

emagazine of professional practice  
for early childhood educators  
in Aotearoa New Zealand

## Kia Ora Koutou

**Welcome to the 18th issue of ecARTnz**

The articles in this issue are based on some of the papers and workshops that were presented at the 8th International Art in Early Childhood conference *Art as Dialogue* held at Victoria University of Wellington in January 2019.

Jaime Cullen from Eskview Kindergarten in Hawkes Bay describes how the teachers at the kindergarten are supporting children to gain an awareness of their impact on their environment through the use of the visual arts as a medium for exploring sustainable education.

To uncover what tools are needed in a teaching kete (basket) to facilitate meaningful engagement between children and the art in a gallery, a small case study is discussed by Michelle Johnston from St Andrews Epsom Early Childhood Centre in Auckland.

Rod Eales, a teacher at Early Childhood on Stafford in Dunedin, outlines her role as a teacher in an indepth art exploration with children using the medium of ballpoint pen.

The conference was greatly enriched by these presentations (and many more) so we are delighted that we can share these stories with you.

Enjoy!

Lisa Terreni  
Editor



# ec ART nZ

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## Stories

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8th International Art in Early Childhood Conference  
Art as Dialogue



# Rethinking rubbish: Exploring sustainability with children via the visual arts

Jaime Cullen

During the 8th International Art in Early Childhood Conference held in January of this year Anne Tasker, my Head Teacher, and I presented about how Eskview Kindergarten (which is located in Bayview, Hawkes Bay in New Zealand), is supporting children to gain an awareness of their impact on their environment. We use the visual arts as a medium for exploring sustainable education.

In a world where issues of sustainability are becoming increasingly prevalent, the environments we create in the early childhood sector can play a pivotal role in inspiring, engaging and empowering future generations of communicators and change-makers. The challenges our children will face in terms of sustainability will arise from our past and present actions. In order to meet these challenges our children will need to become curious and creative problem solvers and, hopefully, become a generation of people who instinctively think and act sustainably (Enviroschools, 2013). As a teacher within a kindergarten setting it is the idea of helping children determine their own future which drives my practice.

Following an in-depth evaluation into our philosophy our teaching team wanted to ensure this was evident throughout our environment. We wanted to accentuate key concepts such as colour, curiosity and creativity, and reflect our commitment to our role in the Enviroschool Programme (a New Zealand environmental education programme managed by the Toimata Foundation - see <http://www.toimata.org.nz/>). The concepts identified here were key in relation to creating such an environment which supports our kindergarten vision of helping children become 'learners for life'. This is a vision in which we aim to instil a life-long love of learning within our children as well as providing them with the skills necessary for their future successes in life.

At present we believe we are living in a world caught up in a never ending cycle of production, consumption, replacement, and rubbish generation. Marketing campaigns encourage us to buy the latest products, the newest items, the fastest systems. We are putting more and more strain on our natural resources without any great reduction in our rates of consumption (Didonet, 2008). As an Enviroschool (silver category) we endeavour to develop and implement an environmental programme which expresses our kindergarten's commitment to identifying the limits to our natural resources and reducing our rates of consumption. We work together with children and their families in order to "positively influence the environment and society" (Department of Conservation, 2017, p. 5). This involves supporting children to develop connections with nature and their environment through taking part in conversations, learning alongside others, gaining knowledge and developing their values and beliefs whilst engaging in hands-on learning (Croft, 2017).



At Eskview Kindergarten hands-on learning occurs via an arts based programme. Through re-evaluating objects, giving items a new meaning and transforming their first purpose into something else, we hope to support our community to develop the idea that items in our environment don't simply just 'go away' (Didonet, 2008). Instead teachers, children and their families are encouraged to view recycling, rethinking and repurposing as a way of re-assigning of meaning and encouraging attitudes of "conservation and respect towards what the objects were, and what they could be" (Didonet, 2008, p. 27).

After being introduced to Junk Art , i.e. art made from scrap metal, broken up machinery, cloth rags, timber, waste paper and other 'found' materials, we became quite enamoured with the idea of taking everyday objects and transforming them into artworks. We could see the potential of using the visual arts as a means of exploring a range of sustainable ideas - such as dealing with rubbish, conservation and resourcefulness. We could see how the visual arts could be used to encourage curiosity and creativity, as well as communicate messages relating to our society about our impact on the environment.

We began small by collecting discarded milk bottle tops and creating garden sculptures out of them. Their impact in our outdoor environment was immediate and had the desired effect of generating curiosity and displaying creativity. But we wanted to go bigger because we wanted to create something more permanent to act as a visual conversation starter. So with this in mind we set about collecting scrap metal - rubbish tins, watering cans, old taps and any old metal our families and community had lying around. From this pile of rubbish three scrap metal robots emerged. The children were actively involved with each stage of the design and construction process.



By now we were hooked on the wonderful art and sculptures we could create from turning old objects into something new, as well the messages we could explore and convey through them. We experimented with hubcaps, terracotta drainage pipes and shoes in order to explore ideas around congestion, as well as explore natural environmental features from multiple perspectives. And we introduced the concept of gifting our creations to other people as a means of sharing our work, expressing our gratitude and reaching further into our community.





Through this work we have seen that the implementation of visual art experiences which utilise junk materials has been able to promote children's natural curiosity and creativity about their environment and their place within it. As we continue to explore sustainability through the visual arts we strongly believe that our children will continue to form unique and creative perspectives about their environment. They will develop an understanding of the relationships and inter-relatedness of the world around them and have an awareness of the ways in which they can creatively and expressively communicate these understandings. Our children will continue to be supported to utilise visual art experiences to help them form perceptions of themselves as social beings and thinkers by working together in order to learn, communicate and act responsibly for the environment.

*Ko tātou ngā kanohi ora  
Nga kanohi o ngā maunga  
O ngā awa  
O ngā papa pounanmu*

*We are the living eyes  
For the mountains  
For the rivers  
For the beautiful valleys*

May our eyes be encouraged to see wonder, to be curious, to create, to communicate, to re-imagine and to re-think.



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# Developing early childhood teachers' confidence to scaffold young children's discussions of art works in a gallery

Michelle Johnston

St Andrews Epsom Early Childhood Centre has a very intentional focus on visual art education in its programme. This focus involves staff teaching children specific art-making skills but also includes providing other experiences that can enhance children's understandings and knowledge of art. This includes such things as hosting visiting artists, having an extensive visual arts library for the children, taking small groups of 4-year-olds to a nearby gallery which has regular exhibitions of New Zealand artists, and holding regular exhibitions of the children's own art work. The deliberate facilitation of these events helps children not only create exciting art works themselves but also helps them talk about art, think about art, as well as critique art (Richards & Terreni, 2013).

In the past Michelle, the Manager and owner of the centre, has taken a small group of children regularly to visit a local art gallery. However, in 2018 a new staff member was given the responsibility for undertaking this learning experience. But after a couple of visits she expressed her reservations about taking children to the gallery. She described herself as feeling nervous about the children running off from the group without warning, or them touching the artworks, or children being totally uninterested in the artworks while others were wanting to stay and look. All of which had happened! As a result, Michelle embarked on a case study with two of her teachers to uncover what tools were needed in a teaching kete (basket), to facilitate meaningful engagement between the children and the artworks in the gallery and which would help guide the teachers' practice as well.

To assist with developing their awareness at the start of the study, the teachers asked some pertinent questions about gallery visiting. These included:

- What tools can we use to facilitate children's engagement with the art when visiting the gallery regularly?
- How can we become more skillful in scaffolding discussions with children about artworks?
- How does looking at and discussing art works in the gallery support children's learning in relation to the New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*?

After much discussion within the teaching team it was determined that there was a kete of specific knowledge that was needed to successfully scaffold children's art learning experiences in the gallery setting.



*An art work by Denys Watkins that the children used in the Art Hunt*

Firstly, it was determined that one of the most important initial skills for the teachers when taking groups into an art gallery involved managing the children in the venue. This requires having clear visiting protocols to make sure that the children were appropriately engaged in the setting. This, the team decided, involves intentionally teaching the children that in an art gallery they had to walk and touch the art works only with their eyes (Terreni, 2015). It also meant teaching the children that they had to respect other gallery visitors and follow the instructions of teachers or gallery staff while they were there. Reminding the children of the protocols immediately before the visit, either in the transport used to get to the gallery or on the steps of the gallery, appeared to be the best way to do this with the children.

Developing questioning techniques to encourage children to better engage with the art works was the next step. Consequently, the teaching team started to make further refinements to a strategy Michelle had used successfully in the past called the Art Hunt. This involved getting children to match photos of an artwork (and sometimes only part of the artwork) to the original artwork. Small groups of children visited Michelle's home to use art work from her art collection for this experience. This strategy was productive because back at the centre all the teachers were able to practice asking children questions in an environment that was both more controlled and more relaxed than a gallery setting.

However, the staff were finding that they still needed to ask the 'right' questions, ones which were more open ended and that helped to lead the children into the art work. Consequently, it was felt that questions needed to be developed that asked for a response to the actual art works themselves. This is because the teachers believe that artists want viewers to make connections with their art and to have a personal response rather than just deciphering or mimicking what experts say. They also strongly believe that children can learn more about themselves and their world through the lens of an artwork, and through this develop "verbal communication skills for a range of purposes" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 42).

Some the questions that were developed included:

- What do you see in this picture/sculpture/print/photograph/video?
- What can you tell me about it?
- What does it remind you of?
- What do you notice is happening in this art work?

Teachers tried hard to ask questions that were more complex than those that focussed only on colour and shape. However, they were also aware that sometimes questions and discussions about these elements of art can be useful starters of conversation about art works.



*Construction by Nicholas Thomas*

These strategies began to help teachers to be more comfortable with allowing the children to answer with their unique and original responses without passing judgement, and seeing that there are no right or wrong responses. For example, when children were looking at the work *Construction* by Nicholas Thomas (image above), Nigel said "They look very fragile, but I wish I could play with them. They have cracks in them. They are brown". When the teacher responded by asking him what he thought the art work was made of he replied, "If they were made of ice cream they would melt!"

One of the teachers had the idea to extend the Art Hunt strategy by using the art works on display on the walls at St Andrews Epsom Early Childhood Centre. In order to do this photos were taken of the centre's collection which included artwork by both children and adults. The photos were printed and laminated, and made available for everyone to use at any time. This was a way of providing the teachers with the opportunity to practice their questioning techniques and learn how to respond appropriately to the children's answers.

Once teachers felt comfortable with this, the Art Hunt strategy was then taken into the gallery setting. For example, one of the teachers who was about to lead a group into the gallery did a special reconnaissance trip to the gallery and photographed twelve art works capturing both the whole work as well as specific parts of work. Back at the centre these were printed and laminated for the group to take with them into the gallery.

These photographs were used as a teaching tool in the gallery and each child had a different art work to find using the photographs. However, despite the children having success finding art works their teacher felt the strategy was more like a game or a competition and did not really allow for any indepth discussion about the works themselves. Consequently, on the second trip to the same exhibition with the same children the teacher gave the children fewer art works to find (four in total) and she encouraged the group to look for the same art work at the same time. This time she found the group worked collaboratively, and it was no longer a race and there was more indepth study of the works. She noted that, "the children were developing an awareness that there is more to a piece than what you see at first glance...I was more confident in asking questions about what they were noticing". She was also learning to rephrase and recreate new questions on the hoof, becoming more and more confident in herself as a facilitator of discussions.

Back at the centre the team were having ongoing discussions about how another teacher who was going to take children into the gallery could benefit from the first teacher's experience. As a consequence, she decided that she would talk to the children in the café at the gallery about the photos as a warm up and prior to looking the art works so that they "... were already in the mindset (of verbalising what they see) and...even more able to come up with a comment". She found that using a photo that was only a portion of an art work also worked well in the Art Hunt process. She remarked that, "It felt like it's a bit of a puzzle/brain teaser for the children to be presented with both the whole image (on the wall) and the portion of it (on a card). It helped to slow the children down and we probably had some brain-gym going on (for adults too!) as the portion is mentally fitted into the whole".

Conversations that developed from this strategy involved talking about how the artwork on the wall was very different from the photo of it on the flat laminated card. For example, one artwork was 3D (the folds protruding from the wall), which could not be seen in the photograph. However, it became clear that for both teachers the Art Hunt strategy worked well, but that practice in the gallery setting itself had enabled this to be developed and refined even further.

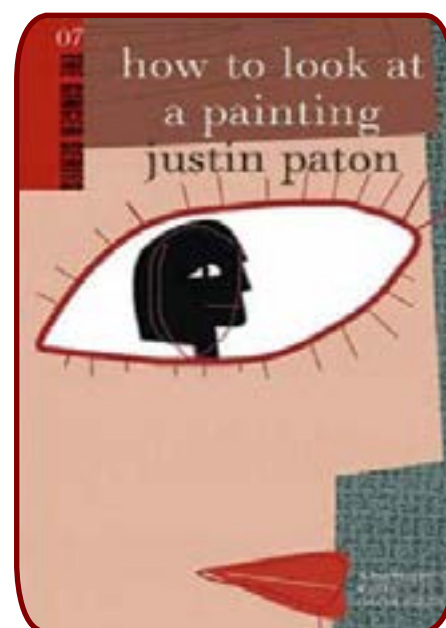
From this work it became clear (to all of the team at St Andrews Epsom) that to be able to effectively support children's engagement with art works in a gallery setting teachers need to be confident in their skills. As this article has shown this can be done by using the Art Hunt strategy. Also, professional conversations around art pedagogy and art experiences, collaboration with other teachers and, most importantly, lots of encouragement, modelling, and scaffolding by more experienced staff is extremely important for teacher development in regard to using an art gallery successfully with children.

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# Playing with ballpoints: A guided exploration-based art experience

Rod Eales



For artists, there is nothing more inspiring and satisfying than entering a world where they have complete freedom to explore a new art medium. This process of joyful willingness to thoroughly engage in a journey of discovery has the power to completely absorb and transfix, as well as ignite delight, curiosity and imagination. In response to a new medium, there is the potential for the kind of transformation that occurs when the artist manages to unite their medium (that requires specific knowledge and skills) with their own personality. The result is a creative and unique visual response to the worlds around us.

The ballpoint pen was one such medium that captivated a small group of six 4-year-olds in a drawing project that developed over a two-month period. Through a guided, exploration-based approach to visual arts teaching the children's initial experimentation with ballpoint developed from simple to more complex thinking and drawing. As their teacher, the children worked with me in an organic, open-ended process where we were free to walk an unmarked path toward an unmarked destination.

It is important to note that my role as teacher is deeply imbedded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning which recognises that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. A great deal of important learning by a child can occur through social interactions with a skilful teacher or tutor who models behaviours and/or provides verbal instructions for the child through cooperative or collaborative dialogue. Scaffolding is also important, and this is where children's learning is supported through modelling, encouragement, discussion and questioning. I regularly use these strategies in my teaching.

For instance, scaffolding in the ballpoint project took place through playful discourse in which the children participated in a wide range of discussions. These discussions ranged from art-based topics, everyday events, personal stories and subject matter. This diverse range of topics had the effect of maintaining a natural flow and progression, and supported the organic and playful nature of the project.



In terms of providing the children with art information, my primary aim was to wrap the 'language of art' around the play of drawing, in order to support the development of their art knowledge, skills and attitudes. This included drawing attention to and incorporating art vocabulary -for both reading and creating visual imagery. This included: line, placement, composition, colour, shape, movement and texture. These were the 'tools' we had to play with. What we did with them, where we put them and how they linked in with our thoughts, ideas and subject matter would evolve as we explored our new medium.

Throughout this study, I modelled drawing by illustrating techniques, ideas and possibilities for experimentation. A myriad of questions, decisions, failures, answers, risks and thoughts that make up the creative process were all modelled when applicable.



While the ballpoint pen is used as a drawing medium in the wider art world, it is more commonly associated with writing. It has a reputation of being hard, unforgiving, difficult-to-control, and as one child put it, "You can't smudge it". However, after viewing some ballpoint art on-line, we discovered that there was both beauty and potential for this under-rated material. To begin with, the children were offered the four basic ballpoint colours of red, green and blue, together with my simple provocation, "I wonder how many ways there are to make a ballpoint work?" The challenge was taken up immediately and after two days the children had amassed enough drawings to provide us with a foundation to move forward.

Through experimentation we were able to discover some more positive and promising attributes of the ballpoint. We had noticed that the lines we had created were bold, clear, raw and crisp. We also noticed that the kind of line created was dependent on the amount of pressure we placed on the pen and on the position of the pen in our hand. For example, if we wanted to create a softer, random line we would hold the pen lightly with just two fingers at the very top. If we wanted to create a strong line or to add colour we held the pen in the same way we use it to write.

Early on the children were given 'permission' to try new things and look for new ways of doing things that no one else had done. This was especially relevant after Reggie told us, "My Mum said not to hold the pen like that! You have to write like this!" However, after making the differentiation between the requirements for drawing and the possibilities for drawing, we were free to explore further, flicking, scribbling, wobbling, shaking and waving the pen across the surface of paper.

As our repertoire of marks increased so did our understanding of the element of line. We discovered that we could create a range of lines, each with the ability to describe or suggest meaning. For example, the more random, flicking lines looked like rain to Caitlyn. After I modelled a way to create strong lines by moving the pen backwards and forwards in short strokes, the children trialled this technique and eventually used it to convey meaning in a story about the forest.



After our initial experimentation, I presented the children with some Rollerball pens (called Artline Flow pens) which offered a wider range of colours. These pens initiated further possibilities for experimentation, and reinforced Darcy's strong interest in colour and who used the pens to colour in patterns she had created. Each child followed Darcy's idea and yet made it their own unique work.



In the broader context of the programme the children had been learning our centre's mihi (greeting), and they had an interest in early Māori and the European settler arrivals in New Zealand. It was this interest that Caitlyn and Nina brought to the group, and which shaped the course of events for the duration of this project. The children began by focusing on the native forest as found in the 1800s. Their drawings featured both Māori and European figures within this habitat. Great attention to the forest flora then generated a shared interest in drawing trees.

Following the children's interest in the forest, I introduced photographic images of native forest which re-orientated us toward an even greater interest in trees. However, the project took another unexpected turn when Kendall alerted us all to the idea that branches don't always stay on trees stating, "When branches fall off the trees, they are called twigs". In the image below Kendall has drawn in her twigs lying on the ground at the bottom of the page.



A discussion about this observation followed and initiated a new direction in our investigation. Branches became our focus of attention and this next stage of this journey focused our attention to the variety of ways that branches grew out of trees, the variety of different shaped branches, either observed or imagined, and how to represent them using the pens. Our observation of trees at our centre, trees at home and trees in photographic imagery supported our investigation. The children were encouraged to make close observations, try new ways of creating trees and branches, invent new trees, and to consider the importance of branches to trees. They were given freedom to explore in their own style of drawing, free to draw upon each other's discoveries and to eventually design their own trees.





In terms of subject matter, some of the questions we asked were: Why do trees have branches and leaves? What happens to make leaves and branches fall off trees? Are there tree branches growing under the ground? What trees have we got in our gardens at home? Have you noticed that some branches grow out of the tree trunk, but others grow only from the top? What evolved from this investigation was a range of different drawing styles, different interests in trees, and a level of complexity in their work that was significantly different to where they had started from.

The final stage of this project became a platform that united the children's interest in trees and branches with their ballpoint skills and techniques, their imagination and creativity, and the emergence of their own unique forms of visual expression. However, our inquiry into the ballpoint pen took several directions and gathered its own natural momentum as it went. There were many unexpected learning outcomes that supported further motivation and engagement and thus generated deeper and richer learning. Having been so actively involved over repeated sessions where they had opportunities to play with materials and resources, through this work the children



developed a greater repertoire of marks, and increased their art knowledge. They also vastly increased their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter which they managed to marry together with their own identities to create a series of rich and complex drawings.

The collaborative, socio-cultural approach and context for learning clearly supported the children in their acquisition of skills, problem solving and thinking. The inquiry was flexible and open ended enough to support all children's contributions and decisions.

At each turn the children were encouraged to copy, to build upon, discard or adapt any of their peer's contributions. As art has little chance of flourishing in a void, all of our contributions were an extremely valuable source of inspiration for us all. The collaborative nature of the project was rewarding and the benefits for myself and the children were rich and significant.





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## Contact details

### Editorial Board information

ecARTnz, an emagazine of professional practice for early childhood educators, is a quarterly publication developed to generate new interest in visual art education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The intention of the editorial board is that ecARTnz will showcase examples of teaching and learning, literature, and conferences of interest to educators in early childhood education.

Members of the editorial board are: Lisa Terreni (VUW), Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips and Janette Kelly (UoW), Nicky de Latour and Janita Craw (AUT), Rosemary Richards (Toi Ohomai) and Lesley Pohio.

The board is responsible for promoting the magazine, writing, reviewing and editing contributions, and ensuring that the emagazine is of a consistently high standard. The views in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial board members.

Contributions are invited for the next issue of ecARTnz. Submissions of 1000-2000 words accompanied by up to 8 photographs sent as .jpgs are welcomed.

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