

## ***“React with more than stunned silence”: A response to Art, culture, and pedagogy* edited by Dustin Garnet and Anita Sinner**

*Art, culture, and pedagogy: Revisiting the work of F. Graeme Chalmers.* Edited by Dustin Garnet and Anita Sinner. Leiden, The Netherlands, Brill/Sense, 2019, 286 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-39007-2

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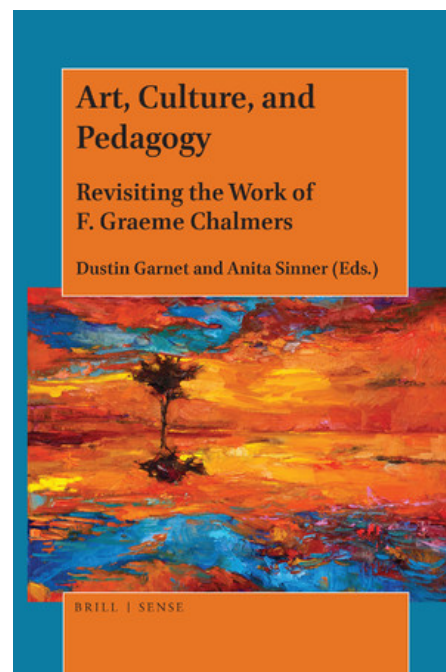


Figure 1. Cover image.

Heather, an art educator, and, Abena, a doctoral candidate, both at Memorial University, collaborated to review this edited volume in which Dustin Garnet and Anita Sinner (2019) bring together a collection of significant publications by art educator F. Graeme Chalmers written over three decades. Additionally, reflective commentaries on Chalmers' work by key international scholars explore both his past contributions and the potential of such ideas. Initially educated in *Aotearoa*, New Zealand, Chalmers' post PhD career as an art educator took him first to Concordia University in Montreal, and then to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Art educators, students, and teachers will find the themes discerned by Garnet and Sinner to be of particular relevance for our contemporary world. Chalmers explored critical multiculturalism, oppression, and the institutionalization of unequal power relations. The editing scheme for the book is sound: each of the three parts (cultural pluralism, diversity, and social justice) is bookended with a reflective essay by a leading art education scholar. That is, Part One consists of “Cultural Pluralism--Looking Back” by Jill Smith, seven of Chalmers’ writings, and a second reflective essay “Cultural Pluralism--Looking Forward” by Christine Ballengee Morris. This pattern is repeated in the next two parts.

### **Heather:**

It was intriguing to follow Chalmers’ developing research agenda, including his interest in Indigenous art. Having spent my childhood years in the isolated island community of Alert Bay, British Columbia, where the art of Kwakwaka’wakw (also known as Kwakiutl) artists made a strong impact on me, I was intrigued by Chalmers’ article, “European Ways of Talking About the Art of Northwest Coast First Nations” originally published in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* in 1995. His premise was that until the late 20th century European accounts of Northwest Coast art compared it to European art, positioning it a “quaint variant of ‘real’ art” (p. 229). However, Chalmers delineated a transition such that by the 90s such work was viewed by art historians “as art by itself, that is art which is inherently valuable” (p. 229). This history helps me better understand one of my most treasured possessions, a wooden mask carved by the Kwakwaka’wakw artist, Jack James. Purchased by my father in the 1960s, with its dark shapes above curved lips (as a child I likened this to my father’s mustache), it has seemed to smile down at me through the years.

As a companion piece, I read Chalmers’ “Art Education in ‘Indian’ Residential Schools in British Columbia,” originally published in *CRAE/RCEA* in 2000. He found that art education tended “to reinforce a white, European view of cleanliness, industry, honesty, neatness, respect and thrift” (p. 143). It was revealing to learn that while I was a child in Alert Bay, only three miles down the road at St. Michael’s Indian Residential School, in the evenings dormitory supervisors had Indigenous children copying, with “a tremendous emphasis on neatness and severe regimentation” (p. 153), images created by Henry Speck, a Kwakwaka’wakw chief and artist. Chalmers found, “what we might have also found 100 years earlier: drawing was being used not so much in the regular school program but by childcare dormitory supervisors who seemed to have used it to keep the children orderly and quiet” (p. 153). The residential school is now demolished, but such knowledge complicates my appreciation of one of Speck’s watercolours, which I inherited from my parents.

### **Abena:**

Chalmers’ “Art Education as Global Education,” originally published in *Research and Development in Global Studies* in 1995 is an inspiring read. As an art educator from Ghana, I am intrigued by cross-cultural issues surrounding art education and Chalmers advocated for meaningful art education that emphasized cultural diversity in art across a global perspective. He noted the word “art” is culture-bound (p. 31). Furthermore, he reminded me of African art and history and the use of carved masks. These are not only a form of art in the sphere of sculpture, but also hold spirituality, power and significance to some societies in Africa. Chalmers addressed issues that touch on the core values of global validity and art in different societies, and their roles

and functions. He sparked an awakening that authenticates societal transformation and the specialness of cultures. I was impressed with how he positioned art in the world and questioned why art is often so benign in schools. This is a question I have personally been battling with for a while--indeed recognizing global issues screams for corrective interventions. Chalmers noted that “no one group’s art is superior to another’s” (p. 29). He argued issues of ethnocentrism, bias, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and racism needed to be addressed in all art disciplines, encouraging and engaging students to use their own experiences “to create awareness of such issues and to take a stand on many global and ethical dilemmas” (p. 29).

In “Cultural Colonialism and Art Education: Eurocentric and Racist Roots of Art Education,” originally published in *Beyond Multicultural Art Education: International Perspectives* in 1999, Chalmers called for a revisualization in art history and art education. He embraced the art of Africa, America, Asia, and the Pacific, and paid attention to a series of art forms that include women and others who are and have been politically and aesthetically oppressed. Chalmers gave a personal account of his experience and struggles of being a person of the Treaty of Waitangi in *Aotearoa*, New Zealand. Written in the first person, the tone of the article communicated the sensitivity of the issue of colonization and its effects on the colonized. Having come from a colonized continent (Africa), I too have incurred some mental damages, and I could relate to several issues raised by Chalmers, i.e. “What is identity, and how has, and is it being constructed through visual arts?” (p. 45). I am now exploring identity as an international graduate student through an autoethnographic lens.



Figure 2. Boachie, A. (2019). *Diversity and Inclusion in its rightful place*. Digital Photography. St. John's, NL: Private Collection.

My digital photograph of feet in *Figure 2* represents the coming together of rich and divergent views and personalities from K1 to grade 6 children in an elementary school for cultural maintenance and social transformation. Chalmers highlights these issues, bringing into focus my role as an early childhood art educator to nurture and foster belonging among all children. The foot represents the longstanding roots from which we have come. This agenda of rewriting and re-vocalising meaningful cultural stories through the visual arts is the driving force of my engagement. The different colours and style of shoes signify the multiplicity of perspectives in their rightful context creating a rich tapestry of contemporary culture using art education as a model of self-expression, creativity, growth, and collaboration. However, the shadows cast on each foot by the others portrays cultural sensitivity and why we need one another to survive the realities of this era of globalization.

### Details

Throughout the collection Chalmers' writing is clear. However, the writing by the other scholars is variable and further re-writing, editing, and copyediting could have addressed problems like the 82 word, one-sentence paragraph on page 78. For many readers such sentences get in the way of accessing meaning.

### Concluding Thoughts

Over many years, Chalmers set the conversations and the complexities of art education on the international stage; he urged art educators to learn from those who have been disempowered and to make art that matters. He argued we must have not merely "an eye for art", but also more than one set of eyes. Art educators should be attentive listeners, not just givers and supposed "do-gooders" (p. 44).

The artistic voices of the colonized are now activated and being re-heard, and Garnet and Sinner's valuable text brings Chalmers' thinking to a new generation. As Chalmers argued, art educators in the 21st century should "react with more than stunned silence to the statistics and implications for equity" (p. 44). It is imperative for us to facilitate educational contexts which encourage students in this multicultural post-colonial world to consider critical questions. Finally, we attend to Chalmers' claim that art educators are equal to constructing a contemporary cultural system which can react to current realities from a plurality of perspectives.

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