These remains which have been preserved and imprinted show the head of a man, 25 depictions of waka and zigzag patterns (Davis, 1958; Nelson, 1991; Spiers, 1971). Perspectives derived from te ao Māori corroborate that such imprints were embroiled in deliberate transgenerational affect and intent and a means to make sense of the world. The largest of the vessels drawn, is a waka taua^{xxiii} and on the bow it has a distinct curvilinear motif that tessellates, over and over (Image 1).



Figure 1: Waka Taua (Hamilton, 1925)

According to Buck (1938) this unique mark mirroring the endemic ponga tree frond^{xxiv} and Hamilton (1925) also puzzled over the “curiously exaggerated bow ornamentation” (p. 358) as it differs from the remnants of waka taua from the time. The remains are an example of early expression of the New Zealand landscape, captured and preserved in a way that was intended for later engagement. Blundell (2010) explains Montelles’ idea that engagement with human consciousness was always the intention of rock art, as a mark of place suggesting: we passed here, something is worth our returning.

As an object, the past artwork invites contemporary engagement as it has a mauri. Its making and expressing as part of the story of place. Left and rediscovered by viewers in a present day context to decode in light of new understandings. This makes the artwork taonga^{xxv} as its affirmed as something of value, important not just for what it is, but equally as it is responded to, for what it can move to be and become (Hiroa, 1966; Massumi, 2015). Exploring early expressions is part of an intergenerational action to continually redefine identity, not separated into discrete confines of dance, drama, visual arts, or music but rather are seen as tangible expressions intermingling past, present and future positions.

If the Arts curriculum continues to reinforce discipline specific agendas, there remains a missed opportunity for interaction and improvisation. If art education maintains a structure of curriculum that is siloed and fixed, where is the opportunity recently revitalised mātauranga Māori alternatives? For example, Hindin’s creative work at the Hastings City Art Gallery (Nikau Hindin: Kōkōrangī ki

Kōkōwai, 2022) that reclaims aute.^{xxvi} As an artform, the process is as important as the output, as it includes harvesting, stripping, beating and soaking the fibres into a cloth-like material. Hindin then chooses to contemporise the practice by inscribing the material referencing tukutuku and tāniko^{xxvii} patterns and traditional colours of kōkōwai^{xxviii} and ngārahu^{xxix}. A further example in practices associated with taoka puoro^{xxx} which include carving, craft, sound and performance. How might the Arts curriculum make room for improvisation and allow for revitalised practices to be centralised in a post-Treaty contemporary context? What place do traditional arts have within the curriculum and what happens to ceremony and ritual when it is no longer marae-based? How do learners authentically collaborate on a shared experience and preserve the integrity and wisdom of traditional Māori arts? Do such practices belong within the Arts curriculum available to all learners, or should there be the retention of marae-based practice? Engaging in such discussion is critical as New Zealand navigates a curriculum refresh.

Where to from here?

Concepts associated with te ao Māori must be discussed and centralised as the Arts curriculum continues to evolve. Although there are important considerations that fall from this action, the way in which curriculum separates and fragments disciplinary binaries underserves the potential of the Arts. The strategic consideration of interconnectedness, intergenerational understandings and improvisation can contextualise educational experiences for New Zealand students. As the Arts curriculum is revitalised, potential is awakened, this discussion seeks the continuation of a wide-ranging conversation on promoting a sense of belonging to place and centralising te ao Māori to enrich opportunities for students and their learning within the Arts curriculum.

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ⁱ Papaarangi is Tumuaki (Deputy Dean – Māori) and Head of Te Kupenga Hauora Māori at the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland and is most noted for her commitment for holding governments accountable for inequities, especially in health outcomes for Māori.

ⁱⁱ Māori knowledge

ⁱⁱⁱ Māori worldview.

^{iv} This concept encapsulates ideas that one can have a sense of identity when they have a home they associate with and is closely tied with kinship, whanaungatanga and whakapapa. It is a value that is not only for Māori students but all those who identify and share in a sense of place in New Zealand.

^v See the Deed of Settlement between The Crown and Maniapoto and Ngā iwi.

^{vi} Such as Te Whāriki; New Zealand Curriculum / Te Marautanga o Aotearoa; Ka Hikitia; Local Curriculum Policy Documents; New Zealand history Curriculum; Assessment for learning; and Information sharing and building learning partnerships

^{vii} Such as Tau Mai Te Reo, Whakapūmautia, Papakōwhaitia, Tau Ana; Te Rāngai Kāhui Ako ā-Iwi; Mōu Te Reo - Te Aho Ngārahu: fostering te reo Māori; Maihi Karauna; Te Hurihanganui and Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori.

^{viii} Oratory.

^{ix} Weaving.

^x String games.

^{xi} Song, chants and poetry

^{xii} Exchange of calling in ritual encounter.

^{xiii} Motifs and scroll ornamentation.

^{xiv} Ceremonial dance.

^{xv} Latticework.

- xvi Poi both a style of performing art and the equipment.
- xvii Stick games.
- xviii Headband creativity.
- xix Traditional ceremony to mourn the dead.
- xx Māori welcoming ceremony that includes many traditional artforms.
- xxi Ritually correct Māori customary practices or behaviours.
- xxii Life force.
- xxiii War canoe.
- xxiv Ponga - *Cyathea dealbata* (silver fern).
- xxv Taonga can refer to many different forms, places, experiences and objects. In the context of New Zealand law something that has taonga status is assigned to by a group of individual and explains it is the *value* attributed to the “object” by a group, rather than the object itself that gives it taonga status.
- xxvi Barkcloth.
- xxvii Weaving designs.
- xxviii Red-ochre pigment traditionally prized by Māori for rock art use.
- xxix Charcoal pigment.
- xxx Traditional Māori wind instruments.