



## Art in Early Childhood

art in the early years: learning about,  
through and with art

Felicity McArdle,

Charles Sturt University, Australia

### ABSTRACT

**This critical essay is a discussion around the challenges and the possibilities for repositioning art in the curriculum for young children. It begins with an attempt to slip away from 'proving' the value/importance of art. The approach in this paper is to play with theory through the use of stories. With the concept of rhizomatic mapping, and a preference for the logic of the 'and' over binaries, the paper maps some connections and flows across a bricolage of stories about art. Without directly pointing out any threads running through the stories, the map, as an object and an action, is a playful attempt to create a dynamic space for possibilities, unsettling 'truths', and ultimately, prompting rethinking and action. Art can make a difference in the lives of young children, and how their successes are measured and mapped affects their chances for success. What is required is change and, 'there are a thousand things to do' (Foucault, 1981/1991, p.174). Art education is not an option. Rather, it is a way to teach and learn.**

### INTRODUCTION

Not so long ago, I asked a friend what he thought about art, and he told me this story as his response:

I remember one day when I was a young university student (in the 1970s), there used to be lunchtime concerts at the refec, and rock bands would play in the courtyard for the hour between mid-day and 1pm. One day, after the band had played their songs, the leader of the band invited anyone from the audience to come up and sing. This day, a student stood up and sang all the way through "In my mind I'm goin to Carolina", with verses and chorus. He sang really badly, and it was a terrible tuneless rendition. But I remember everyone in the crowd listened, still and silent all the way through, and then he was given a rousing applause at the end. I don't know why I'm telling this story but I really remember that day, and... I think... that's something about art?

This paper is constructed around a bricolage of stories like this. Each has been selected with a purpose and a meaning, but not necessarily a single truth. My friend finished his story with a quizzical look, and the point was partly the not knowing, the wondering, the open invitation to theorizing about what that experience might have been. What was it like for the performer, and why it was that everyone, in what might have been an otherwise unruly and unsympathetic audience, paid him the great respect of silence until the end, and then applause? What was it

that had gripped them all? And why did my friend still think about this many years on? Was that art?

According to Alice Munro (1996), a good story “has a sturdy sense of itself, being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you” (p.26). Tolstoy, another great story teller, spoke of the point at which ‘the separation between the artist and the audience melts’ (1896). The stories threaded through this paper are selected as a playful way of recognising the value of many different realities and knowledges (Koehne, 2006), about art and young children. Through these stories I have come to “know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything” (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p.961). Sometimes I offer reflections on the stories, but sometimes I leave them to speak for themselves.

Teachers tell stories all the time. These stories are exchanged in the lunch room and elsewhere, frequently over shared meals. They are as likely to end with questions as answers. In one sense, this paper draws on narrative inquiry, which is based firmly in the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story (Andrews, Squire & Tambokou, 2008). The stories can be both method and the phenomena under scrutiny and, according to Connelly & Clandinin (2000) often begin with an “autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle” (p.40). This paper does not build from a set of interviews but, rather, a collage of stories gathered over an extended period of puzzling over the issues. The thinking mapped in this paper sits somewhere at an intersection between interpretive theory, critical inquiry, culture, discourse and poststructuralist philosophy. The stories are fragments, memories that are partial and incomplete. Foucault (1972) understood painting as related to our understanding of how knowledge is communicated or felt, rather than of how it exists as philosophy. Like the artist who wants the viewer to see things differently, the purpose of presenting these stories is to provoke, prompt, and question what we already know about art and young children, and what is, and might remain, unknown.

Teachers bring their personal and cultural knowledges and experiences of art to their own teaching. Many teachers are themselves products of poor art education (Ewing, 2010). This is not to say they have no knowledge or experience of art. On the contrary, it is almost impossible to suggest that individuals in today’s world can escape daily encounters with art, images and visual experiences. Attempts to simply co-opt this and ‘remake’ attitudes and beliefs about ‘good’ art can be futile, and misinformed. It is the complexity in the experiencing of art – the cultural, social, personal, critical – that teachers bring to their own teaching of art. The case is made in this paper that, before acquiring a ‘toolkit’ of pedagogical strategies and a repertoire of ‘never fail ideas’ for teaching, it is important that teachers reflect critically on their own understandings and experiences, questions of identities and cultural production, and how these shape their pedagogies.

For at least fifty years, art has been ‘recognised’ in schooling programs and curricula, being placed alongside literacy, numeracy, science and studies of society, and awarded the ‘status’ of a key subject. Traditionally, kindergartens display examples of children’s large, bright and colorful paintings on the walls, and easels and drawing tables remain standard features in most settings designed for young children. If for no other reason, the artworks of young children send a visual message about the education space. And yet, it is not an uncommon experience for students enrolled in a first year university subject, after completing twelve years of schooling, to become frozen with apprehension when asked to simply make a mark on a page – or mix a colour, or name ten, no five, artists whose works they admire (McArdle & Wright, 2014). Clearly, the twelve

years of schooling, in this decade when getting 'back to the basics' was the imperative, have failed some students, at least when it comes to 'the basics' of art.

When it comes to art pedagogy, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1986; Ball, 2000) is far from settled nor straightforward. Numerous discourses are at once in play, sometimes competing, sometimes colliding, and sometimes combining, to prescribe 'proper' approaches to art and how best to teach and learn.

Children are best left to explore and experiment and discover mark-making, resulting in their 'natural' development and learning  
AND children benefit from intentional teaching, which includes art appreciation, aesthetics, skills and techniques  
AND teachers should keep their 'hands off' children's artmaking  
AND children learn best through 'hands on' learning.  
AND Art is /should be taught as a 'language', a way of seeing, a form of expression, a 'voice' for children, a therapeutic experience, a way of learning, a way of 'making learning visible'  
AND Art can be high, low, fun, hard work, traditional, modern, postmodern, primitive, cultural, social, individual, collaborative.

Bricolage is a construction made from whatever materials come to hand. Pieces might be selected because of their shape, colour, texture, and they might overlap, cast a shadow, contrast, make a pattern. As the following stories in this paper are laid down side by side, they create 'messiness' around some of the many ideas about art. Readers are urged to "actively search out and value the complexity and richness that comes with the mess" (Gunaratnam, 2003, p.104). Narrative inquirers recognise that a story will differ depending on the listener and the teller, when the story is told and in what context (Mishler, 2004). The invitation here is for the reader to bring to the story imagination, creativity and a degree of uncertainty.

## BELONGING, BEING AND BECOMING

To begin with, I pay my respects to the Indigenous people of the land on which I live and work. Australia, the country of my birth, has a sorry history when it comes to the treatment of the Indigenous people over the past 200 years, since white settlers arrived from over the seas. And much of this sorry history remains cloaked in silence and secrecy. The Canning Stock Route Project was initiated in 2006, and the resulting exhibition was launched at the National Museum in 2010, and had attracted more visitors to the museum than any other exhibit in its history (*NgurraKujuWalyja*, 2010). The processes involved in producing this exhibition were part of an act of reconciliation, bringing together over 120 Indigenous artists and elders, and white Australians who were historians, anthropologists and documentary makers. The purpose of the Project was more than showing art → audiences were invited to get to know the artists, learn their stories, gain some understanding of the cultural diversity within Aboriginal communities and their interconnections with each other and their Country and their part in a greater Australian story (*NgurraKujuWalyja*, 2010). The non-Indigenous history of the stock route is fairly well-known. It was through art that the story came to be told publicly through aboriginal voices.

There are two histories. The European and the Aboriginal. Two worlds, two understandings. Canning made his mark and we, as Aboriginal people, got scarred. The land was scarred too. If people wanna know what really happened, they got to catch it, deep inside, spiritually and emotionally.

(Murungkurr Terry Murray, 2010) [www.canningstockrouteproject.com](http://www.canningstockrouteproject.com)

Alfred Canning, who had finished work on the rabbit-proof fence, was commissioned to survey a stock route through Western Australia's harsh desert country. The Canning Stock Route stretches for almost 2000 kilometres, crossing the traditional land of many different aboriginal language groups. Canning and his men relied on the knowledge of aboriginal people to locate water holes and complete the survey on time, but the methods of acquiring this knowledge were later the subject of a Royal Commission. The stockmen chained up the Indigenous desert dwellers, fed them salty food, and then freed them so that they would run to the waterholes. There are 52 wells, each a day's cattle travel apart, signed and numbered. Ironically, the trek proved impractical and was only used on a very small number of occasions, before being abandoned as a functioning stock route.

Maps are an important element in this bricolage. To read a map requires understanding of the 'language' of maps, what is being communicated, and how. This 'literacy' is culturally subjective.

Indigenous artist Clifford Brooks uses his art to 'map' and communicate his way of knowing his country which was crossed by the Canning Stock Route.

I been listening to all them Countries when I was a kid with my old man. He tell me, 'One day when you want to see me you'll go to all them places there. And you have a look and you can tell the story. If they can't listen to you by the story, you'll do the art. By painting, you can do that'. (Clifford Brooks, Artist, 2007).

<http://www.canningstockrouteproject.com/artists-and-artworks/>

Artist Patrick Olodoodi (Alatuti) Tjungurrayi uses his canvas to point out significant places in his painting of the Canning Stock Route Country, using geometric shapes and repetitions and patterns to represent the waterholes that became stock route wells. Just as Clifford Brooks says, Tjungurrayi's painting tells his story, through what some might read as a "map" of the country and its features, including the stock route and its wells. For the artist, his story is contained in his art.

The stories told in over 120 artworks that make up this reconciliation project might be said to be stories about "belonging, being and becoming", a fundamental framework which underpins Australia's first national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) for early childhood educators. My first response to experiencing this exhibition was an immediate physical pleasure and sense of marvel evoked by the beautiful colours and thick application of paints on canvas. Later, and ever since, I have been pondering any number of questions about this exhibition and I am not finished thinking my way around these questions today.

## MYSTERY

These artists, Clifford Brooks and Patrick Olodoodi (Alatuti) Tjungurrayi, are not doing the same thing that Picasso was doing, or Francis Bacon, or Michelangelo as he painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Neither are their paintings on canvas, nor the same as the ancient cave paintings, nor the more familiar dot paintings by the indigenous people from Papunya. Or ... are they?

Clearly, the artist is not always one person, and the act of painting is not always a solitary act, it is often collaborative. In many cases with Indigenous art movements, the whole community is

involved. The stories are passed down across generations. In some of Emily Kane Kngwarrye's works from Utopia, it is possible to see dogs' pawprints running across the canvas. Sometimes, the most important, sacred and ancient paintings on rock walls are touched up regularly, by the person bestowed with the custodianship. In northern Australia, the Wandjiinainimage is recorded on rock walls. As I understand, as any people approach these caves, they are expected to call out to the spirit of the Wandjiina. According to indigenous knowledges, this spirit, which governs storms, lightning and thunder, is believed to reside in that painting, and must not be upset. The Wandjiina must be given all the respect due to it. This is another way of reading/ experiencing/understanding 'image'.

Alongside this art, consider the experience of a visit to the Sistine Chapel in Rome or viewing the Mona Lisa at the Louvre in Paris. Reverence for these iconic works appears to manifest differently. Noisy (often tired) crowds jostle in a continuous flow of movement, hurried along by guards, and maneuver to take a snapshot of the object or, more recently, of the 'self' in the proximity of the object. This juxtaposition of experiences is not a rolling of the eyes and a judgmental comparison. Instead, it is a prompt to accommodate yet another understanding of art. According to Berger (1972), such classic works are afforded a 'bogus religiosity' through the lighting, framing, and protocols for behavior in art galleries. Clearly, in both the Sistine Chapel and the Louvre, it is the experience that is the important factor. Popular culture and mass media have made these images so familiar to the point of banality. And yet, in the presence of the real object, there is an excitement and a physical response that fills the space.

The 'mystery' around art is something that young children have expressed. In a cross-cultural study in 2010, researchers asked children aged 4 and 5 years, in Hong Kong and Brisbane, Australia, "What is art?" and "Why do you make art?" (McArdle & Wong, 2010). Analysis of their responses suggested that one view of art expressed by a number of children was that art was a mystery (p.11). The children in Hong Kong spoke of how their kindergarten teacher appeared to place a great importance on their engaging with the art materials, but they were puzzled that nobody else seemed to give art the same importance their teachers did not draw or paint, nor did their parents, nor did their older siblings at school. You go to school to work, not paint pictures. It was a mystery to some of the children, why they had to do art at kindergarten.

Art is a mystery to many adults too. The story that began this paper, about the singer and the audience, had mystified the story-teller for years. Other mystery discourses include:

My two year old could do that.  
I don't get it.  
Is this art?  
What is this supposed to mean?  
This cost over a million dollars?

## EXPERIENCE

Michelangelo's marble sculpture of David stands majestically in a gallery in Florence. A constant stream of visitors queue to see this beautiful sculpture that stands larger than life size. Those who 'pilgrimage' to view the work come from any number of countries, language groups, cultures, socioeconomic levels, genders, ages, ethnicities, religions. Some stop and stare, spellbound, like I did. Some walk through at a brisk pace, give an almost cursory glance to the statue, perhaps sneak a photo, and move on. Others look tired and worn out, and flop down on

a seat as soon as one is vacated. Others stop to sketch. Why are some artworks such drawcards, and not others?

Dewey (1934) argued that it is not about the objects, it is about the experience. And, the experience does not come with the price of the ticket. It takes work. We look, we ask, we think. Clearly, not everybody has the same 'experience'. In the midst of all that bustle of hundreds of visitors and the flow of the noisy crowd, I surprised myself by being moved to tears. In his book *Pictures and tears: A history of people who have cried in front of paintings*, James Elkins (2001) inquires into the nature of art, and tells stories about people who have had strong emotional reactions to paintings, such as Rothko's Chapel in Texas, and Millet's *The Angelus*. Why do some paintings make us cry?

Seeing is not just in your head. Neuroscientists will map the brain and point to the exact location of stimulation that lights up when we view an artwork (Noë, 2015). But the brain-centred theory of everything fails to explain much that is experienced with and through art. It is one thing to see a picture or sculpture of something. It is another to be in the presence of the real thing. And, these are not necessarily isolated encounters with objects. Our responses are formed by what teachers have said, or what critics, friends and family have said, by what we have seen before, what we do or are interested in, how the work is presented, who we are with (Lanier, 1968; Noë, 2015).

In another take on neurological conception of aesthetics, Deleuze (2007) maintains that Art produces and generates intensity. The physical interaction with art can directly impact the nervous system and intensify sensation. But he also describes a coexistence between the material and the sensation. Art can enable matter to become expressive, to resonate and become more than itself. Echoing Tolstoy and Alice Munro on stories, Deleuze writes of Art becoming a "compound of sensations of the present, self-sufficient and which holds itself on its own" (2007, p.167). My story of my viewing of David provokes in me questions around the old adage "seeing is believing", and more importantly for the teaching of art with young children, how art works, and how art acts on us, and we act on art.

#### VIVIEN MAIER, STREET PHOTOGRAPHER

Vivien Maier worked as a nanny for over forty years, mostly in Chicago, and was an enthusiastic photographer in her spare time. Evidently she took photographs when she was accompanying the children on outings and excursions, which she frequently planned for them. She took over 100,000 photographs. They were kept secretly hidden in storage. They were never developed or shared with anyone (with the exception of a small handful of prints Vivien had developed). The negatives were only discovered decades afterwards.

The photographs then, were presumably not produced for the benefit of an audience. When processed, many of the images are profoundly powerful images, with exceptional artistry and composition, and they tell intriguing 'stories'. Critiques have acclaimed the artistry and composition and content of the many beautiful photographs. Vivien Maier did not see them developed. What was the process or the experience that so absorbed Vivien Maier that she continued to take thousands of pictures - many of them the most powerful and mesmerizing images of humans - without needing to view the final 'outcome', nor share these with others? Could she envision them in her mind? Or did she not concern herself with the final image? Was it the process of taking the photographs (and setting them up) which engaged her? Many of her

shots were carefully designed and framed 'self-portraits'.

The question of process vs product seems pertinent here. Once teachers were urged to keep their 'hands off' children's artworks, with the insistence that it was their processes that were important, not what it looked like in the end. Others understood that children did actually want to produce 'better' end products through their art-making, and saw the role of the art teacher as supporting the development of knowledge, technique and skills. The process and the product are important - if the product has no value, there is little point to the process. Where does the story of Vivian fit in this debate?

We can learn, or imagine, so much about the artist Vivian through the art she produced. In fact, what we come to know of Vivian is filtered through the work of John Maloof and Charlie Siskel, documentary film-makers who have worked at their art to construct and craft a 'good' story (see <http://www.findingvivianmaier.com/>). This involves the selection of particular photographs, and particular dramatic elements - mystery and intrigue, building tension, human observations, secrets, unanswered questions, resolutions.

And yet, there are large parts of her 'story' that we cannot and will never access. The temptation to 'read' stories *into* children's drawings, or rather, treat their drawings and paintings as 'windows to the soul' (Noddings, 1995), is worth a caution, in line with the Vivian story. How we come to know children, what we can learn about them through the artworks they produce, and also what we *cannot* know through their artworks alone - these are all matters worth critical reflection on the part of teachers. In her close analysis of children's drawings, Wright (2014) demonstrates a level of rigour and validity that is called for, before making any claims to the generation of data through asking children to draw. Unless researchers are present as children draw, paint, sculpt, listening and communicating with them as they work in multimodal ways, any interpretations or claims about 'reading' the children's thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, should be tentative at best.

There are various discourses at play when it comes to art. These ways of speaking and thinking and performing sometimes make a fit, sometimes contradict, and sometimes overlay. Which particular discourses, and combinations, are available, and not available, to individual teachers depends to some extent on each person's histories, cultures, families, experiences. It is possible to approach art as:

Problem solving  
Skills and techniques  
Currency and investment, a worthless frill  
Language, expression, communication  
Freedom, play, experimentation  
Creativity  
Aesthetics, finer things in life  
Elite,  
Cultural, political, gendered, historical, traditional, modern, postmodern, pop  
Gallery, street, school, child  
Cognitive, physical, emotional  
Knowledge and learning  
Brain stimulus, emotional stimulus

This list has no particular hierarchical organization, can be added to or reduced. The experience

of looking at an artwork carries no decision procedures, no rules, no way of proving who's right and who's wrong. Art consistently compels us to agree or disagree (Zylinska, 2002), and to care enough to argue when our opinions differ. Foucault's (1970, 1972) writings about the relationships between art and knowledge combine his familiar concepts such as archaeological description, genealogical rupture, the event, resemblance, the techniques of self, with the formal problems of art, including materiality, medium, light, colour, representation. He never resolved the issues around art but had no problem with understandings that bring together science and literature, the lived and the known, the imaginary and the scientific.

The inclusion of this long list above is not to say that understandings of art are 'relative', personal, or as is often misquoted, 'in the eye of the beholder'. Imagine if this 'anything goes' understanding was the pedagogical underpinning for the teaching of mathematics, literacy, science. Imagine a teacher saying:

I don't know much about reading, and wouldn't know a good book if I finished one, so the children this year will not get to read much. Next year, when they go to Ms Thompson's class, they can do more reading.

The importance of these understandings about how art is discursively produced is that this will have a very strong influence on what and how and why we teach art with young children. To return briefly to the Canning Stock Route story, the rest of this paper shifts to a position that does not distinguish the work of art education from the work of education – a fair and just education for all. At a recent gathering of professional educators, one of the Indigenous teachers was asked to speak about her memories of her schooling as a child. She spoke passionately about her rights, and how she had been "denied the right" to learn in school about her ancestors. This would have been in the 1990s in an Australian school setting. She had been denied the right to learn about her elders as people to admire and respect. In school, the only available discursive constructions about her ancestors were the 'primitive', the 'exotic', the 'savage', and the strong implication was that they no longer existed as a people. According to the dominant discourse, Australia 'began' in 1788, and before that, the country was empty - *terra nullius*. The Canning Stock Route Project was initiated as an act of reconciliation, with one of its aims being to redress such injustices. In this context, art in all its diversities becomes connected with power and knowledge, history and education, and principles of fairness and equity.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

What is education for, and what are you for in education?  
(- once seen on a free postcard in a coffee shop)

It is now over a decade and a half since the neoliberal regime became ensconced in the field of education and Australian education policies have been driven by the fervor of "education fundamentalism":

The belief that the future lies in turning back the clock to self-evident print 'basics' through test-driven policies that focus on the production of performance indicators, on the development of the private education systems and markets to supplant universal, free, public education  
- Luke, 2012, p. 9

Education value is measured in terms of rates of return to human capital. Various graphs, calculations and other techniques and mechanisms that lend 'scientificity' (Lather, 2005) to the story have repeatedly shown that 'investors' (in the future) will get 'more bang for their bucks' if they invest cleverly in the early years. Distinguished economists have calculated the rates of return to human capital investment at different ages, in relation to an extra dollar at various ages (see, for example, Heckman et al., 2010). Astronaut John Glen is reported as having said:

as I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind... every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder.

One of the consequences of the transference of this 'time means money' business model to education, and young children, is that seeing children just 'playing' or still doing paintings has come to be read as a 'waste of time', when they presumably could be more productively engaged.

Broadly speaking, the field of Early Childhood has been advantaged by this focus on the benefits of early investment in the early years. At the same time, early childhood educators can find themselves charged with being the 'stockbroker', accountable for the investment, and responsible for the outcomes (see Gibson et al., 2015). Evidence-based research has been supported, 'proving' the value of the arts in relation to performance-based outcomes (see Vaughan, Harris & Caldwell, 2011). Nevertheless, as with the many facets of art and art-making, it is difficult to generate simple causal explanations.

'Child development' and ways of learning have changed. Young children inhabit a world with an exploding population, unsustainable appetite for resources and goods, increasing disparity between the wealthiest and the poorest, and ever growing numbers of children living in conditions of poverty and worse, even detention. A computer screen is not read from top to bottom and left to right. Children play and replay movies, slow down scenes, skip over 'boring bits'. They learn about a new program on the computer by 'playing' with it. Cultural and linguistic diversity, and digital cultures, are part of everyday realities, and there is no possibility of going 'back to the basics' (Luke, 2012). Traditional schooling and print-based curricula struggle to compete with the images, games and 'experiences' so skillfully marketed to children, permeating their eating, sleeping and waking hours.

Aesthetic encounters are not fixed data points, to be measured on test day. We take stands on works of art. We don't just like them, we react. Argument, criticism, persuasion - art is about the pleasure and hard work and engagement and enjoyment of positions staked out in conversations. Encounters such as mine with the rich and profound paintings that make up the Canning Stock Route project exhibition are learning experiences. They continue to play on our minds in our day, our lives, and in the historical time and culture. Such experiences are to be cultivated and nourished, learned, challenged. To pose questions, debate, form our own opinions - these acts cannot be reduced to a test-driven education shaped to serve the free-market economy.

Maxine Greene (2001) insists on the role that imagination can play in bringing about change, and when it was put to her that art cannot change the world, her response was that it can change someone who can. It is time for change. The great neoliberal, test and market-driven experiment has not worked (Luke, 2012). If Vivien Maier had been "assessed" today, she would have nothing to show for her learning. If the young man who sang through "Carolina" 30 years ago had been assessed today, he would more than likely have been steered into a more

'appropriate' career path.

Art can create new knowledge that matters. If the goal is standards-based endpoints, then there is no time left for change to occur organically. Imaginative ideas and creative spaces can lead to unexpected outcomes that may challenge and change what we don't know ... because this can profoundly change what we do know.

Imagine a system that is fair and just, and where every child has the chance for success. Artists not only document social change, they promote, inform and shape it. Art is the intellectual underpinning of social change; nowhere is there more potential and more need for art than here and now (Martinez & Spivey, 2007). What is currently being produced, discussed and censored in the arts? What are children *not* permitted to do with art? Imagine if we can find solutions that work to create sustainable, equitable, anti-racist, democratic and meaningful public education.

When teachers are effected by the complex corporate interest in shaping education policy and the destructive influence this is having on children and democracy, this can lead to apathy, or it can lead to activism. There are, according to Foucault (1981/1991) a "thousand things to be done, to be invented, to be forged, by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are implicated, have decided to risk or escape them" (p.911). This paper concludes with Foucault's "absolute optimism" (p.912), and it is turned on the imagination, artfulness, and poetics of the teacher who works with young children. One more story, a story of documentation, works as an invitation to take up the challenge to describe new conditions of childhood, and schooling.

## EVERYTHING SINGS

In his book "Everything sings: Maps for a narrative atlas", Denis Wood (2010) tells of his quest to inject poetics into his mapping. He was formally trained as a cartographer but, partly due to the times in which he was living, and partly because of his heroes at the time like Neil Young and Bob Dylan, he wanted his maps, like their music, to flourish and bloom with creativity and poetry. His book of maps then is filled with detailed pictures/stories/maps of his neighbourhood, Boylan Heights in Raleigh, North Carolina. One map records all the houses that have a dog barking in the yard as he walked by. A second map about the dogs includes their names, if he heard their names called as he was recording the data. Another map is a visual capturing of the sounds of wind chimes as he walks the neighbourhood. Another shows the number of calls to the police over a period of time, the nature of the calls, and the locations from which the calls were made. This collection of charming maps accumulates into a multi-layered story of the neighbourhood, conveying information that, in the usual conventions for mapping, would remain unmappable, un-measurable.

Imagine applying the same attention to the poetics of documenting children's growth, development, hopes, dreams, capacities, achievements, actions, games, inventions, imaginings, running, skipping, dancing, singing, laughing, friendships, frustrations, desires, needs, understandings, misunderstandings, constraints, limits, injustices, unfair behaviours. Early childhood educators have the perfect opportunity to reclaim the public narrative around education policy by mapping children, beyond their test scores. Most contemporary early childhood curriculum documents call for educators to be reflective practitioners, documenting the richness of children's "belonging, being and becoming" (Australian Government Department

of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). Through the artful and poetic mapping of data and information about every child, teachers can lead community and policy makers to see children in new ways.

The final story in this paper belongs to an early childhood educator who demonstrates one way of bringing artful ways of seeing and being to firstly research, but also to working with young children. Through her artful research, Sheri Leafgren (2009), like Denis Wood, has paid attention to systematic inquiry. But, rather than adopting methods of inquiry from the social sciences, she has used artistry and playful ways of seeing and inquiring. Instead of eliminating her own thoughts and responses in the quest for 'objective' observations, she has instead privileged intellect and imagination in the generation and analysis of the 'data' (Duncum, 2005). Through this approach to research, she constructs new knowledge - that is not only new but has the capacity to transform human understanding.

Leafgren (2009) is chiefly concerned with matters of social justice, and an analysis of young children's disobedience in preschool. She uses unconventional methods to research and rethink, among other things, how democracy might be nurtured in schools. She uses imagery and poetics to reflect on the practices she observes and experiences in schools. And she draws on her own imagination and artistic responses to make meaning of what she sees and feels. One particular moment she has captured in her work is the practice of sending misbehaving children 'to the wall' i.e. some children are singled out because of their actions, and are made to spend their recess time standing against the wall, removed from play and the other children. But they remain in full view of all - the other children are not permitted to interact with the 'wall children', instead continuing on with their play activities. Leafgren captures this practice and, through her analysis, part of which she expresses in a poem, she gives us pause to stop and see this practice in a way that perhaps previously we had not stopped to think about.

Compliancism  
On the wall.  
On the line.  
On the pole.  
Oppressed, bound & gagged.  
Standing, standing,  
Wounded by a carceral society  
that  
Cares little for the ones who disobey  
and  
Even less for those who comply.

- Leafgren, 2009, 213.

## CONCLUSION

Part of the problem in putting the poetic, arts, at the core of the curriculum is that, even with maps, you are still going to get lost occasionally. In a climate of standards and performance driven outcomes and testing, there is no room for gradual change. If we are to have social justice and success for each child, every day, then we must have a conversation about equalising power. If we are to take action, put up our hands and get off the footpath, then we need to imagine where we might be going. Schools have to change, and not by the application of more

testing, standardization and market competition. Schools can be highly active, imaginative, life-changing places. Children can develop and express their robust ideas, enact inventive processes, and make purposeful use of creative and critical art practices.

#### IMAGINE

- Does blood have eyes?
- Would there be anything that dogs find disgusting?
- I've finished my apple. Where do I put the bone?

As a general rule, the questions like these that children wonder about are rarely served by the testing regimes and performance indicators. Nor are the children who can do backwards somersaults, walk on their hands up and down stairs, recreate the Goldilocks story in the sandpit. Nor is the child who is so moved by the plight of a friend who has been excluded from play and made to stand outside the Principal's office, that he disobeys and spends his lunch hour sitting with his friend outside the office.

The stories shared in this paper make no claims to any universal knowledge about what art is, nor a single 'best approach' to art education. They are presented to indicate the complexities and recognize the limitations of a quest for the 'proper' way to teach art with young children. The stories establish some of the connections between art, ideas, education and action.

If we think of our work as education, not art education, the invitation is for the art /teacher to bring to the curriculum imagination, creativity and a degree of uncertainty. We can work for an education concerned with facts *and* poetry, science *and* imagination, skills *and* creativity, learning *and* thinking *and* curiosity *and* questioning *and* critique. Such a curriculum will have art at the core.

This curriculum requires changes to the structure of schools – multidisciplinary administrators, teachers, children. In Australia's first national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), educators are encouraged to draw on multiple theories, as they actively listen and build knowledge and learning with children.

What theories shape and assist my work?

Who is advantaged when I work in this way? And who is disadvantaged?

What questions do I have about my work? What am I curious about? What am I confronted by?

What aspects of my work are not helped by the theories and guidance that I normally draw on to make sense of what I do?

Are there other theories or knowledge that could help me to understand better what I have observed or experienced?

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p.13.

Translating these stories about art into *what* we teach, and *how* we teach, remains the task at hand. There *are* a thousand things to do. Actions and change will require imagination, artistry, playfulness and creativity - from the teachers who are advocates for children, and activists.

## REFERENCES

- Andrews, M., Squire, C. & Tambokou, M. (2008). *Doing narrative research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.:Sage.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, being, becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2015/belonging\\_being\\_and\\_becoming\\_the\\_early\\_years\\_learning\\_framework\\_for\\_australia.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2015/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf)
- Ball, D. L. (2000). Bridging practices: Intertwining content and pedagogy in teaching and learning to teach. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), pp. 241–247.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
- Clandinin, J. & Connelly, M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, Ca.: Jossey-Bass.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1995). *Report on Arts Education*. Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2007). *A thousand plateaus*. London: Continuum.
- Desai, & Koch, (2012). Educational crisis. An artistic intervention. In T. Quinn, J. Ploof & L. Hochtritt (Eds.), *Art and social justice education. Culture as commons*. New York: Routledge.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as Experience*. New York: Putnam.
- Duncum, P. (2005). Visual culture art education: Why, what and how? In R. Hickman (Ed.), *Critical Studies in Art and Design Education*, Chapter 11, p.154. Bristol: Intellect.
- Elkins, J. (2004 ). *Pictures and tears: A history of people who have cried in front of paintings*. New York: Routledge.
- Ewing, R. (2010). The Arts and Australian Education: Realising potential. *Australian Educational Review*, 58. Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press.
- Foucault, M. (1981/1991). *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences*. New York: Vintage.
- Gibson, M., & Hatcher, C. (2015). Governing child care in neoliberal times: Discursive constructions of children as economic units and early childhood educators as investment brokers. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 5(3), 322-332.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a blue guitar*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gunaratnam, Y. (2003). *Researching "race" and ethnicity*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage.
- Heckman, J.J., Moon, S.H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P.A., & Yavitz, A. (2010). The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94 (1-2), 114-128.

- Koehne, N. (2006). (Be)coming, (Be)longing: Ways in which international students talk about themselves. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 27(2), 241-257.
- Lanier, V. (1968). Talking about art: An experimental course in high school art appreciation. *Studies in Art Education*, 9 (3), 32-44.
- Lather, P. (2005). Foucauldian Scientifcity: Rethinking the Research, Policy, Practice Nexus. *AESA*, November.
- Leafgren, S. (2009). *Reuben's Fall: A rhizomatic analysis of disobedience in kindergarten*. California: Left Coast Press
- Luke, A. (2012) After the testing: Talking and reading and writing the world. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56 (1), pp. 8-13.
- Maloof, J. (2011). *Vivian Maier. Street photographer*. New York: powerHouse Books. (see <http://www.findingvivianmaier.com/>).
- Martinez, M. & Spivey, R. (2007). *The Legacy of Maria Poveka Martinez*. USA: Museum of New Mexico Press
- Mishler, E. (2004). Historians of the self: Restorying lives, revising identities. *Research in Human Development*, 1(1 & 2), 101-121.
- Munro, A. (1996). *Selected Stories (1968-1994)*. Toronto: McLelland & Stewart.
- McArdle, F. & Wright, S. (2014). First literacies: Art, creativity, play, constructive meaning-making. In G. Barton (Ed.) *Literacy in the Arts: Retheorising learning and teaching*. New York: Springer. 21-37
- McArdle, F. & Wong, B. (2010). What young children say about art : a comparative study. *International Art in Early Childhood Research Journal*, 2, (1). 1-17.
- NgurraKujuWalyja — One Country One People — The Canning Stock Route Project (2010). FORM, Perth: MacMillan Art Publishing. Retrieved from <http://www.canningstockrouteproject.com/about/>.
- Noddings, N. (1995). Teaching themes of care. *Phi Delta Kappa*, May, 675–679.
- Noë, (2015). How art reveals the limits of neuroscience. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September. <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Art-Reveals-the-Limits-of/232821/>
- Quinn, T., Ploof, J. & Hochtritt, L. (2012). *Art and social justice education: Culture as commons*. New York: Routledge.
- Richardson, L. & St. Pierre, E. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp.959-978). Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage.
- Russell-Bowie, D. E. (2012). Developing preservice primary teachers' confidence and competence in arts education using principles of authentic learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(1).
- Sellers, M. (2009). *Re(con)ceiving children in curriculum: Mapping (a) milleu(s) of becoming*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Queensland. Accessed July, 2015. [http://issuu.com/gfbertini/docs/re\\_con\\_ceiving\\_children\\_in\\_curriculum\\_-\\_mapping\\_\\_a](http://issuu.com/gfbertini/docs/re_con_ceiving_children_in_curriculum_-_mapping__a)

- Shulman, L. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. AERA. *Educational Researcher*, 15, (2). pp. 4-14.
- Tolstoy, L. N. ([1896], 1960) *What is art?* New York: The Liberal Arts Press, Inc.
- Trahar, S. (2009). Beyond the Story Itself: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography in Intercultural Research in Higher Education. *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 10 (1).Art. 30. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitativeresearch.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1218/2653#g1>
- Vaughan, T., Harris, J. & Caldwell, B. (2011). *Bridging the gap in school achievement through the arts*. Victoria, Australia: The Song Room.
- Wood, D. (2010). *Everything sings: Maps for a narrative atlas*. Los Angeles: Siglio Press.
- Wright, S. (2014). The art of voice: the voice of art. Understanding children's graphic-narrative-enactive communication. In D. Machin (Ed.) *Visual Communication (Handbook of Communication Sciences, Vol. 4)*. Berlin: DeGruyter
- Zylinska, J. (2002). *The cyborg experiments: The extensions of the body in the media age*. London: Continuum.