

Editorial: An Arts-led English and literacy curriculum

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Imagination is no mere ornament, nor is art. Together they can liberate us from our indurated habits. They might help us restore decent purpose to our efforts and help us create the kind of schools our children deserve and our culture needs. (Eisner, 2005a, p. 213)

As we attempt to make sense...we might well look through some of the perspectives provided by literature and the other arts. This is partly because an engagement with an imaginative form can lead, as no other engagement can, to a recapturing of our authentic perspectives on the world. (Greene, 1978, p. 119)

The international education community has been saddened this year by the passing of two truly outstanding educators: Elliot Eisner and Maxine Greene. Both were ardent advocates for the importance of the role that imagination, creativity and the Arts can and should play in education. Their writing and research take on even more import at the present time, given the current privileging of what Eisner (2005b) termed a ‘heightened form of literacy reductivism’ (p. 8), a traditional competitive academic curriculum (Connell, 1997), an increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing in many western countries, a search for the best teaching “recipes” devoid of context, and questionable comparisons drawn from international benchmarking.

The Arts are an immensely rewarding part of being human. International research and scholarship demonstrates unequivocally that engagement *with* quality arts processes and experiences can enhance our social and emotional wellbeing as well as our academic achievement (see for example Caldwell & Vaughan, 2011; Ewing, 2010; Catterall, 2009; Bamford, 2006; Miller & Saxton, 2004; Deasy, 2002, Heath, 2000; Fiske, 1999). Engaging meaningfully with any art form, whether a literary text, a painting or sculpture, drama, dance, film or music, can be transformative. Arts-rich experiences can give us the courage to take risks, to fail memorably (Zusak, 2014) and empower us to challenge the stereotypes that prevail too often within our society and within ourselves. Our students need to feel confident about asking the big questions, wondering about different ways of knowing and exploring and expressing their ideas, concepts and emotions in creative ways beyond traditional curriculum boundaries.

This issue of the journal includes contributions that focus particularly on research that considers the development of students’ imaginations and learning in the English classroom. It offers ways in which students can learn about, in, with and through the Arts (Lindström, 2012). It explores how meaning-making through and in the Arts can transform learning in English and literacy curriculums. Authors have considered links between the Arts and the enjoyment of English; the impact of arts processes and experiences on students’ literacy learning and their development of deep understandings of image and text on their creativity and learning. Such opportunities

encourage students to interrogate any text to understand more about who they are or might be and see new potential or possibilities in themselves and their communities.

The issue kicks off with two articles with a conceptual orientation. Mary Ryan, writing out of the Australian context, focuses on theories of reflexivity, as offering a way of framing one's understanding of one's relationship with the world and the people, texts and objects within it. She argues a case that through "deep, cumulative reflection we make aspects of our experience more perceivable, thus making them available for self-awareness and identity-building. This conceptual framework is used as a basis for a discussion of the ways in which reflection can be expressed and performed in a range of ways to develop literacies through and in the arts.

Ketil Thorgersen, adopting a Scandinavian perspective, begins by contextualising his article to the current international focus on outcomes-based curriculums and assessment technologies. Based on an analysis of syllabi for English as a second language (ESOL) and L1 in three Nordic countries, Thorgersen argues that outcomes-based learning is not a viable system for formal education. In constructing his argument, he draws on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1994), who argue that knowledge is always in a state of *becoming*, and that this becoming operates differently for science, philosophy and art. Using a theoretical framework developed by Ferm (Thorgersen) and Thorgersen (2007), aesthetic communication is offered as a way of transcending the division between sender and receiver that theories of multimodality and multiliteracy suffer from, and also to take into account the existential aspects of the arts.

Two papers in this issue focus on English teaching in an international context. They address both the joys and challenges of teaching those for whom the demands of the curriculum demand a certain familiarity with spoken English and offer a glimpse into the issues facing these students. For many of these learners, the humanising languages of the arts (UNESCO, 2006) become a way to provide access to a new language through aesthetic forms of communication. These authors present compelling arguments for the importance of the arts, while appreciating the challenges facing their students and advocate for new pedagogies to enrich learning for all students.

Martin Craig and Curt Porter's research takes place in a Korean high school. Both challenge the traditional approach to English language teaching in this context and focus on the effectiveness of integrating visual arts in their teaching, reporting on the efficacy of the addition of using visual art forms for learning. Hsiao-Chien Lee, based on a case study of two EFL learners over a two-year period, argues a case for the use of multimodal English-writing tasks as a way of helping less confident and less motivated students. She provides readers with extracts from these students' compositions, which use a range of modes, illustrating how arts-integrated pedagogy can empower at-risk EFL students in a way that monomodal approaches can't do.

The next three articles arise out of the Australian context and in a number of ways are mutually illuminating. Jessica Mantei and Lisa Kervin argue for the centrality of imaginative picture books in literacy and English pedagogy. Their research demonstrates the rich, insightful and knowledge-building potential that imaginative picture books create for children and teachers through close study of the visual

artwork of Year 4 students. A *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) lens was used to analyse the representation of students' out-of-school lives and experiences within the artworks they produced.

Georgina Barton and Margaret Baguley in "Learning through story" also focus on multimodality, but this time in the context of an end-of-year show in a small, multi-age school. They emphasise the power of expressing knowledge and meaning through multiple art-forms rather than privileging language in isolation. These case-study children in this small school demonstrate how creative and collaborative expression can enable transformative learning and trigger a deeper understanding of story.

Finally, in this trio, Nicole Anae theorises an arts-based interdisciplinary curriculum and its attendant practices. Her approach is informed by research, and she layers her theoretical discussion with her practice with pre-service students through a researcher lens. Her approach invites pre-service teachers to examine their perceptions of "teacher" in order to gain awareness of how reflecting through the discipline of creative writing and arts-based pedagogy can inform their growing teacher-self. Her examples of student responses show the potential empowerment of an interdisciplinary methodology.

In the sole teacher narrative in this issue, Michelle Hall reflects on an intervention she conducted in an intermediate school on the East Coast of New Zealand (Poverty Bay). The intervention she designed as a way of having her students engage with the historical figure of Te Kooti, draw on three theoretical traditions: Mantle of the Expert (Dorothy Heathcote); the Orff Schulwerk; and Brechtian theatre. This narrative is essentially one teacher's critical reflection on what happened, what worked and what didn't, at least within the constraints of the study itself.

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