Artists and Transpedagogy: Possibilities for Enriching Teaching and Learning Through Radical Engagement with the Arts

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Abstract Over the last decade, cultural institutions have worked hard to connect audiences with contemporary arts practices that are no longer created by a sole person working alone but by artists who work collaboratively and across disciplines.

Like generalist teachers, contemporary artists utilize practices and pedagogies to engage audiences (including children) in meaningful and high-quality ways. The different contexts and sites where artists and teachers work ignites a curiosity about how these various practices and pedagogies occur across arts space and school space contexts.

Specifically, we are curious about these differences and the possibilities for 'transpedagogies'; pedagogies that emerge from blended, multi-context approaches and expertises of diverse pedagogues to offer ideas about general aspects of teaching.

We present some preliminary findings from an ongoing seed project that examines the innovative and creative skills artists utilize in their own practice, to think how these might be reconsidered in the context of generalist (non-arts focused) primary education teaching.

Case studies of the practices of four multidimensional artists who approach their artistry in interdisciplinary, collaborative and agentic ways help provide some potential ideas on transpedagogical opportunities that connect artistic, and school-based pedagogies.

Keywords Transpedagogies · art museums · artist pedagogies · collaboration · audiences · pedagogic practices

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1 Introduction

Over recent decades, cultural institutions such as art museums have had to work hard to maintain a healthy visitor presence during the global shifting of social and cultural habits and practices. Tourists, families, students and others no longer need to reply upon visiting a physical collection in a dedicated building to encounter objects and exhibitions, such things can easily be found in digital form via online videos, photos, gallery sites as well as books, postcards and catalogues. School and tertiary groups can also access specially designed art study programs that display images digitally on smartboards that react to touch in non-invasive ways.

Collections of contemporary and historical artefacts that 'accord objects particular significances' (Sherman & Rogoff, 1994, p. ix) were curated and arranged by museum staff into collections which might interest and fascinate publics. The tensions faced by museums seemed to fixate on how to 'provide a safe haven for high art while catering to a crowd it did not select?' (Zolberg, 1994, p. 49). The dilemma, certainly for government-owned, taxpayer-funded museums was how to convey the brilliance of the works to a mass audience with largely unrefined, underdeveloped tastes.

An additional issue with the museum model was that mass audiences usually accessed the art but not the artist, this dislocation did not necessarily impede audience engagement and understanding of the works exhibited, but the lack of contact with artists helped create populist notions of how artists lived, worked and how they conceived of the rationales for their work. Although artists can live 'outsider' lifestyles, such as living in fluid arrangements (the Australian Heidelberg commune being one example, the British Bloomsbury set being another), constructed 'images' of the artist can be said to have grown alongside the arts they produce. These common images of the artist as bohemian and commune-dwelling is complicated by a counter-image of the artist as the isolated (usually young, single, white, male) tortured recluse, a social outsider fixated on perfecting (his) practice. Only a small number of artists may possibly have lived these lifestyles, however these visions persist through history, affecting mainstream understandings of contemporary arts practices.

The point here is not to contest a notion artists obsessively work on their art, or they live in communities with other artists or that they are 'unconventional'; like any 'group', artists are diverse and live and work in diverse circumstances. This is particularly the case if the artist is very young, a parent, a carer, or has physical, intellectual, cultural, spiritual needs or responsibilities that require the persistent presence and assistance of others.

Stereotypic, subjectifying assumptions fail to acknowledge the diverse ways in which artists live their everyday lives, and how they approach their practices. Many contemporary artists conceptualise production differently, working as collectives producing art collaboratively and across practice disciplines. Compagnia TPO is a performance company based in Prato, Italy. Compagnia TPO takes a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to practice, working with 'a varied team of authors, able to use different languages (mainly theatre, dance and visual arts)'

(Compagnia) across the globe to create performance pieces that feature 'images projected onto big surfaces, but especially by … sets of interactive technologies' (Compagnia), this interactivity promotes a way of performing whereby 'dancers 'paint' and 'play music' on stage using their bodies or movements thanks to the interactive effects' (Compagnia) of sensory flooring and digital projection.

Insite Arts, a production/performance company based in Melbourne, Australia also work across practices and collaborate with different artists in each of their projects. In 2009 Compagnia TPO collaborated with Insite Arts to create Saltbush, a multi-practice, interactive performance work suitable for a young audience. Saltbush references a native plant 'found throughout Australia in almost all Aboriginal lands, and … a common thread between all the different nations of Australian Indigenous peoples' (Insite Arts). Insite Arts describe how 'narrative, contemporary painting, dance and instrumental music' (Insite Arts) combine with digital technologies to enable 'children to interact, play and perform in the production and [provide] an immersive experience of the artwork' (Insite Arts). The Saltbush project exemplifies how contemporary artists collaborate within companies such as Insite Arts and Compagnia TPO to create multi-practice works in ethical ways. In this example artists came together to draw on their culture and practices to produce a work that explores 'the natural features of the landscape in an indigenous mythological context' (Insite Arts) through egalitarian collectivity that privileges Australian Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practice.

An excellent example of hybridized arts practice is *Kin* by Stephen Page (2006). Since 1991, Page has been Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Company, an Australian company that draws on 'contemporary and traditional Indigenous Australian dance, oral traditions and social history' (Albert, 2006, p. 184) with works such as *Ochres* (1994) and *Lore* (2015). Page was commissioned to produce *Kin* for the 5th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. The Asia Pacific Triennial showcases contemporary art of Asia and the Pacific, including Australia and is a flagship exhibition curated by Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA).

Kin is a performance about 'local Brisbane youth, culture and social history' (Albert 2006, p. 184) linking to Page's ancestral lineage from the Nunukul, Munaldjali and Yugambeh people of South-East Queensland, and exploring themes 'central to [Page's] upbringing: kinship and family values' (Albert, 2006, p. 184). In writing an article on *Kin* for the 5th Asia Pacific Triennial catalogue, Tony Albert describes how 'In preparation for *Kin*, Page worked closely with three generations of his family to produce a personal and dynamic work that explores the urban upbringing of Indigenous boys, and the close ties they have with their own communities, families and histories' (Albert, 2006, p. 184).

Kin was predominantly a performance piece that incorporated and merged different arts practices and disciplines, and was collectively 'built' by family members across generations. In conceptualising the piece 'through the eyes of seven young male jarjums (kids), aged between nine and thirteen' (Albert, 2006, p. 187). Page worked collaboratively with his family, allowing the project to grow 'in an organic way, from the journey to Beaudesert to the workshops in the months

leading up to its final presentation as part of the opening celebration for APT5' (Albert, 2006, p. 187) where it was performed by multi-age dancers. As an art project *Kin* made a bona-fide contribution (as in, it is 'real' art) to the Triennial, it was also a pedagogic work. As Albert establishes, 'Page's intention, through *Kin*, was to give the boys the confidence to express themselves' (Albert 2006, p. 187). Page took on a mentoring role to help develop the boys' respective practice and performance skills. *Kin* exemplifies how artists like Page work across disciplines, they collaborate, they challenge thinking and they work pedagogically with performers and audiences.

2 Pedagogies of Contemporary Artists

Kin and *Saltbush* are two projects that demonstrate the practices and pedagogies contemporary artists utilize to engage audiences (including children) in meaningful and high-quality experiences. Like generalist teachers, artists develop and refine their own practices and approaches to help transfer information as well as prompt the development of practices and concepts of others. Although contemporary artists are doing something similar to a generalist classroom teacher in applying high-quality skills to engage audiences and children, the differences between the contexts of teaching and the contexts of practicing and creating arts, make apparent the differences between the ways practices and pedagogies are learnt, conceptualized, theorized on, and enacted by artists and by teachers.

In *Saltbush*, the artists negotiate environmental factors such as a transient audience of very young children, a temporary workspace, a digitally responsive sensory floor, along with critical factors such as respectfully telling a story of cultural significance. The artists work collectively with designers and in-house theatre technicians and managers to develop an experience that is more than a visual feast, it must have meaning and affect on those participating. These practices and pedagogies differ from the more fixed or stable workplaces and student cohorts, and the multiple 'stories' teachers negotiate in their daily routines.

In *Kin* Page brings about active and egalitarian collaborations between multi-age groups to enable performers to make collective decisions about the performance works. There is a purposeful deliberation in this process that is not hurried but takes whatever time is required to produce a performance that represents everyone in the group. Pedagogy here emerges through polyvocal and polycorporeal activity that does not hierarchise; this is in contrast to school-based pedagogies that locate the teacher as the central source of expertise on what is to be learnt and how it is to be taught.

These two examples are described in order to show that artists develop and use pedagogic practices. Our comment, and the broader purpose of the chapter aims not to typify the pedagogic practices of artists, or the pedagogic practices of teachers (which we also think of as diverse and fluid) but simply to declare that artists have pedagogic practices. We assert artists think pedagogically when

encouraging audiences to appreciate the arts and produce arts works in engaged and participatory ways, and we suggest that although these might differ to the practices and pedagogies seen in daily or routine teaching activity, they are nevertheless, pedagogically authentic, 'bona-fide'.

Artists and teachers use practices and pedagogies to inspire and educate audiences and children; in acknowledging that these respective pedagogical practices exist how might the pedagogic work of artists be articulated? Specifically, how might artists who work with children and audiences theorise on their pedagogic practices? Finally, how might the work that artists do with audiences be recognised or considered as pedagogic and with equal value as ascribed to the pedagogic work of 'conventional' pedagogues such as teachers?

We begin by discussing Helguera's (2011) studies into the ways artists and audiences work together to participate in art as social practice as a form of *transpedagogy*. We then consider Helguera's notion of transpedagogy as we reflect on two conversations we had with artists who describe how they work with young audiences in education contexts.

Finally, we suggest how the practices of artists can be conceptualised as pedagogic and we call for a shift from associating artists solely with stereotypical images of the bohemian outsider to one of community and cultural educator, with practices that can inform and enrich the pedagogic practices of teachers in school contexts.

3 Transpedagogy

The practices and pedagogies of artists can act as what Helguera (2011) describes as a transpedagogy: a pedagogy that blends 'educational processes and art-making' (p. 77) in ways that promote art as social practice. In describing the work of artists in terms of transpedagogy, Helguera places pedagogical processes at the heart of artistic endeavours, where artists and audiences become collaborators. In setting transpedagogy against a more traditional form of arts education, he makes the following observation:

> Traditional pedagogy fails to recognize three things: first, the creative performativity of the act of education; second, the fact that the collective construction of an art milieu, with artworks and ideas, is a collective construction of knowledge; and third, the fact that knowledge of art does not end in knowing the artwork but is a tool for understanding the world (Helguera, 2011, p. 80).

The promise of transpedagogy is realised through the practices of contemporary artists who work closely with their communities. The formation of an artistic milieu provides multiple and diverse opportunities for community members to engage in art creation alongside artists. The boundaries between artists and learners, arts practice and education are blurred as the collaborative process of art-making itself becomes a pedagogical act.

Truman and Springgay (2015) note that, 'in transpedagogy, the pedagogical value is not in the transfer of art skills or techniques but rather, the pedagogical

process becomes the artwork' (p. 151). We are interested here in how artists are able to collaborate with audiences (which we might consider as learners, whether or not in formalised education settings such as schools and universities or public spaces such as art galleries, museums and festivals) in ways that involve a pedagogical exchange. 'Often referred to as socially engaged art, such projects function in a transdisciplinary way, re-conceptualizing particular problems or conditions through artistic practices' (Springgay, 2013, p. 17). Communal engagement with the arts through transpedagogy enables people to individually and collectively engage in rich meaning-making practices.

Hall, Thomson, and Russell (2007) take Bernstein's (2003) distinctions between competence and performance pedagogies to characterise artist pedagogic practices as tending toward performance-based pedagogies. For Hall, Thomson and Russell, Bernstein's distinctions about competence and performance boil down to 'what' is being learnt coupled with 'how' art is being experienced. Because many young people encounter art making primarily in school, a site heavily organised by the structures of curriculum, the 'what' and 'how' of arts activities are seen to focus on

> establishing ways of expressing yourself in different forms, exploring different perspectives on the world, appreciating the art and crafts of a range of cultures, expressing different identities for yourself. (Hall et al., 2007, p. 618).

The pedagogies in these school sites form patterns of actions and interactions between learners, where the spatiality and sociality of engagements come into play. While schools have clearly denoted teachers who 'teach' using their respective particular pedagogical approaches, we are more interested in how pedagogy works as an affective flow when relationships are formed between an artist and audience-community-learners in sites that include schools as well as other places and contexts.

Central to the notion of how artists can meaningfully engage in pedagogical exchanges with learners that goes beyond traditional arts education, requires a rejection of the rational ordering of knowledge, where art is reduced to a field of study or a disciplinary knowledge set (Grierson, 2011). Instead, through transpedagogy, art becomes seen as much more than objects for display or artistic products for consumption, but rather as a way of perceiving and being in the world.

We argue that Helguera's notion of transpedagogy is a useful one for attempting to imagine pedagogy differently, in terms of how arts and learning might produce a more creative mode of thinking and being. In conversation with our artistic peers, we explore how these pedagogies of artists might be understood. In doing so, we present a necessarily limited snapshot of the practices of two multidimensional artists who approach their artistry in interdisciplinary, collaborative and agentic ways. We do this in order to provide hopeful illustrations of the potential of transpedagogy as a radical engagement with the arts as a 'semiotic, social, cultural and even political practice, a mode of thinking and making that has the capacity to engage with the complexities of [our] discourses' (Grierson, 2011, p. 338). We are interested in how art might act as a vehicle for situated meaning-making, for creative and productive aesthetic, conceptual and affective knowing.

The significance of attempting to understand how transpedagogy might be able to flow across from artist to learner, from arts practice and community engagement with cultural institutions, into more traditional spaces of curriculum and pedagogy such as the classroom, should not be understated. One important question of course, is to ask whether transpedagogy might actually be able to travel from the practice of the artist working in diverse contexts, to the teacher in the classroom – in ways that are different to the pedagogical practices of which, teachers currently make use. Although teachers might learn much from the artist in building their skills in teaching curriculum-based arts subjects, what might also be learned from artist's practices in terms of pedagogy, teaching ideas and innovations that are applicable to general aspects of teaching?

Although contemporary artists and teachers are working to similar agendas in applying high-quality skills to connect with audiences and children, the differences between the contexts of teaching and the contexts of practicing and creating arts, make apparent the differences between the ways practices and pedagogies are learnt, conceptualized, theorized on, and enacted by artists and by teachers. But, if the agendas are similar, might there be opportunities for generalist teachers to look to artists, to enrich their usual practices and tactics in engaging students in learning?

Our conversations with two artists focus on how each artist encourages audience participation through multi-practice, transpedagogical processes. The ways each artist ignites these affective and participatory exchanges offers rich ideas about how transpedagogical practice might also be adopted in school-based teaching contexts.

4 Anthony: Musician-Composer-Producer

Anthony is a musician-composer-producer, based in Brisbane, Australia. He has been a professional artist for 20 years, and has performed nationally and internationally with his bands. Anthony has worked with diverse artists on the production of various musical recording projects. He is also an instrumental teacher, studio manager and occasional lecturer in creative industries at university. When asked about his approach to contemporary arts practice and its link to a collaborative approach to pedagogy, Anthony shared the following with us:

> Kids have very unformed ideas and I help them form those ideas, and I think what's happened as a result of that and as a result of working in my collaboration with bands is that my process is very much bouncing off other people. What is happening in a collaboration is a negotiation that has an outcome that is based entirely on personal taste. So there is a group of people looking for something when there is no right or wrong answer, and it is … to me is especially for my young students – I had a student who ended up being part of a law office after he left his bands 'cause he stopped being in bands and decided to take a job that pays money, and his exact words were 'Negotiating a law office is child's play compared to working with a band'. Because when artists disagree, they are hard to work with, because artists have very emotional connections that what they're doing and sometimes not entirely rational connections to what they're doing. So learning to negotiate for an outcome with a group of three or more people is an incredibly hard thing to do, and to keep that together for any amount of time is seen as borderline impossible.

For Anthony, music making is a collaborative process that requires a close-knit group of creative people working together. There is a clear pedagogy of social learning at play in the collective and artistic activity:

> In terms of learning, someone told me a long time ago – another professional musician who was in his sixties at the time – told me that he'd been to the school of hard knocks, and I was young at the time and I didn't really understand what he meant by that; but essentially the learning that you do on the road as a touring musician and the experience that you get collaborating with other musicians, living with other musicians, travelling with other musicians in tiny little spaces, taking a project internationally and trying to find ways to give it its own voice in another country, is just a massive amount of work, is a massive amount of patience, and it is the sort of thing that you couldn't possibly teach formally.

Interactions between artists and audiences-learners is really important for Anthony, who understands that there is a difference between simply performing for an audience and the process of structuring deliberate opportunities for learning through active engagement with the arts:

> When you begin a workshop, there's a little bit of anticipation there. They're unaware of what you're gonna do, some of them I guess might even be completely indifferent to it and thinking 'Hey I'm getting a day off school' or something like this. But those kinds of audiences are a fascinating opportunity because they're young minds who I'm there with the ability to influence their mind and maybe hopefully have them come away from it taking something for themselves. And I guess that's very different to a rock show in the sense that when you're doing a workshop with someone it's a much more two-way interaction, whereas a performance to me is to an extent a one-way interaction.

Unlike teaching from a traditional curriculum that treats knowledge as separate from the experience of learners, Anthony's transpedagogy foregrounds the importance of affective responses to engagement with learning and the arts:

> I still think that as a creator and as an artist, the closer the personal contact you can have, the better. Because we're dealing with emotional response generally when we're talking about art in any form. We're creating an emotional response.

At the heart of Anthony's transpedagogy is a creative vitality and the deliberate removal of obstacles to artistic creation. The environment, both physical and social, is clearly emphasised through his work with others as a musician-composer-producer:

> To me the word 'creating' is something that happens not something I do. When I was younger I used to go out of my way to try and create things, and as I get older and as I do more I'm more just letting creation happen. It's really about having an environment that facilitates allowing the creativity to be whatever it needs to be. So I guess it's about removing boundaries or even setting boundaries that enhance the creation.

5 Cassie: Visual Artist

Cassie is a visual artist based in Melbourne, Australia. Cassie creates collaborative and solo projects that use projection, installations and painting. Cassie exhibits her work nationally. Cassie has been a practicing artist for 15 years; during that time,

she also became a qualified high school teacher. Cassie teaches on a casual basis, continues her art practice, she also lectures in art and art education in university.

Cassie talked about her early desires to be an artist, and how those desires continue to drive her current art practice:

> I do definitely still feel that I'm becoming an artist and still very emerging in my practice. But, erm, I would have to say that from a very early age I've always considered myself to be, to be an artist. I always wanted to be an artist so my earliest memories were that this is what I was going to do.

Cassie identified how the pedagogical delivery of her early experiences of arts practice was problematic and had a negative effect on her confidence in making art:

> The art education in high school was quite disappointing and had sort of, various teachers. And one of them told me that I couldn't paint! (laughs) and so … that was really … that was really damaging.

The formative ideas about being an artist and how to develop an arts practice have changed over time for Cassie. She describes how initially she was not concerned about audiences, but this changed as her understandings of art and arts practice matured. Cassie describes how her desire to make art remains as strong an urge as it ever has but that her sense of what artists can be and do has expanded. She now regards her art as a form of social practice:

> To be honest, I don't think I ever thought about my audience. I just created art because I did it for me.
>
> I create art now because there's a sense that I need to.
>
> My practice is both solitary and collective.
>
> Working in the public realm, you've got this amazing opportunity to work with audiences and actually share an idea or get an idea across or perhaps create change through that creating awareness. And I think that's one of the exciting possibilities of working with publics.
>
> I think art in that way is changing, we are viewing art in a different way and working with publics in a different way. Art can be a lot more community-minded.
>
> Site-specific works really do engage their audience, or really do take into consideration the environment, the physical environment and also the social, cultural environment of the space.

Through describing her working processes, Cassie demonstrates how transpedagogy occurs for her through collaboration, through consciously foregrounding how learning is taking place, and how ideas and practices work together as she creates her art:

> I think collaboration is so important because you're constantly jumping off ideas from one another. And as an artist and working with different audiences or different publics, I think you get the same. You're constantly learning from each other.
>
> It's not because I have a message that I need to share with everyone, it's the actual, the act of making is actually really important, and then the idea or the concept behind the idea of the artwork comes after. But it's the actual making that's really important I think

> to me [and] it also actually helps me to think in new ways. I find if I am creating, I'm actually making new connections and I'm actually learning about different things.

The pedagogical drive for Cassie emerges from her ideas about arts as a social practice, and the rights that communities and individuals have to participate in and encounter the arts. A key agenda and primary consideration for Cassie is to help audiences and others explore key issues through their arts practice that they regard as meaningful and important. Transpedagogy occurs through Cassie paying careful attention to the ideas and needs of others and using that to force shifts in her own practices and ideas.

> I think humans need to create, and whatever form that is, I think it's really important for us to create.

> I think that art should be attainable and should be available for everyone to participate in.

> I think perhaps when working with participants or with audiences on a project, I think they need to see what they're going to get out of it, whether the topic is something that's important to them, or whether they want to create something, or learn a new technique, or just meet people. And I think perhaps you need to sort of think about, well, what the audience is going to get out of that. It's not just about you creating the project, I think we have to think about, it's important to think about the people, the audience that are working with you, and they're going to be satisfied, and they're going to get something that's worthwhile for them out of the project.

> I think there definitely is an element of pedagogy or teaching going on, whether it's intended or not.

6 Discussion

Grierson (2011) reminds us that art does not sit well alongside reified knowledge, truth and morality. Instead, art provides us with an important 'space beyond the obvious' that is 'more than mere information, more than means-end commodity, more than instrumentalised technology, and it is this 'more' that we must identify and defend' (p. 346). It seems to us that this might perhaps be how radical engagement with the arts provides numerous possibilities for enriching teaching and learning.

It is not particularly remarkable that artists and teachers use practices and pedagogies that seek to inspire and educate audiences and children. However, we wonder at how the constraints of curriculum and pedagogy as it is enacted in classrooms and other sites of learning, might limit what is possible for young learners. As transpedagogues, artists find ways to work with diverse audiences, particularly those who are 'art-informed' and also those without a particular background in art or with a social investment in the art world. We have only had space in this chapter to briefly engage with the transpedagogies of two particular artists, yet these clearly demonstrate the rich potential of making deeper links between the arts and educational practices.

Through a deeper engagement with arts practices and pedagogies, the relevance of the artist is increased beyond the arts, and demonstrates how ideas for improving

on teaching and student engagement can be addressed by looking to diverse professionals with complementary and relevant skill sets. Hybridized arts practices are pedagogical and have the potential to inform and affect those who are delivering concepts as well as those who are learning. As contemporary arts leaves the confines of the gallery/studio and entangles with public contexts, artists are experimenting with radical pedagogies in diverse ways and contemporary arts practices can inform different learning contexts. Furthermore, artists are able to develop a pedagogy that brings a more creative mode of being and knowing together.

The collective and blurred skills of artists, and their strategies for disseminating and connecting their work to collaborators and the public can help to prompt new understandings of what effective and engaging teaching and learning might be able to produce in reimagining approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. By connecting with artists and transpedagogies, perhaps it might be possible to build high quality education provision in and outside of formal education settings, that connect powerfully and meaningfully to the lives of learners of all ages and in all places.

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