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## AN INTERVIEW: MAKING ART AS DIALOGUE WITH MATERIALS, MOMENTS AND MOTIVATIONS

### GRAHAM PRICE SPEAKING WITH KERRY EARL

*The University of Waikato*

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Graham Price has worked extensively in primary, secondary and tertiary art education in Otago (1976–1997) and since 2000 in pre-service secondary and primary art education within the University of Waikato arts education team. He has experience in developing art education resources, Waikato professional development programmes, and the development of visual art assessment in primary schools through the National Education Monitoring Project 1995–2008. His research interests include arts integration, the history of art education in New Zealand and how students talk about art. His own artwork spans painting, jewellery and sculptural responses to calligraphy. He actively participates in a cappella choral performance.

In this piece Graham shares his views and his approach to art making.

#### Art as interaction, as dialogue

**Graham:** What the camera gives you is not ‘your’ world. It gives you a visually accurate world. But there’s another world to discover, which is the one that is innately yours.

Every artist has got his or her own way of mark making. It is not about copying some perfect model. It is about finding an authentic way to remember, express, recognise significant experience.

**Kerry:** There is also the difficulty in comparing what you imagine in your mind, with your actual physical skill to be able to represent it.

**Graham:** This is often claimed—I can see it in my mind, but I can’t make it. I would question the assumption that memory and imagination is, in fact, visual information.

It is not about having a finished mental art object ready-made which you then put down on paper. It is an interaction with what is arising on the paper. You are in dialogue with what you are creating at the time. And sometimes the media you are using, the paper, the mark-making material, actually drives the image more than you think it does. It cannot go to where you want to force it, you have to actually learn how to work within the limitations of what you are using. If you are not having success, then what you are building is the patience, endurance and persistence to wait for the image to emerge.

How much do you want it? Does the experience even matter to you? If you are just doing it to build a skill, or to please a teacher, or to get approval then that is not a strong motivator. You actually have to want to draw something. Drawing puts you into relationship with the object, and helps you remember it, and retain it, and have a feeling tone about it, through an experience of sustained perception. Taking a photo does not give you that.

People have experiences that they remember through different senses. I used to think I was a visual person, and that I had a visual way of recording my memory. It was not until I realised, when somebody was really digging me, ‘Okay, so what are you seeing?’ I said, ‘Well, which side do you want to see it from?’ ‘From the back it looks like this, from above it looks like that.’ My major sensory memory was touch. Three-dimensional. So my eye operates like I am touching the object. And I’m ‘seeing’ with a sense of touch, not with a sense of vision. I mean, I have developed a sense of the visual, but you take me into a room, I will tell you where the furniture is. You ask me to pack up a car boot, and I will make everything fit. I put that down to lots of experiences when I was young. Dad was a joiner, and I had the equivalent of a Soma cube experience all the time, of making—stacking things away. I was playing a lot of block play, which gives you a kind of a three-dimensional touch. Now for other people, they might be kinaesthetically dominant. Or they might be visually

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dominant. You have still got the skill issue of how do I take what I know, and turn it into something that other people can understand.

Sometimes, like around age eight, nine, 10, they often used to say with child development, ‘Look if the kids are having obstacles with drawing and painting, take them away from that for a while. Give them clay. Give them three-dimensional experiences.’ Because it requires a different kind of thinking and understanding, and you can get over that block of, ‘I cannot do art’. You know, you are actually still making art, but you are doing it with manipulating materials. The sculptor thinks differently than the painter. Each medium requires a different kind of thinking process. So when you deliberately limit the kids’ experience to two dimensions, because that is the only art you ever do, you are actually limiting their capacity, and you are defining art as only a two-dimensional experience and it is not.

I mean, you see Donn Ratana, and he picks up two things and he puts them together in a new way. That assemblage that Picasso was so good at—take a bicycle seat and the handle bars, and turn it in to a bull’s head, just by the way they are rearranged. This way of ‘thinking-with-the-material’ is totally different to, ‘I can draw that’. Picasso taught us to see like that. He broke that ground. He said, ‘Take two foreign objects, put them together and create a third.’ You know? So we learn possibility by seeing what other people do. Or we describe that as meaningless. We are not even interested in what he did. But when you say, ‘Hey that is clever, how did they do that?’ Then you are curious; then you want to find out. Then you start learning. It is all about curiosity.

You can see where I am going, so there is healing the block. The block is, ‘I cannot,’ for whatever reason and that usually clicks in after the age of seven. I mean, the classical model of that was that kids reach what they call a ‘representational crisis’. They do not know how to represent what they see. And their previous—young symbols, no longer satisfy. You know the ‘I drew birds like a flying bum’. They’re symbols, not representations of the way things look. As soon as we bring in an awareness that images I make can actually look like the real world you get a definition of art being about visual representation. And it is such a narrow definition of what art can be.

### **Children’s art-making**

**Graham:** If you were asking the question why would it be desirable to have art in a primary school? That is not the same as an adult acquiring art skills because they want to do something with art. You know? It is like why is it in the curriculum? What are the possibilities? It is the novice teacher, who is not competent—not confident—in his or her own art-making, suddenly being pushed in charge of making children’s art programmes. And they think art is about coming up with a product that looks like ‘one of those’. ‘I got it off the Web’, and it is a recipe. It kind of worked for me, and the kids liked it, but I do not know where to take it next, ‘cause I do not have enough art knowledge.’ Which brings us back to if art is important enough for it to be in the curriculum, and I think—for kids—it is a way of making sense of their world, interior and external. When it gets overly defined as the external, you stuff away the imagination pathway. We no longer value our imagined experiences in art because we just keep trotting out the same visual cliché that we did four years ago. It is stopped satisfying because, ‘I am not growing, I am not developing, I am not learning to do it better. And hey, look at Freddie—his is so much better than mine’. So we stop doing it. ‘I am no good.’

**Kerry:** They are completely undermined by a frame on the wall.

**Graham:** True. We are assuming the teacher is the major source of approval. Whereas, I think peer group is the major source of acceptance or rejection. My role as the teacher provides the opportunity for peer approval, which is more powerful than opportunity for teacher approval, or parent approval. The peer group matters more to them, and if they think their stuff is not going to match up to their peer expectations ... Somebody who can draw anime or cartoons, or you know, the perfect horse, or a great looking racing car is going to get peer approval fast. Then that gets defined as what ‘good’ art is.

It is complicated because the minute you start valuing the adult art product and the adult art world, then you get aberrations like schools trotting out McCahon and getting seven-year-olds to copy it. Which is just weird. There are all sorts of false pathways that have been thrown up by different models of art education. One is, ‘Let them go, they are all expressive, and they all know how to do this’. ‘Get out of the road, do not show them anything, just give them the materials and let them play.’

That only lasts for as long as your curiosity: ‘What can this material allow me to do?’ But if you do not have a motivation, you do not have a reason to make an object.

### Deepening the learning

There is a classic art education quote from artist-teacher Robert Irwin: ‘Give the student what they want to learn, and then prove to them that it is not enough.’

He was talking about art school undergraduates and saying they all come with varying expectations of what art is. ‘I want to be able to do this.’ He says, ‘Show them how to do what it is they want to be able to do. And then place them in a context where what they want to do, is not enough.’ You extend their boundaries of what might be possible, but you have given them the success, and built their confidence around an issue that they wanted to explore in the first place.

Related to this idea of confounding a student into a new challenge is the story of the artist Kandinsky. Working with students in 1923 in the Bauhaus School, he had a master class. Incredibly talented students, and they walk into this master class, and all they see is a pencil, paper and a lemon on the table. Kandinsky dryly says, ‘Draw the lemon.’ So they all think, ‘This is pretty basic’, you know? So they all sit down and draw the lemon. And then he comes round and chops the lemon up, and says, ‘Bite the lemon. How many of your drawings have got that?’ Now, we ask the new question, ‘How do you draw something that tells you about taste?’ You know, it is not even a visual piece of information, and yet attending to the sensation can make your marks change—you might change the material, you might do thin, bite-y lines. You might choose a particular kind of yellow to get that sharpness. You might put it against a purple, so that it looks even more sharp. There are logical decisions, but you can actually trust your intuition to take you somewhere new if you just keep looking. ‘Oh, if I did this, I get that effect. Oh that’s closer.’ So you are trusting—you are looking at what you are getting, and you are making decisions about, ‘That one is more what I am after’. And you follow that path. It is trusting that looking at what you produce, and having another go, or developing something that maybe accidentally happened, and taking it that little bit further. It is all about, ‘What happens if?’ and accepting what happens when. ‘What happens if?’ is your first activated question. And then, learning from the response.

### The notion of slow time

**Graham:** Key to me is how are we dealing with the child’s desire to make. They have to ‘want’ to make, that intrinsic motivation that is around a desire to want to communicate with self, or remember something, or explore something. Without that motivation, everything you might set as a task is just an empty skill practice, and they will get bored with that eventually. It would not sustain the learner. They have got to keep wanting. You have got to sustain their wanting long enough to allow something new to emerge. If they give up, if you lose your confidence in their persistence, if you have no belief that keeping on trying takes them somewhere new and interesting ...’

**Kerry:** So that is what your ‘slow time’ actually refers to, a kind of patience.

**Graham:** It is a patience that also involves repetition and development. It is a quality of attending. It is mindfulness. It happens to be achieved through movements of the hand holding pigment, and the eye. And being in a quiet, supportive place. It does not necessarily have to be quiet, it can have an instrumental soundtrack. It is about giving over the need to get on to the next thing, or to have instant success. As a teacher, you generate that by just pushing slowly from, ‘Okay, you have been able to do this careful looking for five minutes with attention. Now I am going to make each new challenge a bit longer’. And you have to get used to the idea of, ‘Oh okay, so we can put this down today, but we can pick it up again tomorrow and carry on’.

It is a mode of being in the world. Observation for art has been scientifically described through tracking eye movements by Tchalenko. We look differently when we are drawing, than when we normally are looking in the world. So if you were walking down Victoria Street and you were looking for an ATM, you are constantly on scan. You know? The eyes flick, flick, flick, flick, flick. What you require when you are trying to draw something from observation is the ability to sustain your viewing in a very controlled way. Tchalenko calls it “target locking”. The eye looks ahead and the hand catches up to that point. The eye has to be slow and methodical, and aware of tracking. If we are

drawing something personally expressive, and memory-centred, or sensory-centred, then it is not about the eye tracking. We are tracking feelings, memories and it is not going to look like the object; it is going to feel like the right move to get the feel of the movement. Or the feel of the experience. So that is about trusting your own repertoire of gestures. It is not only about training the eye/hand co-ordination. It is the hand co-ordinating with something else, perhaps the remembered experience, the emotional nuance.

### Using art materials

**Graham:** Let us get onto colour mixing. Colour mixing is such an easy thing to teach. When the focus is, ‘I’m trying to paint me in a red jersey, I do not know how to mix that particular red—oh, this will do’. You know? ‘I take the ready-made stuff from the bottle’. It is about a lazy lousy compromise ... It stands for ‘red’ it does not have anything to do with the variety of reds I am seeing. Perhaps it is having too much to think about, so that you cannot actually focus on the one thing you are trying to master at this moment ... mixing the right colour.

The other side of that is, ‘I, the art teacher, have given you the most suitable raw materials that when you mix them, they actually work’. Because some art materials are so cheap they leave the pigment out of the paints, and you have got this sort of, kind of, blotchy stain that is already a mixture of colours. ‘How do I make that brown? I haven’t got that ready-made brown in my paint palette, so I will give up.’ They have not learnt to control colour and they have not learnt to control form. They have not learnt to see an edge accurately. Do you tackle all those things at once? Well, they are always all there, but you do not want to set up every scenario as, ‘Now we are going to paint the Mona Lisa’. It has got to be sometimes, ‘Let us try this little practise thing. Get a bit of control over that. Now let us use that way of working in something I actually care about’. That’s the key. You can jump through my hoops for a wee while, [but] you are going to get bored with that, unless you end up making art about what you care about. It is like creative writing, you know, when it is the best creative writing going to come? It is going to come out of an experience that you want to write creatively about.

I think what we were missing in classroom art is motivated, meaningful experiences that create the need to say something. We teach kids to conform, and then we ask them to be individuals. There is a tension in that. We teach them to comply, you know, 90 percent of the day. Then we say, ‘Oh, for the next hour we want you to be freethinking, independent, creative, imaginative beings.’ We have not scaffolded that disposition in any other part of the school day. We have tested, we have shown them answers, we have defined outcomes for everything. Suddenly we want them to be creative. What does that mean? Oh, it means copying somebody else’s creativity. ‘I will make mine look like that.’

**Kerry:** The same thing is, I think, happening with play, which is now being reintroduced.

**Graham:** Play is exploring without the need for a defined outcome. You are interacting with a medium, materials, experiences. That is play. That is how creative people work—it is playful. If you are not having fun, you are probably not being creative. You are probably being derivative of somebody else’s ideas. But if you are having fun with something, you are curious, you are alive, you are watching. You see what happens. You are more likely to come up [with] new solutions than you are if you are just learning how to be skilled with this technique.

My idea about play is, ‘Hey let us see if we can learn how to colour mix. I want to see 20 different greens. Show me 20 different greens, and when you have got 20 different greens, I am going to point to one and say, “mix me that one again”.’ ‘Oh, I can do 20, but do I remember how I did that?’ I said, ‘If you can do that again three times with accuracy, then you have learned how to control colour.’ That is when our playing has purpose. ‘How many different greens can you see? You have got two different blues, you have got two different yellows, you have got a white. How do we make greens darker and lighter? What happens if we put red into them?’ That is scaffolded, meaningful, exploration ... which we used to call play. Some kids seem to be able to sustain themselves in a play mode, really easefully, and I do not know whether that is upbringing, or opportunity, or environment generally. Donn, for example, cannot remember ever learning to do art. He just always did. He used to get a stick on the sand and drew these big pictures of horses and things like that. He just always knew how to draw. I remember consciously teaching myself to draw, probably about the age of 14. And I

re-explored that process when I went to Teachers' College. 'I want to learn how to draw' was my motivation and I felt I had the time.

If a teacher does not know how to take a student to the next step, when the student reaches a wall, you are not as helpful as you could be. If you do not believe that encouraging persistence is necessarily going to improve skill, then you are not even going to set up the opportunity for people to carry on and support each other and support themselves. Instead the teacher will decide the art lesson is going to be over in an hour.

### The talent thing

**Graham:** The talent thing, the talent thing. Art of any kind is like learning to ride a bicycle. You did not arrive in the world knowing how to ride a bicycle. You fell off a few times when you started and you might have had trainer wheels. You might have had an adult holding onto the carrier, while you learnt to steer. But sooner or later, through repeated practise and desire, you learnt to do it. And once you had learnt to do it, you do not forget. I think there are a requisite number of hours of practise to trust that level of confidence. What has to happen for the teacher is that they have to believe in your ability to gain that skill and set up the scenarios that help you have the practise, you need to get to the goal you are trying to get. I did not know that when I was a beginning teacher. But I just kept believing in the kids. They trusted me—foolishly or otherwise—and eventually they started producing really good artwork. All I was doing was gradually increasing the time and opportunity they had, approving what they gave me, and asking them, 'so, what is working? What is not working? What would you like to try next?' I did not give solutions. I gave time and attention,

**Kerry:** You were circulating at the time? Or you were working? Did you monitor? Are you going round chatting?

**Graham:** Ah, well there is a magic thing that I teach our students here. I do not know that they realise how powerful it is. As an art teacher, you are constantly seeing the learning happening in front of you. You know exactly what is going on in the room, you can look around, 'Oh, that is interesting what that kid is doing. Oh, he has learnt how to do that'. And so the magic for the teacher is just in the watching. And then, when you see somebody who is stuck, you either go to them and say, 'Oh, tell me what is happening for you?' Or you go up to them and describe their work to them without judgement. Now that takes a bit of doing. You do not say, 'That is good, that is lovely, keep going.' You say, 'Oh, you have used a nice yellow there for the cheekbone, and you have made it go darker underneath the chin. That is really interesting.' Now all I am doing, is describing what I see is happening in the image back to the kid. The fact that an adult has described to the child what is happening lets them know that there is a meaningful audience. The teacher is the kid's first audience, and it is a position of trust. You have been let into their process, and you are letting that kid know that you have seen them. And you are seeing the decisions they are making. There is tremendous power in just being the articulate witness. You are not saying whether it is good or bad. You are just describing what you see happening in the work. They might come back and say, 'Oh, I do not like that yellow now, I think I will change it.' You just say, 'Oh, what are you going to change it to? Where are you going to go next?' So you are not telling them what to do. You are the witness to their product that is emerging in front of both of you. It is a very privileged relationship.

**Kerry:** And a witness to their decision-making that they may not be able to articulate.

**Graham:** Yeah, exactly. In the meantime, I am describing and I am reinforcing the skills that they are intuitively doing, but not realising yet that they are doing it. I remember seeing a video clip of seven-year-olds discussing their painting. And another kid in the class was saying to this child, 'I love the way you have done those clouds. How did you do that?' She says, 'Oh, I do not know, it just happened.' And then the kid reflected a bit more, 'It might be the way the blue and the white just mix together, while it was still wet'. Now that is insight. That child having articulated their thinking is likely to reassess that discovery when needed.

You get the insight because somebody has asked you, 'How did you do that?' Yes there are intuitive accidents, but the real learning happens when you recognise the accident just gave you something special, and it was repeatable.

**Kerry:** And there is more power in that question coming from a peer. So we are moving from talking to teachers, talking about teachers, talking to students of art, whatever age. And talking about children.

### Speaking to 'teachers and curriculum' readers

**Graham:** My question[s] for a teacher readership, then, might be, 'what is the best way to support kids' art learning in a school setting? How do you go about developing your own knowledge professionally? Are there some basic foundational ways of behaving in a way that actually supports kids art making? What are some of the habits that happen inside primary schools that actually inhibit and close down art growth? What attitudes are you trying to foster? And what are the best strategies for doing that? And where do you get your information from about that?'

We have got a profession that has now got no art advisors or sustained professional development. There has been a major devaluing of pre-service experiences in specialist fields of knowledge. Over the last 40 years we have decreased the opportunities for teachers to learn in art, and probably in a lot of other fields as well. We have become impatient teachers for ready-made online resources. Even experienced teachers scan resources from the point of view, 'Oh, I like that. I could get my kids to make one of those'. So they are starting from the premise that art is about the ability to replicate a model, to carry out instructions, to get 'one of those'. Art in this time-pressured strategy is not an active way of engaging in the world in visual terms. They are not teaching how to see, how to imagine, how to control the media that kids are working with. They are giving them a few one-off experiences. So you might hear it said, 'Oh, the kids will get bored if we do painting for a whole term.' So what is going to drive your art programme? It has got to be the desire to say something. You will get better at using the media, if you get repeat opportunities. If it is a one-off, you are going to get a one-off response with no development in perception or material skill.

Short-term goals that are going to be achieved in 40 minutes on a Friday afternoon are not going to develop skills. So we are actually preventing kids from getting better by the quality of the materials we give them, by the amount of time, and frequency of repeat opportunities. If we do not provide those things they do not get better. You might be distracting them into activity but you're just keeping them busy.

This arises from defining art as a product. For me, however, art is about a process of engaging. That is the bit that is missing. From my perspective, if you can draw from observation, and accurately, then you can also draw expressively. Now you have probably got an innate bent to doing one or the other because you are more used to one or the other, or you value one more than the other. But unless you are put into the situation of actually having to develop the whole of your repertoire, observed, experienced and imagined, two and three dimensional, then your students are being short-changed. The crippling thing is that the teacher may be limiting the kids by their own perceived limitations. Instead of examining, 'I wonder if I really empower kids? Do I actually have to teach skills? What if I gave a more challenging, more motivating, more engaging focus?' And what about returning to the image to rework it, and stop trying to achieve everything in one sitting.

With a lot of younger kids, if you get them to paint something, they will paint the object, and then you say, 'Oh, what are you going to do with the background?' 'I will fill it in.' I go the opposite way. I say, 'Let us create a world; let us create a space. I wonder how many greens you can mix? Can we turn this into something that feels a little bit like walking through the bush? Now, how do you want to inhabit that? Who is there? Is it a person? What are they doing? Is it an animal? What do they look like? Let's get some visual information that we can actually look at, and draw in chalk on the top of our background. Let's put some life into this created world.' So artworks develop by becoming cumulative solutions to problems that are scaffolded from an early, achievable sense of satisfaction, into something more complex—'I am adding more ...' 'Oh, you have been using your finger, you have been using fat brushes. What say I give you a really fine brush now? And you can go back in and get some of those details you have not done.' I see painting not as an object coming out of your head, and completed—it is more like it is a successive series of layers that are built on top of each other. You work from the big area scenario down to the finer detail, and you build it up slowly. That is a classical way of thinking about painting, and it comes from pre-renaissance. A painting does not all happen in one hit. Cezanne had about 10 pictures a year that he was working on. He just went back into making important decisions, seeing what it looked like, walking away, working on another

painting, coming back a week later. That is the other thing, we try to do single objects, instead of saying, 'Actually, I could have three paintings on the go. While this one is drying, I can be working on this one.' It is about setting up the situations where the kids care about what it is they are making because it is their own problem. They have made it their own. Then we must give the time to accomplish that with some skill teaching along the way if they get stuck—the 'how to'. What tends to happen is a teacher focuses on the 'how to'. 'I am going to teach you how to make one of these.' So they disempower the child's discovery and engagement with his own imagery.

**Kerry:** You have got something to put up on the wall though, at the end of the day.

**Graham:** That is right. And who makes those display choices? My attitude to that is a kid should have a right, in a classroom, to have a space that is theirs, and they choose what goes in that space to be shared publicly. It is not that everybody's artwork goes up every time you do an art lesson. Because sometimes it does not work, and you do not want to be seen for what does not work. So you would rather put up a piece of writing. The space for display in a classroom should be about a child choosing what they want to share. What is your motivation as a teacher for putting it on a wall? Aesthetic environment, parental approval? And once it is on a wall, does anybody talk about it? Is there any kind of sharing around it? Do they write about what they learnt?

**Kerry:** They might do a little self-assessment?

**Graham:** Or do you get little Post-It notes, and the kids write a response to each other and stick it next to the painting that says, 'Wow, I love the way you have done this tree bark.' You know? Do we really take time to celebrate visual learning? Those displays where the finished product never gets looked at again, are wallpaper. Research in art galleries tells us that most people look at paintings for three seconds and move on. So the challenge for the visual artist, and for the teacher in the room, is to get kids to want to look again. 'Do you remember when we did this? Or if you were to do that again, how would you do it differently?' Or, 'what can you learn from looking at Charles' work? What has Charles done that Peter has not?' So whose work do you call upon to illustrate the possibilities? I have seen great practice where the teacher just says, 'Oh, you want to know about colour mixing? Ask Bridget, she has got that nailed. Get her to give you a wee lesson.' You do not know much about art? So recognise who knows inside your class, and empower buddy relationships. Do not avoid art because you do not know enough. Set up the art opportunity and let the kids communicate. Get them working in pairs, and get them working on the same painting together. You know, we always think that art is about being independent, solo, expressive and personal. It is not about sharing a problem that we sort out together and come up with a product that we collaborated on when team effort drives [the] most creative practice professions now.

**Kerry:** So take the sandpit idea into the art class?

**Graham:** Sure. Kids sometimes work better in informal places where the expectations are different. The stakes are not so high. So you could do a little installation with finding sticks and leaves, and make some physical assemblage. We are not used to thinking about making a visual object by collaborating. Working together you have to talk about why you want it there, and when it works, and when it does not work. When sharing a goal you have got to give each other feedback along the way about what you like, and what you do not like. You are actually learning a lot more because you are involved and you are making your decisions articulate, and you have got somebody who is interested in what you are doing, who is a co-collaborator. Now, as teacher, you cannot be the co-collaborator for every child in your room. Share that role with the peer group.

I mean if the art teacher has done a good job, basically s/he sets up the motivation; s/he has provided and structured the materials. The materials are suitable for the task that is been asked of. You step back and you just watch. And when you see things beginning to happen, you affirm that. When you see things rocking, you get in there, and you ask about what decisions they are making, 'what are you seeing? And what are you trying to do?' You are not trying to force them to come up with a particular product; you just want them to be engaged. If they are engaged, and the materials are suitable, then learning will occur. But at some stage, you want that learning to be objectively expressed through reviewing their experience and remembering it. So that they can do it again. 'What did you learn?' And I am not talking about success criteria or WALTs (we are learning to ...). I mean you are talking about creativity, about being open-ended enough not to be able to define what the finished product

should look like. We are learning to play, explore, discover. We are not learning to make ‘one of those’. If art = product, you have already lost the opportunity for teaching creativity, and imagination, and discovery.

What happens for most art projects is that the child and the teacher fixate down to what the product should look like, far too early. So why aren’t we using materials in a way that remains playful? Probably time pressure, but that is stopping the project growing into something else that actually might have more agency. Art really takes off when you start with an idea, and on the basis of what is emerging on the paper, your idea changes, and shifts. I am saying, ‘it is about dialogue with material.’ What is the voice of the medium? It is all about noticing what happens when you do this. What happens when ... what happens if ... and making new choices on the basis of what the media gives back to you. And what your current skill level gives as feedback.

So why do we make art? I’d want to say something about the one theorist that really, I think, nailed it for me. ‘The arts were always a human way of making something special.’ Dissanayake said, “Art is making special.” Culturally, socially, historically we made art because we were trying to make something that was already impacting on us, more special. It’s an enhancement of the ordinary. If that is the reason for making art, then we need to deliver the experiences we want to treasure, we want to celebrate, we want to make more of. From that insight, the motivation for making the art in the first place, is the most crucial thing. I might be harking back to my origins, where I was taught in that way, by some pretty persuasive people who emphatically said, ‘Teaching art to children is more about motivation than it is about technique.’ I am talking about a child’s intrinsic need to communicate. ‘I want to make ‘this’ image.’ And if the student does not believe she can have the time, the opportunity or the skill then that gets in the road of them having confidence to even attempt their intrinsic image. The job of the teacher is to give room and to believe in the student long enough, until they believe in themselves.

*What are the questions you can take away from Graham’s reflections on art and his engagement with it in education? How can we help ourselves to progress in art beyond Friday afternoons? Can we commit to play? What are our motivations? What do our students want to make special?*