

Submission to the Ministry of Education

From: Capital E
Civic Square
Wellington
New Zealand

Draft Curriculum
Document 2006

Background

Capital E is a centre for Creativity, Technology and Live Performance for Children. Every year we deliver formal and informal learning experiences, including workshops, events and live professional theatre, to over 100,000 children and their families.

Our professional theatre company tours to over 20 centres annually, performing in real theatre venues for children, and advocating a respect for children as an audience within the industry sector.

Our OnTV Studio and SoundHouse NZ multimedia suite deliver focused learning experiences linked directly to the curriculum to more than 15000 students annually.

Around 65% of our annual audience takes part in one or more of our learning experiences through a curriculum linked school visit. We receive a small proportion of our funding from the Ministry of Education through an LEOTC contract for one of our many learning experiences. Other stakeholders include the Wellington City Council and Creative New Zealand, who are a major funder of the Capital E National Theatre for Children.

Many of our staff and contractors are education sector professionals, and we have a very successful history in developing and delivering programmes and experiences which meet the curriculum needs of many schools from around New Zealand.

Summary

Our submission would like to point out three areas of concern for the Ministry of Education:

that the draft document fails to adequately focus on the relevance and significance of **creativity** in the development of both the individual and collective New Zealand future.

that within the arts curriculum area, there is a gross imbalance of **expressive vs responsive** elements to the learning pathways from strand to strand.

that within the arts curriculum area, there is very little focus on learning from **examples of excellence**, or from applying **literacy in the arts** in the same way we do with language, or with mathematics.

Creativity and its place in the Curriculum.

We believe imagination is the cornerstone of progress for any culture. The way in which humanity utilises imagination is what more than anything sets us apart, and what has driven us apart developmentally, from the rest of life on this planet. The ability to bring to mind what isn't physically there:

Some imaginings may be considered deeper than others. It's a small jump from imagining something which is or was somewhere in place or time and imagining something which has never been, but might be, somewhere in place and time. Which of them is more creative? Well, neither really. . You could imagine all day without ever being creative, until you do something. This is where creativity comes in. As applied imagination. It is often most effectively applied in groups, where the key competencies of *relating to others* and *participating and contributing* are important, yet there is no mention of creative process in these competencies (Draft p11), nor of imagination, which could sit effectively alongside *knowledge, skills, attitudes and values*, in the introduction.

The current inference is that capable people **do not** draw on imagination, or rather, that imagination is not a resource available to capable people. I'm sure the chorus of disagreement would include voices such as Daniel Carter, Peter Jackson and Alan MacDiarmid. Engineers, Artists, Authors and Astronomers past have all proved the necessity of imagination in achieving their 'capability'.

This capability for and from creativity is combined with other thinking and practical processes to take a concept through to implementation. This, in turn is applied creativity –innovation.

Imagination – {application} → Creativity – {application} → Innovation

How much of our current world wasn't there while we were going through our formal education? A lot of it, really. In terms of technology, the majority of it. How many of these developments which have changed our culture came from someone, or more likely some more-than-one, somewhere imagining something that wasn't there? –well, all of them, really.

To put creative thinking in context:

In the next thirty years, there will be more people going through formative education than there have ever been for the whole of our world history. Not just a snapshot of history, I mean everyone who was ever educated, anywhere and anywhen in the history of our planet. There will be more education occurring over the next thirty years than all the combined education ever given on this planet to this point in our development. No wonder the capacity for change is expanding almost logarithmically.

In practical terms, being *creative* and *innovative* is given its rhetorical space in the Draft Curriculum document (p9) in one word, in a single sentence that falls under the heading *Learning to Learn*. It is a bit of a part of our principles. What the curriculum lacks is any detailed reference to imagination or creativity outside of the Arts.

The curriculum draft is an excellent opportunity to replace the following myths with the reality:

Creativity is not just a special gift that some have and some don't; Everyone is creative.

Creativity and Imagination do not belong exclusively, or even largely, in the learning area of the Arts; Creativity and Imagination are necessary and increasingly relevant elements of Intelligence across all learning areas.

Since 1877 in New Zealand, Intelligence has largely been measured in terms of deductive thinking skills. Right answers, right procedures. Common ends, common means. Our entire education system was established, and has until recently been perpetuated on this industrial revolution inspired model. We have the imperative to create a new environment for learning. One where we don't just pay lip service to creativity, but through every learning opportunity, across every learning area, we demonstrate that we value the creative discourse as much as critical analysis.

Under the heading of Values (p10 draft), *creativity* gets one word, under a solitary bullet point. Imagination is again ignored. We don't believe this truly is reflective of values *the New Zealand community supports because they enable us to live together and thrive in a diverse, democratic society in the twenty-first century*.

Let's face the fact that world change is going to happen regardless of what education children receive. Are we equipped to educate for change, or do we simply talk about educating for change because we know it's the right thing to do? Using the analogy of global warming, do we have the courage to give the New Zealand Curriculum more teeth than the Kyoto Protocol?

At present, we are using our **imagination** regarding where education might need to move to. The New Draft Curriculum needs to be the place where we engage our **creativity** in regard to education for a world of change. With this support and guidance, or rather mandate, the education sector can apply the Curriculum with a sense of confident innovation, following the new model we purport to believe in.

The shape and direction of the change is what we can influence. Or rather what we can equip our learners to influence. Today's students are, after all, the ones who will be indigenous to the future they create.

Receptive vs Expressive balance in the Arts

The cost of expressing 'creativity' through formal education varies from subject to subject: For example, it is relatively expensive in terms of equipment and materials to have students involved in practical scientific learning experiences. On the other hand, practical dramatic learning experiences have far less hard cost in plant and materials attached.

Whether by design or simply by evolution, this has led to the subject of Drama being implemented with a far more 'practical' (in the sense of practising) bent than many traditional subject areas, such as Science or Mathematics. This may well be due to a proportional imbalance in the breadth and depth of theoretical discourse which has informed the teacher training in different subject areas.

Whatever the reasons, Drama sits within the education system as a cheap subject in which students can expressively participate. We would like to think the new curriculum document could redress this current imbalance with a stronger focus on the receptive and critical elements of Drama (traditionally the territory of the English curriculum). Maybe a comparison could be that Visual Art has the subject areas of Practical Art and Art History, whereas Drama as it has appeared is heavily biased toward Practical Drama. As we move away from these older definitions within the Arts (a positive direction within the draft document) it will be important to ensure that Drama broadens its focus to encompass a more Receptive/Responsive/Critical perspective than it has to date. There is little to suggest this broadening might occur under the new draft.

Arts Literacy and Learning by Example

You wouldn't teach Mathematics ONLY by telling children to explore and play with numbers and learn from what each other has come up with. We don't simply ignore Pythagoras, Boole or Comrie.

You wouldn't teach language and writing skills by ONLY getting children to write and read each others writing. We use professional examples of writing to model these skills, techniques, forms and structures. We don't simply ignore Ihimaera, Frame or Baxter.

Where in the Drama curriculum is the same emphasis on professional models of good drama? Where is the link (as in reading and writing) between producing/presenting and responding which incorporates real world contexts ie theatres and children as audience? As critic?

There are vast benefits in relation to curriculum outcome to be had through enabling and education our young people to be an audience of the arts. From Te Whariki, particularly the areas of Well-being - Exploration – Communication – Belonging. Attending Professional Theatre is recognised by

Early Childhood Educators as a prime method of achieving many curriculum outcomes.

P32 Coherent Pathways: Literacy in drama or even Arts Literacy

It is recognised in the draft document that learning occurs outside the school environment/boundaries, and that an authentic environment is essential to the relevance and meaning of many learning experiences. There is little if any encouragement through the new draft to apply this conclusion to the Performing Arts.

In the Achievement Objectives, professional drama, generated outside of the classroom, is not mentioned at all. Anywhere children are encouraged to 'respond to...drama' is always immediately preceded with 'present' or 'share drama' through presentation. The clear inference to teachers is that students are to respond to the dramatic endeavours of one another.

Specific to Drama, at Achievement Objective L4, students are asked to 'Use conventions to structure drama' but what conventions have they seen in practice? There is no requirement or even suggestion (as within the Music strand) to respond to examples of live professional theatre.

Of even more concern, New Zealand Drama not mentioned until L6. It is very disheartening to see that there is no motivation in the draft curriculum for Children in Aotearoa to view original theatre from their own country before the age of 16.

Finally, at L7, the following statement appears: "*UC—Research the purposes of production, performance and technologies of drama in a range of contexts, including New Zealand Drama and how it reflects our growing cultural diversity.*" This objective could, with progressive simplicity, flow back through all levels from level one, and be linked to real world examples of quality professional theatre.

We believe that it would reflect our values as a society for each New Zealand child to have at least one experience every year of live theatre in an authentic context. We believe that the only way this can practically occur is through our education system.

In Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to what is a progressive and empowering document, which we believe will go a long way to preparing our young people for a tomorrow which they can shape, and in which they belong.