

Works:

Ngā tūranga takitahi me ngā mana whakahaere
kauri, steel, blackboard paint, chalk

Te Kōtahitanga - Reflective Practice - Mauri
kauri, steel, blackboard paint, chalk

Manaakitanga - Ako - Mana Motuhake
kauri, steel, blackboard paint, chalk

Narrative Pedagogy - Contesting Curriculum
kauri, steel, blackboard paint, chalk

Wānanga - Restorative Practice - Ngā Ākau
kauri, steel, blackboard paint, chalk

Floor
15,000 white chalk sticks

ARTSPACE^{NZ}
Mezzanine

Matt Coldicutt

**Kōtahitanga! Chalk that talk,
walk that chalk!**

13 June - 13 July

Kōtahitanga! Chalk that talk, walk that chalk!

23rd February 2011

As we proceed down the long archway formed by maturing pohutukawa, mist from the early morning shower begins to clear between the ground and our heads. What is left gathers and clings to the dark leaves above us, while an abundance of tui, kereru and tauhou dart through the canopy spreading thin remains and revealing a clear summer's day. Following our kai whakatu, we slowly gather at the waharoa fronting the marae ātea of Te Puna Wānanga's wharenuī as a nervous group of hopeful secondary school teachers. Our new school's kaikaranga acknowledges our presence here and calls us onto the small marae. Without knowing each other we stand in formation, tightly packed, ordered shoulder to shoulder - a sense of stability between us is felt and gives a strong contrast to the previous day's events we are still trying to comprehend. As we listen, the penetrating flow of the kaikaranga's call suddenly breaks down, she drops to the ground, crying as she speaks – the old school she left for Auckland was destroyed in yesterday's earthquake. As she continues to weave her spiritual rope, she is empowered by her karanga, her words pull her through and her confidence and clarity is restored.

Following the hongī we mingle, dipping malt biscuits into styrofoam cups brimming with weak filter coffee. We are optimistic about our tentative new place in the education sector and are now more aware of the emotional investment and baggage teachers can carry with them from place to place, school to school, student to student.

13th June 2013

After making the difficult adjustment from fulltime art student to fulltime teacher, her ending words still resonate “we are not just, readers, writers, mathematicians, historians, artists and scientists but cultural workers... it is our duty under the Treaty of Waitangi to ensure the learning and safety of all ākongā in our classrooms.”

Matt Coldicutt

In this project, rocking chairs offer educators an unexpected form of support. Embossed around the rims of five rocking chair seats are phrases that draw upon Māori pedagogical philosophies. Their circular configurations indicate some kind of symbiosis; every phrase is simultaneously preceded by and precedes another in a mutually dependent relationship.

On one of the seats, the word “Ako” - to learn as well as to teach – is pinned between “Manaakitanga” - caring for students as culturally located beings and “Mana Motuhake” - caring for student performance. The interrelationship between these three phrases places education within a circular trajectory of both looking back and aiming forward. Learning from students becomes synonymous with teaching them.

As student-centric phrases, these principles stand in stark contrast to the traditional transmission model of education, where the teacher didactically performs for a passive student audience. This conventional framework treats knowledge as a body of definitive facts that can be possessed and that possession in turn managed. As a pedagogical approach, it's about as out-dated in the classroom as the sticks of chalk scattered upon the Mezzanine floor. I'm reminded of a line in Redmond Entwistle's Walk-Through that called for teachers to be ‘hailed down from the podium’. To promote discussion over monologue. To interact and not just to perform.

I've been thinking recently about approaches to art education, and in particular a public talk given by Julia Moritz, the head educator for Documenta 13. Moritz spoke of the importance in education of suspending what we take as certainties in order to make space for the ‘not known’ to enter. One of her strategies was to invite non-

art professionals to give exhibition tours. These people were called ‘companions’, a term that denotes equal authority.

Moritz' approach resonates with the idea of “Ako”. Both stem from the notion that people bring different forms of knowledge with them, and that new understandings can grow out of sharing these experiences. This feels to me like a more genuine and frankly less intimidating approach to arts education. I cannot confidently pretend as an educator to have a level of profound insight into an artwork that could eclipse any other reading. Rather than pass on my own limited thoughts, I venture to create opportunities for visitors to make their own meanings.

Still, there's an underlying tension between the desire to leave space for the not-yet-known and the need for some kind of pragmatic framework to put this into practice. When I was looking for the translations of the Māori phrases, one struck me as particularly prosaic: “Ngā tūrango takitahi me ngā mana whakahaere” - to create a secure, well-managed learning environment.

This tension is mirrored in the nature of the rocking chair itself. Pulled in opposite gravitational directions, the educator must rock back and forth until they find a place of perfect equilibrium. True to the ethos of the teacher-learner, Matt Coldicutt's project refrains from offering us this point of resolution. His guiding phrases circle the rocking chair seat, suggesting the continual nature of practicing and reflecting on that practice. Even as we look back to learn from our pasts, we still leave space for a better understanding still to come.

Ioana Gordon Smith