



# The importance of aesthetics for curriculum and job readiness: an exploration of student, teacher, and employer perceptions through Appraisal Theory

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## Abstract

Aesthetics is a broad topic viewed from a number of perspectives. This paper understands aesthetics to involve beauty and design, and it is used to communicate meaning, particularly in multimodal texts. Knowledge of aesthetics is necessary for effective communication both during and post-schooling as many professions use aesthetics in their line of work. Yet very little is known about when and how they are taught in schools despite their inclusion in the curriculum. Using Appraisal Theory as a framework, this paper shares interview and focuses group data from students, teachers, and employers regarding the teaching of aesthetics and their importance for job readiness. Findings from the research showed several themes including the recognition that aesthetics is important, the lack of explicit teaching related to aesthetics, and the implicit knowledge of aesthetics by students, teachers, and employers. The study points to the need for aesthetic literacies to be taught more explicitly in schools. The research is significant as it advances knowledge and understanding related to the learning and teaching of aesthetics for job readiness.

**Keywords** Aesthetics · Literacy · Multimodal · Curriculum · Job readiness · Appraisal Theory

## Introduction

Aesthetics is concerned with the study of beauty. In schooling contexts, aesthetics is often noted to be important when designing and presenting objects or texts through various modes (Barton & Le, 2022). When students create multimodal texts, that is, any artefact involving two or more modes of communication, knowledge of aesthetics is important so that effective meaning can be made. Indeed, much contemporary communication involves different modes of meaning including not only language but visual image, sound, gesture, and spatial awareness. For example, digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and web browsers use all

modes to communicate with their readers/viewers. Without knowing how best to use these modes, students will be limited in their communication with others, particularly in professional contexts (Van den Berg & Arts, 2019). It is, therefore, important to learn about aesthetics at school for future job readiness (Kusumasondjaja, 2019; O'Neill, 2009).

Knowing about aesthetics for effective meaning-making is not necessarily intrinsic, so it needs to be taught in schools (Barton & Le, 2022). Importantly, aesthetics is in many curricula across the world, and it is expected to be taught in a range of subject areas (Freedman, 2003) including English, the arts, humanities, and design and digital technologies (ACARA, n.d.). In Australia, a general capability of literacy (ACARA, 2012) also discusses the need for students to both comprehend and compose multimodal texts. Multimodal texts naturally involve aesthetics as they use artistic features to enhance meaning.

To understand the role aesthetics plays in making meaning, students need to know about the unique literacies associated with them. Aesthetic literacies are the skills needed to learn and talk about how aesthetics can enhance or diminish a product's visual appeal (van Leeuwen, 2017). Knowing more deeply about how different modes are used to make

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meaning in multimodal texts requires a literate understanding of the metalanguage associated with each mode (Barton, 2019). Further, in socially constructed literacies, students interrogate a range of multimodal texts/artworks to identify the artist's/author's intent, viewer's/reader's interpretation, and a broader picture of how the text or artwork might be constructed and analysed (Barton, 2019).

In literacy education, Appraisal Theory is often used as an approach to understanding the diversity of texts (Martin & White, 2005). It includes three systems of evaluation that can be used by students when accessing texts—affect, judgement, and appreciation. Appreciation involves how we make meaning of, assess, or evaluate aesthetic features in objects and products (White, 2015). Using Appraisal Theory as a framework, we interviewed students, teachers, and employers about the importance of aesthetics in school and work. Therefore, the focused research questions for this research were: What do students, teachers, and employers know about aesthetics and how does this knowledge align with Appraisal Theory? and Do students, teachers, and employers know aesthetics feature in the curriculum and should be taught at school?

## Brief review of the literature

### The importance of aesthetics in contemporary communication and multimodal texts

Aesthetics is often a critical component of contemporary communication (Petrovici, 2016). In fact, Brath et al., (2005), when exploring the role of visualisation in communication, identified the need for “aesthetic sizzle”, meaning the inclusion of appealing elements. They argue that when there is more knowledge about aesthetics, a communicator can increase “a design’s appeal, intuitiveness and memorability” (p. 1). Additionally, many scholars in literacy argue for the need for students to expand their knowledge about different modes of communication due to the increasing complexities and diversity of technology, populations, and communicative methods (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis et al., 2016). Further, literacy research in educational contexts has

explored the need for schools to address more effectively the teaching of multimodal text construction (Serafini, 2015) including the need to “read” and “write” multimodal texts differently (Vasudevan et al., 2010; Walsh, 2006).

Aesthetics also contribute to the visual appeal of multimodal texts (van Leeuwen, 2017) and therefore the ways in which we communicate through creative design (Reimann & Schilke, 2011; Siefkes & Arielli, 2018). It is important that students know how to include knowledge of aesthetics in their compositions as it has been proven to improve their academic results but also ways in which to communicate in modern times (Lilliedahl, 2018; van Leeuwen, 2017).

### Aesthetics in curricula

The notion of aesthetics features in many curricula across the world. Interestingly it is included in many content areas such as in English or language arts, the arts, and history and geography. Aesthetics can also feature in STEM subjects as knowledge of it is often needed in relation to design. Similarly, subjects such as film and media (often included in the arts), fashion design, and digital technology consider aesthetics in the creation of objects.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) support the inclusion of aesthetic and artistic education in schools. A project developed by UNESCO outlined various skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to promote aesthetics in schools. These are listed in Table 1.

Another example of aesthetics in the curriculum is the Core Common Standards in the USA which state the importance of aesthetics by acknowledging:

an arts-literate individual recognizes the value of the arts as a place of free expression and the importance of observing and participating in the social, political, spiritual, financial, and aesthetic aspects of their communities (both local and global, in person and virtually) and works to introduce the arts into those settings. (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, n.d., p. 17)

While these examples are largely about aesthetics in the arts, they can feature in other subject areas such as those

**Table 1** Project aims of aesthetic and artistic education in schools (UNESCO, 2015)

Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of creative spaces in schools and cultural institutions</li> <li>• Provision of training for teachers and other school staff in different artistic fields</li> <li>• Provision of training for cultural actors</li> </ul>
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of models and structures for conveying arts and culture in schools and cultural institutions</li> <li>• Development of a multifaceted and tailor-made range of offers for cultural education and artistic projects</li> </ul>
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of long-term cooperation projects with local cultural institutions/artists</li> <li>• Promotion of systematic class activities in arts education</li> <li>• Development of the ability to appreciate and appraise works in the visual arts, music, dance, and drama</li> </ul>

mentioned above. An example is the Australian curriculum, where students in English are required to discuss the aesthetic appeal of a range of texts. Students are also expected to learn about aesthetics in geography where questions are posed about “aesthetic, cultural and spiritual value of landscapes and landforms for people” and in Design and Digital Technologies where students undertake “functional, structural and aesthetic analyses of benefits and constraints of design ideas” (ACARA, n.d.). Aesthetics is also studied in all subject areas in the arts as students learn how to convey meaning through aesthetic effect. Table 2 shows specific learning objectives for some of these subject areas.

Further, the Australian Curriculum’s General Capabilities of literacy, personal and social capabilities, creative and critical thinking, and ethical understanding (ACARA, 2012) align with the many benefits of learning aesthetics. Despite the inclusion of the need to learn about aesthetics in the curriculum, there is very little known about whether they are indeed taught in schools. This paper has therefore sought to know when, where, and how aesthetics might be taught. We now turn to the theoretical framing of the research.

## Theoretical framing

Given aesthetics involves knowledge about how to present something to be pleasing to the eye, students need in-depth understanding of how to manipulate different elements. To do so, an understanding of how to appraise objects or texts is necessary. Scholarly work in the field of semiotics has

addressed how students might provide detailed analyses of such texts (White, 2015). White’s work further explains such appreciation through the concept of Appraisal Theory.

Appraisal Theory is a framework that allows students to analyse texts through the identification of emotions, ethical judgements, and/or aesthetic features. Stemming from social semiotics, Appraisal Theory includes a sub-system of attitude that includes three semantic dimensions of affect (emotions), judgement (ethics), and appreciation (aesthetics) (Martin & White, 2005). Appreciation involves students reacting to, and evaluating, the impact and quality of objects or texts by commenting on the composition, balance, and complexity of a work. While both affect and judgement also involve an understanding of aesthetics, for this paper, we focus on appreciation given it is solely regarding aesthetics. Table 3 shows that appreciation involves reaction, composition, and valuation, assisting students with prompt questions for discussing how an object and/or text might look and if the meaning being intended is effective.

In many ways, appreciation aligns with art criticism where students, first, describe an artwork (reaction) using sub-categories of appearance and, second, analyse it (composition) such as colour, shape, and line and interpret and judge a work (valuation) including what feeling is evoked. In the education field, more notably in schools, literacy education (most often taught through language English) and arts education are often at odds with one another. Many scholars have witnessed the disintegration of the arts in preference to literacy (Barton, 2019; Ewing, 2010), yet there are many synergies that we are trying to represent in this paper.

**Table 2** Learning objectives in the Australian curriculum regarding aesthetics

Year level/s and subject area	Learning objective
Years 6–10 Dance	Aesthetic, artistic, and cultural understanding of dance in past and contemporary contexts as choreographers, performers, and audiences
Year 3–4 Design and digital technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertaking functional, structural, and aesthetic analyses of benefits and constraints of design ideas, for example, to different communities and environments including those from the countries of Asia</li> </ul>
Years 9–10 Drama	Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms, and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect
Year 7–10 Earth and environmental science	Ecosystems provide a range of renewable resources, including provisioning services (for example, food, water, pharmaceuticals), regulating services (for example, carbon sequestration, climate control), supporting services (for example, soil formation, nutrient and water cycling, air and water purification), and cultural services (for example, aesthetics, knowledge systems)
Year 3 English	They listen to, read, view, and interpret spoken, written, and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade
Year 9 English	Building a knowledge base about words of evaluation, including words to express emotional responses to texts, judgement of characters and their actions, and appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of text
Year 7 Geography	Spiritual, aesthetic, and cultural value of landscapes and landforms for people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
Years 3–10 Visual Arts	Adapt ideas, representations, and practices from selected artists and use them to inform their own personal aesthetic when producing a series of artworks that are conceptually linked and present their series to an audience

**Table 3** Appreciation (Martin & White, 2005)

Appreciation	Appreciation type	Reaction	Reaction type	Impact
				Arresting, captivating, engaging <i>Did it grab me?</i>
		Composition	Composition type	Balance Balanced, harmonious, unified <i>Did it hang together?</i> Complexity Simple, pure, elegant <i>Was it hard to follow?</i>
		Valuation		penetrating, profound, innovative <i>Was it worthwhile?</i>

Appraisal has often been applied in educational contexts (see Mills & Unsworth's, 2018 work for example), although there remains an issue with students not necessarily having the required metalanguage to describe their appreciation of objects, texts, artworks, etc. We believe that the theory of aesthetics through an arts lens can assist students in learning more about appreciation.

According to White (2015):

Values of appreciation may focus on the compositional qualities of the evaluated entity - how well-formed it is. For example - harmonious, symmetrical, balanced, convoluted or they may focus on the aesthetically related reaction with which the entity is associated. that is, the appreciation is formulated in terms of the entity's aesthetic impact - for example, arresting, captivating, boring, dreary, beautiful, lovely etc. (p. 2-3)

Further, appreciation has either positive or negative status, for example, harmonious versus discordant and beautiful versus ugly. It can also be located on the cline of low to high force/intensity, for example, pretty, beautiful, and exquisite. An appreciation assessment can also include other systems of cultural and social value (White, 2015), so it is important that teachers recognise cultural nuances when discussing appreciation. As students in classrooms are expected to compose multimodal texts, it is critical that they know how to appreciate them, that is, how well parts of an object fit together. Students must know how to judge and then create well-presented assessment that displays an understanding of aesthetics such as in the English curriculum which states students need to know about "the dynamic nature of literary interpretation...their literary conventions and aesthetic appeal" (ACARA, n.d.).

The ability to make judgement or appreciation assessment using multimodal texts is apparently subject to aesthetic experience. To add another nuance to the term aesthetic experience, Baumgarten (1961) challenged common sense notions that aesthetics refers only to judgement or evaluation of an art object that aesthetics is not simply an evaluation of beauty or how pleasing something might be to the eye or the

palate; instead, aesthetic experience is akin to the relational qualities of an experience or flow experience. Relational qualities are those voluntary and involuntary connections among the person, the context, and the activity.

Thus, Augustine & Zoss (2006) theorised aesthetic flow experiences as having qualities of flow, pause, emotional intensity, and meaningful relationships. With this conception, they believe that a book, a painting, a building, a landscape, or an activity could provide relationships that become aesthetic flow experiences (Augustine & Zoss, 2006). This belief lends itself to visual cultures in which we regularly experience and react to images as part of a plethora of other written, spoken, and electronic texts, while we work, study, or play (Callow, 2005). Visual images form an integral part of the new literacy discussions, where students need to read/view, critique, and create a variety of visual texts, from single still images in a picture book to multimodal web pages and the moving images of television and film (Semali, 2001). To this end, Callow (2005) proposed a model to analyse students' responses to appraising artworks and pictures of natural and non-natural settings. The three dimensions of viewing in Callow's (2005) model comprise the *affective*, the *compositional*, and *critical*. The affective dimension explores an individual's part in interrelating with images, that is, their initial and sensual response to visual objects. Compositional dimensions relate to how images are designed incorporating semiotic, structural, and contextual aspects. It includes how different elements in an image, for example, are situated in making meaning for the viewer. Aesthetics is about how artistic features are presented. Finally, a critical dimension values an approach whereby students question particular discourses and/or ideologies that may or may not be privileged in an image. Callow (2005) suggests that "by promoting a critical analysis of how images might position all types of viewers, this aspect also explicitly supports a socially just and equitable approach to understanding images" (p. 13). By integrating these dimensions, the study sought to bring together powerful but different aspects of aesthetic literacy learning and practice to create a more

robust understanding of how students expressed their aesthetic experience using multimodal texts.

In this project, we are interested in finding examples of these kinds of flow experiences in the lives of our students, teachers, and employers outside of school and their professions as well as their experiences in school, classrooms, and professional contexts. By engaging with students, teachers, and employers in conversations about aesthetic flow experiences in interviews, how they appraised these experiences can be investigated. Our research design is grounded in Augustine & Zoss' (2006) theorisation and Callow's (2005) model as described in the following section.

## Research design

### Methodology and methods

As a qualitative research project, this study sought to understand a range of stakeholders' perspectives on aesthetics in school and work. Specifically, it aimed to uncover how much students, teachers, and employers knew about the importance of aesthetics when composing multimodal texts. As such, interviews and/or focus groups were carried out with upper primary-aged students ( $n=30$ ), teachers ( $n=7$ ), and a range of adults working in various industries identified as having aesthetics play an important role in the workforce ( $n=5$ ) (see below for more details on interview protocols and participants).

### Interview protocols

The interviews/focus groups were divided into three sections. The first set of questions focused on participants' definitions of aesthetics (i.e. beauty, ugliness) and personal aesthetic preferences. This set of questions was developed in response to the key question defining and naming aesthetic flow experience (Augustine & Zoss, 2006). The second part of the interview examines participants' viewing of artistic and non-artistic objects, using Appraisal Theory and Callow's (2005) model. The third set of questions sought participants' knowledge or awareness of aesthetic-related learning in the curriculum. That is, whether they knew aesthetics featured in the curriculum and hence if aesthetic literacies were taught in schools.

### Participants

Focus groups ( $n=5$ ) were conducted with year 5 and year 6 students and individual interviews with schoolteachers ( $n=7$ ) and industry employers ( $n=5$ ). Six students were interviewed in each focus group, resulting in 30 student informants. Seven interviews were conducted with teachers of various subjects, including arts, English, and STEM

subjects. Five interviews were conducted with various industry and community partners where aesthetics plays a crucial role in the workplace. This resulted in interviews with a chef, a graphic designer, a landscape gardener, a marine biologist, and a sheet metal worker.

### Data analysis

Six-phase thematic analysis, using a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was conducted. That is, a combination of "theory-driven"/"analyst-driven" and "data-driven" approaches were adopted. The deductive analysis involved producing codes relative to a pre-specified conceptual framework or code-book (i.e. Appraisal Theory), whereas the inductive was based on producing codes solely reflective of the content of the data. The coding process was performed using two coding cycles.

The interview data were analysed using the process of two coding cycles. The first cycle coding (Huberman et al., 2014) used a descriptive coding method (Saldaña, 2015) in which labels were assigned to data summarised in a word or phrase. The first cycle coding process resulted in the development of 179 initial codes. In the second cycle coding (Huberman et al., 2014), pattern codes were generated by grouping similar codes identified in the first stage, and the frequencies of the emergence of each code were noted. These pattern codes are labelled "themes" in this article.

Once the themes were identified, we then discussed them in relation to Appraisal Theory, in particular appreciation, as it explores the notion of aesthetics. This shows how teachers might be able to use the prompt questions and the metalanguage associated with each mode of meaning (see Appendix Table 7).

## Findings and discussion

The findings from this part of the study showed a number of themes including the recognition that aesthetic literacies are important, the lack of explicit teaching related to aesthetics, and the implicit knowledge of aesthetics by students, teachers, and employers.

### Implicit knowledge of the respondents

The interview data were deductively analysed to identify specific mentions of aesthetic features as outlined in the sub-category of appreciation in Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). As noted, Appraisal Theory includes a sub-system of attitude that includes three semantic dimensions of affect (emotions), judgement (ethics), and appreciation (aesthetics) (Martin & White, 2005). Attitude is the essence

of emotion the appraiser conveys about the object. In the emotional region, affective sentences are used to express the appraiser's emotion. The ethical region involves the use of judgemental statements to evaluate an artistic object, whereas appreciative sentences used for non-artistic objects (i.e. natural forms/settings). In this project, we are also interested in aesthetic experiences and personal aesthetic preferences of the participants outside of school and their professions and how these might shape their instances of appraisal. As such, a categorisation of utterances, extracted from student focus groups ( $n=374$ ), teacher ( $n=135$ ), and employer ( $n=108$ ) interviews, was performed. These utterances are related to themes of "Appraisal" and "Views of beauty/ugliness" in which the former deductively emerged from using Appraisal Theory as a framework for appraisal analysis of multimodal texts in the presence of an object of appraisal, the latter inductively from participants' definitions of aesthetics in terms of beauty or ugliness independently from the presence of an object of appraisal. Table 4 presents the results of this analysis.

Appreciation involves students reacting to, and evaluating, the impact and quality of objects or texts by commenting on the composition, balance, and complexity of the work. Appreciative appraisal can be expressed as the appraiser's reaction to the object. This reaction can be about the impact of the object on the appraiser or its quality including the degree to which the viewer thinks the object is beautiful or ugly. In addition to reaction, the appraiser might also focus on the composition of the object (including colour), which may address the balance of the object or its complexity (impacting on feeling). Finally, the appraiser can talk about the valuation of the object such as how worthwhile it is to them as an individual. As such, the sub-themes of attitude can simultaneously occur with the sub-themes listed

under beauty-ugliness. They have been listed separately in the above table, however, as they often feature distinct theoretical frames. Some examples (i.e. representative quotes) in Table 5 illustrate the students' appreciation of aesthetic objects presented to them in the interviews. That is, they reacted to and commented on these aesthetic objects.

### Comparing views of school students, teachers, and employers

To understand further the category derived from inductive analysis (i.e. category "Views of beauty/ugliness and its sub-categories"), thus, aesthetic experiences and preferences, a comparison of perspectives of the three informant groups was considered. In fact, they expressed similar views of beauty/ugliness. Like student informants, as indicated in Table 4, beauty or ugliness was defined by other informant groups (i.e. teachers and employers) to be (i) based on preferences (e.g. hobbies), (ii) appearance or look of an object or person (e.g. design, physical look), (iii) personality, (iv) colour, or (v) feeling (i.e. the vibe). Different from students, the adult groups also viewed aesthetics in terms of their occupational focus. Table 6 illustrates the occupation-related view of aesthetics with representative quotes from teachers and employer informants.

### Explicit learning and teaching of aesthetics

Apparently, the employers indicated a limited understanding of teaching and learning aesthetics in school. It depends on specific jobs; it appeared that aesthetics came to them from the post-school level. Some of them recalled their experience with aesthetics in school:

**Table 4** Themes and frequency counts of sub-themes emerged from student focus groups, teacher, and employer interviews

Themes	Sub-themes	Utterances					
		Student ( $n=374$ )		Teacher ( $n=135$ )		Employer ( $n=108$ )	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Appraisal	Judgement	91	24.3	20	14.8	17	15.7
	Appreciation	47	12.6	25	18.5	18	16.7
	Aesthetic experience	36	9.6	7	5.2	2	1.9
	Affection	30	8.0	4	3.0	2	1.9
Views of beauty/ ugliness	Preference (i.e. subjective)	76	20.3	22	16.3	10	9.3
	Appearance/look (person/object)	36	9.6	13	9.6	10	9.3
	Personality	22	5.9	11	8.1	4	3.7
	Colour	20	5.3	7	5.2	6	5.6
	Feeling	16	4.3	23	17.0	9	8.3
	Occupation-related	n/a		3	2.2	30	27.8

**Table 5** Representative quotes aligned with the theme: implicit knowledge

Representative quotes	Appreciation/views
Sometimes I think it's not about the actual artwork. It's about the story that the artist sees it. It's how the actual back story is of that piece	Commenting on the impact of the meaning behind the artwork ( <i>it's about the story</i> ) (valuation, feeling)
I think they're trying to give like where this place is. Kind of like a Western desert thing. In old-fashioned style	Exploring how the artwork is composed ( <i>old-fashioned style</i> ) (composition, appearance)
Maybe the artist was a bit lonely because there's only one of them, but there also shadows of itself, making imaginary friends	Commenting on the complexity of the work including interpersonal meaning ( <i>a bit lonely, shadows of itself</i> ) (reaction, composition, appearance and feeling)
The rainforest appeals to me. It's very aesthetically pleasing to look at and it's quite relaxing to look at because you are kind of transported to that scene. The smells and the aromas and the birds chirping	Reacting to and evaluating the complexity of the object ( <i>It's aesthetically pleasing/relaxing</i> ) (valuation, preference and feeling)
It's interesting and different. It's like the way that the person's drawn the perspective and everything, you can see two other people I think over there and then one person going like that. And the shape of the head's quite interesting, and the body proportions	Reacting to and evaluating the composition ( <i>the shape is quite interesting</i> ) (reaction, valuation, appearance)
Yes, bike seat. Especially the way the photo is taken, it's on kind of an angle so you can see one of the shadow's bigger, like it's bigger than the actual object. And the other one's cut off	Exploring how the artwork is composed ( <i>the shadow is bigger than the other object</i> ) (composition, appearance)

Well, I think one of the biggest problems they've done is actually, that they've kind of slowed down teaching aesthetics in some areas of the curriculum. In relation to, I don't think it pictures out anymore, as in the paintings and the drawings and stuff. But then, they've kind of grouped it together in relation to music and dance. But some kids will relate to one part of it, but they're forced to do all, which I think makes them shut down a little bit, instead of appreciating what it actually is. And I think it would get back to teaching it properly. I do believe it's going to help with mental health for me too. (Chef)

We didn't really go into much of the design aspects and things like that. It was more about just painting and which do involve the basic concepts for design, but not so much. (Graphic designer)

No, I would have thought though that it would have had something to do... I mean, I haven't been in school for a while, but one thing that I had to do in one of my classes was to design a house. And obviously that had to be aesthetically pleasing to look at as well, as part of it. (Marine biologist)

Many of the students reported that aesthetics was not explicitly taught in subjects other than art-related ones or English:

They've never taught us like, 'Oh, aesthetics is in the curriculum.' They just go, 'Make sure it looks pretty.' (Grade 6 student)

The teachers don't tell us make it... do it like your best job, because all they told us was like, 'Do it. You're being assessed on it. Make sure it looks pretty.' That's all they tell us in art and stuff like that. (Grade 5 student)

Yeah, some... In art and English maybe. In stuff that we're making posters and we could definitely get better marks in it. (Grade 6 student)

Sometimes when we're doing a fact file or a fact sheet, we talk about putting the picture here. It would look better. Having a picture near something is very pleasing to one's eyes. Yeah, but it's not the main focus of something. (Grade 5 student)

Even some of the teachers were not aware of the inclusion of aesthetics in science-related subjects:

I don't teach beauty in Maths in Science I teach facts.

No, I was not aware we don't look at other areas.

I didn't know it was in history, geography and science! Yes in Art but you could look at many areas of the curriculum but I am unsure as to how it fits in the curriculum.

I now realise that aesthetics is incredibly important when my students are creating multimodal texts. I know I need to teach this better so the presentation of their work is more effective.

## Conclusion and implications for future research

Throughout this paper, we argued that learning and teaching related to aesthetic literacies are important for students' schoolwork, particularly in regard to multimodal text composition. It has also been shown that knowledge about aesthetic literacies is important for students' job readiness. As such, interviews with teachers and employers and focus groups with students have shown that respondents know that aesthetic literacies are

**Table 6** Teacher and employer views of aesthetics

Informant	Representative quotes	Appreciation/views
Teacher	As I am a teacher nearly everything I do professionally is about aesthetics. I am always making resources that are engaging for students. I used to love making posters for the walls. Now most things are digital, however my classrooms are always bright and engaging. (with blank spaces for those who don't cope with that)	Describing classroom environment ( <i>aesthetically pleasing resources, classroom bright and engaging</i> ) (composition, appearance)
Chef	Giving people food, because food makes people happy so you see their reaction. But when you're actually putting it on a plate, it's kind of like making a painting, because you're looking for heights, colours, textures, shapes. All those types of things working together to create an experience	Importance of aesthetically pleasing plates to make people happy ( <i>it's like making a painting</i> ) (composition, appearance, colour and feeling)
Landscaper	I get pleasure from it myself. I like to make something beautiful and attractive, and I like to get... I like for people to think, "Wow, that looks nice. I feel really comfortable here, you've made a lovely spot for me there." And because you've got to kind of think ahead, so things are evolving as well. You're not just thinking, "What's it going to look like?" Well, you are. What's it going to look like when we finished this? But we're planning for something that's going to be here for 20, 30 years, so that tree's going to be this big and it's going to shade that	Explaining intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for design ( <i>what's it going to look like, I feel really comfortable here</i> ) (reaction, evaluation, feeling)
Marine biologist	And then if you go to somewhere else where you rely on it for the economy, like the Great Barrier Reef, you want it to still look beautiful. So you work hard to protect that beauty, while still giving back. So yes, you want to make sure that you've got our pretty corals there, you've got all your different fish, your ornamental fish, and your reef fish, and your sharks, and all that sort of thing. So you make sure that's there, but if you say go off to somewhere in a Marine Protected Area, where you don't get people coming in, you shift focus. Your brown corals are still beautiful	Explaining the importance of sustaining beauty in natural landscape ( <i>you work hard to protect that beauty</i> ) (composition, colour, appearance)
Graphic designer	Most probably when you're putting it together and completing it. Make sure it's all... looks all neat, tidy, and supposed to look the way it was designed to look. I think simply because if the designer and you manufactured it and when you put it together, it should all just go bang and you haven't got to think about it	Explaining how to design something ( <i>make sure it all looks neat and tidy, it should all just go bang</i> ) (composition, preference, appearance)
Sheet metal worker	The design and the look of it. Yeah. Well, that would've been style, the shape, whether it'll fit into where you want it to go, and your personal preference, whether you liked it or not	Explaining how to design something ( <i>whether it will fit, personal preference</i> ) (composition, appearance)

important, but they are all in agreement that they are not taught explicitly in schools. Without knowledge of aesthetic literacies, students are at risk of not effectively communicating ideas through multimodal means. Further, as it has been shown from this study, given aesthetics is not taught explicitly in schools, the curriculum is not being honoured as aesthetics features in many subject areas. For teachers, one way to know more about teaching aesthetic literacies is knowing more about Appraisal Theory, as it explores the notion of appreciation (Martin & White, 2005).

Further, our research showed that all participants had intrinsic knowledge of aesthetics because of their personal and/or professional engagement in communication. The students, for example, knew that aesthetics mattered in their multimodal school assessment, but they also noted they were not taught how to best include aesthetics in their work. They also knew about the importance of aesthetics and moreover aesthetic experiences when interacting with others. The teachers also noted the importance of knowing about aesthetics for schoolwork but admitted not knowing how to teach aesthetics specifically, and the employers all agreed aesthetics played an important role in their work.

In answering the research questions for this research: What do students, teachers, and employers know about aesthetics and how does this knowledge align with Appraisal Theory? and Do students, teachers, and employers know aesthetics feature in the curriculum and should be taught at school?, we found that teachers, students, and employers do know about aesthetics, but their ability to talk about it is limited as more explicit teaching is required. The participants' knowledge of aesthetics was therefore limited to the language they were able to use when discussing it. While we could locate the sub-categories of Appraisal in this discourse (i.e. reaction, composition, and evaluation), the extent to which the participants could explain these classifications deeply was restricted. We, therefore, argue that if Appraisal were made more explicit in classroom conditions, then both students and employees would have improved metalanguage to describe, analyse, and evaluate objects, texts, and artworks related to their employment.

In answering question 2, we also found that they did not know aesthetics was in the curriculum but recognised the importance of knowing about aesthetics for future work. It was interesting to find that both students' and employees' knowledge about aesthetics and the importance of aesthetics in different professions was present in the data but in more implicit ways. For example, many of the adult respondents acknowledged the important role that aesthetics played in their daily lives in work, while the students were able to engage with selected images using an aesthetic frame of mind. Again, with deeper and more explicit knowledge about aesthetics through an Appraisal

framework alongside arts criticism, both students and employees could improve their understanding.

If schools can support professional development related to teaching aesthetic literacies, then students will be better placed to create effective multimodal texts, improve their abilities in diverse communication, and hence be job-ready given the prevalence of aesthetics in many professions. While Appraisal Theory is just one way to improve the teaching of aesthetic literacies, the notion of Aesthetics Education could also help students to better communicate by understanding how to judge and evaluate aesthetics in various forms of media.

The work reported has not been previously published and is not being considered for publication in other venues. We, the authors, will not allow the manuscript to be so considered before notification in writing of an editorial decision by Written Communication.

## Appendix

**Table 7** Metalanguage associated with each mode of meaning

Mode	Examples of elements or codes
Aurality and sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulation</li> <li>• Dynamics</li> <li>• Pitch and harmony</li> <li>• Rhythm</li> <li>• Tempo</li> <li>• Texture</li> <li>• Timbre</li> <li>• Tone</li> </ul>
Gesture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action</li> <li>• Contact</li> <li>• Expression</li> <li>• Gaze and posture</li> <li>• Line of action/direction</li> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• Proximity</li> <li>• Weight</li> </ul>
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangement</li> <li>• Balance</li> <li>• Direction</li> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Framing</li> <li>• Position</li> <li>• Proximity</li> <li>• Saliency</li> </ul>
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camera angle</li> <li>• Colour</li> <li>• Framing</li> <li>• Layout</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Line</li> <li>• Shape</li> <li>• Tone and texture</li> </ul>

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## Declarations

**Ethical approval** All data collected from human subjects has been collected in accordance with the standards and guidelines of the human subjects review board (or equivalent body) at the author's or authors' home institution. All ethical procedures have been followed.

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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