



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Making art meaningful

Specifying and recognising learning outcomes in the Visual
Arts in New Zealand secondary and Swedish upper
secondary schools.

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ABSTRACT

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In Sweden, art students at upper secondary school have little choice. Sweden bases its whole school structure on democratic principles and the curriculum, which is goal-based, is said to give limitless possibilities for a teacher to facilitate high levels of learning outcomes. I say not so. Or more to the point such a view is theoretically sound but in practice problematic, particularly with regards to the visual arts.

My motivation for this study began after observations from art classes in Sweden and New Zealand and the concern I felt for how differently teachers approached learning outcomes in visual art. I was particularly interested in how New Zealand schools work with the portfolio method on a national level as a way to set and identify learning outcomes in upper secondary school students' art.

This study of Swedish and New Zealand school curriculums and visual art teaching practice in both countries aims to identify underlying reasons for how each country defines and recognises learning outcomes in the visual arts..Observations are to a greater extent from a study trip to two New Zealand upper secondary schools and to a lesser extent from Swedish upper secondary schools as this would constitute a much larger study and is perhaps destined for future research. I am aware of the fact that this study lacks some quantitative validity due to the absence of comparative observations from several schools in Sweden. I have only made observations from two schools in New Zealand which further weakens the validity of this study

School curriculums from Sweden and New Zealand have philosophical differences and place focus on different aspects of knowledge and learning. The goal-based school curriculum (Sweden) and the outcomes-based curriculum (New Zealand) should and do influence how a subject is taught in the class-room. The difference between the two countries however is that in Sweden interpretation of these goals allows teachers the right to make subjective decisions about levels of learning outcomes and in NZ these levels are nationally recognised. This study aims to show that the use of student portfolios together with nationally accepted criteria for learning outcomes can be a way to achieve high standards and equivalence in visual arts as these provide a structure for the teaching and learning of art-making practice and specifying for students, teachers and parents the appropriate levels of performance a student needs to achieve at different assessment levels.

This study gives justification to the view that meaningful visual art education occurs when there is an agreement to specify clearly the lowest levels of learning outcomes (*Achieved* or pass) and that subsequent assessment levels build upon this base of knowledge. Visual art education is thus a democratic act in its clarity of objectives and expectations upon students for it is then that a student can choose. Only when an individual becomes well informed can choice be meaningful.

Key words;

Visual art, learning outcomes, assessment, curriculum, aesthetics, equivalence, process, democracy, criteria, portfolio

PREFACE

For four weeks I lived and breathed art teaching in theory and practice in New Zealand. Apart from the daily work with students which I observed, and often was invited to be a part of, I sat with Jania and Martin over breakfast, in the car on the way to work at lunch breaks and over dinner in the evenings. This gave me unique opportunities to fire questions at them whenever they arose. I am eternally grateful to them for their valuable time, patience and expertise as they explained the complexities of the New Zealand Curriculum in some cases more than once. Many thanks to Ray for making time in his busy schedule for a short but inspiring visit.

I would also like to thank all of the other art teachers at both Chilton St James and Wellington High, Fiona, Poppy and Lou for welcoming me so warmly into the team at such a crazy time of the year! Their wisdom, passion and patience were inspiring.

To all of the students I met and was amazed by I want to thank for being so friendly and generous with their thoughts, energy and wisdom. They were the best teachers of all!

Many thanks to Tarja Häikiö for her encouragement and her passion for visual art teaching.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This introduction will present my motivations for this study, the research aims and enquiries and lastly a summary of the research methods used.

1.1 My motivation

For the last 20 years I have been a practicing artist and gained recognition through a large number of solo and group exhibitions in Sweden and overseas. I was born in New Zealand and spent my school years there but have lived in Sweden since my mid 20's. Not so long ago I returned with my family to live in NZ for two years. Some of my best friends from high school and art school years work today as art teachers in NZ. After discussing with them how art is taught there today I became curious to see more and visited two of them at their respective schools. What I saw there I found to be very inspiring for two reasons; firstly that methods employed to teach art seemed to be based on processes of art-making similar to how I work in my own studio and secondly what students were expected to learn seemed to be artistic qualities I also regarded as meaningful and important. Qualities such as:

- Process
- Informed decision-making
- An open view on what art can encompass
- Play and experiment, risk-taking
- High expectations on oneself
- Prior knowledge
- Clarity- of ideas, influences
- Time management
- Theory and practice interweave
- Ability to give self-critique
- Perseverance

My decision to enrol at Teachers' College upon my return to Sweden the following year was a direct result of these visits to secondary school art rooms in NZ. I imagined that if it was possible to approach high school art teaching with these learning outcomes in mind then art as a subject had a meaningful part to play in the development of young people who are genuinely trained for the challenges of contemporary life.

My first introduction to art teaching in Sweden was during my VFU (20 week period 'on section' at schools). However what I observed in art rooms in Sweden was markedly different from what I saw in New Zealand. The best of these observed teaching situations was very good although structured very differently from what I had seen in NZ. But at its worst I found some art teaching to be devoid of both meaningful content and understandable structure. Students themselves, however, seemed to be largely unaware of or in any way to be able to control or at the very least ascertain whether they have gained a similar standard of teaching and achieved equivalent levels of understanding as students in other schools. There seemed to be no effective system in place to insure this. These observations of how different art education in Sweden can be caused me to wonder where the underlying reasons lay. This question was partly answered when I studied the Swedish curriculum.

1.2 Research aims

It is my opinion and my concern that courses offered at upper secondary schools which are included under the 'visual arts' umbrella are particularly prone to subjectivity with regards to assessment, determining of learning outcomes and that equivalence in visual arts appears particularly at risk.

I have experience of visual art teaching in two Swedish upper secondary schools. Between these two schools I observed widely different teaching methods, assessment standards and student learning outcomes. In the two schools I visited in NZ, I observed teaching of a completely different nature than anything I had seen in Sweden. Assessment criteria seemed to be equivalent and student outcomes showed a deeper understanding of fundamental art-making processes than anything I had seen ever before in the work of young people.

The aim of this study is to see if it is possible, through an in-depth study of the Swedish and the NZ school curriculums, to highlight why there exists such a dramatic difference between the two countries regarding teaching methods, assessment standards and learning outcomes in visual art. I hope to come to some understanding of where these fundamental differences lie and how they affect art teaching in practice in both countries. This study aims to prove that use of student portfolios in combination with external assessment as stipulated in the *New Zealand School Curriculum* are more likely to lead to more objective and equivalent assessment and higher learning outcomes in the visual arts.

I aim to prove that consistent standards and high levels of student learning which are less a result of and/or subject to individual teaching skills and more a result of well grounded criteria and proven methods are in fact possible to achieve in upper secondary school visual art courses of today (In New Zealand, Sweden or any other country).

1.3 Research enquiries

In a comparative study of two different systems, Sweden and New Zealand, with regards to the teaching of visual art teaching for 15 and 17 year olds I will reflect upon these questions;

1. What are the differences between the school curriculums in Sweden and New Zealand?
2. In which way can use of portfolios as employed in New Zealand secondary schools help teachers define and assess students' learning outcomes in the visual arts?
3. In which ways can school curriculum goals and values in Sweden and New Zealand be seen to be used in practice in the teaching of secondary school visual arts in both countries?
4. In which way does each curriculum aim to ensure equivalent education?
5. In which way and to which extent can learning outcomes in the visual arts be understood by students in New Zealand?
6. Is it possible that pervading definitions of democracy in a country as a whole can influence how teachers in Sweden and New Zealand relate to students and how they teach visual art?

1.4 Research methods

This study begins with a text analysis of the Swedish and New Zealand school curriculums according to stipulations for qualitative text analysis as stated in *Metodpraktikan*, Part 3, Chapter 12.¹

The study then presents direct observations according to *Metodpraktikan*, Part 3, Chapter 17.²

Direct observations are firstly from art class situations from two Swedish upper secondary schools during my 20 week period 'on section' (in Swedish VFU or verksamhetsförlagd utbildning) during teacher training. Formal interviews with students or teachers were not carried out in Sweden. My observations are based on what I saw in the class-room and the informal discussions I had with teachers at both schools.

I carried out direct observations at two schools in New Zealand during a four-week field study in New Zealand during the autumn of 2008. I chose to narrow my observations to only two schools and to study in detail how schools approach portfolio work at upper secondary school.

Methods include observations from the class-room, lessons and discussions, informal interviews with teachers and pupils, taped interviews with students and photographic documentation of examples of students' visual art work.

¹ *Metodpraktikan*, Esiasson, P, Gilljam M, Oskarsson, H, Wängnerud, L, Nordstedts Juridik AB , Upplaga 2, 2004, p.233

² *Metodpraktikan*, Esiasson, P, Gilljam M, Oskarsson, H, Wängnerud, L, Nordstedts Juridik AB , Upplaga 2, 2004, p.333

2 THEORY

Here I will present the Swedish and New Zealand School curriculums. Included here are the curriculum definitions and aims for Aesthetics (in Sweden) and the Arts (in New Zealand which I will also refer to as NZ from now on). This chapter includes a summary of the systems which are in place with regards to assessment and particularly how this applies to the teaching of visual arts subjects. In both cases Aesthetic programme and the Arts include the four disciplines; visual art, dance, music and drama.

In Sweden a child starts school at the year he/she turns 7 years of age. Compulsory schooling is from 7-15 years and thereafter begins the non-compulsory part of Swedish schooling. In these three years of schooling called *gymnasium* (upper secondary school), the student becomes more specialised and courses include a number of core and elective subjects. In New Zealand a child may begin school the day he/she turns 5 years old. As in Sweden, schooling is compulsory up to 15 years of age. In NZ this is also the age a child is when he/she begins secondary school. Secondary school is from 15 to 17 years of age. For this study I had originally an ambition to concentrate on the final two years of secondary schooling as these two years correspond to the age of students at *gymnasium* in Sweden. However, it became important for me, during the course of my visit, to come to terms with students' understanding of learning outcomes in visual art by also studying earlier school years.

2.1 Swedish Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system

Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system (Lpf94) is based on learning goals in each subject. In The Arts course programme (*Estetiska programmet/ Aesthetic programme*) the goals are widely open to interpretation and depth and breadth of students learning is seemingly subject to individual teachers' understanding of the subject and the extent of teaching skill and knowledge of pedagogic practice they have acquired.

In Sweden schools must adhere to school laws and curriculum set down by the government. The curriculum determines what role schools should play and also overall goals and values that must form the basis for teaching. The government decides on the goals and aims for each of the 17 national programmes at gymnasium. The National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*) is responsible for writing plans which decide goals for each subject and course. These goals do not however give any specific guidelines for how this should be fulfilled by schools. *Skolverket* has deemed that this is the responsibility of teachers and students to come to their own interpretations of these goals as this gives 'the local freedom for discussions which arise in relation to the programme'.³

The national goals that specify norms for equivalence are however not statements of methods for attaining these goals or in which way resources are used within a school. The Swedish curriculum acknowledges that there are many ways to achieve these goals. National equivalence within a subject area is said to be achieved through setting of these goals and guidelines decided by the government, cabinet (riksdagen) and *Skolverket*. It is then stated to be up to each school to analyse, reflect upon and discuss for each subject:⁴

- methods
- subject matter
- appropriate criteria for assessment
- criteria to be fulfilled at each assessment level.

³ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.3

⁴ Where no exact equivalent word exist in English I have used the most appropriate English translation

The state remains neutral regarding how schools approach these matters although there are set regulations teachers must adhere to in the setting of grades in terms of frequency, relevance to syllabi and informing students of criteria. This is a job for principals, teachers and students. It is deemed to be not only the responsibility but the duty of each school to create, within the framework of the curriculum, the best education possible.

Education in Sweden shall be objective, include a range of approaches, uphold the values set out in the curriculum and be adapted to the needs of each student.

The Education Act stipulates that the education provided within each type of school shall be of equivalent value, irrespective of where in the country it is provided.⁵

The curriculum is divided into six major areas:⁶

- Knowledge (*kunskap*)
- Norms and values (*normer och värden*)
- Students responsibility and influence (*elevens ansvar och inverkan*)
- Educational choices (*utbildningsval*)
- Assessment and grades⁷ (*bedömning och betyg*)
- Principals responsibility (*rektorns ansvar*)

Following is a short summary of these areas where there is a relevance to this study;

Knowledge

It is a goal that each Swedish school shall strive to ensure that all pupils acquire good and appropriate knowledge in order to form and test ideas, solve problems, reflect on and critically analyse experiences and knowledge. Schools should help pupils believe in their own ability to develop, train them in metacognition and in ethical thinking. The ability to work alone and in a group are important goals. Schools shall encourage active debates on the various concepts and definitions of knowledge and all of the different forms of knowledge, ‘facts, understanding, skills and accumulated experience’⁸, shall exist simultaneously in schools.

Education shall give historical perspectives and aid students to develop an ability to see interconnections and a coherent view (*‘This requires special attention in a course-based school’*⁹) and provide opportunities for reflection and application of knowledge. Schools shall use ‘specialist literature, fiction and other forms of culture as a source of knowledge, insight and joy’ and that students can ‘acquire stimulation from aesthetic creativity and cultural experiences.’¹⁰

The curriculum states that teachers shall ensure that each pupil develops to the best of their ability, that they progress and find school work challenging and increasingly demanding. Learning should be meaningful. There should be a balance between practical and theoretical knowledge and that knowledge is to be founded in the values specified in the document. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for own learning but the goals of education are achieved through consultation between student and teacher. The curriculum states that teachers should be

⁵ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.4

⁶ I will give the Swedish terms inside a parenthesis.

⁷ In NZ however grades is not a term used. *Assessment* is the term used for both the activity of assessing and for the grade students receive.

⁸ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.6

⁹ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.7

¹⁰ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, pages 11 & 12

aware of ‘developments in pedagogical research and relevant subject areas, and apply these in the education.’¹¹

Norms and values

In Sweden, common values of the Swedish society as well as Christian values shall be upheld by all schools as well as encouraging ‘the expression of these in practical daily action.’¹²

Responsibility and influence of students

Democratic principles are fundamental to the Swedish education system and students are asked to influence, take responsibility and be involved in the work of planning course/subject content and structure.

Educational choices include 17 nationally approved courses.

Assessment and grades

Schools should ensure that students can assess their own results in relation to the demands of the syllabi. Teachers are responsible for giving students the information they need to develop and succeed and to inform students on the criteria or basis for these grades. When setting grades the teacher must use ‘all available information on the pupil’s knowledge in relation to the demands in the syllabi.’¹³ It is important to note here that there are no guidelines that require that the setting of grades should at any time be carried out by more than one teacher.

Responsibility of the School head include seeing that the school is focused on attaining national goals, is responsible for the school’s results. He/she must ensure that education is based on the wishes of pupils and their choice of course, that they receive help in formulating goals for their studies and that the pupils in dialogue with the school draw up individual study plans. The school should also be in co-operation with institutions of tertiary study so that the pupils receive a high quality education as well as preparation for working life and further studies.

2.1.1 The Aesthetics programme; definitions and aims

The word ‘aesthetics’ is used here in a wider sense today than the earlier definitions; ‘belonging to the appreciation of beauty’ and ‘having or showing such appreciation’¹⁴. The curriculum describes the term Aesthetics;

Aesthetics covers our experience of everything Man has created and the means by which this creativity has been expressed, as well as its underlying ideas. Aesthetics also embraces an understanding of the values and the means by which one's own and other cultures express themselves, as well as the ability to communicate by aesthetic means.¹⁵

In the Swedish school curriculum states that the main aim of the Aesthetic programme to provide students with the opportunity to explore and develop own capacity in the area of self-expression. The curriculum states that; ‘This can serve as an instrument for personal development and self-realisation, and can be combined with a general interest in the arts.’¹⁶

¹¹ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.13

¹² *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.13

¹³ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.17

¹⁴ The Oxford Paperback Dictionary, Oxford University press, 1979

¹⁵ Kursinfo, Skolverket

www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0809&infotyp=15&skolform=21&id=5&extraId=0, 14 Dec 08

¹⁶ Kursinfo, Skolverket

www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0809&infotyp=15&skolform=21&id=5&extraId=0, 14 Dec 08

The Aesthetic programme aims also to give opportunities for students to meet, experience, analyse, discuss and form opinions about different art forms and aesthetic values as well as providing a broad art/cultural history orientation. In Sweden, art as a subject is compulsory throughout the school system but from 16-18 years of age students can elect to specialise within one or more of the Aesthetic disciplines. There are high schools throughout the country that specialise in providing Aesthetic programmes.

2.1.2 The Swedish assessment system

The Swedish curriculum describes grades as the following; ‘Grades express to what extent the individual pupil has attained the knowledge goals expressed in the syllabi for different courses and are defined in the grade criteria’¹⁷

The curriculum states that grades are decided by Skolverket and specify the ways knowledge in the grade levels: IG, G, VG and MVG should be structured.¹⁸ The grade that students receive should be a recognition that these criteria are present in the work submitted by the student as well as the breadth of the knowledge the student has acquired. Grades should be read together with ‘Goals to strive for’ and ‘Goals for the course’ as well as ‘Goals to be reached’. Each school should make their own interpretations of these grade criteria in the choice of method and content. It is interesting to note however that there are no specifications for ‘Goals to strive for’ anywhere to be found in the curriculum for the Aesthetic programme.

2.2 The New Zealand School Curriculum

In NZ, as is the case in Sweden, schools must adhere to the curriculum. In NZ the 2008 curriculum is the second revised version of an outcomes-focused curriculum, a curriculum that states what students should know and be able to accomplish. The NZ cabinet requires the curriculum to undergo regular revision and modification in order to meet the fast changing pace of social change, increasing population diversity, more sophisticated technologies, and more complex demands of the workplace.

The New Zealand Curriculum states succinctly what each learning area is about and how its learning is structured. The sets of achievement objectives have been carefully revised by teams of academics and teachers to ensure that they are current, relevant, and well-defined outcomes for students.¹⁹

The New Zealand Curriculum, whose symbol is the nautilus shell as it is as a metaphor for growth²⁰, outlines and defines the following six key elements:

- Vision
- Principles
- Values
- Key competencies for learning and life;

¹⁷ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.17

¹⁸ IG = Icke Godkänd (not achieved), G = Godkänd (achieved), VG = Väl Godkänd (achieved with merit), MVG = Mycket Väl Godkänd (achieved with excellence).

¹⁹ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2008, p.4

²⁰ ‘The nautilus is a marine animal with a spiral shell. The shell has as many as thirty chambers lined with nacre (mother-of-pearl). The nautilus creates a new chamber as it outgrows each existing one, the successive chambers forming what is known as a logarithmic spiral. Physician, writer, and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–94) saw the spiral shell of the nautilus as a symbol of intellectual and spiritual growth. He suggested that people outgrew their protective shells and discarded them as they became no longer necessary: “One’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions”.’ *New Zealand Curriculum*, 2007, p.1

- Learning areas (eight areas)
- Pedagogy

Following is a short summary of these areas where there is a relevance to this study:

Vision is about what NZ schooling should aim to foster in its younger population. Personal qualities and competencies are grouped under four main areas (which reoccur in all of the remaining 5 key elements):

1. Confidence - positive self-identity, motivation, entrepreneurial skills, resilience.
2. Connection - ability to use tools for communication i.e. symbols, images and texts.
3. Life-long learners - literate and numerate, critical and creative thinkers, active seekers of knowledge, informed decision makers.
4. Actively involved - in different life contexts, contribute to social, economic and environmental wellbeing of NZ.

Principles are a set of beliefs that each school is expected to adhere to.

1. Excellence - achieve to the best of one's ability.
2. Learning to learn, metacognitive skills.
3. Cultural heritage.
4. Equity - equality of identities, cultures, languages and talents.
5. Connections - engaging with family and community.
6. Coherence - curriculum guides to and has relevance for further education
7. Inclusion- non-sexist, non-racist, non-discriminatory
8. Future- sustainability, citizenship, enterprise and globalisation

Values for schools are a reflection of the values of the democratic and diverse NZ community. These values 'should be evident in the school's philosophy, structures, curriculum, classrooms, and relationships'.²¹

- Excellence - aim high, perseverance
- Creative and reflective thinking
- Diversity - cultural
- Respect for self, others and human rights
- Equity - fairness and social justice
- Community and participation for the common good
- Environmental awareness
- Integrity and honesty
- Responsibility and acting ethically

Key competencies are defined as skills individuals gain within social contexts, assimilated from practices of people with whom a learner has close interactions, are competencies essential for future employment and lifelong learning. Workers envisaged to be needed for the future growth of NZ are those who are 'highly skilled, able to respond to continually changing demands and who can fill new kinds of jobs'.²² These contexts become wider and more complex as the student grows and learns. The New Zealand Curriculum identifies five key competencies:

1. managing self: a 'can-do' attitude, setting goals, planning, setting high expectations for oneself. 'It is about students knowing who they are, where they come from, and where they fit in.'

²¹The New Zealand School Curriculum, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.8

²²The New Zealand School Curriculum, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.12

2. relating to others: active listening, awareness of different points of view, negotiation and co-operation skills
3. participating and contributing: locally, nationally and globally
4. thinking: creative, critical, metacognitive and reflective
5. using language, symbols, and texts: 'making meaning of the codes in which knowledge is expressed' that is written, spoken and visual, informative and imaginative, informal and formal, mathematical, scientific and technological.²³

Learning areas are stated in eight broad groups: Social sciences, technology, science, mathematics, learning languages, English, health and physical education and the arts.

Pedagogy is explained thus in the document: 'While there is no formula that will guarantee learning for every student in every context, there is extensive, well-documented evidence about the kinds of teaching approaches that consistently have a positive impact on student learning.'²⁴ There then follows a long list of the ways in which a teacher can help students to achieve. These measures include providing a supportive learning environment, encouraging critical thought, showing relevance in what is being learnt, stimulating curiosity, encouraging learning with others, connecting to prior learning, revisiting new learning and finally a teacher's inquiry on the impact of his/her teaching.

2.2.1 *The Arts; definition and aims*

The following quotation from the *New Zealand School Curriculum* I have chosen to use in its original form as I believe that it indicates for the reader a fundamental value of the arts as not only important for individuals but even in its relevance to the formation of NZ's multicultural identity:

The arts are powerful forms of expression that recognise, value, and contribute to the unique bicultural and multicultural character of Aotearoa New Zealand, enriching the lives of all New Zealanders. The arts have their own distinct languages that use both verbal and non-verbal conventions, mediated by selected processes and technologies. Through movement, sound, and image, the arts transform people's creative ideas into expressive works that communicate layered meanings.²⁵

In the *New Zealand School Curriculum* the aims of the arts begin in a similar way to the Swedish curriculum. It states that arts education 'explores, challenges, affirms, and celebrates unique artistic expressions of self community, and culture.'²⁶

It is important to note here that in NZ, the arts as a compulsory subject ends when the child reaches 15 years of age. Between Years 1-8 (5-12 years of age) students learn in all four arts disciplines; visual art, drama, dance and music. Over the course of years 9-10, (13-14 years) they learn in at least two. From Years 11-13 (15-17 years), art becomes an elective subject and students may specialise in one or more of the disciplines or undertake study in multimedia and other new technologies. The curriculum states that schools should value and build on young children's experiences. The arts build on these with increasing complexity as knowledge and skills developed through four 'interrelated strands'; Understanding the Arts in Context,

²³ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.12

²⁴ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.34

²⁵ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2008, p.20

²⁶ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2008, p.20

Developing Practical Knowledge in the arts, Developing Ideas in the arts and Communicating and Interpreting in the arts.²⁷

I quote three statements about the more general goals of the arts in schools;

1. Learning in, through, and about the arts stimulates creative action and response by engaging and connecting thinking, imagination, senses, and feelings. By participating in the arts, students' personal wellbeing is enhanced. As students express and interpret ideas within creative, aesthetic, and technological frameworks, their confidence to take risks is increased.
2. They learn to use imagination to engage with unexpected outcomes and to explore multiple solutions.
3. Through the use of creative and intuitive thought and action, learners in the arts are able to view their world from new perspectives.²⁸

2.2.2 The New Zealand assessment system

Assessment is defined in the *New Zealand Curriculum* as being 'collecting and evaluating evidence to establish the level of an individual's performance. In other words, what a teacher does to determine if 'learning' has occurred'.²⁹ Assessment can be *either* internal *or* external. The choice is up to each teacher to choose how they gather together the correct amount of points for each subject. Thus, portfolio work accounts for only some of the points a student should gain at a certain level and subject.

Internal and external assessment is based on *achievement standards*. 'Standards specify learning outcomes, or describe the levels of performance learners need to reach to meet the standard'.³⁰ These *standards* identify the knowledge the student must have gained and are a framework for teachers to recognise where and how learning has taken place. *Standards* are 'in general' not however statements or definitions of content, nor do they determine how each assessment should be carried out (exams, tests, essays). Students receive an assessment based on how well they have fulfilled the criteria.³¹

In visual arts subjects in NZ, one way to carry out assessment of learning outcomes is to compile a portfolio. In NZ this is not a teaching 'method' as such but more a visual way to compile and display students work (on two or three large sheets of heavy cardboard, taped together and folded at the sides) so that students, teachers and assessors can ascertain whether *achievement standards* and criteria for the three achievement levels have been met.

National equivalence is assured through nationally recognised assessment and is quality assured in several ways. All of these *standards* can be sourced on the Ministry of Education website and teachers can access, on the same website, samples of student work that meet standards at levels *Achieved*, *Achieved with Merit* and *Achieved with Excellence*. On the website they can also find help with assessment activities/tasks they can use in the class-room. Teachers are stated to be trained in this style of assessment and Ministry of Education has a specialist staff who visit each school to monitor and advise teachers.

²⁷ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2008, p 20

²⁸ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2008, p 20

³⁴ NCEA website <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/index.html>, 27 Dec 08

³⁰ *A guide for students*, Secondary School Qualifications, New Zealand Qualifications Authority 2008, p.2

³¹ NCEA website <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/index.html>, 27 Dec 08

Initially when the NCEA (*National Certificate of Educational Achievement*) system was in its early years there was only what was called *unit standards* which specified the criteria which a student either fulfilled and passed or did not and failed. This was soon found to decrease student motivation to work any harder than what was necessary for a pass. Hence the consequent introduction of *achievement standards* which gave the students a minimum achievement level called *Achieved* plus two higher levels, *Achieved with Merit* and *Achieved with Excellence*.

Internal assessment is carried out during the year by teachers. National equivalence of these assessments is carried out in a process of *moderation* whereby external moderators check a random sample of the student work marked in every subject in every school. These moderators control level of marking set by teachers and to a lesser extent the content of the course. This control of content has decreased over the years as schools are becoming more and more autonomous with regards to programme content.

External assessment of the visual arts take place when portfolios are handed in, or 'submitted', for assessment by a panel of markers appointed by the Ministry of Education. Rather confusingly, teachers themselves mark Level 1 and 2 portfolios and send in seven of these for *verification* by external moderators which is seen as a way to achieve national equivalence of these external assessments. All of the Level 3 portfolios in the country are submitted for external assessment only. The theory is that if teachers have marked correctly it is assumed that all of the folios from that achievement level are also correct. If, however, the grade is too low or too high all of the other folios with the same mark are also affected, that is, the grade is reduced or raised a 'notch'. I say 'notch' as there are within each achievement grade unofficial levels called low, mid and high. It is only for these verification samples that this is necessary as students receive only *Not Achieved*, *Achieved*, *Achieved with Merit* or *Achieved with Excellence*. It has relevance in that submitted portfolios assessed as 'low' or 'high' may be moved up or down a notch and therefore after national assessment receive a different grade than they were ranked at by teachers.

Completed and submitted portfolios are assessed according to the criteria but may be presented in many different ways. The most important aspect being that the folio shows that criteria are met. Assessors are looking for evidence of what is called the PPMT's- Procedures, Processes, Methods and Techniques.

3 METHOD AND IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter begins with an explanation of the methods used and a presentation of the schools in New Zealand that are included in this study. The first observations are from two Swedish upper secondary schools. Following these are observations from the two New Zealand schools I visited. Included in the NZ school observation is a description of an assessment situation I attended

3.1 Methods

Direct observations are firstly from art class situations from two Swedish upper secondary schools during my 20 week period 'on section' (in Swedish VFU or verksamhetsförlagd utbildning) during teacher training. I daily followed Aesthetic programme students (and some lessons with Aesthetics as a compulsory subject) in their various art lessons. I was able to form an understanding of how visual art teaching can be carried out in Sweden. I did not however carry out any formal interviews with students or teachers in Sweden. My observations are based on what I saw in the class-room and the informal discussions I had with teachers at both schools. The schools I observed did not use the portfolio method although this would be an interesting comparison for further study. For this study I was more interested to observe how learning outcomes are specified and recognised in both countries and what the respective curriculums state of this task. Portfolio is only one method available to teachers for these ends.

To a much greater extent I carried out direct observations at two schools in New Zealand. I have focused on the upper secondary school years for this study (ages 15-18). I chose to narrow my observations to only two schools and to study in detail how schools approach portfolio work at upper secondary school. Observations are from the two schools my friends are currently employed and were carried out during a four-week field study during the autumn of 2008. These observations are from the class-room, lessons and discussions and interviews with teachers and pupils. This chapter will also include photographic documentation of examples of students' visual art work and excerpts from pages from my diary. I then present an example of an assessment situation at one of the schools. Attachments to this chapter are documents used in the teaching of visual art, photos of work-books and completed portfolios and interviews with students.

I have used only first initials for the students or simply called them student. I have been given permission from teachers and the two NZ schools to include their names in the study. I am aware of the fact that this study lacks some quantitative validity due to the absence of comparative observations from several schools in Sweden. I have only made observations from two schools in New Zealand which further weakens the validity of this study. In eventual continuation of this study it would be advantageous to extend the parameters in both Sweden and New Zealand to create a clearer picture of the variations of practical interpretation of visual art curriculum that exist in the class-rooms of both countries.

3.2 Presentation of New Zealand schools and teachers

Chilton St James School for Girls is a privately run Christian girls' school. The school is in a middle-sized New Zealand town, Lower Hutt, 12 km from the capital city of Wellington. The buildings are a well-maintained collection of old wooden villas and during my visit the school celebrated its 80th anniversary. One of the schools art teachers who I observed, Martin Butts, is Head of Arts and Technology Departments. He is also employed by the Ministry of Education to reassess and improve the New Zealand visual arts curriculum (Achievement standards review panel) and he is employed by the same Governmental body as a national assessor for Level 3 Sculpture portfolios.

Wellington High School is a co-educational (both sexes), non-uniformed state/public school in the very centre of the capital city of Wellington which sits on the harbour at the southern tip of the North Island. The teacher here, Jania Bates, is Head of Arts Department which has a staff of three.

I also visited Akaroa Area School which is a small country school in the South Island with a school roll of 120 students from 5-17 years. I visited the school during a weekend and discussed student portfolios with the art teacher there. It was interesting to compare these folios³² with the ones that I had seen in the North Island but for the purposes of this study and in order not to increase the research enquiries further I decided not to include these observations at this time.

Note on time disposition

I spent the first week at Chilton Girls School as I wanted to first acquaint myself with the general pedagogic methodology employed in the country. I returned to Chilton towards the end of my trip to take last photos a week before the portfolio submission deadline. I spent about one and a half weeks at Wellington High School observing and interviewing.

3.3 Observations from two Swedish art classes

The following observations were from my 20 week period 'on section' at two upper secondary schools. They include only observations and informal discussions with teachers.

3.3.1 *First school observation*

My very first impression of a Swedish art room is positive. The room is large, the ceiling is high and the whole atelier-like space is filled with natural lighting. The art department at the school I am located at seems to have a generous budget as there are high quality materials in the cupboards and paper-drawers. This is a large school and there are four full time teachers in the visual art department and around three teachers in every other Aesthetic discipline at in the Aesthetics programme.

The first lesson I observe is a nervous class of first year high school students (16 year olds). There are 18 students in this class and they are only girls. Since it is early in the year they do not know each others names yet. The task today is an exercise in expressive drawing, to draw with pencil a picture from their 'inner selves'. This is an excerpt from my notes on that first day:

I wonder what the idea is behind starting so early with expressive drawings? There is so much anxiety, nervousness in the group. My own head feels empty when I am faced with the task of 'drawing expressively from my inner 'visual-language'. The result (the students work) here is a whole lot of clichés and trend images. I am worried.

The teacher tells me that this lesson is preceded by lessons in use of materials and different techniques and a lesson in still-life. Many girls draw directly from advertising from a women's magazine they found in a pile in the art room. The teacher asks if anyone needs help and one at a time they go up to a corner of the room and the drawing is hung up for discussion. One student asks for ideas for her work but the teacher refuses to give her any as this is about *her* inner

³² A commonly used shortened form of 'portfolio'

picture not the teachers'. The teacher tells me that the use of 'art terminology' during these discussions is so that the students get used to hearing these terms.

Art lessons are generally over an hour long. Ninety minutes is common but there are lessons as long as three hours. The next lesson is 2D art with Year 2 (17 year olds). This class is smaller and there is one boy. The task here, which will take as many as eight lessons to complete, is oil-painting. The canvasses are large - one student has a stretching frame that is around two by two meters. The lesson begins with the teacher giving a short introduction to oil painting. Teacher explains what the different colours are called, which are warm and which are cold, about thinning the paint, which brushes to use and a little about the canvas itself. The painting is called 'Paraphrase' which in my dictionary means 'new and fuller rendering, free translation'³³. From what I can see, however, the chosen artists' painting is being more or less directly transferred with use of grids onto the canvas. Again I write at length in my notebook:

I am still worried. There is no idea of flow from one section to the next - some concept that leads naturally from one material and technique to another. If I as an established artists find it difficult to suddenly from thin air find my own style or inner voice then how...are these small kids supposed to do it?.....There must be a better way to teach progression, experimentation.....it is all so fleeting and unfounded in anything...Basics without attachment to anything past of present.....art really does feel like an easy way to get grades when it looks like this

The following day I interview a teacher as a part of an assignment from teachers' college concerning the use of written language in our chosen subjects. The teacher tells me that students at this school are at such different levels in their own goals with art. Some have not chosen art as a subject out of any real interest in art but more as something nice to do as they perhaps struggle at other school subjects. The teacher explains that; 'You can't demand that these kids express themselves clearly in written text'. Instead they are asked to write a bit about exhibitions they have visited. These passages of writing are based on their own reflections.

The same teacher has a Form (3D) lesson with the second year students from the painting class the day before. The task is to sketch a figure in clay. The students have not worked with clay before and the teacher leads them through the steps to building up a framework for the figure. The teacher sits as model and after 20 minutes goes around and gives help and advice. Advice is clear and technical help is well grounded and correct. I ask later about working with process and I am told that it is difficult to work with process here since there is not much 'process-thinking' in the Swedish school-system and therefore the students are not used to thinking in terms of process. I am told that 'When they are finished with a painting or a sculpture then they are finished - that's what the students say'. 'Very few students continue on to tertiary art education, it is enough for them to learn technique at high school', the teacher explains to me.

I observed a class of students who had chosen art as their compulsory aesthetic subject. All students must pass aesthetic subjects in order to receive a pass in their other subjects. The art room for these compulsory students is much smaller and more like any other class-room in the school. The task for these students today was to draw a self- portrait in the form of a house. The teacher gives them the task and provides technical and other formal help but students are free to express the house in whatever form they want. Most students have no difficulty deciding what kind of house they will draw. The next task is to take a detail of this drawing and enlarge it in

³³ The Penguin English Dictionary, Penguin Books, 1965

another material; to find a 'picture in the picture'. Many choose to draw using felt-tip pens from the large jars in the material cupboard.

The same teacher has adjusted the same task to suit a class of 'technical programme' students. These students are more design orientated so this teacher has chosen a task which revisits new knowledge from their other subjects. The task is to express themselves through the use of symbols and logos.

3.3.2 Second school observation

The second school where I was 'on section' was of a similar size and here, as in the first school, there is a strong *aesthetics* focus. In one of the first lessons I observe the students have also been given a similar task - to make a model of a room as an expression of ones' identity. The teacher stresses that this is not an interior decorating task and gets the students warmed up by asking the students to describe what *her* room would look like- in what way could a room reflect her identity? The teacher shows then a Power-point presentation of different contemporary and historic rooms with different kinds of expression. The last image is a 'why not?' image of a chair in a swimming pool. For this task the approximate scale and number of walls is set but other than that this is a free exercise. The teachers (two teachers at this school use the same task for two different classes) see this as an 'artistic exercise' but realise that the kind of 'inspiration images' that they show in the beginning of each task often are instrumental in the way in which the task is approached and how freely the students interpret it. More often than not each new task begins in this way with a discussion about the task and a Power-point presentation giving historical background to the genre in focus. What I noticed was that most students, although they have chosen art as their elective subject and a large part of their time is in the art room, have little prior knowledge of visual art practice. Teachers are careful to ask how much the students know of art practice and theory and any artists they know of or studied but this varies greatly depending on what school and which teacher they had at primary school (*grundskola*).

I observe in general that teachers build on students technical skills throughout the year and that the last task is an open 'own project' where they are asked to draw on all of their new skills and knowledge to create a final work of their own choice. The teachers guide students in technical matters and give formal advice (composition, colour, form etc) but the focus is on individual expression so the teachers choose not to comment on content.

Assessment at these schools is based on criteria which each teacher should present for students at the beginning of each block of work, although not for each task. Teachers in the first school always marked their students work alone but at the second school teachers often invited a colleague in to assist. At the second school one teacher would often have one to one discussions with the students a month or so prior to marking to see what the student themselves thought their mark should be. At the first school there was no project-work involving several subjects and the art teachers did not discuss their lessons with each other. At the second school there was a lot of cross-subject project work and the art teachers were in constant discussion with one another about lesson content and collaborative work.

3.4 Observations from New Zealand class-rooms

The following is written and photographic documentation of my observations from firstly Chilton St James School for Girls and secondly from Wellington High School. The written documentation includes introductory descriptions of class-room lessons and environment so that readers can form an internal picture of what a New Zealand art room can look like and how an art lesson can be structured. Inserted within this descriptive passage are excerpts from my diary,

discussions between teachers and students and some informal discussions I had with teachers and with students as they worked. In the final week of my trip I observed how teachers and students at both schools gathered together and finally assembled work for portfolios in preparation for submission to the national assessors. There is also a description of an assessment situation which I observed. Here I will include excerpts from assessment criteria from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) as well as attachments showing these criteria, student work-sheets and examples of students' portfolios.

3.4.1 Observations from Chilton St James School for Girls

The first lesson I observe with Martin Butts at Chilton St James is with Level 2 photography students. The girls arrive, they are neatly dressed in their school uniforms of red blazers and calf-long grey pleated skirts. They say good morning before they sit themselves at a computer in the newly finished computer room. This room, designed by Martin, has a large window that looks out over the art room next door enabling him to teach in one room and have an eye on the students in the other at the same time. The girls open their course manuals at the appropriate page, log in and find their files on the computer. Martin asks if they all know what they are doing and if anyone needs help. The girls get to work on their set tasks which take them through a number of basic Photoshop and photographic techniques. There is seemingly little hesitation as to what is required of them in these final works. Martin later explains to me that this task is the last stage of a half-year long study of photographic methods and practice. These tasks are internally assessed. Martin begins every course with theoretical study, carried out in work-books. Martin chooses eight artists from which the students choose three artists and one work from each of their chosen artists. The artists' work is analysed from all aspects of making from questions of context and the circumstances that give rise to the work, theme or ideas and concepts behind the work and formal properties such as materials, form, structure, surface, colour and balance. Other areas of analysis include expressive properties used, articulation of space and translation of materials.³⁴

After this analysis work they are given a theme for an individual photographic piece. Martin says that he is trying to prepare the students for Level 3 criteria that include using theme and developing ideas. In this first task, brain-storming on the theme is the catalyst for ideas. They then create small idea sketches which spring from a collection of photographic images. He encourages the students to take their own photos rather than scouring the internet as he believes that personal relevance of images makes for more engaged work by students. The photos are printed out and assembled in a collage. Today the girls have an example of three artists' work in front of them; David Salle, Hannah Höch and Renée Magritte. Using collage techniques they compose their own variation of these different artist styles. The use of collage technique is something I will see a lot of in New Zealand schools. Martin explained that; 'A teacher must choose a way of working that will give opportunities to show all the criteria in the curriculum-appropriation, progression, understanding, regeneration of ideas and so on. This is the reason for the common use of collage technique, particularly evident in painting portfolios but also commonly used in photography, as it gives the student several avenues to apply the criteria.'

Lessons in NZ are short, only one hour long, and due perhaps to this the girls are quickly 'on task'. Martin is at hand to help but most girls work independently until the lesson, or period as they are called, is over. Occasionally they will ask for advice on their compositions and Martin's answer is most often 'What would David Salle do?' And after a few seconds thought and comparison of their own work and the work of the artist model the student will answer something like; 'He would tone down the hue here and turn that image around. He might crop this image

³⁴ Artist model analysis sheet. Course booklet, Level 2 Visual arts, Martin Butts, Chilton St James

too' and Martin will say; 'Then that is what you could do. Try those things and see what works in your composition'.

Next period is a lively Year 7 class. The class of 11 year-old girls sit themselves in their usual places at high tables placed in u-shape with Martins table at the front. The art room is full of natural lighting and the walls are covered with student art-work, there are boxes of students work on the floor and on drying racks in the corner. Martin says good morning and they answer 'Good morning Mr Butts' in unison. He introduces me to the class and then says to the girls, 'Adrienne will be coming around to see you work and if she asks what you are doing then of course you can tell her OK? Right, you know what to do. Get to work!'

I am astounded to see that indeed, even these young girls seem to know exactly what their task is today and they get to work. Paintings are taken out of a large plastic box, small dabs of 'fingernail sized' paint splotches are squeezed out of bottles onto palettes and away they go. Brightly coloured still-life paintings in the style of Matisse are everywhere and as I go around and talk to the girls they explain: they tell me about gesso, ground colour and subsequent layers of colour, of composition, surface decoration and of thickness of outlines, of depth of colours and how colours work next to each other. They can show me in their work-books how they have studied Matisse, analysed a painting and step by step have copied the painting. They have then sketched a still-life from different angles and repeated one of these drawings four times in order to try out different colour combinations. They have finally chosen one of these that they think works best and using a grid the sketch has been enlarged on to a stiff card for the final painting. Again the girls seem to be self-directed and need little technical help during this lesson. A few girls come up to Martin and want to know if they are finished and if there is anything else they should do on their paintings. Martin props the painting on a ledge and they both stand back to look at it and Martin asks; 'What do you think?' or 'What would Matisse have done?' The student looks for a few seconds and then may say something like; 'I think I need to do some patterns on the table-cloth', or 'That background colour needs to be stronger'. Another short discussion went like this:

Student: Do you think I need to do a black line on the edge of the table?
Martin: What do you think?
Student: The edge is a bit wobbly
Martin: I don't think that matters
Student: No, and I think that if I put a black line on it it wouldn't look right that it was wobbly any more
Martin: So you don't need the black line?
Student: No
Martin: OK. So you've finished

In an attempt to narrow my study of art teaching in NZ I had decided that I would concentrate my observations on the last three years of secondary school art. But when Martin showed me the work these 11 year old girls were doing I thought- 'This I *have* to see'. When I got home that evening this is what I wrote in my notebook:

I am in shock. The work I saw today was amazing. It left me speechless. I have never seen 11 year-old kids making art of that kind anywhere before. The depth of knowledge and understanding about the fundamentals of art practice are present at such a young age here. I am beginning to wonder if there is any point in wishing for changes to gymnasium level art (in Sweden) when here students are being prepared for portfolio work since primary school and by the time they get to senior years at high school their previous knowledge is far beyond anything I have observed in Swedish high school art students. It is like starting at the wrong end.

The next class of Year 13 sculpture students is much smaller - only 8 students. Every lesson Martin has one-to-one discussions with two students which are 10-15 minutes long. The rest of the class go to work on their sculpture projects which lie in different corners in one half of the large art-room. Martin begins these one-to-one meetings with students at the start of the second half of the school year. This is the time students have to complete their externally assessed portfolios. The first of these discussions occurs after the student has completed a mind map full of ideas relating to a chosen theme. He explains to me that, in his experience, when a student has trouble developing her ideas it generally is because she did not have a range of ideas to begin with. 'In my discussions with students I will often go back to these original ideas in her work book and in my own note book and get them to draw on these in the search for new direction.' Martin opens his unlined A4 note book begins to sketch ideas together with the student. 'I have no problem sketching their ideas for them' he says 'as it is a way to get them to get used to visually documenting their ideas'.

Martin encourages the students to find a theme that relates to their own interests. His students chose the following themes:

- Escapism
- The 4 elements
- Identity
- Memories and their complexity
- Architecture and strange creatures
- Documentation as obsessive behaviour
- Sporting equipment
- Digital communication

Today Martin sits in the classroom next to J, the first of today's one-to-one discussion students. J's portfolio is folded open in front of them and spread over the three large portfolio cards are loosely attached preliminary photographic print-outs of the work she has so far completed. Her theme is Digital Communication. Martin explains that she needs to use more of her sketches and find new ways to develop these ideas sculpturally. Making new ideas from old ideas, or as the criteria describes as *regeneration* of ideas, is something that she has to show more evidence of in her folio if she is to gain a higher grade. Martin quotes the assessment criteria for *Achievement with Merit*: 'Use of drawing as the central means to purposefully generate a range and depth of ideas to analyse, clarify and regenerate options'³⁵

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Martin | Would these elements (<i>pointing to initial sculptural sketches that incorporated use of newspaper, balloons, words</i>) relate to your theme and form- ideas you have developed over here? |
| Student J | Yeah- I could use these letters and project them...perhaps I could use Photoshop and play around a bit? Could I use Photoshop to project images on to my work? |
| M | Yes that's a good idea but you have to show evidence of this in your sculpture work. I am thinking about music boxes and those old hearing aids- you know those horn shaped things old people used...I am thinking we need to consider how to turn your 2D sketches into 3D sculptural elements (<i>he sketches a Tony Cragg sculpture he is reminded of</i>). I'll look for this work in a book for you... |
| St J | Yes, I think this idea relates to my theme...it is repeated here... there is a connection between this idea and my artist but I need to find a way to show a continuous flow through the folio... |

³⁵ Achievement standard, Visual arts 3.3, Achievement Criteria NCEA
<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=90670&view=all&level=03>

- M- Looking at these initial sketches again I think we should pick up on ideas here that you haven't used yet.
- St J Yes, there are a lot of ideas I haven't used yet- I was a bit too ambitious I think! But it's incredible how far we stray from our first ideas!

Next discussion is with M. Her theme is about escapism and dreaming. Again the discussion is about development and regeneration of ideas;

- Martin I have found an artist here who uses domes in their work as this dome idea, your idea of a contained world, needs developing. How can you use these ideas here to create new domes?
- Student M I would like to use this idea again somewhere...Could I use these dots on objects for example?
- M Yes, and then you have your clock here that you haven't taken up yet in your work...and the flower pot idea here... *(they discuss and Martin does some sketches in his book. They talk about the criteria)*
- St M *(goes to fetch her work book she opens at the glued in criteria sheet)*
- M Here it says for achievement with merit that you must; 'Use drawing as the central means to purposefully generate, analyse, clarify and regenerate objects'. I can see that you have purposefully generated ideas in your theme sketches here, you have generated or thought up a range of ideas but you need to show more analysis of these ideas in the way you explore these ideas like you are starting to do today. Then you need to come to some kind of conclusion in your final page here. You need to show for example use of spatial ideas and concepts. Regenerating objects means that you show different ways to reuse an idea - obliteration, transparency, movement, repetition, light...that you identify and reuse ideas is the key here.
(They draw up a plan sketch of how the final portfolio should look- which images to use and where.)
- M So you know what you have to do now?
- St M Mm.. I have to make 6 sculptures this week using the dome and photograph them.

Another discussion with a student was about use of artist models and that it was important for her assessment that she found a way of clarifying this. In the achievement criteria it states that; 'Show knowledge of the characteristics and constraints of established processes, procedures, materials and techniques used'³⁶. This knowledge is required at every level. A deeper level of understanding of these artists models gives higher grades. Understanding can be expressed in terms of how well a student tests the constraints and limitations of any given practice as well as visual proof of thoughtful decision-making regarding use of these constraints and its relevance to the students own ideas. The conversation below reflects this thought process;

- Student T How do I fit Stockholm in? *(Sally Stockholm, artist models)* I was thinking perhaps I could use boxes (*goes to get her work-book and opens at her working drawings*) I have used these things in her work like the lines from top to bottom here and the boxes...like...could I have the boxes in the corner with things coming out of them?
- Martin You would probably need to have them as part of it sucked in..*(he does a sketch to describe what he means)* then it becomes more like that or that *(he point out features of the students work in her portfolio)* so that it grows from your ideas. Here you need to show a more stated reference to Boltanski (*Christian Boltanski, artist model*). They will want to see more obvious reference *(referring to accreditors)*
- St T Could I put photos on the outside of the boxes?
- M Yes that would be good
- St T So I need two or more sculpture ideas for my final page.

³⁶ Achievement standard, Visual arts 3.3, Achievement Criteria NCEA
<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=90670&view=all&level=03>, 27 Dec 08

- M Yes. Think also about the different sculptural elements. Play around with them and see which ones fit in to the final work. Stockhold uses colour here for example.
- St T And can I get hold of some of this tape that she uses here and use that too?
- M Yes good idea. So go for it. You have heaps to do!

3.4.2 Observations from Wellington High School

My first impression from Wellington High is that it is a very big school! The school, which overlooks the main business centre in the capital city, Wellington, is a complex concrete structure and there are students everywhere. This is one of the few non-uniform schools in the country which may be one of the reasons for the more relaxed atmosphere here.

Jania's first period is a class of excited 13 year olds for a lesson in Year 9 art. Even though it is spring in New Zealand the classroom is cold! Images of contemporary art work, examples of art from different art movements, and assessment criteria for different standards are hung up around the room. On the white-board is the Maori proverbial saying for the week:

WHAKATAUAKI FOR THE WEEK:
 'Ko to kai rapu, ka ia te kite'
 (whoever searches will find out - don't sit back, have a go!)

There is a lot of noise and activity in the room. Jania hands out A3 sketch books and graphite pencils. They learn step-by-step how to make different lines with the pencil, how to carry out a tonal study. There is a lot of excitement as the students compare pencil lines and discover how much a pencil can do! The hour passes quickly and the next period begins. It is a class of Level 3 sculpture students who quickly invade the space, open up their folios and begin on various sculpture projects around the room. The date for portfolio submission is only two weeks away and teachers and students work late most days and extra hours in the weekends to meet the deadline.

Jania has a discussion with E, Level 3 sculpture student about her artist model:

- Jania Thinking about your artist - do you remember how it was- that you were exploring her and what she did, her ideas about environmental issues?
- Student E Mmm If I did a figure with letters projected on it in this room would that be strong enough for the final work?
- J Let's jot down some ideas for your final piece (*she puts a piece of paper on the last space in the portfolio and writes*) ...you could use an overhead projector, then you have the plastic bag man...what is happening in the room? What else are you working on? The garden? The toxic wastes that relate to your artist model?
- Student Yeah...I would like to do more with the toxic wastes (*she goes to get an old coke tin which is cut open and stuffed with rubbish*)
- J Yes, OK- this is about rubbish and consumerism as well as the physical act of cramming things into a space that you have been doing earlier on so that's good.
- Student (*she goes to get her work-book*)
- J Ah yes here there is the plastic bag idea...hmm could you wrap your figure in gladwrap now? You looked at which artists? Tony Cragg and Virginia King? I really like your plastic bag man. What about doing several of them over a whole wall?
- Student Yeah- and then project words over them...but perhaps that would be too chaotic...Ohh I know! How about a whole wall with like 4 plastic bag people and letters projected only over their eyes- like blinding them to what they are doing!
- J There you go- your grand finale. Yes a big photo of that here at the bottom. Go for it. You need to start collecting plastic bags.

Again here at Wellington High school I am reminded of how important the use of artist models as a way for students to generate and develop their own work is in art teaching in NZ. 'What is the link in your work to your artist model?' is a question I heard teachers ask students time after time. I asked Martin about this very central part of art teaching in NZ. He answered:

A lot of art teaching concentrates on teaching of technique. Technique in itself is dead and without inherent interest for an art student. In-depth study of the work of artists, both past and present, gives learning in context through learning critical thinking about content, formal pictorial elements etc. By copying the work students gain an understanding of how the work grows, develops and comes to its final conclusion. My students have studied many artists' work and are now able to look at other work and analyse what techniques, materials and processes were employed to produce any work they are confronted with.

He says that the biggest criticism for NCEA (*National Certificates of Educational Achievement*-NZ high school qualifications) is the focus on artist models as a basis for study of art forms. However, he sees no problem with this for five reasons;

1. This method is not new! It has been used through the centuries by art students and is as relevant today as a way to understand technique and process.
2. Just teaching technique is without meaning -gives relevance
3. It removes the problem for students of finding subject matter which is time consuming and stressful for young people
4. It is a springboard for their own ideas to grow from- important for our students as the last criteria for assessment is development of ideas
5. It is a way to consolidate knowledge of artists in a real way – understanding through physical experience of a technique instead of intellectual understanding through observation and descriptions written by others.

Back in the art department things are heating up. All through the day students arrive to work on their portfolios- some are taking time off from other subjects to be here which is not encouraged! Folders are open on the floors as paintings and photos are moved around to find the best positioning and flow in the work, students build up, photograph and then dismantle sculptures and installation work, paintings are produced at a great rate and often several simultaneously.

In one corner is a Year 13 student busy working on a model for an installation. I ask him about his work and he replies that he has started with an artist whose sculptures were based on the idea of fractured objects frozen in the momentum of an explosion. The week before he made his own sculptural version of this concept with a glass bottle suspended in splinters. The piece he was now working on removed the bottle and was using coloured wool to track the explosion's momentum: 'I am applying the same idea I have been working on for my painting - the removal of the object and focusing on the space surrounding the subject instead.' Then he explained that; 'This is just a maquette which I will enlarge to full scale next week. Then I have this idea to join objects in a room together with string. Linking objects together in space'

In another corner of the room is a student taking photos of her work. Her sculptures are made from ripped magazine pages and she tells me that her work, based on her artist model, was a continuation of an earlier sculptural installation where she had made cut-out chandeliers in corrugated cardboard. The work she now was photographing was part of the installation background or walls. The next stage in the work was to use the boards from which she had cut the chandelier parts. Both of these students are absorbed in their work (despite the madness around them!) and work without instruction from teachers.

3.4.3 Observation of Assessment in New Zealand

The following is my own description of an assessment in practice, one which I was able to observe at Chilton St James School. Included in the observation are the relevant *Achievement standard* and the *Achievement criteria* matrix, NCEA descriptions of the different assessment criteria as well as photographic documentation of examples of portfolios from each of the different assessment levels.

Fiona and Martin from Chilton together marked Fiona's Level 1 painting students folios. The *Achievement Standard* she had chosen for her students had the title:

Generate and develop ideas in making art works

This achievement standard involves decision making and use of a range of media and techniques to record information, generate and develop ideas from subject matter, and showing how these are based on established practice.³⁷

This *achievement standard* is externally assessed and Fiona tells me that she sets tasks for her students so that she and they know that if they complete all the set tasks, to the best of their ability, they will be guaranteed a pass. Fiona's tasks include painting a still life with an eclectic mix of objects and patterns making it able to be reused in future works, a collage to show planning and developing of ideas, mixed media, printmaking and different painting tasks. She has chosen the artist models; one Victorian bird illustrator from early NZ history and a contemporary NZ artist whose allegorical paintings are often based around a bird-human figure. To a large extent she sets her tasks from what is stated in the *Achievement standards*.

Fiona sees the strength of the portfolio system is in its structure and clarity. She appreciates the way that folio work makes the students work visible for both her and the student so that they both can see clearly what has been done and what remains to be done. She avoids the last-minute panic to complete folios which she says is common in schools here. She talks of teachers letting the students work freely to see how the work develops and then an inevitable rush at the end of the year to find ways to fulfil assessment criteria. She believes that this denies the student of a chance to really understand what they are doing and for ideas to synthesise in their work in a real way.

Assessment was carried out in the following way: There are 18 folios in the room opened up and standing on the floor and tables in the art room. Martin and Fiona do a first rough ranking of the folios. They pick out the lowest and the highest and place them at opposite ends of the room. I was interested to hear that one of the lowest ranked folios was by a girl who has recently come to this school after years of anthroposophical schooling. They told me that she had a number of social difficulties as well as finding it difficult adjusting to a more structured way of learning. Deciding which folios received highest and lowest grades appeared to be almost self-evident and needed no or little reference to criteria. After this however the task became more difficult and Martin and Fiona read and reread the criteria many times during the approx 3 hour marking-process.

The *Achievement Criteria* matrix for this standard looked like this:³⁸

Achievement Criteria

³⁷ Visual Arts Achievement standards, Achievement Criteria, NZQA
<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=90020&view=all&level=0127> 12 Dec 08

³⁸ Visual Arts Achievement standards, Achievement Criteria, NZQA
<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=90020&view=all&level=0127> 12 Dec 08

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Show evidence of decision making and appropriate use of a range of media and techniques in recording information and developing ideas from subject matter.	Show evidence of purposeful decision making and control of a range of media and techniques in recording information and developing ideas from subject matter.	Show evidence of purposeful decision making and fluent control of a range of media and techniques in recording information, and developing and clarifying ideas from subject matter.
Show that ideas, techniques or conventions from established practice have been used in own work.	Show that ideas, techniques or conventions from established practice have been developed in own work.	Show that ideas, techniques or conventions from established practice have been developed and integrated into own work.

Definitions were read and explained for me, and perhaps for one another, from the explanatory notes that always follow a standard achievement criteria matrix. To gain *Achievement* the student must ‘use a range of media and techniques, record information and develop ideas from subject matter, use ideas, techniques and conventions from artists’ work and show developing ideas by demonstrating decision-making in and between works.’³⁹

The area hardest to identify seems to be *Achieved with Merit*. For example, to be awarded *Achievement with Merit* a student must ‘show purposeful decision making’ which means that there are indications in the work that the student seems to ‘know what they are doing’ as Martin described it, and that the choices the student has made in the making process are visible in the work. *Merit* folios also show a ‘control of range of media and techniques (eg wet and dry media, collage, mixed-media, printmaking). Martin explained that this is an indication of time put in as well as the motivation behind the production of a work. ‘Developing subject matter’ is also important criteria, that the student has made an effort to try own ideas. Finally the work must show a development of ‘ideas, techniques and conventions from artist models’. The student is required to fulfil *all* of the criteria. Here it is important to be aware that in this assessment system there is no value or ranking placed on criteria, each one must be evident in the folio in order for it to qualify for that assessment level. This means that even though some folios will show great strength in one area, for example show exceptional control of media and technical skill, the folio will not be higher ranked unless all of the other criteria have also been fulfilled.

Achieved with Excellence seems to be easier to identify as the criteria are quite tough and many fail to fulfil one or other of the criteria. It was clearly apparent that all three of us had no problem identifying when a student really knew what they are doing, when the work showed a lot of variation, high control of media and technique, subject matter and used artist models to spin off on own tangents. These highest graded folios were mesmerising, skilfully painted and quite simply outstanding.

Martin gave one insight into marking of portfolios which is of interest. He stresses that portfolio is about process and not about getting to the end and having a final finished piece of work. It should be possible for the assessors to imagine what would happen with the work if the student were to complete one more portfolio page.

³⁹ Visual Arts Achievement standards, Achievement Criteria, NZQA
<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=90020&view=all&level=0127> 12 Dec 08

4 RESULTS

I am aware that this study lacks a certain amount of empirical validity due to its limited number of schools studied in New Zealand and the lack of comparable observation of schools in Sweden. I will still approach this chapter by attempting to answer the research enquiries one at a time.

4.1 Responses to research enquiries

1. What are the differences between the school curriculums in Sweden and New Zealand?
2. In which way can use of portfolios as employed in New Zealand secondary school help teachers define and assess students' learning outcomes in the visual arts?
3. In which ways can school curriculum goals and values in Sweden and New Zealand be seen to be used in practice in the teaching of secondary school visual arts in both countries?
4. In which way does each curriculum aim to ensure equivalent education?
5. In which way and to which extent can learning outcomes in the visual arts be understood by students in New Zealand?
6. Is it possible that pervading definitions of democracy in a country as a whole can influence how teachers in Sweden and New Zealand relate to students and how they teach visual art?

4.1.1 *What are the differences between the school curriculums in Sweden and New Zealand?*

In its broadest terms New Zealand has an 'outcomes-focused' curriculum which 'states succinctly what each learning area is about and how its learning is structured' whereas the Swedish curriculum which is 'goal-based' does not have an ambition to provide teachers and students with specific learning requirements but provides goals which are broad and open to interpretation.⁴⁰ In this way there are fundamental differences between the two documents which are immediately tangible. Although many of the goals of education are similar there are different areas of focus between the two and alternative ways of defining these fundamental aims of education. One of the most fundamental of these goals is of course knowledge. The Swedish curriculum uses the word 'knowledge' (*kunskap*) and then deliberates widely on the breadth of definitions that knowledge should be understood to encompass. Reflective and critical thinking, problem-solving, belief in one's own ability to develop, metacognition, ethics, values and ability to work independently and in a group are all included here. The Swedish curriculum states the importance of 'good knowledge'⁴¹ but at the same time that schools shall encourage active debates regarding what this 'good knowledge' is:

The school's task of imparting knowledge presupposes that there is an active debate in the individual school about concepts of knowledge, on what constitutes important knowledge now and in the future, as well as the learning process itself. Different aspects of knowledge are natural starting points for such a debate.⁴²

⁴⁰ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.6

⁴¹ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.10

⁴² *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006 p.6

The New Zealand Curriculum identifies instead five *key competencies*. These include managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing, thinking and using language. The document describes an ability to use and communicate using language in all of its variety of forms:

Using language, symbols, and texts is about working with and making meaning of the codes in which knowledge is expressed. Languages and symbols are systems for representing and communicating information, experiences, and ideas. People use languages and symbols to produce texts of all kinds: written, oral/aural, and visual; informative and imaginative; informal and formal; mathematical, scientific, and technological. Students who are competent users of language, symbols, and texts can interpret and use words, numbers, images, movement, metaphor, and technologies in a range of contexts. They recognise how choices of language, symbol, or text affect people's understanding and the ways in which they respond to communications.⁴³

Knowledge of the different forms of language that are available to us for human communication is not an area that the Swedish curriculum, in this part or in any other part of the document, highlights to the degree that is apparent in the above statement.

Where the Swedish document places a focus on aspects of thinking and how knowledge can be both broad and changeable, *The New Zealand Curriculum* stresses social skills, self-esteem and use of languages. Fundamental to the Swedish curriculum is that there is a respect for, and an understanding of, democratic values. The opening paragraph states:

Democracy forms the basis of the national school system. The Education Act (1985:1100) stipulates that all school activity shall be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values and that each and everyone working in the school shall encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as for the environment we all share.⁴⁴

And further in the document,

The democratic principles of being able to influence, take responsibility and be involved shall embrace all pupils. The pupils' responsibility for planning and managing their studies as well as their influence on not only the contents but also its structures, shall be important principles in education.⁴⁵

The word *democracy* is not used in the NZ curriculum but a democratic vision is not absent from the document. In several places under the different headings can be found democratic ideals but the word democracy has been replaced by other alternative descriptions.⁴⁶ Under *Principles: Foundations of curriculum decision making* is the subtitle 'Inclusion', under *Values* the subtitle 'Equity' and further on in the document under the title of *Key Competencies* is included 'Relating to others' which is stated to be about encouraging students to 'recognise different points of view, negotiate, and share ideas'⁴⁷

There are also fundamental differences in the two countries arts course curriculums. To begin with I would like to give an example of how the goal-based Swedish curriculum could affect the content and teaching of the arts. Where, for example, the NZ document states succinctly what forms of language that a student should be able to understand and use (*see above*), the Swedish

⁴³ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p.12

⁴⁴ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006 p.3

⁴⁵ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94*, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006 p.14

⁴⁶ There is one sentence where *democratic* is used to explain that NZ values at large should be reflected in the values upheld in NZ schools but is not repeated later in the document.

⁴⁷ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p.12

curriculum for the Aesthetics course aims to give opportunities for discussions based on different views/understanding of art and different art forms and the course in this way is said to put demands on language abilities beyond Swedish:

The programme provides opportunities for discussing different views on art, forms of art and aesthetic values. By this means the ability to experience, reflect over and analyse creative activity is developed in a broad sense. Language is an important instrument for interpreting and communicating different forms of aesthetic experiences. The programme thus also imposes demands on language skills, in addition to Swedish, as well as an understanding of other cultural patterns.⁴⁸

Here I am uncertain whether this refers to other spoken languages (i.e. English) or non-verbal languages. The statement that one of the aesthetic course goals is to form an understanding of other cultures patterns could be, I presume, interpreted to be non-verbal patterns. However here again I am forced to make my own interpretation and understanding of what is being stated. This is an overriding aspect of the Swedish curriculum and an important one to have in mind when considering the nature of teaching in the arts.

The NZ arts curriculum states clearly what is expected of schools and teachers and students. The arts in NZ schools, the document states, should provide opportunities to explore, challenge, affirm, and celebrate unique artistic expressions of self, community, and culture. The celebration of culture is the focus of a doctorate study by New Zealander Jill Smith titled *Art education in New Zealand: Issues of culture, diversity and difference*. In a recent edition of *Bild i skolan* (a Swedish magazine about art in schools) she is quoted as being critical of the way in which a typical New Zealand teacher 'a European woman in her late 40's of middle-class background and educated in a time when art was more about product than process' chooses to interpret culture as ethnicity and not a question of individual and more dynamic interpretations.⁴⁹ This is of course a relevant question in a multicultural society and her observations of visual art teaching in what appears to be primary school are important to be aware of.⁵⁰ My impression of secondary teaching and teachers, who were male and female between 30-45 years, is somewhat different as the teachers often encouraged students to use and regenerate ideas from artists of many diverse cultures in the process of finding new forms of expression. What I did perhaps notice was a tendency to employ European modernist approaches to art-making which could be seen to inhibit development of ideas in other directions.

Included under the key aims are providing opportunities for students to connect thinking, imagination, senses and feelings. The arts should enhance personal wellbeing, give the confidence to take risks, see new perspectives, value unexpected outcomes, use imagination, develop arts literacies and guide students in 'practical enquiry through theoretical investigations'.⁵¹ Finally students should be given the tools needed to participate in, interpret, value and enjoy the arts all through life. The most prevalent aim of the Swedish arts curriculum appears to be to provide opportunities for students to explore and develop their self-expression; to provide different approaches towards creative expression as these can become tools towards 'self-discovery' (*självförverkligande*).⁵² Further aims are to provide a basic knowledge of the

⁴⁸Kursinfo, Skolverket

www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0809&infotyp=15&skolform=21&id=5&extraId=0, 27 Dec 08

⁴⁹ *Bild i skolan*, nr 4-08, Lärarförbundet, 'Bejaka mångkulturen!' text Claesdotter, A. Taken from thesis: Smith, Jill: *Art education in New Zealand: Issues of culture, diversity and difference*. Diss. University of Auckland, 2007

⁵⁰ It is however, not mentioned whether the study of 5 schools were primary or secondary but from her description of tasks given I am inclined to believe that she has studied teaching in primary schools only

⁵¹ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p.20

⁵² Kursinfo, Skolverket

www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0809&infotyp=15&skolform=21&id=5&extraId=0, 27 Dec 08

arts, opportunities to meet, experience, analyse, discuss and form opinions about the arts and to encourage students in reflective thinking around artistic/cultural manifestations which again reinforce the overriding democratic structure of education in Sweden.

All visual arts teaching in NZ has two major aims, achievement of visual literacy and aesthetic awareness. As the student makes progress in their understanding in these areas a deeper level of 'visual enquiry' is sought and; 'As they develop their visual literacy, students are able to engage with a wider range of art experiences in increasingly complex and conscious ways.'⁵³ There is a spiral learning process throughout the whole NZ school system which can be explained further upon reading of the NZ visual arts curriculum. It states that by engaging students in the visual arts they learn how to:

.. discern, participate in, and celebrate their own and others visual worlds... Visual arts learning begins with children's curiosity and delight in their senses and stories and extends to communication of complex ideas and concepts.⁵⁴

The Swedish curriculum has no ambition to provide a coherent learning spiral in this way. The curriculum states that 'upper secondary school shall, taking the compulsory school as its foundation, deepen and develop the knowledge of pupils' but it is up to each teacher to assess the level of prior knowledge of each individual student and to thereafter build on and develop these within the goals for the specific course syllabi.⁵⁵

There are also aspects of processes of art making which are interesting to notice in the NZ curriculum with regards to helping students develop confidence to take risks and make use of unexpected outcomes. This part of process is not mentioned in the Swedish curriculum:

As students express and interpret ideas within creative, aesthetic, and technological frameworks, their confidence to take risks is increased.

They learn to use imagination to engage with unexpected outcomes and to explore multiple solutions.⁵⁶

As a summary of the most prevalent differences between NZ and Swedish curriculums:

- In *The New Zealand Curriculum* several what I would call 'life-skills' are repeated in many different parts of the document. For example 'high self expectations', 'relating to others' and 'communication skills' feature many times throughout.
- In the Swedish *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* it is a democratic working structure which should colour and indeed steer over every aspect of the educational sphere and that definitions of what knowledge encompasses should be open for debate in all areas of the school and by all of its participants.

4.1.2 In which way can use of portfolios as employed in New Zealand secondary schools help teachers define and assess students' learning outcomes in the visual arts?

⁵³ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p.20

⁵⁴ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p 21

⁵⁵ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.8

⁵⁶ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p.20

My initial area of focus for this study was how New Zealand approaches the use of portfolios in the teaching of secondary school visual art. What I discovered however is that production of a portfolio is only one possible way to help students achieve and present 'learning outcomes'. The NZ curriculum bases its entire art teaching programme in schools on achieving and building on learning outcomes and in the final three years when students can choose to specialise in visual art the assessment system introduces a *standards-based* system where *assessment criteria* are nationally defined and verified. Portfolio is a tool which can be used to present these *standards* but learning outcomes can also be assessed by teachers during the year and in these cases a portfolio is not a requirement. In both cases, however, the same assessment criteria apply and it is this aspect of the New Zealand system which I will discuss here. *Standards* are defined by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority:

Standards specify learning outcomes, or describe the levels of performance learners need to reach to meet the standard.

And also;

In general, standards do not prescribe (or define) content or curriculum (what is taught). Nor do they describe exactly how assessments are to be carried out (by exams, tests, essays, etc).⁵⁷

This statement highlights an important aspect of the NZ curriculum. In NZ there are several ways in which a teacher can carry out the work of setting tasks. A teacher can (as the Qualifications Authority prefers) set tasks from what is stated as goals for each standard. These *achievement objectives*, as they are called, are designed to provide a guide for the setting of tasks and in this way there is a similarity to the Swedish goal-based system where curriculum is meant as a guide for teachers and not a set formula. The setting of tasks based on what is stated in the curriculum would perhaps be less limiting for the student and give greater scope for development but at the same time this demands more of a teacher in terms of both time and vision. In the article in *Bild i skolan* the NZ researcher Jill Smith is quite correct when she says that 'the curriculum is good but it is the teachers own vision and horizon that determines how good art teaching is'.⁵⁸ This is the case in NZ as well as in Sweden but without clear criteria, standards of learning in visual arts risk falling only to the hands of teacher subjectivity.

It is therefore an interesting aspect of the NZ visual arts curriculum that allows teachers the possibility to set tasks which are based on the more specific *assessment criteria*. Fiona, the painting teacher at Chilton St James, prefers to set very specific tasks which cover all the basic *assessment criteria*. In this way she has more control over their output and subsequent results. If her students carry out every task she sets their chances of gaining a pass are increased. An interesting comment I found in the '*Achievement Criteria*' booklet (which NZQA use during their visits to NZ schools to explain the definitions and implementation of achievement criteria) states that 'well-structured programmes allow weaker candidates to achieve, and more able candidates to think for themselves and develop their ideas.'⁵⁹ There is relevance in this statement but only provided (as it also states) that the student is given direction and is allowed to make his/her own choices along the way. If this aspect of teaching is weak there is a risk that set tasks can inhibit a students own creativity. It is during assessment of learning outcomes that the teacher has greatest use of the *achievement criteria*. It is during the assessment process that a teacher can ascertain whether a student has met the basic criteria or not. Firstly a teacher studies

⁵⁷ NZQA website <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/index.html>, 27 Dec 08

⁵⁸ *Bild i skolan*, nr 4-08, Lärarförbundet, 'Bejaka mångkulturen!' text Claesdotter, A. Taken from thesis: Smith, Jill: *Art education in New Zealand: Issues of culture, diversity and difference*. Diss. University of Auckland, 2007

⁵⁹ *Achievement Criteria (guide for teachers)*, Visual Arts Achievement standards, NZQA, p.2

a portfolio for evidence of the basic levels of understanding. Following this it is then important to be able to recognise in what way a student has improved and built upon this basic understanding. This is very clearly stated, described and specified in the curriculum. When the teacher is unsure of where the student grade should lie there is the opportunity to send the folio away for *moderation* (internally assessed standards) or *verification* (externally assessed standards).⁶⁰ All of the countries portfolios for Level 3, the final school year, are submitted for assessment externally.

Having said this there are some problems with this assessment system. Firstly that it seems not to be problematic to find the lowest level of understanding (*Achieved*) but that the level after pass (*Achieved with Merit*) seems to be the largest and most difficult grade to award students work with. I am not sure why this is, but it could be that this is the area that must encompass the largest scope of work that falls between fulfilling the criteria and fulfilling them with extra flair. In Sweden there exists a similar assessment dilemma where VG (*achieved with merit*) seems to encompass a larger scope of learning than a G (*achieved*) or MVG (*achieved with excellence*). Secondly there seems to be difficulty when setting assessment for external verification. The setting of assessments by teachers prior to portfolio submission appears to be a bit of a strategic guessing game which has consequences for students grades and is something that most teachers appear to not be completely comfortable with. These 'extra' grades can cause confusion and places high demands on teachers to really identify small variations within each level. This work demanded a lot of knowledge of the criteria, sharp observation skills was very complex and time consuming. On the other hand, portfolio work represents half of the students total production for the school year and it would be greatly unfair on the students *not* to take a good deal of time to really look at the work. It appears that the most important aspect of assessment of portfolios (and visual art in general) is that there is an agreement on a national level of the criteria which must be met in order to pass in the visual arts. It is this lowest level of understanding (learning outcomes) which forms the basis for other learning outcomes to build upon.

Further problems with portfolio assessment is the fact that the final portfolios I saw included work in different stages of the working process (sketches, variations of visual ideas etc) but that they seldom included explanations of thought processes, aesthetic considerations, background themes, ideas or artists used. Whilst portfolio is used in NZ as a method for making visual the learning that has taken place it is perhaps not as likely that external accreditors will be able to assess process accurately merely from using a portfolio as grounds for assessment. This is perhaps best left to teachers during internal assessments where thought and working processes are documented to a much greater degree.

4.1.3 In which ways can school curriculum goals and values in Sweden and New Zealand be seen to be used in practice in the teaching of upper secondary school visual arts in both countries?

Under the heading Pedagogy in the NZ curriculum, *revisiting new learning* is stated as an important aspect of learning. Good pedagogy is not always a matter of *quality* but also of *quantity*. Time spent revisiting new learning can be decisive for what is learnt:

When curriculum coverage and student understanding are in competition, the teacher may decide to cover less but cover it in greater depth. Appropriate assessment helps the teacher to determine what "sufficient" opportunities mean for an individual student and to sequence students' learning experiences over time.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Refer to Chapter 3.2.1 for explanation of these terms

⁶¹ *The New Zealand School Curriculum*, Ministry of Education 2007 p.34

Statements like this seem indicative that a learning outcomes-focused curriculum such as is in place in New Zealand relies, as is the case in Sweden, on teachers autonomous decisions about appropriate pace of learning and use of the right amount of learning opportunities. This aspect of teaching, the day-to-day and at times minute-by-minute decision-making process in the classroom, is where a teacher must rely heavily on his or her own pedagogic skill and knowledge of his/her own students. But a teacher in this situation is helped by being able to return to assessment requirement documents, as specified in the NZ curriculum, so that both student and teacher are assured that adequate levels of knowledge are gained.

The following statement gives an indication of how *revisiting new learning* was visible in practice in the New Zealand class-room. A Level 3 sculpture student who was taking art for the first time for three years gave the following answer to what she thought she had learnt about the process of making art.

Student 4- Um..... just like understanding art work and each artist. Like before I was like what does that mean like and kind of thing now that I've gotten better at it I understand it. Some things I'm still like...what??? But its really helped me choosing which artists I wanted to work with as well.

The Swedish curriculum aims to reinforce art/cultural historical breadth through close collaboration with the other subjects. This appears strong in some school and weak in others. In one of the schools there was a great focus placed on placing practical knowledge in context before the start of each block of tasks. These Power-point presentations were well researched and relevant and were meaning-making at its best. Some teachers in Sweden build on theoretical/technical skills throughout the year which culminate in a final open-task or 'own project'. The teachers guide students in technical matters and give formal advice (composition, colour, form etc) but the focus is on individual expression so the teachers choose not to comment on content. This can be seen as a practical example of the Swedish curriculum's underlying aim to uphold democratic structures.

4.1.4 In which way does each curriculum aim to ensure equivalent education?

In the Swedish curriculum it is stated that; 'Education shall be objective and encompass a range of different approaches.'⁶² It continues to state that education should uphold the values set out in the curriculum and be adapted to the needs of each student. It continues; 'The Education Act stipulates that the education provided within each type of school shall be of equivalent value, irrespective of where in the country it is provided'⁶³. This statement seems most problematic as there appears to be no system in place to assure this, other than that it is the principals' responsibility to that national goals are upheld and is responsible for school results:

The school head is responsible not only for ensuring the drawing up of a local work plan, but also for following up and evaluating school results in relation to both the national goals and those specified in the school plan as well as the local work plan. The school head is responsible for the school's results...⁶⁴

Nowhere can I find specific responsibility for the way that a subject is equivalent regarding level of student learning and Swedish school- heads do not appear to have the level of knowledge within the arts to be able to assess that the results are in fact appropriate, relevant or equivalent. In the NZ curriculum there is a system in place to assure equivalence: through publicly accessible

⁶² Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.4

⁶³ Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.4

⁶⁴ Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.18

standards, examples of student work from earlier years, examples of appropriate tasks and trained staff to carry out marking and to some extent to control that the content of subject programmes is according to set standards.

4.1.5 *In which way and to which extent can learning outcomes be understood by visual arts students in New Zealand?*

Training students in using and interpreting different languages begins very early in NZ schooling and could be observed in the discussion between Martin and a Year 7 pupil:

Student: Do you think I need to do a black line on the edge of the table?
Martin: What do you think?
Student: The edge is a bit wobbly
Martin: I don't think that matters
Student: No, and I think that if I put a black line on it it wouldn't look right that it was wobbly any more
Martin: So you don't need the black line?
Student: No
Martin: OK. So you've finished

These young students were also learning to analyse and draw upon artists work in this half-year long study stemming from the paintings of Matisse. Artist models also give students a practical way to apply learning and as a way to reinforce meaning of what is being learnt. We learn best through an ability to see the relevance of new learning in real terms. Drawing from and reflecting on artists' work gives students that relevance for their own work. From my observations in Sweden I saw a similar use of artists work in the 'Paraphrase' painting-task. Such a task is only meaningful however if it builds on former knowledge and that the learning outcome for this task is that this knowledge is consciously extended by the student through reflection and through regeneration of this new learning in their own work.

A student I interviewed said this of portfolio work:

Student 1 In portfolio work you can do what you want and you aren't restricted. In 3:2 (internally assessed standard) we had to do more writing and studied things and it was less free. It was more controlled then but now you know more about painting - now you can do that stuff and apply them. If you start different styles you can choose new ones and apply them

Martin explained to me that the biggest criticism for NCEA (*National Certificates of Educational Achievement*- NZ high school qualifications) is the focus on artist models as a basis for study of art forms. He explained that he sees artists models as being important in the way it gives relevance to technique, it helps students to find subject matter which is otherwise time consuming and stressful for young people (with so much else to keep in their heads every day), it provides a springboard for their own ideas to grow from, and is a way to consolidate knowledge of artists in practice. These comments are reinforced as it seems to be the case in both Sweden and New Zealand that open tasks generally create a level of stress and uncertainty in students. Art students in NZ show varying degrees of this use of artist models. Some students have several artist models and can in depth describe how they have used ideas and elements of their work to develop their own. Others seem to have limited themselves to only one artist model. The self-direction evident in these students is markedly different. Those with several artist models have no problem working through their ideas whereas those with only one soon stagnate and have seemingly worked themselves into a corner. This is true for students of all kinds and does not

seem to have any relation to the students' ability to create art work, or to express themselves in words.

A student who I interviewed was a high achiever in all subjects and is a boy of artistic talent but he had narrowed his interest to one abstract expressionist artist, Jackson Pollock, which had obviously limited his options markedly and he struggled to 'pull it all together' for his final portfolio page. His teacher Lou was aware of this problem and had done her best to explain this to the student but in the end it is the students' choice and responsibility to meet the criteria. In this way it is possible that an outcomes-based system can suit some students more than others. On the other hand the student within such a system can choose not to adhere to the criteria even though he/she is aware of them. I interviewed this student by firstly asking him what he thought he had learnt of visual art making. He replied:

Student 3- A LOT-.... the teachers have a lot of experience and they are very broad and accepting different artist models you want to look at and different styles. For level 3 at the beginning of the year I started off with Jackson Pollock as my artist model – that's not really a process most students go through from purely abstract and later move to the figurative- so that was a bit of a challenge and to be perfectly honest I started with it as a bit of a joke to see if I could get away with it but I've learnt a lot 'cos it's the freedom to look at different artists... and through looking at Jackson Pollock and the abstract expressionists I've learnt a lot about the concept of painting- like I've learnt a lot about the physicality and the action of painting but also the concept of what it should be ...also you learn a lot about painting itself which is incredible - like we really tend to overlook the medium that we actually use when painting- it doesn't get enough agenda really – we just use it to create pictures but it in itself is an incredible medium and it has a lot of history behind it too . So this year I've learnt a lot. Previous years... it's been good- this year has a lot more freedom—

Do you think that portfolio system is fair?

Student 3 Yes kind of. It's as fair as it can be. Like I don't expect my portfolio do very well (*in assessment*)- in my opinion I think the (*my*) painting is of a high quality and I think I have learnt- that I understand painting- but um... it is not...it doesn't necessarily fill out the criteria for portfolio as it's a painting style... its more drawing with paint rather than painting with paint..

Do you think that would draw your mark down?

Student 3 Well I think it's just like not a concept that's usually seen-pure abstraction has a lot of theory behind it and I can see markers believing that a 17 year old student wouldn't really understand that and chooses that just for the sake of being lazy and doesn't want to do the actual work....

With regards to curriculum goals to teach students metacognition which can be defined as the understanding of ones own learning processes and ultimately how one thinks. Portfolio method gives students a way to trace and plot this visually. A student I interviewed explained this aspect of portfolio work in this way:

Student 2- I prefer portfolio 'cos you get a wider reaction but also that it's good you get to display all you work not just in a book format but like that so you can see it- like progressing it shows development as well – its quite important that you aren't going through pages and pages but its right in front of you so you see what you've done – also it makes you feel much better when you've finished your portfolio at the end

'cos you look at it and can say wow look what I've done, look what I've achieved, yeah...

4.1.6 Is it possible that pervading definitions of democracy in a country as a whole can influence how teachers in Sweden and New Zealand relate to students and how they teach visual art?

This is a huge area and one which I only will touch on here. I do want to make the point however that it appears to me that fundamental differences in the two nations as a whole with regard to how each view youth, have a great role to play in deciding how curriculums are structured and consequently how we teach our children.

In NZ society I have observed within certain areas/social classes that it is still relatively common that authoritative parenting is considered the correct way to rear children. This seems to stem from an British parenting tradition. Interestingly even though many New Zealanders travel widely there appears still to be a strong preference for authoritative parenting. One example of this which will be immediately apparent to a visitor from Sweden is that teachers at schools are more often than not addressed by pupils as Mr /Mrs/ Miss/Ms as are many other adults in a child's world. The way the Year 7 class greeted the teacher in unison at Chilton St James can be seen as an example of this division between children and adults. A contrast however to this however one gleans from the NZ visual arts curriculum a belief that young people have the potential for deep conceptual thought as well as an ability to form an understanding of the creative processes. The discussion below between Martin and a Level 3 student I think illustrates this belief in young minds:

- Student T How do I fit Stockholm in? (*Sally Stockholm, artist model*) I was thinking perhaps I could use boxes (*goes to get her work-book and opens at her working drawings*) I have used these things in her work like the lines from top to bottom here and the boxes...like...could I have the boxes in the corner with things coming out of them?
- Martin You would probably need to have them as part of it sucked in..(*he does a sketch to describe what he means*) then it becomes more like that or that (*he point out features of the students work in her portfolio*) so that it grows from your ideas. Here you need to show a more stated reference to Boltanski (*Christian Boltanski, artist model*). They will want to see more obvious reference (*referring to accreditors*)
- St T Could I put photos on the outside of the boxes?
- M Yes that would be good
- St T So I need two or more sculpture ideas for my final page.
- M Yes. Think also about the different sculptural elements. Play around with them and see which ones fit in to the final work. Stockholm uses colour here for example.
- St T And can I get hold of some of this tape that she uses here and use that too?
- M Yes good idea. So go for it. You have heaps to do!

In Sweden there is a strong democratic belief that students should be responsible for their own education and that they are expected to contribute to the planning of course and in determining what subject matter is included. Teachers and students appear to be more equal in Sweden and adults are more accustomed to consulting young people before decisions are made. Tasks in Swedish art classes were often open and allowed for individual interpretation. On the other hand I have observed in Sweden that teachers have lower expectations of the potential of the young mind and I have seen little evidence that teachers believe that it is possible to train students in conceptual thinking or process. This attitude can for example be recognised in the comments made to me at one of the schools in Sweden, that it is difficult to work with process in Sweden since there is not much 'process-thinking' in the Swedish school-system and therefore the students are not used to thinking in terms of process. Comments like; 'When they are finished

with a painting or a sculpture then they are finished – that’s what the students say’ and ‘Very few students continue on to tertiary art education it is enough for them to learn technique at high school’ are evidence I believe, of a certain view of young people today.

5 DISCUSSION

I will again repeat the research enquiries and discuss these one at a time.

5.1 Discussion of research enquires

5.1.1 *What are the differences between the school curriculums in Sweden and New Zealand?*

In the NZ Curriculum many of what I would call life-skills are mentioned in many different parts of the document. For example high self expectations and striving for excellence are included under four of the *key elements*: Vision, Principles, Values and Key competencies. Critical thinking and metacognition are also under these four elements as are social connection and communication skills. It is not surprising, I feel, that these ‘human life-skills’ appear again and again within a curriculum considering they are fundamental to all learning no matter what the age of the child or the subject being taught.

The Swedish Curriculum states that that all of the different forms of knowledge should be simultaneously present in all areas of learning, ‘facts, understanding, skills and accumulated experience’⁶⁵. An excellent summary of the goals of education. I believe however that it is not enough to make a statement. The visual arts need ways to ensure that its implementation is equivalent and meaningful. Both NZ and Sweden curriculums state that education shall prepare young people for the swiftly changing nature of modern life. Therefore I believe that art subjects are valuable ways to train young brains for the challenges of future careers in all fields.

In the Swedish curriculum it is stated that assessment should be based on what is written in the curriculum under; ‘Goals to strive for’ and ‘Goals for the course’ as well as ‘Goals to be reached’. However what I have discovered is that there are no specifications for ‘Goals to strive for’ anywhere in the curriculum for the Aesthetic programme nor for each individual subject in the programme.

The fact that the Swedish curriculum uses ‘democracy’ as a key word in the document and the NZ document employs a number of different descriptions of this philosophical view-point is of importance here. After my observations of how differently democracy can be interpreted by individuals I have met in the art-rooms of Sweden and New Zealand I am curious to know why the NZ Ministry of Education has chosen to avoid this word in its school curriculum. Both NZ and Sweden are after all democratic countries. It would not be unrealistic perhaps to imagine that in the more specific NZ curriculum that the word ‘democracy’, in contemporary usage, has become too diffuse and therefore has lost its value for this specific purpose.

5.1.2 *In which way can the use of portfolios as employed in New Zealand help teachers define and assess students’ learning outcomes in the visual arts?*

In New Zealand, teachers I observed often use this reference to artist models when a student becomes stuck or is getting too engrossed in a technique or a particular pictorial motif. This ability to suggest new artist models demands that art teachers have a broad knowledge of past and contemporary artists and can draw from this knowledge when needed.

The lowest level of learning achieved to attain a pass (*Achievement*) has what I see to be relatively demanding criteria in New Zealand compared to what I have seen of passed work in Sweden. Teachers in Sweden seem to be inclined to award a pass for a student who simply has

⁶⁵ *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* Lpf94, National Agency for Education (Skolverket) 2006, p.6

carried out a task. This would not be possible in the assessment system in place today in New Zealand. This aspect of determining the lowest level of learning is of the most challenging tasks for a teacher and indeed for a whole schooling system if art is to be given the equivalent status of all other school subjects. Without this recognised lowest level of understanding the subject of visual arts there is a great risk that the subject as a whole lacks validity and meaning.

5.1.3 In which ways can school curriculum goals and values in Sweden and New Zealand be seen to be used in practice in the teaching of upper secondary school visual arts in both countries?

Where New Zealand teachers may at times feel restricted to the assessment criteria and the assessment procedure and as a result create set tasks which guarantee that students pass I have seen the opposite phenomena in Sweden where teachers interpret the curriculum's non-specific goals as a right to set students 'free tasks'. The example given was a first year art class in a high school in Sweden where the task was to 'draw an expressive image from your inner selves'. A student faced with such a task which is not grounded in theory apart from one or two lessons which covered use of materials and different techniques and a lesson in still life drawing has little to guide them. The curriculum states that education shall give historical perspectives and aid students to develop an ability to see interconnections and a coherent view. This teacher explained to students that this inner drawing task was a way of working was 'an example of Expressionism'. In my opinion this does not suffice as 'historical perspective' but the curriculum does not state to what degree the stated goals should be covered. Therefore interpretation can be to the lowest level and still be fulfilling the goal. A comment by Martin on the question of free tasks sums up my thoughts. He told me of a student who asked him once; 'When can we do what *we* want to do in art?' He answered, a bit exasperated; 'You can paint however you want in your own time - you can do that whenever you want when you aren't at school! But you are here to learn about painting and my job is to cover as much of the theory behind art practice as I can.'

Where students are not first prepared for free tasks through study of subject matter, ideas techniques and conventions from artists' work, use of materials and understanding of compositional devices and so on, a student is left only with what they came to class with. Prior knowledge must be a starting point not the finish line. Neither the Swedish curriculum nor the NZ one would approve of such teaching and yet it exists. In Sweden, however art students would all receive a pass (I was told by the teachers at this school that they had never failed a student in art) and they would perhaps leave that school believing that they were proficient in the field of visual-art making. In a system where teachers are given total autonomy to interpret goals as is the case in Sweden, learning outcomes can be frighteningly low. Yes, they *can* also be outstanding if a student is lucky enough to have a teacher who has high expectations both on his/her own teaching practice but also on the abilities of their students. Then I truly believe that the sky is the limit. But my concern still remains, weak teaching skills in combination with non-specific learning goals increase the risk that student outcomes are of an unacceptably low standard in the visual arts. In my opinion, no democratic country should accept that some students will never receive their right to a good education in visual art under these conditions.

5.1.4 In which way does each curriculum aim to ensure equivalent education?

It is my opinion and my concern that courses offered at upper secondary schools which are included under the 'Visual arts' umbrella are particularly prone to subjectivity with regards to assessment and learning outcomes and that equivalence in the visual arts is at risk. This could be due to the subjective nature of art in general and a popular belief that art cannot be judged as it is essentially a form of individual expression. But I am more inclined to believe that this is only a smoke-screen. I believe that the underlying power-house behind a good art education in schools lies fundamentally in the importance a country's ruling body places on the whole area of the arts

and to what extent it sees the arts as one of education's major areas of knowledge and as a tool for training young brains in the art of conceptual and critical thought. With regards to the question of equivalence between schools and assessment equivalence between schools, I believe this is in part subject to where the curriculums place their focus and the varying amounts of freedom teachers have to teach. I have also felt, after a study of these documents, that there are some major philosophical differences between the two in terms of views of learning but equally important are how the two documents are a reflection of how each country sees their young.

5.1.5 In which way and to which extent can learning outcomes be understood by students in New Zealand?

Conceptual thinking is the result of a well developed mind trained in the art of taking a thought on a journey, to play and extend a thought in a range of directions, deepening one's own understanding on the way. To be able to think conceptually places demands on a student's prior experiences and knowledge from past and present art practice. To believe that young minds are not capable of these thoughts indicate I believe a general mistrust in the importance of the arts in the development of young minds.

5.1.6 Is it possible that pervading definitions of democracy in a country as a whole can influence how teachers in Sweden and New Zealand relate to students and how they teach Visual Art?

Is it more a question of a question of *interpretation* of democracy rather than whether it exists in one country more than another? Sweden places focus on students' democratic right to have an influence over the nature of their education and right to free expression. New Zealand places focus on students' right to an equivalent education and specified learning outcomes. This can perhaps only be seen as a question of which definition of democracy a country chooses to adhere to.

6 FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

The first and most obvious area for further research would be to increase the scale of the study. I am of course curious to see whether a study over a larger number of schools in both countries would give different results and if so in what way. Beyond sheer increase in scale I have, during the course of this study, become aware of many other possible research options. I have successively become aware of the numerous factors which may and can influence the way visual arts subjects are approached in a country. I have realised that it is a most complex area indeed! I will present here some of these thoughts and possible future research enquiries.

Through this study I have gained awareness that expectations placed upon students to achieve in visual arts are often not to the same high level placed upon them from other subjects at upper secondary school. Further research could attempt to assess what expectations teachers have regarding students performance in visual art subjects. In what way are teachers' expectations upon students in the visual arts an explanation of learning outcomes and standards reached?

I have also wondered whether the differences in the Swedish and New Zealand curriculums for visual art relate to tertiary education choices available in each country. Could the existence of preparatory art schools in Sweden be directly related to the way that visual art is taught and indeed how art is perceived as a school subject in a country as a whole?

Related to this last research enquiry, could a study of the standard and nature of art that is produced by university art students give a clue to the quality of teaching in a country's upper secondary schools?

The whole area regarding views of democracy and other basic values in a society interests me greatly. I would be very interested to see in what way it is possible to see correlations between these and such things as subject matter, teaching methods and learning outcomes in the visual arts.

In the Swedish curriculum it is stated that assessment should be based on what is written in the curriculum under; 'Goals to strive for' and 'Goals for the course' as well as 'Goals to be reached'. However what I have discovered is that there are no specifications for 'Goals to strive for' anywhere in the curriculum for the Aesthetic programme nor for each individual subject in the programme. The question of equivalence arises again- in this case I am aware of the fact that the arts are seemingly treated in a way that few if any other school subjects are treated. Why are there no 'Goals to strive for' and what does this say about the overriding attitude to the arts?

Finally a question which is always pecking away at the back of my mind: Is it possible that the lack of interest in the arts in schools could be a question of gender? The arts in general are not considered to lead students towards financially lucrative career choices and therefore are subjects often less attractive for males. In all of the visual art classes I have observed it is girls that dominate. Gender issues cannot, I believe, be overlooked when facing the relevance, quality and equivalence of the visual arts subjects in schools.

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