



Trolls aren't known for their ability to think!

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey

Standing 3.6m tall, these impressive fibreglass troll sculptures were created by the original film artists at Weta Workshop. William (on the left), Tom (ready to stomp) and Bert. Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Visited during the 16th International Conference on Thinking.

A PLACE FOR SKILFUL THINKING IN VISUAL ARTS

THE GALLERY

Richard Coote



At the end of last year Birkdale Intermediate School completed the building of a small Art Gallery as part of a new Arts Centre. The visual arts gallery was developed to enhance our visual arts and skilful thinking programmes. The gallery is to give visual, and on occasions, performing arts a place to celebrate, reflect and learn. It signals to our community the value we place on a quality arts programme.

The New Zealand Curriculum

Our visual arts teacher is required by The New Zealand Curriculum to have our students, 'Explore and describe ways in which meanings

can be communicated and interpreted in their own and others work.' As part of this our students spend a good deal of time discussing their own and others works of art. The gallery provides a place free from distractions to discuss in depth, to find 'what awaits and what hides in the art work' (Perkins 1994). 'Digging deeper for features the artist plainly meant us to find and ponder ... looking for what awaits us in the work, what invites our attention and our responses,' and looking at 'how the artist pulled it off ... the artist's strategies' (Perkins 1994).

A Thinking Curriculum

The school's art gallery is designed to add an additional tool for our visual arts teacher to use when teaching our students to be skilful thinkers. Regularly discussing works of art in the gallery setting develops familiarity and confidence in this environment. It develops the thinking needed to enrich our students experience of, and understanding of, art.

By discussing art in our own gallery as they would at the Auckland Art Gallery we are giving them the confidence to visit such special places. The thinking skills they gain will avoid them becoming 'wall cruisers' looking at each painting for only a few seconds, never deciding what to look at longer and more thoughtfully, never gaining the most from the experience. We want to cultivate their ability to see all that is there to be seen. Kenneth Clark, British author, museum director and broadcaster puts it this way: 'Art is not a lollipop.... looking at pictures requires active participation, and in the early stages, a certain amount of discipline.' We teach this active participation and disciplined response.

In his book 'The Intelligent Eye, Learning to Think by Looking at Art' David Perkins says, 'The connection between art and thinking may seem surprising. Too often, our encounters with art fall prey to a 'look and see' mind-set. We look. We see right away what there is to see, or believe we do. We like it or we do not, and that is all there is to it. But looking at art in ways that make sense of it calls for much more than that. Philip Yenawine, former director of education at New York's Museum of Modern Art, puts it this way: ... 'art is not supposed to be just beautiful, appropriate for a setting, or easy. Its most satisfying function is that it allows us to exercise our minds...'



THE SKILFUL THINKER

Teachers of Thinking - Aotearoa Collaborative

Perkins talks about people viewing art with only their experiential intelligence. He describes this as, 'the intelligence of experience, what we gain from a rich range of knowledge and a multitude of encounters with diverse aspects of life. Experiential intelligence is streamlined for fast, efficient responding, It relies on rapid automatic pattern recognition mechanisms to make sense of the inflow of information moment to moment.' This type of intelligence serves us well in most situations but 'artists reach out for the subtle, the complex, the powerful.' Most art sits here where experiential intelligence is at its most vulnerable. In this area it, 'can all too easily be, 'hasty, narrow, fuzzy, and sprawling.' Perkins says this makes art, 'invisible' to the 'quick takes of experiential intelligence.' He says we need to add the 'thinking dispositions of reflective intelligence' to get the most out of the art. The 90% solution, provided by experiential intelligence, 'serves looking at art poorly, because art worth looking at is almost always an exercise in subtlety. To miss the subtlety is to miss of the art in art. By cultivating awareness of our own thinking, asking ourselves good questions, guiding ourselves with strategies, we steer our experiential intelligence in fruitful directions. This steering function is reflective intelligence.'



Teaching our students to use their reflective intelligence with their experiential intelligence will make the experience far richer. To do this we teach our students to give thinking time rather than being hasty, to slow down looking and ask themselves questions, to have a conversation with themselves and others, to ask questions like, "What's going on here?" "What mood or personality does the work project?" "Where and how does the work surprise me?"

A Place of Learning

While studying at Tufts University, Boston, in 2006 and Harvard in 2008 our teachers came across art galleries belonging to these Universities. We began thinking of the advantages an arts space here at Birkdale Intermediate School would bring. It would allow us to introduce the concept of an art gallery to students who have not yet experienced such culturally rich places.

It provides a place for visual arts to conduct their concluding conversations and show the importance we place on student art. It would also provide a place where parents and family can visit throughout the day to experience the students work without interrupting classes.

When planning a foyer to link the theatre to the rest of the Arts classrooms it was decided to enlarge this so as to create a school Art Gallery. The gallery was designed to provide space to display the best of our students work in a high quality setting.

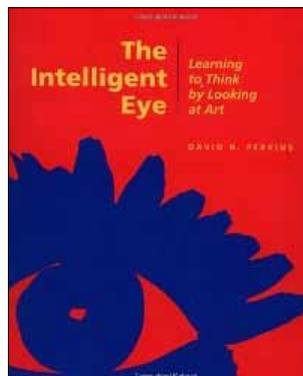
The gallery has also been designed to display and house our small collection of works by New Zealand artists. We also offer the space to local artists wishing to exhibit. It adds greatly to the richness of our school as a centre of learning.

Performing Arts

On occasions when we wish to have special events such as a student's solo recital performed to a small lunchtime audience, the space of the gallery is the perfect space.

We hope that not only our students, but also their teachers and parents, will find this space a place of inspiration and learning that challenges their thinking.

A BOOK WORTH READING

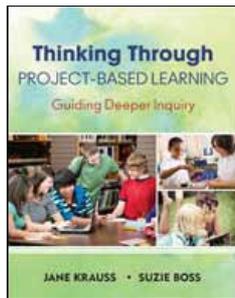


The Intelligent Eye, Learning to Think by Looking at Art' David Perkins.

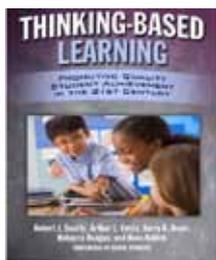
16TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THINKING

Held last January in Wellington, New Zealand. David Perkins gave the closing keynote address. It was the clearest explanation of where the teaching of thinking developed, what's important in improving students thinking and where this may lead in the future. Its well worth an hour of your time to listen to his views. His presentation is available at: <http://vimeo.com/59523046>

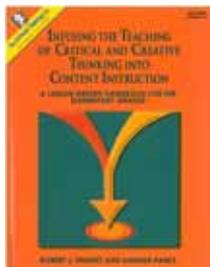
BOOKS WORTH READING



Thinking Through Project-Based Learning by Jane Krauss and Suzie Boss, University of Oregon, Sage Publications.



Thinking-Based Learning by Robert Swartz, Art Costa, Barry Beyer, Rebecca Reagan, and Bena Kallick, forward by David Perkins.



Infusing the Teaching of Critical and Creative Thinking into Content Instruction: A Lesson Design Handbook for the Elementary Grades by Robert J. Swartz and Sandra Parks.

