

CULTURAL CENTRES' SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING

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New Zealand primary schools' arts education programmes are becoming marginalised by a combination of an expanded curriculum, national testing and a lack of curriculum support. Using data from two studies, this paper examines the role played by museums and galleries (cultural centres) in supporting teaching and learning and teacher development within local primary schools. This paper examines the dynamic relationship between cultural centres and primary schools. Analysed data from both projects point to the importance of 'situated learning' in enabling students to develop creative and critical thinking skills and support teachers as they develop confidence in teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Primary schools' arts education programmes in Australia, the US and United Kingdom are under pressure from a combination of an expanded curriculum, national testing, and a lack of curriculum support. Garvis and Pendergast (2010) came to the conclusion that the arts were becoming marginalised, following the introduction of a national assessment programme in Australia. Barnes and Shirley (2007) recognised that the Arts in primary schools in the UK suffered after the government pushed for a rise in literacy and numeracy standards in 1997. In the US, a study of the 'No Child Left Behind' policy's impact on art education reached the conclusion that the policy had a negative effect on school art education programmes (Sabol 2010).

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, primary schools face a similar challenge. An expanded curriculum, the withdrawal of professional development in the arts, and the introduction of national numeracy and literacy standards threaten arts education in primary schools. Traditionally, New Zealand primary schools have relied on a teacher advisory service to provide specialist curriculum support, this service ceased in 2010. Price (2010) said that New Zealand primary school teachers face a challenge of finding suitable support to increase their understanding of art educational practice.

This paper, through qualitative data, considers the role played by three museums and one gallery and their educators in enhancing the delivery of art-based curricula programmes. Given the need to respond to the challenges described above, and the need to evidence our practices and policies, it is important that the impact of educators working in museums and galleries be better understood. Using the model of communities of practice as described by Lave and Wenger (1991), the purpose of this paper is to shed light on the impact of these educators. To date, there has been a dearth of published work in the area to which this paper is a response.

Comparing analysed data (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) from two studies, this article looks at how museums / galleries support primary schools in their communities. The two studies are: a pilot project using museums and galleries to develop the confidence of newly qualified primary school teachers to teach visual art and a study examining the relationship between museums and galleries and primary schools that frequently use them. The interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions gauged the project participants' perceptions of the role played by museums / galleries in primary school education.

MUSEUM AND GALLERY EDUCATION

Examples of cultural centres providing support for teachers and teaching can be seen in many countries where museum and gallery education is offered. In the United Kingdom, Davies (2010) described the use of cultural centres (children's theatres and museums) to help student teachers develop confidence in the teaching of the arts. Also in the UK, the 'Out of Art into Literacy' (2010) exhibition at the National Gallery showcased a project between the National Gallery and local primary schools that used artworks to develop children's literacy skills. Often cultural centres provide professional development programmes to teachers such as New York's Museum of Modern Art

(2011) where courses are offered in incorporating contemporary art in classroom programmes. Museums / galleries often offer a comprehensive range of practical activities for students like the Museum of Contemporary Art (2011) in Sydney that provides a range of practical visual art activities associated with its exhibitions.

During a recent visit (September 2010) to the Tate Modern, the author observed school-age students working in all the gallery spaces. Fold-away stools made it easy for students to sit with art works while completing research projects that often included drawing processes. These gallery spaces had become an extension of the students' traditional classrooms.

Good practice in the classroom is often exhibited by student participation, inquiry and collaboration. Often the role of the museum / gallery educator is to replicate this good practice in a setting outside the traditional classroom. According to Hughes, Jackson and Kidd (2007), museums are places of learning and memory increasingly attempting to engage visitors' emotions. Vallance (1995) said that the role of a museum educator is to enable the visitor to connect back to the museum or gallery artifact and make meaning from the curator's selection and arrangement and the visitors' own selection and sequence of exploration. This view could describe the role of a teacher helping students make sense of the world around them using the content presented to them and the knowledge and understanding they bring to the classroom.

Tools used by teachers to engage students often involve a series of questions designed to help them analyse and reflect upon the content making connections to their developing understanding. Museum educators also use a series of questions designed to enable students to engage with artifacts within the cultural centre and analyse their content.

The term 'cultural centres' has encompassed everything from sports stadiums to museums. In this paper, the author will use this term to describe museums and art galleries whose programmes are available to the public. Vallance (2007) viewed cultural centres as essential components in formal arts education. She makes the point that they may provide remedial support for schools who have omitted arts learning opportunities. In New Zealand, the programmes offered to schools by cultural centres are funded under the 'Learning Experiences outside the Classroom' (LEOTC) programmes which are partly funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and are described by them as curriculum support projects. The Ministry makes the point that LEOTC (2011) contributes to curriculum-related programmes benefiting New Zealand school students. It seems, therefore, LEOTC programmes that receive government funding are designed to support the delivery of the New Zealand National Curriculum (Ministry of Education 2007).

CULTURAL CENTRES AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The term 'communities of practice' has grown from an original description by Lave and Wenger (1991) to describe vehicles of learning. They described a process, where a newcomer to a community learns from experts within that community, gradually becoming a full community participant. According to Hildreth and Kimble (2008), one of the key components of a community of practice is that they are ideal environments for developing and sharing knowledge. Cultural centres can be seen as a community of practice with the museum / gallery educator performing a key role enabling community newcomers to develop their knowledge.

In describing communities of practice, Islam (2008) and Lave and Wenger (1991) use the lens of social-cultural theory to understand them. Learning processes are situated in social situations. Lave and Wenger make the point that a community of practice is socially situated with new community members learning through a process of acculturation.

Use of this view of communities of practice places cultural centres in a key position to help students develop their knowledge outside the traditional classroom environment. The research and examples

described above suggest learning in cultural centres is likely to be situated within a social experience as described by Lave and Wenger.

The following sections describe the two projects that provide the empirical basis for this paper. The personal views of primary school principals, teachers and museum / gallery educators (expressed in the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups) describe the use of cultural centres and their role in students' education.

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Project One: Supporting Provisionally Registered Teachers

In January 2010, a two-year pilot project was initiated in Wellington, New Zealand to explore ways to increase the confidence and expertise of newly trained primary school teachers in the teaching of visual art. Drawing on the experiences described by Andrews (2006), Davies (2010) and Hudson (2005), the project used a network of existing visual art expertise within the community to support Provisionally Registered Teachers (PRTs). To become a fully registered teacher in New Zealand, PRTs must be employed in a teaching position and complete a two-year programme of advice and guidance, supervised by a fully registered teacher. Given that the first two years are recognised as a time when teachers develop their teaching confidence and expertise, this was viewed as an opportune time for teachers to develop their confidence in the teaching of visual art.

The project was funded by Ako Aotearoa, New Zealand's National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. Throughout the project, Ako Aotearoa reviewed and disseminated the project's findings for the benefit of other tertiary educators and learners. Prior to starting the project, ethics approval was granted by the Human Ethics Committee at the institution. The community network supporting the PRTs comprised of four institutions, each responsible for developing and delivering workshops related to the use of visual art within the classroom.

Each institution had at least one visual art education expert who was either a gallery or museum educator, a visual art specialist teacher, or a practising artist. The expert designed and delivered two workshops. Thus, the PRTs participated in eight workshops during the two years of the project. The experts worked as a team to develop and evaluate the workshops, based on the feedback given by the PRTs. Each workshop focussed on developing practical understanding and confidence in visual art and its teaching in the classroom. In addition, three of the four visual art experts acted as mentors to the PRTs, using both face-to-face and online mentoring. The online setting enabled PRTs to share and develop visual art teaching resources based on the content of the workshops.

Each practical workshop, which used specialist visual art teaching workspaces provided by the institutions organising them, focused on developing understanding of and confidence in, visual art and its teaching. Each workshop was structured around a range of practical visual art activities interspersed with informal discussions about the ways these activities could be used within a teaching context. Following the workshops, the participants were encouraged to use the ideas and techniques explored in the workshops within their own teaching. After the first workshop, the participants were encouraged to bring examples of visual art work their students had completed, as a result of their teaching, to share ideas and discuss their teaching of visual art. Images of work completed by both the participants and their students were posted and shared online. Twelve volunteer PRTs took part in this project, all from the same one-year postgraduate primary teaching diploma course and teaching in the Greater Wellington region. A control group of volunteer PRTs was also established to compare data. The central research question in this project was:

To what extent can a community support network develop the confidence and expertise of a group of provisionally registered teachers in the teaching of visual art?

A mix of qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed, using a multi-method approach (Anderson 1998; Best & Kahn 2006; Cohen & Manion 1994; Yin 2006), enabling triangulation to address the above question. Data collection followed each of the eight phases. Data from the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, focusing on both the PRTs' self-reported confidence in the teaching of visual art and their previous visual art experience, were collected at the start of the project, and at the end of each workshop, the PRTs completed another questionnaire that focused on the effectiveness of the workshop in developing their confidence in teaching visual art. At six-monthly intervals (6, 12, 18 months), focus group discussions and questionnaires were used to monitor any change in the PRTs' perceptions of their confidence in teaching visual art. At the conclusion of the project, each participating PRT took part in another semi-structured interview focusing on their confidence in the teaching of visual art. Data from questionnaires were collected from the control group half-way and at the conclusion of the project. The questionnaires were the same as those used in the study group, focusing on teachers' self-reported confidence in the teaching of visual art. The data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions were to validate the data from the questionnaires, and to identify any common themes and issues that emerged.

Project two: Museum and Gallery

The second project (also two years and beginning January 2010) used four centres (three museums and one gallery) to investigate the relationship between museums and galleries and the primary schools that use their education programmes. Prior to starting this project ethics approval was applied for and gained from the Human Ethics Committee at the [Institution].

Research Design

The central research question in this project was: What support is provided by museums and galleries to local primary schools? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three principals and six teachers from primary schools that regularly use education programmes offered by the museums/galleries. Eight museum/gallery educators who designed and developed these programmes were also interviewed. These semi-structured interviews were analysed using a system of open coding (Glaser 1992). Initially, interview transcripts were analysed to identify themes within each participant group – principals, teachers and museum educators. Identified common themes were then used to re-analyse the transcripts. This paper draws upon the perceptions of the participants contained within the qualitative data in project one and compares these with the perceptions of the participants contained within the qualitative data in project two.

Project one themes

Supporting PRTs

Evidence from the analysed data suggests the confidence of primary school teachers to teach visual art increases when there is a combination of: 1. Practical visual art experiences; 2. Using museums/galleries; and 3. Reflecting on, and discussing, visual art practice and teaching.

Participant PRTs referred to practical visual art experiences as one of the main factors enabling them to develop confidence in the teaching of visual art:

It (practical activities) has definitely helped with what I can do with regards visual art. I have been able to take what I have learnt on the course and use it with whatever topic I am doing at the time.
(PRT)

We are doing practical things then it gives you more confidence to go on and do that at school...
(PRT)

PRTs' comments confirmed the analysis of data collected from the post-workshop questionnaires, where practical activities were identified as the most important element in enabling them to develop confidence and expertise to teach visual art. Practical visual art experiences formed the core of the workshops, and confirmed findings of literature that point to the importance such experiences play in

enabling teachers to develop their understanding of visual art education and confidence in teaching it (Alter, Hays & O'Hara 2009; Andrews 2006; Davies 2010; Hudson 2005; Lowenberg & Cohen 1999).

As the project progressed, the expertise found within the museums / galleries used for the workshops and the participants' opportunities to reflect upon their own practice and share this reflection with others became increasingly important:

If I needed any support or had questions I could email her (Gallery educator)
I found really valuable was meeting with other PRTs and talking about your experiences. (PRT)

The developing relationship between the participating PRTs and the cultural centres involved in the project increased the PRTs' confidence to teach visual art and enabled the cultural centres to strengthen links with primary schools within their community.

Data analysis also revealed practical visual art experiences was enriched by the ability of the PRTs to discuss and share ideas, and the availability of resources and expertise provided by the cultural centres. It became evident that the PRTs' confidence to teach visual art also developed as a result of the resources and expertise provided by the cultural centres taking part in the project.

According to Talbert and McLaughlin (2002), collaborative teacher communities improved teaching practice as a result of teachers sharing knowledge, evaluating new practices, and sharing a repertoire of practice. The opportunity and environment created by the cultural centres taking part in this study enabled the PRTs to develop their expertise in the teaching of visual art. The participant PRTs became a collaborative teacher community developing their confidence in the teaching of visual art by sharing knowledge and evaluating new practices.

Project Two Themes

Use of Museum and Gallery Educators

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers and museum/gallery educators from project two revealed several themes (see Table 1), some of which were common to all three groups.

Table 1
Semi-structured Interview Themes

Teachers	Principals	Museum and Gallery Educators
Practical activities	Motivation (student)	Practical activities/authentic experiences
Development of creative and critical thinking skills	Transferability of skills in a range of curriculum areas	Supporting school programmes
Transferability of skills in range of curriculum areas	Critical thinking	Developing relationships with local communities
Student engagement	Building relationships	Teacher professional development
Gallery educators' expertise		

Practical activities/Student engagement

Discussing practical activities, teachers and principals made the connection between these activities and engaging students:

A whole new richness, it makes it come alive for them, it is hands-on experiences. (Teacher)
They have built up quite an ability to be able to respond to art works. (Principal)

The museum / gallery educators referred to practical activities as authentic experiences that motivate students:

There has to be a hands-on practical component which schools really like. (Museum / gallery educator)

You want it to be a memorable experience, enjoyable and fun. You want them to feel a spark of imagination making them more motivated to learn. (Museum / gallery educator)

The connection between practical experiences and student motivation links to the theory of situated learning. Lave (1988) suggested that a great deal of what is learnt is specific to the situation in which it is learnt, arguing that learning in a natural setting contrasts with classroom settings. He made the point that learning occurs as part of the activity, culture and context in which it is situated.

Development of creative and critical thinking skills

The teachers and principals interviewed linked cultural centre visits to the development of students' creative and critical thinking skills, believing that the programmes offered, encouraged these.

The depth of thinking: It certainly helps with critical thinking. (Teacher)

The richness of the discussion and the inquiry: They become inquiry learners. (Principal)

You want students to become life-long learners and make connections between various bits of knowledge by asking questions. (Museum / gallery educator)

It is unclear from the analysis of these semi-structured interviews whether the cultural centre visit enables students to develop their critical thinking skills or the way the museum/gallery educators facilitate student learning. What is evident is the participant teachers and principals believe students' critical thinking skills are developed as a result of the cultural centre visit. Commenting on the expertise of the museum / gallery educators, one teacher said: *...for the less experienced teachers it is extremely good models of teaching.* It may be that a combination of practical experience and the expertise of the educators in facilitating student discussions enables the students to develop their critical thinking skills.

Transferability of skills in a range of curriculum areas

The teachers also talked about the benefits of the museum / gallery visit back in the classroom. Not only did the teachers discuss the development of creative and critical thinking skills but also the enrichment of students' language and writing skills. Following comments refer to the students, two weeks after their LEOTC visit:

Lots of language. In their writing. They are talking about it all the time. (Teacher)

Their literacy programme, definitely in their writing. Particularly around their stories and the reading. (Principal)

The principals talked about the links between the cultural centre visit and the development of a range of student expertise. When talking about a visit, the whole school had made to an exhibition of abstract painting, one principal said: *It is going to be linked to Maths and the work they are doing (Visual Art) tied up with what they did at the art gallery.* Analysis of the data indicated that for both teachers and principals an important aspect of the cultural centre visit is how students built upon the expertise they gained during the visit on returning to school.

Building relationships within local communities/Professional development for teachers

The teachers and the principals talked about how schools and cultural centres had developed a working relationship with each other. One museum / gallery educator talked about their role in forming a working relationship with local schools to develop activities to supporting school programmes:

Ultimately I'd like them to have an ongoing relationship with using us as a part of their visual art or social science or other programmes

The cultural centres see their role in developing programmes as one of collaboration with local schools. Their focus is responding to the needs of the schools as well as responding to the changing exhibits within their institutions.

In developing a working relationship with schools in their community, one museum/gallery educator talked about developing connections within the wider community: ...*facilitating connections especially arts in the community*. The cultural centre associated with the last comment has organised many projects involving artists from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Canada, USA, as well as New Zealand working with students from local schools. It seems the connections and expertise associated with the cultural centres can be used to develop working relationships with schools within the cultural centre's community. Museums / galleries are cultural hubs and the educators' brokers making connections between artists and schools.

Discussing their relationship with schools, the museum / gallery educators talked about the ways they support teachers:

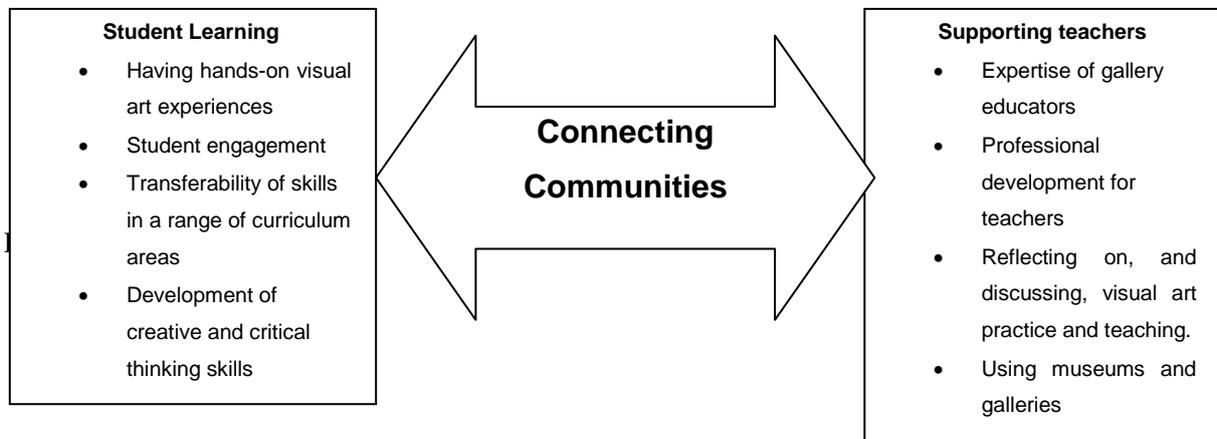
Teachers also see that going to the gallery is another way of opening learning for the kids. It is good for them to see other educators with specialist knowledge teaching and interacting with the kids. We have a secondary teachers' visual arts cluster group; Teachers' drawing courses; and Open days for teachers.

The museum and gallery educators see part of their role as providing professional development to teachers. As mentioned earlier, at present in New Zealand, there is a lack of professional development available to primary school teachers in a range of curriculum areas, partly due to the removal of national advisory curriculum support. Museum and gallery educators could provide curriculum support to schools within their local communities. The advantage would be the ability of cultural centres to respond to the needs of local schools targeting professional development.

Themes common to both projects

Analysis of the themes from both projects reveals two main categories (the role the cultural centre plays in student learning and in supporting teachers through professional development) and one overarching theme, connecting communities. (See Fig.1)

**Figure 1
Common Themes**



Student learning

Analysis of the data points to the role cultural centres play in supporting student learning. Lave (1988) argued learning, as it normally occurs, is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs (i.e., it is situated). Situated learning contrasts with most classroom learning activities which involve abstracted knowledge out of context. A critical component of situated learning is social interaction, where learners become involved within the site and activities associated within that site. Other researchers (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989) have further developed the theory of situated learning, emphasising the idea of cognitive apprenticeship. This is described as students acquiring, developing and using cognitive skills in an authentic setting. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) make the point that learning, both outside and inside school, advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge.

Analysis of data from both projects reveals the importance interviewees attach to the practical activities associated with the cultural centre visits. The PRTs emphasised the importance of working as a group in developing their understanding of teaching visual art. This would confirm the importance Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989) place on collaborative social interaction in the development of expertise. The PRTs talked about the importance of practical activities allowing them to develop their expertise in teaching visual art, and the teachers and principals talked about practical activities enabling students to develop creative and critical thinking skills. Analysis of situated learning by Lave and Wenger (1991) described a process where novices gradually acquire knowledge and skills from experts in the context of everyday activities. Analysis of data from the PRT project points to them gradually developing their confidence to teach visual art as they become more familiar with the cultural centres and the educators within those centres. The cultural centres become increasingly important as a place to gain and develop expertise and a place to inquire and discuss professional practice.

Supporting Teachers (Learning Communities)

Earlier I referred to cultural centres as communities of practice. Riel and Polin (2004) differentiated between communities of practice and other learning communities that focus entirely on completing specific tasks or gaining specific knowledge as being engaged in improving joint practice. The PRTs developed into a community of practice as they worked towards improving joint practice. They belong to two distinct learning communities, firstly as one of a group of participant PRTs involved in developing expertise in teaching visual art, and secondly as a member of the school in which they teach. The PRTs talked about sharing their developing expertise in visual art with school colleagues: *... tell other teachers and give other teachers ideas...show them my work book and show them what we did.* (PRT). When asked if this had been done in any formal way, by organising school professional development, the following comment was made: *Yes. I will be doing it on the masks. We did it with the drawing. Taking ideas especially with the portraits we were doing* (PRT).

Developing confidence enabled the PRTs to develop the confidence of their school colleagues in the teaching of visual art. The two communities, of which each PRT is a member, were intersecting. Schwen and Hara (2004) made the point that fully functioning communities of practice are not designed but evolve naturally. The group of participating PRTs involved in the research project evolved into a functioning community of practice supporting its members in their developing expertise and supporting the schools in which they teach.

When talking about taking students to visit cultural centres, the principals and teachers also talked about the opportunity teachers had to view good professional practice exhibited by the museum / gallery educators. It would seem the teachers involved in taking students to cultural centres are given the opportunity to develop their own practice through the observation of the museum / gallery educators. The two communities of practice are intersecting.

Connecting Communities

The developing relationship between cultural centres, local primary schools and local communities became an overarching theme linking the two projects. Analysis of data from both projects points to the importance the teachers, principals and museum / gallery educators attached to the relationship between the cultural centres and the schools within their community. The principals and teachers talked about the role cultural centres play in the development of teacher expertise, student creativity and student learning. Teachers and students using the cultural centres build upon the knowledge and experience gained during a visit and the cultural centres develop as they respond to the needs of the schools and their own context. The key to this relationship is the cultural centre educator striking a balance between the needs of the school, the local community and the context of the cultural centre.

CONCLUSION

With arts programmes in primary schools being squeezed by a combination of an expanded curriculum, national testing and a lack of curriculum support, this paper sets out to consider the role played by museums/galleries and their educators in enhancing the delivery of art-based curricula programmes. Evidence based upon the perceptions of participants from two research projects points to the important role cultural centres play in supporting student learning and teacher development. Vallance (1995) made the point that cultural centres are important in providing remedial support for arts learning in schools. The evidence presented in this paper supports this view and suggests that cultural centres are important in providing schools with teacher professional development. Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) description of communities of practice, the evidence describes the importance of the working relationship between schools and cultural centres. Hildreth and Kimble (2008) highlighted the importance of communities of practice as ideal environments for sharing and developing knowledge. It was this process of sharing knowledge that was described by the participants as they discussed how they developed their professional expertise. Analysed data from both projects demonstrate the importance of situated learning in motivating students, enabling them to develop creative and critical thinking skills. The data also found situated learning was important in enabling the PRTs and teachers to develop confidence in teaching. Lave (1988) described situated learning as a process of the gradual acquisition of knowledge from experts in everyday activities. The data support this view as the PRTs and teachers described the acquisition of knowledge in a situated learning environment. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) emphasised the importance of social interaction in enabling students to acquire knowledge in situated learning. The evidence would support this view as the participants emphasised that the working relationship between the teachers and the museum / gallery educators enabled them to develop their professional practice. The important role played by cultural centres in supporting arts-based curriculum programmes was highlighted by the data. The key to this support was the ability of the cultural centre educators to respond to the needs of the schools within their communities using their expertise and ability to help schools make meaning of exhibits. Hughes, Jackson and Kidd (2007), Vallance (1995) and Ross (2007) highlighted the increasing importance played by cultural centres in providing support to schools. The evidence presented in this paper reinforces this view. Although the focus of both projects has been the arts curriculum, other curriculum areas could also benefit from the support of cultural centres. A greater understanding of the role played by cultural centres in supporting student learning and teacher development would encourage all primary schools to use them as an integral part of their programmes.

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