Music Education in a New Key: The Dissonance of Competence, Connectedness, Culture and Curriculum

Introduction

The arts are powerful agents for the development of knowledge and understanding, for the nurturing of sensitivity and imagination, and as a rubric for socio-cultural representations of meaning and ceremony. However, in globalised educational settings the language of culture is increasingly taking second place to the language of commerce. While the tension between the politics of economy and the politics of identity has the power to marginalise the arts in education (Thwaites, 1998), it is still possible to find essential spaces within which music persists as a critical force in a balanced learning environment.

Elliot Eisner in his response to The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum draft document stated that “Because New Zealand is multicultural you have a golden opportunity to illustrate the impact of culture on the forms humans use in the arts to establish community, to celebrate major events in their lives, and to generally enrich life. Yours is a living laboratory of such possibilities and those possibilities should be exploited.” As part of its task, this paper expresses the concern that the conceptual framework of The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) is likely to result in a squandering of the opportunities Eisner speaks of.

The new key

Philosopher Susanne Langer in her influential book Philosophy in a New Key first published in 1942 (my edition 1953) describes the situation at that time in ways that ring true for the present. In the preface to her book, Langer (1953) says:

the universality of the great key-change in our thinking is shown by the fact that its tonic chord could ring true for a mind essentially preoccupied with logic, scientific language, and empirical fact, although that chord was actually first sounded by thinkers of a very different school. Logic and science had indeed prepared the harmony for it, unwittingly; for the study of mathematical “transformations” and “projections”, the construction of alternative descriptive systems, etc., had raised the issue of symbolic modes and of the variable relationship of form and content. But the people who recognised the importance of expressive forms for all human understanding were those who saw that not only science, but myth, analogy, metaphorical thinking, and art are intellectual activities... (p. i)

Every age seems to have its own preoccupations, its specific problems and needs peculiar to it, whether social, political, or intellectual/artistic. Looking back over history we can see that groupings of ideas, linked by their particular “technique” or ways of organising knowledge, are what influence understanding rather than subject matter. In the present age, if the political
rhetoric is anything to go by, mathematics, literacy and information technologies define education as students are prepared to play their part in the ‘knowledge-economy’.

Again Langer provides some guidance, for she asks why we take the abstractions of mathematicians “not only seriously, but as indispensable, fundamental facts” (1953, p. 14). Claiming that mathematicians are rarely practical people, or good observers of events, she believes “the secret lies in the fact that a mathematician does not profess to say anything about the existence, reality, or efficacy of things at all. [Their] concern is the possibility of symbolizing things, and of symbolizing the relations into which they might enter with each other. [Their] “entities” are not “data”, but concepts” (ibid). In other words, mathematical constructions are only symbols, their meanings are in terms of relationships and not substance, and “are not supposed to be items of reality” (p. 15). So why do politicians and educators place such faith in the power and truth of mathematics and not in the power and truth of other symbolic systems—such as the arts?

The notion of a knowledge-based economy is not new and in a 1999 submission to the New Zealand Government by the Minister for Information Technology’s IT Advisory Group (supported by the international professional services organisation – Ernst & Young), the government was urged to “take the next important step and transform New Zealand from a pastoral economy into a knowledge-driven economy”. The OECD has also urged educators to move from the ‘industrial’ and ‘agricultural ages’ that formed education into the ‘Information Age’ which will need practitioner-based system thinkers. Such a concept sees education as a business product that can be exported for high value return and as an outcome of computer networking and connectivity, information and knowledge intensification and globalisation.

Could it be, as Langer (1953) observes, that even as we are ‘conquering’ nature, there is little we see in nature that is ours? Are we losing our life-symbols, those symbols that ensure an embodied and historical engagement with the world, for our actions no longer seem to have ritual or human value. This is impacting on the free functioning of the human mind, leading one to suspect that education is now more about closing the human mind rather than freeing it to explore possibilities of its world. Is there a decline of symbolic efficiency as evidenced by text messaging, binary codes, the limits of on-line interaction, and music created only on the computer? Even with such a decline, ours is a period of accumulation, a period of abundance with information communication technologies (ICT) that communicate abundant choices. We accumulate wealth, property, goods, carbon credits, qualifications, identities and soon, according to the policy of The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), values and key competencies.

What follows is an overview of music education over the past 100 years, particularly in Britain given that country’s influence on our education. I continue with a brief history of music education in New Zealand. I then follow with a discussion of The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (2000) and The New Zealand Curriculum (2007) before asking the questions “What constitutes music education?” and “What should music education do?”

**An overview of music education in the twentieth century**

In describing music in education it is appropriate to first consider modern democratic education through the theories and influence of Dewey. Writing in *Art as Experience* in 1934,
Dewey cautions against the arts removing themselves from their contextual source and becoming mere objects to be admired from a distance. He states:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which aesthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement. (1934/1997, p. 210)

In including Dewey I wish to acknowledge the potential impact his philosophy could have on the arts in education and on democracy and freedom of the individual. Dewey adopts a neo-Aristotelian approach to practical knowledge, acknowledging that *phronesis* is the intelligent use of practical reason and its concern is with worldly action or *praxis*. For Dewey, all reason is practical reason and, as with Aristotle, intentionality distinguishes intelligent action from mere behaviour. Thinking makes explicit the intelligent element in our experience and makes it possible to act with an end in view, while interpretation exposes the possibilities for some consequence. Deliberation he sees as a part of practical reason—a sort of rehearsal in the imagination—which clears the way towards a naturalistic freedom constrained only by context. Deliberation requires experimentation through which reason will reveal a desired value that we then assert into action.

Wisdom and desire are very much a part of Dewey’s philosophy, and the realisation of individuality forms part of this thought. Dewey sees the authentic self as being one who is open to possibilities, their existence contingent on socio-historical constructions, but with potential and possibilities of their own. We are embedded in our own environment which we must manipulate, adapt and control in order to become authentic-in-the-world. Delineating between selfish creation and self-creation, Dewey claims that “Imagination is the chief instrument of the good...The ideal factors in every moral outlook and human loyalty are imaginative” (as cited in Garrison, 1998, p. 131).

Dewey’s influence on music education is not aimed at the gifted, or necessarily the musicians of the future, but is framed in simple democratic terms through which all children’s musical abilities can be developed so they can make cultural use of their leisure time. Giving music a social or socialising function subsequently influenced the Progressive Education Movement and encouraged music and art education as experience. Ordinary experience can produce music in ways that large amounts of ecstatic eulogy about finished ‘masterworks’ cannot. We can conceive of music as a form of social and cultural criticism through the qualities found in common experience, and of ordinary people as having the potential to make musical and artistic contributions to their world.

Abbs (2003) suggests that between 1920 and 1980 the arts in Britain were predominantly taught under the shaping powers of progressivism and modernism, a fusion influenced by Herbert Read in his book *Education Through Art* (1943) as well as through the theories of Freud and Jung. A 1931 report on music education in Britain (Board of Education, 1931) suggested that “the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored” (as cited in Metcalf, 1987, p. 100). A short time later, the Spens Report (1938) affirmed that ‘subjects’ are not bodies of knowledge to be stored, but modes of activity to be experienced (as cited in Metcalf, 1987, p.100).
Since 1980 subjects have been taught within a new paradigm based on different premises, practices and expectations that have largely ignored vital principles of creative pedagogy and holistic vision—often instituted in literal and mechanical ways (Abbs, 2003, pp 45-46). Paradigm refers to the pattern of interlocking categories and assumptions that make sense of the world, or portions of it, in particular ways. A paradigm is not a set of rules; it is more binding and more complete than that. When a paradigm shift occurs, as it did for the arts in Britain in the 1980s, the old languages and systems of communication are used but with new denotations and connotations. The changes in the 1980s, for example, saw the use of the term *aesthetic* move from meaning the discernment of taste and the ‘beautiful’—a sensuous mode of cognition and meaning making—to ways of questioning assumptions about the arts and testing their veracity.

Emerging in the 1920s and lasting until the 1970s the old arts paradigm promoted the teacher as being responsible for releasing a child’s creativity and self-expression and was often referred to as ‘child art’. Education ‘through’ the arts was not an apprenticeship into the traditions of the arts but rather what might be cynically called “a kind of encounter group” (Abbs, 2003, p. 50). Many of the arts examples children were likely to come into contact with tended to reflect the adult world of long books, dense language (especially in poetry), the ‘master–works’ of western art music and the like, and the mature imagination was perceived as unhelpful to the child’s journey of self discovery. Read (1943) had proposed that an appreciation of painting (a response to other people’s modes of expression) should not be taught until adolescence, and “the child’s reactions to the sensuous qualities of experience—to colours, surfaces, shapes and rhythms—should be preserved” (p. 200). The instrumental effects of the arts in education were well represented by Hadow in 1927 (Hadow report, 1927), who suggested that the study of the fine arts could perhaps counter the effects of an unfavourable environment and that music teaching often had a remarkable effect on “dull” (viz. backward) girls (as cited in Metcalfe, 1987, p. 102). In this paradigm, however, the aesthetic field was seen as potentially harmful to a child’s natural development, with culture polluting nature.

From the start of the post-war period, for music, the progressive movement remained untapped until the 1970’s. Despite reports that suggested change, music education stagnated and consisted mainly of singing, music theory and perhaps a recorder or pipe band, with music ‘appreciation’ often transmitted through broadcast lessons. Through the 1960s there was a concern that music, so enthusiastically engaged with out of school, should be regarded in the 1968 School Council Report as top of the list of most boring subjects by 15 year-old school leavers in Britain (Metcalfe, 1987, p. 104). Not all classrooms were boring; some teachers included the continental philosophies of Orff (Germany) and Kodály (Hungary), embracing systematic approaches to school music that involved music making. Both continental systems hoped to stimulate the child’s creative imagination—Kodály through singing and Orff predominantly through tuned percussion instruments. British homegrown concepts explored self-expression and contemporary experiments such as Self’s *New Sounds in Class* (1967) and Dennis’s *Experimental Music in Schools* (1970)—both of which found favour with a young generation of teachers in New Zealand secondary schools.

In 1970 Paynter and Aston produced an influential book that sought to move music teaching away from prescriptive traditions towards a more child-centred creative approach, with the freedom to explore chosen materials. That book was *Sound and Silence*. Witkin’s *The Intelligence of Feeling* (1974) also had significant impact on music education in that it argued
that the arts in education offer us not so much a product but rather a process—a vital instrument in the education of feelings. Witkin was particularly scathing of music education, its content and methodology. Witkin claimed that “despite its long and in places impressive tradition, it [music] repeatedly fails to obtain a general hold on the musical development of the majority of pupils and is considered by many pupils to be irrelevant to anything that really concerns them” (p. 118). In 1977 Small’s book *Music, Society and Education* applied many of Herbert Read’s principles and attacked so-called masterpieces and the domination of the Western tradition. Small also promoted the virtues of African and Eastern music as well as contemporary styles within popular culture.

In the United States, Reimer asserted that music education must be aesthetic education in his significant publication *A Philosophy of Music Education* (1970). Reimer’s argument was based on the premise that the nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the art of music itself. A basis for music education would begin by affirming the nature of music as music while recognising the relation of music to life. He claimed that the major function of music, as of all art, was making “objective, and therefore conceivable, the subjective realm of human responsiveness” (p. 39). Promoting the belief that education is concerned largely with the development of people’s ability to share meanings, and that the arts are a means by which we explore and understand subjective reality through engaging with feelings in the creation and experience of an art work, Reimer stresses that “the deepest value of music education is the same as the deepest value of all aesthetic education: the enrichment of the quality of people’s lives through enriching their insights into the nature of human feeling” (ibid). Reimer suggests that this might be attained through aesthetic perception in contexts which encourage creative reactions to that which is being perceived. Throughout his long career, Reimer has consistently stressed that listening to music is never (and should never be) passive or boring, rather it is a highly cognitive action.

The elements for the new paradigm were put in place when Swanwick published *A Basis for Music Education* in 1979 which denied self-expression as the validating principle of music education and promoted instead a creative process within a larger matrix of composition, music history, audition, skill acquisition and performance. Building on the three activities posited by Reimer—composition, performance and listening—Swanwick (1988) later defined listening with intent as ‘audition’ (p. 8). For Swanwick, meaning means value, and he identifies two levels of meaning in music: recognition, or ‘meaning to’, and relationships, ‘meaning for’. Teachers can only provide the opportunities; they cannot force students to understand. However, if teachers give aesthetic significance to composing, performing and audition, some educational value is inevitable.

The new paradigm for the arts of the 1980s was about processes but no performance, and culture and self were seen as working in a reciprocal relationship. But more conservative elements in arts education fought against the ‘creative’, and gained much support, so that eventually the creative music lesson was seen to be of less value than the more traditional one in which traditional instruments and tonal harmony were seen as relevant. What eventually became categorised as ‘academic music’ was lined up against ‘practical music’.

The new paradigm was more sympathetic to history and culture and the symbolic needs of humanity, but while aesthetics were central, the shift placed new values on works of art, giving increased status to the place of tradition, and identifying the arts as a generic community. The move from self-expression and psychological notions to the pursuit of
meaning and arts as embodiment with a more philosophical turn was significant. The arts were now recognised as important symbolic modes that could be expressed and structured in ways no less significant than the spoken or written word. Within this paradigm, the ‘great works’ from the canon were taught as part of a dynamic tradition that was part of an aesthetic continuum. Culture was now valued, fixed musical notation informed creative practice, dance suddenly had a grammar and all just in time for the realisation of a National Curriculum in Britain. Where the old paradigm had encouraged spontaneity, the new one recognised technique, control and eventual mastery. The arts were now valued not for their commitment to self-expression, but for their intrinsic value.

The Gulbenkian Report, released in Britain in 1982, stressed powerful arguments for the arts in education, but for most pupils, parents and employers this is not enough—a piece of paper as a written qualification is the main requirement. Metcalfe (1987) points out that “as long as the examination system exists in our society as the accepted way of validating education experience it cannot be ignored or sidestepped by those who wish to promote their ‘subject’” (pp. 112-113).

In 1995 Canadian David Elliott proposed a new philosophy for music education in his book *Music Matters* in which he argued that music is one of the most vital, dynamic and practical pursuits in the human repertoire and deserving of a central place in general education. In his book Elliott proposes a ‘praxial’ philosophy of music education implicit in which is the requirement that all music students should be engaged in rich and challenging music-making in classroom situations that are deliberately organised as close parallels to true musical practices. Praxial implies a merging of theory with practice. Colleagues Thomas Regelski and Wayne Bowman also have strong sympathies with Elliott’s ideas. Elliott, along with American Elliott Eisner and Briton David Best, was an external critiquer for *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum Draft*(1999).

British researcher Lucy Green is also making her mark and is a driving force behind ‘musical futures’, a group based in Britain under the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (www.musicalfutures.org.uk). Part of Green’s research (2006) looks at how students can learn with little or no input from teachers—for example, working out how to play music presented to them on a recording by the teacher through collaborative listening and problem-solving. Green thus demonstrates how learning can occur in both formal and informal contexts.

National curricula need an assurance that goals are being met and that students are regularly being assessed; so record keeping becomes a priority over practical curriculum experience. The ‘knowledge’ of an arts curriculum is a given, and in the case of the United Kingdom with its Key Stages, almost unassailable. This means that the novice artist spends most of their artistic development preparing for assessments, rather than growing as a dancer, actor, musician, or visual artist. As teacher education courses offer less and less curriculum time, emergent teachers have fewer models to refer to outside the curriculum document in order to develop their knowledge and skills. This is an ongoing problem in New Zealand.

**A brief overview of music education in New Zealand**

When MĀori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, were converted to the Christian faith in the early nineteenth century the most powerful agent, apart from language, was music.
Hymn singing was engaged in with vigour, yet this was not without injections of the ways of singing that Māori were familiar with. Later in the century, the Native Schools denied Māori the access to ‘knowledge-power’, for rather than extending existing knowledge the Pākehā (European New Zealanders) sought to replace Māori knowledge. In this context, Music, using songs popular in England, functioned as a passive means of domination. These songs included There is a Happy Land Far, Far Away; Ring the Bell, Watchman; and, Shall We Gather at the River, as perennial favourites in the classroom. For all students in colonial schools, music was restricted to the singing of songs that reinforced ties with ‘Mother England’ (Thwaites, 1999).

Nelson College was the first secondary school to offer music in 1856, and by 1900 there were music courses in 11 out of the 25 secondary schools, ranging from tonic solfa to an academic course and orchestral work at Napier Girls’ High School. Nevertheless, ties to England remained and the first supervisor of school music, Mr Douglas Tayler, came out from England in 1926. Many other prominent music educators of the time were also ‘brought out’ from England to join him. Tayler’s important legacy was the national songbook that was popular through to the 1960s, and schools put their own covers on these to give a sense of local ownership (Thwaites, 1999).

In 1942 The Thomas Report reflected the progressive education movements overseas and was also influenced by the ideas of Dewey. The report recommended a generous and well-balanced education in which music was to be a part of a compulsory common core. The report stated that “Music and art should be taught for their value in awakening and developing aesthetic sensibilities” (Department of Education, 1959). Reflecting the aims and values of the report, School Certificate Music was instituted in 1945, although School Certificate had been introduced in 1934 for many other subjects (in Thwaites, 1998).

The Currie Commission Report of 1962 reflected an economic rationality and threatened to disrupt music education for it stressed an emphasis on the ‘intellectual core of the three Rs’. In 1968 the Tait Report (1970), commissioned by the Hamilton branch of the Society for Music Education, challenged music teachers to look at their own pedagogical practices and suggested that most music education existed more by chance than by design. It also asked the question most music teachers took for granted: “Why do we teach music?” Later, in the early 1980s, music faced further challenges from the then Minister of Education (Merv Wellington) with a familiar catch-cry of “back to basics”, and a feeling that music and art had no place in schools subsequently prevailed.

1983 saw the formation of the New Zealand Society for Music Education, giving music education a national representative body. In 1989 the incumbent Labour Government supported the publication of Syllabus for Schools – Music Education – Early Childhood to Form Seven (which is still regarded by many as a seminal document for music education in New Zealand). Its dominating mantra was: “create, re-create and appreciate”. The ‘syllabus’ was supported through 1993-1994 by handbooks for music education from early childhood to secondary music, and these were distributed to all schools.

In 1993 a new School Certificate prescription was introduced, one which placed more value on performance and composition (60%) than the study of music works (appreciation), theory and aural training. Several school principals complained about the inclusion of the practical component, for music “used to be a good academic subject”. It is interesting to recall that this
statement was also made in 1972 when aural training was added and was then accused of being too practical for a music prescription. In 1995, music unit standards began to be developed and to date there are over 60 unit standards across all levels, from Level 1 to Level 8 of the Qualifications Framework and these include unit standards in music technology (Thwaites, 1998).

In 2000 The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum emerged, giving music the equal status it needed in schooling. The year 2002 saw the introduction of the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) which replaced previous examination prescriptions. It is standards-based and incorporates both unit and achievement standards up to Level 4 of the Qualifications Framework. Ironically the Board of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) chose not to include the domain of Practical Music (performance and composition) in the list of ‘approved subjects’ for entrance to university, despite its inclusion for the previous eight years. This was frustrating for secondary music teachers as it disrupted the so-called ‘seamless education system’. However, Practical Art was included in the Approved List in five of its modes of representation, including painting and photography. Changing the strand name from Practical Music to Making Music along with some vigorous lobbying has resulted in performance and composition once again being accepted on the ‘approved subjects’ list from 2007. Meanwhile, in 2004, The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (2000), which also included composition and performance, became compulsory for all schools from Years 1-13.

In 2007 a new curriculum document, The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), was produced by the Ministry of Education and sent to schools for compulsory use from 2010. This new document removes the status of most Essential Learning Areas in the curriculum, and teaching and learning must now be centred on Key Competencies and Values. The “Essential” is removed, leaving bodies of knowledge as simply “Learning Areas” and the status of Achievement Objectives is reduced. The document states that the learning area statements, “rather than the achievement objectives, should be the starting point for developing programmes of learning suited to students’ needs and interests” (2007, p. 38). This could mean that The Arts learning area may be given reduced teaching time, a return to the pre 2004 period where music tended to be offered on a Friday afternoon when the students are “brain dead”—too tired to engage with ‘real’ learning.

The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum

During 1998, a project development team prepared the first draft of The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 1999). After broad consultation, the document was revised into its final form at the beginning of 2000 and became compulsory in schools in 2004. Despite the original Ministry of Education directive to combine dance and drama, the project team quickly made the decision to present a document of four separate disciplines: Dance, Drama, Music, and the Visual Arts. This decision was made with the conviction that students should have access to whichever form of artistic expression best suits their needs and modes of being. In Music, the decision was also made not to leave technology to the Essential Learning Area known as “Technology” and to reclaim it simply because of its growing significance in music education.

Soon after the writing of the draft document began, the government directed that additional time and focus should be given to literacy and numeracy in schooling even though this
worked against the spirit of a Curriculum Framework consisting of seven essential learning areas of equal value. To meet this challenge the project team looked at notions of literacy and how these might impact on the structure and intent of the document. Clearly any idea of presenting the arts in schooling as being only about feelings and aesthetic ideas of beauty was not an advisable way to proceed in a climate where specific educational canons were being thrown up as the pathway to New Zealand’s economic future. A more balanced blend of the cognitive and affective dimensions was deemed to be the best solution for both schooling and preparation for the lifeworld of the twenty-first century.

During the late twentieth century, the modern mass media and the technologically complex means of global communication circulated “meanings between different cultures on a scale and with a speed hitherto unknown in history” (Hall, 1997, p. 3). This was of high significance to the arts and, to better prepare New Zealand youth for communicating and critically interpreting through a range of media, including the arts, the project team opted to embrace the concept of multiple literacies. Such a concept seeks to broaden the understanding of literacy in teaching and learning and to acknowledge a multiplicity of discourses within the school curriculum. Believing literacy to imply modes of meaning other than the purely linguistic, and drawing on the writings of the New London Group (1996), visual, aural, gestural, spatial forms of literacy were considered. Kress suggests that literacy begins in the situated self of the learner rather than in the generic individual and reflects cultural resources, artistic resources and multi-layered identities (in Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). For The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum, literacies in the arts are developed as students learn in, through and about different arts forms within the arts disciplines and use its languages to communicate, develop and interpret meaning (Thwaites, 2006b).

In considering the arts as languages, the project team paid tribute to a long history of such a perception. Many contemporary musicians, for example, refer to the language and vocabularies of their particular musical form, and many Latin musicians stress that learning to play Latin music is not just memorising a ‘bunch of patterns’, but is like learning a language. The Blues has specific vocabularies within its dialectic of major/minor harmony, its chromatic alterations and bent notes, as well as a unique form and cultural heritage. A specific music vocabulary needs to fit the genre and it also needs to take account of syntax. For example, not all orchestral musicians can play convincing jazz or rock, and vice versa.

Moving towards a consideration of what it means to be literate, the draft document was then structured into four equal strands to be addressed by all four disciplines. These strands were not seen as mutually exclusive, but rather to combine in a more holistic fashion to avoid simplistic and reductive categorisations. It was also clear that the strands should reflect an underpinning of arts literacies and one of the subsequent aims of final document was “to enable students to develop literacies in dance, drama, music, and the visual arts” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 12). Reflecting a conceptual framework of literacy in the draft document, the strands were labelled: Exploring the Languages and Vocabularies of the Arts; Developing Ideas in the Arts; Communicating and Interpreting Meaning in the Arts; Investigating the Arts in Context. The project team saw this as a natural process in the arts—to explore, develop, communicate, interpret and investigate.

The consultation process of 1999 challenged the notion of languages and vocabularies in the arts, despite its wide use in the professional world. The Ministry of Education also expressed concerns that exploring and investigating could not be effectively assessed. Both issues were
contested by the project team, and the strands were reluctantly revised. In their published format they read: Developing Practical Knowledge in the Arts; Developing Ideas in the Arts; Communicating and Interpreting in the Arts; and Understanding the Arts in Context.

The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2000) states that: “Literacies in the arts involves the ability to communicate and interpret meaning in the arts disciplines” (p. 10). It further suggests that we develop these literacies in dance, drama, music, and the visual arts, “as we acquire skills knowledge, attitudes and understanding in the disciplines and use their particular visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic signs and symbols to convey and receive meaning” (ibid). Claiming that within this particular curriculum document “developing literacies has been adopted as a central and unifying idea” (ibid) and that:

Students develop literacy in each discipline as they:

- explore and use its elements, conventions, processes, techniques, and technologies;
- draw on a variety of sources of motivation to develop ideas and make art works;
- present and respond to art works, developing skills in conveying and interpreting meaning;
- investigate the discipline and art works in relation to their social and cultural contexts. (p. 10)

Central to the development of literacies in the arts is the notion of exploring the evolving traditions, conventions and practices of the arts in New Zealand and of the arts in the international context. This also includes engaging with the arts of Māori, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand, as well as with new technologies.

The New Zealand Curriculum (2007)

The idea of giving curriculum power to schools, as suggested in The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), may seem to be empowering for local communities, but is in fact leaving schools with little choice at all. The document already makes clear that, while the community should be brought in to provide support, the National Education Guidelines (NEGs) must underpin whatever curriculum strategy a school sets for itself. This could mean that knowledge transmission is no longer the teacher’s professional domain and school autonomy could become a fiction; schools will continue to be monitored and funded according to their rates of ‘success’ as evaluated by the Educational Review Office (ERO). The possible result is technicist ways of teaching, transmitting knowledge forms that are either stated or implied in official documents such as the curriculum in support of training generic behaviours to feed the ‘knowledge-economy’. Teacher education will follow and train only from a functionalist point of view, with compulsory information technology giving the illusion of progress and innovation.

In debating whether a universal form of education is possible, one that feeds the so-called ‘knowledge economy’, we need to first consider what rational structure educational institutions would have to conform to in order to actualise the fundamental form. Indeed, we must question whether phenomena that embody a rational structure are preferable to those
that do not. The development of a knowledge-economy, as an aspect of the commerce-economy, positions it to contribute to human enculturation, a collective process whereby we ‘liberate’ ourselves from our base and naturally given needs and desires into more meaningful values that will service the needs and desires of the global state.

There are, of course, educators who will argue that this new curriculum document will free up education to respond to the needs of its communities while simultaneously servicing the ‘knowledge-economy’, but I have some reservations. Firstly comes the statement that the new curriculum “takes as its starting point a vision of our young people as lifelong learners who are confident and creative, connected, and actively involved” (The New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, Ministry of Education, p. 4). As artists this seems a positive move, for in the performance arts we stand for creativity and connections, but the vision in this document seems to point towards the generators of ‘creative ideas’ by people trained to be connected, or wired, to the web in the service of the knowledge economy. It would appear that a political economy that subscribes to a fantasy of the free market is the key philosophical underpinning of this curriculum document.

The second point to note is that the Essential Learning Areas of the 1992 Curriculum Framework have now become merely Learning Areas, for the new document sees nothing much essential about most forms of knowledge other than mathematics (understood as numeracy), functional language (understood as “literacy”) and the ability to engage with new technologies (understood as “connected”). This might appear as perfectly logical in a dynamic world that is wired, in a nation that subscribes to globalisation (both of peoples and knowledge), and where difference is seemingly valued.

Here my third and last point intends to show how these free and “actively involved” individuals are to behave, for the document stresses the overall curriculum control maxims of Values and Key Competencies. Educators may be responding to local needs, but the document stresses that there are ways that this should be done.

The new curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2007) stresses the values desirable in contemporary New Zealand. These are: excellence; innovation, enquiry, and curiosity; diversity; equity; community and participation; ecological sustainability; and integrity (ibid, p. 10). These social practices cannot occur without committed social practitioners, such as teachers and politicians, who behave in accordance with these social practices and who understand themselves as agents behaving and engaging in accordance with these practices. To be successful, these practices must be seen to have the potential to aid individual freedom and to provide individual benefits from its structures as well as contributing to the common good. If the only purpose is to make the individual a marketable commodity, then knowledge becomes a mere technical term and individuals are reduced to a disposable nothingness—faceless and with a commodified shelf life.

In the new document, Music has become Music-Sound Arts, reflecting the title of Music Education New Zealand/Aotearoa (MENZA) publication, the society that is the reformed New Zealand Society for Music Education (NZSME). The localising of the society’s name meant a break from immediate associations with the International Society for Music Education, although a subscription does entitle one to a membership of both organisations. The new body also introduced a commission on any teacher support courses that local branches organised, even though these were entirely a local initiative. This saw an immediate
reduction of teacher support courses offered as there was no incentive for the branch members to organise these. The changeover also resulted in a serious drop in membership in some key centres, for example Auckland, which had over 800 Society for Music Education members in the mid 1990s and fewer than 20 members subscribed to MENZA in 2006. The loss of a distinctive support group, because of the name and structural changes, was significant for music education and, one might suggest, somewhat untimely given the drive to effectively implement *The Arts in the New Zealand* (2000). It is fair to say that membership is now growing, although the nationally membership is still lower than the Auckland figure for the mid 1990’s.

Executive members of MENZA have publicly claimed that the term “Sound Arts” will purge music education of superfluous terms such as “Music” which was seen to stand for western art music. While Sound Arts was also intended to open the doors to music technologies (which the 2000 curriculum document had already done) as well as indigenous and popular music forms, the term is found lacking on several counts. First and foremost is the reality that in the music industry; musicians still call what they do “music”, no matter what style or period. It is true that we have sound designers and sound engineers, but the actual practice of composing and performing still reflects the term “music”. I acknowledge that some DJs and various ambient musicians, such as Brian Eno, may disagree. Secondly, institutions that have adopted the term Sound Arts for their music programmes have tended to be elitist and strongly based on western art music (for example, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology – RMIT). Third, Sound Art is in fact a term that applies to specific forms of visual art and sound art exhibitions, as art, have been held globally for the past 20 years or more. The dust cover notes to a recent book *Sound Art: Beyond music, between categories* (Licht, 2007) begin as follows:

Over the past century, an art form has emerged that draws from the world of visual art and music. While sound’s increasing importance in the art world is evidenced by recent exhibitions and books devoted to the subject, sound art has yet to be accurately defined…..Sound art’s roots can be found in the experimental work of Italian Futurism, Dada, and later the Fluxus group in the early to mid-twentieth century (dust cover).

Whether pretentious or predictive, the term ‘sound art’ adds little to music education and even less to the music industry as it presently understands itself.

**Key Competencies and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

There is little doubt that globally societies are facing rapid social, environmental and technological change. To deal with this the OECD, representing 30 countries (including New Zealand) who share the principles of the market economy, pluralist democracy, and respect for human rights, has sought to develop a policy for education that will prepare students for a constantly changing future. It initiated a study entitled *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations* (DeSeCo) that set out to find out whether a set of competencies could be identified that would enable students to prepare for a successful and effective life. The Key Competencies in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) are informed by this study.
New Zealand has generally been a willing player in OECD constructs for education, continuing the tradition outlined in *The New Zealand Experiment* by Jane Kelsey (1995) which sees New Zealand as a kind of laboratory for testing ideas out for the OECD before they are presented to the world stage. Iceland is also another willing guinea pig. The Key Competencies are about to become tested in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) and are identified as:

- Thinking
- Using language, symbols, and texts
- Managing self
- Relating to others
- Participating and contributing (p. 12).

In 2006 the OECD published a new document in their ‘Schooling for Tomorrow’ series called *Think Scenarios, Rethink Education* (2006) which proposes new pedagogical strategies for education. The document begins by criticising the short term thinking that straitjackets education and of the need for long term planning in order to meet the challenges of complexity and change. This reflects the increasing number of stakeholders who make demands on education, and also on the desire, by the OECD, to shape, not predict, the future through education. The terms “strategies” and “scenarios” emerge as key aspects of this document that urges educators to move from the “industrial” and “agricultural ages” that formed education and into the “Information Age” which will need practitioner-based system thinkers.

The OECD (2006) believes the function of schooling is no longer just about delivery or supply, it claims that we need to shift our values and “gear” education from its socially oriented perspectives to where it is individualistically oriented in an educational system that is “geared” to its “clients” both as consumers and as knowledge-producers (pp. 12-13).

There is little doubt that for the performance arts the key competencies appear as a gift, for the arts can easily deliver on each and every competency. The problem comes in convincing schools and the Ministry of Education that this is so. When the member countries of the OECD listed learning areas of most relevance to key competencies, the arts were ranked of low relevance and came bottom of the list (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). While a detailed critique of competencies is necessary, that is not the purpose of this paper.

**Dissonance and key change**

This paper has set out to present the educational space available to music education as confused, troubled and diminishing. In problematising music education in this way I hope to stimulate conversations that will guide music education in new directions relevant to the twenty-first century. We live in times of technological advances of such scope that it is easy for our students to engage with illusions of competence. This imaginary is also reflected in the culture of the celebrity, a culture that seems to be the prime motivator for studying music. The World Wide Web not only supports networking cultures, it also provides access to ambiguities of place and space, a constant crossing of borders. Within this ‘connected’ setting, students find it easy to change identities regularly throughout the day, aided by communication technologies that also enable the communication of identities. Identity thus becomes a recurring matter of choice, merely reflecting a given situation.
Individual identity in the contemporary world is usually a fluctuating state of being. In a "normal" day, individuals express varied cultural and sub-cultural beliefs and understandings, and normality becomes a multifaceted identity. Hall (2000) proposes a theorisation of identity as a form of self-representation that is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak. This transforming of identity opens up new trajectories for speaking which in music may be expressed through embodied forms such as gestures of movement, sight and sound (Thwaites et al, 2006a).

Culture is created by human interaction, which in turn shapes how human beings see and hear the world. ‘Culture’ is the filter through which we interpret our daily experiences; and our perceptions of the ‘real’ are a product of negotiated and socially created meaning. Where, for example, Durkheim and Marx saw culture more as a means of control, we now see culture as being in a constant state of transition and the human subject’s role is one of action, encouraging change over stagnation.

New definitions of ‘culture’ have moved beyond expressing only the identity of a community, to “the processes, categories and knowledge through which communities are defined as such: that is, how they are rendered specific and differentiated” (Donald & Rattansi, 1993, p. 4). If the key to understanding culture(s) is to ask how they are different, we can see the way that cultures use signifying systems as having new importance. Williams (1981) sees some practical convergence between the anthropological and sociological senses of culture and the “more specialized if also more common sense of culture as ‘artistic and intellectual activities’” (p. 13). The anthropological and social as a “distinct ‘whole way of life’ within which a distinctive ‘signifying system’ is seen as not only essential but as essentially involved in all forms of social activity” (ibid). The artistic and intellectual sense of culture includes “not only traditional arts and forms of intellectual production but also all the ‘signifying practices’” (ibid). Thus Williams broadens ‘signifying systems’ to include “not only the traditional arts and forms of intellectual production but also all the ‘signifying practices’ – from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising – a complex and necessarily extended field” (ibid) (Thwaites et al, 2006a, p. 2).

Any kind of music collection inevitably embodies hierarchies of value and exclusion, the rule-governed and the free. The tension between cultural totemism—the elevating music to such a level of reverence that its immutability is unquestioned—and the access by all to artistic cultural forms for exploration and innovation, needs some resolution. While all music has symbolic meaning, the need for musicians to challenge existing traditional structures is very strong. This means that, educationally, our students must interact with other cultural forms, otherwise we are left in an environment of collected sonic objects to be revered and left historically static. The West has a history of collecting, from artefacts to territory, and the modernist tendency to value the collectible, from the appropriated (making one’s own) to the tourist icon (commodifying the functional), can set up discontinuities in specific traditions. Cultural forms can be regarded scientifically, or as studies in anthropology, or aesthetically; the latter perhaps perceiving music as something to be admired for its structural and timbral uniqueness and as an inspiration for further expression. There is a need to whether there is any difference between the controls exercised by resurgent indigenous communities over their cultural arts, and the prestigious controls accorded to Western arts practices in schooling. Only when these questions have been addressed can we establish educational settings that embody a balance between traditional music practices and artistic practices in the contemporary world.
Cultures are now blended and transferred across geographical spaces and for some, living, working and educating across a range of countries is becoming the norm. Communities have become both transcultural and transnational. Diversity now matters and difference has come to describe the contexts in which we live, our tastes in the arts, our behaviour and our beliefs. One way of dealing with difference in the world is to acknowledge the notion of *hybridity*—the multiple identities each of us has. In other words, we each have a difference within, a kind of in-between reality. Bhabha (1994) suggests we open up the “cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (p. 5) and move beyond the border of our times. If we view all identities as essentially hybrid, then it is possible to conceive of a ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1990). This ‘third space’ enables new positions to emerge, displacing the traditions of ‘received wisdom’ and the establishment of such an interface provides a borderland for potential innovation and collaboration so that identity becomes less an issue of physical or geographical space. Belonging can thus come to be regarded both through sameness and difference and negotiated rather than categorised.

In research into effective professional development facilitation in the arts, conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Education in 2005 (Thwaites, Ferens, & Lines, 2006), analysis of data showed that teachers in primary schools were confused about what to teach and it transpired that simple solutions were the most empowering. For some generalist primary teachers, the prospect of getting children to sing in tune is too daunting as many doubt their own ability to sing in tune (p. 95). It should be pointed out that *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (2000) document does not require musically untrained teachers to teach students to sing in tune; what the *Communicating and Interpreting* strand requires is “basic performance skills and techniques” at curriculum levels 2 and 3. Clearly, some direction is necessary concerning what should constitute music in education and what musical skills, knowledge and understandings are necessary in the present age.

The research undertaken in 2005 found that prior to the professional development being observed, primary teachers sought access to user friendly resources to help students with creative ideas, music terminology and notation and musical skills. They also sought help in better understanding the curriculum document, broadening the scope of the school specific curriculum, and developing a school-specific arts policy document. Following professional development, primary teachers felt the most valued experiences were discovering they could use simple and ‘found’ materials as instruments—such as upturned plastic buckets; realising how to better sequence lessons in music; and for one teacher in a rural school, a compilation CD that gave their students access to a wide range of music (p. 95). Secondary teachers valued the help they received with the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) assessment strategies, or what teachers refer to as “paperwork” (Thwaites, Ferens & Lines, 2006, pp. 110-111).

As schooling moves into a new era, one dictated by the training of behaviours called ‘key competencies,’ music, more than ever before, needs a coherent and concordant philosophy. Educators need to consider what it means to be literate in music and should strive to reintroduce the senses into education through more embodied forms of teaching and learning. Thus, a student’s understanding of music can be transferred to “a knowledge of imagining, thinking, creating, expressing, analysing, interpreting, communicating and critically reflecting upon the possibilities of the phenomena of sound” in musical ways (Thwaites, 2008, p. 317).
It seems that, as a result of the technological revolution, the physical world is no longer necessary. For music we no longer appear to need the ambience of the physical space that the world provides, binary codes reproduce the illusion for us. We can create all kinds of music on a computer with a minimal knowledge of instruments, theory, form or history. I challenge that supposition. Should we return to the concept of praxis which, for Aristotle, signifies action which is embedded in and is responsive to a specific context? Thwaites (2008a) reminds us that music “exists in time and space—terms such as high and low, fast and slow present the world through our bodies. Sound is founded on bodily existence. Sound has no meaning until it receives a certain conceptual formulation of perceptual life; to become music it requires the power of expression of the lived body” (p. 19).

In The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (2000), I wrote “In music, emotion, intellect, and imagination are articulated through sound” (p. 52). Why not take this utterance as a starter for encouraging our students to express their ideas about themselves and their world? I conclude by referring back to Langer (1953, p. 239), who ends her book with a quote from Alfred North Whitehead: “Error is the price we pay for progress”.

References


Footnotes

1. Personal communication to the project development team, August 3, 1999.

Biography
Trevor taught for 20 years in Auckland secondary schools before his appointment to the Auckland College of Education in 1993. A recent merger with the University of Auckland saw Trevor appointed to Head of School for Visual and Creative Arts 2006-2007 and, following a restructuring, he is presently Deputy-Head of School of Arts, Languages and Literacies at the Faculty of Education. Trevor was Project Director responsible for music in the writing of The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum document (2000) and is heavily involved in national assessment systems; he was also National Moderator for NCEA music until January of this year. His research interests are the politics and philosophy of education, assessment and, of course, music education. His PhD thesis Being-literate-in-the-world: Music, language and discourse in education is grounded in the theories of Heidegger and explores the possibilities of literacy in broader contexts. Trevor also directs a big band and is an active drummer on the Auckland jazz scene.