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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

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Frequently marginalised and maligned, the arts in education are often positioned as a nice-to-have “extra” for students but not academically vital or significant (Ross, 1975). However, as artificial intelligence replaces the traditional workforce in numerous industries, creativity, and the arts, often seen as a conduit for creativity, have attracted renewed interest. Many educators consider the arts essential for their ability to engage and activate responsive critical thinking, possibility thinking and develop flexible learners ready to adapt to an unknown job market. National and international research documents the transformative potential of embedding quality arts processes and learning experiences across the curriculum (Biesta, 2013; Catterall, 2009; Ewing & Saunders, 2018). Recent enthusiasm for 21st-century skills has seen the arts welcomed into STE(A)M (science, technology, engineering, arts, and maths) education as part of a drive to remain economically competitive in an increasingly automated world (Geisinger, 2016; Land, 2013).

Important though this may be to the frequently cited economic imperative of our capitalist economy, these are potentially not the most significant opportunities that the arts provide. Through arts engagement, participants can think critically, express themselves creatively, and respect diverse opinions. The arts invite collaboration and require participants to draw upon their personal knowledge and experience to persistently explore, create and reflect upon new meanings and ideas. The arts allow participants to explore who they are, where they are and imagine who they might be. They offer space to consider and express fears, feelings and ideas. The arts stir memories, move hearts, elevate hope, and convey the indefinable. We play within them, test ideas, explore identities and challenge the known world around us. They give space for the internal world of our innermost fears and dreams and enable us to process, present, communicate and face them. As our prime minister herself has asserted, the arts are a human right (Ardern, 2018). They are part of what makes us unique and are essential to our survival.

Originally commissioned to traverse the embattled space of arts education in New Zealand schools and highlight the value of arts practices through the pandemic, this issue is happily now well timed to directly address policy makers prior to the Curriculum Refresh of the Arts due in 2023. While noting Aotearoa’s chequered history, this issue celebrates the arts in education and the potential reinvigoration of the arts through innovations of curriculum, technology, thinking and authentic partnership with Māori.

Historically, Aotearoa has recognised education as a public good and purposefully placed the arts at the centre of education, to expand the creativity and criticality of tamariki (children) for an unknown future (Alcorn, 1999). However, the commodification and application of an economic model to education during the 1990s failed to recognise the value of the arts. While significant resourcing supported the Arts curriculum document of the 2000s, it positioned the arts as siloed disciplines focused on the development of instrumentalist skills rather than as an expressive human endeavour for making sense of the world. As four discrete disciplines there is no doubt that within the pressured confines of New Zealand classrooms, the arts have competed for resources, expertise, status and of course that most precious commodity, time. The introduction of National Standards in 2010 saw a narrowing of the curriculum with an increased focus on literacy and numeracy. During the ensuing years, access to Arts education fell by the wayside as schools focused upon seemingly more utilitarian subjects. As a result, provision of the arts within schools has remained variable, despite the good intentions for the arts in the New Zealand Curriculum.

Perhaps not coincidentally rates of anxiety, mental health issues, behavioural concerns and learning difficulties have skyrocketed within schools. The education system has and continues to fail many

students on one of its most basic sentiments: to allow students to “be”. Education directed at outcomes that fail to consider the rights of the child as a living, breathing human “being” can and does contradict itself. How can children become confident, critical life-long learners if they do not have the space to explore and express themselves first?

While removed in 2018, the legacy of National Standards and its narrowing of the curriculum remains. Limited time in initial teacher education programmes and a lack of professional development in the arts has left teachers woefully under-resourced. However, perhaps the tide is turning; the arts took centre stage during the COVID-19 pandemic as people engaged and shared a variety of art forms via virtual platforms while in lockdown. We have collectively awoken once more to the importance of the arts in a time of uncertainty to process events, offer comfort and bring us together.

In 2021, in response to a review and consultation, the government announced a refresh of the national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2022). This five-year programme will occur alongside proposed changes to early learning and the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) and phased in over several years. The goals of the new New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) are to honour our mutual obligations to and through Te Tiriti o Waitangi, create curriculum that is inclusive so that all ākonga see themselves and succeed in their learning, make sure the NZC is clear about the learning that matters and make sure the NZC is easy to use for teachers. Each learning area must contribute to the development of key competencies, literacy and numeracy for learners, include its own purpose statement, link to the updated Vision for Young People and outline the learning that matters (Understand, Know, Do) and what progress in that learning looks like. Due to occur in 2023, the writing of the new arts curriculum has yet to begin but we hope these articles offer an illustration and provocation for the significance and vitality of the arts in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Peter O’Connor and Moema Gregorzewski kickstart this issue by reminding us that drama education in New Zealand has always focused upon a desire to improve the lives of its participants through engaging them in embodied learning through drama as an artform. They caution policymakers to remember the significant foundations of our existing drama curriculum and consider how to embrace the full possibility and potential of Te Tiriti o Waitangi alongside that.

The sentiment of respecting our history is echoed by Jade Brown who stresses the continuing marginalisation of music education in spite of the removal of National Standards and recent introduction of *Creatives in Schools*. She challenges future policymakers to confront and address multiple deficits in resourcing and funding if the goals of a “refreshed” arts curriculum are to be realised. These two articles offer a critical frame through which to consider the arts as community, its resilience despite the global pandemic and the exciting potential of a uniquely bicultural arts curriculum.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a profound effect on the arts and arts education. Although lockdowns and restrictions have placed constraints on how the arts are practised and taught in schools, Lily Empson suggests that these constraints can prompt us to reconsider how we include the arts in the curriculum. She hopes to see the focus of the arts in schools move away from performance towards engagement and everyday integration in the classroom. Jane Luton and Jacqueline Hood describe the challenges they faced teaching Year 9 drama online during lockdowns, when embodied relational learning experiences became static and isolated. Year 9 students struggled to engage with drama lessons online and teaching became more performance than facilitation.

Arts education extends well beyond the classroom, festivals and events provide important platforms for participation and inspiration; extra-curricular activities and community-based classes not only nurture skills in the arts but contribute to the development of life skills and help build social relationships. In an interview with Claire Coleman, artist and educator, Donn Rātana explains his approach to artmaking including his use of materials, ways of working, and the social commentary of his work. As a Māori artist (Ngai Tūhoe) with an extensive career in arts education, Donn aims to challenge dominant perspectives and ensure other voices are heard. Comparably, Sue Cheesman takes a close look at the

Fresh Moves festival and considers the vital role that dedicated and passionate individuals play in providing young people with opportunities in the arts. Helen English's article highlights the multifaceted contribution of community arts to lifelong learning and wellbeing when describing her experiences teaching visual art to mature adults.

The significance of the voice of tangata whenua is emphasised in both Priya Gain's sole authored article and her collaboration with Christian McDonald, Wirimu Sarich and Kelly Kahukiwa. These articles call for a recognition of Mātauranga Māori, te ao Māori, and Māori-led educational initiatives in a truly bicultural arts curriculum. Sarah-Kay Coulter explains how the arts are multi-disciplinary in te ao Māori and suggests that the division of the arts curriculum into four distinct disciplines is counterintuitive for Māori and limits the potential of the arts. Priya Gain, Christian McDonald, Wirimu Sarich and Kelly Kahukiwa further advocate for arts education initiatives that centralise Māori expertise and knowledge. They discuss taonga puoro marae wānanga (marae-based music education) as a central means through which Māori arts educators can support young Māori to thrive within the arts and enhance future creativity and innovation in ngā toi Māori. Collectively these articles reflect a diverse range of disciplines, locations and perspectives in arts education yet share a common thread of passion about the arts and a commitment to ensuring quality arts experiences are available to all tamariki of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has previously stated her belief that the arts and culture are, "not a 'nice to have'" but "an essential part of our individual, community and national identity" (New Zealand Government, 2018). In the intervening years, government policy on the arts and arts in education has remained largely stagnant. Post pandemic and into an uncertain future, the arts remain a vital part of creating and sustaining futures for our economic, spiritual and, vitally, our community wellbeing. Let us hope that this journal and the conversations it may provoke ensure that the attitude towards the arts and our new curriculum is a robust response not in the mere style of arts education but in commitment to its substance.

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