

# Title: Learning and Teaching Cultural Connectedness from the Secondary Art Room

Or Survival and Success in a Secondary Art Room in the  
Northwest



*'In the thick of it'.*

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College of Education

Victoria University

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[Master by Research Declaration \(by performance/exhibition\)](#)

I, **Charlotte Liley Clemens**, declare that the Master by Research exegesis entitled

**Learning and Teaching Cultural Connectedness from the Secondary Art**

**Room** is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work'.

Signature

Date

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Maureen Ryan for stoically guiding me through the process of developing a creative project that would eventually earn me a Master of Education. She saw the possibilities of the project and encouraged me to persevere. Her cool head and even temperament kept me focused on the job at hand, and her methodical correction helped to develop my writing skills.

Thank you also to friends and colleagues who arduously read through the draft and suggested how to improve it.

Thank you to my family, former students and friends who helped make the exhibitions successful and so much fun, especially Justine Debruyn whose stunning photographs enhance my work.

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# Reflections of Teaching

## Abstract

Through autoethnography, I am seeking to demonstrate how Cultural Connectedness can be developed from and in the secondary art room. My project comprises three parts, two visual exhibitions and an exegesis. The first exhibition consisted of paintings and prints around the theme of Creativity and how I am inspired by my environment at home, in my community and at work. This exhibition was called 'Living Colour'.

The second exhibition consisted of digital photographs taken in the classroom that were manipulated by Photoshop CS6 and collaged prior to the show and in situ to emphasise different meanings. This show was named 'The Real Deal'.

The exegesis fuses all aspects of the creative project and goes into depth about how my ideas were formed and how they were used to effect transformation in the secondary art room. I use the term 'Cultural Connectedness' to mean a feeling of completeness and confidence of themselves in their communities achieved by students through activities created in and through the visual arts.

## Introduction

Through autoethnography, I am seeking to demonstrate how Cultural Connectedness can be nurtured by creating a positive environment in and through the secondary art room.

I chose autoethnography as a methodology because it serves my project better than other methodologies. I particularly enjoyed reading the work of Carolyn Ellis called 'The Ethnographic 1: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography'. I felt there were similarities in the emotive content between my experiences and hers in focusing on the groups in the schools where I worked. In her book, she discusses how she developed from ethnography to autoethnography, and explains that it was common practice to be dispassionate or objective about research, and writes that she 'got emotionally involved' with

participants and 'interactions were intricate grappings with the day-to-day details and life crises. I learned as much from what I felt as from what I observed' (Ellis, p.71).

I very much like the idea that

'autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture' (Ellis, p.37).

as that is what I hope to be able to do.

In 1969, Carol Hanisch, a radical women's liberation activist, wrote a paper called *The Personal is Political* about how women collaboratively drew conclusions from experience and feelings, that then defined political issues. In the revised Introduction (2006) she stated that women were originally criticised for gathering together in consciousness-raising groups to discuss their own oppression. She writes that their critics 'belittled us no end for bringing 'personal problems' into the public arena' (p.1). Linda Napikoski (2014) wrote 'Hanisch noted that 'political' refers to any power relationships, not just those of government or elected officials' (p.1). I immediately related this idea and criticism to my own experiences in the early days of the Equal Opportunity movement, when myself and my colleagues had to first collaborate and listen to personal stories related to us by each other and our students in order to define the issues so that they could be enacted upon.

The historic and political links between the personal and politics led me to investigate autoethnography as a method of research for this study. I related to the different approaches and how it mirrored aspects of my stories and what I intended to write about.

According to Bochner and Ellis (2006) 'an autoethnographer is first and foremost a communicator' (p11).

'The benefits of autoethnography are the ways in which research of such a personal nature might give us insight into problems often overlooked in culture-issues such as nature of identity, race, sexuality, child abuse, eating disorders, life in academia, and the like' (p.1).

Ellis argues in *Autoethnography: An Overview* that

‘the forms of autoethnography differ in how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researchers self, and interaction with others, and the

interview content, as well as on power relationships’ (p.2).

Leon Anderson proposes the term ‘analytical’ to describe a form of autoethnography. (2002). Heewan Chang (2008) prefers the more evocative method and writes

‘autoethnography is affirmed as an ethnographic research method that focuses on cultural analysis and interpretation’. It ‘promotes self-reflection, understandings of multicultural others, qualitative inquiry and narrative writing’ reads the Introduction.

Dr. Rick Sheridan writes in the journal ‘Teaching for Success’

‘Autoethnographers write narratives about what they experience, and are themselves a primary participant and/or subject of the research’ (2013 p.2).

After reading the section on Arts-Based Research by Susan Finlay in the Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research (2008), I also thought that arts-based research could be applied to my work, especially as there exists a social science component, artistic integrity and a certain ‘truthfulness’ about my past experiences. There is a strong political edge to Arts-Based Research that I enjoy, however my work concentrates mostly on positive transformation rather than ‘unveiling oppression’ (p.75) but there is the ‘connect with the everyday lives of real people’ (p.75).

In Chapter 7, (Stephanie Springgay, Rita.L.Irwin, Sylvia Kind, 2008) Finlay explains the intricacies of A/R/Tography and Living Inquiry, but I felt that it did not apply so well to my work, where ‘a work of art becomes meaningful only through interactions and engagements with an audience. Art becomes a socially useful activity’ (p.85).

As part of the creative project, I produced a series of paintings for the first exhibition (the DVD named ‘Living Colour’ is included) about my creative influences and environment where I live. I originally had the idea to show the

positive experiences I had witnessed by being an artist that carried over into my secondary teaching and I chose to call this show 'Living Colour'. The first pieces I created portrayed the emotions expressed by students who were experiencing pivotal moments in the creative process. I then drew on photos I had previously taken at local festivals. One larger work, '*Cultural Connectedness 2012*' addressed the historical significance of creativity and the high incidence of indigenous women who maintain the culture of their people by practising creative activities. I included monoprints in the exhibition because of their painterly quality, and their capacity to relate to the subject matter of the paintings. Sections of old paintings that I had cut up were attached to most paintings, adding the element of surprise and playfulness to each piece. Later in the process some glitter was added to the surfaces to intensify the overall experience. I found I was working hard to express the idea of creativity visually. In some cases I had to 'set up' situations and photograph them so that I had some reference. I also wanted to modernise the images whilst keeping some semblance of realism, so that the meaning did not become obscure. I went some way towards achieving my aim by outlining the dominant images so as to flatten them, and juxtaposing others in different ways. The bright colours and busy surfaces are to convey the positive aspects of creativity. The accompanying photographs of the gallery, food and opening night visitors I felt described the organization of the show and offered a sense of cultural connectedness. By showing the sign outside the building and streetscapes, one becomes aware of the local setting which is an integral part of the work. I deliberately chose an artist run gallery as I would have freedom to express what I wished to, because it is part of my philosophy to 'demystify' the art world and to connect students to that world.

I have produced separate images of each artwork for closer examination.

The second part of the project was an exhibition I created using digital images. They are visual collages and the images included present memories recalled from a secondary school art room as seen through the eyes of a teacher who is also an artist. Together with collected memorabilia, they make up the second exhibition as shown in the DVD named 'The Real Deal'.

The images were created from photographs I took in my classroom. Some were modified by using Photoshop CS6, and I made others into collages and had them photocopied on a large scale. Some images were collaged prior to hanging, some were collaged in situ and some were reprinted after being photographed. The effect of the bulk of images was not fully known until they had been fixed to the walls, although I had a strong image of the space in my mind's eye and worked towards integrating the work with the space. I purposely left the hanging until I was on site even though I had previously prepared which images went together. It was much easier to see how it all worked together once on site in the gallery. Adjacent images were deliberate attempts to emphasise an idea. In some cases, I used collage to conceal identities. Even though relationships are of paramount importance in the classroom between teachers and students, I did not want to focus on the students here. Instead, I included images of eyes, hands at work, locks of hair falling over work or the backs of students in order to show their presence. Repetition is used to show the incessant nature of the work of teaching and the raw and intense colours express the way I sometimes felt. Blurring is used to show speed and activity and the collages have been cut into simple, geometric shapes to express the ordered nature of life in the classroom. I wanted the overall effect to be one of energy, intensity and lively creativity. This is the way I saw the productive secondary art room. I wanted to show the students concentrating on their work, producing, and their connectedness to their inner and outer selves and to each other, their work and the thinking and learning that is so important in building confidence and ability. I added enlarged copies of some of the pages of this written document to the photos on show, as well as images from my first exhibition to link the components of the project. I deliberately emphasised the positive aspects of teaching in the secondary art room because there is much to celebrate.

This written study accompanies and completes the project.

The written narrative and the images included the stresses and frustrations, and the joys and triumphs of working in a secondary school art room. These images are collages made up from collected memorabilia and photographs from my secondary school art teaching years. They portray exhibitions of student work;

students engaged in their work; students on excursions; students in festivals; murals and art works completed by the students and materials, tools and equipment which make up the essence of an art room. In every case faces and identities of students have been concealed for the sake of privacy. The stylistic influence draws from artists such as the American Abstract Expressionist Robert Rauschenburg, the British artist, David Hockney, and the Australian printmaker Anne Newmarch. The Abstract Expressionist movement in the United States resonated with Australian artists because it expressed the ideas of the time, and Australia shared some of those ideas. Mass culture, consumerism, the media, feminism and the protest movement were all part of the subject matter. Some of these artists used realistic images in their work, which I had perpetuated as a vehicle of expression since working with John Brack in the sixties. However, I did experiment with abstraction to a certain degree. Indeed, 'Hockney tried his hand at abstraction, but found it too barren' (Lucie-Smith 1985). His continual fascination with emerging technologies informed my own practice and I referred to his creating work with colour photocopiers for my second exhibition. Weschler describes Hockney's 'prodigious verve' and 'persistent youthfulness to technical innovation, the eager willingness to delve into any and all manner of new gadgetry-fax machines, color photocopiers, car stereo CD systems, LED stage lighting grids, iPhones, iPads, HD videocameras-often long before anyone else even sees their artistic potential' (Weschler, 2013 p.1). I saw the potential of these experiments for future use in the classroom and for my own work.

Anne Newmarch's work was attractive to me because we belonged to the same politically aligned art movement of the seventies, that addressed social issues and community involvement. I enjoyed her use of layered realist images, particularly photographs, combined with text, as well as her use of printmaking as a medium. The ability to produce multiple copies superseded the 'preciousness' of the unique object that is a canvas painting. She also addressed subject matter that spoke of the feminist issues of the time. Art historian, Catriona Moore insightfully recalls that

'Fieldwork on female experience jogged happily alongside witty spoofs on mainstream art (often again involving nappies and other accoutrements

of women's domestic labour, as fitting interventions within Pop's suburban iconography and the mind-numbing directives and ritualized routines of Conceptual Art, as in work by Jude Adams and Helen Grace)' (2013).

My photographic images are presented together to provoke an emotional response to the social justice issues involved. The stories reflect the emotions and relationships within the secondary school art room and the obstacles and successes achieved through perseverance and hard work.

'Visual Images in Research' by Sandra Weber in Knowles and Cole (2008) sparked my interest, especially as it breaks with the past tradition of written research. She points out that the 'quality of the artistic elements' and the 'attention to aesthetics' are important and that 'aesthetics of form are integrally tied to communication' (p.66).

In my second exhibition, which focussed on my life as a teacher, I used collage as an artistic technique to display the photographs I have prepared because it helped express the rich, active life of the secondary school art teacher. The section on 'Collage as Inquiry' by Butler Kisber in Knowles and Cole (2008) offers new insights into the technique. They explain that different juxtapositions and relationships between images create different meanings and give a 'sense of something rather than a literal expression of an idea' (p.269).

I chose to use photographs because I wanted to take the opportunity to create a photo installation which was comparatively new to me. I felt I could create a better expressive response through their use, and in comparison with the first exhibition, the photographs are a way to present the artefacts in a consistent format rather than reproducing them in paintings or 'in situ' displays. In a Guide to Practitioner Research (Menter et al., 2011) reference is made to the use of photographs. It states that

'The images created by the participants are not records of reality but 'investigative landscapes' in which the person taking the photos uses this as a mode for carefully and powerfully presenting oneself, ones identity, views, and innermost thoughts' (p.177).

I believe I achieved this as the response to the exhibition was for myself, surprisingly positive. Dr. Mary-rose McLarens' notes in my visitor's book on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013 that

'I am so moved by the range of emotions your work provokes. The vitality of the imagery, the colour, the juxtapositioning, and the simplicity of stories'.

My research project draws from both stories and visual images as ways of presenting my ideas. Ellis (2004) writes in favour of stories when she says that

'Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding and are not unique to autoethnography....I argue that stories should be both a subject and a method of social science research'(Ellis, p.130).

In my case, the visual and written stories constitute subject and method. I thought of adding audio but thought it would distract from the images and overcomplicate the already quite intense presentation. I also wanted to mirror the visual approach of the classroom. The stories in the exegesis are separated by using different colours and texts as I had done in the second exhibition. I aimed to use colours that reflected the mood of each story and to relate the exegesis to the images, portraying the exegesis as a living literary art work and I have sought, where possible, to relate it to the exhibitions.

## Disconnectedness

Many of my students presented signs of disconnectedness when I first encountered them. Eventual 'failure in school, unemployment and the lack of intimate relationship' are sited as elements of unstable development (Friedhelm, 2010 p.1). 'Disconnectedness seems to result from low-quality adult mentoring in development and economic periods when mentoring is most needed' (p.4).

Friedhelm's research found 'that part of disconnectedness in adolescence indeed has deep roots in childhood. Parents in disadvantaged families have difficulty in providing emotional and material support for their offspring in times of developmental change as well as in times of economic hardship' (p.14).

Constant vigilance and experimentation with new programs was required to address some of the issues involved, such as lunchtime activities, that helped students' socialize and learn new skills.

## Cultural Connectedness

The term I use in the heading, 'Cultural Connectedness' has become a complex combination of a variety of perceptions in my pursuit of meaning for the state of confidence and self awareness that students come to after a period of time developing skills and techniques in the area of the arts. Davis (2012) writes that

'Adolescents undergo complex, rapid, and sometimes traumatic development changes which can result in a loss of their self-concept. The ability and opportunity to construct a new, adult self is dependent on a complex interplay of individual, family, school, societal and cultural factors' (p.21).

I first heard the term 'Connectedness' used when I visited the aboriginal community of Mutujulu at the base of Uluru. I chose to use it as part of my title because I saw that connectedness was a desirable state to aspire to, and it reflected what I had witnessed in the secondary classroom. The word means simply that everything is interlinked and harmonious and gives a sense of belonging or of being whole. 'Kayini' is the Pitjandjara word for connectedness. Having a sense of belonging is a human need and is important for the building of self-identity, which I claimed as an aim to attain in my teaching practice.

In my search for relevant material, I discovered that the term 'connectedness' is becoming increasingly used as a reference for an individuals' state of wellbeing in a wide variety of contexts.

C. Sperry Andrews observes that 'non therapeutic touch, which is now used in hospitals worldwide, has been well documented' (Andrews, 1009 p.1). He refers to a sense of connectedness. Social connectedness is seen as 'the new health and wellbeing blockbuster to ward off illness' by Becky McCall in her article in COSMOS, UK on 21<sup>st</sup>September, 2009. Erica Frydenberg et al., found that 'students' sense of emotional wellbeing was found to be positively related to school connectedness' in their research paper for the Australian Journal of

Education (Frydenberg, Care, Freeman & Chan, 2009 p.1). Workplace connectedness is described as ‘this feeling of belonging – being connected to your work, workplace and colleagues – is a key part of employee satisfaction. Workplace connectedness builds high performance culture, improves employee mental health’ (Rimington, 2011 p.1). P. Wesley Schulz of California State University and his students created a study called Connectedness with Nature, where they concluded that connectedness with nature led to caring which led to commitment in protecting the environment (Schulz, 2011).

There are also a number of innovative social and school programs using connectedness in their titles. Ilena Young writes about the ‘Connecting Young Parents’ program, ‘a network based project in rural Australia creating connections for services and young parents with health, education, family services and other agencies’ (Young, 2009 p.1) for the 10<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference. Samantha Cross writes about peer connectedness in reference to the digital collaborative storytelling project for wellness she manages for ‘Young and Well’. The digital inclusion program is ‘empowering young people through digital collaboration’ (Cross, 2012 p.1). And Classroom Kaleidoscope, ‘a program to facilitate connectedness and wellbeing in the culturally diverse classroom’ run by Foundation House-Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and documented by Mary Read (Read, 2007 p.1), outlining strategies to facilitate connectedness.

I added the word ‘cultural’ because I saw that students’ confidence grew as a result of finding their place in their own culture, as did their level of achievement. Ryff and Keyes refer to this as developing ‘wellness’. They write that there are six distinct components to psychological wellness that can be considered, autonomy, self acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relationships’ (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

‘Well-being is a multifaceted concept. It is often thought of as one of the hallmarks of the liberal arts experience, resulting from educational encounters that both guide students in the search for meaning and direction in life and help them realize their true potential’ (Ryff, 2005 p.1).

I was taking a dual approach in my classroom. To build a student's recognition of their own ethnicity and cultural background, and then to build connections in the environment in which they lived. This was used as the vehicle for helping to consolidate social and cultural bringing as it does historical and contemporary understandings.

Even though I saw only a few students experience transformation as a result of their connection to the secondary art room, it was encouraging to witness, and developed in me a desire to foster a holistic approach to student development whenever possible, to create opportunities for students to not only achieve success but also reach their potential. It surprised and informed me that the study of visual arts nurtures several unique attributes and skills not easily attainable in other studies.

I explain my own search for identity within the multilayered experiences I had as a child in Cyprus and in Britain, and what I learned from other teachers and artists. I came to understand, how, by expanding the boundaries of the classroom experience together with the knowledge gleaned through self-expression over some years, students can be taught and can develop the resilience necessary to take opportunities, despite the obstacles.

As fellow teachers of the Arts, the experiences of Carillo and Baguley are explored in the paper 'From school teacher to university lecturer: illuminating the journey from the classroom to the university for two arts educators' (Knowles and Cole, vol 8 2010). They reflect my own experiences in many ways. Qualitative Methodology of Narrative Inquiry is used in their paper to interweave the narratives of the two academics' experiences together to focus on temporality, sociality and place. They both mention the hybrid identities of the teacher artist; praxis shock and not being able 'to deal with the attitudes of some students' when they started teaching, strategies that they utilised to improve practice such as Baguley's strategy of using art exhibitions as a pedagogical tool as I have always done. They also mention teaching and research in the higher education area where I too am completing my career. Both artist teachers felt ill equipped to teach at university level when they started, but Baguley recognised that 'I really did feel that I have learned more about teaching by having to teach

preservice and graduate teachers' (p.6). Both mention the need to have supported their artistic practice through teaching at schools, and Carrillo revealed that 'she believed isolation was a common feature amongst artists' (p.4). The paper includes many important insights into transitions from artist to teacher and on to higher education as experienced by myself also.

## Rationale

In this exegesis I utilize the structure of the developmental systems initiated by Urie Bronfenbrenner, the famous and influential Russian American psychologist known for his ground breaking 'Ecological Systems Theory'. I am doing that to provide a framework for the stories and visual images. As such, the framework gives shape to my story as a teacher and artist. Bronfenbrenner's theory has also provided a useful base for my exploration of Cultural Connectedness, simply because it is a bio-ecological model of development, that puts child development into a social context.

The five environmental systems Bronfenbrenner created explain the effects of environment on the development of a child. Each of these systems affect individuals at different times in different ways. His ideas are based on analysis and research carried out over many decades beginning with a study in Berlin in 1870 on the effects of neighborhood on the development of children's concepts. The theoretical systems were used as a framework for demonstrating research findings and were described as 'a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 p.39). I see the stages rather like a flower that is gradually blooming or a person wearing layers of clothes. All of the stages are overlapped and are relevant at different times in the development of the child.

The first, most intimate stage is called the Microsystem, and is a 'pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit' the immediate environment. Examples include peer group, school and family (Bronfenbrenner. 1994 p.39).

The second stage is the Mesosystem and comprises links between two or more settings that contain the developing child, such as school and home.

Indirect links that affect the person such as the parent's workplace or for an adult, the relation between the peer group and school, is called the Exosystem.

The beliefs, culture, resources and life style options come together as a pattern in the Macrosystem. It could be a particular culture or set of social expectations that affect the development of the person.

Lastly, the Chronosystem's perimeter covers the developments affecting the environment over a period of time such as The Great Depression or war.

I use the term Cultural Connectedness in relation to my experiences as a child in Cyprus and Britain, and also in a wider context. I use it to explain what I remember from my own teachers, and from reading the work of other teachers. And finally, I use it to explain that which encourages the transition to wider society by the students I have taught, through their growth in confidence and self-awareness, to moving away from parental guidance towards identity achievement.

'Adolescent development involves changes in self concept and identification with different groups or cultural norms' (Davis, 2012 p.1).

I highlight one or other of Bronfenbrenner's systems to explain different stages of my own development and how they contributed to the person I became as a teacher. I also use the systems to refer to the developmental stages of my students as outlined in the stories below. The Microsystem as the name implies, refers to the immediate intimate surroundings of the individual, the family, peers and classroom where the individual actively creates social settings. Because of the isolation of my early years, a time when I was home schooled and protected by armed guards, I developed an imaginary art world that was supported by my family, who, because of circumstances, were tightly knit. I was physically isolated but the environment was where I felt safe and free to express myself. When I recently asked a friend to read through my work, she pointed out that when she was young, growing up in Australia, visual art was not valued as much as other

subjects at the school she attended and it was seen as unusual to have such a passion for the arts as I had.

This study has made me aware that my creatively stimulated upbringing differed from many children in Australia. For families like mine, England was a leader in education at the time and the centre of the arts. It had an impact on me and I was encouraged at home. I had brought with me to Australia a love of high culture, creativity and



*'My way of seeing Bronfenbrenners' Systems'.*

craftsmanship along with an understanding of history and multiculturalism, and was eager to share my knowledge.

## My Story-Early Childhood Development

After some reflection, I think my passion was ignited by both my parents, more so my mother who had lived in Paris when young, and who had studied art there. And later it was fostered in Cyprus, where I was born and lived in my formative years, as a child seeing ancient art works and local crafts. Because of persistent curfews and periods of isolation in Cyprus during the war of the 1950s, my mother often thought of creative activities to do with us children, such as making

figurines and painting them, or plated miniature gardens. She taught us to draw, paint, sew and knit. In good weather I would spend hours outside in the garden creating small 'environments' with miniature huts and tiny houses in the dirt, or I would climb the carob tree to have a better view of the whole garden.

Imagination was encouraged and nurtured by describing 'other worlds' and 'civilizations'. My mother was unusual for her era in that she would dress me in dungarees and allow me climb trees and make mud pies and did not mind how dirty I got, which I relished. And later with my sisters I made up 'plays' to perform to anyone who would become the audience.

My passion for education was not only nurtured by my parents, but also at a school in England named Rupert House School in Henley-on-Thames. It was a very small private school for the children of actors and actresses. It was through my parents' friendship with well known actors Googie Withers and John MacCallum that I was introduced to the school.

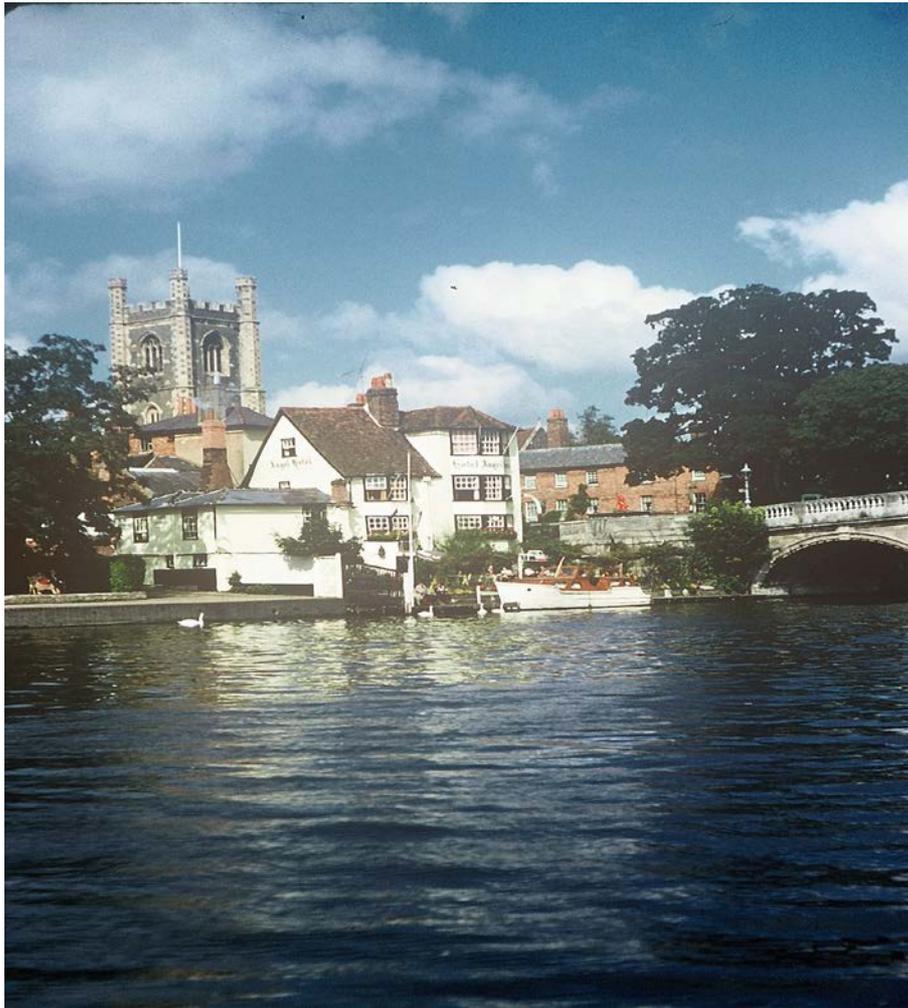
My mother and grandmother (my father's mother) often took us to London to see the galleries and museums and theatrical productions. I remember distinctly going with my grandmother to see ballet dancers Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn. It was a dream come true for me to see these stars as it nurtured my passion for ballet and the theatre. Nureyev's flying splits were even better than I had imagined, and Fonteyn was his perfect partner. The traditional Swan Lake was an indulgence of the time with full sets and orchestra.

I thoroughly enjoyed being a student at Rupert House School. It was such a positive experience and I thrived there, galloping ahead in my work. I loved walking in the fields by the river Thames for nature study, I loved art lessons where we could create the pictures we wanted to and I loved physical education because we learned ballet and would produce full-scale performances each year. Any child would have thrived in the school because everything was created with the child's point of view in mind.

I learned piano and ballet and progressed well in both studies.

The English teacher, Mrs. Barnicot, on occasion, would take us home to her house called 'Apple Tree Cottage' where we would eat scones or cakes she had baked, and we would listen to stories whilst working in her kitchen. The Principal was called Miss Fawcett and her brother was an explorer in 'deepest, darkest Africa' and he sent her strange statues of animals and other gifts. She would relay stories to us that he had told

her about his adventures while we sat on the floor in her sitting room cum office.



*'Henley-on-Thames with swans 1959'.*

We would all, about fifty students, be together for lunch around a huge table, or adjoining tables that spread through two wood paneled rooms. We were not permitted to leave the table until our plates were clean. I think this contributed to putting on a lot of weight while I was there as we indulged in such delicacies as treacle tart with custard. My memories were positive and I am sure that it cemented many of my ideas about teaching. School was fun and I looked forward to going each day, the way school should be.

It contributed to my philosophy of making classes fun, out of which eventually came the idea of the arts festivals that I organized much

later in my teaching career. Many students learned more from the festivals than some carefully crafted lessons.

## Adolescence

I eventually won a scholarship to attend a private boarding school for the whole of my secondary schooling. I would be specializing in ballet. But we were going to Australia. I had no idea what the consequences would be. I was heart broken to come to a country that not only had very untidy natural environments caused by the trees and the scrub, but what I thought of as ugly urban scenes as well, such as the area around the docks, which was the first place I saw of Melbourne.

My mother had finally had enough of my fathers' 'workplaces' that were in the most dangerous situations. When he was reposted it was to be in Sabah, North Borneo. My mother replied that she was taking the four children to Australia 'and that was it,' after contemplating the lack of doctors, dentists, schools and other services that families normally need. Of course I was unaware of her previous sacrifices and looked at the situation only from my point of view.

No music or ballet lessons were available for me and I was struggling at school against bullying and intolerance. Even though my hair was blonde and I spoke English, it was with an accent different from my classmates. My mother told me I cried every day for a year. We both learned a lot about prejudice and pain. I instinctively rebelled and withdrew into my own artistic world.

I became reckless, 'damaged mentally and emotionally,' and I was angry. At school, I intimidated the art teacher of the time into leaving teaching forever, when I disagreed with her over the title of one of Michelangelo's sculptures. When it happened and I was proven correct, I wondered why she didn't just apologize instead of leaving.

And much later as a teacher myself, it was something I remembered well, and ever since have apologized to students whenever I was wrong.

Another incident I learned from was when I had produced a painting of a child with a coat over one arm with his back to the viewer walking down a path. He was passing through a beautiful garden with trees that I remembered from England and into the 'bush' of Australia. I had spent a lot of time on the work and liked it as it expressed my frustration with my new environment. The Principal had also liked it and just took it, and the next time I saw it, it was hanging in a

frame on her office wall. I suppose I should have been proud or elated or something, but instead I felt cheated because I had not been consulted.

## Teaching Career

It was all about respect, and sometimes when I had to make a difficult decision as a teacher, I would try to remember how I would have felt as a teenager. Even though the students I taught were young, they were still people and had feelings. So often, at that time particularly, a child's dignity was ignored. Quite a few of my later teaching ideas were formed at that time. I, like many teenagers took myself very seriously. For example, I suddenly realized that 'being 14' (the most dreadful year of my life I thought at the time) was not going to last much longer as I was about to turn 15. Elation! Adolescents do not have the experience of things changing as time passes, and I think because of this lack of knowledge, they sometimes panic and act rashly. However, many adults forget how they felt as teenagers and need to be reminded, when dealing with adolescents. I usually ask the pre service teachers I teach to write down what they felt like as teenagers themselves, and the behaviour they have witnessed in school rounds starts to make sense after that, and fear is exchanged for compassion or empathy.

Beginning teacher Eliot Wigginton (1996) writes in his reflections of his first years of teaching practice that 'when treated with respect, students responded with respect' (p. 42).

Something else I learned as a child, was about war from the child's point of view. Few teachers in Melbourne in the 1970's and 1980's had any idea what some of their students had gone through before arriving in Australia. Many teachers were of Anglo-Saxon descent or the children of migrants who had grown up in Australia, and in some were still living with their parents. Most were relatively isolated and unaware of the ravages of war. At my first inner city school I inherited a full class of students who had experienced terrible things as the result of war in their native countries.

*A mature student from Cambodia joined my class. She did not speak, but was keen to work. She understood a lot of English. One day she looked sad, and I called her aside as she was about to leave the class. I said that if she ever needed to talk to*

*anyone about Pol Pot's dreadful war, I was willing to listen because after having experienced 'the troubles in Cyprus' for many years, at least I had some understanding of the atrocities of war. She said nothing for a few more weeks. Then one day when I was supervising about 300 students in the courtyard, she approached me and started talking in fluent English. She said that her parents and four siblings were killed in the fields in front of her and her baby brother was literally cut out of her arms. She played dead and survived and somehow managed to take a boat to Australia. She was by then 17. By the end of the story, I was crying, and eventually made sure that she had access to the best support being offered at the time.*

*Then there was 'the Fight' in W3, between a tall, thin boy from Lebanon who had recently arrived at the school from the 'front lines' of battle, and a very large obese boy of Italian descent, who was a known male prostitute in the area. Boys made up the rest of the class and I shouted at them to try to stop the two fighting, but they were too scared. In a frenzy, I emptied the fire buckets and filled them with water and proceeded to throw it over them, as I had been taught to do when the rabid dogs fought in Cyprus where I had grown up. It worked thank goodness and no one was wounded. I would love to say that both students had expert counseling as a result but as far as I can recall we had a school nurse but no counselor in particular. At that time we had to rely on the expertise of individual teachers.*

The students often swore, but it was not particularly aimed at me, or at least if you thought that you would leave teaching instantly. In a poem called 'Fat Cow' from 'Pedagogy of trace: Poetic representations of teaching resilience/resistance in arts education' Monica Prendergast writes

'in the classroom  
to weather  
the disinterest  
and casual cruelty  
of those few who  
so trapped

in their own  
furies  
refuse to see  
the humanity  
of those  
who teach  
who  
refuse  
to be taught (Prendergast, 2008 p.70).

My students were 'casually cruel' to each other as well as the adults. I saw it as a way of expressing anger and a survival trait.

The sentiments of the poem could be true for the experiences of any number of young teachers. Fortunately, not in my case, I think because I worked hard to be able to see the other side of the equation by empathizing with the students.

One particularly powerful teacher's story that has been popularized in newspapers, magazines, books and 1988 film called 'Stand and Deliver' is the story of Jaime Escalante, an East Los Angeles high school teacher who reversed the fates of his underachieving Maths students. He did this through hard work, sacrifice and the confidence that inner-city Hispanic youth had the ability to learn. His story is an example of the difference a fine teacher can make in the lives of students, when he believes in their intelligence and abilities and how he demands excellence and draws out their strongest efforts. Because he believes and cares for them, they begin to believe and care as well. He instilled in his students the feeling for 'ganas' or desire/ hunger in English. His death in 2010, prompted an article in the New York Times by William Grimes.

## Influences

In *The Enlightened Eye*, Eisner (1998) writes,

'Compared to the assessment of teaching, even the judgment of Olympic diving performances is simple. First, there is no single ideal to which a teaching performance can be assigned' (p.70).

I think this quote continues to be timely since performance payment for 'better' teachers continues to be discussed. Each teacher brings different qualities to the profession, which are as varied as the people themselves.

A teacher who influenced me a great deal was John Brack, the Melbourne artist and teacher. I was interested in what he had to say, because I had great respect for his artwork and he was willing to share his knowledge with us, the students at the National Gallery Art School. He was dour, caustic, quick witted, intelligent and kind. His advice was practical and insightful and he introduced us to all his friends who were artists, such as Fred Williams. He told us to get used to the boring parts of being an artist; draw every day; learn to be disciplined and don't give up, amongst other things. He showed us how to make black oil to mix with oil paints how to prime an artwork as Rembrandt had done with white lead and how to see when drawing a nude as Michelangelo had done. Originally working class, he taught at Melbourne Grammar School and then became Principal of the art school both at the old Gallery which is now the State Library and the 'new' Gallery which is now the International Gallery.

I found the following on the Only Melbourne site (an online guide to Melbourne informed by the National Gallery of Australia [www.onlymelbourne.com.au/melbourne](http://www.onlymelbourne.com.au/melbourne), where Murray Walker, a colleague of Brack's says of him

"You would always be learning with John. A whole range of artists were coming and going because of his connections. And on Wednesdays, he would give these wonderful lectures on art history."

Brack urged his listeners to look at great art - Nicolas Poussin's *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (1634) in the Gallery's collection was a favourite.

One of my fellow students Rick Amor says of him

Life class was Brack's domain and Amor says "John could be quite unnerving, very witty and sarcastic, when he came around and

looked at your work. His comments were usually pretty right, though."

Brack was a very good teacher. He supported his students and often helped them long

after they had left art school. He attended all my exhibitions and those of his other students had, until his death.

My years as an art student were experienced during the turbulent times, when the 'Vietnam War, feminism and recognition of minority, migrant, and indigenous people were occurring' (Selkrig, 2009 p.22). I became involved in the prevalent social justice issues that allowed expression of struggle through the arts. These ideas fitted well into the public school environment.

### **Diverse Styles of Management**

All the school administration decisions are made at meetings. They are a necessary part of organizing a large institution containing many people from diverse disciplines to enable them to effectively carry out their various jobs. They determine the feel of the school environment, the effectiveness of the curriculum, the look of the buildings and the overall ambience of the school.

In some cases, time can be wasted, which is unnerving because it is precious time that could have been used to give extra assistance to students.

In 'The Enlightened Eye', Eisner recalls a phrase that sums up the whole reason why education is so valuable. He says

'The summum bonum of education is to assist individuals – children, adolescents, adults- to become what they have the potential to be' (Eisner 1998, p.100).

When I started teaching in the 1970s I did not mind attending meetings, especially at the inner city school I started teaching in, because a democratic procedure was followed and they were kept short and efficient.

This particular school was seen as democratic and radical. Most of the students were disadvantaged and there were numerous issues to be addressed. Coming as I did originally from Cyprus, I felt I had come full circle as my classes were made up of students from Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Vietnam, with

some Aboriginal students. I empathized with many of these students' as I had not easily adjusted to this country when I first arrived, and I was able to speak English and was white like many of the migrants who had arrived before me. It must have been so much harder for these students.

Maxine Greene is quoted as saying

'Care may be important; but more important in my life has been the feeling of connectedness in marches or campaigns or deliberate efforts to make something better-to plan, to build, to stop the killing, to cherish the young' (1998 p.41).

Many of the students had come from war zones as I had, so actively fighting for a quality education was appropriate action to take to improve their lives. And this was precisely what I became involved in during the early 1980s through this particular school.

### Politicization

Because jobs were plentiful then, teachers were not afraid to be radical, to participate in street marches, demonstrations and the delivery of petitions to various parliamentarians demanding change to the system. At one stage, our school had two teachers for every Year 7 class because it was recognized that our students were so needy. This momentous and unusual 'condition' was achieved after the most radical of us teachers and the Principal made our demands known to the Education Minister under a tree in the gardens next to the parliamentary buildings in Spring Street, Melbourne. I learned a lot about left wing politics at the school. I went to union meetings specifically to learn about how to achieve such outcomes and was impressed by the passion and dedication of the teachers. My initial fear of joining the union stemmed from my conservative upbringing, but it made sense to me that teachers needed support for such a difficult and demanding vocation.

Jo Williams, a fellow colleague and teacher expresses her ambivalence towards teaching in her paper Why I Became A Teacher Activist. I quote

'I was simultaneously inspired and buoyed and demoralized and disempowered by my experiences as a teacher. Again it was my activism

that provided a framework for responding and turning my reflection in action' (Ryan, 2012 p.199).

It did not take long before I was a staunch union member. The teachers really cared about the students and worked hard to maximize their opportunities. Every strategy was employed to do so. I recall large photographs in the passageways, of students who had achieved, to encourage the current students to improve themselves. Students were given a lot of support but were strictly monitored. Many of the families were unemployed and were continuously on welfare. The Year 9 students that I was Form Teacher of, had only one parent out of forty in work and that was as a cleaner. Bronfenbrenner's Microsystem resonates with many of the students' situations, where the immediate, intimate surroundings of affected individuals actually helped construct the social settings created by those individuals.

### Special Challenges

I found each school had its own particular set of challenges. In the case of the inner city school I was referring to, diversity and marginalization played a large part. In order to change the situation, and to break the poverty cycle, students needed a broad, basic education and efficient meetings were part of the way to deliver this.

'Poverty is a major societal constraint that increases the chaos in young peoples lives, potentially leading to increased psychological distress, learned helplessness, and reduced emotional self-regulation' (Davis, 2012 p.12).

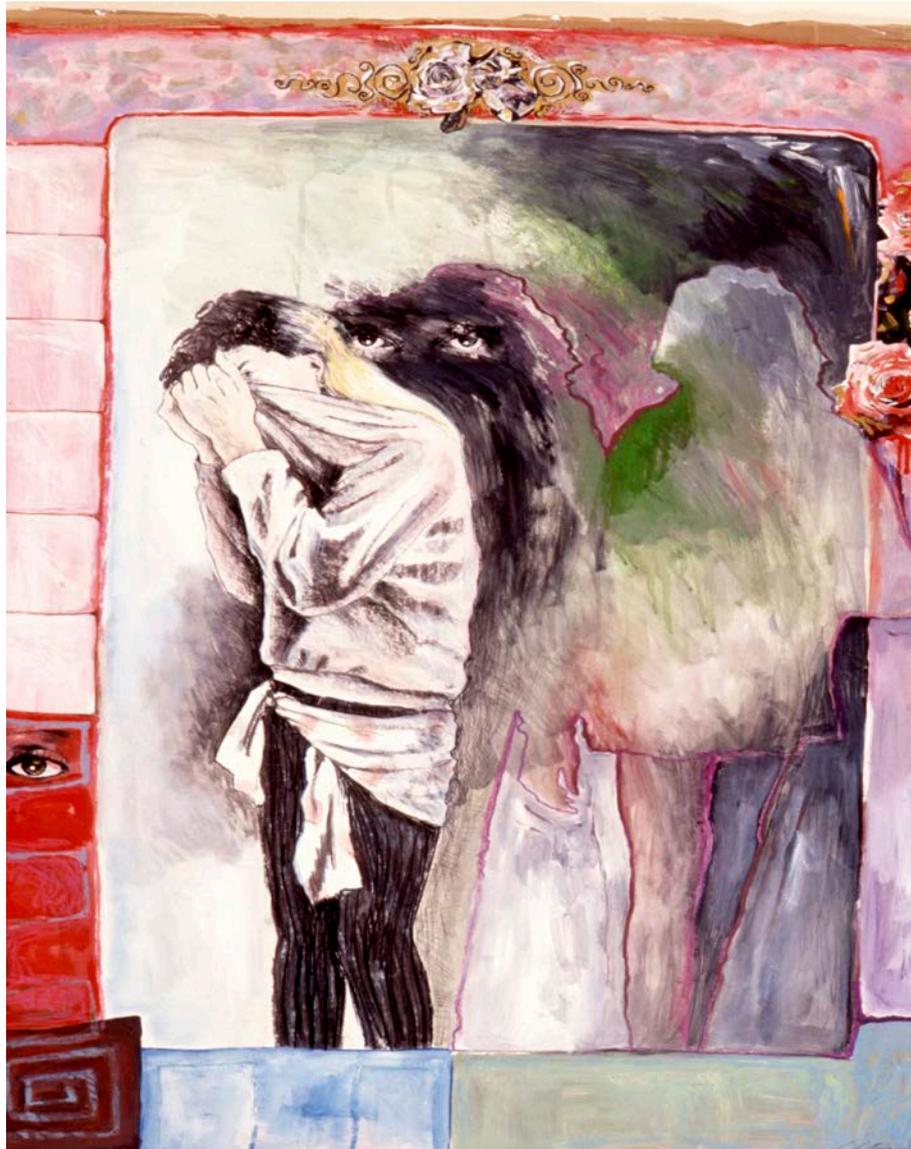
At this school the staff were very efficient and supportive of each other. When I first started there I found the students very challenging, and according to the Vice Principal, who I still see on a regular basis, I was demanding and needed a great deal of support.

In most schools at that time the 'tougher' men, often the trade teachers, used the strap, which meant that if you didn't, you had to eventually ask them to strap your students too because that was where the line was drawn. I did have some incidents where it was difficult to avoid having to arrange for someone else to

strap a student. Many of the students were accustomed to being disciplined in this manner at home and some parents would even give the teachers permission to hit their children if they misbehaved. It was part of their home culture and part of the school culture of the time. Bronfenbrenner's second system of developmental influence is named the Mesosystem. It refers to the relations between the different Microsystems or connections between contexts. The connections between the family experiences and school experiences, school to church experiences and family to peer experiences are examples. A child rejected at home may have difficulty socializing at school, for example.

I recall one Year 9 student who came very late to class one day. He walked into the room and started flicking razor blades around the room. I immediately thought of the wellbeing of the other students. I

approached him and after realizing that verbal instruction was useless,



the only

*'Girls Toilet, acrylic on paper and charcoal, 1989'.*

thing I could think of doing was to slap his face to bring him back to reality. This of course by that time, was illegal but I could not think of any other way to stop him. I slapped his face as hard as I could. He called me all sorts of names and ran out of the room. Fortunately, it was very nearly the end of the lesson and as soon as the siren went off, I ran to tell the Principal what I had done. He very supportively said that if he had been in charge he would have flattened him. But it was all rather sad, especially when I discovered why this boy had gone

berserk. He had spent the night trying to sleep outside on a step of a second floor building, because his mother, a prostitute, had thrown him out of their one room apartment to be with a paying client.

On a more positive note, when I went to work in the outer western suburbs, I went to my local bank during a lunch break. I discovered that one of my former students from the inner city was the manager there. I was impressed and asked her how she did it, coming as she did from a large, impoverished Irish family. She told me that home life had been so hard that she preferred to stay at school. And stay at school she did, following on to university. When I saw her, she had a family and house and had moved into the area where she worked.

Bronfenbrenner's third developmental system is named the Exosystem. This is when the individual does not play an active role in their social setting or their immediate context and this powerlessness is reflected in their behaviour. The effect is indirect, such as the attitudes in the community to migrants in Australia at the time, and how it affected employment opportunities.

Knowledge about diet was limited when I started my teaching career. One boy said his arm hurt on a Monday and it turned out that he had actually broken it on the previous Friday playing soccer at school. His diet had not been monitored because both parents worked in factories and had no time, and just left money out for him. It was discovered that he had existed on a diet of coca cola, chips and chocolate iced doughnuts, and that his bones had become brittle from lack of vitamins.

*One of the funniest incidents I can remember was with the incredible 7N, four of which were called Mohammed. I would go home with a sore stomach every day I taught them because I had to shout and run around so much. I had been given this class and I set about teaching them what other Year 7's were learning. One major problem was that when I lined them up outside the room as we were instructed to do in those days, it took about six tries, which meant by the time all students entered the room, it was time to pack up. One day, I thought that what I will do is get the whole room arranged so the students could enter the room and start work immediately.*

*So, I did this and they all barged into the room, seemingly yelling at the top of their voices, sat where they always sat and I stood back to take in the situation. I noticed that they were all working furiously even though they were incredibly noisy.*

*The following week I decided to experiment. I taught 7N how to trace pictures of birds and animals onto lino, cut the lino with cutting tools and print the designs onto paper. I usually did this lesson with Year 8's, but thought that if I said to this class that it was a 'special treat' they would try hard to meet the challenges and it might quieten them down. At the time, I was coming down with my fourth episode of the flu or a very bad cold. My immunity was not good since I had recently started teaching and also had just had a child.*

*I usually tried not to take time off because the students were insecure and became very unsettled with replacement teachers, but this flu/cold just kept reoccurring. I eventually took one whole week off. When I returned I was told that two replacement teachers gave up teaching forever after taking my class, that the whole classroom had been trashed and that supplies had been stolen as well.*

*I ventured into the room. There was a stanley knife hanging out of the blackboard, others in the clay bin. There were twenty five smashed window panes and pieces of glass everywhere. The store cupboard had its door hanging off by the hinges and I realized that all the lino I had ordered for all my other students from Year 7 to Year 11 for the whole year had been stolen along with all the cutting tools, and nothing else. I rang some of the 7N parents and asked them to come to talk about what had happened. It eventuated that the students had raided the store, and had stolen all the lino supplies. They had taken it home and had produced the most beautiful work on a much larger scale than I had intended originally. I was astonished. What to do? They had done incredible work. They were punished for the thefts and trashing, but their work was shown later in the year. I still have a piece of work from that class.*

Many of my students suffered from circumstances beyond their control. Some were refugees, others were from families where no one spoke English and others had illiterate parents. All of these situations when added to the lack of positive role modeling, lack of resources, poor advice and lack of aspiration, affected the students' progress. In the video of Jane Elliot's 1970's experiment 'Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes' it is interesting to see that when her students wear the collars of discrimination and lose privileges, they do not achieve as well as when they are perceived as more intelligent, more respected and more important. And so it is

paramount that when working with students, not to allow prejudices or fears to keep them from achieving their potential.

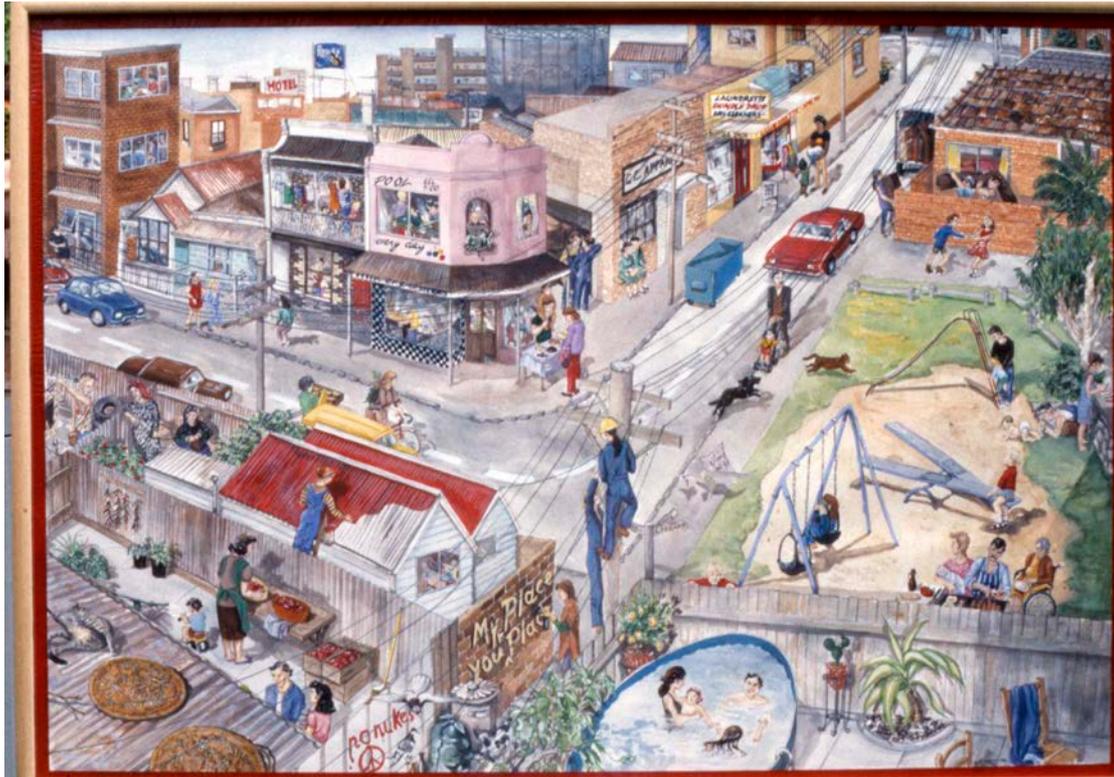
I understood these children expressed the ideas they had heard at home, often through isolation and ignorance, and as a result became part of this experiment.

Bronfenbrenner's systems also related to my own experiences of the time. I was in a position of working to support my two children and to maintain the lifestyle to which I aspired. I was not enjoying good relations with my spouse and this was also negatively affecting my health. The Mesosystem applies here as I was reacting at home to the pressures I felt at home and vice versa.

### **Beginning of the Equal Opportunity Movement in the Education Department**

Each new project undertaken at school relied on a series of meetings. We held meetings about introducing girls to the school, to temper the boys. We held meetings about what was happening to the girls after they had been introduced to the school.

This was not always pleasant, as there were still far more boys than girls, in an era not so sympathetic to the needs of the girls. A group of female teachers, myself included, and others from nearby schools, initiated a movement in the Victorian Education Department called the Equal Opportunity movement. It was felt that it was a necessary step to take in order to support the usual minority of girls that were introduced to the old technical schools, to transform them into co-educational schools.



*'My Place, Your Place poster and accompanying booklet, that I completed in 1983 for the Equal Opportunity Department., about all types of families in the inner city. The original is in the foyer of North Fitzroy Primary School'.*

At school, one of our projects was the writing of the 'Sexual Harassment Handbook' containing strategies to combat sexual harassment. I illustrated the book and it was distributed to every school in the state. Another project was to form a childcare centre nearby so students and teachers had somewhere to leave their own children or siblings, when attending school. This project took five years to come to fruition. I participated in numerous meetings as a part of this project. The childcare centre still exists today, and was eventually 'hijacked' by the local council, who took it over and claimed it as their own.

The School Principals held many meetings in order to combine the more disadvantaged schools in the area to form one organization. They successfully banded together to form stronger links when asking for funding, resources and better conditions.

## [Western Suburbs-Many Challenges-Equal Opportunity Strategies](#)

From the inner city I went to the western suburbs, and this is where I saw more examples of the fourth developmental system of Bronfenbrenner. The Macrosystem, so called to describe the culture that people live in, the socioeconomic status of the environment and the ethnicity of the area. Typically, these environmental factors and the political beliefs formed, affect the development of the student.

The outer western suburb school where I worked, was surrounded by market gardens and fields full of horses when I first arrived, and it was mainly populated by students of Mediterranean, Latin American and Philippine descent, with some Aborigines and some students from Vietnam. As the land was gradually taken over, and replaced with building estates, more and more Pacific Islanders and then African and Indian families moved in and joined the school.

Another school that I spent some years in, this one a little closer to central Melbourne, looked similar to many other public schools except my classroom was across a main road, separate from the main school, located with Home Economics and Business Studies. Basically, the subjects were not seen as so important, because they attracted a majority of girls and the perception was that they did not lead to lucrative careers.

I recently drove past the school to see what had happened to it. The crossing is gone and so are the portables that I used to work in. New houses have been built there and there are obviously many more Vietnamese families living in the area. The nearby shopping centre has mostly Vietnamese shops that are rather shabby in appearance, indicating their low economic status. The school had many more students of poor Anglo Saxon, Mediterranean, and Indian descent when I was working there, and the parents generally did not value education very much. Most students were from poor families and were not particularly 'academic', as the brighter students attended the High school nearby. Technical Schools took students who 'were good with their hands' and were channeled into bluecollar jobs or apprenticeships. Students learned skills thoroughly and made some beautiful and useful work. The Woodwork students I eventually taught maintained such a high skill standard that they consistently took out all the prizes at the annual Royal Melbourne Show.

Staff meetings at this school were held in clouds of smoke. It was completely normal for staff rooms to be full of smoke at that time. Rarely did anyone object. I even remember some teachers smoking in the classrooms. If a teacher was gay, or in an unmarried relationship/living together, it would be hidden because it was akin to being a paedophile in the eyes of some. Nowadays, it all seems so outdated. But when I started teaching in 1979, women teachers were not allowed to wear jeans, they hid their pregnancies until they were obvious, for fear of losing their jobs, and part time work was almost unheard of. I had small children at home and did my best to gain part time employment. I had to leave my permanent position, and work as a temporary replacement teacher in order to do so.

One of the first things I initiated out there was a 'Girls Room' where girls could escape if they did not want to share their breaks from class with the boys, who made up the majority of the students outside in the playground. Girls were seen as second class citizens. This notion was acceptable at the time, and exacerbated by the ethnicity and poverty. I recall listening to staffroom arguments about whether a woman's brain was smaller than that of a man.

Generally, girls did not do well in maths or sport. Fortunately, this was understood at the time and eventually corrected. However, many girls grew up having experiences that limited their identity development. Bronfenbrenner's fifth stage of environmental development is called the Chronosystem, and consists of all the experiences that a person has had during their lifetime, major lifetime events and socio historical events that ultimately affect them.

When I first started at the school, I noticed that the boys frequently 'egged' the young girls into fighting as a sort of sport. They would then surround the girls and chant, a bit like cock fighting. I told the Principal every time I caught the students doing it. He was appalled, but far too gentle and scared of the students to do anything but shut his door. After a number of years of affirmative action, the girls' confidence improved and these activities no longer occurred. I invited many people into the school to speak to the girls about looking after babies, and other issues such as sexual harassment and youth pregnancy, which was our biggest problem at the time. In one Year 9 class I had three girls with their own

babies. Fortunately, we did our best to keep them at school, but I felt for their mothers in particular, who had not had the opportunity to study themselves, and now they had to look after their grandchildren. I ran lunchtime woodwork classes for the grandmothers as a support program, to encourage self determination and social interaction. Older women had rarely been taught how to use power tools, or how to work with wood, and since I had all this at my disposal I took the opportunity to teach them what I had learned. We made simple, useful items such as cutting blocks, which could be given away as presents or used at home.

All my students designed their own work and followed the design process, which was a big leap forward from the lock step approach that had previously been employed by the trade teachers. There was quite a bit of resentment against a woman teaching in a traditionally male subject. My work was labeled 'arty farty' and the students behaved differently for me than they did for the male teachers. Eventually, I confronted the Principal with a list, a very long list of complaints about my treatment by male staff. It was decided that we would meet with the Head of the Woodwork department, in the presence of the Principal. I put my head down and read from my list. He was totally shocked but understood. What had instigated my original action was that he had said that 'I could easily be eliminated' from the department if he did not like me. I received an apology and eventually managed the department while he took long service leave and went to Europe. I even received a postcard. It was all about the fear of change and lack of understanding, but it was very destructive at the time.

After much lobbying and organization, we held the first all Girls Work Options day. Research has shown that girls have been educated differently from boys and

'Stanworth notes the way in which girls are channeled towards careers considered 'suitable' for their sex' (Thomas, 1983 p.62).

At that time, in the 1980s, Dale Spender, an Australian feminist, teacher and philosopher had written a book called *Man Made Language* which became an important reference for the education of girls, and guided much of my work. She states

'It is unlikely that anyone presented with alternatives would choose the socially disadvantaged position which women occupy, and it is because they are precluded in many instances from making a choice, that education is required to make their lot more palatable' (Spender, 1980 p.25).

I would invite all the women I could find in the area who worked in 'unconventional' jobs, such as a female plumber, or a female tree lopper to the school. The girls from 12 years of age and older would be invited to attend with their mothers to question the women about their professions. Surveys were carried out before and after to see if any minds had been changed. Before, most girls wanted to be hairdressers, and after, there was much more variety of choice. I am told the girls enjoyed this so much that they organized the 'special days' themselves after I left the school. If there was any way to make school more fun (real) or any opportunity to bring in visiting speakers, I would do so, because the students always responded and remembered far more than if it was just an ordinary class.

Bronfenbrenner applies the same kind of thinking as mentioned above to his second developmental system, which he named the Mesosystem. This system refers to the combined effects of family and school processes on the individual. Along with the prevalent racist and sexist attitudes of the time, wars were brewing in various parts of the world. Many of my western suburban students went on to join the armed forces, because this was one way of breaking the poverty cycle and they could also be financially supported for further study. Unfortunately, some were wounded in East Timor and Afghanistan but at least all of them returned home. Personally, I am not keen on the forces as a career due to my own experiences of war as a child, but they were set on a path and nothing would deter them.

In my own experience, separation from my children's father had disrupted our lives considerably, and we all had to learn to live differently. Over time, things gradually settled and the children and I learned to cope better. The greatest effect was on my son who acted out in all sorts of high risk behaviours. Money was tight and I had little time to devote to them, except during the holidays. I did

not take on any further study or administration jobs that would take my time away from my children. However, it was required that teachers stay after school for meetings most days of the week.

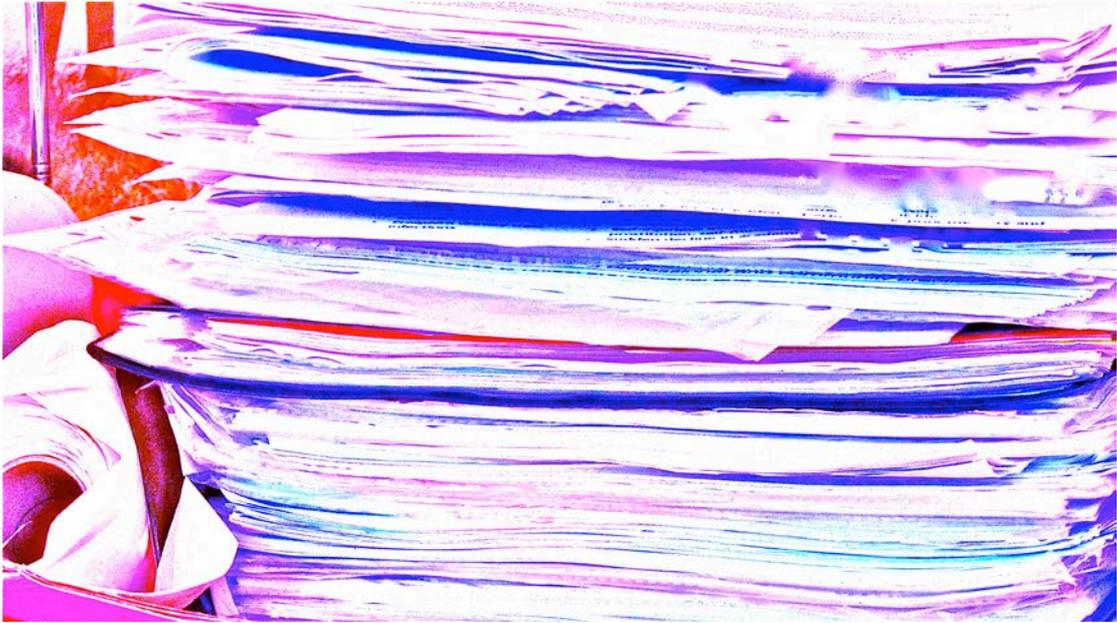
The most tedious of all, were the weekly full staff meetings at the outer western suburban P -12 school in the early days of my tenure there (early 1990s). Secondary school staff had to wait an extra 30 minutes after school for the primary school staff to join them in the secondary school library, which was really the only place big enough to seat the 80 staff.

We had to queue up to be ticked off the roll. If you did not attend you received a stern scolding from administration as if you were a primary student yourself. If you were lucky, an agenda was circulated. The same people would always sit at the back, and some would have something to say about every topic on the agenda. Others would just talk continuously among themselves, ignoring the business of the day. If you said something more than once, it was likely that you would get scowled at because everyone wanted to go home early.

And then there was always the person who asked a question at 4.25pm. In order to hear the answer of course, meant you had to stay until 4.50pm at least. Individuals would take on what you had suggested and because they were louder, more articulate or further up the ladder of 'favorability' in the eyes of administration, your ideas were always accepted in their words. When consensus was the aim, it only really happened because everyone wanted to get out of the place and not because people had resolved the issues being discussed. It meant that some important issues were never fully discussed. There was never quite enough time to resolve a long list of issues.

### **Lack of Voice of Female Art Teachers in the Boys Club**

Because I was also an artist, I was seen as eccentric, unreliable and emotionally



*'Always something to do in the holidays'.*

unstable by some. Colleagues were often amazed when forced to work closely with me, that I could carry out complicated organizational programs or have sensible ideas.

One day I thought that the school badly needed a fence around it, as a man in a balaclava had recently accosted one of my students in the girls' toilets. I thought that if I suggested the idea at a meeting, not much would be done, and staff would have thought the idea was stupid and would ignore it. My opinion was not often seen as important, since I was merely an art teacher and not a member of administration. I thought I had better be strategic, and so devised a plan.

I deliberately sat next to the union president (who was much more popular than me because he was male and he was in the 'boys club' that made most decisions in the school) one day and loudly spoke to another female colleague about how the parents and students (as well as the teachers) may be able to sue the school in future as it was so easy to get in. We had a fence in no time may I say.

Some necessary meetings were the Victorian Certificate of Education (Years 11 and 12) meetings. I enjoyed listening to remarks about students' progress, but we would never get out before 5.30pm, which meant I did not get home until about 6.30pm. This made a very long day for my children who were waiting for me in North Fitzroy. One day I angrily told the assembled staff my feelings about

all the fiddling around, coming and going, late notices, lack of agendas, and people constantly talking over each other. I was told in no uncertain tones that 'Well, if you're so smart, then you take the meetings', so I did my best rendition of a chairperson, and completed the task in twenty minutes instead, by following the inner city schools' 'democratic procedure.' I think everyone was very relieved. We certainly proceeded more rapidly after that. And, the meetings were taken more seriously.

In order to keep up the excellent performance of the oldest art students, it was necessary to keep the art department dynamic and stimulating. Departmental meetings were vital to motivate and support staff, organize materials, and curriculum and deal with various departmental issues. I had been Head of Department for a number of years, and tried to limit the time taken and keep the meetings interesting or supply coffee and biscuits and the like. Key Learning Area leaders, (subject leaders) had no power in some schools. At times, I found it hard to motivate the other art teachers to take our work seriously.

Our views differed as did our standards of housekeeping which meant that misunderstandings occurred and we worked at cross purposes. At times, the Art Department felt totally dysfunctional. My priorities were sometimes not shared by my art colleagues or administration.

My major concern was the quality of the art program and the ideas of those surrounding me interfered with delivery and production of high quality curriculum.

'Arts programs have an impact on the child; the teaching and learning environment, and; on the community, but these benefits were only observed where quality programs were in place. Poor quality and inadequate programs do little to enhance the educational potential of the child or build first-rate schools' (Bamford, 2007 p.9).

It was important to keep the program running smoothly.

'Arts education tends to be poorly resourced both within the arts and more broadly in the cultural sector. While highly motivated, creative staff can compensate for under resourced program to produce quality

outcomes this should not be seen as an excuse for inadequate human and physical resource development' (Bamford, 2007 p.4).

The parent teacher interviews are sometimes tedious and tiring. For art teachers it is time not always best utilized because parents do not often care about their children's progress in art. It is a time to get on with other work such as marking and a way of catching up with how other teachers see the progress of shared students. The parents' attitudes were fairly obvious and could be seen as part of the Macrosystem the student found themselves in. The set beliefs held by some parents, peers and the existing subculture of the school sometimes gave life to its own culture. The idea that the study of art subjects would not in any way enhance a students' education because it had not been done in the past, therefore would not be necessary now. Gentle and persuasive arguments and persistence are necessary to inform and change these attitudes.

Interestingly enough, parent teacher interviews often attract the parents of the children who are doing well. Not the ones you have sent notes to, asking to see them. For a start, many parents do not value the arts as much as other subjects. And somehow it seems to give license to some parents to be rude to the art teachers. One mother sat down in front of me and said "I tell Jamie that art is a wank." This had the obvious effect on 'Jamie' who was hard to motivate in class. I pointed out that the subject would not be compulsory if it was 'such a wank' and I also mentioned all the personal qualities the arts enhance as well as the skills learned. Sometimes parents attend drunk and are very vocal and are sometimes kindly moved on. Some parents have not had good experiences of school themselves and are intimidated by young middle class teachers who they may think are telling them how to rear their offspring.

*One mother brought her newborn child to the parent teacher night of her Year 7 boy. She was so drunk she left the baby with us and we did not notice until we heard crying, because he was in a bassinet under the table. About 45 minutes later she sent the boy to collect the bundle. The incident aroused anger in me at how dysfunctional the family was and how easily some of these women have babies, when I had lost so many. I compared my experience to Bronfenbrenner's*



*'Waiting for a thunderbolt (inspiration)'.*

***Mesosystem system that refers to relations between different Microsystems and connections between contexts. For example, between the family experience and what is the school experience.***

As hard as it is to interview parents all evening after work, it was a good way to inform parents of their student's progress and to encourage parents about how to help educate their children. Everything is addressed in a formal manner in reports and at parent teacher meetings. As I mentioned before, the parents you really needed to see rarely attended. One of the students in my Year 10 group was disruptive in class, getting into trouble at break times, and not doing his work. No one could contact his father who was a long distance truck driver in Western Australia, who rarely spent time at home and it seemed took no interest in the boys' education. Part of the reason the boy was rebelling it was suggested was because of lack of interest from his father. I rang the man and spoke to him while he was driving. I told him that if the behaviour was not addressed very soon, it would prolong the delinquency and make it hard for the boy to gain employment in the future. This meant of course that his father would have to support him financially. The thought of this must have triggered a response, because a few days later the father came up to the school for a meeting with the boy's teachers.

It occurred to me that if I presented the situation in terms of dollars and cents the father would better understand the effects of his long absences on his boy. The unemotional and coldhearted effects of 'neo liberalism' borne out of the Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan era were beginning to become prevalent in society. The boy was reacting emotionally to a situation he had little power over. Bronfenbrenner's third stage, the Exosystem comprises links between two or more settings. One that does not contain the developing person, but where events occur that directly influence the setting where the developing person lives. In this case, the father was away for long periods of time and the mother was left to work and care for the children.

The Australian Institute of Teaching has online guidelines for teachers on best practice which fills 26 pages. They are told to 'Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidently with parents/carers' (2011 p.19). In practice it is not so simple. Young teachers especially, are not confident with parents, and many young teachers who do not have their own children find it hard to understand the position of the parents. I found that the more involved the parents are, the better the students behaved. I have had a few parents who came into classes to help, which is unusual in a secondary school, and very valuable.

At a parent teacher interview, one of my Year 8 students and his mother approached me. They were a Maltese family. I invited them to sit down. The boy had a huge anger problem and I started to explain his classroom behaviour to his mother in 'diplomatic' terms. I was his Technical Studies teacher and we were currently cooking. He had disagreed with someone in the class and started to get hot tempered. I 'let him out' (knowing how violent he could become and how scared some of the other students were of him) and told him to go back to our classroom as it was nearly the end of class. I locked the door behind him for our safety. He was so angry he 'stomped' on the full rubbish bin so hard that he flattened it.

He was suspended, but his parents supported him to the hilt and blamed others in the class for arousing his anger.

I asked how he behaved at home and his mother indicated that he was also very angry and disobedient at home. He then told his mother to 'f...ing shut up.' I must have been in a dramatic mood because I slowly rose from my chair and uttered loudly that nobody should talk to their mother like that. "How dare you," I roared. I think because I was having trouble with my own son at home in a similar way. This boy's mother immediately burst into tears and the whole story came out. The father had many women and the son and his father disrespected the mother. I immediately said that the whole family needed counseling and that the boy especially needed to work on anger management. Of course, I should not have done that as it was not my place to do so and there were 'certain channels' to go through, but sometimes bureaucracy interferes with real life. I had said too much but in this case it worked to bluff them into action. Not that I thought all that through at the time, which I hadn't, but sometimes acting intuitively is what is needed. We have become so careful, that great intentions are lost to protocol. After the family left, all my colleagues, about four of them, just gasped at my audacity, and I was hoping that I would not be cautioned.

Eventually the boy returned to school after 'a holiday.' His family had attended counseling and had developed a stronger family unit, and his marks rose from a D average to fifteen A's by the end of the year. He went right through school and passed his VCE, which had never before been achieved in his family. In Year 8, it looked like he was about to drop out, because of his shocking volatility and the lack of assistance and support from his illiterate parents.

That is an example of what I call success. His Victorian Certificate of Education Tertiary Entrance Rank was in the 30's but he had finished school, had a lucrative future to look forward to and his parents were proud of him. His anger has dissipated and was controllable. He had choices when he left school that he would not have had, had he continued his tantrums. The teachers had 'served' the family well.

### Parent Teacher Interaction

I usually made an effort to speak with parents when the opportunity arose, and I was particularly interested in supporting indigenous parents, as one of my roles was as Indigenous Coordinator.

*One parent I struck up a positive friendship with was an Aboriginal woman. I will call her Laura for the sake of the story. I was creating a display in the front office, when I first met her. She asked me if Indigenous students were supported at the school, to which I said that if her three children came to the school, I would personally look out for them. She had already enrolled them somewhere else but brought them over to our school. I became very friendly with her and soon she told me her story. She had grown up 'in a car' with her two siblings and her parents who had driven all over Victoria away from the social workers who they feared would take the children away from them. She does not remember ever having drunk milk, and every Saturday night they slept outside a pub where her parents would throw them a bag of hot chips to share. When she decided to lose some weight much later, I had to instruct her eldest daughter to talk to her about food, since Laura had cut out all meat and vegetables and kept eating all the starches thinking she would lose weight. She developed osteoporosis in her early 40's.*

*When I first met her, she was running away from a prominent Aboriginal who was her husband. He was much older than her and had been frequently violent with her. One story she told me was that he had kicked her repeatedly when she was pregnant one time so that she aborted on the kitchen floor. She was very scared that he would find them and take the children.*

*Because I had been in similar circumstances, and she was an artist I 'created a job' for her as 'artist in residence' in the back room of the art department, where she*

*could come every day and do her own paintings, and watch out for her children. The students could see her working and she could sell her work to staff and others. She stayed for two years. In that time, together we started an Aboriginal support committee to be eligible for government funding; created and coordinated a wonderful mosaic designed by all the current Indigenous students; painted a brand new surf board, that was shown at the Surf Museum and the Melbourne Central Post Office; went on Indigenous camps and excursions, and put together a very well supported exhibition of Indigenous artifacts. The exhibition probably attracted more Indigenous parents than any other event at the school. Pieces were collected from both staff and parents. There was an official opening attended by about 40 parents.*

*Laura and I would sit in my car at break times and talk over a cigarette. The first thing we aimed at for her new life was to purchase a car. We worked out a financial plan and with the help of her father's generous input, she achieved it in the first year I knew her. Many months later, she went through the Family Court. She was terrified. I gave her all the support I could as I had experienced it and knew how stressful it was myself.*

*I sometimes visited her for a cup of tea after school at her housing commission house. It was a pleasant two-storey house, which had plenty of room as well as quite a big garden. But, there was a draw back; the neighbours were so dysfunctional it was starting to affect her children's behaviour. The child next door kept stealing her son's toys and the couple over the road fought so much that they attracted the police on a regular basis. The neighbours on the other side had a heroin problem and kept throwing their syringes over the fence into her garden. I sat down with her and was brutally honest because, by then, we could pretty much say anything to each other. I felt that if she didn't move, the children would get too used to the behaviour they were seeing modeled all the time. I proposed that if she ever got the opportunity to purchase a house I would lend her some money, and suggested contacting the Aboriginal centers about special support programs.*

*It was just before the summer holidays, so we said goodbye. I thought I would see her the following year as usual but this was not to be the case. I started work again and waited for a while and then I went to her place. I asked her if I had offended*

*her at all, but she said I had not. But what was interesting was that she had been so taken by my offer to lend her some money that it had motivated her to make something of her life. She had started a degree at Deakin University. I was astounded. But she did not stop there. She not only completed her degree, but went on to do further study to accomplish even more. I gave her a pretty watch as a celebratory gift, which she wore, but she later told me that people had accused her of stealing it.*

*And what about moving, was another question on my mind. She had scoured the government welfare packages and came across one that specified if she saved \$1000.00 in a year and found a house for under \$100,000.00, the government would buy it for her and she would pay it off as if it were rent. Amazingly, she managed that too. I asked her how on earth she did that on a pension, and she replied that she had been starving as a child, so a year of eating less wouldn't hurt her children either.*

*Her two eldest children finished their Victorian Certificate of Education and the third, studied Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. When the eldest passed, I made her a special certificate and paid for her to go to the valedictory dinner through Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness funding. Then on my way home one day, she said to me that she was not going. I asked her why, and then it hit me like lightning. She had no dress, she could not afford to get her hair done, let alone nails, new shoes etc. I rang the regional Indigenous centre and within a very short time she had everything arranged for her to be the belle of the ball.*

Max van Manen states that teachers need to be mindful of the effects of the surrounding environment on their students and says

'Some have argued that increasing selfishness and greed in modern society requires that professional educators develop caring school environments, for the sake of the children and ultimately the sake for the sake of society (Max van Manen, 1991 p.6).

In this case I think it was having the imagination and desire to develop the empathy that worked for me and ultimately for the student as well.

## Entrepreneurial Skills developed due to low status of the Art Department

As I prepared the exegesis, a friend suggested I recall the many battles I had in procuring funds and building respect for the art departments I worked in, because I was always the one to push for the creative arts in particular.

Traditionally, in a high school, even in the best high schools, the art department is 'down the back' of the school. At my first western suburbs school, as I mentioned earlier, it was over a main road with a special crossing for students. This of course meant that they were always late to class and always had to leave early for other classes, allowing less time to practice art. In *The Enlightened Eye*, Eisner quotes Bernstein (1971) as saying

'Students learn quickly what adults believe is important for them to learn. This message is conveyed in several ways; among the most important is the amount of time allocated to subjects' (Eisner, 1998 p.76).

Only recently, I visited my last school in the outer western suburbs. There, I discovered that their art department budget had been severely cut because the previous Head of Department had lost part of it due to inexperience.

Unfortunately, it will now take time before the amount can be increased again. Fortunately, it never happened to me because I had learned through experience and by watching what happened to other departments.

I had to have all sorts of strategies for adding to resources. With more time I could have probably done better, but teachers never seem to have the time they need.

I ran arts festivals, that I managed to gain extra funds for, organized massive exhibitions with other subject areas where we could share the costs and started a 'gallery' in the administration passages that went a long way in validating the Art Department's position because I held proper 'openings' and invited speakers and the



*'Kidstuff was popular with most students'.*

media. I held competitions that encouraged students who would never have normally been interested, to create posters and to dress up or to draw concrete drawings; painted sets for the school performances (that meant extra paint for the art department). I involved students in community projects where we received extra funding and created special 'projects' around the school such as the 'Indigenous Mosaic' and always sought opportunities for positive media coverage for the school which would resonated well in administration circles.

### **Collective Action**

I have consistently been a member of the union because a person as outspoken and as eccentric as myself will sometimes need support. I have needed their services twice in my 30 years of service. Many times throughout my career, I have gone on strike and marched in the city. It costs each person a lot financially, because everyone loses a days' pay for each day they strike, and in my case it always meant a cutback, as I was responsible for my two children. I was usually angry with those who kept the schools open and went to work while we were on strike. It undermined our struggles. First of all, they got paid AND they eventually gained all the conditions that we had 'paid 'for as well. It was divisive in schools and one soon learned where people's true values lay. I had no sympathy for those who 'could not afford' to take a day off and pointed out that

some of us had done the hard yards and paid the prices for the improvements in conditions.

### How I accessed the External Art Environment

In order to do all this 'fighting,' which is what it sometimes felt like, I had to be passionate and 'armed' with information about the importance of the arts. Educating the school community in the arts was imperative. I already knew that the arts were important because they had served me well, but I had to learn to articulate it.

Eisner addresses the issue in chapter four of his book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002). Sub headings named 'What the Arts Teach' (p.75) and 'How does 'Learning in Art Show' (p.90) articulate the value of learning the visual arts at school. He states that

'in the art room, students are given permission to direct their own activities in settings that provide much more space for personal initiative than is normally found in most academic settings'(p.74).

and he continues with ideas about how imagination is developed, how materials are used as a medium and the learning of aesthetics. He also stresses the importance of 'the ability to transform experience into its linguistic counterpart'.

'This task-talking about art- is the job of critics and art historians, but it is done by all of us who wish to converse about what we have experienced' (p.86).

I experimented with many ways of learning about the world in the classroom, and of building general knowledge, and found that everything counted: the festivals, the art shows, the visitors, the excursions, the camps, the social projects, the films, videos and books, and the fact I was an artist too. When it was time to paint sets for the school plays, I would paint them in the classrooms with the students. They were always intrigued and interested in helping or watching and would rarely disturb me.

### Significance of the Built Environment

Many of my students had problems of one kind or another and it was a matter of providing a secure environment where confidence could be nurtured. I was conscious of the needs of some students for refuge, away from the occasional hardships of the schoolyard, especially during break times. Eisner knew only too well, that a classroom has a familiarity about it and wrote

‘Classrooms like wine, are known by their smell, and tactile qualities as well as by sight’ (Eisner, 1998 p.68).

On a hot day, my classroom smelt a bit sweaty and stale, but mostly it had a pleasant smell of paint, pencil shavings and crayon, sometimes of clay.

And Eisner, (1998) adds

‘How school buildings are designed, we have come to realize, affects how people behave in them (Eisner, p.71).



*‘Student work on cardboard’.*

My classroom was relatively isolated at the back of the school near the back gate. If students were there for period 6, there would be a gradual drift of bodies towards the doors at 2.45pm, if you allowed it to happen. And because the

'powers that be' rarely walked down to our end of the school, the littering was atrocious and hard to stop.

Eisner realized the importance of the teacher-student relationship and mentions that

'Teachers teach by example...by animation and excitement they display the class, by the level of affection they provide to students.....teachers teach by relying on illustration, using metaphor....The features of their teaching convey their own messages' (Eisner, 1998 p.77).

The personality of the teacher is often displayed in the maintenance and decoration of the room. My last classroom was a huge hanger really. It had a tin roof and was made of concrete building blocks originally painted in the sickly colour I would call 'commercial skin colour'.

And, of course, it was 'down the back,' so far that sometimes I had to jump in my car at break times to get to the toilet over the other side of the campus, before I had an accident. It was much bigger than my rooms at previous schools, and didn't just look out to paddocks or concrete. It took me ten years to be able to purchase a computer for the room and then I bought it out of funds procured for Indigenous students so it



*'An old, but happy classroom-moving on from flesh tint'.*

was really theirs to use. Eventually, I got two more and a printer. The Studio Arts room was finally mechanized (sort of, but not nearly well enough for twenty six students). I always tried for more but no one seemed to think that Studio Arts and Art students needed to work on computers. I was always told that there were rooms full of computers near the library, which was true, but it was often the case that others had booked up all the same classes that I needed and there were no restrictions on how many bookings a person could make. It was first come first served.

When I first moved in to E2, I had to really tidy up as the previous 'tenant' was a Technical Studies teacher who had 'lost it' and had left 'burnt out'. The mess was unbelievable. All surfaces were covered with electrical circuits and wires and bits of wood with tools intermingled. The Principal had decided I should be there because it allowed more space, which was good, but I lost warm water forever, my exercise regime was boosted by distance running to the toilet and my exasperation was enhanced by wading through trash on the way to the class room, which got worse the further the distance from the administration block. I asked the Principal if I could hang pictures on the wall. He said I could if I asked him first and produced a diagram of what and where I was going to put them. I nodded, and went ahead after a while and hung all the students' work and let them on 'special occasions' paint the walls. I am a great believer in the empowerment experienced by actually taking part in changing your own environment. Later on we stuck ceramic tiles on the wall and I enlisted students to participate by painting their own bit of a mural. My final gesture before leaving my vibrant and well-loved art room (named by committed students and myself as 'the Studio') was to paint a type of Guernica homage on the door to the storeroom, with myself replacing the woman holding the dead baby, except I was holding paintings and brushes, in vibrant colour. It is still there.

I made sure materials were of a good quality as one day I had supervised someone else's painting class. This teacher had augmented the materials with some cheaper brands. I tried to help a couple of students and found I could not paint with the stuff myself, so how could they be expected to. I remembered what van Gogh had said about materials to his brother Theo in his letters, that it

was important to use the best materials so that there was no way you could blame the material, and you had to then look at your own lack of technique. It was so annoying when a new young male teacher decided that I should not be able to have cadmium colours in the classroom because they were poisonous. I did point out that I had used them for about forty years without consequence and besides, we did not EAT the paint. But I was coerced to submit. The colours were pretty hard to replicate, and some yellows made awful greens and oranges. As you might have realized, I ensured my students had to mix their own colours at all times.

Waste was punishable, as was neglect of brushes and leaving lids off paint bottles.

There was an old 'compactus' to one side, which was helpful but was easy for students to get into a mess, or to hide in, which was very annoying. I kept small easels I had had made for the department in there, along with folders and tools.

Along the back of the room were windows with very old vertical blinds that were occasionally useful when other students or teachers went past. On the left hand wall as one looked from the front, were cupboards full of student work. On the bench were paintings on stands and above the board that was also fully covered with artworks, paintings on stands and above the board that was also fully covered with artworks, were charts of western art history and word definitions.



*'My painting called 'Emerging Identities' that was part of my first exhibition, shows the different stages of psychological development throughout adolescence. The anxieties and traumas and highs are akin to the game of snakes and ladders'.*

There were also windows on the upper level of the huge room. Sometimes the sun was so strong as it beamed onto the tables that I would have to move students to save them from being scorched alive. There was nothing to cool the room in summer so I always brought an electric fan from home to make it bearable. In winter there was a crude heating system that snaked itself around the ceiling under the beams in a great big shiny silver tube. I would also bring in heaters on very cold days and take them home again, as anything left in the room would get stolen or broken. It was a constant battle to keep equipment and tools in order. Because it was 'Art', we were never in receipt of any new furniture and most of the fixtures were old and broken. I did my best to make them look 'funky' or different, and even collected a couple of old couches from off the street that

someone had put outside to be taken away as rubbish. One of the couches I brought in used to belong to my parents and was in good



*'Attempts to cover the sickly flesh tint and my homage to Guernica. (The photograph's blurry effect was useful to portray speed in the exhibition).'*

condition. It was useful as long as it was near the front and in my full view. Many teachers could not control the students in the couches, but I found some worked better there, leaning over a table. The couches gave a more relaxed feel to the atmosphere of the room. My desk was stuck to the floor, and behind me was a white board. The sinks were to my right, which was convenient as I could oversee students when they cleaned up. I was given an old lockable cupboard by the cleaner (one of my best contacts) that became where everyone left their tag or messages to me. I kept it to my left side next to two tables covered in boxes of materials, to encourage students to collect their own when appropriate. I unlocked the cupboard so students could peruse the 3000 books and catalogues I had there. The book cupboard was always open and contained puzzles of great paintings, art crosswords and other games. Students were encouraged to collect their own materials and books after I had introduced the lesson. I once went to a professional development class to learn how to use a smart board. Now that would have been really useful in that room with all the art students, but instead

the school placed them in administration and the library. At twelve thousand dollars each, this meant that students would have little access to them and teachers' access would be limited.

**Needless to say, the Principal did not venture into the room for 4 years, which I thought was interesting but not surprising, as it was so far to walk and away from the comforts of the administration block. It appeared that he was quite shocked to see the room that by now was brightly colored and highly decorated, but there was no way he could object, as the students were so enthusiastic about 'their bit' of wall that they had painted, there would have been a riot. I did have to paint over the stencils created by the Year 9 boys, who had finally produced one each after much cajoling, simply because the business manager did not like them. Sometimes, people's outdated or uneducated views interfered with the teaching process.**

Many students did well in this environment, away from the rest of the school and in a slightly messy but not too precious environment. It was delightful to hear their responses when they first entered the room.

### [Relationships and External Speakers](#)

Introducing aspects of the outside world to enable students' access to opportunities provided in wider society was always on my mind. I invited speakers to class, and organized as many camps and excursions as I could. At one stage, every Year 7 or 8 had been on the 'initiation' tour of the Victorian National Gallery, because I would organize the excursions for the teachers. One year I organized seven excursions before June, and all for other people. Once the students had been, there would be far greater interest and appreciation of art because students had been taught how to 'read' art works. One Year 7 boy, at the exact moment of understanding how to read an artwork exclaimed joyously that 'it is just like reading a book'.

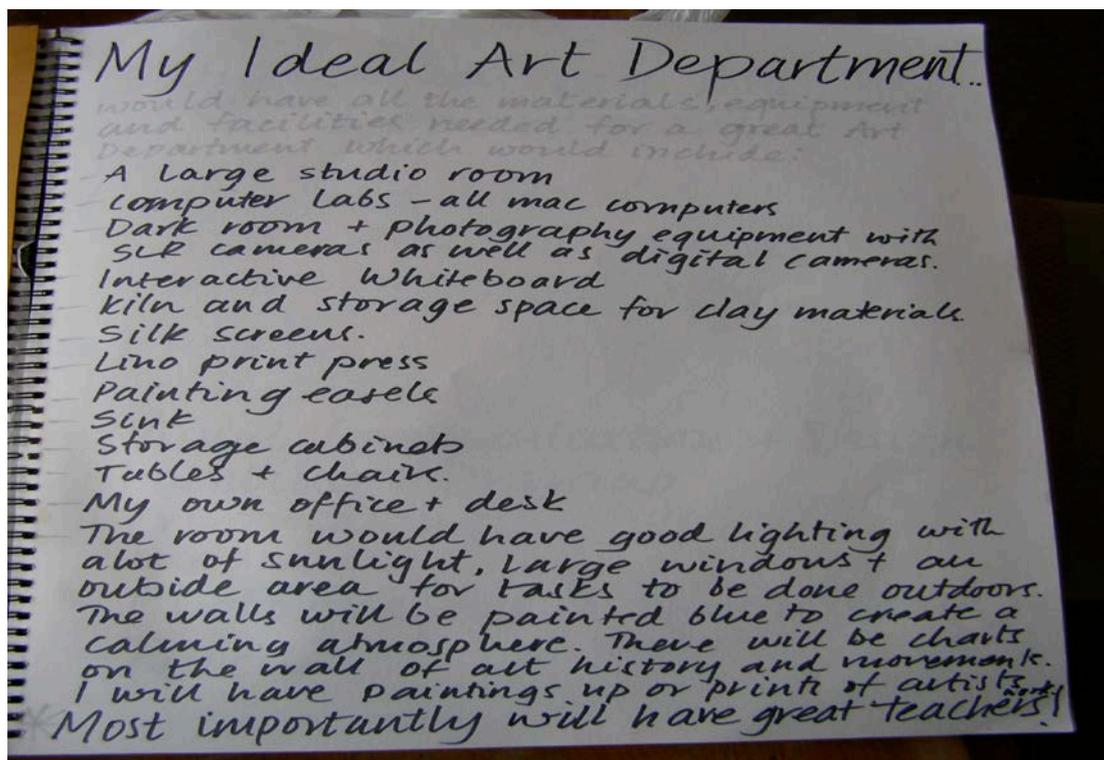
Tattoos were always of interest to students even though they were illegal for those under 18 years old. A visiting speaker I invited to the classroom one time, a friend of my daughter's, was a tattooist. She showed what was appropriate for the class, talked about techniques and laws and the importance of hygiene. The

students were fascinated, and I had taken the precaution of sending notes home first. Two girls were particularly interested and continued their art studies through school and on to art school, specifically because they remembered this one speaker. At art school that one went on to do illustration and the other, animation.

I held life-drawing classes so the students could get the feeling that it was a serious study as they had seen in the art books. I told them that it was an advantage if life drawings were found in their folders because it was so difficult and not all schools attempted it.

They were told in no uncertain terms that if anyone misbehaved they would be sent home. This had also been stipulated on the permission note that had gone home to parents. It worked best when taken with the utmost of seriousness.

I spent time contacting art schools to find out how to contact the professional models.



'Dreaming....':

Eventually, we joined the Life Models Association who sent a list of people with descriptions of their appearance and whether they had a car or not.

I would always have to make payment as easy as possible, which sometimes meant I had to pay, because the paper work was tedious and slow. Sometimes I would collect models from, and return them to the railway station, or take them home so that they would come to the outer suburbs where the school was located. Not an easy request. Gradually, the support for life drawing grew amongst students and even some teachers came along. It was always after school and in a room that had a wall heater and covered windows. One afternoon I heard a noise that seemed to come from above; I looked up and saw a Year 7 boy on the roof looking through the upper windows. He'd been sprung big time! That was the worst that ever happened in fifteen years. It was free and all materials were supplied. Newcomers, particularly boys, would be gob smacked for the first five minutes and would even go red in the face for a little while, then they would settle and realize how hard it was to draw the human figure. Some students excelled at it. I think the classes being well run with

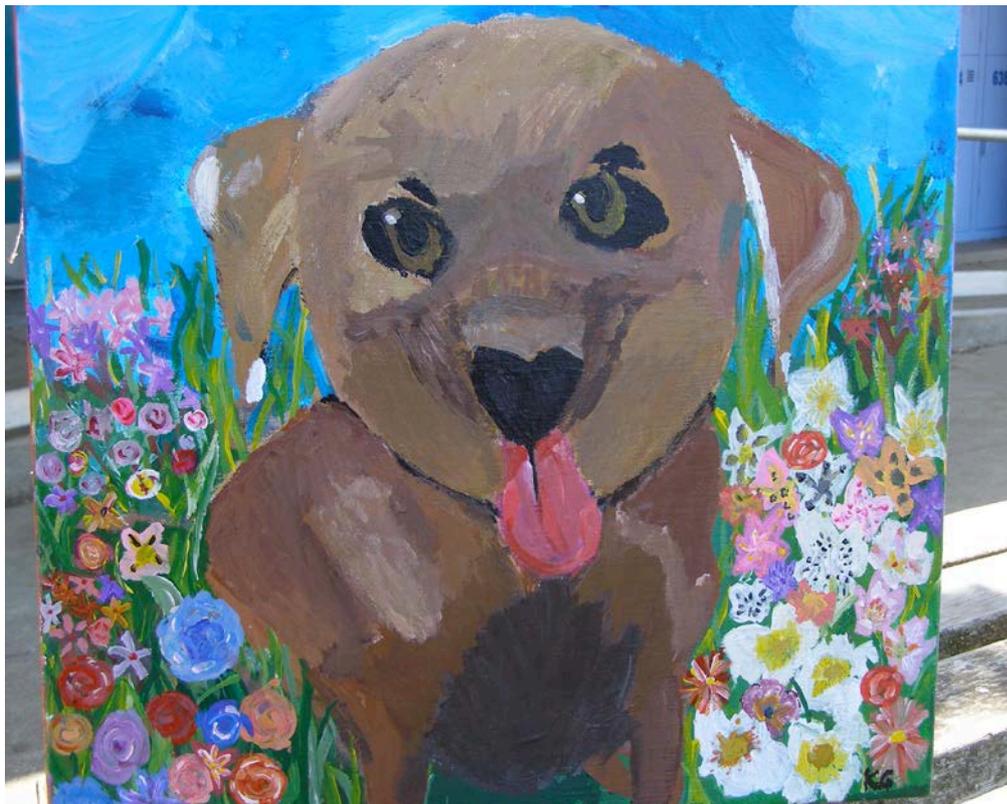


*'Always the best materials'.*

professional models involved, added validity to the work of the art department. I also found that any 'extra' effort on my part always paid off, so even though it meant I would be late home, it helped the students so much that it was worth it. I noticed that the students who attended the life classes also wanted to do better.

It gave them impetus to do further develop their skills, because now they were 'real' artists.

I encouraged the ability to draw in other ways as well. I had classes where students had to do observation drawing using different materials. Their drawing gradually improved, especially if they came to 'art club' after school. Younger students would be in awe of the work of some of the older students and aimed to achieve a similar level. Sadly, I had to drop 'art club' after a few years as staff were forced to attend all meetings.



*'K's joyous Metaphor for Me'*

According to Ian Menter et al., (2011)

'Drawing reflects childrens' knowledge and understanding of the world and provides a means by which they express their thoughts and feelings. Although it is not language-based activity, children's drawings are communication channels as the articulate their views and perceptions of the world on other people. Apart from the content of the drawing one could argue that children's

drawings also enable people around them to have a glimpse of their motor coordination, self concepts and social; attitudes! (Roberts-Holmes, 2005 p. 183).

Often, the colors that students chose reflected their state of mind. One cheerful Year 10 girl (I will refer to her as K) responded to the subject matter 'Metaphor of Me' or self portrait, by painting a brightly colored field of flowers with a puppy in the middle.

A Year 12 boy thanked me for teaching him to express himself through art, because it had helped keep him sane and occupied. He was not he only one to stay out of trouble because he had discovered painting and art.

### The Importance of the Arts

The time allotted to study the arts has been cut in the Australian National Curriculum, which leaves less time to learn skills, which I would argue almost takes it out of the category of 'a discipline'. It comes down to '160 hrs across Years 7-8, 160 hrs across Years 9-10' ([www.acara.edu.au](http://www.acara.edu.au) p.4). In an article that was published in the The Australian newspaper on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2012, it is noted

'But the Visual Arts Consortium, a N.S.W-based lobby group, doubted whether students would be given enough time to engage with the workload, given the pressure on teachers to produce higher National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy' (p.1).

In Phenomenology Online [www.phenomenologyonline.com](http://www.phenomenologyonline.com), Joy of Teaching Peter K. Von Mueller writes

'the teacher sees these moments of learning on the spark of recognition, relief, satisfaction and wonder in the eyes of his student.....This is where the moment of enjoyment of teaching arises'.

There continue to be mixed messages on how important the Arts should be in the curriculum.

In support of the Arts, former Prime Minister of the UK, Gordon Brown said in 2007

'I make no apology for saying that education is the best economic policy...to educate is to form character, to shape values, and to liberate the imagination. It is to pass human wisdom, knowledge and ingenuity from one generation to the next.... As Plutard said, the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled...education is the greatest liberator mankind has ever known, the greatest force for social progress.'(P.45 Transforming through the Arts)

That said, the Arts do not appear as prominently as they could in the British education system. These days the concentration is on the subjects that produce bankers and corporate administrators. Even in the USA, times are as hard as ever and the Arts do not predominate at these times of fiscal cutbacks.

A new study by Professor Andrew Martin, Associate professor Michael Anderson, that was published (2013) in the latest issue of the prestigious Journal of Educational Psychology, and can be found on the American Psychological Associations' Database that highlights the benefits of student involvement in the Arts.

'Not only does this study demonstrate that the arts help deliver positive outcomes in engagement and motivation for students outside of the arts domain, it also shows that high quality, participatory arts education has the greatest impact' ..... 'Academic outcomes included motivation, homework completion, class participation, enjoyment of school, and educational aspirations, while personal wellbeing measures considered such factors as self esteem, life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning or purpose'.

A story I call 'Flowers' is interesting because it involves students who were not particularly interested in Art but joined the class in Year 10 as a way to stay with their friends, and to experiment before going on to do the Victorian Certificate of Education. They were an intelligent group but not too good at drawing and painting, and since the subject was Drawing and Painting, I was always looking for ways to include them in a challenging way. I think the story shows the diverse ways of communicating and expressing important issues through the Visual Arts and how enjoyable and valuable it can be for students.

I was offered the opportunity to become part of a community project addressing the issue of Domestic Violence.

I jumped at the chance to be involved, especially since the suburb where the school was situated happened to suffer from the highest number of cases of Domestic Violence in Australia. I estimated the project would take one full term. I first addressed my class to see who wanted to be involved. The previously mentioned group put up their hands. I showed them a video I had been given by the project coordinator, addressing the issue in graphic and even brutal terms. They had been warned before embarking on the project that some aspects were 'unsavoury', but the more involved they became the more inspired they became about wanting to do a good job in communicating the dangers of the issue.

The next stage involved meetings between the group and the social workers who would inform the students of all aspects of the issue. This took place in the school counseling rooms. I then guided the students to design a project. What they came up with evolved from its inception to completion, improving as time progressed, as individuals had 'divine inspiration'.

We settled on a four piece screen because screens can hide unpleasant actions. Then one student came to school with a poem from the net that had been dedicated to battered women and at the time had no author attributed to it. She downloaded it and we discussed it. The poem was harrowing, but perfectly described the issue. We decided to add it to the two middle screens.

We had many discussions about the visual content of the project, and I collected all sorts of materials to add to it. By chance, I had purchased boxes of fabric flowers and ribbons a few weeks before at a garage sale. These were to become an important part of the project.

It got underway and the students became obsessive. They harassed me to arrive early each morning to open up so they could work before school. They came at recess, lunchtime and after school until it was complete. Not just one or two students but all of them. The commitment was exemplary. One of the girls rose to be the natural 'leader' and it was her who did all the organizing. She organized purchasing materials, free periods for every one to come to the art room and the finances to pay for various needs of the project. She would timetable me to attend when they were there. She would even arrange for refreshments when necessary.

They were, and I was too, extremely proud of their achievement when it was finally finished after about 10 weeks, and talked about how much it meant to them that might be able to help lower the rate of Domestic Violence in the area.

The final artwork was very carefully taken to the council offices for approval, which was overwhelmingly positive. So much so that the local newspaper wrote an article about it and took pictures of one of my students for it.

The finished piece was in four parts. The first panel was made to resemble a closed door. It had a knocker and around the edge it had broken plates and other pieces of crockery glued to it representing the fights that go on behind closed doors. We hung chains across it in a crisscross pattern, to indicate that it was often not so easy to escape. Then one of the students came to school with police tape that had "crime scene" written on it. Her father was a policeman and had it handy, which added clarity to the original idea (even though apparently it was not legal to use it). On the next two screens the Domestic Violence poem was projected and traced painstakingly until it was finished. In between, the silk flowers were glued and others were painted to appear as though they were falling from the sky.

### I Got Flowers Today (Dedicated to Battered Women)

I got flowers today!

It wasn't my birthday or any other special day.

We had our first argument last night;

And he said a lot of cruel things that really hurt;

I know that he is sorry and didn't mean to say the things he said;

Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today.

It wasn't our anniversary or any other special day.

Last night, he threw me into a wall and started to choke me.

It seemed like a nightmare.

I couldn't believe that it was real.

I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over.

I know he must be sorry.

Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today!

It wasn't our anniversary or any other special day;  
Last night he threw me into a wall and then started choking me;  
It seemed unreal, a nightmare, but you wake up from nightmares;  
And I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over-but I know he is sorry;  
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today!  
Today was a special day-it was the day of my funeral;  
Last night he killed me; If only I would have gathered the courage and strength to leave him;  
I could have received help from the Woman's Shelter, but I did not ask for their help;  
So I got flowers today- for the last time.

This is part of the poem.

Since then I notice that various versions have appeared on the net and have been claimed and even copyrighted, but at the time, this had not been done and it was signed "anonymous".

On the last panel, a window was cut out and instead of glass, a mirror was fixed behind the curtains and the window box. This was meant to signify self reflection and healing. A window box was added with new shoots growing out of the earth symbolizing healing and a new life. Green grass was painted on the bottom of the piece indicating peaceful pastures in the future.

The council held a special luncheon for our students and others who had been involved in the project. We all went along with friends and relatives of the students. The particular girl who spoke on our behalf had had many problems and was just starting to become more confident about herself. Her father, who she had not seen in many years attended the luncheon to see her speak. She was so proud, and so was he.

We had an impromptu party back in the classroom for the artists, and we celebrated with pizzas and coca cola (their choice).

The project was shown at the local library for some time and then it toured around Victoria because it had such an impact on those who saw it.

After two years it returned in a very dilapidated state. I fixed what I could and let it rest in my art room for as long as I was there.

## **Professional Development**

I used to look forward to attending the annual Art Education of Australia Conference as it meant I would have stimulating days away from the school and find out what exciting activities were being undertaken at other schools. The conferences were always beautifully organized but often were miles away. I usually paid for them myself as the professional development subsidies had been cut back and if others had got in before you then there was nothing left in the kitty. This particular conference had enough variety to hold my interest. I found nothing worse than attending a conference that was boring and kept me away from the students.

Always a two-day affair, the most up to date materials and techniques are presented there. Traders from all the art suppliers are always in attendance and it is a great time to peruse new books and materials and equipment.

At one stage I joined the governing committee to try to increase the state schools input but I dropped out as my family responsibilities increased (ageing parents). Each year I would learn more about how to teach and what was going on in other art rooms across the state. Now that I am teaching secondary art teachers I have spent my time trying to teach what I think is the most relevant and most helpful activities to deepen the knowledge of the students. Even to the point of doing my best to add to their general knowledge and awareness of cultural issues. I wrote the subject in the three weeks before I started working at the university and while I was still teaching in a secondary school, which was ideal. My 'hands on' approach has been generally popular with students and I try to help them adapt to the art classroom and give them strategies to cope with all types of behaviours, so that they have a real view of the classroom rather than just a theoretical view. We visit the local Special school in St. Albans and participate in art classes where timetables allow. The assessments take the form of a final folio and a Victorian Certificate of Education Studio Arts theory question. I do this so that students realize how much theory needs to be taught in secondary school. Some secondary art teachers do not have the knowledge or research know how

to teach up to Victorian Certificate of Education and their students are then very ill prepared for their final exams. The student folio I usually set as an assessment task is filled with practical work and lesson plans and ideas so that prospective employers can see the levels of teaching competence, while the school students also enjoy seeing their art teachers' work. The lesson ideas are almost as important as the teacher's own artwork.

I take the teacher education students' with whom I work to the city and show them how to conduct inexpensive and interesting excursions and I make them organize an exhibition each of their own work at the end of each semester. This requires quite a bit of extra work on their behalf but I have found it to be most worthwhile, as some who have started work as teachers themselves have held exhibitions at their schools. The semester's end exhibitions have been a great way to include students' families and friends who in many cases have never been to the university and are usually really proud of their children's work.

Attending appropriate Professional Development that suits the individual teacher is important. Learning to follow annual goals, skill development, updating theories and technological changes means that teachers have to be educated whilst teaching. This has to be financially supported and enacted upon in each school so that individual teachers can take part in conferences and lectures.

Just as in my school teaching, my life and those of the students I taught coalesced in Bronfenbrenner's framework, so too my life as a teacher and artist inform my work with student teachers. Further, Bronfenbrenner's Systems continue to shape this and has developed my awareness of the needs of the student teachers I now teach. It was at a recent conference that I attended a lecture by a Purima Ruanglertbutr, a Melbourne University student studying her Masters of Art Education. She curated an art show called 'Crossing Boundaries' The Journey from Teacher to Teaching Artist at the George Paton Gallery, Union House, and Melbourne University. I was particularly interested in the idea, as I had always thought that by continuing your own art practice made for much better art teaching. From this I developed the idea of an Art Teacher's show. Ruanglertbutr writes in the catalogue that

‘The artist’s value as an authentic arts educator is enhanced by the label of being an ‘active artist’ in the school community. Artists such as Annie Barton....., exhibit works of art that were created as models for their own students to see improved quality in student work’ (p.7).

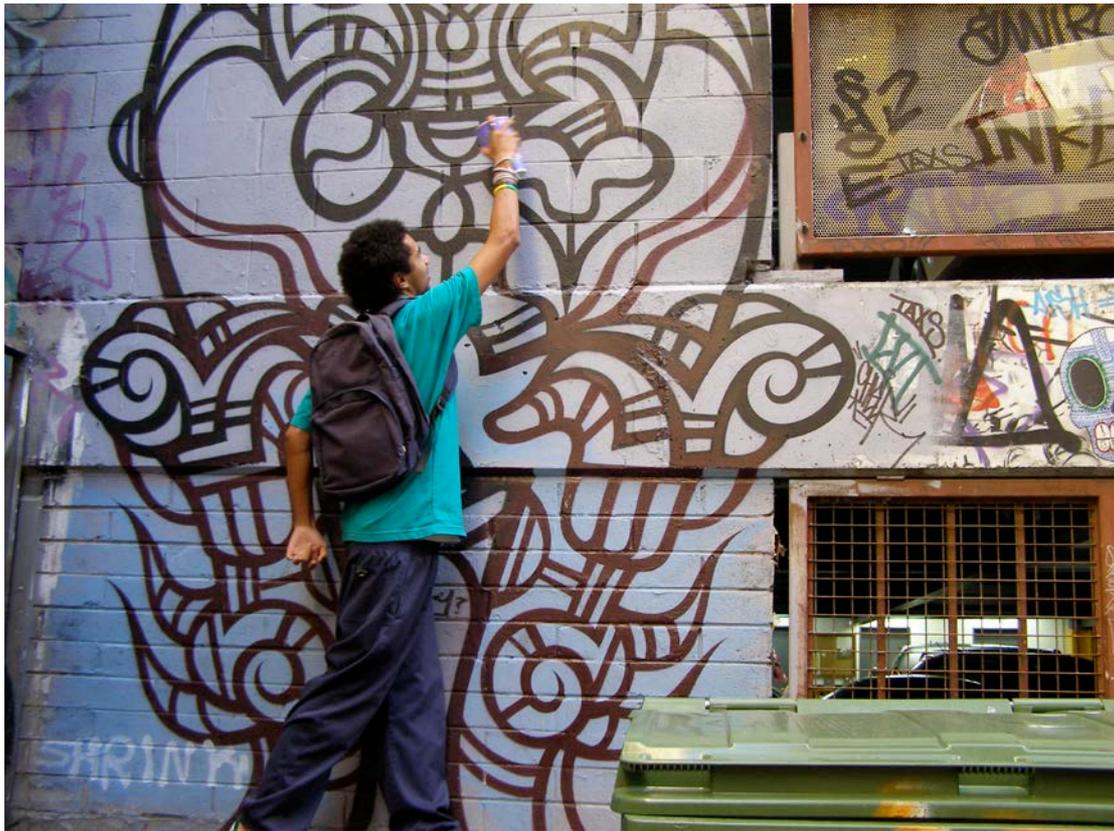
The lesson ideas are almost as important as the teacher’s own artwork.

By always aiming to raise the quality and status of the work by the students and staff in the art department, more time and money needed to be allocated from administration. Each year I would reflect on what could be improved upon and what additional opportunities could be opened up for students and teachers in the following year. I had a master plan, even if others did not.

To raise the quality of the work, resources, furniture, technical equipment and materials were needed. And to get those, money was needed. To raise money you had to work constantly on the status of the department and keep up the momentum and the professionalism. It meant joining committees and making the department visible in every possible way, in the school community The curriculum committee was important to join as it often involved in allocating time to subjects, and which other subjects were put with yours for students to choose from. For example, at Victorian Certificate of Education level if Maths was back to back with Art on the timetable it will be Art that suffered as Maths was seen as more important subject.

I continue to wonder why the poorest of the poor people on the planet continue to produce art as an expression of their cultures with little regard to the cost. Or when people are at war, artistic expression is engaged in to communicate their frustrations or loyalties. Maybe, I suspect, that self expression is an essential element in the struggle to find an identity, no matter who you are The Hon Peter Garrett, MP states in his keynote address to the National Arts Summit, 2013 that

‘...in 2008–09, the creative industries were valued at more than \$31 billion in terms of industry gross product.....Participating in a high-quality arts



*'Relating to his culture....'*

program has many benefits, including improved academic performance, especially for students from a low socioeconomic background...Participation in the arts can help young people as they move through troubled periods in their lives, and explore challenging personal issues in a non confronting way.....Ultimately, immersion and exposure to the arts enriches the citizen because, through the arts, we do understand our own lives better, and the lives of those around us'.

### **Cultural Connectedness and Self Expression Through Art**

The Arts do not appear as prominently as they could in the British, American and Australian education systems. These days the concentration is on the subjects that produce bankers and corporate administrators. In the USA, times are as hard as ever and the Arts do not predominate during times of fiscal cutbacks.

Students develop a feeling of Cultural Connectedness through the Secondary school art room when they finally show the confidence to express themselves competently. They start by first expressing their own ancestral cultures through

their artworks. I was constantly fascinated by the cultural references of different students work. This confidence is built upon once shared values are discovered in their explorations. By exposing students to wider society, and expanding the options to explore, understanding grows. The Kidstuff arts festivals I established allowed students a certain amount of autonomy and creative expenditure that was very beneficial for the development of their knowledge and arts appreciation. The art camps, excursions, visiting speakers, set production, community projects all contributed to the students' development and capabilities in society. Students sometimes achieve in Art because there are no expectations from family or peers to succeed in the subject and there are so many facets to engage in that it allows for maximum freedom of choice.

A boy, newly arrived from Africa who was several years older than those in his Year 9 class, created beautiful pictures of free flying birds for his silkscreen prints on T-shirts. He could hardly speak English, but he made prints for his brothers and his friends, producing old T-shirts and singlets each art lesson, including his own that he took off and printed during class.

A lovely interpretation of Islamic culture was produced with the application of a pattern for a cushion cover made by silkscreen printing onto fabric. The student was from Iran and was very committed to the subject, and aimed to reflect her culture in her work. The design was striking, competently produced, and perfectly unique.

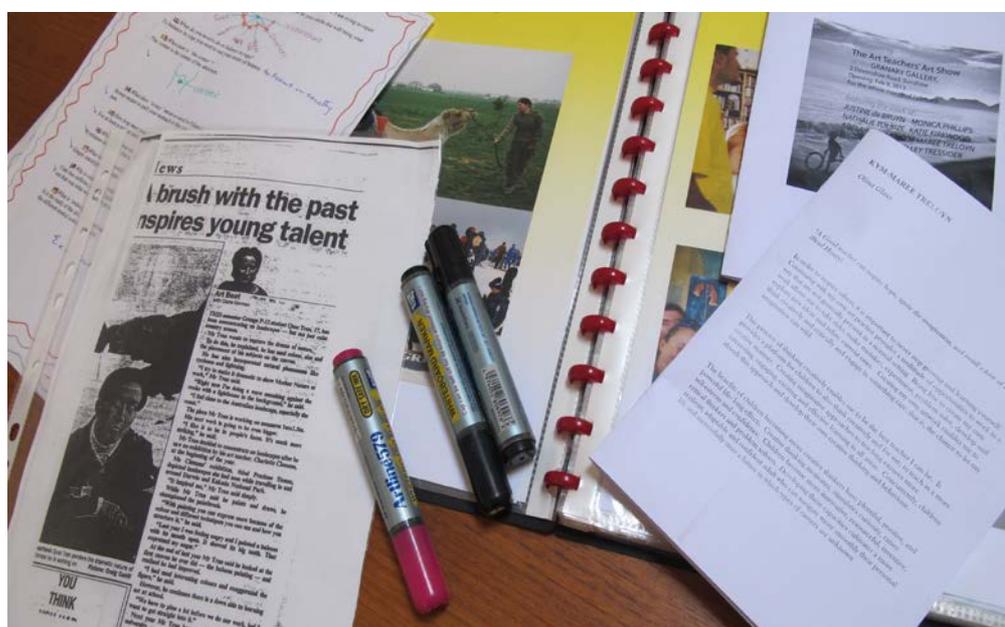
Even when a theme was set, the different nuances in each artwork were fascinating and reflective of each distinctive culture. We talked in my classes about how everyone was from a different place including myself.

I had to somehow teach a girl from Mauritius who hardly spoke English, how to pass Studio Arts at Victorian Certificate of Education level. And another time, a boy who has just arrived from Vietnam on a boat with his family. With much hard work, a lot of symbolism and extra English lessons both students received A's. The girl's subject of research was her homeland. She produced two exquisite paintings of tropical flowers floating on water. The Vietnamese boy had been a student of mine in Year 11. So he did have that advantage. In Year 11, he had attended the art camp and was very enthusiastic about what he wanted to

achieve in Year 12. He had also learned in Year 11 how to use metaphors to express himself.

He painted two huge artworks of the sea in various stages of weather, one with a lighthouse and another with rocks and landforms around it. He was interviewed for an article in the local newspaper 'The Leader', where the comment was made,

'Mr. Tran decided to concentrate on landscapes after he saw an exhibition by his art teacher, Charlotte Clemens, at the beginning of the year.'



*'More piles of paper...find the camel and Mr. Tran'.*

The waves he painted, had an elegance about them that was distinctly Vietnamese or at least stylistically eastern. In the article, it is reported

'While Mr. Tran said he paints and draws, he championed the paintbrush. With painting you can express more because of the colour and different techniques you can use and how you structure it, he said.

Last year I was feeling angry and I painted a baboon with its mouth open. It showed its big teeth. That expressed my anger.'

The achievements were sometimes quite astounding considering the obstacles many students faced.

*A very shy, little boy from Laos was placed in my Year 7 class. He sat at the back of the room at the end of the long table. We were doing colour mixing and aiming to perfect painting techniques. I sat down to assist him. He apologized for not being able to do it properly, and said that he had never painted before because they did not have paint in the refugee camp he had grown up in. I recall looking up at that moment to see the two Australian students who were throwing paint at each other at the other end of the table, and thinking what a lot we all had to learn. The following year I taught this student to do linocuts, and the expressions of surprise and delight when seeing the finished products were priceless. In Year 9, one year later, I gave students a bundle of florists wire and stapled some to small wooden blocks for them to produce wire sculptures. The Laotian student created a minutely detailed sculpture of a soldier crouched behind a bush with a gun poised to shoot. He also made a tiny knife that fitted into a sheaf with hand grenades. It was superbly done but the subject was a little disturbing. I sprayed it bright red as was his wish and sent him to show the Principal to give him a sense of achievement and to make the principal aware of what was happening. I asked if I could show the piece in the forthcoming exhibition but he was too keen to take it home. Once his parents saw it, it never returned to school. I found the detail and knowledge of weaponry very interesting and rather sad for someone of his tender years. Not to worry, by the end of year 10, he was as Australian as they come, rebelling with all the confidence he could muster.*

After initial confidence holds, as these examples demonstrate, students start to share elements of their home cultures. Being aware of this, I organized ten consecutive arts festivals at the school where students and teachers had freedom to create projects to share with others. Sometimes a theme was set to assist those who struggled for ideas. Themes included 'Culture' or 'The Future' or 'Australian History.' The budget did

not increase in ten years but the number of students doubled. A committee was formed to assist me. However, over the years only a couple of particular people worked really well with me, and I am still friendly with them outside school. It usually took at least two terms to organize, all the while, preparing teachers and students about what to expect. The arts festivals had just started to 'fall into place' and become a tradition when I retired from the school and they have not continued,



*'Islamic Cushion design'.*

students about what to expect. The arts festivals had just started to 'fall into place' and become a tradition when I retired from the school and they have not continued, which is disappointing. However, they certainly changed many ideas and the culture of the school during their ten year reign, and we had experiences that some of us will never forget. For example, at the end of one day in class I heard the loud speaker asking me to go to office to direct 'Shorty' and his four camels to the oval to set up camp for the next three days. The office girls were laughing so hard they could hardly come out with the words. And when they asked the very short man what his name was, and he answered 'Shorty', that made it worse. It was to go down in history after that! That particular year, author John Marsden, opened the festival by smashing a chocolate bottle made to look like a champagne bottle over the 'ship of the desert'. The camel was a bit alarmed by the act, and dropped a large pat of pooh soon after. The audience was in uproar! There is nothing funnier to young adolescents, than an inpromptu pooh. To my delight, after a few hours of joining in workshops and talking to

students and teachers, Mr. Marsden said that he felt it was the most creative event he had ever seen in a school.



*'John Marsden with his chocolate champagne bottle (On the chair, in the plastic).'*

The day was eventually perfectly organized, and usually free from discipline problems as only the interested students attended. It was always 'an out of uniform' day, but there was the option to dress up as there were various competitions to enter. When the school was young, the students were slow to participate in dressing up or dancing or similar activities, but as time progressed, it became part of the school culture. Students were given autonomy to run events or stalls by themselves or in teams. They learned organizational skills; witnessed quality work from special visitors; learned how to follow through a project to completion and became part of a whole school activity.

In many cases, the fourth of Bronfenbrenner's systems called the Macrosystem, which takes into account the effect of the culture in which an individual lives, particularly affects the development of adolescents. References to belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material, resources, life-styles, opportunities, structures and hazards mean that the Macrosystem is thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture. The older students in the arts area at the school

I worked in, had become one of the dominant 'subcultures' in the school. They were seen as 'cool.' Sometimes older students would spend extra time in other classes catching up, doing extra work for exams or working on a special project. They were wonderful role models for the younger students.

### The Art Teachers Show

I recently pulled together a disparate group of my former preservice teaching students, who are now mostly working as art teachers, and held an exhibition of some of their work. The only previous exhibiting experience had been in my classes at university, where they were required to show off all the practical work they had completed in the year. I did this at University, to encourage art teachers to celebrate the success of their students. In many cases it is too easy to let it all go and not be bothered with an exhibition because it is hard work, but it is a very special validation of an artist's work.

This particular exhibition, the Art Teachers Show was the suggestion of my supervisor who also runs a gallery as part of a café in Sunshine. It meant that the 'artists' would not have to pay for the space, invitations and opening refreshments and

that they would be supported throughout the process of the exhibition. It is a daunting

task to launch oneself as an artist especially as an individual, and it is also financially prohibitive to those who have not long been in full time work.

I asked each person to write a page on why it was important to continue ones' art practice as a teacher and I produced a small catalogue. They were each to contribute about three pieces of work each. We all met at the venue to hang the work and worked solidly most of the afternoon until we were satisfied that the work was looking its best. It was a happy event and everyone was very excited. Some had friends and family in tow who participated according to how of intimidated they were

by art or women. Most mistakes were ironed out or at least noticed during this time.

The opening was to be following week.

The big day arrived and we reassembled with friends and family at the venue. About forty people attended as 3.00pm seemed to suit most families, who brought children and parents as well as friends along.

One woman found herself in a career that her parents found hard to relate to, was very grateful for being asked to join in the show. Her family were supportive but had no idea about how to foster the interests of their daughter. Fortunately for her, she was the first one to sell some work and eventually sold her other piece as well, which was a wonderful way to experience one's first effort at exhibiting.



*'The poster I made from Justine's beautiful photo'.*

Another woman, who was a mature student when I met her, was very keen to be involved. Her husband told me at the opening that she had looked forward to the day and had started to do her own work again.

In the booklet I collated, she writes

*'When I am working on a piece, I feel like I am engulfed in a different time and world; it is a great escape (p.8)'.*

It was wonderful to see all these artist teachers benefitting from the experience. Since that time, one person has joined an artist's cooperative in order to have an exhibition of her own, and a new group has formed, including some from the first exhibition, in order to show in December in Sunshine.

### **My artistic Processes**

Throughout my life I have been attracted to new techniques and processes and have a basic education in many, from knitting to weaving and etching to digital printing. I choose a technique according to the subject matter of my project or exhibition, because each has its own effects. For example, etching is best used for images that do not need much colour and rely on delicate drawing to define them. Silk Screen Printing gives a bolder effect with strong colours.

For the two exhibitions I completed for this study, I used the techniques of mono prints, painting, collage and digital photography. In the first show I indulged myself in painting, my first love, and embellished the works with scraps of old paintings that I had cut up and some glitter, which I really enjoyed doing because it seems to enliven the works and take them out of the ordinary.

My images are a combination of realist and semi abstract. I aim to make my work understandable to as many people as possible, because I believe in demystifying art and, because I am good at drawing I am able to. Like Matisse, I want my work to be aesthetically beautiful. The colours I favor are clear, strong and lively, even if the subject matter is sombre. I remember John Brack telling us as students that muddy colours mean nothing, and that it showed that we were not thinking if we used them. I like each stroke to be deliberate. For many years I worked as a scenic artist in London and Melbourne which taught me to be unafraid of using black and white, in the theatre and TV, because lighting depletes the colour. I also learned to work consistently and persistently, and to just do what I was asked to do, which varied in technique many times a day.

In the first exhibition I heavily outlined the images in order to flatten them and to accentuate them. By using a collaged technique I am able to connect images in order to present a specific idea. I use the 'hard edge' technique when doing this. I tape the edges of the frame I have decided to use and paint clear medium down the side of the tape I am going to paint over. Before the paint fully dries I pull off the tape revealing a sharp edge in between two painterly areas. I learned this

technique at art school from Alun leach Jones, one of my teachers. I find the collage technique suits my need to tell stories. This way, I can change the meaning by placing different images together.

The prints I processed at the Australian Print Workshop. I chose to use Monoprinting because of its painterly quality and luminous colour. The images I used were taken at the Brunswick Street festival some years ago, but I have always wanted to use them to demonstrate the extraordinary creativity I have been accustomed to in my neighborhood.

Although photography is not my favoured technique, I use it to inform what I need to express. I like candid shots and slices of everyday life as a basis for artwork but I can incorporate surrealist elements in order to clarify an idea. My second exhibition was somewhat experimental for me. Because I no longer work in schools, the photos I had were varied in resolution. However, by using Photoshop, which I taught myself to use for this show, I was able to manipulate the images to incorporate all manner of effects. I then saved the images and photocopied them on a large scale for the show. I organized them in my studio according to their meaning and collaged some pieces together prior to hanging. I had a scale drawing of the gallery space and in my mind's eye I knew where I wanted each set of images to be placed. Hanging them in situ was much easier than I expected, and they hung together well, each one elaborating a different story. I decided to use text from my exegesis with the clusters of photos in order to not only link both components of the project, but to clarify the images for the viewer. The only real problem I had was what to stick them onto the wall with because of their size they were heavy and blutack or transparent stickers were not strong enough. Eventually after buying everything on the market, I found that 'common masking tape' rolled behind each one kept them in place for quite a long time. I did visit the gallery to check on frequent occasions.

## Conclusion

As a result of working on my thesis and investigations over many months, I am convinced that Cultural Connectedness is a vital aspect of adolescent development, as it generates self awareness, confidence and self assuredness, as well as a certain

satisfaction gained by the knowledge of the links and connections in our society that are applicable to their lives. Cultural Connectedness is the holistic state of satisfaction or 'wellness' (Davis, 2012 p.1) after the culmination of many struggles to achieve an identity by investigating and questioning different value structures, and moving away from others. It is an ease with the common culture or a connection to self through the understanding of gender and racist issues, the value of education and the ability to shoulder responsibilities.

This sense of connectedness of the individual is with the family, the community, the wider world and the natural environment, through networks, and also contributes to the building of society and communities.

In this exegesis, I am exploring my life and the life of my students within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Models of Human Development.

I am linking the experiences of my childhood and later life with my development as artist and teacher. In doing this I am reflecting on ways in which these experiences impacted on my interactions with my students. In turn, within Bronfenbrenner's systems, I am reflecting on the myriad influences on students and the ways in which teachers' and students' lives come together and influence one another within complex school settings. My adult development fits most clearly into the perimeters of the Chronosystem, where changes in the environment impact on the characteristics of the person. Examples of this include my engagement with feminism and with issues associated with asylum seekers and immigration and with connectedness.

In the artwork of my second exhibition, I have attempted to show the depth of emotional experience, the raw energy and activity that I became aware of in the secondary art room and finally, the enormous effort and achievements I witnessed.

Every individual is affected by their environmental surrounds, and Bronfenbrenner's systems clearly describe the different pressures that affect us as we develop. Diagrammatically, the stages emanate from the individual in an aura like radiance. They start from the most immediate and intimate relations of all, the family, and describe each of the effects of five successive environments as the individual develops and grows through life experiences.

By providing as many options as possible and broadening the student's world view, more can be achieved.

The joy of seeing a student at the point of 'understanding' or 'the light bulb moment' is immeasurable and is what makes teaching such a special and important career. To quote from a letter written by one of my students from many years ago that I only recently received,

':-) things are really good and I have u to thank for fostering me (sic) creative design abilities all those years ago! Thank you!'

I have elaborated some of my teaching experiences so that my work can be seen in the context of time, and so that future teachers can learn from my experiences. I have always told stories to my students and used them to describe different behaviors and strategies in teaching. I have tried to use autoethnography in an evocative and interesting way to describe personal and interpersonal experiences.

New teachers bring vitality, talent and energy to teaching, and their experiences can only be enriched by students' and teachers' stories written (and painted) by those with a life long passion for their subjects and many years' experience. I wish them hope and joy in their endeavours.



*'Stage of Development'.*

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Selected individual photographs from 'Living Colour'.



*The Details.*



*'Cultural Connectedness'2011, acrylic on canvas.*



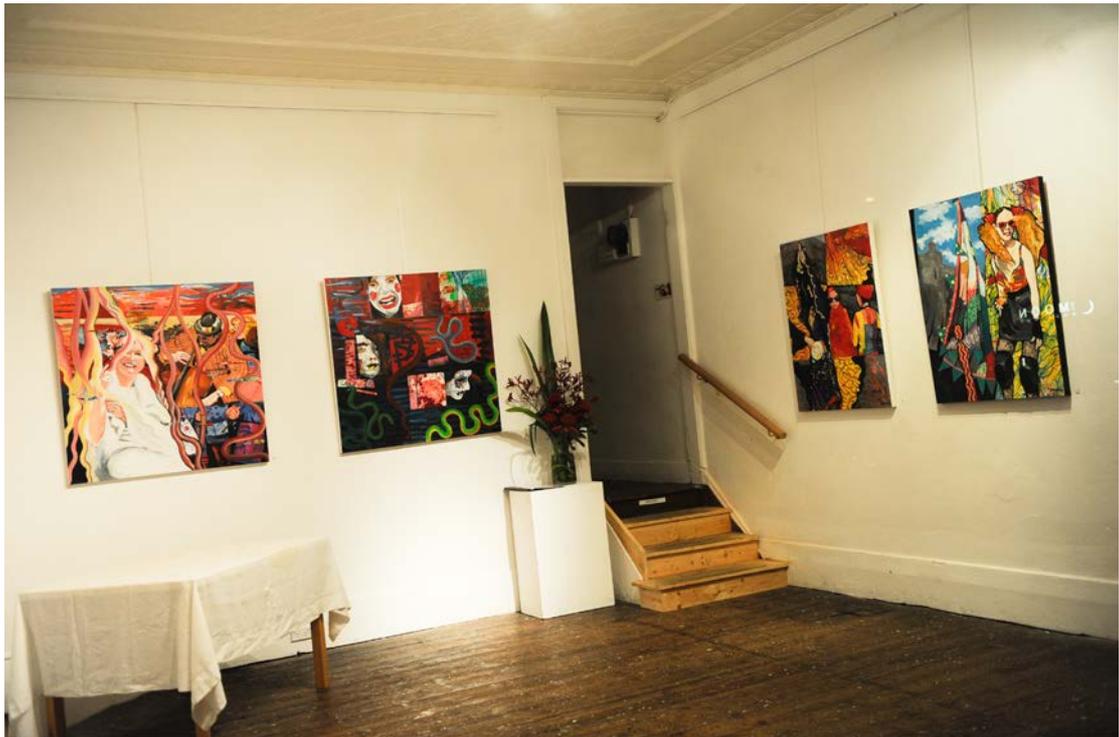
*'Music in my Veins'2011, acrylic on canvas.*



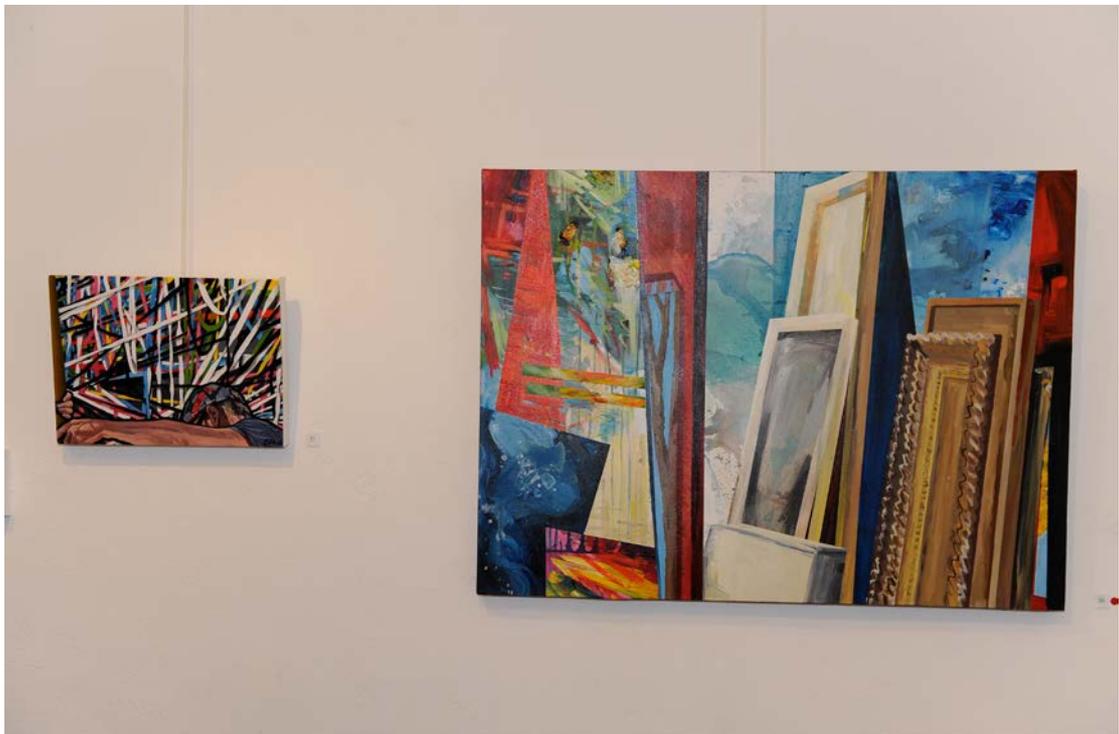
*'Me in My Garden' 2011, acrylic on canvas.*



*'Emerging Identities (Snakes and Ladders)' 2011, acrylic on canvas.*



*Installation shot.*



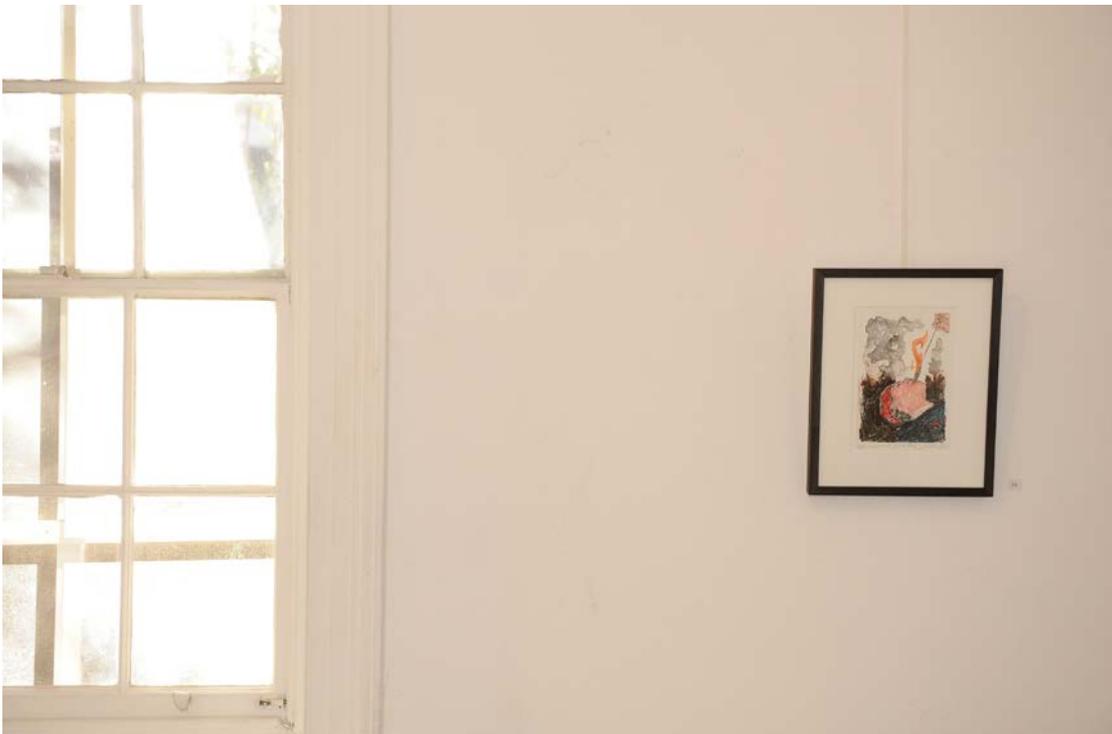
*'Entangled' 2012, acrylic on canvas (left).*

*'Store'2012, acrylic on canvas with collage(right).*



*'Flower Girl'2011,monoprint (left).*

*'Wild Flower'2011, monoprint (right).*



*'Devil Boy'2012,monoprint.*



*'Fair Favourites'2012, acrylic on canvas.*

Notes from "Living Colour".

28/9/12

Charlotte, the veins, linear spaces are  
engaging and draw the views in and  
between the surface lots of tension &  
spatial exploration. I especially liked  
the mono graphs, but that may be because  
I have spent the last week printing.  
I enjoyed all the vertical surfaces,  
the new.

28/9/12

Congratulations on the show  
Charlotte! Thanks for the  
invitation. Di Calk

Shinning words Charlotte,  
- an inspiration!  
Justine

philosophy

Ellen + Sophie - beautiful!

28/9/12  
You are bright like a star. Very lush  
not dark at all. Congratulations  
Marianne + Frank

bot.  
15/11

Congratulations Charlotte, great work  
Stan + Sandra

Charlotte thank for the invite  
to a terrific exhibition. Love  
the colour and energy also the  
relaxable sound your way of  
seeing the world all using your  
experiences Jan W.

philosophy

Great Sm Charlotte Bkings

ALWAYS BRIMANT CHAK,  
LOVE YOUR COURNFUL  
DISPLAYS OF LIFE!  
SPONSERED

Bright colorful and infectious  
full of life. Marg J.

You do great faces!  
Thank you for a lovely  
afternoon! Omond

philosophy

Full of life!

K-guan

Bright + refreshing Buite

Very very nice work Charlotte  
- Peter

(and wonderful to meet you!)

Grace Fair great show. 14/10/12.

philosophy

LOVE YA WORK CHARLOTTE (VERY INSPIRING)  
J. CRAIG

Congratulations Charlotte! Love the monoprints & the small paintings at the front. Keep up the work. Perry xx

Always inspiring! Love all of it  
Cher ☺ Anne H. xxx

lovely colorful art fantastic day  
absolutely amazing Charlotte. Fantastic  
Ryker Marie Tolye

Dorothy Birchell Well Done Charlotte

Elizabeth - Congratulations on your exhibition. I really like the energy in the small works! philippa

Fabulous Charlotte!  
Sorry we didn't make it on 'The Night' but got here eventually.

Congratulations on a vibrant exhibition  
Love Julia, (Gay + Sam send them love too!)

P.S. I love #19 not sure why  
& #17ms high is exhilarating.

Love the mix collage & vibrant colors, Karen

Wow how fantastic to mix lots of techniques.  
Thank you Sunny day Mix

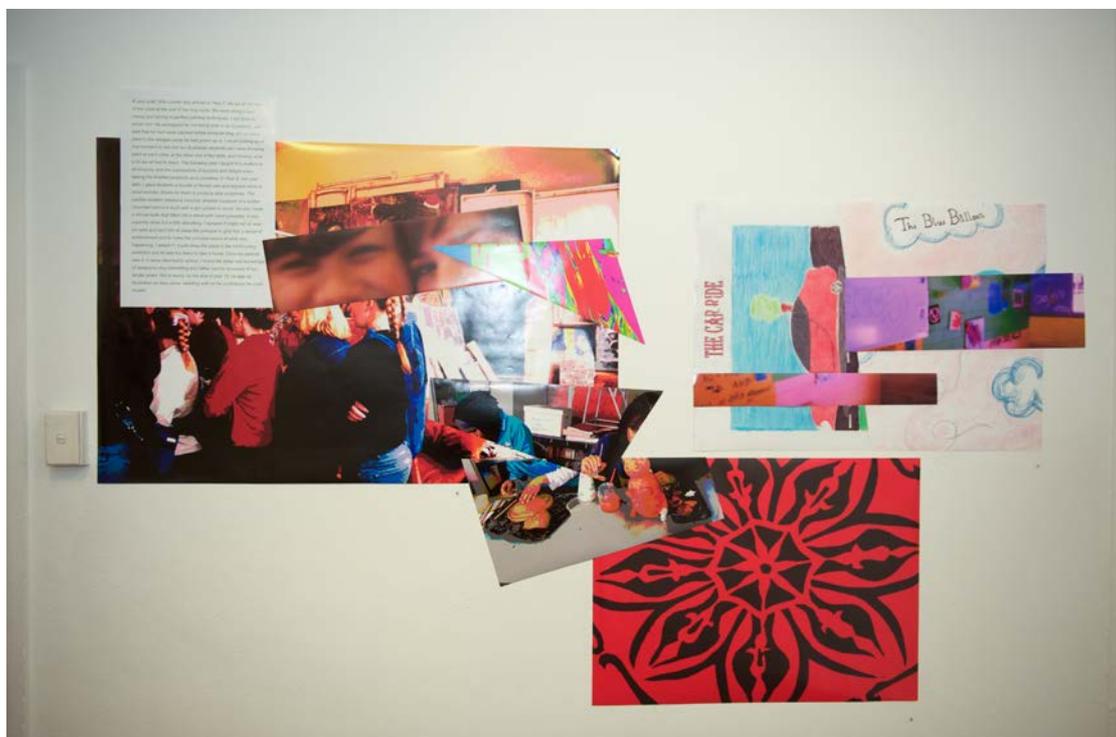
Great use of colour, a very fun collection!

philippa

Selected photographs from 'The Real Deal'.



*The Details.*



*'The Blue Balloon' 2013, digital photo collage.*





*Installation shot.*



*'Blue Class', Messy Mixtures', Culture Comments', Cold War Collywobblers' 2013, digital photo collage.*



What a wonderful expression of the  
intimate aspects of a classroom. Art Class  
have an atmosphere and real emotions/  
feelings, you have achieved those.  
*admirable*

Chudette thank you for taking the time  
to capture the moments of connection  
between art & humanity - an  
invaluable relationship - loved the color,  
the stories & the collage X Magi

Thanks for the invitation  
my friend -  
Vibrant & Activated: Sus.

*philosophy*

I love the use of saturated  
colours in the pictures, it  
adds an element of surrealism  
to the everyday. Also interesting  
to see the Schooling System  
from an artistic perspective, as  
opposed to 'constructions'!!  
X Boris the barstender

Dear Charlotte,  
Congratulations on your  
Show 'Classroom'! I was

immediately excited about the  
sight of your work and the  
'classroom' really draws you  
towards each piece. I can imagine  
the energy levels of children riding  
the roller coaster

*philosophy*

Charlotte - you're incredible. Your work is beautiful & inspiring. congratulations Rom (& Anne).

Cher,  
The work looks amazing & attests to the power of art - as pedagogy. We open up, think critically, rejoice, create, & play in the work as an enactment of doing & teaching. Learning about feeding & about art making from your work - if only it was core curriculum!  
Congrats & well done!

Anne & Ruth

philosophy

6/9/13

Wish every kid could have an art teacher as inspired & sensitive as you are

Congratulations Cher. The work reveals your dedication to your art and your teaching. I wish I had a teacher like you when I went to various schools.  
Philip Longhen

Inspirational. Meaningful.  
I found them very touching. Moments in art & a life  
Congrats. Wonderful Dec C  
xxx

philosophy

Very inspirational and moving gallery which really gives you a good insight into life as a secondary art teacher! Congrats! Kath!

Incredible words & stories.

Dear Charlotte,  
lovely to read your stories & experiences.

You have obviously led an amazing & inspiring life

A wonderful insight into the intimacy & influence of Art teaching

philosophy

Really wonderful combinations and explosion of colour. Interesting emphasis on certain elements. Gives a really nice insight into your teaching experience. Love.

Interesting layout - painting with photographs, ~~and then~~; enjoy the added physical elements too 😊 Sarah.

lovely beautiful stories  
congratulations xx helen

Love the color & passion. Love

philosophy

14.9.13

Such a heartfelt exhibition. The text & images convey the chaos, colour, movement & eclectic energy of a high school art room so well. You have clearly done an incredible job being the students' creative & emotional support & guide - a huge job! ~~Well done!~~ Well done! Very inspiring & so human!  
♡ Claire & Mike Lefebvre

20/9/13

Great work Charlotte!

Pauline

I am so very moved by the range of emotions your work provides. The vitality of the imagery, the colour, the juxtapositioning, and the simplicity of stories. There is something deeply political in what you are doing here & I congratulate you on the honesty & courage I see  
20/9/13. Mary Rose

20/9/2013

So full of life - energy, creativity & hard work all intermingled & transformed. Very beautiful and very thought provoking. A wonderful reflection on 20+ years in the classroom. Fran Newell well done!

philosophy.

philosophy.

