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Seeing the Bigger Picture: Investigating the State of the Arts in Teacher Education Programs in Australia

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Abstract: There is extensive research that shows how the arts provide many benefits for all students yet there is evidence that arts education offerings and experiences are decreasing across both university and school sectors. It is important that we recognize the essential role of teacher educators in preparing pre-service teachers to be aware of the 'bigger picture' of arts education before beginning their work with students. Drawing on interview data from eight tertiary arts educators, this paper will provide a timely national snapshot view of their perceptions. It explores their experiences as arts educators in higher education contexts in regards to the 'state of the arts' at their respective institutions. Together with a narrative inquiry approach, this research investigates deeper, lived experiences of the authors in relation to their experiences as arts educators and offers suggestions for improvement to arts education in teacher education programs.

Introduction

Recent research highlights the many and profound benefits that the arts have to offer education (Aprill, 2010; Bamford, 2006). Elliot Eisner's (2002) work for example, highlights the importance of the arts in education and offers eight reasons as to why the arts matter. He explains, that the arts encourage thought and action that is difficult to quantify: "The arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one's choices, and to revise and then to make other choices" (p. 9). While the advantages of learning the arts proliferate the literature, there is an equally large amount of research that reports on the increasing cuts to funding for arts practice and education in both schools and universities (Bamford, 2006; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). Eisner's perception that arts learning 'relies on feel' rather than solid evidence may be one of the reasons why the arts are not consistently valued. Education policy tends to privilege other curriculum areas and skills over the arts (Ewing, 2010) despite research highlighting that without access to arts education children will inevitably encounter a deficit model of education resulting in limited learning experiences (Adams, 2011; Caldwell & Vaughan, 2011). Adams (2011) claims that "the wide field of arts ... are suffering enormously in [English] state education ... despite the rhetoric of progressivism on the part of government" (p. 156). While other subject areas such as Science and Mathematics or other educational priorities such as literacy and numeracy are on the 'financial radar' "the arts are neglected and expected to be sustained through dedication, commitment and passion rather than by state resources" (Adams, 2011, p. 156). The effect of market forces on education, and

particularly arts education, which utilises social justice principles as an important aspect of their approach, inevitably impacts on the type of society we create.

The ideology that drives pedagogy out of teacher education, and teacher education out of universities, and finally the arts out of our schools, is rooted in individualism and models of social behaviour modelled by the market, and is at the expense of progressive forms of education that are informed by principles of social justice. (Adams, 2011, p. 158)

Similarly, the tertiary sector has also suffered major funding cuts, largely due to the global financial climate, although consolidation of resources and staff has been increasingly evident over the past decade (Waples & Friedrich, 2011). In Australia for example, universities are dealing with the decrease in course offerings, the increase of online teaching, and large funding cuts (Leach, 2013). Teacher education is a case in point where certain specialisation areas, such as the arts, are given less time in programs (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, 2012). The problem of having limited arts education in pre-service teacher programs is that limited exposure to the arts can lead to a lack of confidence in teaching the arts in the school context. Pre-service teachers' experience with, and beliefs about the arts, will impact on whether or not they are able to provide quality arts education experiences as graduate teachers. If their experience in the tertiary context is limited and if they do not have previous and positive experiences with the arts, then it is unlikely that they will implement extended strategies in the classroom space and will tend to 'teach how they were taught', if at all (Author, 2005; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010).

Given the current climate it has become increasingly critical for arts educators to develop positive strategies to improve access to arts education in the tertiary sector. This paper aims to provide further evidence of the continuing decline of the arts in education (Adams, 2011) and suggests a number of recommendations in support of the arts in teacher education programs. The following section will provide a brief literature review of the current issues in arts education in relation to the focus of this paper including the value of the arts in education and issues related to teacher education.

Current issues in Arts Education: A Literature Review

Evident in the research is a disparity between the well-researched benefits of arts education and the time allocated to the arts to ensure meaningful opportunities and engagement in arts practice. Over the past few years there have been a number of major reviews in regard to the arts in schools both nationally and internationally. In Australia, for example the *National Review of Music Education: Augmenting the Diminished* (Pascoe et. al. 2005) and the *National Review of Visual Education: First We See* (Davis, 2008) highlighted the importance of both music and visual art and made major recommendations for the improvement of arts education in schools and the community. More recently *Transforming Education through the Arts* (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012) considers the social and educational impact of neglecting the arts, however, as Gibson and Anderson (2008) note, despite these major studies the arts still remain marginalised in schools.

Similarly, international arts education studies such as *The Wow Factor: Global Research Compendium on the Impact of the Arts in Education* (Bamford, 2006); UNESCO's *Road Map for Arts Education* (2006); *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (Eisner, 2004); and *Champions of Change: The impact of the arts on learning* (Fiske, 1999) have identified the lack of arts offerings both in schools and universities and call for major reform in arts education practice. A common finding throughout these publications is that for such reform to happen, change at the tertiary level is essential.

The following section will begin with the ‘bigger picture’ of how the arts are valued in education and then investigate issues in relation to the arts in teacher education.

Value of the Arts in Education

Ideas about the place and purpose of the arts in education and society inevitably have implications for the emphasis and approach of arts programs in school contexts (Wright, 2003). Wright (2003) determined the benefits of arts as being far reaching in their influence, positively impacting upon both person and place, and the inherent reciprocal relationship between the two. Parr, Radford and Snyder (1998) described the value and importance of the arts in relation to energizing the school environment and improving student performance in areas outside of the five key arts areas in Australia of music, visual art, drama, dance and multi-media (ACARA, 2010; Sinclair, Jeanneret & O’Toole, 2012).

The arts have traditionally been considered the area for creative exploration and expression to occur in schools, and are often used to promote the holistic education offered by schools, particularly during open days or school award events through exhibitions and/or performances. There are arguably few, if any better opportunities within the educational context to allow for vital creative experiences (Cornett, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Gamwell, 2002; Zimmerman, 2009). Teachers can use the arts to tap into natural and intrinsic motivators of learning (Hunter, 2005), allowing opportunity to engage young people playfully and artfully and show them ways to explore and better understand themselves and those around them. Lampert (2006) found that art students had significantly higher discipline-neutral critical thinking dispositions than non-art students and were more inclined to employ thinking and reasoning “when solving all problems, not only art-related problems” (p. 47). Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) argue that if we fail to value and find a significant place for the arts in education then we will fail to provide a holistic model of education.

According to Robinson (2001), human beings are innately creative by nature, and Western society is moving into a period where creativity is being valued more highly than ever before, particularly through collaborative practices (Sanker, 2012). Our creative capacity allows us to confront a variety of issues through our ability to produce, react, and invent as a means of negotiating life (Robinson, 2001). Livingston (2010) suggests that creative thinking is neither new nor foreign to most students and contends that it is an integral element of the higher education sector arguing that universities are highly adaptable and have survived for many centuries because they have enriched the ‘commonwealth’ (p. 61). The place and space of creativity in schools is also gaining increasing attention by educational researchers for its’ potential to positively change the direction of people’s lives. Although there is a recognition that creative thinking is an important skill to have as a 21st Century citizen (Florida, 2002; McWilliam & Haukka, 2008), creative curriculum areas such as the arts remain marginalised.

Ewing (2010) states that the arts have the potential to transform “learning in formal educational contexts, and ensure that the curriculum engages and has relevance for all children” (p.1). Ewing’s (2010) report into the arts and Australian Education indicates that the increasing focus on literacy and numeracy has resulted in a drastic reduction in Australian government funding for arts programs. She notes that the exclusion of the arts from the external NAPLAN (National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy) program might lead to a questioning of their value in education (p. 6). Further, she recognises the negative influence that the national testing, together with the introduction of the *My School* website (<http://www.myschool.edu.au/>) has on support for the arts. Where schools are under constant pressure to demonstrate high results in external benchmark testing and there is a general lack

of understanding of the value of the arts to general human learning, it is not difficult to understand why areas such as the arts are being allocated decreased time and funding.

Interestingly, this continues to happen in spite of research that clearly indicates how allowing students' opportunities to participate in arts programs has been shown to boost academic achievement (Bamford, 2006; Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Wetter, Koerner, Schwaninger, 2009; Vaughan, Harris & Caldwell, 2011) particularly in relation to the areas of Government focus and funding - literacy and numeracy. Music instruction in particular, has been shown to significantly increase spatial- temporal reasoning skills (Hetland, 2001), encourage mathematical reasoning (Vaughan, 2001), improve numeracy (Hunter, 2005; Spillane, 2009) and mathematics (Bamford, 2006; Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Hunter, 2005; Uptis & Smithrim, 2003; Vaughan, Harris & Caldwell, 2011). Further to this, Robinson (1999) emphasised that creativity and literacy are of equal importance, and proposed that fostering creativity in students would enable them to interpret and genuinely appreciate the "real meaning of being literate and numerate" (Ewing, 2010, p. 9).

Despite the significance of the demonstrated benefits of the arts to learning there continues to be resistance to acknowledge in policy what inevitably impacts upon practice. Ewing (2010) describes how in the last decade "acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of the Arts has resurfaced, at least in terms of policy rhetoric" (p. 1). However, there still remains an obvious disjuncture between the 'lip service' given to arts education and its priority within schools (Bamford, 2006).

Wright (2003) implores educators and policy makers alike to recognise the opportunities for communication that arts participation provides. It is in acknowledging the expressive and communicative power that the arts can offer that we can come to see how participation in the arts can better prepare students for profoundly human interactions; thinking, caring and acting in awareness. Explicit and implicit arts education can expose students to diverse means and modes of communication and in doing so provide opportunities to deepen understanding of intangible themes (Wright, 2003). Heid (2005) notes that an aesthetic experience is deeply affected by sensory perception and through sensory perception we are prompted to reflect and think (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Eisner, 2002), thereby increasing our cognitive abilities. Importantly, participation in the arts can foster courageous and innovative thinking, and put students in touch with their environment, culture and community (Hansen, 2009), through purposeful embodied pedagogy. Through the arts, opportunities arise for us to connect with our past through access to cultural insight, to our present within embodied participation, and to our future by nurturing creative thinkers and minds accustomed to problem solving and calculated risk taking, thus serving a propensity for lifelong learning (Wright, 2003; Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012).

To ensure arts teachers are adequately prepared to deliver on these ambitions, much responsibility falls on the shoulders of teacher education programs. This aligns with Davis (2005), who suggests that 'artful teachers' (those who utilize the arts and their associated processes and practices to enrich, enhance and inform their pedagogical perspectives) have the vision and power to persistently challenge norms; rewrite the boundaries, definition, and objectives of education. If we are to expect our future teachers to use the arts to their full potential within any curriculum, they will need opportunities to engage in arts learning that challenge them to think creatively, develop proficiency in using arts materials and processes; further their arts knowledge; aesthetic sensibility and "understanding of the arts as cultural activities that are part of the fabric of society - and to reflect upon the work undertaken or experienced" (Dinham, 2011, p. 25). If **practitioners in** teacher education can make it an ambition to foster praxis between skills, attitudes and capacities within pre-service teacher

training programs, they are likely to be better placed to embrace and take advantage of changing curriculum landscapes.

Teacher Education

The difficulty of defining a 'professional self' in relation to evolving teacher identity has been described as a struggle that characterises the novice years of classroom teaching and despite best efforts to provide novice teachers with "rich, formative experiences, there remains a crucial void" (Dotger & Smith, 2009, p. 162). The effectiveness of teacher education programs in their capacity to adequately prepare pre-service teachers for the reality of life as teachers has been under increasing scrutiny (Britzman, 1991; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Zembylas, 2003). In this context, teacher education programs need to consider the inherent complexity of negotiating one's identity as a teacher. Further evaluation and critical review of the status quo within pre-service teacher education programs would align with findings of the National Review of Visual Education (Davis, 2008), which suggest that despite increasing numbers of graduate specialist art teachers in Australia, there is still 'disquiet' in relation to their preparedness to teach visual art effectively. This may in some part be reflective of the notion that teacher education requires conformity to externally ascribed views of 'good teaching' which Webb (2005) suggests may "create dissonance with the personal qualities and pre-held beliefs of pre-service teachers" (p. 206) generally.

The fact that the majority of specialist secondary Art teachers enter pre-service teacher training with "studio art and/or art history backgrounds" (Davis, 2008, p. 177), does not mean they have successfully "developed the knowledge, skills or conceptual understandings necessary to *teach* visual art" (Grauer, 1998, p.20). Goetz and Zwirn (2010) concur and state that "being an artist does not mean that great [art teaching] pedagogy will follow" (p. 8). Knowledge about pedagogical practice and curriculum is tangibly important in the role of an 'arts teacher'. However, there is not a straightforward or simple answer in determining the effectiveness of arts teacher education programs, particularly in regard to establishing whether and how they adequately prepare arts teachers for the reality of the classroom. This is also an issue for artists who wish to become generalist primary teachers as they are often in core arts curriculum classes which provide limited training for teaching the arts to children. Hall's research (2010) into the artist/teacher phenomenon concluded that connections between arts practice and teaching practice "are complex, diverse, difficult to articulate, challenging to implement and do not easily lend themselves to simple impact measurements" (p. 103). This proves insightful when considering Bullough, Knowles and Crow's (1992) point that "little is actually known about *how* a student actually becomes a teacher" (p. 1).

Predicting the success of an arts teacher or arts teacher education programs cannot be determined by the quality or emphasis placed upon their arts practice alone. Although artists may be accomplished in their respective arts practices, this by no means guarantees an understanding of how to teach it effectively (Kind et al., 2007). In this sense, success in artistic pursuits alone does not equate to pedagogical proficiency, however the opportunity to explore and engage in arts practice is reported as being beneficial to the construction of a strong arts pedagogical knowledge and positive arts teacher identity. As indicated by Hunter (2005), arts rich programs can powerfully contribute to improvement in teaching quality, in turn providing students with not only quality learning but also positive role models.

In reality though, if continued decreases in arts offerings occurs in teacher education it will be essential for arts educators to think of creative ways to sustain arts knowledge and practice for pre-service teachers and beginning teachers. Maintaining a positive outlook in

times where priorities lie elsewhere will be needed to continue and support arts education and advocacy. This is particularly important given the impending implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* in schools from 2014.

The overview of the literature has sought to contextualize the 'bigger picture' of arts education and how it is currently being impacted through policy and subsequently funding cuts. The review then considered the significant value of the arts in preparing students to be creative and lateral thinkers. The focus then moved towards teacher education programs and the increasing effect of policy and fiscal tightening on how well teachers are being prepared to deliver holistic educational experiences.

Research Design

Methods and Techniques

This research has utilised qualitative methods to provide insights into the focus of this paper. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with tertiary arts educators from each state and territory in Australia. The authors are also tertiary arts educators and have engaged in a narrative inquiry process from which they have created accounts of their respective journeys as arts educators through a three phase process (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray-Orr, 2007). Extracts of these accounts have been interwoven with those of the other tertiary arts educators' data to provide a reflective account and discussion of tertiary arts educators' views on the Australian Arts curriculum.

Participants

For the purpose of this paper the authors conducted interviews, either in person or by phone, with eight (8) tertiary arts educators, across the five arts domains, from each state and territory in Australia. The interviews ranged from 30 – 60 minutes and the participants consisted of four males and four females with pseudonyms being used to protect their identities. The participants include Beth, a music educator who has taught across the five arts forms; Susan, a drama and primary arts educator; Mary who was responsible for the coordination of all of the arts in education courses; Nathan a media arts educator; Kevin, a dance educator; Natalie who taught drama and dance; Ned a visual arts educator; and Harry a music educator.

The authors have a range of tertiary arts teaching experience ranging from two to eighteen years. Two of them specialise in visual arts and one in music. One is currently completing her doctorate whilst the others were awarded theirs in 2007 and 2004 respectively.

Methods

The semi-structured interview questions were designed to gather data from arts educators about their personal backgrounds, what they currently teach in relation to the arts and their opinion about the new arts curriculum about to be introduced into schools. The following questions guided the interviews:

1. Please outline your arts teacher training and experience.
2. What do you currently teach in relation to the arts?
3. What is your experience of arts offerings in the tertiary sector?
4. What is your knowledge of, and how are you implementing the new *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* in your courses?

A qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken of the interview data. This analysis revealed a number of similarities between the arts educators: that they all had broad and comprehensive education backgrounds and consequently taught across a range of not only the arts but other areas concerned with educating pre-service teachers; that they had diverse teaching experience across a number of sectors – from early to tertiary years; and they had experience in leadership and curriculum development, albeit in different contexts. As such, this analysis identified the following themes: Diversity – experiences and adaptability; Change – curriculum and the tertiary sector; and Advocacy – importance of the arts and partnerships.

This thematic analysis was combined with extracts of the narrative inquiry approach undertaken by the authors. This approach uses a storytelling method to investigate the three commonplaces investigated simultaneously through narrative inquiry: temporality (how people and events have been, and will be affected by the past, present and future); sociality (how the participants felt about particular events and the social context in which they occurred); and place (how the impact of place affects participants' experiences) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor & Murray-Orr, 2007). Initial field texts were written which we exchanged with one another and focussed on the following areas: Transition from the school to the university sector and reasons for this; Tertiary teaching arts experiences; and Experiences with arts curriculum change. These questions also aligned with some of the questions asked of the participants.

The next stage in the narrative inquiry process was to respond individually to each narrative and to seek further clarification by challenging and/or clarifying what had been written. From this process we created interim texts to address the questions that had been asked. Following our consideration of the interim texts from the participants, we then further interrogated the data to seek deeper understandings to more accurately portray our own and the participants' experiences as they related to the three themes that had emerged. After incorporating insights from the previous conversations we created our final research text from which extracts will be used in the following discussion of the themes Diversity, Change and Advocacy through the use of italics. The interviewees' voices will be designated by italics and they will be named in brackets following their quotes.

Findings

As we read through and reflected on the transcripts of the interviews we found many synergies with what our participants were experiencing across the country, which did not appear to discriminate regardless of arts forms.

Diversity

The interviews revealed that each participant had wide ranging teaching experience across primary and secondary schools. They also commented on the diverse range of courses and programs they taught in the tertiary sector. These included courses such as: educational leadership and management, curriculum and assessment, creativity, pedagogical practice, sociology of education, inclusivity and literacy. Gina revealed how *having a wide range of teaching experience in diverse contexts has enabled me to understand difference and has definitely impacted on my teaching approach, however it has also made it difficult for me to concentrate on one aspect of my work*. We considered our own and the participants' ability to adapt to our respective university's needs as both a positive and a negative. It appeared to

confirm the value placed on the arts in relation to how the arts foster creative and lateral thinkers who are also resilient and able to adapt to new situations. However, it also suggests that with increased regulation there has been a decrease in autonomy and possibly work satisfaction across a range of professions (Boden, Kenway & Epstein, 2005), resulting in, for example, arts academics being utilised to teach and coordinate across subjects they were not originally trained for. Mary revealed that *I embed arts approaches into other courses I am teaching using strategies such as visual literacy to interrogate axes of identity, exploring the philosophical basis of the arts through alternative approaches to schooling and ensuring students are aware of arts based approaches in research methodology*. Greenwood and Hinings (1996) note that organisational change and the ability to adapt has increased since the early 1990's largely due to "the complexity of political, regulatory, and technological changes" (p. 1022) that increasingly confronts organisations.

It was also evident that the diverse skills each participant had acquired throughout their professional career were paramount to their commitment to education generally. This enabled them all to have had some experience in curriculum development at either the state/territory and/or federal level in Australia. Due to their years of teaching, both Gina and Mary had written curriculum documents for accreditation and had been part of this process. As the co-convenors of the Arts Education Practice and Research Special Interest Group affiliated with the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), the authors have also provided feedback on the recent draft proposal of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2010).

Experience in the development of curriculum showed a trend in the responses in viewing curriculum as a diversely dynamic process. The respondents spoke of both the benefits and disadvantages of curriculum change, particularly during transition periods, such as currently being experienced in Australia with the staggered rollout of the national curriculum.

I try and encourage them [the students] to see the new curriculum as an enabling document. So again even though I haven't seen it I'm trying to kind of put a spin of the glass 'half full' rather than 'half empty' in terms of how they're going to encounter that curriculum and their needs to implement it. I often say to students that they're going to be pioneers of this work and that they need a really - a good understanding and an integrated understanding of the value of arts education in school, and in the value of how you approach arts education within the curriculum so that they can be the ones to carry that curriculum. (Natalie)

I have an attitude that once students know how to use curriculum in regards to outcomes and then using those outcomes and working through a sequence, then it doesn't matter what curriculum document we are using... my philosophy is if you can teach you can teach, and it's a matter of what documents you use at the time... if they move to another country...they'll have to pick up another curriculum document.

(Mary)

As we read these extracts we were reminded of how people drawn to the arts are adept at finding more than one solution to a problem (Mishler, 2000) and are often chosen to take leadership and convening roles, which was in fact the common experience across all respondents. At times this was necessary, particularly for those who were the only arts academic at their institution. Gina proposed that as a result of the curriculum changes she had experienced that *this has impacted on the way that I present information to my pre-service teachers, explaining that what matters is what they do in the classroom. While there are many changes that happen in their careers this is not necessarily a bad thing*. She then added *artists tend to manage and deal with change well*. For the participants in less urbanised areas they were 'jacks of all trades' and often graciously accepted roles that may not have been in

their specialised or preferred areas. *I definitely have a very heavy coordination role of all the arts areas because I'm the only arts lecturer at the University.* (Beth)

Similarly, their counterparts in larger cities had experience across a number of roles and courses.

I was given a course which was very dull called Administration, Management, Leadership and Change in Early Childhood which was very theoretical. I was given the task of making it more community-based, so we embarked on a range of projects, including arts projects with a local theatre company and design students working with the early childhood students. That course has now morphed into two courses, one's called Curriculum Leadership and Advocacy which I've taught, where students go out and do practice-based work in the community and often arts-based work. We link them up with artists in the community. The other course is called Literacies Across the Early Childhood Curriculum which I'm coordinating this semester, I've done that twice now, which is a multi-literacies approach to the curriculum. (Kevin)

The arts educators described how they had faced many challenges and difficulties throughout their professional careers. These usually occurred around the time of curriculum or managerial change. Annie acknowledges that although she has limited time in the tertiary sector *from my neophyte teacher educator perspective I sense frustration amongst my arts colleagues, particularly from those whom I know have fought and are still fighting a seemingly endless battle to justify the value, power and place of the Arts within education contexts.*

It was evident that each person however, was able to face these times of uncertainty with a positive attitude. We considered that although this is often seen as a strength it may have also impacted on how the Arts have been treated, such as being integrated with other areas and/or offered online without critical debate regarding the consequences of such an approach. As Annie revealed: *This reconceptualization of what we can offer to those teachers wishing to specialise in the Arts at our University is in both response and reaction. Response to an understanding of the need to not privilege any of the five key arts areas over another and reaction to an impending 'sink or swim' ultimatum from the University for all specialisations with unsustainable student numbers.*

It was clear that due to the fact that they had expertise in a number of diverse areas this equipped them with necessary skills to assist them to accept this change. The feeling of frustration however, was evident and therefore much of the talk in the interviews focussed on both change and advocacy for the arts.

Change

In Australia there is a great deal of change occurring in the education sector, such as the staggered rollout of the national curriculum and funding cuts to institutions such as schools and universities due to a range of factors including the global financial crisis. Institutional income has decreased as a result of lower than expected student numbers, particularly in the area of International students, and also due to increasing globalisation of university courses in a competitive global market. The interviews revealed that these are all very real issues for each of the tertiary arts educators with a number of the respondents linking this decrease in funding to reduced arts offerings:

There's not any resourcing at the tertiary level so that our students can be better equipped to use the arts across the curriculum. But I think that's part and parcel of the whole current tertiary climate. I mean the resourcing in the tertiary area is almost non-existent. (Susan)

It's dismal, it really is dismal the provision. We were, we kind of were on the edge of having two arts courses last year... so we were on the edge of it but we didn't get it because of the literacy and numeracy thrust...that's why we've kind of lost time in the arts...they got at least sixteen hours of face to face contact with an assessment in each of the arts, whereas now we can't do that, we just don't have the time. (Kevin)

Our narrative accounts also revealed experiences at our respective university experiences' resonated with the participants' data. Mary described how after taking up a new position at a university that *I was soon to discover the plethora of arts courses were to be taught out during that year as the university had been undergoing consolidation of courses in order to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness*. Gina explained that *eight years ago the music specialisation students at my current institution undertook two music courses each semester. Now they do one*. Annie's experience of the reduction of arts courses was similar, however she also argued that *the Arts are by no means the only area under threat in this situation; other specialisations such as Outdoor Education and Design and Technology are also feeling the heavy gaze of critical eyes due to a decline in student numbers*. Annie also revealed her experience of teaching into a 9 week 'Introduction to the Arts' intensive unit for Masters of Teaching primary specialisation students *which constituted the entirety of their exposure to the Arts across two years of their degree but when faced with 'this or nothing at all', you do your best to make it as worthwhile as possible*.

The participants also acknowledged that due to cuts in teacher education programs it was inevitable that children in schools will suffer by not having access to quality arts education.

The climate I think is quite dire and I think if it continues to go this way we will continue to have these problems if not worse because the students that come in through different education systems will have even less literacy in the arts. (Beth)

Despite comments such as these the respondents were hopeful that things may improve. They acknowledged the many benefits that the arts have to offer and believed that every now and then this is valued by people in positions that matter.

One of the things that really was interesting was just the explosion of interest at a tertiary level in creative practice. So in the last 10 years there has been an increase in the number of creative PhDs by creative practice...There's been a real change I think in the way that the arts are engaged or the way that the arts find themselves in the tertiary setting in arts faculties and creative arts faculties or creative industries faculties across the country. (Natalie)

I just kept thinking...there might have been a paper in there somewhere that now the big boys and girls in education [meaning those that matter] are talking about it, people want to listen. (Nathan)

So it seems that while the arts have experienced decreased hours in teacher education courses there is evidence that the arts are valued albeit in different contexts. Research pertaining to the arts and arts practice has increased, although this could be related to the recent Excellence in Research in Australia initiative in 2009, which broadened the definition of research to make provisions for artistic research, practice-led and practice-based research (Mudie, 2012).

As the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* is yet to be introduced into schools, the arts educators based their opinions on this implementation on previous experience with curriculum change. They felt that unless there was a strong awareness of the plight of the arts and therefore a conscious effort made to ensure quality arts education in schools, arts education practice may lack rigour and depth. Those qualified in the arts and with training across a range of studio disciplines should be able to draw upon this previous expertise to alleviate potential shortcomings in their teaching preparation courses. Mary noted that this is what occurred during her first years of teaching as her *confidence grew I was able to develop*

an emerging identity as a teacher that drew upon my strengths, suited my personality and contributed to an understanding and appreciation of the arts with the students I was teaching. However, although it would be expected that secondary art teachers would have a foundation in their studio discipline areas most generalist primary teachers would not. Therefore the importance of quality arts education at the tertiary level is critical in ensuring the arts are valued in the school context.

Advocacy

As we considered the participants' transcripts it became clear that advocacy for the arts, such as through the creation of partnerships, was a strong theme. Gina revealed how her university was visited by Aboriginal women from the central desert. *The opportunity to work and interact with these women was special not only for me but also the students. The ways in which the women performed and interacted with us was unique and powerful. For many undergraduate students the informal and oral mode of learning had not been experienced before and the immersion into these ways of knowing expanded their views of music and music teaching.* This observation also aligns with work done by Ellis (1985) with Aboriginal people. It is evident that reduction in time for the arts is also impacting on opportunities to develop partnerships within allocated university time and often these were sought as extra-curricular activities for the students as value-adding to their qualifications.

It was also clear that the participants were acutely aware of the substantial research documenting the value of the arts, yet it appeared that this needed to be constantly reinforced to those making decisions about time allocation and funding.

It's just frustrating but you would know as an arts teacher that's what you have to deal with all the time, it's a justification for why we exist and I don't know if you could say that about some other areas. (Beth)

I don't think there's enough realisation of how important the arts are. I mean I think we've got a strong arts team here but I think that there are probably lots of people who think there are other more important areas. (Susan)

Annie's narrative account perceptively argued that it is difficult to justify the Arts in a tertiary education program *when the tertiary context cannot even afford to give all five arts equal and reasonable representation within their pre-service teaching program ... justifying the value and significance of the Arts to my students when it is glaringly obvious how little they feature across the four years of their pre-service teacher training is an ongoing challenge.*

The arts have experienced a major decrease in the tertiary sector. This has impacted on the arts educators' role with many seeking new ways to increase the visibility of the arts in their own institution.

I do workshops for parents, I do a lot of work in schools working alongside teachers who are interested in looking at what's possible. (Susan)

I started using the arts as a tool for learning, really, and a way of engaging very disadvantaged kids... I was their outreach manager, so we brokered a partnership with the Department of Education and Training... I've always been interested in that kind of area of the power of [the arts] to engage kids who are not engaging with school. (Kevin)

Building positive relationships with 'outside' organisations was evident in each of the interviews. Developing partnerships with art galleries, music organisations, orchestras, and theatre companies were all highlighted. The interviewees noted that these connections for their pre-service teachers were perhaps the most profound learning experiences they encountered throughout their study.

There's a lot of things I do as part of the course which are almost seen as extracurricular activities but they definitely raise the profile of the arts... I mean people who were in third year and they said this is the most powerful and interesting thing I've done in three years of university. (Beth)

While the respondents intimated that all arts educators are aware of these impacts, it was others in leadership positions that still need to be made aware. The importance of advocacy is a real issue although there was a feeling that the arts educators were tired of having to constantly justify the benefits of the arts. Ultimately they just want to get on with their job but unfortunately the lack of understanding from people in management positions and across the education sector generally means that advocacy is necessary in order for the arts to survive. Waples and Friedrich (2011) reveal that the greatest impact on creativity is having autonomy in relation to the way people conduct their work, resulting in increasing motivation which is essential to creative performance (Amabile, 1996). This sense of autonomy for tertiary arts educators is being impacted by increasing accountability and corporatisation evident in higher education which is now commonly using terms such as 'benchmarking' and 'outputs' (Biggs, 2002; Neumann & Guthrie, 2002).

Discussion and Implications

It is clear that the arts are consistently at risk of being marginalised in teacher education courses across Australia. While the arts may not be the only area being affected, it is concerning that pre-service teachers will potentially have limited knowledge and skills in order to implement the arts curriculum and/or arts experiences in their teaching. It is therefore necessary for arts educators in higher education to develop positive strategies that ensure continued success of arts education within the school sector.

Our data indicates that arts educators do tend to focus on the positive aspects of their work and can think 'outside the square' when it comes to implementation and effective pedagogical practice. This could be a result of the fact that arts educators are creative individuals who are passionate about supporting arts learning. What typically drives them is their conviction that the arts enhance learning experiences. This is an attribute that could be utilised positively, particularly if arts educators work collectively.

It has been shown that the arts have potential for transformative change for students both in schools and the tertiary sector yet the arts still seem to be marginalised in both these educational contexts. While benefits from studying and being involved in the arts have long been presented in the research literature, there remains an issue with arts educators having to justify their existence in teacher education programs. With the new *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* about to be implemented in schools this is of great concern. If a misunderstanding and lack of awareness of the value of the arts is evident in Australian universities, as found in the data, then it is necessary for strategies to be developed to maintain and increase inclusion of the arts in teacher education programs. Without such measures there is a risk that quality arts experiences for pre-service teachers, and consequently children, will be lost.

One positive aspect of the research shows that arts educators, despite their frustration and tiredness surrounding constant advocacy, are willing to keep going. Arts educators are essentially enthusiastic, energised and passionate people who can meet the challenges present in the tertiary and school sectors. The authors note however, that perhaps the approaches to and delivery of continued advocacy needs rethinking and political **acumen**. Comments were made in regard to knowing who the 'right' people to convince were, in order to gain more time for the arts in teacher education curriculum. Also having one voice across all the art forms could potentially have more impact than 'solo' voices.

The potential impact of not addressing these issues and developing a strategic approach to improving arts education and access in teacher education courses means that ultimately children will experience a deficit model of education. Unfortunately, we are now at that point in time where serious decisions need to be made in regard to the presence of the arts in education. If the cuts in tertiary education continue the potential result will mean less time in schools for the arts also. As such, the authors have made a number of suggestions to improve the presence of the arts in education.

Conclusion

Insights from the tertiary arts' educators suggest important areas for consideration by policy makers and individuals who are responsible for advocacy and implementation of the arts in the education sector. Participant data directly leads to the following suggestions which will allow us to see 'the bigger picture' in relation to the importance of the arts in education.

Firstly, it is suggested that arts educators continue to advertise the benefits that the arts have to education and to acknowledge and promote the value of the arts to learning. There is much research that provides strong evidence as to the value and benefits of studying the arts across the life-span. Elliot Eisner's (2002, 2004) and Ken Robinson's (1999, 2001) work are both examples that show that without the arts in people's lives, holistic learning is compromised. With a heavy focus on literacy and numeracy learning it is also recommended that arts educators become more familiar with the unique and distinct literacies and numeracies evident in the arts as a curriculum area.

Additionally, it is encouraged to promote the idea that arts educators are generally flexible, have diverse skills, accept change, can adapt, can teach concepts across other curriculum areas and therefore should be recognised for these skills. Arts educators could be invited to present to other educators on how to make pedagogy and curriculum innovative and creative, skills that are valued in the 21st Century. It is also important to expand professional development opportunities for arts educators. Continued and quality professional development is essential for a number of stakeholders in relation to arts education (Fullan, 2001). We recommend a conscious commitment to and improvement of professional development for the following: a. People in leadership roles in tertiary contexts; b. Teacher registration boards; c. All teachers in schools where the new *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* will be implemented; d. Beginning arts and generalist teachers; and e. Pre-service teachers, in addition to course offerings.

It is apparent that the political agendas of governments today are results driven. Continued advocacy via political means and through the mass media is critically important for sustainable arts education practice. While there have been a number of reviews into arts education it is clear that recommendations from these reviews have been largely ignored and not implemented. Drawing on these reviews and critical research can support action in lobbying government on arts education.

Further, partnerships were highly discussed in the data and are important in sustaining arts education and arts practice across the country and internationally. Linking tertiary, school and community arts practice increases the bond between such organisations as well as provides the collaborative strength required for effective advocacy. Ensuring that quality and positive arts experiences are maintained in both tertiary and school contexts means that children, their families and communities will continue to enjoy creative and engaging practices in education. It will also mean that 'the state of the arts' is healthy and contributes to a holistic approach to teaching and learning.

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