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Masculinity and Visual Culture

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Abstract

There exists little formal Art Education research that is concerned with the role visual culture plays as boys develop their concepts of masculinity. In suggesting ways this oversight might be addressed, this paper summarises briefly the emergence of masculinity as an educational concern, and utilises findings from an ethnographic study to situate Art Education within this discourse by arguing its curriculum is serendipitously an exemplar of boy-friendly curriculum. Visual culture pedagogy is discussed as a possible mechanism for engaging boys in the process of exploring a range of masculinities, supported by evidence from a large non-art national project that highlights visual culture's ability to engage and motivate boys in learning. The paper argues that emerging visual culture pedagogy in Art Education mirrors the type of curriculum boys believe helps them develop fair and equitable masculinities.

This paper will make the point that boys" development of concepts of masculinity is centred within the boy-culture they occupy in schools, that the visual plays a significant role within that culture, and because of this art education is a rich site for understanding boys" explorations of masculinity. While feminist discussion has made a rich, valuable and lasting impact on Art Education, there exists no significant legacy of masculinity-specific research relevant to our subject. For this reason a component of the following discussion will, of necessity, occur in areas somewhat removed from Art Education, such as "mainstream" sociological discourses in gender, non-art government projects, and research concerning boys" relationships with each other, their school and broader interpretations of curricular in which they engage. However each of these areas of discussion is highly relevant to Art Education; they begin the process of establishing a rationale for including masculinity as a topic of discussion within our subject, and offer evidence concerning the potential role our subject has in helping boys explore, build, police and inhabit their various masculinities

Masculinity and Education

It is difficult to discuss the phenomenon of boys, masculinity and visual culture without first acknowledging the rich academic context within which the wider "masculinity discourse" is situated. This foundation includes the enormous scholarship of those who have explored gender issues from psychological, psychiatric, sociological, historical and educational perspectives. The nature of masculinity has been a topic of conversation for decades, incorporating descriptions such as its most essential (sexual) structure (Terman & Miles, 1936), its role in socialisation (Bem, 1974), the behaviours

and characteristics associated with being masculine (Brannon, 1976), the attitudes associated with masculinity (Collins, 1974), multi-faceted political machinations of masculinity (Messner, 1997), through to explorations of masculinity as a socially constructed phenomenon capable of re-invention (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2000). The legacy of these decades of research was a complex, often polarised landscape of "masculinity terrains" (Messner, 1997), within which boy-specific research proved problematic due to conflicting agendas, essentialist politics, and difficulty accepting that boys in schools were not simply a younger version of men in society (Imms, 1997b).

Historically, boys" issues were poorly addressed in educational research, or at least this was generally so until the late 1990s. Before this, boys were represented as part of a wider sociological discussion on gender, but invariably as attendant information within the examination of girls" experiences in schools. Boys were mostly referenced in terms of how their shortcomings impacted equity issues for girls (Kenway, 1995). On the occasions that boys were discussed separately they were mostly treated as a monolithic category with a singular masculinity ascribed to them as a group (Imms, 2000a; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). It was rare to find any research or discussion about boys that was not negative, unduly categorical, or based on the presumption of *a* singular, hegemonic masculinity (West, 2000). Around this time masculinity discussion appeared to be the domain of the sociological theorist with a penchant for the grand narrative; within this construct it was femininity which was oppressed, masculinity the oppressor (see, for instance Brannon, 1976), and the individual was rarely acknowledged. As a result boys in schools, that is men in the making, were mostly deemed guilty of oppressive practices, sometimes simply by association, but also proved to be so through carefully scripted

literature (Gray, 1987; Jordan, 1995; Reay, 1990; Skelton, 1996, 1997, 2001; Walker, 1988).

As both a male and a teacher of boys this literature had two effects on me. The first was the sense of disabling guilt described so well in this context by Jackson and Salisbury (1996); it would seem that try as I might I was incapable of escaping the collective mantle of male hegemonic practice (Connell, 1995). The second was frustration that such accounts did not reflect the complex reality of what I had seen of boys" experiences in schools. Many boys were certainly guilty of hegemonic practices. But a teacher I also witnessed boys being oppressed by other males, girls, female teachers, and even mothers. I had watched them struggle against socially imposed and quite limiting stereotypes of masculinity. I had witnessed the trauma of boys" suicides driven by pressures that remained tragically silent. During this time I had also seen them, contrary to the preponderance of descriptions at that time in the literature, grow into seemingly egalitarian members of society. This is not so much a criticism of what the field *had* proved – there was ample evidence that many boys were not behaving well - rather what it had omitted to explore. Without wishing to diminish or ignore the traumas girls were experiencing in schools, I felt that many boys were suffering as well (albeit in ways quite different to girls): this was quite unreported, and these untold stories (Imms, 2004) carried considerable significance for gender debate in education. By mentioning this omission I am highlighting the status of masculinity debate at the turn of the last century, and also providing an indication of how far this discourse has travelled in the few years that followed. During the 1990s gender debate in education was guided by the larger debate concerning social equity. In this regard Art Education was equally guilty of

omission; for many years masculinity issues within this subject were not explored through research in spite of boys being under-represented and under-performing academically in this subject (Imms, 1997a). In both art and mainstream education remarkably few researchers bothered to problematise this discourse‟s simplistic view of masculinity (Smith, 1995), or to ask boys what they felt about schooling, gender, or "being male" (Imms, 1998; Slade, 2002). While even now Art Education remains relatively mute on this topic, towards the end of the 1990s, within the broader education context, this state was to change relatively quickly.

A wave of research evolved during the late 1990s and into this century that problematised masculinity as a multiple construct (Connell, 2000). In most instances not intended to be friendly to boys, it never-the-less unwittingly validated the legitimacy of boy-specific research. From this perspective masculinity was not considered an entity constructed of pre-determined rules and characteristics that males wore like an overcoat, rather it was considered to be actively constructed and inhabited by men, influenced by the society within which they lived. This approach had, in itself, a multitude of sometimes quite polarised discussions, ranging from the mytho-poetical (Biddulp, 1997; Bly, 1990; Gurian, 1998; Pollock, 1998; Tacey, 1997), to the pro-feminist (Connell, 1996; Hearn, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2009). A competent summary of this literature (Weaver-Hightower, 2003) is in itself an indication of how wide spread and catholic this international conversation has become, and emphasises through a total lack of representation Art Education‟s ignorance of the gender impact of its subject on half the school population.

Multiple Masculinities and Education

The concept of "multiple masculinities" at one stroke significantly broadened how educators looked at masculinity. Multiple masculinities theory took us from an essentialist, monolithic, singular view of gender, to a pluralist, site-specific exploration of the machinations that happen as boys explore and develop their masculine identity (Hearn, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1996). It had four main characteristics; (1) masculinity is a multiple entity; (2) masculinity is co-constructed by individuals and the society in which they live; (3) masculinity is relational with femininity; (4) masculinity (like femininity) is always in a state of change (Imms 2000, p. 159). It was within this new framework that a swathe of education-relevant literature evolved; an important characteristic of this literature was the recognition that boys actively used school curriculum to build gender constructs, as opposed to the opposite (Imms, 2003b):

> Contemporary research into boys" schooling requires not clinical or psychological abstraction, but a theoretical orientation that recognises masculinity as the embodiment of boys" actions and beliefs. It demands recognition that boys inhabit a variety of masculinities rather than one and that boys actively negotiate individual interpretations of masculinity and do not passively accept their gender as a set of pre-determined roles…each boy"s masculinity is unique, and his actions are responsible for its structure. (p. 159)

This focus recognised that in every sense, boys owned their own masculinity and had the power to build, modify and negotiate its very structure with others. With this ownership came responsibility, most importantly that of egalitarianism (Imms, 2003b). This discussion had a logical progression: if boys were continually building individual masculinities within and influenced by the community and culture in which they lived, it seemed logical that researchers in education needed to gain a better understanding of the qualities of the interplay between those environments – that is the impact of curriculum

on boys" development of masculinities. From the mid 1990s onward the school became a rich site of masculinity research (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002; Connell, 1996; Cresswell, Rowe, & Withers, 2002; Frank, 2003; Lesko, 2000; Lillico, 2001; Martino & Berrill, 2003; Martino, Kehler, & Weaver-Hightower, in press; Mills, et al., 2009; Mills, Martino, & Lingard, in press; van Houtte, 2004), but with a few exceptions (Imms, 2003c, 2004, 2006; Kelly, 2001; Martino & Berrill, 2003; Martino & Meyen, 2002; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, 2003, 2005; Mills, et al., in press; Nilan, 2000; O'Donoghue, 2006). There has been less attention given to the obviously co-related topic of the "boy-cultures" built by boys within, and influenced by, those institutions. This is a significant void as there is an obvious and important link between the personal culture a boy inhabits and the active, ongoing, never ending construction of his masculinity. What do we know of boy-cultures as they exist in schools?

Masculinity and Boy-cultures

During the late 1990s I interviewed many boys in schools intending to establish an Art Education perspective on this topic, but found a lack of antecedent data necessitated first building an understanding of the ways boys perceived, negotiated and inhabited the range of masculinities within their culture (Imms, 2003b). One significant research project was ethnographic in nature, conducted over a full year through a "participant-as-observer" model (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This included informal and formal observations in as many school sites as possible, many dozens of informal interviews, and approximately forty formal interviews with boys aged between thirteen and eighteen (grades 7 to 12), teachers and school administrators. The "multiple masculinities"

theoretical structure described in the previous section was used as a lens for all data collection, and was intended to gain in-depth participant views on masculinity, and explore the overlap between gender identity formation and the school curriculum. While not random, a representative sample of art and non art participants were selected through "convenience" and "snowball" sampling processes (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). There slowly evolved from boys" responses two models that I feel now inform the further investigations of visual culture and art education. The first model (Figure 1) summarised how boys in the school of this study identified a range of masculinities, and how they moved between them; not in a hierarchical sense, but as part of the practice of negotiating masculinities while conforming to the mores of their complex boy-culture (Imms, 2008a). With this established, it was possible to begin the process of exploring how Art Education assisted (or hindered) boys" negotiation of these masculinities. Again, with little previous research to draw upon this first required an understanding of what boys believed to be the qualities of curriculum that allowed them choice, protection and guidance when negotiating gender beliefs. The second model (Figure 2) described the type of curriculum boys said optimised their social, emotional and academic well-being, something I eventually termed "boy-friendly curriculum" and which was later favourably compared to the predominant Art Education curriculum at that time, Discipline-based Art Education (Imms, 2003d).

Developing models from ethnographic data is problematic but useful if used cautiously as lenses for discussion. The first model opens space for situating visual culture within the masculinity negotiations boys conduct with each other. The second model allows a view of how this might be done. It will be these two issues that will be

discussed throughout the remainder of this paper. Of necessity, this will be a brief overview, but those interested in greater detail might like to access two publications; Imms (2008) for the former, and Imms (2006) for the latter.
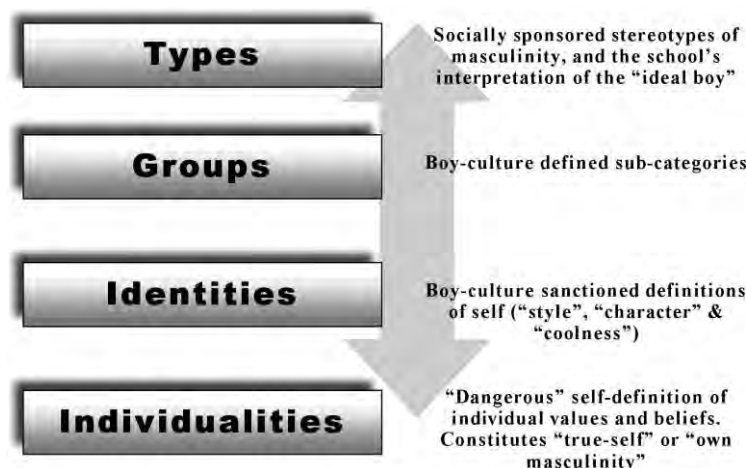

Figure 1. **Boys layered engagements with masculinity (Imms 2003a)**

When asked about masculinity boys are generally reticent to make comment (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001), but when approached from a somewhat safer perspective they readily sort themselves according to characteristics more familiar to the culture within which they live (Imms, 2008a). In this study the question "How are some boys different to others?" produced quick references to very broad categories of boys: "We come in all types, according to what we are good at or like to do" (Kurt, Grade 10). Consistently, responses such as these; "I am a sporty type of guy" and "Matthew is a loner, keeps to himself, but is really involved in music and grunge type of things" comfortably categorised boys by traits that seem to them to be unchangeable parts of their personalities, characteristics the boys said they were born with and would find quite

impossible to change. You were either a tough, a nerd, a jock. It was the *type* of boy you were, and man you would become. Typing was safe because it was determined by generic inheritance, and these categories were imbedded within the social stereotypes of masculinity so well understood by all.

It took further interviews and considerable data gained through observations to get beyond the superficiality of typing. To go beyond this layer was to begin to express a degree of individuality that carried increased danger. The next layer involved the *groups* that boys said existed in the school. Becoming part of a group was in itself reasonably safe they said; to criticise one boy for the way he acted, and the beliefs and values he espoused, was to challenge all that group. Grouping provided protection in numbers but its drawback was obedience. The list of groups boys described was exhaustive, including categories that are quite common such as jocks, nerds and metals, as well as the more esoteric whiggers (white boys who envied and emulated black rap culture), parachutes (boys who lived in the country only to study), and gangsters (boys supposedly embracing violence and gang behaviour). In comparison to types, this layer involved a degree of self-selection. Boys aligned themselves with a particular group and in the process adopted its cultural mores, many of which were visual; the brands of clothing they wore, hairstyles, where they congregated in the school, and additions to their regalia such as badges and chains on their clothing, and the graffiti they placed on their school bags linking themselves to particular genres of music.

As an outsider living in the school for many months it became easy for me to identify this myriad of groups using the rich visual evidence of their mannerisms and the cultural artefacts they exhibited. What was clear was that these groups certainly were not

homogeneous entities. Repeatedly boys discussed the need to "build identity", a maturity-related issue that apparently disrupted the stability of groups. Being part of a group allowed only a small degree of personal expression but it provided social security. But going to the next level was dangerous:

> When you are younger, your style, expressing your individuality, isn"t as important. But as you grow older, your style is important because it shows you are different. But you can"t set yourself up as different in a way that totally conflicts the trends (Oscar, grade 11).

To seek a greater degree of autonomy meant either successfully re-defining the accepted boundaries of the group, a difficult task, or risk ostracism. Fear of the latter permeated the actions and decision making of all boys, with katagelophobia policing the identities they sought to build within this "…ephemeral thing; our culture is always changing" (Oscar, grade 11). Kategelophobia is the "fear of ridicule", in this context a term that neatly describes the way a boy"s actions can be counter to his true beliefs or opinions, in an effort to subscribe to peer pressure and avoid being ostracised. Boys stated that they needed tools to negotiate their divergence from the group, a critical one being manipulation of the elements of the culture within which they existed. They could do this and challenge the hegemony of groups most successfully, through utilisation of their strengths; "Its hard to make fun of someone because of how good they are at something…" (Robert, grade 12). Boys good at art, sport and music used these skills to define themselves and to build an identity within the group that made them admired and different. Interestingly, little social status was achieved from being singularly skilled at academics. Being accepted as a scholar necessitated complementary skills at, for

instance, sports or leadership or the arts; the lack of such breadth of activity labelled these boys as "lacking a life".

The final layer boys described was occupied by those they called "bohemians", the socially unconventional boys. Bohemians were those who freely expressed their opinions, often being activists for change, whose pursuit of their "passion" went beyond normal boundaries and often overrode their social survival instincts. These boys moved from the protection of the group into a state of virtual self-exile. To them individuality often came at a high social cost, being simultaneously outcast yet also admired; by staff (for their forthrightness and courage), and by their fellow students (for the "escape" they had made). These *individuals* enjoyed their fellow student"s envy because of their freedom to "…say what they want, do what they want. They don"t care…" (Grant, grade 12), and often used this position of autonomy to express egalitarian beliefs and social critiques. Comments such as "You have to realise that your own actions impact on others", and "As you get older you see that other opinions, while different to your own, are equally valid" (Neil, Grade 12) epitomised both this particular layer of engagement with masculinity, as well as being the embodiment of "good" masculinity into boys" actual beliefs and deeds that is sought by social theorists in the literature described earlier.

Figure 1 provides one extra component to this phenomenon, a large vertical arrow between these layers. Boys themselves discussed how they moved between these stages according to the various social situations in which they found themselves. In times of katagelophobic duress they might retreat to the safety of the simplistic stereotypes of masculinity contained in the earlier layers. Under certain favourable cultural (and curricular) situations, they might occupy the more egalitarian versions of masculinity

epitomised by the individuals layer. This vertical movement equates to the constantly evolving nature of masculinity discussed earlier, the ability of the individual to build and negotiate and navigate various masculinities with his peers with the ultimate objective for many boys being the freedom enjoyed by individualists, but without the social cost. The obvious challenge for educators is that of facilitation, of creating curriculum that helps this *intra-masculinity mobility* to occur; the failure of "remedial" strategies with boys (see, for instance Martino, 1995; Nilan, 1995) has proved that we have little control over the culture they build and occupy, principally because such strategies seek control from *outside* masculinity"s structure (Imms, 2006; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). This research indicates, however, that educators may at least have some control over *aiding* change, providing curriculum that allows boys to manipulate their masculinities from within its structure, and as will be discussed later in this paper, visual culture pedagogy potentially plays an important role in this process.

Boy-friendly Curriculum

This term is problematic, but to many boys it exists; during the process of the ethnography from which these models were developed, boys named the majority of the terms being used in Figures 1 & 2, including boy-friendly curriculum. During this year-long ethnography (Imms, 2003b) boys were asked to describe the qualities of teaching, the operation and structure of a school, and the curriculum that they felt best suited their needs in terms of positive academic, social and moral growth; boy-friendly curriculum. Figure 2 provides an overview of the data relevant to the third of these foci. It reports that boys said they wanted a curriculum that provided them *safety*, opportunities to

communicate and express, *freedom*, opportunities to develop **relationships**, and that was sympathetic to the *particular ways they learned*.

Boys need curriculum that provides

- A non-competitive school environment
- "Safe" classes that foster discussion
- Tasks that are open-ended and require interchange with others
- Subjects that mandate exploration of "the self"
- Teachers who "facilitate"
- Subjects that accept alternative truths

Boys need curriculum that provides

- Small class sizes
- Pedagogy that counters katagelophobia
- Skills to enable expression
- A vocabulary to discuss masculinity
- A mandate to explore individuality
- Opportunity to engage "a passion"
- Opportunity to be a risk-taker
- A level playing field between types of masculinities

BOYS NEED OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE RELATIONSHIPS

BOYS NEED SAFETY

BOYS NEED THEIR WAYS OF LEARNING ACCOMODATED

BOYS NEED OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNICATE IDEAS

BOYS NEED FREEDOM

Boys need curriculum that provides

- A wide variation of courses and activities
- Teachers with "passion"
- "Disciplined freedom"
- Avenues to be impetuous
- A school atmosphere that encourages participation
- Tasks that are "relevant" - can be explored through boys' culture
- Problem-based learning, (i.e., "doing it")
- Hands-on activities with practical solutions

Boys need curriculum that provides

- Teachers skilled at facilitating boys' exchange of ideas
- A range of tools to express ideas
- A range of outcomes to set tasks
- Criticism skills
- A mandate for the expression and an exchange of ideas
- Subjects with "non-binary" epistemologies
- Subjects that are non-competitive and allow access to boys' culture

Boys need curriculum that provides

- Freedom for individual interpretation of curriculum tasks
- Freedom to undertake curricular tasks according to personal skills
- Freedom to move between groups
- Freedom to access a range of academic and non-academic activities
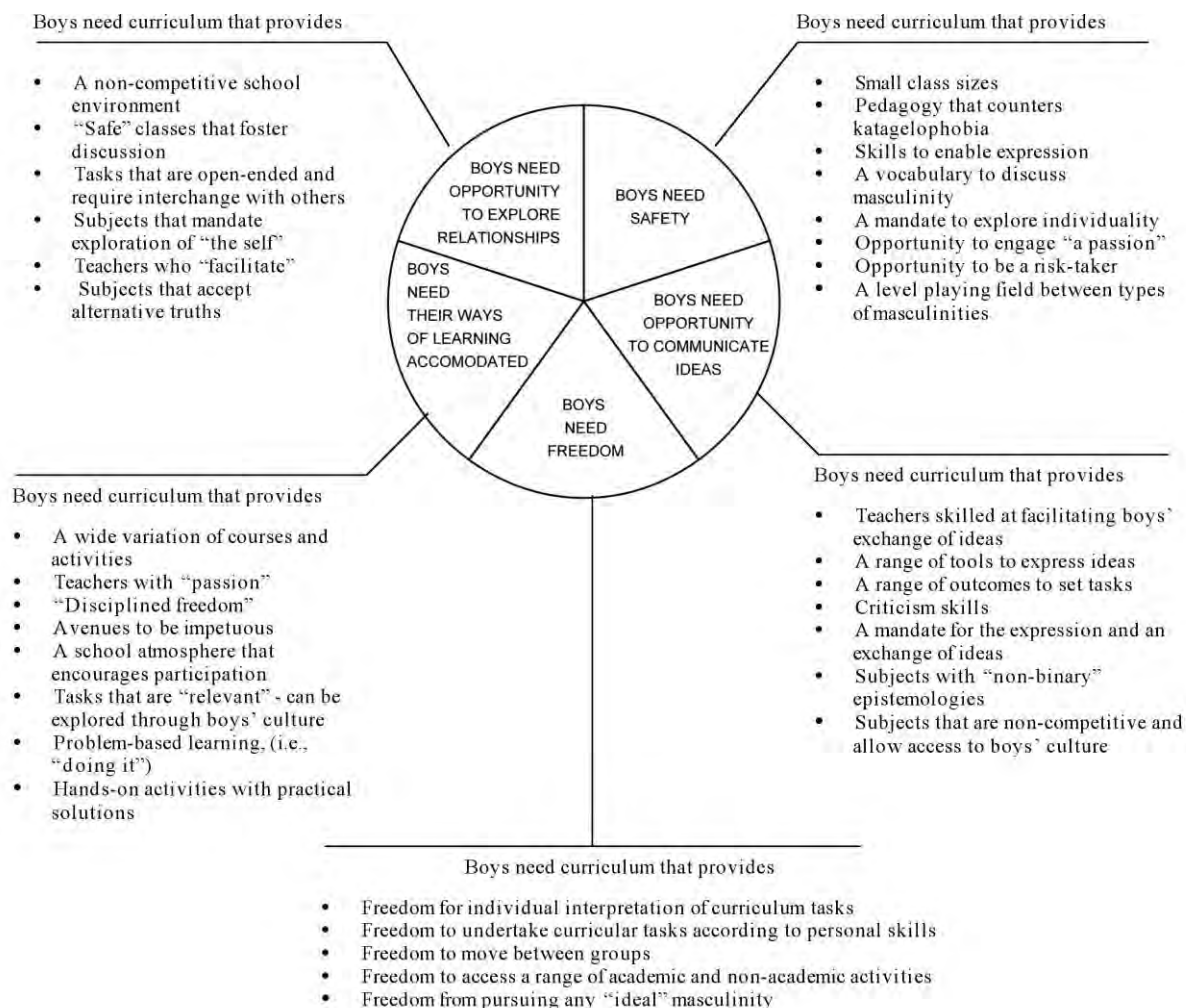- Freedom from pursuing any "ideal" masculinity

Figure 2. **Boy-friendly curriculum (Imms, 2003a)**

These were only broad categories, with the specific characteristics they contain changing from boy to boy, and over time. This model is discussed in length elsewhere (Imms, 2006), and has since been used with some success by teachers when assessing their own pedagogical practices (Imms & Imms, 2005). A consistent thread across the 5 areas of

boy friendly curriculum identified by boys were characteristics that could be argued to come from the domain of their own visual culture, and that are now emerging as characteristics of visual culture pedagogy (Daiello, Hathaway, Rhoades, & Walker, 2006). Boys wanted opportunities to engage their passion, to have work that was relevant, to have work that let them explore the self, to have subjects that allowed the possibilities of alternative truths, that allowed multiple outcomes rather than one super-truth. Boys wanted a curriculum structure that provided them safety; mechanisms that protected them from ridicule and harassment as they explored issues personally relevant to their own experiences, and as they built relationships with others. They wanted to be able to learn by "doing", and that included allowing the inclusion in daily classroom activities that carried significant relevance to their own culture. They wanted learning to be non-competitive so that their personal interpretations of tasks would not be judged against others. They wanted the physical freedom to move around the class so they could negotiate their own learning with others, the intellectual freedom to bring to their learning ideas from their own culture, and the academic freedom to conduct learning using the skills and knowledge in which they excelled. The close parallels between these characteristics and those of generic Art Education curricular are obvious, and are explored more fully elsewhere (Imms, 2003a, 2006). What is also clear is the way visual culture is embedded in the characteristics of this model and is implicit in boys" portrait of this "ideal" curriculum. Given that these are significant issues for Art Education, what empirical evidence exists to support these supposed links?

Linking Visual Culture and Boys

Art Education has, in recent years, witnessed some quality research in areas including historical analyses (Chalmers, 2008; Chalmers & Dancer, 2007), teacher education (O'Donoghue, 2005), the aesthetics of space and place (O'Donoghue, 2006, 2007) and issues concerning participation and achievement (Bowden, 2008). However, there exists limited research that provides evidence of the impact of visual culture on boys" schooling, with little of it situated within Art Education. During my own study I observed how important physical appearance was to boys, discussed briefly at an earlier stage in this paper in reference to boys" groupings (Imms, 2003a). Jones and Vigfusdottir (2004) wrote on this topic, identifying a culture of appearance amongst girls and boys and links between this and popular culture, particularly magazines. O"Donoghue (2006) has explored how the physical and visual spaces boys occupy in schools manifests itself into the boy-culture within which they live. Vamos (2008) conducted a gender-oriented study of student use of media, and found that boys significantly differed to girls in terms of quantity of some media usage, and in the types of media being used. Alloway and Gilbert have been concerned for years with boys" literacy skills, particularly the methods that best engage them in reading. They published findings that indicated that video culture amongst boys – while potentially troubling (1997) held more power than traditional learning methods and speculated where this might lead pedagogy in schools (1998). Newkirk (2002) explored boys" interaction with new media, and found that they did not conform to the stereotyped behaviour of mindless occupation, rather they were surprisingly quite discerning, critical, and manipulative of (rather than victims of) popular culture than people gave them credit for.

While Art Education has been blessed with many years of invigorating discussion on this topic (Duncum, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Tavin, 2000), including work focusing on gender (Freedman, 1987) there exists a paucity of research on visual culture specific to males. Some evidence does exist embedded within larger projects: somewhat tangential data has emerged from my own country located within the Boys Education Lighthouse Schools program (BELS). In 2004 and 2005 the Australian Federal Government spent over AUS$8m on this program aimed specifically at improving the learning outcomes of boys (Godinho, Thompson, & Imms, 2006). This amount of spending on a classroom-based initiative was in itself notable given Australia"s small population, and equally remarkable was the fact the project focused exclusively on boys, the result of a lengthy consultative process that included parliamentary reports (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002), commissioned research (Trent & Slade, 2001), and a large pilot project (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003). While most of this project is not of relevance here, what is pertinent to our tentative exploration into boys and visual culture is the nature of the strategies that were employed in many schools.

BELS funded teachers to identify exemplar teaching strategies for boys that currently existed in schools, and to disseminate those practices to other schools. This "bottom up" model was unique in that it recognised and utilised teachers" expertise - governments tend towards forcing pre-designed strategies on teachers, rather than allowing teachers" expertise to direct pedagogy-focused research (Godinho, et al., 2006). Because of this BELS constituted a unique research opportunity because it provided an excellent sample of what teachers saw as the actual boy-problems that needed to be addressed, and the strategies they felt dealt well with those problems.

Results from BELS were mixed (Cuttance, et al., 2007) but some interesting data emerged after the final report. Of the four hundred strategies utilised, between thirty to forty percent contained arts-rich pedagogies (Imms, 2008b). That is not to say teachers employed the arts overtly, or even in some cases conscious of the fact they were "doing art". In fact most BELS projects were reported as focusing on literacy, engagement, and boys" learning styles. But it was in the implementation of those strategies where the arts came to the fore. When teachers wanted to engage boys in learning, whatever the stated focus, more than a third of the time they used an arts based strategy to some degree. Even a brief illustration of these projects demonstrates the role the arts played in this large program. The Northern Beaches Cluster of schools in New South Wales identified as the educational problem to be addressed that "Many of our boys are disengaged in their schooling. These at-risk boys lack motivation to learn, and to engage in the curriculum. They are often aliterate, that is they choose *not* to read even when they are capable." This cluster"s aim was to boost boys" literacy levels and their engagement in reading. Their strategy included, amongst a range of approaches, art appreciation exercises, ICT for art-making, and workshops in tap dancing, puppetry, pottery, and digital diary construction (ePortfolios). In their results they noted that while improvement in literacy levels could not be accurately measured over the time-frame of the project, they could report an eighty percent drop in truancy of at-risk boys, and a significant fall in recorded incidents of inappropriate behaviour, violence, and suspension from within the group of targeted boys (Imms, Ward, Adamson, & Collie, 2008).

Similarly, the Albury-Wodonga Cluster (New South Wales/Victoria) had a litany of problems with their boys, including "…bullying, anger management issues, homophobia

and other „masculinity‟ problems, illiteracy and aliteracy, poor engagement, poor leadership skills, rampant truancy, anti-social behaviours, and anti-school behaviours". Their strategy included, amongst a range of approaches, drama productions, creative writing, music ensembles, video production, and computer animation. This Cluster reported results similar to Albury-Wodonga. The Flora Hills Cluster (Victoria) reported poor engagement by boys in schooling, and used, amongst a range of approaches, a visiting artist strategy. The Airds Cluster in Queensland wanted to address boys‟ poor self-esteem, engagement, literacy skills. They used, amongst a range of approaches, a manual and creative art strategy, designing and building billy-carts with role models (Imms, et al., 2008).

Because the schools‟ BELS reports rarely acknowledged the role of the arts in their strategies (Cuttance, et al., 2007), we can only surmise why the arts proved so useful to this large program. It may be reasonable to say teachers‟ intuition told them that the arts had the capacity to do what many other subjects could not; it engages boys in actual classroom practice, and does so by allowing them to bring the personal, the relevant into their learning and their identity formation (Imms & Nash, 2008). What was clearly evidenced in these BELS final reports was the way visual art was unintentionally utilised as a portal for accessing boys‟ cultures, and making otherwise uninspiring learning relevant and poignant for these disaffected males.

The trajectory of this discussion to date has been one of masculinity research occupying space somewhat removed from art education. The fact that such a gap exists is surprising, given the obvious role our subject has to play in this discourse. A rationale for Art Education‟s central position in this debate reads this way: The *issue* concerns

supporting boys" active exploration of positive masculinities. In this regard Figure 1 illustrates how, mediated by issues of safety and agency, boys are actively mobile in negotiating access to the egalitarian masculinities characterised by "individuality" - free exploration of the self – a state that allows them opportunity to rise above stereotypes of masculinity that are often hegemonic in nature. The *strategy* requires education to facilitate this exploration of masculinity through implementing boy-friendly curriculum. Figure 2 paints a model of the type of curriculum that boys say helped them access these worthy versions of masculinity, a curriculum that closely mirrors Art Education. Art Education curriculum allows academic, physical and intellection freedom; it provides provide safety by scaffolding the expression of often quite personal thoughts and beliefs; it trains for, then facilitates expression and communication between students; it has the ability to cater to specific learning styles; it provides considerable opportunity to build relationships. *Evidence* supporting this trend is evident in analysis of one large national project demonstrating that, quite unsolicited, and with no acknowledgement for this subject, non-art teachers in a large national project consistently utilised Art Education pedagogy to address boys" poor learning outcomes.

If the topic of this paper has been a conversation about issues seemingly unrelated to Art Education, this has been caused by neglect rather than irrelevance. For some reason Art Education has steadfastly and inexplicably avoided engaging in any sustained examination of the obvious impact of its curriculum on boys, fifty percent of the schooling population, even while those with no interest in Art Education utilise its unique and powerful capacity to positively impact boys" social, academic and emotional well-being. The attraction for those teaching outside our subject appears to be art"s ability to

easily appropriate for the classroom those issues, interests and activities usually attributed to student‟s "other" life, the "material milieu" (Tavin, 2003) that have traditionally existed beyond the regulatory confines of the school. Within our subject this art of the everyday (Duncum, 1997) has awakened art educators to the power of popular culture to engage and motivate students, not only by providing them with rich sources of relevant material to engage with in the classroom – what Tavin (2003) would call the "substantial thread" of visual culture – but also by facilitating a co-relational "phenomenological thread" that addresses their experiences, subjectivities and consciousnesses (p. 210). Particularly with the latter, it is at this juncture that the discourses of masculinity and Art Education begin to converge, perhaps obliquely, but certainly suggestive of some powerful possibilities. In particular, this is so in terms of visual culture pedagogy‟s ability to address the qualities of boy-friendly curriculum listed in Figure 2. At heart concerned with what Freedman (2008) calls the "…development of cultural and personal identity" (p. 211), visual culture research in this subject acknowledges that "…student creativity can be thought of as an imaginative illustration of their responses to external conditions" (p. 211). This movement away from more traditional approaches to art curriculum philosophically mirrors the move that occurred in the late 1990s in gender discussion from viewing males in monolithic and essentialist categories, to the multiple-masculinities paradigm discussed earlier in this paper which gives males responsibility for, and scope to be able to create individual versions of masculinity (Imms, 2000b).

Conclusion

The gender aspect of Art Education‟s visual culture debate is obvious and curiously overlooked; for both boys and girls, pedagogy that "…enables students to map, identify, and question their personal and cultural values, meanings, historical suppositions, memories and emotions" (Brasher, 2002, cited in Daiello, et al., 2006) has a direct impact on their explorations of masculinity and femininity. Pedagogy that embraces visual culture is predominately concerned with informing our understanding of how we construct knowledge (Marshall, 2007), and tolerates the transgressive qualities (Duncum, 2008) essential for boys and girls to engage others, and the world they live in, as they negotiate and inhabit their concepts of gender. This paper has unashamedly focused on boys, not because visual culture offers only one gender any significant benefits – this is clearly not the case - but as a response to the regrettable lack of visibility of masculinity in our subject. For boys, exploring masculinity is the practice of personal exploration; this discussion is naturally focused on "the self", and as such, Art Education and its unique pedagogy holds extraordinary benefits for young males.

As occurs with the arts on many issues, the powerful role it plays in peoples lives often goes unrecognised. Illustrated in this paper through limited examples such as the BELS program, this is particularly the case regarding the role visual culture pedagogy plays as boys explore their beliefs concerning masculinity. This paper has attempted to do no more than to provide some evidence of the strong links that limited research has shown to exist between these phenomena: that masculinity discussion has evolved to the stage where we generally accept the existence of multiple versions of masculinity with its emphasis on boys‟ active negotiation of masculinities; that we can facilitate boys‟

building of (and mobility between) those masculinities; that art education curriculum contains the critical elements that facilitate boys development of egalitarian masculinities; that of these critical elements, art has the ability to allow boys to bring to the classroom the elements of their visual culture most important to them; that the exciting discussions concerning visual culture and art education must include a gender aspect that embraces boys‟ negotiation of masculinities. Further research into boys‟ use of visual culture to explore and negotiate egalitarian masculinities must be a priority for art education.

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About the Author

Wesley Imms is Senior Lecturer and Head of Visual Art Education, University of Melbourne. Primarily a curriculum theorist, his multi-disciplinary research conflates issues concerning gender, teacher education, cross-disciplinary pedagogy, architecture, applied design and teacher/artistry. Significant research includes the Australian Federal Government"s *Boys Education Lighthouse Schools* and *The Compendium* projects, and Arts Victoria"s artist-in-schools program evaluation. Current projects include the impact of classroom design on student outcomes and teacher performance, and a longitudinal study of the impact of teachers" artistic practice on performance and retention rates. He provides service to peak state and national art education organizations, is an editorial board member of *Australian Art Education*, and Editor of *Journal of Artistic and Creative Education.*

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Mapping Research in Visual Arts Education in Singapore

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Abstract

This paper maps out the state of visual arts education research in Singapore that is necessary to inform, support and sustain the current wave of reforms in government policy and education practice in visual arts. The research studies appear to cluster around 8 general themes, each of which are presented to provide an overview of the types of research topics, to discuss significant contributions made by particular writers, and to comment on factors that seem to characterize the research grouped under each theme. Overall, the studies are unevenly distributed across various domains and do not provide a cohesive overview of what visual arts education in Singapore is. The potential for meaningfully and strategically expanding visual arts education research in Singapore may be made possible by undertaking research initiatives such as a critical charting of the history of art education and incorporating an analysis of policy changes and implementation, both past and current. Although the number of research studies undertaken to date is comparatively small, there is enough evidence to indicate that the factors that have served to constrain research activity in the field are undergoing significant change. A new climate now exists in which the contribution that the visual arts make to Singaporean society is now more fully acknowledged. There is a need to take constructive steps to equip a new generation of researchers who will be able to further advance established areas of research, and who will be ready to take advantage of new research opportunities that this climate of change has ushered in.

Introduction

In recent years, the visual arts landscape in Singapore has been radically transformed by a number of government initiatives that aim to transform the country into a "Distinctive Global City of Culture and the Arts" and a hub for art collectors and auction houses in the Southeast Asian Region (Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, 2008). This goal is articulated in the government's Renaissance City Plan and among its major projects is the construction of The National Art Gallery, slated to open in 2013, which aims to position itself as the premier venue for the "display, promotion, research and study of Southeast Asian art, including Singapore art" (The National Art Gallery Singapore, 2010). In 2006, the country also started staging The Singapore Biennale, a platform for the country "to participate in the global field of contemporary art, inviting artists from around the world to the city and providing local audiences with a wide range of art experiences" (Singapore Biennale, 2011). The Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) have reported success in the initial stages of the Renaissance City Plan, citing more vibrant arts and cultural scene in Singapore and an increased demand and appreciation of the arts and culture (Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, 2008).

Similarly, government efforts have focused increasing attention on the quality of visual arts education in schools. The Ministry of Education (MOE) accepted the recommendations of the Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) committee which called for new emphasis on the visual arts and music within the curriculum, the enhancement of quality instruction in visual arts through qualified and specialized teachers and the provision of more resources to schools to meet these goals (Ministry of Education, 2009). These recommendations to primary education have begun to be progressively implemented in schools over recent years and there has been a palpable shift in educational goals to include more training and exposure to the visual arts. In addition, the National Arts

Council continues to implement the Arts Education Programme (AEP) to "advocate the value and importance of arts education and appreciation among the young in schools" (National Arts Council, 2003-2004). The range of programs under AEP has since increased with the launching of AEP+ whereby artists can work directly with schools to formulate unique arts programs. The initiative has resulted in a growing demand from schools for arts education programs and an increase in programs being offered by artists and art groups (Bamford, 2006).

This paper is the first to map out the state of visual arts education research in Singapore that is necessary to inform, support and sustain the wave of policy and education practice reforms in visual arts. The objectives of the present review are to identify the range of topics in visual arts education that have attracted research interest in Singapore, to present some observations on what characterizes the research that has been compiled to date and to recommend future trajectories of research to be undertaken. The research collected is mainly drawn from an online database of the UNESCO-NIE Centre for Arts Research in Education (CARE) (see http://www.unesco-care.nie.edu.sg/research/search). CARE is a research centre based at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore and is part of a regional network of UNESCO arts education observatories tasked to address the problem of scarce, anecdotal and inaccessible research in arts education. The network of observatories responds to the need for arts education research to be systemized and to achieve, among others, an analytical inventory of research. The types of research that comprise this database include journals, book chapters, reports, historical accounts, exhibition catalogues, conference papers, undergraduate research papers which include NIE Academic Exercises (completed during the students' honours year) and theses from tertiary institutions in Singapore and overseas universities.

The mapping of research in visual arts education in Singapore is akin to an exercise in "imaginative geography" (Moran, 2010) in that we are charting a terrain and making decisions about the emphasis of certain features at the expense of others. Moran explains, "Maps are inevitably textual representations because it is impossible to reproduce reality in a reduced form. Certain features are emphasized at the expense of others, symbols and explanatory texts are included and human decisions are made about scale, orientation and projection" (Moran, 2010, p.151). The first mapping of new territories will also require a degree of speculation and a sense of the provisional. What might first appear as clearly defined, may prove to be varied and heterogeneous. While arid, empty landscapes can quickly be transformed to fertile ground.

Research in Visual Arts Education: General Observations

There are about a hundred identified studies/papers that relate to visual arts education in Singapore, less so are published. The distribution of research articles in visual arts education that have been located at the time of writing is shown in Table 1. Journal articles, of which there are 38, comprise the largest group. While educational research in Singapore, as a whole, has gained increased exposure in international journals, visual arts education does not enjoy the same research productivity. The comparative paucity of published studies on visual arts education may be explained by a composite of factors; that in a small country like Singapore, there are relatively few visual arts educators/researchers and they work in a limited number of tertiary institutions that specialize in the visual arts education. Visual artists who teach tend to focus more on their art practice rather than conduct research on visual arts education. Furthermore, as in Australia, the dearth in arts education research possibly "relates more closely to the academic capital other areas of the curriculum enjoy by virtue of their alignment with political "hot buttons" (Gibson & Anderson, 2008, p.103)".

Since gaining independence in 1965, Singapore has established a longstanding prioritizing of more formal academic subjects like science, math and language, the development of which have been considered as vital to Singapore's meteoric economic development.

Undergraduate research papers, a major group of research articles, are mostly Academic Exercises completed by student teachers majoring in the study of the teaching of visual arts during the final year of their Bachelor of Education at the National Institute of Education. They mark an important step towards generating a research environment in the field of visual arts education in Singapore, although the quality of the research methodologies and writing may vary. It should be noted that in a subsequent review of the NIE Bachelor of Arts syllabus, the Academic Exercise was removed and it has not been replaced in the recent BA in Art Education. This has led to a loss of opportunities for student teachers to learn basic research skills that they could draw upon when they enter the teaching profession and therefore the loss of an important potential feeder to research in visual arts education in Singapore.

Table 1. *Types of Research Articles in Visual Arts Education in Singapore (1989-2010)*
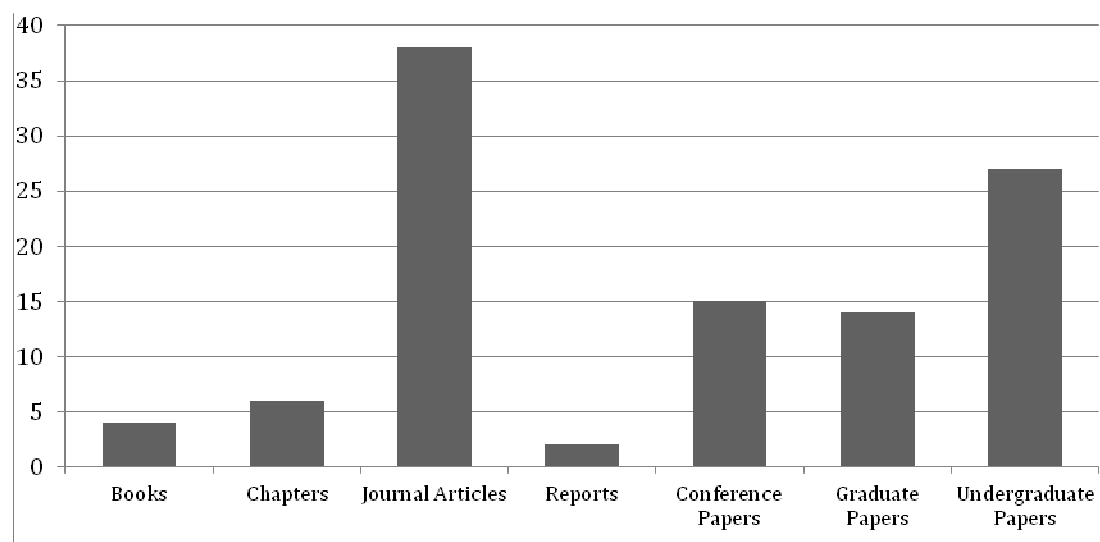
Historically, it can be observed that there has been a marked increase in research activity starting from the 1990s onwards (see Table 2). To date, few examples of research from the period 1970 to 1990 have been located. A collection of five essays on art education in Singapore from 1970 to 1979 is included in the book *Bits and pieces: Writings on art* by Chia Wai Hon (2002) published by the Contemporary Asian Arts Centre, Singapore. The titles of these essays include: *The teaching of art and crafts in Primary School* (1970); *Seminar on looking at the Singapore Secondary School System* (1976); *The Art Curriculum from an art educator's view point* (1978); and *Art and the Pre-School child* (1979). The essays were originally published in such journals as *The Journal of the Singapore Teacher's Training College*, *Singapore Journal of Education* and *Teaching and Learning: A Publication for Teachers.* Many of these professional journals have long ceased publication. A study of these articles could yield insights into the types of issues and concerns that confronted teachers working in the primary and secondary visual art classrooms during the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

In 2009, the National Institute of Education published *The Road to nowhere: The quick rise and the long fall of art history in Singapore* by noted art historian and educator, T.K. Sabapathy. Based on a lecture given at that institution, the book provides an account of the teaching of the history of art at the National University of Singapore, (the then University of Malaya) in the 1950s, charting its advancement through the 1960s until the closure of the facilities in 1972. Both the essays by Chia Wai Hon and the book by T. K. Sabapathy provide valuable insights into the concerns of two knowledgeable and experienced Singapore art educators whose writings seek to locate art education in a specifically Singaporean terrain. They will be of great value to a researcher examining this period in the history of visual arts education in Singapore.

Table 2. *Time Line of Research Studies in Visual Arts Education in Singapore (1970-2000)*
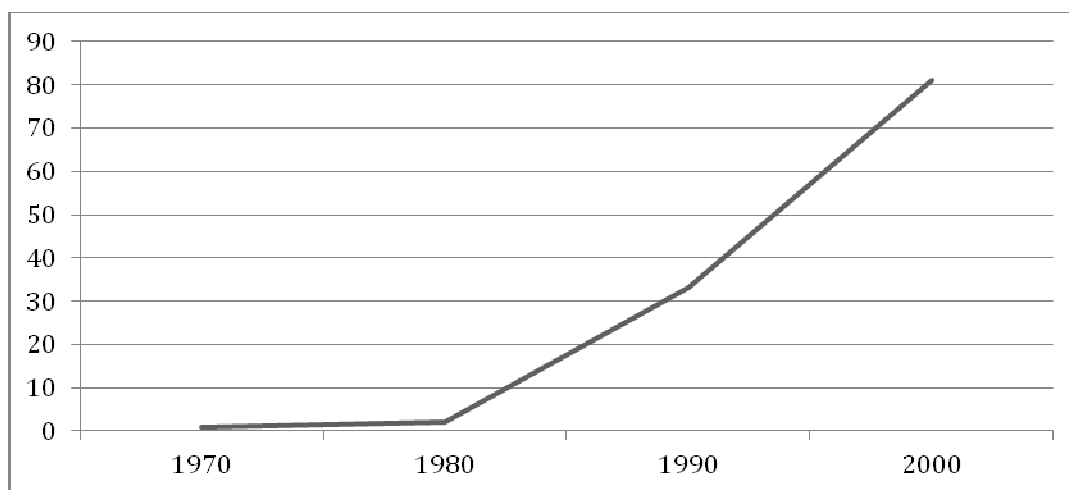
Based on informal conversations with senior academics in Singapore, it seems that the dearth of research in visual arts education in Singapore prior to the mid-1980s is a trend aligned with activity in the field of education in general. In other areas of education, the situation began to change in the mid-1970s when students began to return from overseas after the completion of their doctoral studies. It was the introduction of their own research expertise into the local universities that seemed to kick start local research. In the field of visual arts education however, there have only been a handful of students who have undertaken postgraduate studies specifically in the field of visual arts education at overseas universities. Of this small number, even fewer appear to have actively engaged in research in this field. It is anticipated that as their numbers increase, their influence will eventually become apparent either through generating their own research or mentoring students who are engaged in postgraduate research.

Possibly as consequence of the small number of local academics specializing in visual arts education, published research in the field has been largely produced by non-Singaporean academics working in Singapore. These academics include Richard Hickman, John Matthews, Jane Chia, Birnie Duthie, Paul O'Shea, Jane Leong and Susan Wright. All have

worked as teaching staff at the National Institute of Education where they have had the opportunity to observe the Singapore visual arts classroom at pre-school, primary, secondary and junior college levels. These authors have also had the opportunity to work with student teachers engaged in the field, and their research expertise has been an important factor in helping to nurture a culture of research within visual arts education in Singapore. Coming from other cultural contexts and drawing upon their experiences of alternative systems of visual arts education, their research has often brought to bear a constructively critical gaze on the teaching and learning practices that characterize the Singapore visual arts classroom.

A particularly interesting recent development has been the increase in articles written by Singaporeans authors working in the field of visual arts education in overseas universities. The work of Kan Koon Hwee, a Singaporean currently teaching in the School of Art at Kent State University, has contributed outstanding examples of research in the field. The research for many of her articles has been conducted in Singapore schools. In her article *How Singaporean adolescent students cruise the expanding art milieu* (2008), Kan's keen observations of and subtle communication with young Singaporean secondary school students provide insight into the factors that impact upon young Singaporeans undertaking ambitious artistic endeavours inside the structures of the Singapore schooling system. Through her studies, Kan provides a valuable opportunity to view the field of visual arts education in Singapore through the eyes of a researcher who combines the deep knowledge of the insider, with the critical distance of an academic working from the comparatively expanded intellectual field offered by the American university.

There appears to be little published research conducted by primary and secondary school teachers teaching visual arts in Singapore schools. We note however that teachers increasingly attend and participate in sharing sessions, forums, symposiums and conferences organized either within local school clusters, by the Ministry of Education or the National

Institute of Education. Their contributions however have remained largely unpublished and, as a consequence, their knowledge gained through first hand experience of working in the Singapore visual art classroom does not reach much beyond the audience who attend the events. In recent years, however, the Ministry of Education has begun to strongly promote action research among teachers, leading to an increase in research activity in schools on issues pertinent to their own context. This may prove to be a stimulus for research in the visual arts classroom.

Research in Visual Arts Education: Themes

A literature search was conducted and the results of this search were supplemented by direct requests for research that the authors knew had been conducted but had not been captured in our search. We identified 58 studies which focused specifically or substantively on some aspect or phenomenon concerning visual arts education in Singapore, both within and outside of the formal primary, secondary and tertiary visual arts education sector and related government bodies and institutions whose mandate encompasses visual arts education in Singapore. An analysis of these studies was made in order to identify the types of themes that had attracted research activity. The picture that emerged from this analysis was that research studies on visual arts education in Singapore cluster around 8 general themes which fall into two main categories: the first comprises published research (books, book chapters, journal articles, and exhibition catalogues) and the second category consists of unpublished research (graduate dissertations and theses, and undergraduate research projects). As many conference papers tend to be subsequently published as book chapters or journal articles, it is the published version that this review will include in its discussion. Undergraduate research projects have been included as they can provide some insight into those research areas that are of interest to student teachers and may therefore be useful indicators of the type of topics

that could attract future research interest. The table below provides an overview of the distribution of research interest that each of the eight themes have attracted.

Table 3. *Number of Research Studies per Theme*
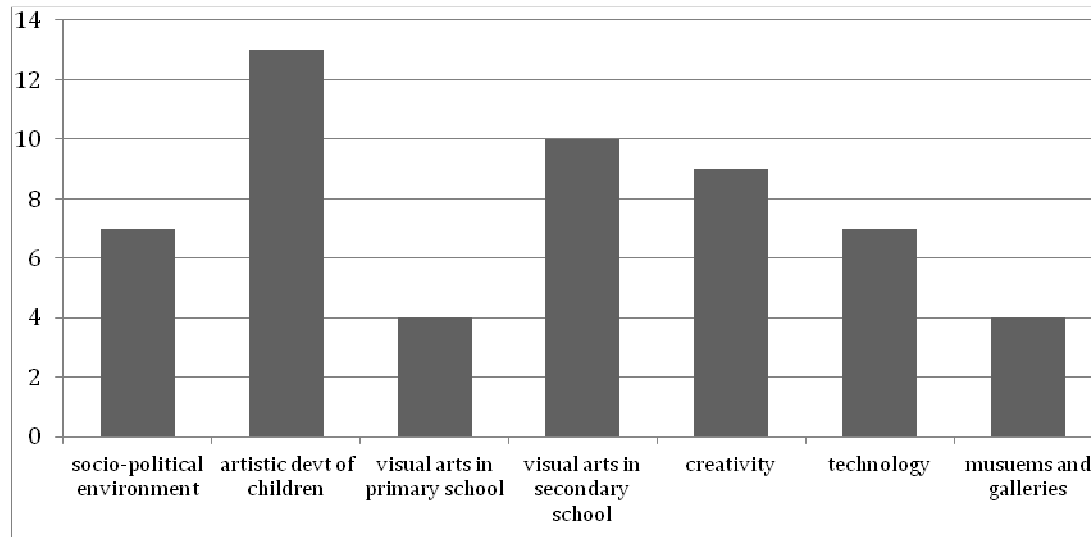
The first salient theme depicts the broader *social and political milieu in which visual arts education operates in Singapore*. Some 30 years back, Chia (1978) has reflected on the state of visual arts practice in Singapore as being "a diversion rather than education" and Tan (1987) describes the visual arts as not having priority in the school curriculum. Succeeding papers highlight the tensions in Singapore between visual arts education and the presence of external controls (O'Shea, 1999), a culture of meritocracy and a bias towards the teaching of Western traditions (Chia, Matthews, O'Shea, 1999). Furthermore, in schools, "art is a second class subject" (Chia, Matthews, & O'Shea, 1995) and visual arts education is challenged by norm-reference and summative assessment modes (O'Shea, 1999) and a highly competitive education system (Chua and Heng, 2010). Ang (2006), in his dissertation, argues at length about "the theoretical incongruence between art learning, which thrives on expression, exploration, and learner-centred pedagogy" and Singapore's competitive learning environment "that is framed by practices such as academic streaming, ranking and

standardized national exams." Ang (2006) subsequently proposed a pedagogical framework that is student and process-centred.

A second prominent theme relates to *artistic development in young children*. A characteristic of studies collected that relate to this theme is the preponderance of important research undertaken by one particular author. This could be a feature that characterizes the mapping of a young and developing field of research, as we consider the field of research in visual arts education in Singapore to be. The research conducted by John Matthews into the artistic development of young children presents an example. His work in this area is seminal. His body of research work on children's representation is arguably the most rigorous and sustained research done in this area of visual arts education in Singapore. Using extensive experiments and naturalistic observation in Singaporean preschools, Matthews (1997) identified and described the early phases of representational and expressive development in children's drawings. Eschewing the dominant notion that children's 'scribblings' are meaningless (Matthews, 1998), his research provides evidence that from their early years on, children make systematic investigations of visual structure and develop representational strategies that together, form conceptually complex visual descriptions (Matthews, 1997). His comprehensive discussion on the development of representational and expressive thinking from infancy to adolescence through art, and the implications of these models to education can be found in his books (e.g. Matthews, 1999; Matthews, 2003). Later work by Matthews extends his studies on paper-and-pencil drawing and painting (e.g. Matthews, 1997; Matthews, 1998; Matthews, 2001) to the impact of electronic, digital and interactive devices on children's development of semiotic understanding (Matthews, 2006a). His later studies suggest that emergent representation and expression are transferred across media domains, albeit manifested differently. For example, in a study tracking children's development in movie-making, he contends that the use of video-camera reconfigures the representational

and expressive action assemblies of children (Matthews, 2006b). Line of sight, pointing, aiming, going-through, looking-through and collinearity are coordinated. In looking at young children's use of stylus-driven, electronic painting and tablet PC drawing, he further concludes, "the insertion of different media into developmental trajectories favours and encourages certain avenues of development rather than others" (Matthews & Seow, 2008, p.265). Matthews pursued his investigation of the precursors of symbolism by also studying chimpanzees at the Singapore Zoo and he discusses how this work has contributed new dimensions to his previous research on the art of childhood and adolescence (Matthews, 2010).

An example of how Matthews' work has been applied to visual arts education is the Drawing Development Assessment Resource for Primary School Art Teachers (MOE, 2002) developed by the Ministry of Education, Singapore. Here, Matthews' developmental principles were used to provide teachers with better assessment tools for students' drawing skills. His impact while teaching at the National Institute of Education is reflected in graduate study research that continues to look into issues pertaining to children's visual representation and expression. These studies "The context of meaning-making through the visual art of a young girl with Down Syndrome" (Joosa, 2011); "The use of drawing in understanding the development of a child with learning disabilities" (Bert, 2006); "How children draw human figures in motion" (Tan, 2005) and "The difficulties faced by secondary school students in observational drawing" (Teo, 2005).

There are some sporadic papers on the third theme, *visual arts education in primary schools*. Chia and Duthie (1992a) report on a program called SMART, a Saturday Morning Art Programme for primary school students run at NIE. Chia (2006) described how two teaching methodologies, Draw-A-Story and Blind Contour Drawing, can be effective in relieving stress among primary school children in Singapore. There are also some teachers in

schools who have documented their own art education initiatives. For example, Harris et al (2009) presented how they used arts-based curriculum to engage students in learning Primary 3 mathematics and Can et al (2007) described how their school has worked to integrate history, geography, English, art and music.

The fourth theme concerns *visual arts education in secondary schools* and is researched more systematically by Kan. As earlier described, Kan investigates Singapore adolescents and their experience with secondary school art education, observing that Singapore teenagers "draw on improvised humour, erudite playfulness, and acculturated mindfulness to transform school art into a potential dialogic space to construct meanings, develop autonomy and enhance learning" (Kan, 2009a). Kan (2007) also used visual narrative to further describe this "hybrid art style" and analysed artworks from competitions and exhibitions to demonstrate how function-based applied art has impacted upon schools. In her article *Playfulness mindfulness: How Singapore adolescent students embody meaning with school art*, (2011) Kan brings to research on visual arts education in the Singaporean classroom important insights into the dynamics of 'embodied learning' in a somewhat restrictive educational terrain that is often hostile to the creative impulse. Other studies by Kan include *Multiple exposures of learning the Singapore Secondary School art style* (2005a) and *The exoticized regional folk art in Singapore school* (2005b), each investigating factors that work to constrain creative student initiatives in the secondary school visual arts classroom.

The secondary school visual arts classroom has attracted considerable interest among post-graduate and undergraduate students. Lingham (2001) investigates how dialogue, imagery and synaesthesia-related task enable learned-centred interdisciplinary teaching and learning in art education. A study by Teo (2005) seeks to improve the quality of art teaching and learning through an investigation of difficulties experienced by students learning

observational drawing skills. Topics among undergraduate students research projects include Choo's (2004) critical study of the secondary school art curriculum; Mohamed Noor's (2004) investigation of the use of the visual diary in the lower secondary school visual art classroom: and Goh's (2004) study of assessment practices in the lower secondary school visual art classroom. These examples provide an insight into the varied research interests of student teachers.

The fifth theme relates to *creativity and visual arts education*. Wright, Burridge, & Stinson (2007) describe the development and trialing of a coding scheme used to observe and analyse visual arts and dance/music pedagogy and practice in a number of selectively sampled preschools, Primary 1 and Secondary 1 classrooms in Singapore schools. Their paper also sought to demonstrate the various uses of the software StudioCode in the analysis of video-based data in arts/arts education research. Tan (2000) provides a review on the study on creativity in Singapore, however only a small number relate to visual arts education. She analyzed and classified studies under five categories: conceptual framework of creativity, conceptions of creativity, creative competence of Singaporeans, creativity programs and pedagogies to nurture creativity. She concludes by noting that the subject of creativity has yet to become a significant research theme and suggests further areas of research. Creativity studies in the review, particularly those that look at pedagogical practices that promote creativity, have implications on pedagogical practices for the arts. It would be useful to refer to these studies when trying to understand the broader political and educational drive to enhance students' creativity and innovation in Singapore. In a later article (2004), Tan analyzes the current status of creativity in education, proposing an approach of "constructive creativity" as a framework for education.

In the same publication, Ng and Smith (2004) contribute a chapter in which they investigate an apparent paradox in the teaching of creativity in the Asian classroom. Through

their research they observe that "the more creative a class of students becomes, the more undesirable their behaviour appears to the teacher. We trace this paradox to two factors: on the one hand, the nature and context of learning in the Confucian tradition is highly authoritarian in character, producing students who are docile and teachable. On the other hand, creative students tend to behave in an, skeptical and egotistic manner" (Ng & Smith, 2004, p. 87). Although Ng and Smith's research did not encompass visual arts education, a study of art teachers attitudes to creativity in the Singapore primary and secondary visual arts school classroom could prove revealing. Does the same paradox exist in the teaching of visual arts? If so, what are the factors that contribute to this paradox? Other studies on creativity include the relationships between creativity and drawing (Cordeiro, 1991; Kwan, 1991); how teachers rate creativity/creative products (Ellis & Tay-Koay, 1995, Tay-Koay, 1992) and thesis by Gan (2008) which investigates Singapore secondary school teachers' perceptions about their own creativity, their teaching efficacy, and their perceptions about what constitutes creativity. It is surprising that creativity in the visual arts classroom has not attracted more research interest as over the last decade a plethora of government reports and studies have focused attention on the need for Singapore to instill their future citizenry with the ability to think creatively.

The Ministry of Education has also heavily promoted *technology and the visual arts classroom*, which is the sixth theme being identified, over recent years. It is therefore surprising that with the exception of Matthews (Matthews & Seow, 2008) and Kan (Kan, 2009b), both of whom have been mentioned earlier, there appears to have been little published research conducted into the impact of information technology, the use of 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional computer graphics, video and photography, and social networking services in the visual arts primary or secondary classrooms. Chia & Duthie (1992b, 1993, 1994; Duthie & Chia, 1992) produced a series of journal articles describing the

various facets of SMART, a program that incorporated a computer-created art component for primary school children. They conclude that there is enormous educational value in the use of the computer as a tool in art education. In the tertiary sector, Constable et al (2010) presented an online application called "visual acuity" for review, grading and assessment of digital art.

The seventh theme relates to *visual arts education in museums and galleries*. Leong (2003) examines the practice of visual arts education in the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and also the formation of identities and art museum education in Singapore (2009). Leong analysed SAM's visual arts education curriculum, arguing for critical pedagogy as an educational approach that "empowers visitors to construct and reflect about issues of identity and culture" (Leong, 2005, p. 8). She then presents an example of a community-based visual art education project, which included such attributes as co-operative and collaborative work, extended discussion based work, and autonomous, experiential and flexible learning (Leong, 2005). Lam (2004) presented a comparative study of visual arts education programmes in museums in various cities. She concluded that visual arts education activities at the Singapore Art Museum and Taipei Fine Arts Museum were more related to school curriculum and more comprehensive than comparable programmes in Hong Kong and Shanghai, which tended to be more exhibition related.

The eighth and final theme concerns *post-secondary and tertiary visual arts education*. Chia & Duthie (1994) detail a project in which pre-service trainee art teachers were introduced to a reflective research approach by participating in a series of planned art activities with primary school children. Roxburgh & Bremner (2001) discuss the curriculum and pedagogical challenges that were faced by The School of Design at the University of Western Sydney (Nepean), Australia and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Art, Singapore in developing and implementing a one-year offshore design course. Kan (2008) juxtaposed visual images with stories to create a visual narrative which explores the formation of the

author's transnational identity as an artist, scholar and international faculty member at an Anglo-American university. Ong (2007) describes the historical development of NAFA in Singapore as a way of understanding the Academy's institutional growth from 1930s to 1980s.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The domains for potential research include visual arts education at preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the government, independent and private education sectors; how they interact with government bodies that directly shape visual arts education policy, namely the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Arts and Communication; and also the government funded art museums under the umbrella of National Heritage Board, whose exhibition and visual arts education programmes aim to inculcate an appreciation of the visual arts in Singaporean youth. If we compare these areas of potential research interest with the research that has been identified in this study, there remain many areas in the field of research in visual arts education that have yet to be explored. We also observe the ground currently prospected by research studies identified in this review appears to be unevenly distributed across the eight identified themes and hence does not provide a cohesive overview of what the situation with visual arts education in Singapore has been, currently is, or what it should aspire to be. The time has come to work towards the creation of such an overview.

An important step in this direction would be a study that undertakes a critical charting of the history of art education in Singapore which incorporates an analysis of policy changes and implementation, both past and current. For example, in response to the PERI recommendations endorsed by the Ministry of Education, extended teacher training in visual arts education has recently been introduced for generalist teachers working in primary schools. It is critical to initiate research that evaluates how this new track for teacher training

translates to actual reforms in classroom teaching practice and how it impacts student outcomes. Another pressing research inquiry is how visual arts service providers operate in schools. In response to the AEP+ programme of the National Arts Council, these service providers are playing an increasingly prominent role in secondary school visual arts education. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they employ an instructor-led engagement in the visual arts classroom which undermines MOE initiatives to introduce a student-centered, problem solving and research-oriented dynamic into the primary and secondary visual arts classroom. Research could verify these anecdotal accounts and help illuminate pathways that support greater synergy between service providers, visual arts teachers and students working in schools.

It is necessary to also foster research that documents the negotiation between fresh currents of thought and practice circulating through the local art world and the nature of education practice in Singapore is need. The increased participation of local artists in international events and their growing interaction with international artists impact upon visual arts education in Singapore, introducing examples of art practice that challenge the largely conservative, exam-oriented teaching practices that have tended to characterize visual arts education. While this paper has identified the initial theorizing of these tensions by authors like O'Shea (1999) and Ang (2006), there is still much research to be done to tackle these issues in depth and more empirically.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need to take a critical look at the gaping disconnect between what is offered as visual arts education in schools and students' social and cultural encounters with the arts through their home, technology and community. Augmenting the smattering of best-practice case studies in visual arts pedagogies can highlight local practices that have succeeded in bridging this chasm and have pragmatic impact on the professional development of visual arts teachers. It is also worthwhile to initiate studies that involve arts

education programs in the community, i.e. art museums programs, artistic methodologies in community engagement, etc., to inform the development and refinement of a more authentic and relevant visual arts education curriculum for students in schools.

The potential for expanding the field of visual arts education research will depend on a number of factors. These include enabling those working within the field to gain access to knowledge of research procedures and also experience in developing their research findings into publications that can form and feed discourse from within and without the field of Singapore visual arts education. The gaining of expertise is particularly important as the majority of teachers working in Singapore receive their visual art training in local art schools studios where emphasis is placed on the acquisition of skills that relate to the production of visual art forms. Visual art students therefore tend to enter visual arts education programmes with comparatively little experience in written modes of communication. The range of undergraduate research projects mentioned in this review indicates that when provided with the opportunity to undertake research projects, interesting, practical and relevant-to-the-field topics are generated. Encouragement by tertiary visual arts education faculties in Singapore of a wider range of qualitative research methodologies, for example reflective studio-based practice-led research, could act as an effective bridge for visually trained art educators to enter the research domain.

A second important factor is the current shortage of local visual art educators working at tertiary level in Singapore who have gained rigorous research experience. Up until recently, those who have such experience through undertaking graduate studies have been expatriates working within the tertiary sector. While these educators and researchers have undoubtedly made valuable contributions to both generating research and enabling students to gain research skills and experience, it is anticipated that the small number of local art educators

with comparable experience who are now entering tertiary visual art education programmes will have an impact on the quantity and quality of research that will eventually be generated.

We argue that although the number of research studies undertaken to date is comparatively small, there is enough evidence to indicate that the factors that have served to constrain research activity in the field are undergoing significant change. A new climate now exists in which the contribution that the visual arts make to Singaporean society is now beginning to be more fully acknowledged. And this in turn could bode well for visual arts education. Having said this, we add the following caveat: in a society that places emphasis on the functional and the pragmatic, and which prioritize social conformity over the encouragement of individual expression, visual arts practice per se and by extension visual arts education will continue to encounter constraints that may compromise artistic outcomes. However, in the light of the present more promising climate, we feel that there is a need to take constructive steps to equip a new generation of researchers who will be able to further advance established areas of research, and who will be ready to take advantage of new research opportunities that this climate of change has ushered in.

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Are The Arts Still As Elusive As The White Rabbit?
Oh my ears and whiskers, how late its getting
Quote from the White Rabbit

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Abstract

More than twenty years ago, Robin McGoff drew comparisons between the elusive White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in wonderland* (1865) and the existence of time for the Arts in the primary curriculum. With the publication of the *Draft shape of the Australian curriculum: The arts* (ACARA 2010) which will guide the writing of the Australian National Curriculum and Ewing's recent monograph *The arts and Australian education: Realising potential* (ACER 2010) it seemed an opportune time to revisit McGoff's observations regarding the status of the Arts in the primary context. By exploring each of the art strands identified in the national arts education policy, *Statement of the arts for Australian Schools* (1994), we find that in Australia at least, the Arts are still marginalised and undervalued in many primary schools. The reasons are multi-layered but a lack of time, minimal resources, low levels of school support, limited pre-service training and a dearth of large-scale educational research to support claims of the academic and social outcomes of arts engagement have done little to raise the profile of the Arts in an already overcrowded curriculum. This article argues that creativity and imagination will be the key drivers of 21st century education and it is only by positioning the Arts at the centre of the curriculum that we can hope to equip young people to address the challenges of the future.

Introduction

More than twenty years ago, Robin McGoff (1988) wrote *Time in the curriculum: The dilemma for arts education, K-6*. In this article, McGoff drew comparisons between the elusive White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in wonderland* (1865) and the existence of time for the Arts in the primary curriculum. With the 2010 release of Tim Burton's film *Alice in wonderland*, the publication of the *Draft shape of the Australian curriculum: The arts* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010) which will guide the writing of the Australian National Curriculum and Robyn Ewing's recent monograph *The arts and Australian education: Realising potential* (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2010) it seemed an opportune time to revisit McGoff's observations regarding the status of the Arts in the primary context. Have we, in fact emerged from 'the rabbit hole'?

Background

The term 'the Arts' is ever-expanding and those disciplines that are taught in schools vary across the globe. We know however that the Arts have their distinctions and commonalities and each makes a distinct offering to a child's education. The Arts, wrote Maxine Green (1995) have the power to open our imagination towards the unimagined and the uncertain. Thus each artform provides different ways of knowing (Habermas,1972) and communicating. Yet according to Gibson and Ewing (2011) each involves some kind of play, design, experimentation, exploration, provocation, expression or representation, communication and the artistic or aesthetic shaping of the body or other media to bring together emotions as well as personal, sensory and intellectual experiences.

The Arts are inextricably linked to creativity and there is little doubt that emphasis in 21st century education is on the need to foster creativity, flexibility and imagination. In fact, creativity has become one of the most desperately sought-after qualities in our graduates.

There is national and international advocacy that creativity is a resource that *must* be nurtured in order to harvest the rewards of innovation (Florida, 2003). Key messages have emerged from more than a decade of international research:

- Creativity is the new key economic driver for international competitiveness;

- The required skill set for the new workforce includes creativity as a fundamental;

- The Arts are the curriculum area that has creativity as core; and

- The role of the Arts in education has been considered more tangential than central (Davis, 2008).

The Arts in the Australian Context

Over the last decade, curriculum documents and syllabi across the states of Australia have charted students' learning in the Arts (Alter, Hays and O'Hara, 2009). The Curriculum Corporation's national arts education policy, *Statement of the arts for Australian schools* (1994) supported a discipline-based approach to arts education which distinguished five strands of the Arts: dance, drama, media, music and visual arts. New South Wales is the only Australian state that does not include media as a separate strand or subject in the state's syllabi. That said, the position of the Arts nationwide is patchy – even in the two longest established artforms – Music and Visual Arts Education (O'Toole, 2010). More than a decade ago, a major Australian national government-funded investigation into the state of Creative Arts was conducted (Senate Committee, 1995). *The Arts education report* concluded that a large majority of Australian primary teachers had both diminished skill levels as well as personal values about the Arts (Alter et al, 2009). According to recent

national reviews such as the *National review of school music education* (Pascoe, Leong, MacCallum, Mackinlay, Marsh, Smith, Church & Winterton, 2005) and the *National review of visual education* (Davis 2008) there has continued to be a serious deficit in these areas with definitely arts-rich and arts-poor schools in Australia. "A very few students have lots of opportunities in many arts; more have some opportunities in one or two arts; many Australian children get few arts or none" (O'Toole, 2010, p. v).

In today's overcrowded primary curriculum, "with its increasing emphasis on high stakes literacy and numeracy testing" (Ewing, 2010, p. 5), the introduction of the MySchool website (which provides information about each school's academic results) and assessment regimes such as NaPLAN, are the Arts still the metaphorical White Rabbit? Constantly concerned with time or the lack thereof?

> *I'm late/I'm late/For a very important date/*
> *No time to say Hello/*
> *Goodbye/I'm late, I'm late, I'm late*

Like Carroll's anxious White Rabbit, we often catch fleeting glimpses of the Arts but rarely do we see them firmly embedded in the primary curriculum providing in-depth, authentic learning experiences to each and every student.

In 1988, McGoff argued that:

> … in public school systems, art and music are the disciplines that are most often found in the curriculum; drama and dance are as elusive as the White Rabbit … when they do exist that arts are integrated with social studies and language arts. They are a means of illustrating or enriching other curricular concepts that have no relationship to what should be taught in the arts. (p. 44)

In western educational systems worldwide, there appears to be a hierarchy of school subjects. Speaking as the keynote at the *Backing our creativity symposium* in Melbourne in 2005, Ken Robinson stated that:

> There is a hierarchy of disciplines in education, especially in schools … at the top of it are languages and mathematics. They're taught to everybody all the time … Science is

kind of a close second tier. Then the humanities, which are always spread out and start to drop off … And at the bottom of every education system … are the arts. Without exception (p. 8).

But he continued:

And in the arts there's another hierarchy … Visual art and music, are generally taught more pervasively and thought to be more important than drama and dance. Dance is probably the bottom of the list in most systems … There is not a school system on earth where dance is taught every day systematically on a compulsory basis to every child in the way that we require them to teach mathematics (p. 8)

Although all national policy statements on Australian education routinely emphasise the need to promote the creative abilities of young people, in actuality the main disciplines taught are often limited to visual arts and music. As an example, the New South Wales Education Act (1990) states that "courses of study in both art and music are to be included in the key learning area of the Creative and Practical Arts" (Section 8). With the introduction of the *Creative arts K-6 syllabus* in 2000, this requirement was broadened to include creative arts experiences in both drama and dance although these only became mandatory in 2005.

And while we might contend that visual arts and music are taught 'more pervasively' there is no evidence to suggest that either is grounded in quality teaching practices in all schools across all states and territories. Not surprisingly, the two national reviews referred to earlier in this article focused on visual arts education and music respectively.

Looking for Visual Arts

The national review of education in visual arts, craft, design and visual communication (NRVE) was commissioned by the Australian Government in 2005. The then Ministers of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) issued a joint media release at the time. Recognising the dominance of visual thinking and visual forms in contemporary society, the Ministers

advocated "the vital necessity for everyone in the community to have skills to read, interpret and produce ideas through visual mediums."(n. p.) As arts educators, we have long recognised the intrinsic value of the cognitive, aesthetic and experiential skills inherent in visual arts practice. These skills are "no less important to the development of human beings and the achievement of human potential than the fundamentals of reading and writing and basic communication" (Coonan & Nelson, 2005).

There was however, an urgency implied in the review with the authors stating that "for too long the visual arts education area has suffered from neglect and uneven standards" (NRVE, Preface p. vi). Not surprisingly, the report found that:

- The Arts tend:

    a)   to be perceived as isolated from other curriculum areas and

    b)   to subsist at the bottom of the curriculum totem pole.

- The Arts curriculum in most Australian states and territories does not differentiate the visual arts from the performing arts.

- Where specifications are made regarding recommended curriculum timetabling for the Arts, it appears that, on average, primary students receive much less than 40 minutes of visual education per week.

- In some states, one-quarter or more of schools reported that visual education was not provided to all students in that school.

- Over 75% of primary schools reported that visual education is taught in a general purpose classroom.

- Classroom generalists play a significant role in visual education.

Furthermore the report suggested that the place and value of visual arts education in Australian primary schools needed reform because in many instances the generalist primary teacher was ill-equipped to teach the visual arts effectively. The *NRVE* report stated:

> The Australian teachers charged with the responsibility of visual education and especially so at the primary level, exist between a rock and a hard place. The rock might be conceptualised as the small toehold they have on the content of their discipline and the hard place the general purpose classroom in which, with inadequate pedagogical preparation, little time, minimal resources, low levels of school support and esteem from their peers, they are expected to provide credible visual education, often contiguously with the other arts disciplines… The creation of an umbrella Arts KLA has had a number of unfortunate consequences, not the least in terms of the further minimisation of teacher preparation. (p. 188)

Clearly the provision for high quality visual arts education appears not to match the direction of education, economic and social policy. Such shortcomings aside, the *NRVE* review did found many examples of teachers in some Australian schools who were managing to develop and deliver promising visual arts education programs despite issues involving staffing, facilities, resources and time allocation.

The Sound of Music Education

School music education in Australia has been described as being in "dire straits" (Pascoe et al, 2005). The 2005 *National review of school music education report* found that many Australian students do not receive effective music education. In fact, the survey showed that in approximately 900 Australian schools there is no music program (about 9-10% of schools). Moreover in *Beethoven or Britney? The great divide in music education,* Robert Walker (2009) highlights the alarming disparity between the number of private schools that offer a "complete musical education focusing on making music – performing, composing, improvising and conducting" (p. 3) and the vast majority of public schools that do not. Although as we will see, the same argument could be made across all the systems for art, drama and dance.

Essentially the *National review of school music education* made a case for the importance of music in all Australian schools. The Chair of the Steering Committee, Margaret Sears stated:

> It [the Review] has shown the importance and significance of music in the education of all young Australians and therefore asserts its alienable place in all Australian schools.
>
> Sadly … while the submissions … revealed some fine examples of school music programmes, they also reveal cycles of neglect and inequity which impacts to the detriment of too many young Australians … The research has revealed patchiness in opportunities for participation in music, significant variability in the quality of teaching and teacher education, a need for much greater support for music teachers, and unintended detrimental impacts on music education arising from changes in the place of music within the overall curriculum. Overall, the quality and status of music in schools is patchy at best, and reform is demonstrably needed …
>
> Raising the quality and status of music education will have a positive impact on the breadth and depth of aesthetic, cognitive, social and experiential learning for all Australian students, and ultimately, for our society at large. (p. iii)

Furthermore the Review listed some unsettling critical findings:

- Many Australian students miss out on effective music education because of lack of equity of access; lack of provision; and the poor status of music in many schools.

- Music education in Australian schools is at a critical point where prompt action is needed to right the inequalities in school music.

- Music-specific professional learning is urgently required for generalist classroom teachers currently in schools.

- Hours for pre-service education in music have contracted radically in the last decade and do not adequately prepare generalist primary teachers for teaching music in schools. Urgent action is needed to address this problem (p. v-vi).

Such findings do not support earlier claims that music is a pervasive presence in Australian primary schools. Like the other Arts, with a lack of time, resources, minimal pre-service and in-service teacher education, music confidence (sometimes referred to as "the red feeling; a deeply rooted view held by large numbers of people including teachers that being able to do or teach music requires special gifts that are only attainable by, or given to, a chosen few" (Hennessy, 2000, p. 183) music is often unheard in the primary classroom.

To Do or Not To Do Drama

For many years, drama has been acknowledged as an important medium for learning (Baldwin and Fleming, 2003; Ewing and Simons, 2004; Miller and Saxon, 2004) particularly in the areas of English, language and literacy. However many Australian primary teachers do not use drama for any substantive activity within their classrooms. Some of this may be attributed to the manner in which drama has been marginalised in contemporary syllabus documents and the reduction of drama learning in pre-service education courses. A few teachers while acknowledging that drama is important, feel constrained by an overcrowded curriculum which leaves little space for creative pursuits.

According to one primary teacher in a New South Wales government school:

> I am the first to admit that Creative Arts, in particular drama, was the first to go from my teaching and learning program if I was running out of time to complete other activities that needed to be done … I was usually so vocal about my desire to focus on the 'academic' subjects in our curriculum. Probably, more truthfully, I had no skills in teaching drama and hadn't had the most promising experiences when studying drama at university ie I am a tree sprouting from a seed. (Gibson, 2012a, p. 12)

And while there is no national review to date, drama appears sporadically and often superficially in many primary classrooms across Australia. There is evidence however that this situation is changing. *The School Drama Program*, an initiative between the Sydney Theatre Company and the University of Sydney places professional actors alongside classroom teachers for up to seven weeks of a school term. The program is based on a co-mentoring relationship between an educator and an actor working towards student academic achievement in this instance, English and literacy outcomes. It also seeks to develop primary teachers' professional knowledge of and expertise in the use of process drama. The actors model the use of drama strategies with quality literary texts in order to address a specific literacy or English outcomes that has been identified by the class teacher. Now entering its

fourth year of operation, the program has grown from 11 teachers to 35 in 2011 and there is

clear evidence that it is benefiting both students and teachers. For example, as one teacher

from the 2011 program concluded:

> … I feel that my maturity as an implementer of drama has really improved. I now
> clearly understand that drama is not just about acting and playing games but about
> accessing characters' feelings and emotions through exploration … I now view drama as
> an irreplaceable part of not only my literacy teaching but as my whole curriculum
> approach to teaching. (Gibson, 2012a, p. 36)

Moving with Dance

If we return to Ken Robinson's comments about dance, we hear what we already know.

> Why isn't dance as important in schools as mathematics, because it should be … We all
> have bodies … what happens in education is we progressively educate people from the
> knees upwards and in due course we concentrate on their head. Don't we and slightly to
> one side? (p. 8)

In support of such claims, David McAlister Director of the Australian Ballet has commented

that, in his view dance is one of the least understood of the Arts disciplines and consequently

it is perhaps the most neglected in primary schools. This seems an ironic situation since

movement is very much part of a child's life the moment they are conceived. Whether it is

lack of time, space or teacher confidence, creative dance is definitely one area of the Arts that

remains overlooked or perhaps hidden within the folk dancing component of the Physical

Education curriculum.

Although research into the impact of dance on learning across the curriculum is

limited according to Messer (2001):

> Creative expression, in whatever form it takes, is a dance. This dance between conscious
> and unconscious, creator and critic, left and right brain results in something original and
> often surprising. This is not theory. It's a process I have observed in my own practice of
> writing and art … [It is a] dance between innovation and logic – flowing, exuberant,
> expressive, joyful. (Messer, 2001, p. 1-2)

Unlike visual arts and music which have long traditions in the primary curriculum, dance is now making a case for the artform to be resourced as a subject area in its own right. *Ausdance*, a group of Australian dance professionals advocates a united voice for arts education (not just dance or visual arts, etc). With the Arts as part of the new Australian Curriculum, *Ausdance* wants dance to have equal status in the learning environment with other artforms from early childhood through to the final years of schooling (*Ausdance*, 2011).

The Current Status of the Arts

Perhaps this is a somewhat pessimistic view of the state of the Arts in Australian primary schools? In many ways, the situation is ironic since the Arts do matter to Australians. The Australia Council for the Arts' commissioned research, *Australians and the arts* (Constantoura, 2001) reported that people across the country wanted stronger and better education in the Arts. In fact, 85% of people agreed that "the Arts should be an important part of the education of every Australian child" and 86% said they would feel more positive about the Arts if there were "better education and opportunities for children in the Arts" (Constantoura, 2001, p. 11).

Many arts educators believe that the Arts should move from the fringes to be placed at the centre of the curriculum. There is little doubt that in Australia, at least, the Arts are still marginalised and undervalued. The desire "to promote the value of the arts as a lifelong learning choice for every Australian" (Australia Council for the Arts, 2002, p. 131) becomes little more than rhetoric. There is an obvious gap between espoused policy in arts education and existing provisions within classrooms (Bamford, 2006). See Table 1 for "Guidelines for Proportion of Time Attributed to each Key Learning Area (KLA) K-6" from the NSW Board of Studies (2007).

Table 1. **Summary of hours allocated to KLAs in NSW**

KLA	Total teaching time
English	25 – 35%
Mathematics	20%
Science & Technology	Between 6 to 10%
Personal Development, Health & Physical Education	Between 6 to 10%
Human Society & Its Environment	Between 6 to 10%
Creative & Practical Arts	Between 6 to 10%
Additional activities	Up to 20%

The NSW Board of Studies (2007) acknowledges that "teachers have flexibility to use these guidelines in accordance with the policies of their school system or authority" but in an increasingly overcrowded curriculum it is unlikely that teachers will deviate from the 6 – 10% recommended for the Creative Arts. And since the Creative Arts in NSW encompasses four distinct art strands: dance, drama, music and the visual arts, adhering to these recommendations would mean that primary students could expect to spend as little as 20-35 minutes per artform in a typical teaching week.

In response to 'How much time should be allocated to the Arts?" the Queensland Studies Authority (2005) is the only Australian state that gives indicative time allocations "based on an estimate of the minimum time needed to provide learners with opportunities to demonstrate the core learning outcomes." (see Table 2) Such marginalisation of the Arts cannot be conducive to the establishment and delivery of quality arts education programs in Australian schools.

Table 2. **Summary of hours allocated to the Arts KLA in Queensland**

School years	Hours
1 – 3	300 hours across 3 years
4 – 7	400 hours across 4 years

In reference to the other states, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia do not mandate time allocations for individual teaching areas while South Australia provides indicative hours for literacy, numeracy and science.

For too long, the Arts have existed in silos with very little dialogue between the disciplines (Anderson and Gibson, 2004). The imminent introduction of the Arts National Curriculum will see five artforms – dance, drama, music, visual arts and <u>media arts</u>. There will be increasing pressure for schools to include the study of media arts into their curricula and to enable students to use ICT as part of their creative process. A nominal school week is already 25 hours. The recommendation is a minimum of 2 hours per week in the Arts. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) *Curriculum design paper* (2012) has further proposed indicative times for the Arts from Foundation to Year 6. See Table 3 for "Indicative Times for F-6 Australian curriculum."

Table 3. **Indicative Times for F-6 Australian Curriculum**

Learning Area	Subject	Year F	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
English		27%	27%	27%	22%	22%	20%	20%
Mathematics		18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	16%	16%
Science		4%	4%	4%	7%	7%	7%	7%
Humanities and Social Sciences	History	2%	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%
	Geography	2%	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%
	Economics and Business						2%	2%
	Civics and Citizenship				2%	2%	2%	2%
The Arts		4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Health and Physical Education		8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Languages		equivalent to 5% per year						
Technologies	Design and Technologies	2%	2%	2%	4%	4%	6%	6%
	Digital Technologies	2%	2%	2%	4%	4%	6%	6%
Percentage of Total Time Allocated		72%	72%	72%	79%	79%	79%	79%
Percentage of Total Time Unallocated		28%	28%	28%	21%	21%	21%	21%

John O'Toole (2010), chief writer of the *Draft shape of the Australian curriculum: The arts* report has already stated that "Only the Fool's School would try to organise the Arts for 20 minutes per week."(n. p.)

Recommendations

We must look at different ways of teaching the Arts to our primary students. While we acknowledge that the Arts are disciplines in their own right, they all share creative practice as fundamental. Creativity, imagination and play are central. The Arts are connected and establishing these connections may be a fruitful way forward. By placing the Arts at the centre of the primary curriculum rather than being programmed later in the day or at the end of the school week or as extra-curricular activities before or after school. No longer the privilege of more advantaged students whose parents can afford art, dance classes, music instruction and visits to the theatre after school or during the holidays.

As McGoff suggested those twenty years ago, we must become advocates for the Arts not just for 'our Art.' We can do this on a small scale in our own classrooms and we can expose both students and their parents to pivotal place of the Arts in the primary curriculum by imbedding the Arts into all aspects of learning. But this is not enough, we must turn our attention to pre-service education and the continued reduction of in-depth programs in the Arts in our universities and colleges. A recent newspaper report titled 'Arts suffer after uni caps axed' *(Sun-Herald)* revealed that "the Creative Arts have fallen out of favour under [the government's] decision to axe the cap on university student places" (Schubert, 2012, p. 3). And although Creative Arts subjects are compulsory in all teacher training courses in Australia, the number of hours devoted to each discipline has steadily diminished over time. As an example, a decade ago, students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) program at the University of Sydney enrolled in mandatory, stand-alone subjects in music, drama and visual arts. Current students now enrol in a semester long Creative Arts unit in Year 1 and Year 3 of their four-year program.

Professional learning in the Arts needs to occur not just with generalist classroom teachers but with principals and other educational leaders. We must continue to source

potential partnerships with external agencies and organizations such as museums, galleries and libraries across Australia who could provide professional learning opportunities.

The recent surge in interest in the United States and the United Kingdom in exploring the links between education and the Arts demonstrates that innovative research in this area is desperately required in the Australian context. The *2004 Australia Council for Educational Research* (ACER) report into school-based arts educational programs in Australian schools indicated that this is an opportune time to engage in significant, longitudinal research that will supply hard-edged evidence on the impact of arts education programs on student outcomes, both academic and social. One such project is a large-scale Australian Research Council (ARC) funded study that brings together researchers from the University of Sydney with Australia's largest arts agency, the Australia Council for the Arts in order to examine the role of in-school and out-of-school participation in arts education on students' academic motivation, engagement and achievement. Utilising both quantitative and innovative qualitative methodologies, over 1,200 Year 5 and 6 primary and secondary students are currently involved in the project which hopes to provide hard-edged evidence of the value of the Arts in the lives of young people. (Martin, Anderson, Gibson & Sudmalis 2009).

"As educators, we are preparing students for life in a rapidly changing world" (Gibson, 2012b, p. 1). They will need to be creative in order to adapt to several careers in a lifetime, to be innovative and imaginative, to see connections and to solve increasingly and as yet unknown problems. Clearly, engagement in the Arts provides opportunities to develop these crucial skills at an early age.

Conclusion

In 2007, the respective federal and state minister for Education and the Arts agreed on the following priority:

All children and young people should have a high quality arts education in every phase of learning. (MCEETYA & CMC, 2007, p. 5)

However from the preceding discussion, it seems that much resourcing and prioritising of the Arts is needed to make this a reality (Ewing 2010). More than a decade ago, Ken Robinson argued that education did not just need a change, it needed a revolution. Now more than ever before is time to become subtle revolutionaries for the Arts in education and as Reimer (1996) directs: "Begin modestly by teaching with art, then about art and finally through the art" (p. 6).

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Robyn Gibson is a Senior Lecturer in Visual and Creative Arts Education in the pre-service teacher education programs in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. Until recently, she was the Associate Dean of Undergraduate and Preservice Programs within the Faculty. Robyn is passionate about the central and critical role the Arts can and should play in life-long learning. She is the co-author of *Transforming the curriculum through the arts* (2011). Robyn is currently engaged as the evaluator of *School Drama* – an initiative between the University of Sydney and the Sydney Theatre Company that places professional actors alongside primary teachers in order to improve students' literacy outcomes. Robyn's recent research has focused on the role of arts education on primary and secondary students' engagement, motivation and academic achievement. She is an advocate of the imperative of creativity within the curriculum and her other research interests relate to the use of creative learning, teaching and assessment in tertiary contexts.