



Resource Review

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Review:

This is a collection of papers presented at the *Interdisciplinary Dialogues in Art Education* congress hosted by the *International Society for Education through Art* (InSEA) in Viseu-Portugal between 1st and 5th March 2006. The congress was intended as an international platform through which a dialogue regarding arts education policy could be evaluated. Its main themes were *Arts Education and Contemporary Societies*; *Arts Education and Peace*; and *Arts and New Technologies*, with investigations into the ways in which multiculturalism is being accounted for in art curricula, how local initiatives can stimulate critical thinking and cultural identity, and how art functions as communication.

The book itself has been organised under the following themes:

1. global perspectives on arts education policy;
2. discussion of theory and practice located in critical pedagogy;
3. exemplary projects involving new technologies;
4. projects targeted at community and environment; and
5. projects focused on art education for peace.

The themes explored throughout the book naturally lead it to be fairly politicized and indeed in the preface, *The Politics of International Art Education*, Ana Mae Barbosa begins by congratulating the editors for “*proposing a book about art education so heavily embedded in political thinking*”. She goes on to demonstrate how the production and learning of art is essentially situated within its political environment and argues that if educators are to accommodate global arts into their curricular then

they need to account for the political environment within which the art is produced and learnt and not situate them in regards to the histories of colonial cultures that currently dominate. She advocates that to avoid the homogenisation of globalisation Third World arts educators must perform their own research, analysis and actions to inform others of their cultural identities and that difference must be acknowledged through a reconsideration of the problems of hegemony to strengthen cultural diversity. Eça and Mason also support art educators becoming more proactively involved with policy making in their respective countries and their hope is that by presenting these constructive responses to the development of innovative arts education from around the world that they will inform and inspire others to practice with these approaches in mind.

Part One: Global Perspectives offers a cross-section of viewpoints on globalisation, creativity and visual arts education policy. Taken from the South Pacific, India, U.S.A and Cayman Islands each paper explores the political and cultural impact on their arts education policies. The first paper focuses on three projects that go towards meeting the challenges of globalisation. They investigate and account for the regions' current arts education provision and look for ways to enhance its knowledge transfer which in turn will enhance its cultural capacity-building and regional identity. They attempt to identify a specific South Pacific identity based on local and regional history, socio-politics and the need to resist the dominance of external cultures and value systems to generate a specific mode of regional thinking.

The second paper presents an argument for utilising folk media as a form of communicating environmental education as advocated by the United Nations' Environmental Programme.

The third explores the culture of post-industrialisation and the position of arts education provision in the light of international policies that look to constrict arts education curricula into specific modes of information gathering and skills distribution, rather than emphasising the creative and critical elements of visual communication. The fourth investigates the socio-political environment of post-colonial states and ways in which a local or regional identity can be formulated or maintained by a re-reading of the historical and contemporary dialogue of the mother country in relation to the cultural traits of the colonised.

Apart from encouraging art educators to engage more actively with the political machinery that determines their subject area, this section also inspires a more critical approach to the individuals' teaching culture in regards to the conditions of cultural practice in other countries. It also reminds us that our culture is one of the dominating dialogues and if a truly global perspective is to be transferred to learners we have to overcome our own viewpoint and become more empathically responsive to regional/local cultures and socio-political environments in which the respective global arts are produced.

Part Two: Critical Pedagogy presents five papers that discuss the theory and practice located in critical pedagogy. Tourinha and Martins, Brazil, argue for a "*nomadic consciousness*" based on qualitative approaches to learning and the empowerment of educational practice in the public domain. Their critical pedagogy relies on a continuous process that is influenced by the lived experience of the participators and they advocate that educational curricula must engage with the social, political and cultural issues that form and can transform them.

The following Brazilian paper *Cultural Literacy* outlines the pedagogy applied to an interdisciplinary arts project which created an image-text in the form of a school mural.

From providing a clear guideline as to how to formulate and facilitate a large scale project through to inspirational tools for generating smaller projects, such as curriculum enrichment or creative thinking, these approaches provide a varied range of thought processes and teaching and learning strategies that can be adapted and applied to many areas of art and design education in Britain. This is then further supported by a paper from the U.S, which examines multiculturalism and education for democracy through deriving ways to encourage young people to view visual images in “*thoughtful ways*”. Journalistic images of civic leaders and the hurricane Katrina aftermath are critiqued as case studies of this process.

Rachel Mason then presents her point of view about the projects encouraged as part of the citizenship and art curriculum in British compulsory education. She finds that the projects are too generic and based too heavily on ethnicity and culture without a study of contemporary works of art to set a context by. Five female artists from diverse cultural backgrounds are explored as an example of how this could improve childrens’ understanding of the way multiple global identities are being formulated. Another project that proposed a new and interesting way to develop individual awareness about cultural identities is found in Nelson Hoedekie’s paper; ‘Face (in) the Mirror’. It entails the production of a series of portraits using imagination, a shadow, a mirror, a glass panel and a photograph which are then explored in terms of reconstructing and reading the participants’ perspectives of themselves. Hoedekie argues that this self-awareness raising encourages positive thought processes about how the participants then ‘view’ others.

Part 3 focuses on projects that demonstrate how new technologies are widening the scope of learning tools and materials in art education. The first explores the creation of a virtual learning environment for teacher education courses in Spain, along with a visual arts network for secondary schools. Proposed as blended-learning sites they use arts based activities to incorporate computers into learning. However it advocates a much wider utilisation of e-art sources across all curricula, highlighting how visual learning can increase learner motivation and, of course, accessibility. The next project concerns itself with the development of a learning environment for drama. This firstly investigates the extent to which media literacy can be supported by hypermedia storytelling and secondly examines putting this into practice with secondary school children. Reimann (Germany) found the project to be fruitful for embedding the computer in aesthetic processes and that the success of the flexible, interdisciplinary and co-operative nature of the hypermedia format indicated that traditional divisions between the arts and computer science need to be redressed.

Paper 3 again researches media technology-based workshops but this time for Japanese children with mental and physical disabilities. A detailed description of the activities employed accompanied by a brief reflection on their outcomes makes this a very workable paper with lots of inspiring ideas in it.

Creating, Developing and Maintaining a Digital Magazine: Revista Digital is what it says on the tin! This paper would be of interest to anyone wishing to develop their own online magazine as it analyses the project’s developments in a very pragmatic manner.

Part 4: Community and Environment holds a collection of examples of research projects carried out by environmental management and community development and sustainability groups who found art to be an ideal form of communicating their wider concerns. Most of the projects were multidisciplinary and made extensive use of the web to translate their activities, messages and findings to the wider population. Coming from Campinas in Brazil, California in U.S.A, Queensland and Tasmania in Australia and Finland the scope of the mediums used is indicative of the cornucopia

of ideas, innovations and artistic processes that are explored, explained and evaluated in this section.

The final section; *Art Education for Peace*, holds interesting interpretations of drawings by children from war torn areas, some are based on clear theoretical standpoints, but others are merely personal accounts of art analysis. Although the subjects themselves are not from higher education level there are many lessons to be learnt by the investigations. For instance Child Counsellors, Art Therapists and their Students would find this section both confirmatory and illuminating. Trainee and experienced Teachers and higher education Researchers working within a wide variety of topics and settings could also benefit from understanding how drawings reflect young peoples' perspectives of their experiences and how the symbolism caught in a simple sketch can tell us so much about a person's state of mind. Many of the papers argue that a fuller understanding of the value and aesthetic processes involved in art making are far wider ranging than is currently being acknowledged.

Conclusion

Although it is inspiring to see so many innovative projects and approaches being implemented and evolved all over the world this collection results in the general sense that art education is still considered the poor relation of its academic siblings which, for me, thwarted the good intentions of its contributors' efforts. The highly politicised approach of many of the papers dampened my exhilaration of the discovery of such an excellent source of detailed project management and action research. However, I realise that this may well suit many a reader and that the thought of art educators battling against the odds to instil their principles in others may be the entire point for them.

Yet it is a highly interesting book that has taken the trouble to not just provide outlines of the role of art educators around the world and their response to their particular environments but has actively collected a multicultural account of contemporary art education. There are many inspirational tools, ideas, projects, mediums and thought processes that could easily be adapted to use in the UK, or as an attempt to be truly more multicultural within the art curriculum. This will be a vital read for art educators and art teacher trainees carrying out their own action research to fully understand how social and political environments can have a far reaching variety of effects on how art is used, read and produced.

So, in all, a mixed bag of work that includes papers that are both theoretically insubstantial and highly academic and, apart from the appalling amount of typing errors, *International Dialogues* is a good quality book that will be a valuable asset to university libraries.