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## "They're far more prepared to teach children": Authentic Assessment of the Arts in Primary Initial Teacher Education Degrees in Six Australian Universities

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**Abstract**

The applied nature of learning in teacher education courses suggests the value of authentic assessment that links classroom learning to "real-world" school teaching. While the features of authentic assessment have been extensively explored, the features of authentic arts assessment are less well-articulated in the literature. We use a collaborative autoethnographic approach to examine our own assessment practices to surface the features of authentic arts assessment in our Australian teacher

education courses, and the principles underpinning it. Using existing approaches to authentic learning as analytical frameworks, our research developed three principles for authentic arts assessment in teacher education. Authentic arts assessment: 1) replicates real-world arts making and actual arts teaching, 2) connects theory and practice through application, and 3) engages students in reflective practices. We propose these three principles as a means for teacher educators to reframe their approaches to arts assessment in ITE.

## Introduction

In Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the concept of work readiness has a focus on ensuring university graduates are equipped with work-ready skills and subject-specific knowledge to fit the changing workplace environment (Peersia et al., 2024), and higher education institutions are responsible for producing work-ready graduates. Increasingly, academics are placing value on the notion of *authentic* assessment, wherein assessments resemble the kinds of tasks undertaken in industry settings and resemble the ways in which expertise is developed and enacted outside of academic environments (McDermott et al., 2017). Assessment in arts education within ITE programs plays a pivotal role in shaping the pedagogical approaches of future teachers and in influencing the artistic development of their future students (Burke et al., 2023). In the context of ITE this translates into assessments that enable students to demonstrate their learning, while also engaging in the kinds of tasks teachers would enact in the school classroom. Arts educators and researchers widely agree that an effective preparation for arts classroom teaching necessitates opportunities for ITE students to develop both their personal artistry and their pedagogic skills (Ewing & Gibson, 2015). As such, it follows that authentic arts assessment should enable ITE students to demonstrate both personal artistry and their ability to effectively teach the arts or "Pedagogical Content Knowledge" (Schulman, 1986) in a manner that reflects the needs and realities of their future classrooms.

The authors have between 13 and 35 years of individual experience as arts educators and are all academics who teach into units of study in ITE programs. In our shared aim to prepare ITE students with applied knowledge and skills for authentic arts practices in their future classrooms, we all employ an approach to assessment framed as "praxis-focused" assessment, which is defined as the mandating of practical arts learning experiences and critical reflection through assessment (Burke et al., 2023). This approach is rooted in constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2007), which creates a direct connection between learning activities, intended learning outcomes, and assessment tasks. Our praxis-focused approach to arts assessment requires students to develop and demonstrate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in the arts and, importantly, recognises that such theoretical knowledge is more effectively

understood when experienced through hands-on arts learning experiences. Recent studies (Burke et al., 2023) have confirmed from the student perspective that praxis-focused assessments positively engage them in this theory-practice nexus, and students believe this approach to assessment helps them to feel more practically prepared for the classroom. However, further research is required to demonstrate whether this integration of theory and practice represents a form of authentic arts assessment, which we consider vital for equipping future arts educators with the necessary skills for classroom teaching (Cutcher & Cook, 2016; Ewing & Gibson, 2015). This article, which is part of a larger, ongoing research project across six Australian universities entitled "Arts education, assessment and ITE degrees in Australian Higher Education," seeks to determine whether our praxis-based assessment approaches align with principles of authentic learning and assessment in the arts.

Despite the benefits from the student perspective, there is still an assumption that praxis-based assessments represent authentic assessment in the arts. Further, while the features of authentic assessment have been extensively explored (McArthur, 2023), to date, the features of authentic *arts* assessment have been variously explored and proposed, but do not appear to have been explicitly articulated in the literature. As such, as academics who utilise praxis-focused assessment, we sought to scrutinise our own assessment practices in the arts and evaluate whether our enactment of praxis-focused assessments delivered the intended outcomes. The aim of the research reported here was thus twofold. First, we sought to evaluate our current praxis-focused assessment tasks using two frameworks: Herrington and Oliver's (2000) design framework for authentic learning environments, and Dinham's (2023) features of authentic arts, to determine the attributes of our assessments that fulfilled authentic learning and assessment in the arts. Second, in identifying the features of our assessments that fulfilled the combined requirements of these two frameworks, we aimed to synthesise overarching principles that may be used to underpin future authentic arts assessment design. In doing so, the project sought to answer the following research question: "What are the key characteristics and potentialities of authentic, praxis-focused assessment in arts education in Australian primary ITE degrees?" In this paper, we also offer both practical and theoretical insights into this question and provide proposed principles for supporting the development of authentic, praxis-focused arts assessments in primary ITE contexts.

## Literature

Authentic assessment can be broadly defined as the blending of theory and practice in and across assessment tasks that requires dialogic, real-world engagement, and mirror real-world tasks (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2013). In Higher Education (HE), as students move from foundational knowledge to more experiential learning, the integration and application of skills and capabilities becomes clearer (DeLuca et al., 2021), better preparing students to "challenge routine practices, take a stand on knowledge and experience, and explore possibilities in light

of who they are becoming" (Vu & Dall'Alba, 2024, p. 206). In teacher education, this is usually reflected through tasks and challenges that teachers will encounter in actual classroom settings, underpinned by a recognition of theory at work in these processes. Such tasks usually involve practical, hands-on experiences such as lesson planning, teaching demonstrations, teaching resource creation, and similar creative projects of relevance to classroom teaching. When considering arts education within ITE, however, additional dimensions must be considered.

Dinham (2023) contends that effective assessment in the arts must not only evaluate the final product of student work but also the creative processes, decision-making, and personal expression involved (Dinham, 2023). It has been asserted by arts educators that effective preparation for teaching the arts in the classroom requires more than pedagogical knowledge (Burke et al., 2023); that the most effective arts educators have experience with both arts pedagogy and arts practices. As Eisner (2002) contends, to be an effective arts educator, one must first be an artist. To this end, arts educators recommend that effective ITE learning in the arts requires opportunities to experience both pedagogical and artistic processes "experiencing the aesthetic, creative and artistic practices as an artist" (Burke et al., 2024, p. 3). Authentic assessment in this context must therefore support the development of personal artistry and pedagogical content knowledge, enabling future classroom educators to model and pedagogically support rich, creative learning experiences in their classrooms. There are a range of reported challenges with the implementation of such assessment approaches, particularly within ITE. One of the most persistent is the noted subjectivity of assessing creativity and artistic expression. Arts-based tasks often rely on judgments of originality (uniqueness of the student's creative expression), aesthetic quality (the sensory and formal appeal of the work), and personal expression (how well the work conveys the student's intended meaning, voice, or emotion), and these have inherent risks of subjectivity in evaluation (Avotina & Froloviceva, 2023; Orr, 2010). This process requires a nuanced understanding of assessment criteria, rubrics, and strategies for providing meaningful feedback (Andrade, 2010). However, within HE, there is a consistent challenge regarding the non-availability of time and resources to effectively achieve this goal (Avotina & Froloviceva, 2023; Baker et al., 2025; Joseph et al., 2025; Orr 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2012). Added complexities arise from the increasing uptake of fully online teacher education programs, which introduce challenges to practical arts learning opportunities that engage learners in embodied and collaborative experiences that reflect the realities of the arts classroom (Nieminen et al., 2022). Nonetheless, while such challenges exist, they point to the need for assessment practices that reflect the realities of the arts classroom.

One approach to assessment in the arts that has been increasingly employed in response to these challenges, particularly in the online mode, is "praxis-focused assessment" (Burke et al.,

2023). This approach emphasises the interconnected nature of theory and practice foregrounding the significance of continually reflecting on these (Arnold et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2023). Praxis-focused assessment in the arts involves engaging ITE students in hands-on artistic experiences that reflect the kinds of arts tasks that might be suitable for the arts classroom while simultaneously requiring critical reflection on the theoretical and pedagogical implications of these practices. ITE students are thus developing both their artistic and pedagogical selves through reflexive practice and are active participants in their learning journey. As Vu and Dall'Alba (2024) argue, authentic assessment should challenge students to reflect on who they are becoming as educators, not just what they know. This kind of assessment might therefore employ a range of artistic practices, such as performance tasks, portfolios, and exhibitions, alongside reflective practices such as journals, peer feedback, or video analysis. Possibilities for assessment innovation also continue to evolve with the integration of digital technologies, which have the potential to expand task choices such as digital portfolios, virtual exhibitions, and video-based reflections (Allen et al., 2014; Nieminen et al., 2022). Such innovations offer avenues for students to document the creative process, permit collaboration when students are not co-located, and create opportunities for multi-modal expression of learning. Given all of this, praxis-focused assessment appears to the authors to embody the hallmarks of "authentic arts assessment" highlighted in this literature review. While a small body of research indicates positive student responses to these kinds of assessment practices, and an indication they feel this kind of assessment contributes to a sense of work readiness (Burke et al., 2023; Davis, 2012), there is a need for further research into the characteristics of such assessment and to ensure it delivers authentic approaches, something this project addresses.

In this study an approach towards developing an understanding of how authentic arts assessment is enacted was underpinned by combining existing theoretical frameworks that emphasise the integration of real-world learning, reflective practice, and artistic learning processes. A range of assessment frameworks have been variously proposed, including Gulikers et al.'s (2004) five-dimensional assessment framework and Villarroel et al.'s (2018) blueprint for authentic assessment. Such frameworks consistently underscore the importance of aligning assessment tasks with real-world practices. For the purposes of this research, two frameworks were chosen for their suitability to an arts education context (Dinham, 2023; Herrington and Oliver, 2000). Table 1 outlines how both frameworks offer a comprehensive lens for examining the design and implementation of arts assessment in ITE.

**Table 1**

*Authentic Learning Frameworks*

| Framework | Core Elements / Processes | Description | Purpose / Learner Role |
|---|---|---|---|
| Herrington & Oliver (2000, pp. 25-26) | "1. Authentic context<br>2. Authentic tasks<br>3. Access to expert performance<br>4. Multiple roles and perspectives<br>5. Collaborative construction of knowledge<br>6. Reflection<br>7. Articulation<br>8. Coaching and scaffolding<br>9. Authentic assessment" | Learning is embedded in meaningful, complex tasks that reflect real-world practice. This framework has been widely applied in teacher education, including in digital and interdisciplinary contexts (e.g., Meihami, 2023; Wu et al., 2021) and provides a robust foundation for evaluating the authenticity of assessment tasks. | To design situated learning environments where learners are active participants in realistic contexts. Emphasizes performance, collaboration, and guided learning. |
| Dinham (2023) | 1. **Invent** – Generating ideas, exploring possibilities, imagining and experimenting<br>2. **Make** – Creating artworks using materials, techniques, and processes<br>3. **Connect** – Linking personal, cultural, and historical contexts<br>4. **Reflect** – Evaluating, interpreting, and making meaning of the creative process and outcomes | These processes emphasize the cyclical and interconnected nature of creativity, critical thinking, and personal expression, and when employed ensure that arts learning avoids common pitfalls that render it tokenistic and stifling of creativity and imagination. | To support authentic arts learning through expressive, interpretive, and contextual processes. Learners are positioned as creative agents. |

## Methodology

The purpose of this research was to determine features of authentic assessment in ITE arts education, with the intention to develop principles that might guide the development and refinement of authentic arts assessment tasks both in our own courses and more broadly in ITE arts education. As ITE arts educators, we collectively realised our use of praxis-focused assessment was based upon an assumption that it represented authentic arts assessment, and that there was a need to scrutinize this. To do so, we engaged in a collaborative autoethnography (CAE) (Chang et al., 2016) to scrutinise our practice and draw insights from this that could improve our approach and develop more rigorous insights into authentic assessment in the arts in ITE.

As researchers, we chose to use an autoethnographic approach (Patton, 2015) because the research question was derived from the "Core inquiry question: How does my own experience of my culture offer insights about this culture, situation, event, and way of life?" (p. 101). Guided by well-established frameworks, the CAE approach enabled us to engage in a shared community experience from both collective and individual analyses to better understand and

critique the features of our approaches. This permitted a nuanced understanding owing to our own positionality as arts educators, and the collective experiences and reflections of the research team contributed to a richer understanding of authentic arts assessment. Figure 1 illustrates the process in which our CAE engaged.
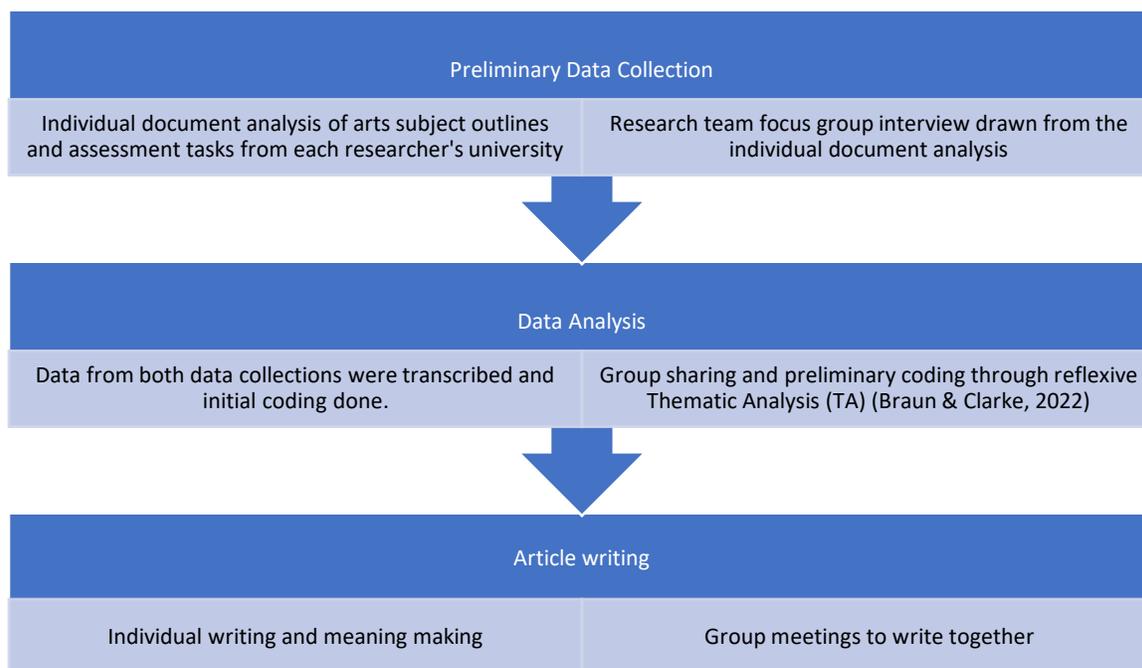
| Preliminary Data Collection | |
| --- | --- |
| Individual document analysis of arts subject outlines and assessment tasks from each researcher's university | Research team focus group interview drawn from the individual document analysis |

| Data Analysis | |
| --- | --- |
| Data from both data collections were transcribed and initial coding done. | Group sharing and preliminary coding through reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) |

| Article writing | |
| --- | --- |
| Individual writing and meaning making | Group meetings to write together |

*Figure 1*. CAE process.

In undertaking this study, we recognised the inherent subjectivity in scrutinising our own practice (akin to the processes of actual arts practice), and the vital need for researcher reflexivity to ensure rigour. In CAE, it is acknowledged that researchers do not keep their distance from the researched; they are, in fact, intimately involved as both researchers and participants. The CAE approach was thus fundamental in this regard, foregrounding our dual roles as both participants and investigators, and enabling iterative cycles of reflection and discussion through which we could challenge our assumptions. We additionally recognised the value of our subjectivity as experienced arts educators, whereby our insider perspective was a crucial element of understanding the complexities of authentic assessment. Chang et al., (2016) suggest that CAE offers the opportunity to "hold up mirrors to each other in communal self-interrogation and to explore our subjectivity in the company of one another" (p. 26). This mirror enabled an in-depth exploration of authentic assessment in the arts from an insider's perspective while promoting critical self-reflection and collaborative interrogation of assumptions, adding rigour to the autobiographical process (Chang et al., 2016). To enable this, we met regularly by Zoom throughout the project. In the reporting of our findings, we

have therefore chosen not to remain anonymous (Edwards, 2021). Table 2 provides a brief
summary of our respective backgrounds.

**Table 2**

*Researcher background and teaching focus*

| Researcher | Background and teaching focus |
| --- | --- |
| William | A school-based music educator for 15 years, and now a music and visual arts educator in ITE degrees for almost 20 years |
| Amy | Visual Arts, 20 years of experience as arts educator in ITE degrees. |
| Katie B. | Multi-arts educator, teaching all art forms and arts integration |
| Sian | Dance, but now a multi-arts educator |
| Katie H. | Visual Arts, but now a multi-arts educator |
| David | Multi-Arts educator K-12 for 34 years, and inclusive education |

Ethical clearance was granted from the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics
Committee in March 2024 (Project ID: 30245). This ethics approval required the researchers
from all six participating Australian universities, spanning five of the country's six states and
two territories to seek their own cross-institutional ethics approvals based on the University of
Tasmania clearance. All such approvals were gained prior to commencing data collection.

### Data Collection

Data collection was conducted throughout 2024, and both document analysis and focus group
interviews were analysed for this article. Focus group interviews were selected as a valuable
method for generating rich, interaction-based insights into shared experiences of assessment,
as they enable participants to reflect, build on each other's responses, and co-construct
meaning in ways that align with the collaborative and dialogic nature of arts-based teacher
education (Kitzinger, 1995). Document analysis included the analysis of subject outlines,
assessment task descriptions, and assessment criteria for one course or unit of study from each
participating university. The responsibility for the analysis of these documents was shared
equally by members of the research team, and they used two frameworks as discussed in the
literature review, as analytical frameworks. Together, these were used as audit tools, in which
each of the elements from the respective frameworks was used to "map" each other's unit
outlines and assessment documents, with examples of the ways each document evidenced (or
not) the various features across the two frameworks. Overarching reflections and questions for
further exploration were also documented as part of this process in preparation for the next

phase of data collection via focus group interviews.

The research team then met to discuss the document analysis, conducting two extended focus group interviews, each between 1 and 2 hours, for all team members. These were conducted and recorded using Zoom technology. The Chief Investigator took on the role of interviewer (and autoethnographic participant) guiding the process using three interview questions: 1) What are your perceptions of authentic learning and teaching (what does it mean to you and how is it evidenced or not within the documents for analysis)? 2) To what extent do you believe you use authentic learning and teaching? and, 3) What are your perceptions of the impacts of authentic assessment on student learning and experience of your ITE students?

## Data Analysis

The interview transcript and document analysis data were analysed using a process called Reflexive Thematic Analysis or TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This process involved six phases of analysis using NVivo software. Thematic Analysis (TA) is reflexive because of the researcher positionality (Holmes, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2022) write that "valuing a subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher, a reflexive researcher, is a fundamental characteristic of TA" (p. 4). The research team took this position throughout the project. Thus, our biases became important, with our TA taking a deductive rather than an inductive orientation to our data, based on the theory that our practice had already demonstrated authentic approaches to assessment, and that a relativist, constructionist approach to data analysis would serve to understand this reality in depth. Following the identification and final expression of our themes, we then returned to the two frameworks chosen for this project to validate the coherence and alignment of our themes with the established models of authenticity in education and the arts. Further, this stage stimulated additional reflexivity through which we questioned our findings considering the theory and identified avenues for further research in recognising limitations of the findings.

## Findings

The analysis resulted in the development of three themes that illustrate core aspects of our assessment tasks and processes that fulfilled the elements outlined in both frameworks (Dinham, 2023; Herrington & Oliver, 2010). We identified that authentic arts assessment: 1) replicates authentic arts practice through the processes of creating and responding as an artist; 2) connects educational and arts theories to classroom practice, and 3) engages ITE students in authentic reflective processes. When data are cited, focus group data is identified by participant name, comments on subject level documents from the document analysis are identified as "document analysis review comments," and the institutional owner of the document is identified subsequently in brackets.

### Theme 1: Authentic arts assessment replicates authentic arts practice through creating and responding as an artist.

This theme included 22 data extracts across the two data sets and included contributions from all six participants. Central to the concepts within this theme was the notion that preparing students as classroom educators necessitates their engagement first as artists, which can underscore their ability to effectively teach the arts in the classroom. Importantly, this first theme emphasised the understanding that authentic assessment in the arts requires students to engage as artists in both arts-making experiences and responding tasks, and providing evidence that they have thus engaged. As artists, they must know and use arts language, value process as well as product, and share their creations with others.

As a result of our analysis, we defined this theme as: Authentic assessment requires students to engage as artists in arts making and responding, and to provide evidence that they have done so. Many of the extracts in this theme were related to authentic arts making *as well as* authentic teaching, such as this focus group extract: "Authentic means operating in the way of an artist and operating in the way of a teacher… it's all about having assessment that embodies those two perspectives" (William). This extract highlights the interconnected nature of authentic arts assessment in ITE programs, wherein the student is empowered to *be both* artist and teacher. Such data were widespread in this theme.

Another focus group extract by Katie B. reflects the importance of this 'embodied' assessment experience and highlighted the connection between this and the process of reflection, stating that "authentic learning and teaching embodies the processes that teachers and artists both engage in, and we want our students to experience that our authentic assessment also contains making and reflection." Similarly, this document analysis review comment highlights the importance of employing both arts making and responding, in addition to understanding and applying arts language as a part of authentic assessment, writing that "the task is authentic in that it seeks to engage students as both responders to, and makers of music and dance. It engages students with arts language" (Murdoch University subject outline).

The importance of ITE students sharing their arts learning through completion of assessment, and the need to provide evidence is highlighted in this document analysis review comment: "The assessment tasks require evidence of the process of creation not just the product, particularly the music and visual arts where photographic/film evidence of the process is to be included" (Southern Cross University subject outline). This inclusion of evidence highlights the importance of student participation in process to the assessment in question. Some of the other similarly coded extracts focused on the importance of the arts as a means of self-expression and again on the embodied experience of making, such as this focus group extract that puts this simply as "part of my intent is to help spark the joy of creation" (Katie B.). This

theme has highlighted the value placed by academics on assessments that mandate students make and respond as artists, provide evidence of this, and use arts language appropriately.

This theme aligns strongly with Herrington and Oliver's (2000) framework for authentic learning. Firstly, through assessments and learning that require students to "become" artists. These data highlight the importance of providing students with authentic contexts (as in real-life arts practice) and authentic activities wherein they engage in making and responding which aligns with "multiple roles and perspectives" (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p. 25), and in the use of arts language as "collaborative construction of knowledge" (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p. 25). This alignment with Herrington and Oliver (2000) is also evident in data that stressed the need for students to share evidence of their embodied practice (as in a performance or exhibition). By encouraging students to apply the skills of both artist and teacher, it encourages students to explore "multiple roles and perspectives" (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p. 25). This theme also connects strongly with Dinham's (2023) second of four interconnected arts processes for authentic arts education, the "Make" stage, in which students "make and present well-crafted artworks that communicate their ideas and interpretations" (p. 38). Finally, because the students are required to share evidence of their making with tutors and peers it also aligns with Dinham's third of four interconnected arts processes for authentic arts education: the "Reflect" stage, where students are given the opportunity to "critically reflect on their ideas, their learning processes, their artwork and the artwork of others" (p. 38).

### Theme 2: Authentic arts assessment connects education and arts theories to classroom practice.

This theme included 31 data extracts and is the most numerously coded theme and again included all six participants. Central was the importance academics placed on designing assessments that enabled students to make links between both educational and arts theories and curriculum, and a practical, applied context. As a result of our analysis, we defined this theme as: Authentic arts assessment aims to reflect authentic classroom situations. It emphasises ITE student preparedness to teach in the classroom through both the knowledge of and application of curriculum, theoretical understandings of teaching the arts, knowledge and application of principles of authentic assessment, and building resources that students can use when teaching.

Linking theory and practice through assessment, where academics emphasised assessments that prepared students for classroom situations was common. The classroom applicability of the assessment design was crucial to the notion of authenticity. However, this focus group comment highlighted the importance of identifying what types of theory students are being asked to link to their arts practice – pedagogic or artistic:

> What's the theory we're talking about?... I guess it's pedagogic content knowledge firstly…I'm essentially getting them to link elements and processes to what they've done. But as the assessment progresses, I'm also getting them to think about…planning a lesson, scaffolding…teaching theories and theoretical approaches to teaching (William).

Another focus group comment again suggested the importance of theory, however, this time with direct reference to identifying wider arts teaching theory at work within the Australian Curriculum, and the need to demonstrate to students the importance of metacognitive thinking in their completion of assessment:

> The curriculum identifies those theories and pedagogies…that's where I…am going back to curriculum regularly with the students and trying to identify, 'this is what we've been reading about in our course, modules and text and this is what the curriculum is saying' (Katie B.).

Sian, in the focus group data, likewise emphasised the important role of authentic assessment as a means to link theory and practice, noting that when students have invested time in the making activities it is important that they link to theory, stating once they have finished "the doing and the practicing and the doing and the making, …to then say, Okay, now go and read about why this is actually important, and how this actually links to theory." Katie H. specifically linked the making of arts to theory and classroom preparedness, stating that "we're asking our students to do and to make connections to theory and their reflection. They must have something to reflect on, which it's in the doing that they are prepared to work in the classroom." (Focus Group).

William reflected on how he designs authentic assessments to ask students to think and act as a teacher, stating that as a "teacher, they're going to have to teach. They're going to have to understand the theory, and the best way to help them connect those dots is by putting them in situations where they need to make the connections" (Focus Group). Amy reflected on a task in which her students are required to plan and teach an arts lesson and provide feedback to another student, stating it "is pretty authentic [teaching a lesson] when you have to be the teacher and…we asked the peers to give an evaluation of how it went…they learned such a lot from having to do that, prepare it, and actually get a response from the other students" (Focus Group). The ways in which an assessment task prepares students for the classroom, is highlighted in this document analysis review comment which states that the "mini lesson and sequence of learning have direct relevance for future classroom; students could potentially use this as teaching resources in the future" (Flinders University subject outline).

William highlighted the ways in which Sian's assessment links directly to thematic integration in a general classroom, thus again preparing students to teach, stating her "students engage in creative practice in response to a pretext such as a song or book. This resembles thematic integration into primary classes so is an authentic activity" (Murdoch University subject outline). He also described the way that Sian's assessment had the capacity to prepare her students for the classroom by linking to the Western Australian Curriculum, stating, "The assessment tasks relate authentically to curriculum through the organisers of making and responding, thus asking students to understand and apply the curriculum" (Murdoch University subject outline).

Katie B. reflected on the ways that authentic assessment can prepare students for the classroom, emphasising the importance of reflection, stating that "it's in the doing that they are prepared to work in the classroom…so they're far more prepared to teach children in the future, because they've already done it, and then reflected on it" (Focus Group). This theme has highlighted the value placed by academics on assessment that mandates students reflect on and apply the links between theory and practice.

This theme aligns very strongly with Herrington and Oliver's (2000) framework. Firstly, the assessment designs referred to ITE student preparedness to teach in the classroom through the application of the skills and knowledge of The Australian Curriculum: The Arts (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2025), and by requiring students to create teaching artefacts such as lesson plans and activities, this theme aligns with "authentic assessment of learning within the tasks" (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p. 26). Through assessment designs that encourage students to link theory and practice, this theme likewise aligns with Herrington and Oliver's (2000) framework by promoting "reflection to enable abstractions to be formed" and by promoting "articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit" (p. 26).

### *Theme 3: Authentic arts assessment engages ITE students in authentic reflective processes.*

This theme related to the ways in which academics designed assessment to encourage student reflection as artist and teacher. It included 15 data extracts from five participants, thus being the least coded numerically. As a result of our analysis, we defined this theme as: Authentic arts assessment (explicitly) encourages ITE students to develop the skills of reflection, positioning them both as teacher and learner. Reflection includes reflection on both arts making and the classroom application and theory. ITE students don't always value the arts, and reflection can help them make those links.

Amy highlighted the embodied nature of teaching and the importance of students seeing themselves teach, suggesting that videorecording and then viewing teaching (and reflecting on it) is an important authentic task, stating "so they can watch themselves afterwards and

critique…what they've done themselves on a big screen, so they can see, 'Oh, maybe I shouldn't have done that, or maybe I'll try this next time''' (Focus Group). This was a very similar form of assessment to that used by William, which includes a culminating performance through a final "assessment task [which] is teaching music or visual arts to a small group of children...So, we say…up to three children and videotape it and reflect on it" (Focus Group). He goes on to state that "I think that's an important part of authentic assessment as a teacher, because if you're not reflecting, you'll never improve" (Focus Group).

The document analysis review comment of the Murdoch University subject outline highlighted the importance of the rubric as a part of the reflective process, stating, "The tasks and rubrics provide an opportunity for students to articulate and reflect on their arts making." The same document analysis pointed out the embedded opportunities "for students to reflect on their own artworks and those of others… [that] may enable that reflection to become critical through the inclusion of different perspectives in arts making and responding." The document analysis of the Flinders University unit linked the teaching assessment with theory, pedagogy, and critical reflection, stating that "critical reflection on the mini lesson should promote articulation of implicit theory and pedagogy." This is similarly noted in the document analysis of the University of Tasmania unit, which stated that assessment "through the written reflection required students [to] reflect on their own making and make links to theory."

This theme aligns very strongly with Herrington and Oliver's (2000) framework. By designing assessments that require students to reflect on both their arts and teacher learnings, "abstractions" can be formed (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p. 26). And likewise, the use of well-designed rubrics to support assessments aligns with "authentic assessment of learning within the tasks" (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p. 26). And because students are required to reflect as both artists and teachers, this theme also aligns with Dinham's third interconnected arts process for authentic arts education, "Reflect," in which one reflects critically on ideas in their own art and on the artworks of others (p. 38). This emphasis on structured reflection also resonates with established theories of reflective learning. Dewey (1933) positions reflection as central to meaningful educational experience, while Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle reinforces the importance of reflective observation in transforming experience into knowledge. Similarly, Schön (1983) emphasises the concept of the "reflective practitioner," highlighting how professionals learn by thinking in and on action, and Mezirow (1991) argues that critical reflection is essential for transformative learning and the development of professional judgement.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study has identified three characteristics of authentic assessment in ITE arts education, it:

1. *Replicates* authentic arts and teaching practices by encouraging ITE students to create and respond as artists and teachers. Eisner (2002) contends that effective arts educators must first experience the arts as artists, and Dinham (2023) notes how this must involve both making and reflecting on artistic processes. Our findings support these views, demonstrating that when ITE students are positioned as both creators and pedagogues, they develop a deeper understanding of the artistic and pedagogical dimensions of their future roles.

2. *Connects* education and arts theories to classroom practice through challenging ITE students through application. Vu and Dall'Alba (2024) argue that authentic assessment should support students in becoming educators, not merely acquiring knowledge. Our findings support previous assertions that assessments should situate arts learning in real-world educational contexts (Dinham, 2023) and emphasise the importance of applying theory in practice (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

3. *Engages* ITE students in authentic reflective processes. Reflective practice as an essential element of transforming experience is well established (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983). Building on Burke et al.'s (2023) study, our study further evidences the value of pedagogical reflection on embodied learning experiences as an effective means to help develop student preparedness for the classroom.

These three characteristics are represented in Figure 2 which illustrates the non-hierarchical, interrelated nature of these characteristics.
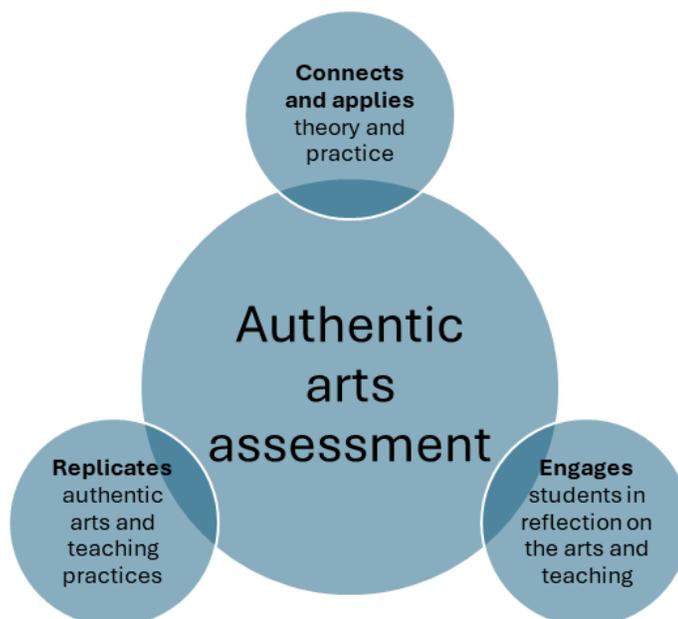
*Figure 2*. Principles of authentic assessment in ITE arts education.

It is worth noting that, when aligning data with the two models of authentic learning, it became clear that not all the elements of each model were evident. Two of the nine Herrington and Oliver (2000) interrelated design elements were not explicitly addressed in our approaches to assessment, namely: "3. Provide access to expert performances and the modelling of processes" and "8. Provide coaching and scaffolding by the teacher at critical times" (pp. 25-26). This was a surprising finding for the authors, all of whom prioritise both modelling and scaffolding. This was most likely a limitation of the focus group questions that did not elicit this but nonetheless emphasises the value of making these aspects explicit in our task descriptions and approaches. Likewise, Dinham's (2023) first area of 'invent' was missing from data. Thus, the recommendation that arts experiences should provide opportunities to explore and develop ideas, create imaginative designs to convey expression intention was not present in our data. While we agreed that the arts are a naturally creative endeavour and our assessments were designed to provide opportunities for creative self-expression, we acknowledged the inherent challenges of time constraints and university requirements for specific assessment parameters somewhat curtailed the opportunities to build this process into our assessments. Further investigation into both anomalies is required.

In seeking to answer the research question "What are the features of authentic, praxis-focused assessment in arts education in Australian primary ITE degrees?" this CAE study focussed on the experiences of primary ITE arts educators through focus groups and document analysis.

The non-inclusion of student participants may be viewed as a limitation; however, this study is part of a broader study in which student perspectives are featured, the results of which will be discussed in a future publication. Also, the focus of this paper was to start from first principles, with highly experienced academics, and to explore the key characteristics and potentialities of authentic ITE arts assessment. Our positionalities were named early in the study, and despite being the widest such study to date, including six Australian universities, the number of participants (N = 6) was small, although this allowed us to have an in-depth focus. This sample size was appropriate for qualitative research that seeks depth over breadth, enabling rich, nuanced insights into participants' lived experiences and allowing for meaningful interaction, reflection, and co-construction of ideas (Patton, 2015).

This study clearly identified links between authentic arts assessment and authentic learning, and how this work is currently being achieved in six Australian universities. This link is critical in producing work-ready, graduate teachers who can create learning experiences that are relevant and engaging for their students. This also aligns with Scott et al. (2023) where the new teacher accreditation expectation is that high-quality practical experience starts within ITE programs. Moreover, by providing authentic assessment and learning within our ITE programs, we can better meet school needs and reduce the impact of the monetary limitations of university providers.

Whilst we have now proposed our principles for authentic assessment, these are yet to be tested beyond our contexts and with a larger cohort, including students. This is the focus for future research, to recruit further participants and to test the principles which have been developed through this preliminary research. This research provides principles by which ITE arts educators can rethink and reframe the ways in which they develop assessment. For some this will require reconceptualising the place of authenticity and praxis in their teaching and assessment; however, to not challenge our assumptions will have detrimental effects on the quality of our ITE programs and on the readiness of our graduates.

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