Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy: Visual Learning as Becoming

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The challenge for arts educators is to find language and conceptual framings for visual art education that resonate with the transformative and literacy aims of mainstream education and position visual learning as essential. The unique value of visual knowing is now an imperative in our ocularcentric culture where new technologies, consumerism and unprecedented mobility impacts on all students in the twenty first century. Visual creative adaptability and its culturally located critical and generative understandings draw from our sense-rich world of human experience. Grounded in the theories of communicative knowing (Habermas, 1976), becoming as the experience of performing self (Deleuze, 2001, 2004), experience and creativity as personal agency (Semetsky, 2003) and informed by socio-cultural inquiry, visuality and art practice as research (Sullivan, 2005) the research connects explicitly to socio-cultural values. This paper presents a conceptual model of Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy as a renewed language for visual arts education. It is grounded in material embodied practices, socio-cultural learning and identities understanding as they emerge in an ethico-aesthetic learning space that contributes to participatory democracy.

The paper argues that the embodied and performative visual experience is central to personal socio-cultural inquiry and subjectivity insights. The paper will foreground the theoretical arguments for Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy of self with empirical Australian visual education research, between 2004-2007 (Dinham, Grushka, MacCallum, Brown, Wright, & Pasco, 2007; Grushka, 2009). It centers the significance of images in society and the need for all students to develop visual communicative competencies. The benefits of socially embedded and embodied visual inquiry are argued. In so doing it calls into question the illustrative and often secondary role afforded to visual communicative proficiency found in visual arts education and its related learning outcomes. It argues that it is an essential way of knowing for the mediation of ideas and feelings in the new image oriented society.

Key Words: visuality, visual communicative proficiency, embodied education, performative pedagogy, ethico-aesthetic learning,
Introduction

The challenge for arts educators is to find language and conceptual framings for visual art education that resonate with the transformative and literacy aims of mainstream education and position visual learning as essential. The unique value of visual knowing is now an imperative in our ocular-centric culture where new technologies, consumerism and unprecedented mobility impacts on all students in the twenty first century (Haraway, 1998; Mirzoff, 1998). Vision and its culturally located critical and generative understandings draw from our sense-rich world of human experience. This paper examines two research projects that focused on the unique learning in visual education and its essential contribution to the education of citizenship in the 21st century. The findings substantiate the original claims of Dewey (1934) for the value of the arts in transformative knowing and for the value of aesthetic knowing achieved through making and communicating using images. The philosophical underpinnings of contemporary theorizing are explored for the contribution of visual arts learning to contemporary communicative and ethico-aesthetic understandings (Guattari, 1995). The adaptive and performative function of socio-cultural inquiry acquired through the visual arts is foregrounded and the essential proficiency of visual communicative knowing as identified through empirical visual art education research in Australia.

Visual Technologies, Education and Visual Performative Knowing

The new language of visual arts knowing resonates with the transformative and literacy aims of mainstream education. In the context of globalization and the proliferation of new digital worlds located in our mobile contemporary life, it is the requirement for each individual, to develop the capacity to communicate using rich imagery. Visual knowledge has always been primary to thought and expression (Hocks and Kendrick, 2003). The creative dispositions, or agency, fostered in visual arts education, will equip the next generation of youth to deal with the infinite possibilities of truths, about self and other located within the social and political narratives that surround personal experience. Understanding how different knowledge is communicated in a digitized world is now a
central concern for all educators. Szerszynski and Urry (2006) direct our attention to the combinational impact of mobility and visuality (ways of seeing and being seen) in current cosmopolitan society. “Our world now consists of the capacity to ‘travel’ corporally, imaginatively and virtually. We consume many places, knowledge spaces and environments, we are curious about many locations and events and we are more prepared to take risks when we encounter ‘other’” (p. 115).

The implications of the ascendency of a visual culture in the arts, sciences, media and everyday life (Dikovitskaya, 2005) places the image as a key meaning-making cognitive tool as objects of the mind (Stafford, 2007). The explosion of multimedia or multimodal practices necessitates the central positioning of visualization in learning. Visuality has emerged as a key concept and has now entered the educational discourse of national research in Australia as visuacy (Davis, 2008). Davis defines visuacy as “involving the ability to create, process, critique and appreciate the spectrum of visual phenomena in the individual’s external and internal environment” (p. 11). Rose (2007) defines visuality as “the way in which vision is constructed” (p. 2). Visuality is a term central to the discourse of all those who work with images. Thompson, N. (2004) refers to the work of artists as strategic visuality, while Emme (2001) talks of visuality in arts teaching. The term addresses synthetic cognitive and physical functioning and their combination, as they inform interdisciplinary understandings that cross between science, art, politics and literature. Visual culture education protagonists stress the need and urgency for understanding how visual culture and media mixes are presenting information in visual forms (Freedman, 2003; Tavin, 2001, 2003, 2005; Duncum, 2003, 2004; Handa, 2004); more significantly, how new media “privileges practice over theory, production over critique, formal over ideological, and visual over verbal” (Hocks & Kendrick, 2003, p.5). In acknowledgement of this visual education and new media learning, curriculum designers are re-assessing the role of the image in the new-literacies curriculum (Anstey and Bull, 2006; Kalantzis and Cope, 2005), beyond mainstream literacy debates and redefine visual arts learning spaces for the critical, strategic and generative understandings they empower (Grushka & Coughlan, 2008; Grushka & Donnelly, 2010) for all students.

It is timely that attention is given to the essential role of creativity and the related skill of adaptability (Dissanayake, 2008) as they inform the construction of images for personal agency, communicative purposes and ethical understandings in contemporary society.
Creatively and expressively exploring representations of knowledge as images is presented as the most significant skill necessary for the 21st century. More significantly, it will be the manipulation and re-representation of images that are set to become a dominant tool for critical socio-cultural inquiry and communication. Imaging acts will become a powerful way to inform identities, beliefs and values and the real life experiences of each individual. New media tools will continue to construct our ever-changing world as digital events.

**Research Informing Praxis in Visual Art Education**

The paper presents two empirical research projects that have informed visual art classroom pedagogies and learning outcomes observed in Australia between 2004 and 2007. The first research project “Identity, Image and Meaning Beyond the Classroom: Visual and Performative Communicative Practice in a Visual 21st Century” was a qualitative longitudinal and case study research project in NSW between 2002-2007 focusing on the learning outcomes of students in a post compulsory learning context, one to five years out from school. It focused on the reflections of the students and the value of their visual learning to life beyond the classroom. The second research project was conducted in Australia in 2005-2006 as part of the National Review of Education in Visual Arts, Craft, Design and Visual Communication. It was a large national multi-method research project. This included, a relevant literature and policy context review, an examination of all Australian State and Territory curriculum documents pertaining to Visual Education, a questionnaire of teacher education in Visual Education in Australian universities, a survey of the provision of Visual Education in a stratified random sample of Australian schools, the sampling of sites of effective practice, and focus groups and interviews with teachers, students and art professionals. The case study component was an “in-depth examination of perspectives and practice identified in the earlier broad-ranging methods” (Dinham, Grushka, MacCallum, Pascoe, Wright and Brown, 2007, p. 79).

The term ‘Visual Education’ emerged in the national research project as a new conceptualisation in the field of education that conceptually and organisationally responds to new developments in 21st century digital communication and the need for a creative workforce (Davis, 2008). Visual Education is presented as a pedagogical orientation that sees traditional and emergent visual communicative practices being redefined and
reconfigured to embrace time-based elements, moving images, interactivity, sounds, music and alternatives beyond the constraints of traditional art media and beyond reading and writing as paper text that includes images as illustration. Future citizens experiencing the rapid technological change, globalization and social networking require a more wide-ranging set of skills and understandings (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Anstey & Bull, 2006; Knobel & Lankshear, 2003, 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2005).

The first model analysed “A Model of Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency for the Visual Art Classroom” (Grushka, 2009) drew on seven case studies of students and their nominated teachers and parents, as significant others, who were able to further inform the insights of the students’ own reflections of their learning. Together both research projects field insights from a vast cross section of society about visual arts learning in Australia.

The term ‘visual and performative communicative practice” emerged from the findings of the first research project, as a way to further describe the embedded skills of visual proficiency. “A Model of Visual Performative Pedagogy and Communicative Proficiency for the Visual Art Classroom” evidenced in this research drew on theoretical insights (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991; Bolt, 2004; O’Loughlin, 2006; Thompson,E., 2004) and were central to personal embodied socio-cultural inquiry and subjectivity insights. In a society preoccupied with self, technologies and the consumer imperative, visual proficiency, embeds ethical dimensions of learning that were found to nurture heritage, culture and values (Grushka, 2009).

As mass media creates global infusion (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Deleuze, 1990, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Kress, 1998, 2003; Mirzoeff, 1998) and subjectivity (Mansfield, 2000) is increasingly a machinic assemblage of energy, time and space (Guattari, 1995), the research revealed that a visual and performative pedagogy, facilitated by a postmodern curriculum, can support ethical awareness towards citizenship understandings.

The second pedagogical model ‘A Model for Visual Education’, analysed for this paper recognises that students of tomorrow have an increasing need to be visually proficient within an understanding of aesthetic, artistic and cultural concepts, in order to function in the contemporary world (Dinham, Wright, Pascoe, MacCullum & Grushka, 2007; Grushka, 2009).
“Visual Education includes aesthetic understandings and artistic sensibilities; generation of visual and spatial ideas; development and application of skills, techniques and processes; responding to, reflecting on and making informed judgments; and, understanding personal, social, cultural, spiritual, historical and economic significance. It engages with traditional knowledge and processes associated with different media, art, craft and design forms, 2D, 3D formats, time-based art and a wide range of genres from different times, places and cultures, as well as the multi-modalities of emerging technologies and the evolving nature of artistic practice” (p. 79).

The ‘Model of Visual Education’ was presented as “a pedagogical framework for the purposeful development of students’ practical, aesthetic, creative and professional skills and knowledge to enable effective engagement with the visual in a multiplicity of ways within social and cultural contexts. At its core Visual Education is about creative practices; – learning by doing – using innovation, skill and imagination to make meaning” (Dinham, Wright, Pascoe, MacCallum & Grushka, 2007, p.79) in an interconnected or interdisciplinary orientation. The model presented 4 key fields:

1) Studio-based experiences:- where learning is authentic, experimental, practical, embodied and cognitive in a studio-centered community of inquiry. It is space where the skill of critical ‘visuality’ is developed.

2) Working with materials (materiality):- Material experiences connect students intimately to the experiences of seeing, feeling and forming materials through technologies to express ideas.

3) Relationships of trust. The studio-learning environment is characterised by relationships of trust, between students, students and teachers in the co-construction of knowledge.

4) Applied aesthetic understanding:- Pedagogical practices support the development of aesthetic and ethical thinking through expressive, interpretive and reflective behaviors in technological and material-based practices.

The four fields have been described as being what the researchers call agency. Agency in this Visual Education model represents personal, social and cultural action or choice. Through action and choice students participate in contemporary society and engage in emancipatory discourses (Denzin, 2005).

Both research projects foregrounded a world of accelerating change where students need dispositions of adaptability that provide them with the capacity to respond in imaginative and positive ways, to express their feelings and considered thoughts about themselves and the world around them. Both identified the benefits of the skill of visuality and the value of a socially embedded and embodied visual inquiry. While the Visual Education
study attended essentially to the practices and ideas of those working in the field, teachers, policy and curriculum designers and school administrators, the *Identity, Image and Meaning Beyond the Classroom* Study focused on the value of the learning to the students, teachers and parents. Both studies focus on the primacy of the visual and the current undervaluing of visual communicative proficiency and its related learning outcomes. Both argue from different orientations that visuality is an essential skill for the mediation of ideas and feelings in the new image oriented society and that a pedagogy and curriculum that attended to various semiotic registers in contemporary contexts was important to the students and their parents.

**Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy: Visual Learning as Becoming**

The emergence of a model of *Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy for the Classroom* (Figure 1, below) resulted from the analysis of both research projects discussed above. This analysis comes from the challenge taken up by many arts educators to find language and conceptual framings for visual art education that resonate with the transformative and literacy aims of mainstream education. Drawing on the pedagogical models from both research projects, the central core finding is that learning about self and society is an embodied and performative act that has communicative intentions. When students engage with their own personal life narratives as experience and combine this with a praxis that has the skills of visuality and socio-cultural inquiry as a key element, you have the conceptual components for exploration of communicative understandings. When combined with material and technological practices that are nurtured in an ethico-aesthetic learning environment, the result is authentic artifact(s) or artwork(s).
Visual performative pedagogy is presented as an embodied socio-cultural inquiry praxis that informs the artfulness of performative imaging acts. This praxis for socio-cultural inquiry requires the student to seek meanings about self and society through tangible artifacts that connect directly to the lifeworlds of the students. A socio-cultural paradigm of learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) is where the teacher acts as cultural worker (Freire,
2005) and the artistry of teaching as performative pedagogy is emphasised (Pineau, 1994; Sellar, 2005; Warren, 2007). In this context, students are able to address questions about who they and how they have come to be this way and what they wish to become.

Artifacts or artworks therefore contain and communicate deeply felt, personal, life experiences and cultural traditions and fulfill a fundamental psychological and emotional need to make things (Dissanyake, 2008). The model focuses on a studio environment and its exhibition processes that inform critical subjectivities toward self as a process of change and becoming (Deleuze, 2004). Such acts honor and value all life experience (Gradle, 2006) and its ritualistic behaviors within an ethico-aesthetic context.

In performative approaches to pedagogy, the importance of the individual, their creativity and their aesthetic responses are affirmed as they relate directly to the vernacular of an individual's everyday life (Dissanyake, 2000) and personal agency (Semetsky, 2003). In this context, youth investigate life experiences through an analysis of fine art, popular cultural and social practices. Students explore how other artists transfer personal and collective values and belief systems of society and how, through self-reflection they communicate their understandings as intentional acts drawing on the visual technologies that resonate with their communicative intentions.

Visual arts, as inquiry praxis (Finley, 2005), draws on the skill of visuality, to critically decode and encode meaning using images taken from cultural life. Images as re-representational acts of becoming (Bolt, 2004) connect the student at a deep level to things and experiences revealing their aesthetic value and personal life possibilities. Making sense of and elaborating on experience is central to meaning making and communicative action (Habermas, 1976, 1990). Contemporary art curriculum, as performative pedagogy, centers the critical qualitative experience of self with the wider society informed increasingly by the dominance of the visual in new media. It draws on educational thought that presents curriculum as an agent of social reproduction (Dewey, 1934; Bourdieu, 1977), and visual art education a platform for engaged and transformative learning (Eisner, 2001, 2002 ) with creativity emerging as the link for literacies as social capital (Buckingham, 2007; Walsh, 2007; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008).

From this position Visual Art Education is presented as a method of social inquiry that explores existence as cultural communicative acts and future possibilities. It involves the imagination, perception and interpretation of the qualities of things as well as the mastery
of skills of artistic representation and communicative intentions. These critical and subjective making acts in turn evoke intangible aspects of the human condition (Dissanyake, 2008) and provide a powerful means for personal agency.

**Conclusion**

The research findings, presented in The Model Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy for the Classroom combine to identify that the visual has significant potential as a conduit for knowledge acquisition and meaning making in the digital environment and supports critical literacy, interactivity, experimentation and production which are vital to attaining the tenets of transformative education. Each artwork or artifact carries the identities of its maker and the embodied and interactive acts of making enact agency. The skill of visuality and its culturally located, critical and generative understandings are a significant learning outcome that informs identities and becoming as it draws on our sense-rich world of human experience and the change phenomenon. Embodied, performative pedagogies lie at the heart of contemporary visual arts curriculum. A curriculum that values personalised enquiry, the uniqueness of each student and their capacities to find innovative and adaptive ways of working with traditional and new visual technologies to communicate their world.

The benefits of socially embedded and embodied visual inquiry are presented as a significant key to communicative knowing in contemporary society. Visual proficiency is now an essential skill or key literacy. Visual Education and its visual performative pedagogies have a role to play in new media literacies beyond the current recognized role within the field of contemporary arts practices and visual arts education. Image and text now interpenetrate one another. Mobility and visuality along with the skill of adaptability it is argued have become essential ways of knowing for the mediation of ideas, feelings and identities in an image and change orientated society. The embodied and performative pedagogies of the arts offer unique understandings for socio-cultural learning and have a core role in the education of citizens of the 21st century.
References


Embodied Learning constitutes a contemporary pedagogical theory of learning, which emphasizes the use of the body in the educational practice. Several researches related to various areas of expertise highlight the usefulness and the necessity of the body itself as a learning tool. Despite this, until recently the body was mostly used as a means to enable students’ experiential participation and to attract their interest. Given the significance of Embodied Learning to new teaching methods and approaches, this paper presents results from a large scale implementation activity in Greece within t. This paper presents a conceptual model of Visual Embodied and Performative Pedagogy as a renewed language for visual arts education. It is grounded in material embodied practices, socio-cultural learning and identities understanding as they emerge in an ethico-aesthetic learning space that contributes to participatory democracy. Images are becoming a primary means of information presentation in the digitized global media and digital technologies have emancipated and democratized the image. This allows for the reproduction and manipulation of images on a scale never seen before and opens new possibilities for teachers schooled in critical visuality. Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. To know about history of pedagogy, different aspects and pedagogical approaches, click here. It can bring out more positive outcomes in students’ learning as they enjoy learning through this strategy. Pedagogical Approaches. Teachers will use different pedagogical strategies with respect to the age of the pupil and the content. They will do research from varying academic disciplines and will choose a strategy appealing to the students in front of them. For example, a playschool teacher adopting EYFS system may prefer cognitive development research. The justifications behind these decisions will later become pedagogical principals and every teacher will develop his/her own pedagogical Embodied learning involves self-awareness of the body interacting with a real or simulated world to support the learning process. When learning a new sport, physical movement is an obvious part of the learning process. In embodied learning, the aim is that mind and body work together so that physical feedback and actions reinforce the learning process. Technology to aid this includes wearable sensors that gather personal physical and biological data, visual systems that track movement, and mobile devices that respond to actions such as tilting and motion. This approach can be applied to the ex