

Asia-Pacific Journal for Arts Education

Co-editors:

Dr. Bo Wah LEUNG

Dr. Cheung On TAM

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

<http://www.ied.edu.hk/cca/apjae/apjae.htm>

ISSN 1683-6995

Volume 10 Number 1

January 2012

Masculinity and Visual Culture

Wesley Imms

University of Melbourne

Australia

wesleyi@unimelb.edu.au

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 Ghail, 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 Ghail, 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.

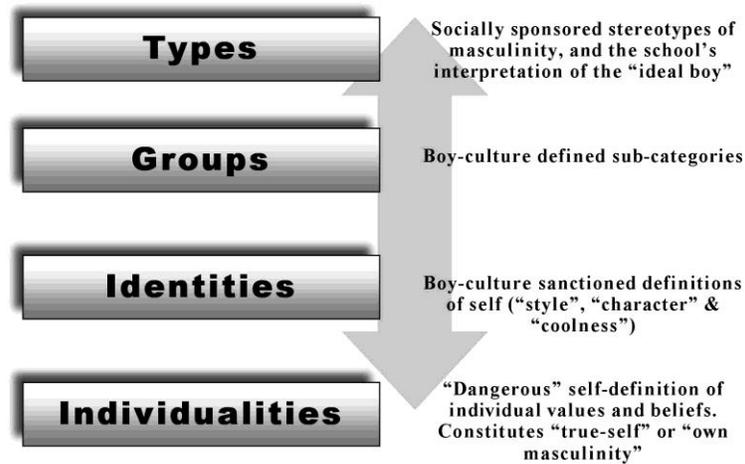


Figure 1. Boys layered engagements with masculinity (Imms 2003a)

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.

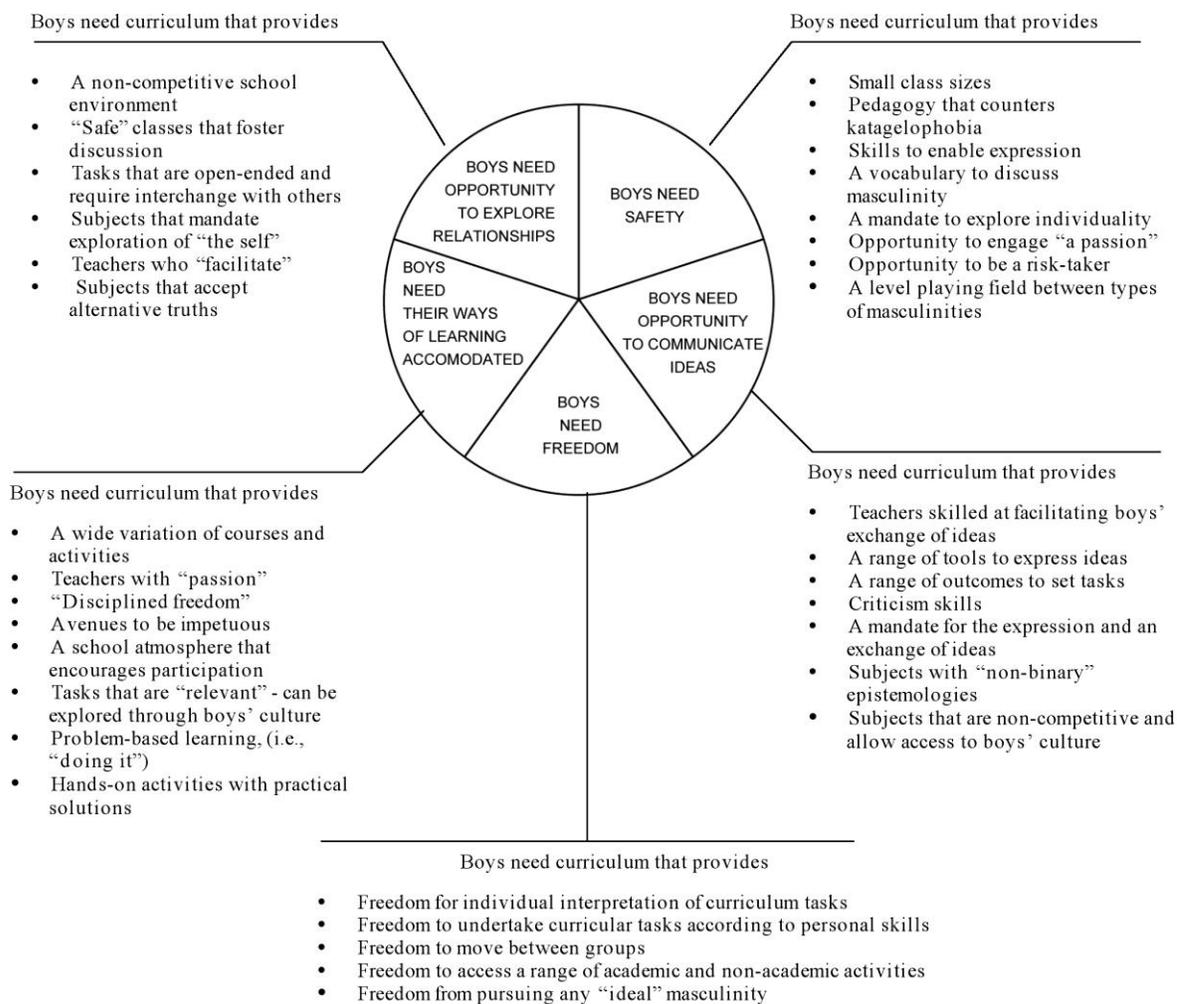


Figure 2. Boy-friendly curriculum (Imms, 2003a)

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 Airs 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 intellectual freedom; it provides 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.

References

- Alloway, N., & Gilbert, P. (1997). Unravelling masculinity: Boys and video games. *Boys and literacy: Professional development units*. Retrieved September 12, 2008, from <http://education.qld.gov.au/students/advocacy/equity/gender-sch/docs/issues-games.doc>.
- Alloway, N., & Gilbert, P. (1998). Video game culture: Playing with masculinity, violence and pleasure. In S. Howard (Ed.), *Wired up: Young people and the media* (pp. 93-113). London: UCL Press.
- Bem, S. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 42, 155-162.
- Biddulp, S. (1997). *Raising boys: Why boys are different – and how to help them become happy and well balanced men*. Lane Cove, Australia: Finch Publishing.
- Bly, R. (1990). *Iron John: A book about men*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Bowden, J. (2008, October 3, 2008). Boys achievement in visual art craft and design. *A'N'D': Newsletter of the National Society of Education in Art & Design*.
- Brannon, R. (1976). The male sex role: Our culture's blueprint of manhood and what it's done for us lately. In R. Brannon & D. David (Eds.), *The forty-nine percent majority* (pp. 1-45). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Chalmers, F. G. (2008). Crafts, boys, Ernest Thompson Seton and the Woodcraft Movement. *Studies in Art Education*, 49(3), 183-199.
- Chalmers, F. G., & Dancer, A. A. (2007). Art, Boys, and the Boy Scout Movement: Lord Baden-Powell. *Studies in Art Education*, 48(3), 265-281.
- Collins, S. (1974). *A different heaven and earth*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2002). *Boys: Getting it right. Report on the inquiry into the education of boys*. Retrieved December 30, 2010 from <http://www.gph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/eofb/index.htm>.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Connell, R. W. (1996). Teaching the boys: New research on masculinity and gender strategies for schools. *Teacher's College Record*, 98(2), 206-235.
- Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Cresswell, J., Rowe, K., & Withers, G. (2002). *Boys in school and society*. Victoria, Australia: ACER.
- Cuttance, P., Imms, W., Godinho, S., Hartnell-Young, E., McGuinness, K., & Neale, G. (2007). *Boys Education Lighthouse Schools Project, Stage 2 Final Report*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government.
- Daiello, V., Hathaway, K., Rhoades, M., & Walker, S. (2006). Complicating Visual Culture. *Studies in Art Education*, 47(4), 308-325.
- Department of Education Science and Training. (2003). *Meeting the challenge: Guiding principles for success from the Boys Education Lighthouse Schools (BELS)*. Retrieved December 30, 2010 from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/meeting_the_challenge_final_report.htm.
- Duncum, P. (1997). Art education for new times. *Studies in Art Education*, 39(3), 110-118.
- Duncum, P. (2003). The theories and practices of visual culture in art education. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 105(2), 19-25.
- Duncum, P. (2008). Holding aesthetics and ideology in tension. *Studies in Art Education*, 49(2), 122-135.
- Frank, B., Kehler, M., Lovell, T., & Davison, K. (2003). A tangle of trouble: Boys, masculinity and schooling - future directions. *Educational Review*, 55(2), 119-133.
- Freedman, K. (1987). Art education and changing political agendas: An analysis of curricular concerns of the 1940s and 1950s. *Studies in Art Education*, 29, 17-29.
- Freedman, K. (2003). *Teaching Visual Culture*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freedman, K. (2008). Artmaking/Troublemaking: Creativity, policy and leadership in Art Education. *Studies in Art Education*, 48(2), 204-217.
- Godinho, S., Thompson, J., & Imms, W. (2006). Optimising teaching practice for boys' learning: Implementation of government policy into classroom practice. *Education and Society*, 29(4), 5-21.
- Gray, A. (1987). Are girls the problem? *Forum of Education*, 46(1), 34-46.
- Gurian, M. (1998). *A fine young man: What parents, mentors and educators can do to shape adolescent boys into exceptional men*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (2 ed.). London: Routledge.
- Hearn, J. (1996). Is masculinity dead? A critique of the concept of masculinity/masculinities. In M. Mac an Ghail (Ed.), *Understanding masculinities: Social relations and cultural arenas* (pp. 202-217). Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Imms, W. (1997a). *Gender differences in art education: Participation and academic achievement in International Baccalaureate Art and Design Education*. Unpublished MA, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Imms, W. (1997b). *Teaching the boys: A new agenda for gender equity?* West Paper presented at the Western Canadian Association for Student Teaching (WESTCAST) Annual Conference, University of Victoria.

- Imms, W. (1998, Sunday June 2). Talking about boys. *Vancouver Sun*.
- Imms, W. (2000a). Boys' rates of participation and academic achievement in International Baccalaureate art and design education. *Visual Arts Research*, 26(1), 53-74.
- Imms, W. (2000b). Multiple masculinities and the schooling of boys. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 25, 175-189.
- Imms, W. (2003a). *Boys doing art: Negotiating masculinities within art curriculum*. The University of British Columbia, Canada.
- Imms, W. (2003b). *Boys doing art: Negotiating masculinities within art curriculum*. Unpublished PhD, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.
- Imms, W. (2003c). Boys talk about "doing art": Some implications for masculinity discussion. *Australian Art Education*, 26(3), 29-37.
- Imms, W. (2003d). Masculinity: A new agenda for art education? *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 30(2), 41-64.
- Imms, W. (2004). Malcolm's story. *Art Education*, 57(2), 40-46.
- Imms, W. (2006). The interplay of art education curriculum and boys' negotiation of multiple masculinities. *Australian Art Education*, 29(1), 86-107.
- Imms, W. (2008a). Boys engaging masculinities. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, 10(2), 29-45.
- Imms, W. (2008b, 28 October 2008). *Lessons for Art Education from Australia's Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools programme*. Paper presented at the CIRCLE: Centre for Research into Creativity and Learning in Education Research Series, Roehampton University, London England.
- Imms, W., & Imms, C. (2005). *Evidence Based Practice: Lessons from the medical sciences, implications for Boys' Education*. Paper presented at the AARE Focus Conference on Implementation of Educational Policy, Cairns Australia.
- Imms, W., & Nash, G. (2008). *Boys and creativity: Arts-rich pedagogy, engagement, and the construction of egalitarian male identities*. Paper presented at the 32nd World Congress of the International Society of Education in the Arts (InSEA).
- Imms, W., Ward, M., Adamson, K., & Collie, R. (2008). *The Compendium: Teaching resources for teaching boys*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government.
- Jackson, D., & Salisbury, J. (1996). Why should secondary schools take working with boys seriously? *Gender and Education*, 8, 103-115.
- Jones, D. C., & Vigfusdottir, T. H. (2004). Body image and the appearance culture among adolescent boys and girls *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 19(3), 323-339.
- Jordan, E. (1995). Fighting boys and fantasy play: The construction of masculinity in the early years of school. *Gender and Education*, 7, 9-86.
- Kelly, E. (2001). *Classroom talk and gender differences in mathematics*. Unpublished PhD, City University of New York, New York.
- Kenway, J. (1995). Masculinities in schools: Under siege, on the defensive and under reconstruction? *Discourse: Studies in the Politics of Education*, 16(1), 59-79.
- LeCompte, M., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2 ed.). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Lesko, N. (2000). *Masculinities at school*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lillico, I. (2001). *Australian issues in boys' education*. Perth, Australia: Tranton Enterprises.

- Mac an Ghaill, M. (1996). *Understanding masculinities: Social relations and cultural arenas*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Marshall, J. (2007). Image as insight: Visual images in practice based research. *Studies in Art Education*, 49(1), 23-41.
- Martino, W. (1995). Deconstructing masculinity in the English classroom: A site for reconstructing gendered subjectivity. *Gender and Education*, 7, 205-220.
- Martino, W., & Berrill, D. (2003). Boys, schooling and masculinities: Interrogating the "right" way to educate boys. *Educational Review*, 55(2), 99-117.
- Martino, W., Kehler, M., & Weaver-Hightower, M. (Eds.). (in press). *Issues in boys' education: Beyond the backlash*. New York: Routledge.
- Martino, W., & Meyen, B. (2002). War, guns and cool, tough things: Interrogating single-sex classes as a strategy for engaging boys in English. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32(3), 303-324.
- Martino, W., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2001). *Boys' stuff. Boys talking about what matters*. Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Martino, W., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2003). *So what's a boy? Addressing issues of masculinity and schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Martino, W., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2005). *'Being normal is the only thing to be': Boys and Girls perspectives on gender and school*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press.
- Messner, M. (1997). *Politics of masculinities: Men in movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mills, M., Martino, W., & Lingard, B. (2009). *Boys and schooling: Contexts, issues and practices*. London: Palgrave.
- Mills, M., Martino, W., & Lingard, B. (in press). *Boys and schooling: Contexts, issues and practices*. London: Palgrave.
- Newkirk, T. (2002). *Misreading masculinity: Boys, literacy and popular culture*. Portsmouth NM: Heinemann.
- Nilan, P. (1995). Making up men. *Gender and Education*, 7, 175-187.
- Nilan, P. (2000). "You're hopeless I swear to God": Shifting masculinities in classroom talk. *Gender and Education*, 12, 53-68.
- O'Donoghue, D. (2005). "Speak and act in a manly fashion": The role of the body in the construction of men and masculinity in primary teacher education in Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14(2), 231-252.
- O'Donoghue, D. (2006). Situating place and space in the making of masculinities in schools. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 3(1), 15-33.
- O'Donoghue, D. (2007). 'James always hangs out here': Making space for place in studying masculinities at school. *Visual Studies*, 22(1 (Special Issue, The Visible Curriculum)), 62-73
- Pollock, W. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Reay, D. (1990). Girls' groups as a component of anti-sexist practices: One primary school's experience. *Gender and Education*, 2, 37-43.
- Skelton, C. (1996). Learning to be 'tough': The fostering of maleness in one primary school. *Gender and Education*, 8, 185-197.

- Skelton, C. (1997). Primary boys and hegemonic masculinities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18(3), 349-370.
- Skelton, C. (2001). *Schooling the boys: Masculinities and primary education*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Slade, M. (2002). *Listening to the boys*. Adelaide, Australia: Flinders University Institute of International Education.
- Smith, R. (1995). Schooling and the formation of male student's gender identities. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 24(1), 54-70.
- Tacey, D. (1997). *Remaking men: The revolution in masculinity*. Melbourne, Australia: Viking.
- Tavin, K. M. (2000). The impact of visual culture on art education: Teaching in and through visual culture. *The Journal of Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Research in Art Education*, 18(1), 20-23 & 37-40.
- Tavin, K. M. (2003). Wrestling with angels, searching for ghosts: Towards a critical pedagogy of visual culture. *Studies in Art Education*, 44(3), 197-213.
- Terman, L., & Miles, C. (1936). *Sex and personality*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Trent, F., & Slade, M. (2001). *Declining rates of achievement and retention: The perceptions of adolescent males*. Canberra, Australia: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Vamos, M. (2008). *Gender oriented media usage*. Paper presented at the 32 World Congress of the International Society for Education in the Arts (InSEA).
- van Houtte, M. (2004). Why boys achieve less at school than girls: The difference between boys' and girls' academic culture. *Educational Studies*, 30(2), 159-173.
- Walker, J. (1988). *Louts and legends: Male youth culture in an inner-city school*. Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The "boy turn" in research on gender and education. *Review of Educational Research*, 73(4), 471-498.
- West, P. (2000). *What IS the matter with boys?* Marrickville, Australia: Choice Books.

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*.

Asia-Pacific Journal for Arts Education

Co-editors:
Dr. Bo Wah LEUNG
Dr. TAM Cheung On
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

International Advisory Editorial Board

Dr. David BETTS	University of Arizona	USA
Prof. Doug BOUGHTON	Northern Illinois University	USA
Prof. Manny BRAND	Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong
Prof. Liora BRESLER	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	USA
Prof. Neil BROWN	University of New South Wales	Australia
Dr. Pamela BURNARD	University of Cambridge	UK
Prof. F. Graeme CHALMERS	University of British Columbia	Canada
Prof. Jo Chiung-Hua CHEN	National Taiwan Normal University	Taiwan
Dr. Lily CHEN-HAFTECK	Kean University	USA
Prof. Veronika COHEN	Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance	Israel
Dr. Paulette COTE	The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts	Hong Kong
Prof. Jane DAVIDSON	University of Western Australia	Australia
Prof. Michael DAY	Brigham Young University	USA
Dr. Kate DONELAN	University of Melbourne	Australia
Prof. Lee EMERY	University of Melbourne	Australia
Prof. Harold FISKE	University of Western Ontario	Canada
Dr. David FORREST	RMIT University	Australia
Prof. Victor C. FUNG	University of South Florida	USA
Prof. Wai Chung HO	Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong
Dr. David JIANG	Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts	Hong Kong
Prof. Jody KERCHNER	Oberlin College Conservatory of Music	USA
Prof. Mei-ling LAI	National Taiwan Normal University	Taiwan
Prof. Samuel LEONG	The Hong Kong Institute of Education	Hong Kong
Dr. Minette MANS	Independent researcher	Namibia
Prof. Patricia MARTIN SHAND	University of Toronto	Canada
Prof. Rachel MASON	University of Surrey Roehampton	UK
Prof. John MATTHEWS	Nanyang Technological University	Singapore
Dr. Laura McCAMMON	University of Arizona	USA
Prof. Gary McPHERSON	University of Melbourne	Australia
Prof. Ka Leung MOK	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
Prof. Marvelene MOORE	University of Tennessee	USA
Dr. Steven MORRISON	University of Washington	USA
Prof. Tadahiro MURAO	Aichi University of Education	Japan
Prof. Shinobu OKU	Okayama University	Japan
Prof. Michael PARSONS	Ohio State University	USA
Prof. Stuart RICHMOND	Simon Fraser University	Canada
Prof. Patricia SHEHAN CAMPBELL	University of Washington	USA
Dr. Robin STEVENS	University of Melbourne	Australia

Prof. Sue STINSON	University of North Carolina	USA
Prof. Keith SWANWICK	University of London	UK
Prof. Les TICKLE	University of East Anglia	UK
Dr. Francois TOCHON	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA
Prof. Robert WALKER	University of New South Wales	Australia
Prof. Peter WEBSTER	Northwestern University	USA
Prof. Jacqueline WIGGINS	Oakland University	USA
Prof. Jiaying XIE	China Conservatory of Music	China