Assessing the Visual Arts

The visual arts comprise a broad range of conceptual, material, and dimensional forms through which we communicate, learn about ourselves, and make meaning of the world.

(The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum, 2000)

Art Permeates our Lives

Throughout time people have expressed their understandings of their world through the arts. The visual arts permeate society and culture. They are part of our daily lives and experience. They have the potential to enrich and inform. A visual arts education is concerned with gaining knowledge and learning skills that help us to understand and participate in this important field of human expression.

The Visual Arts and the National Curriculum

Education in the visual arts represents an essential part of the curriculum for all New Zealand school students. It is that part of the curriculum which offers opportunities for developing abilities of personal, social and cultural expression through a range of visual media, forms and techniques. A visual arts education is also concerned with developing an appreciation and understanding of the art of others, the ways artworks are looked at, valued and thought about.

Students learn in, through, and about the various forms and processes of the visual arts. Through practical work and a study of others’ art, they are learning to make objects and images, to source and develop ideas, and to communicate and interpret meaning. They come to understand visual artworks as social and historical texts as they investigate the contexts in which the visual arts are made, used and valued.

As makers and viewers, students gain knowledge about the content, structure and meaning of art works and develop visual literacy in their representation and “reading” of the visual world. They develop appropriate critical skills and understandings as they analyse and question the parameters of visual arts practice.

(The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum, 2000)

Skills and Knowledge

Making artworks requires skills of selecting, organising and using materials along with those necessary for creating and forming images that help express and represent the ideas and intentions of the student. Appreciating and understanding the works of other artists requires knowledge of how they work, their purposes, and the influence of the environment on their work and their work on the environment. It also involves a growing ability to see, interpret, comment and respond.

Framework for National Monitoring Assessment of Students’ Ideas, Knowledge and Skills.

National monitoring assessment frameworks which are developed by the Project’s curriculum advisory panels have two key purposes. They provide a valuable guideline structure for the development and selection of tasks, and they bring into focus those important dimensions of the learning
### Visual Arts Assessment Framework 2003

#### Central Organising Theme

*Students making and responding in the visual arts.*

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<th>Making Art</th>
<th>Responding to Art</th>
<th>Communicating and Interpreting</th>
<th>Understanding Art in Context</th>
<th>Students’ Attitudes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Developing Ideas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communicating and Interpreting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Understanding Art in Context</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interest and enthusiasm</strong> &lt;br&gt;Willingness to explore and take risks <em>(Making)</em> &lt;br&gt;Open-mindedness <em>(Responding)</em> &lt;br&gt;Satisfaction and self-confidence</td>
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<td><em>Generating, exploring, selecting and developing ideas and experiences.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Using a range of sources of information.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Expressing thoughts, feelings and perceptions through art.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Experimenting with and testing ideas and processes.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Reviewing own work in progress.</em></td>
<td><em>Describing subject matter and use of elements and principles.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Identifying media, processes and procedures.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Commenting on the choices the artist has made in order to convey ideas or meaning.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Developing and explaining personal responses.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Considering the responses of others.</em></td>
<td><em>Considering artists’ intentions, values, beliefs and feelings.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Recognising cultural symbols and the artist’s personal symbols.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Investigating social, cultural and historical contexts of art.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Considering how and why value is assigned to artworks.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Recognising personal views and preferences when judging artworks.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Understanding how and why art is cared for.</em></td>
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<td><strong>Practical Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communicating and Interpreting</strong></td>
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<td><em>Selecting and using elements, principles and media.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Using techniques and processes within 2D, 3D, mixed media and time-based art.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Adapting and refining technical processes and ways of working with tools and materials.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Interpreting specific cultural approaches.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Care and conservation of materials.</em> &lt;br&gt;<em>Practising healthy and safe procedures.</em></td>
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The frameworks are organising tools which interrelate main ideas, processes and attitudes with reference to important learning outcomes. They are intended to be flexible and broad enough to encourage, enable and explore the development of tasks that lead to valid descriptions of what students know and can do.

The art framework has a central organising theme supported by three interrelated aspects.

The *central organising theme*, “Students making and responding in the visual arts”, is consistent with New Zealand’s art curriculum and sets the broad context for tasks. The aims of the curriculum are intended to help students:

- develop practical knowledge in the (visual) arts, exploring and using the elements, conventions, processes, techniques and technologies of the visual arts;
- develop ideas in the arts, individually and collectively, drawing on a variety of sources of motivations to make artworks;
- communicate and interpret meaning in the (visual) arts, presenting and responding to a wide range of artworks;
- understand the arts in context, investigating artworks and the (visual) arts in relation to their social and cultural settings.

*The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum, 2000*
The Choice of Art Tasks for National Monitoring

The choice of art tasks for national monitoring is guided by a number of educational and practical considerations. Uppermost in any decision is the central consideration of validity, and the effect that a whole range of decisions can have on this key attribute. So tasks are chosen because they provide a good representation of important dimensions of an art education, but also because they meet a number of requirements to do with their administration and presentation. For example:

**Consistency**
Each task with its associated materials needs to be structured to ensure a high level of consistency in the way it is presented by specially trained teacher administrators to students of wide-ranging backgrounds and abilities, and in diverse settings throughout New Zealand.

**Ability Range**
Tasks need to span the expected range of capabilities of year 4 and 8 students, allowing the most able students to show the extent of their abilities while also giving the least able the opportunity to show what they can do.

**Practical, Accessible**
Materials for artmaking tasks need to be sufficiently portable, economical, safe and within the handling capabilities of students. The visual items for responding tasks (reproductions of artists’ works, photographs, etc.) need to depict images and contexts that are accessible (within the range of) to students.

**Timing**
The time needed for completing an individual task has to be balanced against the total time available for all of the assessment tasks without denying students sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities.

**Motivating**
Each task needs to be capable of holding the attention and effort of students if they are to produce responses that truly indicate what they know and can do. Since neither the student nor the school receives immediate or specific feedback on performance, the motivational potential of the assessment is critical.

**Unbiased**
Tasks need to avoid unnecessary bias on the grounds of gender, culture or social background while accepting that it is appropriate to have tasks that reflect the interests of particular groups within the community.

National Monitoring Visual Arts Assessment Tasks

Eighteen visual arts tasks were administered, using three different approaches. Eleven tasks were administered in one-to-one interview settings, where students used materials and visual information. One task was presented in a team situation involving small groups of students working together. Six tasks were attempted in settings where students worked independently on artmaking tasks which involved hands-on use of art materials. All eighteen tasks were the same or substantially the same for both year 4 and year 8.

The time allowed for working on each making task was standardised. Students were not expected to produce finished work within the time available, and consequently the marking did not use completion as a criterion. The time required for the responding tasks varied from student to student in the one-to-one approach, depending on the extent to which they were able to comment and elaborate.

Trend Tasks

Four of the tasks in this report were previously used in identical form in the 1999 assessments. These were called link tasks in the 1999 report, but were not described in detail to avoid any distortions in 2003 results that might have occurred if the tasks had been widely available for use in schools since 1999. In the current report, these tasks are called trend tasks and are used to examine trends in student performance levels: whether they have improved, stayed constant or declined over the four year period since the 1999 assessments.
To allow comparisons of performance between the 2003 and 2007 assessments, nine of the tasks used for the first time in 2003 have been designated link tasks. Results of student performance on these tasks are presented in this report, but the tasks are described only in general terms because they will be used again in 2007.

**National Monitoring Visual Arts Survey**

Additional to assessment tasks, students completed a questionnaire that investigated their interests, attitudes and involvement in visual arts.

**Marking Methods**

The students' responses were assessed using specially designed marking procedures. The criteria used had been developed in advance by Project staff, but were sometimes modified as a result of issues raised during the marking. Tasks that required marker judgement and were common to year 4 and year 8 were intermingled during marking sessions, with the goal of ensuring that the same scoring standards and procedures were used for both.

**Exemplars**

A selection of exemplars has been chosen for inclusion in this report to help show the range of responses in relation to marking schemes and what was asked of the students. The examples also illustrate the attributes of individual works in relation to the overall mark each one was given on global rating scales. Examples have been chosen as representative of works that were given high and middle range marks. The commentaries provided with each of the exemplars in the middle range describe features, impressions and merits observed in the work. They indicate some of the characteristics typical of works in this range. The characteristics of works in the upper range can be observed in the pictures themselves and considered in relation to those with commentaries.

**Task by Task reporting**

National monitoring assessment is reported task by task so that results can be understood in relation to what the students were asked to do. Examples of student work are given to illustrate the type and range of responses.

**Access Tasks**

Teachers and principals have expressed considerable interest in accessing NEMP task materials and marking instructions, so that they can use them within their own schools. Some are interested in comparing the performance of their own students to national results on aspects of the curriculum, while others want to use tasks as models of good practice. Some would like to modify tasks to suit their own purposes, while others want to follow the original procedures as closely as possible. There is obvious merit in making available carefully developed tasks that are seen to be highly valid and useful for assessing student learning.

Some of the tasks in this report cannot be made available in this way. Link tasks must be saved for use in four years’ time, and other tasks use copyright or expensive resources that cannot be duplicated by NEMP and provided economically to schools. There are also limitations on how precisely a school’s administration and marking of tasks can mirror the ways that they are administered and marked by the Project. Nevertheless, a substantial number of tasks are suitable to duplicate for teachers and schools. In this report, these access tasks are identified with the symbol above, and can be purchased in a kit from the New Zealand Council for Education Research (P.O. Box 3237, Wellington 6000, New Zealand).

Teachers are also encouraged to use the NEMP web site (http://nemp.otago.ac.nz) to view video clips and listen to audio material associated with some of the tasks.