

Engaging museums and galleries in pre-service teacher education

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The relationship between teacher education courses and the educational programs and exhibitions operating in museum and art galleries is vital in students' development towards being informed, critically engaged and effective communicators in schools. This paper will predominately examine how pre-service secondary art teachers, with a prior degree in fine art, and generalist primary teachers at the University of Tasmania have accessed and utilised museums and galleries in their preparation as future teachers.

The University of Tasmania, founded in 1890, is the fourth oldest university in Australia. In 1991 the University of Tasmania amalgamated with the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology to form the new University of Tasmania with campuses in Hobart and Launceston, and a study centre in Burnie. This study centre is now the regional Cradle Coast Campus. The university employs more than 1400 academic and general staff and has a student population of about 12,500, including 1550 postgraduate students.

The Faculty of Education offers a four-year Bachelor of Education from the Launceston campus, while the two-year graduate entry Bachelor of Teaching is based in Hobart or Launceston, depending on specialisation. The two-year Bachelor of Teaching began in 1997, replacing the one-year Diploma of Education, and is available to students with a first degree. Upon completion of the course, and depending on their chosen specialisation, students will be qualified to teach in Early Childhood/Primary (Grades K–6); Middle School (Grades 5–8) or Secondary (Grades 7–12).

The Bachelor of Teaching degree at the University of Tasmania (UTas) is an intensive course which prepares students to teach in either primary or secondary schools. Entry to the secondary art specialisation of the degree is restricted, due to the difficulty of finding teaching positions for secondary art teachers around the state. The first and second years of the degree are combined in the same time allocation due to the smaller numbers. This necessitates preparing a diverse yet complementary program for each year group, including opportunities to exhibit their work and that of others, and visits to museums and galleries.

The educational role and value of the museum/gallery in pre-service teacher education has been well documented (Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Hein 1998; Ambrose 1987). The establishment of strong links between the education officers of such institutions and pre-service teachers should be an important consideration for universities providing teacher preparation courses. The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) at Inveresk, Launceston, has developed a range of educational programs which are exciting, creative and

innovative, involving visitors in a more practical way than they have in the past (Hooper-Greenhill 1989; Galbraith 1995; Hickman 2000). On 3 September 2004 the Museum Learning Centre opened as an important addition to the QVMAG. The Education Service Team consists of four staff who utilise the centre as a pre-visit meeting place to assist students to focus on the topic being studied or as a post-visit venue to discuss insights gained through a guided or unguided exhibition tour. Educational kits relating to specific exhibitions are also available and have been created by the Education Service Team to reflect the values of the new Tasmanian curriculum. Pre-service teachers enrolled at the University of Tasmania have also been invited to attend teacher professional development sessions and teacher preview sessions. In addition to finding these sessions educational and enjoyable, the pre-service teachers are pleased to be considered as *teachers* and to have the opportunity to mix with other teachers.

The pre-service teachers have visited the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery to observe exhibitions and to learn about arts literacy, particularly in light of the new curriculum which has begun to operate in Tasmanian schools this year, known as the Essential Learnings Framework (ELF). The Essential Learnings consist of five curriculum organisers: Thinking, Communicating, Personal Futures, Social Responsibility and World Futures. These provide a framework which encourages and fosters integrated connections between disciplines. All Tasmanian schools will be assessing and reporting against the Essential Learnings Framework from 2005. An important culminating outcome of the Communicating strand in the Essential Learnings is 'being arts literate'. This is described as:

Understands the purposes and uses of a range of art forms – visual arts, media, dance, music, drama and literature, and how to make and share meaning from and through them. Uses with confidence and skill the codes and conventions of the art form best suited to their expressive needs. (Department of Education, Tasmania 2003)

This important element of the Essential Learnings Framework will be reported on in 2007 and it is therefore necessary to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to visit museums and art galleries to increase their own understanding of arts literacy. Museums and galleries have important resources which can complement and support teachers who are trying to enhance students' skills in art appreciation, enabling them to make and share meaning about the artworks and objects they are viewing. Peter Timms (2004, p. 45) recognises the fact that taste and discrimination are developed gradually and 'although the personal rewards are great for those who take the time and effort to do so, not everyone does'. As Paine notes, because teachers are so important in effecting changes to learning, museum education studies 'should be an essential core ingredient in all teacher-training programs ... if not an obligatory part of inservice provision' (1989, p. 29).

The museum/gallery context – an environment very familiar to fine art students – created a bridge between the fine arts degree and the Bachelor of Teaching degree. In education this would be known as a teaching strategy which uses the familiar – fine art – to help students understand the unfamiliar – education. One of the earliest tasks for the first-year students was to create a 2-D artwork based on the theme ‘practical journey’ which visually represented their journey of learning to become a secondary art teacher. This was to be accompanied by an artist’s statement of no more than 200 words which referred to their emerging knowledge of the secondary visual arts curriculum. The development of the artwork was to be traced through a visual diary to record the process undertaken, a requirement of secondary senior art courses throughout Australia. In this way students would be drawing upon a range of learned skills to visually conceptualise their early progress through the teaching degree, in addition to having an exemplar of a visual diary to use for their own students.

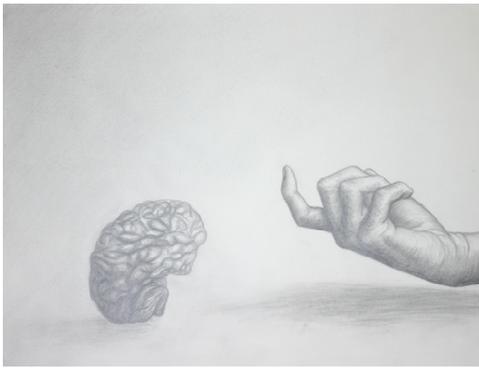


Fig. 1. Angela Maney, *Practical journey* (2004), pencil, 29.5 x 42 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: Margaret Baguley.

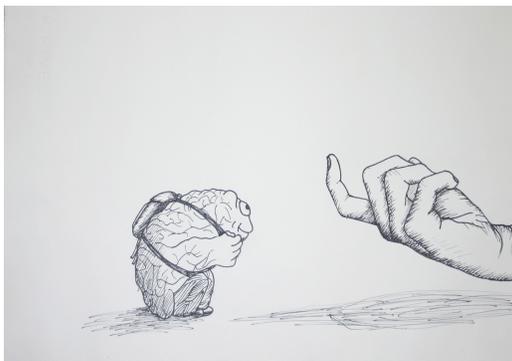


Fig. 2. Angela Maney, *Practical journey* (2004), pen, 32.5 x 42 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: Margaret Baguley

The artworks were displayed in the University Gallery, which is also a main thoroughfare to other faculties. The exhibition was installed for the UTas Open Day celebrations, and was therefore seen by a large number of

people. A questionnaire was distributed to the students asking if this particular task helped their journey from the fine arts degree to the education degree, and how they felt about having opportunities to exhibit whilst learning to become a teacher. Some of the comments received were:

It is important to continue making art whilst becoming art educators. University is demanding on time and resources, so often the art process stops or slows whilst studying. The ability to make an artwork for assessment is an invigorating process. The relevance of art making and class appraisal goes far beyond that of any learning essay which I have produced this year (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

One of the reasons I have gone into a teaching degree is to begin a career that builds upon and supports my artistic needs. The presentation and assessment of a work of art for the course helped confirm my hopes for this future, as well as establish in the course the value of visual arts as a medium for communication and thinking (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

It is important to keep up art making. As teachers we should demonstrate to students our skills. Exhibitions are the best way of doing this (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

It gives an authentic experience but more importantly it helps teachers to keep up their arts practice which is important for their students to see. If the students see that you are a practising artist they take the subject more seriously. In effect you are leading by example (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

These comments reinforce Eisner's belief in the model concept of teaching which he explains as learning from other people by observation (1972, p. 182). He describes the implication of this concept in art education as the teacher acting as a potentially powerful model for providing students with examples of what people do in the field of art. The student feedback above confirms that role-modelling through exhibition is considered an authentic way for an art teacher to demonstrate skills and commitment. During their school experience placements, the pre-service teachers also found that students considered they had more credibility if they were practising artists. One of the pre-service teachers noted that:

I am sure a practising teacher is of considerable importance to students, as they then feel confident in the teacher's knowledge and capabilities in the arts. I was surprised to find that students in my classes during my internship were amazed I was capable of producing my own artwork. I had taken a lesson on contrast and produced a

quick sketch of an umbrella plant that was in the art room as an example for the students using crosshatching etc. I found teaching the arts also stimulated my own need to create and started me off doing my own work again, although very limited due to the commitment and concentration of my practicums (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

Earlier this year the first year Bachelor of Teaching students attended the 'Art Rage' exhibition at the QVMAG. 'Art Rage' is a selection of the best secondary student work from around the state and was an important opportunity for pre-service teachers to see the level of skill, range of themes and diverse media being used by art students that they potentially would be teaching during their school experience placements. Pre-service teacher feedback obtained anecdotally from this exhibition included the disbelief that students were producing such well-executed work for their age, a sense of awe and nervousness that they would not be able to teach students to produce such high quality work, and positive recognition of the range of themes and social issues that the students were working with. Written feedback verified that this was an important learning experience which should remain in the course and also clarified the standard of student work which they would encounter as teachers:

I do think this is an important component because it gives the pre-service teacher an opportunity to view students' work and in particular an understanding of the students' art standard. The pre-service teacher can take the opportunity to create mock-up criteria and experience an assessment type experience (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

Yes it was a great way to start the course looking at student art and what we will be aiming to achieve with our own classes one day. It was a good way to interact with classmates and build understanding of what the course is about (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

Learning how to take students to a gallery and make it educational is very important. I think it should happen next year (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

The Bachelor of Education pre-service teachers undertake a four-year course to train to become early childhood or primary teachers. A small minority of these students have had further education in art beyond their own schooling; however, there are also a significant number who have not had any training in art since Year 8. They complete a compulsory eight-week unit of art for two hours a week in their second year. A questionnaire was distributed to 103 pre-service second-year Bachelor of Education

students during a visit to the QVMAG and Museum Learning Centre. When asked how often they visited a gallery or museum the results revealed that 11 students had never been, 12 students had rarely been, 23 students did not go often, 16 went annually, 14 went once or twice a year, 10 went two to five times a year, 15 went very regularly and for 2 students this was their first time to a museum or gallery.

Further questions revealed that they did understand the importance of museums and art galleries for a well-rounded education; however, during their school placements only 13 students discovered that their schools had visited a museum or art gallery in recent years. It is essential, therefore, to be exposed to museums and galleries in pre-service education as it enables pre-service teachers to become aware of the depth and breadth of resources available which will impact upon the professional decisions they make. As Paine (1989, p. 28) notes:

Few would deny that these periods of initial teacher-training are highly influential in teachers' later professional practices. The process is interactive, with student-teachers and museum educators learning from each other. Those trained in this way frequently retain and exploit the contacts made, as well as (in time) influencing other teachers to make more use of museums and their resources; such ramifications, when manifested, are impressive.

In the recent *NAVA Quarterly* from the National Association for the Visual Arts, Anne Bamford from the University of Technology, Sydney, states that there is a lack of substantial data about teacher training in visual arts, craft and design. She believes that there is an urgent need to review teacher education and ensure that relevant and contemporary policies are developed: 'Creative learning requires creative teachers. Teachers need to be innovators and to use more creative and imaginative approaches to make learning engaging, interesting and relevant' (2004, p. 4). Encouraging pre-service teachers to utilise museums and galleries, which are also striving to make visitors feel engaged, interested and to find relevance in the exhibits, can only benefit both institutions.

Some artists find it difficult or even uncomfortable to talk about their work and this can also be a serious issue for pre-service teachers who are also artists when teaching students about arts literacy. Hausman (1970) asserts that skilled artists may not necessarily be effective as teachers. His argument is based on the perception that the artist's essential relationship is between him or herself and the form being created. However, the teacher who has to interact with students needs to ensure information is clearly and accurately conveyed, and cannot afford the luxury of 'not being understood or appreciated by the audience of his [sic] time' (p. 334). This view is also supported by Lansing (1976) who notes that even though someone considers themselves an artist, it does not automatically

make them a gift to education (p. 15). He further notes that aesthetic knowledge and artistic vocabulary are essential if the teacher and the student are to have 'meaningful and efficient conversations about creative work or aesthetic experience' (p. 364). These conversations can occur without a specific reading level or stage of conceptual development. With guidance, they should be able to engage with a work of art and be able to discuss various aspects of it on some level (Shuh 1999, p. 82). The relevance and significance of these works must be made clear to people who visit museums and galleries so that they can make a connection with them through information which is provided about them.

The Education Service Team at the QVMAG, in addition to providing education kits for exhibitions, has also infused these with the Essential Learnings Framework by describing the generative topic of the exhibition, the focus essentials, the supporting essentials and teaching activities which reflect the philosophy of this framework. This documentation has been of immense value to pre-service teachers visiting the QVMAG as it provides a practical way for them to use visual literacy in pre- and post-exhibition activities. As one student noted: 'They have now incorporated the ELs into their program, making it more user-friendly for teachers' (Bachelor of Education pre-service teacher, 2004).

The importance of understanding what arts literacy is was revealed when collating comments from the Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teachers who were asked 'What was the most interesting thing you learned today?' Some of these comments included:

The motivation behind the creation of artist's works; often they can only be viewed at face value, so the insight information is wonderful! (Bachelor of Education pre-service teacher, 2004).

The most interesting thing I learned was the motives and intentions, aspects of the paintings (i.e. certain colours) had for the artist (Bachelor of Education pre-service teacher, 2004).

I enjoyed the talk re: the history, background of the artist, her motivation for her work and the significance of the colours she uses (Bachelor of Education pre-service teacher, 2004).

This recognition of their own interest in learning more about the motivation of the artist and reading a work of art also translated into how this could occur for school students when asked of the benefits for them if they visited a museum or gallery:

They will have a better understanding about an artist's work and how to evaluate their own work (Bachelor of Education pre-service teacher, 2004).

By being able to experience real artworks and displays, not just pictures. By analysing and discussing the differences and techniques that are being employed to make artworks and the reasons why and how the artists are expressing themselves (Bachelor of Education pre-service teacher, 2004).

It's very different to being in the classroom! It allows children to explore possibilities they can experiment with and view artworks that extend their knowledge and perceptions of art (Bachelor of Education Pre-Service teacher, 2004).

In addition to helping visitors to understand that art has a language and there are certain ways of reading it, it is also important that museums and galleries are relevant to people's lives. If information can be made available about objects being viewed in a relevant and interesting manner, then the viewer will feel more involved with the work itself. As Jensen states:

Museum programs must relate to the life-experiences of the audiences they seek to motivate and engage. As museum staff members come to understand their audiences in greater depth, they can create programs more directly relevant to them (1999, p. 110).

With this concept of exhibiting work that is socially relevant, the second-year Bachelor of Teaching students were given a task which would literally bring the community they were working with into the gallery. This piece of assessment was inspired by the Essential Learnings Framework which states: 'To be effective, education needs strong connections with the families and communities in which children live and learn' (2003, p. 3). The students were asked to devise, plan, implement and document a voluntary community art project with young people to enrich the community they were based in for their practicum. The project could be carried out on school experience or by working with young people from a community group. Five pre-service teachers chose to work in one group, as they were based in Launceston. Three students decided to complete their assessment individually due to geographical isolation and the difficulty in teaming up with another pre-service teacher. One was placed at King Island, and two students were placed in Hobart. The outcomes of the community project for the pre-service teachers included the recognition of important elements such as communication, organisation and time management, in addition to the creation of Powerpoint presentations to document the process for assessment purposes, which were also installed on large computer monitors in the university gallery. In a very real sense they were able to bring the community project, which they conducted outside the university, back into the university in order to share their learning experiences. The pre-service teachers provided the following comments in relation to this assessment:

The Community Arts Project gave me a challenge and led me to acknowledge the importance of relationships with the teaching profession – not only with the students but also with the colleague teachers, the cleaning lady, the office lady, the Principal, in fact with everyone. Having had many of my own exhibitions, I realised that the main condition for a great exhibition was always the support of many others, from gallery assistants to printers. However, I had not curated an exhibition before and found the winning over of staff and students to the original concept was the most important step, followed by good organisation and perseverance (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

Community events provide an opportunity to develop units of work which combine many subject areas and have the potential of resulting in a greater sense of purpose for the students involved. They establish a communicative link between community members and begin to reveal philosophical perspectives only realised through these forms of interaction. For all of us the nature of exchange and quality of feedback inherent in these processes is rich and rewarding. The open and shared nature of community events makes available to all an understanding of the complexities offered and offers pathways to those who wish to engage in higher levels of personal challenge (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

It was a realistic and relevant project when training to become a teacher (Bachelor of Teaching pre-service teacher, 2004).

The opportunities provided through this assessment task were many and varied, but in the context of museums and galleries the students were able to utilise various venues as galleries, including a shopping centre, library, city mall and rest home, which are the venues that many teachers rely on when wishing to exhibit student work. To bring this process into a fine arts context meant finding a way to translate the experience in a way which could be exhibited in the university gallery. A Powerpoint presentation which documented the process appeared to be the most visually stimulating and informative way to do this.

In conclusion, teacher education courses can only be enhanced by fostering and maintaining strong links with museums and galleries. Some museums and galleries may be entertaining but not educative. As Hein (1998, p. 3) notes:

To make them educative represents the fundamental challenge of museum exhibitions and programs: how to transform the obvious enthusiasm of visitors into connected, engaging, integrated activities that lead to growth.

In Tasmania, the arts literacy outcome of the communication strand, to be reported on in 2007, has created an opportunity for museums and galleries in Tasmania to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, and particularly pre-service teachers, to understand what arts literacy is and how it can be taught using genuine artworks. The Bachelor of Teaching pre-service secondary art teachers are fully aware of how to analyse and appreciate a diverse range of artworks, however their understanding is much more intuitive: 'our first degree relied heavily on the ability to reflect and analyse our own work and the work of others'. Therefore some of the secondary art pre-service teachers have found it difficult to express complex concepts in terms which students may understand. Encouraging pre-service teachers to talk about their own work and the work of other artists helps them to clarify and express their passion for art, which can then be conveyed to their own students who will begin to understand the range of symbolic systems operating in artworks.

Organising excursions to museums and galleries allows students to engage in the products of the artists on display, reinforcing the concept that understanding happens through actual engagement. The museum and gallery are invaluable resources for teachers which provide links to the past and provide powerful ways of 'capturing and conveying individual and collective experience' in addition to helping learners to 'engage with them [art forms] as a life-enhancing part of personal and social experience' (Department of Education, Tasmania 2002, p. 23). Universities providing training for teachers should emphasise the importance of museums and galleries as an important way for pre-service teachers to access a range of cultural forms. Teaching the skills of arts literacy to students will provide them with skills in interpretation, thereby allowing them to understand and evaluate the increasingly complicated communication technologies shaping their world.

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