Creative Arts Teaching and Practice:
Critical Reflections of Primary School Teachers in Australia

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Abstract

This paper details aspects of a research project that explored nineteen Australian primary (elementary) schoolteachers' perspectives of Creative Arts education. The study investigated the participants' personal Arts experiences and training, as well as their views of Arts pedagogy. In depth interviews with the participants highlighted the important influence that participants' own interactions with the various Arts disciplines had upon their role as facilitators of Creative Arts education. The findings of this study also identify multiple ways of approaching and facilitating teaching and learning activities. The research not only revealed insights into the educational value each of the teachers ascribed to individual Arts disciplines, but also the level of confidence and preparedness they felt to teach these disciplines. The generalist primary teachers participating in this research

study identified a number of issues that they believed compromised their ability to
teach the Creative Arts effectively.

The Creative Arts in the Australian Primary School Milieu

The Creative Arts, as a group of subject areas, are an essential component of the teaching and
learning process in the Australian primary school milieu. While uniquely different in
appearance and method to each other, the Creative Arts employ similar cognitive processes,
ultimately allowing language and thought to be expressed through a variety of representations.
These disciplines represent forms of communication that allow people to experience the
challenges of the artist as an actor, dancer, visual artist, or musician. They are a way of
presenting ideas and developing understanding through interaction at a symbolic level. Key to
an education in the Creative Arts is the knowledge of how to communicate through abstract
symbols and to decipher the communications of others. Effectively, the Creative Arts contain
basic skills for the positive growth and development of students.

In the majority of Australian primary (elementary) schools it is the generalist teachers, as
opposed to the specialist teachers, who are largely responsible for teaching the Creative Arts.
As generalists, these teachers are required to teach all six Key Learning Areas (KLA) in the
curriculum, many of which include a number of discreet subject areas. These areas of learning
provide structure showing where foundational knowledge needs to be developed by students
from Kindergarten through to Year Six. This includes the Key Learning Areas of English,
Mathematics, Human Society and Its Environment [HSIE], Science and Technology, Personal
Development, Health and Physical Education [PDHPE], and the Creative Arts. Engaging
students in the four disciplines that make up the Creative Arts requires teachers to attend to
different learning strands within syllabus documents.

Over the last decade arts syllabuses and curriculum documents throughout the states of
Australia have charted students' learning in similar ways. This unity resulted from the
formation of a national arts education policy in 1994. The *National Statements and Profiles
for the Arts* (Curriculum Corporation, 1994) supported a discipline-based approach to arts
education. This approach had already been adopted in many English and North American
schools throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (Taylor, 1986; Emery, 1998). Within this
discipline-based model the key aesthetic processes of *making, presenting, responding* and
evaluating were used as scaffolds and guides for students' learning in the Arts. The rationale
for selecting these 'organisers' was that students were believed to come to a better
understanding of the Creative Arts through engagement as both arts practitioners and
percipients.

In each of the Creative Arts syllabuses that have subsequently been formed across Australia, the process of exploring and creating (making) art is seen to be as important as displaying a product (presenting). Equally in each art form, students are expected to engage as audience (responding) and this requires them to analyse their own and other artists' work. Analysis models include description, interpretation, and evaluation of artworks studied within any of the Creative Arts disciplines. Within the different syllabus documents there are 'stage statements' in each art form that provide an overview of student achievement at the end of each developmental level (six levels altogether from Kindergarten through to Year 12). Teachers are expected to work towards the achievements of 'learning outcomes' appropriate for each stage level. These outcomes are statements that delineate subject knowledge and skills.

Teacher Experience, Training, and Perceptions of the Creative Arts: A Brief Overview of the Literature

An issue often raised amongst Creative Arts education professionals and researchers at an international level is whether generalist primary teachers with no specialist Arts knowledge are capable of realising the learning potential of the Creative Arts in schools (Alexander, Rose, & Woodhead, 1992; Eisner, 1994; La Pierre & Zimmerman, 1997; Welch, 1995). Generalist teachers are often perceived as lacking the requisite experience and training to teach the Creative Arts effectively. Holt's (1997) study of art education in the United Kingdom found that primary education falls below what can be considered 'satisfactory' performance in over one third of schools studied. He notes that most generalists are hard working but have limited understanding of materials and a lack of knowledge about art. He further attributes this to the way that primary teachers have been trained.

One of the most substantial hindrances for effective teaching and learning of the Creative Arts in primary schools is attributed to a lack of confidence by teachers. This diminished confidence has resulted from teachers feeling that they themselves are not artistic. Some studies have shown that the way that teachers' perceive themselves in regard to their own artistic abilities connects directly to the level of effectiveness they demonstrate as Arts teachers (Welch, 1995). Within a study conducted by Housego (cited in Welch, 1995) it was asserted that there are two significant, yet corresponding, factors attributed to a teacher's self-perception. These include teaching self-efficacy, or the individual's sense of whether they have the skills and abilities to assist student learning, and one's beliefs about one's own preparedness to teach. Russell-Bowie and Dowson's (2005) study of 936 generalist primary teachers across five countries found (a) that most "… had very little formal background in any of the art forms," and (b) that "… in every creative arts area, background is very strongly, and positively, predictive of confidence and enjoyment in teaching" regardless of gender (p. 7).

Research in Australia has shown that the values related to the Creative Arts are closely linked to teachers' backgrounds (Welch, 1995, Costantoura, 2000, Russell-Bowie, 2003). Values related to the Creative Arts are shaped by many factors. For example, data from the *Australians and Arts* Report (Costantoura 2000) suggests that an individual's level of education, their age, gender, location relative to capital cities in Australia, income, national origins, the age of their children and lifestyles arrangements, were all factors that impacted values related to the Creative Arts.

Eisner (1997, 2002) in the United States, and Holt (1997) in the United Kingdom, argue that values and attitudes are fundamental to the role and purpose of the Creative Arts in education. Eisner (1997), for example, claims that, "We are expecting [generalists primary] teachers to teach what they do not know and often do not love" (p. 17). A lack of value and support for the Creative Arts in learning at a systemic level can perpetuate already low levels of esteem for the Creative Arts amongst teachers. Pateman (1991) describes a situation where there has been increasing marginalisation of the Creative Arts in British primary schools. He attributes much of this to greater accountability and national testing in core subject areas combined with the insecurities already felt by primary teachers. Pateman (1991) says, "Is it surprising that some already overburdened teachers, insecure in the arts because of their own inadequate initial training, are inevitably choosing to treat the arts as peripheral?" (p. 19).

Problems in regards to primary teacher self-efficacy, values for the Creative Arts, as well as arts knowledge, skills, and training have been also been identified in a series of major national research investigations conducted in Australia. Over a decade ago, a major Australian national government-funded investigation into the state of Creative Arts education (Senate Committee, 1995) was conducted. The ensuing *Arts Education* report concluded that a large majority of Australian primary teachers had both diminished skills as well as personal values about the Creative Arts, which resulted in a failure to provide students with the foundational knowledge they required for development in the Arts. More recent Australian research investigations such as the *National Review of School Music Education* (Centre for Learning, Change and Development [CLCD], 2005) and the findings of the recently released *National Review of Visual Education* (Davis, 2008) have shown there has continued to be a serious deficit in these areas over the last decade.

The Australian *National Survey of Schools*, a section of the *National Review of School Music Education* report (CLCD, 2006) had a stratified sample of 525 schools and an additional sample of 147 schools nominated through the submission process as 'effective music' schools. This survey provided a picture of the current state of music education. For example, the survey showed that there are students in approximately 900 Australian schools that have no music program (about 9-10% of schools). In addition to this there were many instances in which music education was limited to a range of simple music activities. The survey also

reported that 40% of schools surveyed perceived that the community did not value music. Pre-service and in-service teacher education was a significant issue that emerged in the National Review of Music Education. In many cases teachers claimed that the reduced time they had for Creative Arts learning in these programs had contributed to what they felt was a lack of knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to teach music.

A second major national review in Creative Arts education has overlapped in time with the *National Music Education* review. The *National Review of Visual Education* (NRVE) (Davis, 2008) considered a number of key questions, many of which are pertinent to this study. For example, one of the key questions was, 'What are the characteristics of high quality visual education?' A critical factor identified in the *NRVE* report is the role of the teacher in effective visual education. The report suggests that the place and value of visual education in Australian primary schools needs to be reformed because in the main generalist primary teachers were ill equipped to teach the visual arts. The *NRVE* report stated

> The Australian teachers charged with the responsibility of visual education, and especially so at the primary level, exist between a rock and a hard place. The rock might be conceptualised as the small toehold they have on the content of their discipline and the hard place the general purpose classroom in which, with inadequate pedagogical preparation, little time, minimal resources, low levels of school support and esteem from their peers, they are expected to provide credible visual education, often contiguously with the other arts disciplines. The creation of an umbrella Arts KLA has had a number of unfortunate consequences, not the least in terms of the further minimisation of teacher preparation. (p. 188)

Consistently, in all of these major investigations into the state of Creative Arts education in Australia, primary teachers' feelings about a lack of preparedness to teach the Creative Arts are partly attributed to inadequate pre-service teacher training. The research findings indicate there are diminished opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in any extended tertiary education program in Creative Arts education. Added to this is the fact that many student teachers bring little in the way of an Arts education background to their tertiary studies and pre-service teacher education cannot address this deficit within the time available (CLCD, 2006).

The research findings and reports presented thus far, appear to present a rather pessimistic view of Creative Arts education in Australian primary schools; however, there are promising signs of positive reform and change. In late 2007 the Federal and State governments in Australia released a momentous joint *National Statement on Education and the Arts* that promises an unequivocal commitment to fostering Arts education in schools. This

commitment arises because these government bodies understand the potential of the Creative Arts in fostering a culture of creativity and innovation in Australia's school systems. In December 2008 the Federal government passed a bill to go ahead with a National Curriculum to be in place by 2012.

Research Methodology

The research question guiding the framework and structure of this study focuses on the perspectives of teachers and how these perspectives affect their teaching and learning approaches to Creative Arts. In answering this question the researcher addresses two specific sub questions. These are: (a) What personal and professional experiences guide teacher understandings of the Creative Arts and Creative Arts pedagogy, and (b) How have these experiences shaped, guided, or controlled the way teachers are able to present and form Creative Arts experiences for their students? The questions were used to explore the key meanings the participants gave to their Creative Arts pedagogical practice.

The study was shaped, in particular, by *symbolic interactionism* (Blumer, 1969), a qualitative research approach that views knowledge as constructed through social interactions. The concept of *self* is also fundamental within the symbolic interactionism perspective (Blumer, 1969; Dewey, 1934; Mead, 1934). By combining *self* and *interpretation*, the process may be likened to a sorting or sifting procedure. An individual involved in interactions with other people acquires different understandings and meanings of particular objects or situations according to the other person's understandings of the same situation. An individual, by way of interaction and reflection, creates meaning. Participants were therefore encouraged to describe their encounters in a self-reflective way, similar to the way one might approach and appreciate a work of art. The teachers participating in the study were able to reflect upon how their own Creative Arts practice in the classroom had been influenced by their understanding of the Creative Arts subject areas, their teaching performance, and the learning needs of their students.

Data Sources and Analysis

In-depth interviewing was used to gain an interpreted image of the Creative Arts as pedagogy from those who facilitate the practice. The applications of in-depth interviewing procedures were used, 'in order to give access to knowledge – a knowledge of meanings and interpretations that individuals give to their lives and events' (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 2000, p. 1). One principal researcher conducted all interviews. During the first stage of data collection, a focus group lasting 70 minutes and consisting of five females and one male was used to explore the critical aspects of teaching Creative Arts in primary education. Taking a grounded theory approach (Charon, 2001), the purpose of conducting the initial focus group discussion was to use the nascent findings from participants' exploration of

the research focus to develop holistic perspectives regarding the research question. Specific meanings and understandings they had been presented within the focus group were later followed up during individual in-depth interviews conducted with another thirteen people including eight females and five males. The people who participated in the initial focus group were also interviewed using in-depth interviews. All of the interviews were spaced and conducted over a six-month period of time. They commenced in March 2004 and concluded in August the same year. The initial focus group, as well as six other individuals, insisted that their interviews be conducted at the schools at which they work, after school hours. The other seven participants used the location of their own home for their interview.

Analysis methods drawn from grounded theory were utilized to identify central concepts and relationships, to gain a holistic view, and ensure the research findings reflect an accurate representation of the situation. The benefit of the grounded theory approach is that, as an analytical strategy, it emphasizes three key phases. These include description, conceptual ordering, and theorizing (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). All these phases are intimately intertwined as grounded theory is based on allowing interpretations to emerge from the data (Babbie, 2001). In essence, the grounded theory strategy 'fractures' the data down into concept and category groups (Tuettemann, 2003). *Qualitative thought*, identified in Eisner's (1998) model of educational research, was also utilized as a way of approaching the data. Together, these research perspectives established the theoretical context of this study.

Credibility of Findings

Member checking was used as a way of verifying the accuracy of the data as well as the validity of the study findings. Moving from the focus group situation into the individual in-depth interviews with each focus group member proved useful because participants could be questioned further on key issues and topics discussed in the focus group. This ensured accuracy of understanding and also provided further depth of detail. Later reporting of the study's preliminary research findings to the focus group participants further verified that their understandings were accurately reflected. These participants agreed the study findings exposed the core and character of Creative Arts pedagogy in their primary schools.

Study Sample

There were a total of nineteen participants who participated in this study and these individuals were drawn from twelve different schools across rural and regional Australia. The broad perspective gained through this variation sampling was beneficial to the study, leading to a greater depth of understanding for the range of Creative Arts pedagogies that are practised in Australian schools. The diverse sampling pool enabled the findings to be applicable to a wider variety of primary schools because it is attributed to a range of positions and perspectives from within the collective school milieu. In this way the diversity of qualifications,

experience, age, gender, and participant's positions within the school strengthened the overall design of the study.

An outline of the participants' backgrounds is provided in Table 1**.** This table includes the participant' alias names used to identify and distinguish between the participants. It includes their gender, the grade/s they teach, as well as a brief outline of the school's context and location, their age bracket, and an overview of their teaching experience. The shaded section of the table indicates the focus group participant. All of the focus group participants were from the one school.

Table 1: *Participants' Backgrounds*

Participant Backgrounds					
Participants		M/F	Context	Age	Teaching Experience
F O C U S G R O U P			A medium sized school, with a high proportion of indigenous students.		
	Jules	F	K-1 teacher	30-40	10+ years experience.
	Susanna	F	Yr 1-2	50-60	25+ years experience.
	Gai	F	Yr 2	40-50	15+ years experience.
	Ross	M	Yr 3-4	50-60	<10 years experience. Trained as a mature-aged student teacher.
	Lindi	F	Yr 5-6	30-40	10 years experience.
	Jane	F	Reading Recovery teacher, and also does some Release from Face-to-Face.	30-40	15+ years experience.
Alice		F	Infants (T-2) teacher at a two-teacher rural Primary school with a high proportion of indigenous students.	50-60	15+ years experience. Trained in Australia but taught overseas. Re-trained in Australia after having children.
Dani		F	Yr 4 teacher at a large centrally-located Primary school.	40-50	20+ years experience.
Gabrielle		F	Yr 4 teacher at an independent junior school as a part of a T-12 school.	25-30	<10 years experience.
Marie		F	Primary (3-6) teaching Principal at a two-teacher isolated school.	50-60	25+ years experience. Trained and taught secondary PE overseas. Re-trained in Australia for primary.
Wade		M	Yr 2 teacher at an independent junior school as a part of a T-12 school.	20-25	<5 years experience. Recently completed teacher training.
Darcy		F	Primary (3-6) teaching Principal at a two-teacher isolated school.	40-50	20+ years experience. Has been a teaching principal for 11 years.

Gary	M	Primary (K–6) teaching Principal at a one-teacher rural school.	40-50	20+ years experience. Has taught in a large number of schools.
Tony	M	Primary (K–6) teaching Principal at a one-teacher isolated school.	30-40	15 years experience. Has been a teaching principal for 5 years.
Paula	F	Yr 3-4 teacher of a class of students with special needs at a large centrally-located school.	20-25	<5 years experience. Recently completed teacher training.
Kevin	M	Primary (3-6) teaching Principal at a two-teacher rural school.	50-60	30+ years experience.
Jean	F	Yr 2-3 teacher of a class of students with a high proportion of mainstream special needs.	40-50	25+ years experience. Experienced teaching children with variety of special needs.
Jackie	F	Yr 5 teacher at a large centrally-located Primary school.	40-50	20+ years experience.
Patrick	M	Primary (3-6) teaching Principal at a two-teacher isolated rural Primary school.	40-50	20+ years experience. Trained as a secondary PE teacher. Re-trained in primary.

Note: *T=Transition, K=Kindergarten*

The information in Table 1 shows that participants represented a variety of backgrounds and ages (between 20–60 years of age). The participant's level of expertise in the Creative Arts was not a factor in determining who was targeted to participate in the study. There were different levels and degrees of teaching experience amongst the group of teachers. The participants were both male and female teachers, despite the fact that there is an overwhelming majority of female teachers in the Australian primary education system. The participants taught a range of levels in the primary school, including different grades and stages, from Transition/Kindergarten through to Year Six. This cross-section also included teachers who held different executive positions, such as teaching Principals, as well as teachers who taught classes with particular needs, such as mainstream special-needs classes. The participants were also drawn from a cross-section of schools. The sample included schools with different-sized student populations, ranging from one-teacher schools to very large multi-class per grade schools with a high proportion of indigenous students; schools from both the public and independent sectors of the education system; schools located in regional centres, as well as schools that were remote and isolated in rural and regional settings. The varied backgrounds and characteristics of both participants and schools provided a typical cross-section of school and teacher profiles in rural and regional Australia.

Findings

The findings of the study reveal participants were concerned with the teaching expectations of the primary school curriculum and specifically the learning standards and outcomes set out for the Creative Arts. A number of factors contributed to their concern that they could not fulfil all of these teaching expectations. A summary of some of the key issues that teachers frequently made reference to in their interviews included the following: interrelated issues of time and the quantity of curriculum material requiring coverage, the accountability to which teachers were held in other Key Learning Areas, the broad scope of subject content within the Creative Arts, teachers' evaluation of their own Creative Arts knowledge and skills and the level of confidence expressed by individual teachers to teach Arts disciplines, perceptions of the value and status given to the Creative Arts, and gender issues.

Time Constraints

The issue of time and quantity of subject matter in primary learning and development was a concern of the participants. In total, five participants used the terms "over-crowded curriculum" and "crowded curriculum" to describe the state of the curriculum. These teachers felt overwhelmed by the demands placed upon them to teach an extensive list of curriculum subjects. For example, Jules said, "I just think that the Education Department thinks that primary school teachers are supposed to be good at everything and people aren't like that." Jackie similarly objected to the assumption that primary teachers were capable of teaching anything. She asserted that, "No teacher can do all areas perfectly."

Intertwined with priority issues, the feelings of being overwhelmed revealed participants reducing the time they devoted to Creative Arts instruction in the classroom. Additionally, some teachers felt the time devoted to the Creative Arts was pressured by the preparation of media necessary to facilitate activities. Susanna stated, "The preparation [in the Creative Arts] takes time and, as you know, there is not much time in the school day for these sorts of things." Additionally, the majority of teachers believed time in the primary classroom was dominated by an attention to core subjects such as English and Mathematics. The fact that new departmental directives necessitated students achieved benchmark standards in Literacy and Numeracy placed additional demands on their time. In the following reflection Tony presented a situation in which he felt there was a neglect of other curriculum areas. He stated:

> In the last four or five years the government's seen how easy it has been to make schools accountable for Maths and English, and schools often teach up to 60% of their time in those two areas. That's two KLAs [Key Learning Areas] out of six! Where's the other four? And, by the way, the other four sometimes seem more difficult because we're trying to divide them up into these little boxes.

At least eight of the teachers similarly felt the precedence of specific subjects necessitated a negotiation between whether more time or less time could be afforded to teaching the Creative Arts.

Scope of the Subject Area

In general, the expectation of Creative Arts teaching and learning was considered a rather unrealistic expectation demanding a breadth of knowledge and skills most the nineteen teachers felt that they did not possess. The scope of the Creative Arts was shown as very broad, and the teachers considered this beyond the skills and knowledge of most people. The view that too much was expected of teachers in regards to teaching all of the Creative Arts subjects was clearly expressed by the participants. Gary for instance considered this a huge demand on their individual skills and knowledge. He stated:

> I mean it is asking a bit too much to suggest that a person can actually adequately clench the six KLA, but the bits of the six KLA. When you look at drama, music, art and craft, you get only a very few performance people in the big world (laugh) who are good at all those.

Gary, like a number of other teachers in the study, considered it was unlikely, even for people who are specifically trained in the Arts, to know and be competent in teaching all facets of these fields.

Experiences, Skills, Knowledge, and Confidence

A line of consecutive stages guided how *experiences*, *skills*, *knowledge*, and *confidence* were acquired and how these concepts were dynamically linked. This line of successive events included the individual initially as a child, then as a trainee teacher, and finally as a qualified teacher, where each successive developmental stage was determined by personal experiences with the Creative Arts in prior stages. Limited and less than positive experiences in any of the Arts disciplines at any stage in their lives appeared to diminish the acquisition of discipline related skills which in turn reduced the teacher's level of confidence to teach the subject. A conceptual model for facilitating Creative Arts learning was developed that drew on the central concepts and themes that emerged from the data. Dynamic relationships and interrelationships exist between these emergent features. This model is shown in Figure 1.
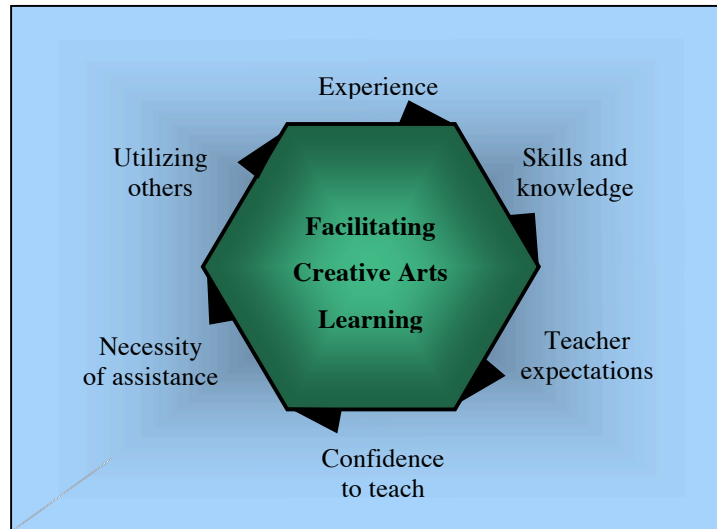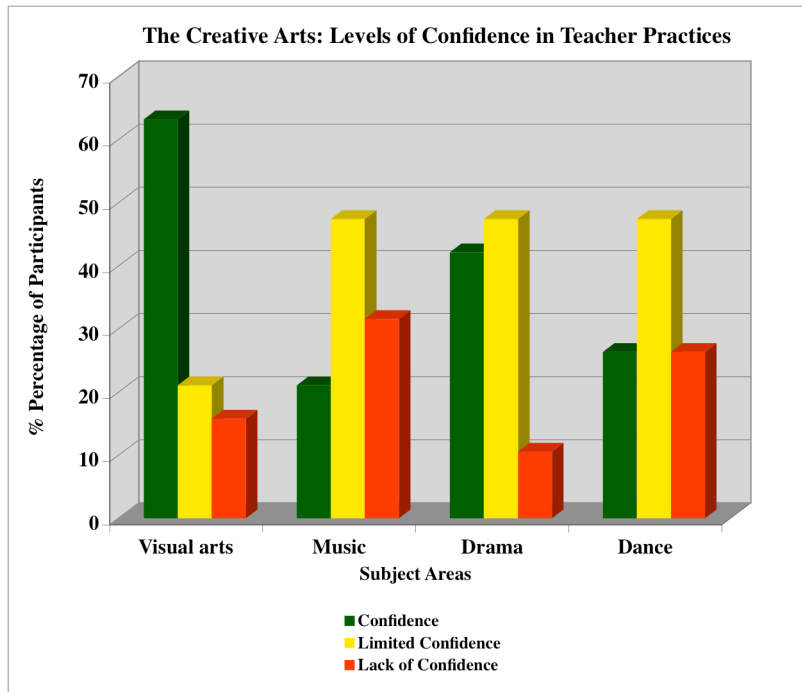
Figure 1. Conceptual model: Facilitating Creative Arts learning

The model for facilitating Creative Arts learning (*Figure 1*) is presented as a cycle. The figure conceptualises how the participants moved through the stages of knowing what they have to teach in the Creative Arts to then applying this knowledge and initiating the teaching and learning process. Points in the cycle represent different stages of awareness. These stages highlight approaches and perspectives of the participants for Creative Arts as primary pedagogy.

The data analysis revealed varying levels of teacher confidence in relation to teaching in the four Arts disciplines. The words and phrases teachers used to describe their degree of confidence were used by the principal researcher to group them into one of the three levels expressed as a *lack of confidence*, *limited confidence*, and *confidence*.

Firstly, *lack of confidence* was suggested in words and phrases like: "uncomfortable" (Jean); "I'm really hopeless" (Marie); "it's daunting" (Kevin); and "I have a fear [of music]" (Dani). The informants used these words to highlight areas where they felt truly uncomfortable. Secondly, *limited confidence* was demonstrated by phrases like: "not a complete illiterate" (Susanna); "not as confident" (Jackie); "reluctant to teach" (Patrick) and "not overly confident" (Gai). The areas where participants indicated they possessed limited confidence showed that they had reservations teaching particular aspects of the Creative Arts. Thirdly, *confidence* was suggested in statements like: "I'm confident" (Lindi); "I've always felt comfortable" (Gabrielle); "I love teaching [art]" (Paula); and "I just enjoy it" (Jane). Confidence was shown in the areas where participants felt they had significant skills and knowledge to effectively facilitate student learning, and were also areas where they had personal interests.

The Creative Arts: Levels of Confidence in Teacher Practices

A bar chart titled "The Creative Arts: Levels of Confidence in Teacher Practices". The y-axis is labeled "% Percentage of Participants" ranging from 0 to 70. The x-axis is labeled "Subject Areas" with categories: Visual arts, Music, Drama, Dance. Legend: Confidence (green), Limited Confidence (yellow), Lack of Confidence (red).

A comparison of each level of confidence in each subject area revealed that teachers felt most confident teaching visual Arts and least confident teaching music. In short, *Figure 2* illustrates the variation in levels of confidence the participants expressed for teaching in the four different art forms.

Each of the teachers tended to avoid speaking about areas within the Creative Arts where they believed they did not have adequate skills and knowledge. In contrast, the participants spoke with more enthusiasm and detail in the areas where their felt their skill and knowledge levels were higher. Interestingly, all nineteen participants stated that they utilized the skills of other people to assist learning in different aspects of the Creative Arts. For example, the participants stated they utilized "consultants" (Darcy); "artists" (Marie); "colleagues" (Jane); "specialists" (Gabrielle); "the parent body" (Ross); and "highly qualified people" (Tony). This organization of teaching responsibility was understood to be a way to improve the quality of teaching and learning within the Key Learning Area. The delegation of teaching ranged from total delegation, to partial delegation, and lastly working together in partnership with others. As many as ten participants stated they delegated the responsibility for teaching music and choral activities to other people, five in dance and two in the visual Arts. The rationale for total delegation was that, overall, these participants felt very uncomfortable teaching these specific subject areas.

Overall, the participants considered that their individual skills and knowledge in each of the Creative Arts influenced their ability to adequately deliver effective practices in the Key Learning Area. As many as twelve participants stated that their pre-service teacher training in the Creative Arts were very limited and that they were extremely dissatisfied with these experiences. Lindi, when asked to describe the training she had encountered, said, "At Teachers College I had to do recorder, and then for art I can remember making a kite. Just your very, very, basic training." Lindi, like many others, felt she should have gained a lot more from these professional experiences.

There were some differences in the ways both the junior and senior teachers viewed their initial pre-service Arts education training. Teachers with ten to twenty or more years of teaching experience indicated that they were exposed in limited ways to the visual arts, music and craft activities in their teacher training encounters. Other participants who were identified as having between five and ten years teaching experience, showed that they believed they had been exposed to a greater variety of subject areas. This included the visual arts, music, drama, and dance within the context of the Creative Arts. However, it was interesting to note that, although their experiences were broader, in much the same way as the other participants they presented their teacher training as limited.

Teachers' Value of the Arts

All the participants in the study believed the Creative Arts have value in learning and society. These teachers not only focused on their own values associated with the Key Learning Area, but on their perception of the values and attitudes that society in general, students, and students' family members hold. Participants described how they valued the Creative Arts for the foundational skills they provided for learning and development. They related how they used the Creative Arts to: develop fine motor skills; assist in the development of social skills; develop student confidence; and enrich learning throughout the curriculum as cross-curricular programming.

Despite revealing that they valued the Creative Arts for the way they assisted in the promotion of these outcomes, the findings also showed that teachers' attitudes might have constrained the scope of the Creative Arts. It was noted for example, that there was little attention given to cognitive aspects of learning in the Arts. In part this may have explained why many of the teachers related how the Creative Arts were 'not as academic' as other curriculum areas. Many also admitted that Creative Arts subjects were practised with irregularity and that the priority they gave to collective area was often lower than other areas within the primary curriculum.

Participants often stated that they had particular interests in one or another of the Creative Arts although they had some difficulty in describing where their interests originated. Family support emerged as a factor within six of the participants' interviews. According to these individuals their families were influential in both positive and negative ways in developing interests and skills. Some, like Jules, Jean, and Paula stated that their family had a negative influence. Alternatively, Gabrielle (dance and drama), Marie (visual arts), and Jane (music), indicated their families provided some positive influence and linked them with outside school activities as children. These were described as a casual development of interests.

When reflecting upon the educational status of the Creative Arts, fifteen participants believed that certain dominant opinions had contributed to their lesser status in the past. A number of

participants stated that their students were influenced by their family's attitudes. Participants, such as Wade, indicated families were guided by narrow perceptions of the Creative Arts. For example, Wade stated:

> I think a lot of parents might know that they've got funny kids, and they might know that they've got kids that are entertaining, but they never actually think that there is a career to be made out of it, or that there's a life that can be filled with it.

In his view, many people continued to believe that the Creative Arts were largely without functional or economic purpose. This meant that not only was there less pressure on schools to strengthen their Creative Arts programs but parents also did not invest in extra curricula training for their children outside of school hours.

Despite believing that the Creative Arts did not have educational status in the school/parent community, many of the teachers emphasized the point that they believed attitudes and opinions were shifting. They indicated that the Creative Arts were continuing to grow in importance within education and in other aspects of life. The comparisons participants made between their own student experiences of the Creative Arts and how the Key Learning Area is currently practised, indicated they believed the quality of Arts learning experiences had improved in schools in more recent years. This was attributed to a greater valuing of the subject area. For instance, Dani suggested there had been improvement over time but she also appeared to believe that the Creative Arts had not yet reached their full educational potential. Jean spoke of greater variety and scope in terms of the learning experiences afforded by current teaching practices. She also expressed considerable sorrow for deficiencies and gaps in her own schooling. Overall, the participants indicated they valued the field for the outcomes and opportunities the subject areas produced. This value included the confidence students can gain as learners and the increasing requirements for Creative Arts skills in a range of occupations.

Gender Issues and Attitudes in Creative Arts Education

The research findings also indicate gender issues still potentially influence how facets of the learning area are practised and experienced by students. Overall, nine of the teachers indicated gender differences had a significant impact on the types of activities that could be presented to students in the Creative Arts. In many of the interviews these participant distinguished between female and male students, describing the ways students responded to certain activities. For example, Kevin said "The girls like things with wool. They like making, weaving, all that sort of stuff. Boys not so much, the boys like the drawing and the painting." Kevin, like the other teachers who indicated gender differences clearly believed students responded to different aspects of the Arts because of their gender.

The issue of gender bias was most pronounced when teachers discussed the subject of creative dance. Some teachers mentioned a heavy neglect in relation to male students studying dance. Many of them believed that a major contributing factor was the fact that male students found dance unappealing. For example, Jackie stated "A lot of boys aren't particularly happy with dance." Patrick explained:

> I tend to avoid dance a little bit. Last year I had a big group of Year 6 boys and trying to do dance with them was like sticking your head in a lion's mouth.

It was interesting to note that, because teachers believed that the male students did not respond to dance instruction, they avoided teaching dance and this meant practice in the subject area was often limited. In this sense students' likes and dislikes potentially influenced the regularity and attention to the Arts they were exposed to. In contrast, there was some indication of an effort on the part of teachers to move away from stereotyped gender roles. Tony showed support for this change as he could see that values were changing in the classroom as well as in the community. He stated:

> I find my boys are so creative and so energetic they never think twice about performing in a dance or a play. Whereas 15 years ago, in the city schools where I've come from, the parents would object to them doing arty-farty stuff. Whereas all our parents are just so over the moon with the way the kids are performing.

It is also important to note that Tony considered the students' families influential in shaping how students experience and perceive the Creative Arts.

Discussion

This study shows how the life experiences of the participants shaped the way they approached and taught the Arts subjects. There was a direct relationship between the participants' skills, knowledge, and their confidence to teach each subject area, and these factors were dynamically related to their prior experiences within the individual areas of the Creative Arts. Teachers' perceptions of their own level of Creative Arts experience was a major factor that affected how they initially engaged in pre-service training, inevitably shaping how they later approached and facilitated student experience. The skills and knowledge each individual derived from education prior to becoming primary teachers seemed in large part to gauge their level of confidence. In turn, these levels of confidence affected the intensity of instruction for each of the Creative Arts. Positive Arts experiences amongst teachers represented the

acquisition of skills, knowledge and confidence, which they said they were later able to transfer into quality Arts instruction in the classroom.

The teachers' comments showed they largely felt overwhelmed by the demands of teaching content knowledge and skills in all of the Creative Arts subjects in the primary classroom. Many considered it was impossible, even for people specifically trained in the Arts, to know and be competent in teaching all facets of this field. Those teachers who believed they had limited Arts experiences, knowledge and skills in one or more of the Creative Arts subjects, found that they struggled to develop students' understanding in these areas. Most of these teachers said they either taught to their strengths by focusing on the Arts subjects they felt most confident to teach or otherwise delegated partial or in some cases, total responsibility for teaching to others with greater expertise. The findings show that teachers felt most confident in teaching the visual Arts and least confident in teaching music. They attributed this lack of confidence to insufficient music training, the complexity of music as a discipline, as well as a perceived lack of personal talent for music. The majority of participants used fairly simple approaches to introduce students to music with a focus on developing foundational skills. In contrast, the approach taken to the visual Arts showed the participants not only provided students with structured learning tasks but also allowed them to be creative. They described how they provided students with the opportunity to explore an array of visual Arts media and activities in the classroom.

All of the teachers in the study acknowledged that the quality and quantity of Arts education that they received at primary, secondary and tertiary levels did not prepare them adequately for this responsibility. Many of the participants made reference to the limited nature of learning activities in their pre-service university courses. The regularity of comments about a lack of depth and relevance in these courses suggests there is a need for reforms to Creative Arts education curricula at this level. Apart from improving the effectiveness of tertiary teacher-training courses the findings of this study show there is an urgent need for greater support of qualified teachers in the classroom. In most cases the participants described a situation in which they had little or no in-service training and support when the most recent Creative Arts Syllabus was introduced to schools.

Providing more training in pre-service teacher courses would go some way to redressing a lack of prior Arts background. However, the findings of this study show that it is difficult to compensate for a lack of Arts background in teacher training programs given the limited amount of time available for Arts pedagogy in tertiary settings. Furthermore, participants who had little prior interest and experience in any one of the Arts disciplines reflected that they had not been inclined towards engaging in these subjects during their teacher training. Research conducted by Ashton (1999) on the visual Arts, Wright (1999) on drama, Franklin (2000) on

music, and Dunkin (2004) on dance, have similarly presented primary and secondary school experience as a factor affecting how primary teachers engage in pre-service Arts training.

Conclusion

There were a number of valuable outcomes that emerged from this study. Firstly it provided a clearer picture of whether a group of generalist primary school teachers believed they could effectively accommodate all their teaching responsibilities in the area of the Creative Arts. Secondly, it identified a number of practical issues and curriculum considerations that impacted upon teachers' approaches to teaching the Creative Arts in their classrooms. Thirdly, but probably most importantly, the study helped to establish a better understanding of the values and attitudes influencing approaches to Creative Arts education in the primary school milieu.

The findings of this study add to what for some time has been a contentious issue in regards to primary education in Australia. The issue of whether it is unrealistic to expect primary teachers to teach effectively in all areas of the primary curriculum. In this respect the study supports Alexander's et al. (1992) proposition that the primary education system curriculum is a far too demanding expectation of a generalist teacher's subject-knowledge. Under such an arrangement it appears that Creative Arts suffers most of all the Key Learning Areas. Specifically the breath of knowledge and experience needed in order to teach all the Creative Arts subjects well was viewed by many of the participants in this study as beyond the skills of most generalist primary teachers. Furthermore, many of the participant teachers implied that because departmental directives in more recent years have demanded more time be spent on Literacy and Numeracy, this had direct consequences for the Creative Arts Key Learning Area. They also admitted it was difficult to have consistency and regularity in the Arts curriculum given both the time constraints and the lower educational priority given to the subject area in the curriculum.

This research study has shown that within the context of Australian education the issues of teacher preparedness and value for the creative arts are highly relevant issues in regards to the quality of primary students artistic learning and development. It confirms the claims of a number of other Australian studies – that there is an undeniable gap that exists between the expectations of our curriculum frameworks and the preparation in arts areas that can be provided by initial teacher education courses, particularly at primary (elementary) school level. Despite the fact that this study is particular to the Australian education context, the findings from this study are germane to the field as a whole. The information should assist individuals who are interested in promoting creative-arts-in-learning and advocating for Creative Arts as core components in elementary education programs or curricula.

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