"Authentic" Arts Teaching and Learning: An Investigation Into the Practices of Australian Home Educators

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Abstract *Research into the ways that "authentic" arts teaching and learning are conducted in Australian home education contexts has not yet been undertaken. Given that home education is experiencing rapid growth and that many current global education reforms place emphasis on the arts as vital to creative futures, the development of deeper understanding is warranted. In order to address the shortfall, this paper reports on the first phase of a qualitative study that investigated the arts practices of 14 Australian home educators for the purpose of understanding the variety of ways that arts learning and teaching are incorporated in individual home education contexts. The study sought to identify the issues that participants experience when facilitating their children's arts education, the specific strategies they adopt, and how arts teaching and learning approaches are adapted to the fluctuating needs and dynamics of their individual contexts. The paper begins by outlining home education as a unique and alternative pedagogical practice that differs from formal institutional learning, before unpacking the concept of authentic arts education. Details are presented that reveal the research process when interaction between participant and researcher combined to consider engagement with the arts and of associated challenges.*

Keywords   Home education, home schooling, arts education, creative arts

Introduction

This research investigated the ways that a group of Australian home educators facilitate their children's arts education. The inquiry sought to uncover the ways they approach arts learning, looking at the issues they experience and at wider contextual features impacting on their individual contexts. The core motivation was to develop an understanding of current practices and that new insights could lead to the development of new strategies that would offer practical benefit to the home educators in their teaching. Importantly, our objective included the concept of "authenticity" in arts teaching as this is our benchmark for meaningful practice in arts education.

Given the rapid growth of the home education sector both in Australia and around the world, and the dearth of research into this domain, the project was considered both valuable and timely. The impetus for conducting the investigation further arose from reflections on issues experienced in our own professional and personal practice. Both authors are tertiary arts educators who are passionate about introducing pre-service teachers to the concept of authentic arts teaching and learning. We also share a research interest in alternative educational contexts (Burke, 2016; Riddle & Cleaver, 2017). In addition to our formal institutional work, one of us (Katie) spent 8 years home educating her two sons. She thus came to a first-hand awareness of the issues and demands of home education, particularly in respect to arts education. Katie found that facilitating her children's arts learning was challenging, including catering to the difference in both her children's ages and interests, limited access to resources, and time pressures created by the demands of teaching across all subject areas. As an arts educator who deeply valued the arts in education, she carried a sense of ineffectiveness in the facilitation of arts learning with her children, raising the question: "If, as an experienced and trained arts teacher, I feel confronted by a range of difficult issues, how do home educating parents without arts training approach the teaching of the arts?"

As university colleagues currently teaching on an arts course for pre-service teachers, we have continually promoted the idea that the value of the arts and hence most meaningful learning is best delivered when they are approached as authentic practice (see Dinham, 2017). We outline this concept in detail shortly but briefly here, it stands in opposition to a devalued practice where art is used as fun "down time" and busy work and without concern for the meaningful possibilities that a genuine program can achieve. Thus, the issues one of us experienced in her home education practice became linked to the issue of the delivery of best practice or an "authentic arts" program beyond home education.

The plan for the research was firstly to understand the variety of ways home educators approach the facilitation of their children's arts education, and then to uncover the wider features that impact on this in individual home education contexts. Participants were sourced from an existing open-access, public online forum and community of home educating parents, and were then invited to reflect on and describe their current approaches to the facilitation of their children's arts learning through a private online forum. After the gathering of data or "lived experience material" (Van Manen, 2004) about their views and personal stories regarding their own experiences in facilitating their children's arts learning, the second phase was to reflect on and analyse the data in order to identify issues of importance regarding the impact of context upon arts learning.

This paper presents findings from the first phase of the research, focussing on identifying the ways that home educating participants facilitated their children's arts learning. We then explore emerging thoughts on these findings in light of literature

and understandings regarding authentic arts teaching and learning practices. Insight into wider contextual influences on arts learning in participants' home education practice is the subject of a successive paper.

The significance of the research

The significance of this study exists at the intersection of two important understandings: First, that home education is considered to represent the most rapidly growing educational sector in Australia (Sinnerton, 2014; Strange, 2013). Accurate figures of children who are currently home educated in Australia are near impossible to obtain owing to the large number of families who do not register their children (English, 2015a; Strange, 2013). However, recent increases in the number of families registering with each state's educational authority, in addition to estimates regarding the number of unregistered or "underground" home educators (English, 2015a), suggest Australia's increasing home education population mirrors the global growth in this sector (Apple, 2015; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Watts, 2014).

The second understanding underpinning this research is that creativity is a cornerstone of the arts and increasingly being recognised as a fundamental attribute for future effectiveness in the rapidly changing postmodern world (Dinham, 2017; Zhao, 2012). Sadly, in spite of ongoing global research to support the central role the arts should play in education, many educational contexts are experiencing a "silent crisis" (Nussbaum, 2012) in which the arts are noticeably absent from curricula (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). We, however, affirm the vital importance of the arts in developing the necessary dispositions in students to face the demands of the 21st Century. This position is supported by educators, scholars and government research committees, who assert that the arts and creativity should parallel Maths, Science, and Literacy in importance (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Nussbaum, 2012; Robinson, 2009; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2006).

Beyond the major role that we believe the arts play in the development of creativity is the recognised value of an arts-rich program to an overall education of any kind. It is incidental but important to note that involvement in the arts over a sustained period of time has been correlated with increased achievement in almost every domain of learning (Bamford, 2010; Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Such benefits to wider education affirm the significance of arts learning in a high-quality education. Given the growing numbers of registered home educators in Australia, in addition to the growing estimates of unregistered families (Harding, as cited in Bantick, 2015), developing understandings of how the arts are being facilitated within this

alternative educational sector is considered a contribution to educational understanding.

Foundational understandings

Understanding arts teaching and learning approaches within Australian home education requires an understanding of the unique nature of home education, as distinct from institutional learning. For the purpose of the study, home education is understood as the process wherein a parent/carer provides or directs their child's education from the locus of the family home, independent of a formal schooling context (Neuman & Guterman, 2016c). This definition therefore does not encompass Distance Education, whereby a student's learning program is provided and overseen by an external authority.

There exists a small, yet growing body of research highlighting the unique dynamics of home education in Australia. It shows families who choose to educate their own children predominantly do so out of choice, rather than necessity (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; English, 2015b; Harding, 2011) and the reported academic and social outcomes of home education are "above satisfactory," and not necessarily contingent upon socio-economic status or parental education (Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES), 2014; Harding, 2006; Jackson, 2009; McColl, 2005). The major reasons Australian parents choose to home educate include transmitting parental beliefs to children, academic achievement, family closeness, a sense of parental duty, geographic isolation, positive socialisation, and special education or health needs (Croft, 2013; Drabsch, 2013; English, 2015b; Harding, 2011; Rowntree, 2012). Research suggests a dedicated parental community who are highly motivated and committed to their children's holistic wellbeing.

Home education is best understood as pedagogically unique and distinct from traditional institutional approaches to learning. Research findings highlight an extremely diverse community that cannot be grouped together in a single, unified or homogenous group (Morton, 2010; Neuman & Aviram, 2015; Spiegler, 2015; Taylor-Hough, 2010) and attempts to "pin down" pedagogical approaches are sometimes found to be counter-productive to a genuine understanding of home education (Neuman & Guterman, 2016c). Instead, a review of home education literature suggests that it is best understood as a form of sociocultural or socio-constructivist practice (Barratt-Peacock, 2003; Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b; Safran, 2010). When living and learning are conducted simultaneously, authentic learning experiences in real world, social settings occur. Within the home environment, children acquire foundational cultural understandings naturally through everyday social interaction (Jackson, 2015; Thomas, 1998), representing situated learning located in social practice (Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). Home educated children are further described

as cognitive apprentices in the family's community of practice (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003) who operate as legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) wherein parents act as guides to the wider field of authentic adult practice, and this wider sphere of life is able to be dynamically related to the child's focussed education. This authentic, situated learning is a unique feature of home education, which differs significantly from institutionalised learning, where the diversity of each student's background and context cannot be as readily introduced related to the focus of classroom learning.

We acknowledge these unique dynamics of learning within home education contexts as an important foundation for this research in appreciating how each family's unique context will fundamentally shape their approach to arts learning. As arts educators we are both concerned with the promotion of meaningful arts learning that permits children to attain the significant benefits that can come from their engagement with the arts (Russell-Bowie, 2015). However, we equally appreciate that strict definitions of "quality" and "best practice" in arts education are not only contested concepts (Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009), but problematic; such definitions could significantly limit an appreciation of the variety of approaches to arts teaching and learning represented in the diverse home education community. As such, we found the concept of *authentic* arts learning a more useful concept to apply in this project. Our understanding and application of this to the project is now clarified.

What is authentic arts learning?
What is made apparent by much research into arts education is that the arts have long been considered to represent "useless frills" by policy makers (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 2). Holding less importance than other subject areas, they are often approached as fun "down-time" or "busy work" rather than as well-considered and meaningful learning opportunities (Bodilly & Augustine, 2008; Gibson & Anderson, 2008; Russell-Bowie, 2015).

On the other hand, authentic arts programs include intentional, meaningful learning with valued outcomes not possible from trivial fun down-time or busy work and certainly not implemented as a reward for good behaviour. Dinham defines authentic arts learning as multi-faceted learning experiences through which children develop their critical thinking, aesthetic sensibilities, cultural understanding, and expressive capacities (2017). Similarly, Russell-Bowie (2015) highlights the importance of process-oriented activities through which all students work creatively to engage in meaningful arts and wider learning. The Australian Curriculum writers advocate for arts learning through specific knowledge and skills and the creation of art works in a manner promoting individual creativity, understanding of cultures and critical and creative thinking (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). All the aforementioned assume that an

authentic approach will enable the development of self-expression, key artistic skills, ideas about different art forms and the forming of aesthetic understanding. Essentially, authentic engagement with art arises from recognition of our basic human capacity for, and need to experience it in meaningful depth. These ideas surrounding the concept of authenticity form the basis of our understanding of important components in quality or "best practice" arts learning.

Given our understanding of the significance of the arts for all children, regardless of their learning context, an important consideration in light of these issues is the extent to which home education can provide for authentic arts engagement. Reflection upon home education as situated learning in a family's community of practice and the hallmarks of authentic arts raises questions as to the extent of influence that parental confidence and proficiency in their own arts learning has upon the arts engagement. This study thus offers insight into the experience of a sample of home educators and the opportunity for dialogue and discussion regarding the issues of delivering authentic arts in home education.

Methodology and methods

An action-research methodology was utilised. Here, the guiding principle was to engage in the conscious study of a practice in order to change or improve it. The emphasis was on the co-exploration of issues and co-construction of new understandings with a sample of volunteer, non-identified participants (pseudonyms are used throughout). Throughout the project, a cyclic pattern of reflection and analysis continued and the researcher's role was to present emergent findings to the participants for their critical comment. The co-constructed understandings were therefore relevant to and representative of participant engagement. The co-researching of shared experiences was an attempt to transcend the researcher-researched binary and the power inequalities this generates (Hawkins, 2011). Further, as Kaseman and Kaseman (1991) assert the most beneficial possessors of knowledge regarding home education are not researchers but stakeholders, and therefore our approach to research foregrounded the value of personal stories in order to convey more useful information more than detached statistics or generalisations.

In order to reach into a variety of home contexts and hear the perspectives from home educators throughout Australia, it was decided that a focus group setting placed within a purpose-built online forum would be appropriate and useful. Participants in the project were drawn predominantly from the established online community at AussieHomeschool.com.au, a large online community of Australian home educators that utilises forums for mutual support. Ethically organised consent to participate in the research was obtained from each of the voluntary participants (represented by 13 adult females and one adult male), who acknowledged they were a home educating parent, and who agreed to abide by agreed ethical standards for

online conduct. The private research forum served as the collection point for discussions, personal stories, opinions and current understandings—items that served as the "lived experience material," or data, for analysis. In addition to the forum discussions, which were conducted over a three-month period (see Appendix A); a short, ten-question survey was administered to all participants towards the end of the project. This survey provided a valuable means to reflect upon data analysis of forum content and to check that identified patterns and relationships were supported. Further, any discrepancies arising between forum and questionnaire data provided opportunity to investigate new angles, thus enabling validation and the enrichment of understanding through the scrutiny of differences.

Analysis involved the search for emerging themes, and these were presented back to participants for their critical comment. Participants were therefore engaged not only in the generation of the data, but collaborative consideration of important themes. An inductive, typological analysis, as described by Hatch (2002) was adopted. In essence, this meant:

- identifying categories for analysis that emanated from the research questions and emergent issues in the data;
- summarising data under each category;
- searching for patterns, themes and relationships within categories and coding inductively according to those identified;
- revisiting raw data to check that identified patterns were supported, to search for potential non-examples and find relationships among patterns;
- generating generalisations and theory from analysis.

Analyses and reflections for the portion of the research presented in this paper were guided by the research question: "What are the varieties of ways that arts learning is incorporated into the family's educational and life-wide practices?" Findings are now explored.

Strategies employed by home educators
Specific strategies that participants used in approaching arts learning were revealed through forum discussions. These included:

- child-led learning;
- resource-led learning;
- outsourcing;
- collaboration;
- integration of the arts with other learning.

We now focus upon an explication of the strategies employed by the participating families to engage in in arts learning, followed by an evaluation of home educator's views of what may constitute authentic arts practices in the home education context.

Child-led learning

For some families, the interests of children were the predominant determining factor in what would be explored in the arts. Children were given the time, encouragement and materials to "get creative" across the arts, an approach used especially by those with younger children. The rationale for this approach included a belief in the innate creativity of children, and that giving children the freedom to follow their unique interests would assist with the development of their inherent capacities. Participant comments included the following:

> For the beginning years, art with the kids has always been simple because all I needed to do was provide materials and they had so much imagination there was little need for instruction. (Ebony)

> Because my kids are little, [attempting to make arts learning attractive to my children] has not been a problem for us. I think little people have an innate love of creative expression. (Tarryn)

Participants with older children—both those who had previously attended school and those who had always been home educated—expressed the utility of structure, making a child-led approach less appropriate to their context. One parent with both younger and older children commented on a preferred use of a structured drawing program, saying: "I only use it with the two older boys 12 and turning 14 very soon." (Imogen) Another parent with older children found that earlier experiences of child-led learning were not as effective as her children grew: "Art has evolved in our home-school as the children have gotten older. I find it is more difficult the older they get as it is not as simple as giving them supplies and letting them go for it." (Grace)

Child-led learning was espoused as a positive and desirable approach by most participants; however the extent to which families embraced this approach varied. For one family, the arts were not formally engaged with, owing to their belief that their children's natural explorations provided adequate arts learning. Such a view reflects the educational values espoused by Holt (1967). His early teachings became the basis for the concept of "unschooling," whereby children's interests are trusted and respected as the stimulus and foundation of their individualised "curriculum" and these interests are nurtured and supported with the parent's help and guidance without pressure to conform to external educational requirements. Other families used their children's interests as the launch point for arts learning, but included

intentional time in their curriculum to encourage, support and facilitate these interests in a more structured manner. This variant of a child-led approach allowed participants to recognise their children's unique interests and aptitudes and then provide additional support to nurture these: "Providing our kids with opportunities has helped me to see what their abilities and interests are, sometimes with surprising results." (Shannon)

Participant comments revealed flexibility with planning and the belief that the child is led to creativity through freedom. The overall sentiment expressed by participants was that children are "naturally creative," and participants expressed their desire to nurture this natural creativity, rather than, as Robinson (2006) notes schools often do, "educate them out of it." This child-led approach to learning conforms with socio-cultural views of home education as situated practice, in which the opportunities naturally arising from the home environment are embraced as an integral part of the home educating process (Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). Child-led learning was thus embraced by most participants to some extent in their home education practice. Families considered it a positive approach to arts learning that enabled children to follow their unique interests and abilities, which were then often used as launch points for additional support and nurturing.

Resource-led arts learning

A plethora of teaching resources are available, providing abundant opportunity for home educators to supplement or guide their arts learning. Participants utilised a vast variety of resources, ranging from purchased prescriptive arts curricula and texts, to lesson-website prescriptions, DVDs and free websites. The use of resources was a central feature of all participant approaches to arts learning; however the nature of the resources notably varied with other contextual features, including the confidence of the parents regarding their ability to deliver arts experiences, and the ages of their children.

Participant families with older children revealed they tended to look to pre-prepared resources or arts curricula for the deeper thinking and more structured artistic engagement they felt their older children should experience. Such resources often represented more prescriptive approaches to learning, and focused on the intentional development of specific arts knowledge or skills. A number of responses, similar to Shannon's, highlighted how arts learning was perceived as more challenging as her children grew and how resources became a helpful guiding element in their approach to arts learning by providing inspiration, direction, and higher-level engagement:

> As [my children] became older it has become more difficult to find something that could challenge them, teach them, inspire them and give them confidence in their abilities. It's not impossible, but

certainly more challenging. I am thankful for the internet and suggestions by other home educators for resources that we have been able to use. (Shannon)

This same sentiment was expressed by other participants with older children, with the rationale that the creative inspiration they provided was the most valued element. In most contexts, resources were adapted to a family's needs or interests, with parents and children making choices as to how closely to adhere to the resource guidelines or how to utilise the inspiration and suggestions of their resources. "We have been using [a prescriptive art] curriculum…and some of the children pick and choose a bit the lessons they do." (Renee). Katie was able to resonate with this: "I find that having a structure provides me with the inspiration and confidence, and that I'm then much more creative within that structure to tweak it according to our context." (Katie)

It is important to note that participants did not see adoption of a child-led approach and the use of pre-purchased curricula as antithetical. All participants except one made use of resources to some extent to guide or supplement their arts learning, and most families embraced child-led learning to varying degrees. Forum responses further showed that participants did not necessarily locate themselves in a fixed position with regard to their use of resources, but that their approach adapted in response to other contextual features, such as parental confidence in different art forms, resourcing and time constraints, community opportunities, and attributes and interests of the child.

Outsourcing

Many of the participants in the study made frequent reference to the outsourcing of arts learning. This term was used to encompass opportunities outside of the home where their children learned through organised experiences such as community classes and paid lessons with specialists. Such opportunities were considered to significantly contribute to their children's arts education. Participants referred to specific outsourcing opportunities such as art workshops at local libraries, involvement in art competitions, private music tuition, community drama groups, art exhibitions, attending dramatic and musical performances and workshops, group dance lessons, and private lessons with professional artists. The extent to which participants outsourced was heavily contingent upon a number of factors, including opportunities that existed in their community and financial viability.

Outsourcing opportunities were actively sought by most participants as a positive means to enrich their children's arts learning, whilst taking pressure off parents to "do it all." Such experiences provided for wider social engagement, and a more structured approach to learning that was desired for older children, whilst opening students up to expert tuition and a broader range of ideas and inspiration.

Importantly, paid outsourcing to professional arts coaches, such as music, dance and drama tuition, tended to be sought only by participants whose children expressed interest or talent in given areas:

> As for dance and drama—well, it just doesn't really happen. I don't have time to squeeze these things in formally. If any of my kids displayed any desire or natural ability in this area, we would probably pursue it with lessons. (May)

This comment was representative of a number of participants who expressed interest in paid outsourcing only when interest or ability in their children was demonstrated. This was in part due to the high cost associated with private lessons. Comments demonstrated that outsourcing to "professionals" helped to engage their children in higher-level arts learning than could potentially be covered in the home alone. It also opened students to the passion of their teachers who usually possessed specialist knowledge that parents could not match, which was considered most valuable for the stimulation of lifelong learning:

> Where possible, hand your kids over to someone who does have the inspiration. My kids are not going to catch much inspiration from me if I don't have it to start with….I don't think any true arts learning has happened at our place unless there was a real person (not a book) with personal passion for the subject driving the learning experience and then sharing it with others in the family. (Amber)

The use of outsourcing to trained arts professionals aligns with some arts educators' beliefs that the arts are best delivered by highly-skilled specialists (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009; Seidel et al., 2009). When home educators have neither the required knowledge nor skills to effectively teach the arts, their choice to engage with specialists enables their children to benefit from specialist knowledge. For those who made strong use of outsourcing, this then translated to a less-structured approach to arts learning in their everyday practice, and was often considered to replace the need for arts learning in those arts subjects within the home education practice.

The practice of outsourcing as a meaningful and valid approach to arts learning again supports the notion of home education as a socio-cultural practice. Vygotsky's attitude that "creativity is a social process which requires appropriate tools, artefacts and cultures in which to thrive" (2004, as cited in Daniels, 2008, p. 48), aligns with participants' rationales that genuine arts learning embraces these wider, real-world opportunities, and that outsourcing provides a meaningful strategy

that sits well with participants' views on the nature of home education as situated learning in learning communities.

Collaboration

Collaborating with other home educating families to engage in arts experiences was a strategy some participants engaged in regularly. They asserted collaboration provided additional motivation to ensure the quality and frequency of the arts lessons:

> I also currently have the extra motivation that my niece and sister come over for our visual arts session on a Thursday morning.…So I have the discipline of both our family needing a routine and of others joining us! (Liz)

Further, such opportunities allowed participants to maximise on different parent strengths. Some participants, who felt competent in one subject area, skill-swapped with other home educating parents. For example, a parent with a science background might collaborate with another family, leading all children through a group science lesson in exchange for the other family's art lesson.

Collaborative and outsourcing strategies fit well with Barratt-Peacock's (1997, 2003) view of home education as a super model of the community of practice, and Safran's (2010) notion of home education as legitimate peripheral participation in which children and home educating parents develop situated understanding and new perspectives in relation to their families and wider community:

> Home-educating families eschew the simplified simulations and social isolation of schools.…Rather they draw, potentially, from as many communities of practice as exist in their society. They maintain a living and reciprocal network of connections between themselves and wider society. (Barrat-Peacock, 2003, p. 109)

Again, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) description that, "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1), demonstrates the nature of a community of practice to bring about learning transformations in both the child and their learning community. Through collaborations, participants made use of wider communities of practice for mutual benefit.

Integration

References to the integration of the arts into other domains of learning were limited within forum discussions, and only one participant identified integration as their

primary approach to arts learning in the survey questionnaire. Regardless of the extent to which families utilised integration of their arts learning with other knowledge domains, discussions of this strategy highlighted that participants recognised integration as a positive strategy: "I think we need to recognise how the arts can be combined into other subject areas." (Tarryn)

> Combining "arts" with other subjects, [is a] two birds with one stone type of thing. It can also help reinforce the information for hands on learning type of children; generally I think it can strengthen what is learned in other subjects as well. (Grace)

Discussions around integrating the arts with other learning domains reflected that this approach was considered helpful, especially for the time-poor. Arts educators support integration of the arts as a positive way forward in a "crowded curriculum" (Dinham, 2017; Ewing, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2015). Further, integration enables students to benefit from the richness of learning across traditional knowledge domains, and better represents the nature of knowledge as spanning traditional disciplines. It also enables children to view issues from new and varied perspectives and enables children's different learning modalities to find creative expression (Dinham, 2007). However, there are some concerns regarding integration: when poorly-implemented arts learning is often diluted and merely used to serve learning in another area, rather than a "syntegrated" approach as advocated by Russell-Bowie (2015), wherein the learning of the whole unit is greater than if the learning had been approached in separate subject areas.

Integration was a strategy that was utilised by only some participants, but was nevertheless widely appreciated as a way to approach the arts within the wider curriculum: "I see arts as more of a practical way of covering and enhancing many other skills. It can add to HPE, History, and English and in a way bring the subjects 'to life'." (Grace)

It was noted that integration of the arts with other subject areas required greater confidence and acumen in the facilitation of arts learning. Participants who referred to their use of this strategy identified themselves as possessing a greater level of confidence in facilitating arts learning. Given that arts educators purport that integration of the arts, whilst potentially positive, can easily lead to diluted arts learning if not integrated meaningfully (Dinham, 2017; Russell-Bowie, 2015), we see that home educators would benefit from some form of support too if they are to facilitate meaningful arts integration. This is therefore recognised as an avenue for future research and development.

Discussion: But is it authentic?

We now turn to a brief exploration of participant views on what constitutes an authentic arts education. This will allow us to evaluate whether the strategies employed by participants can be considered to align with our own understanding of authentic arts practices as authors. Forum discussions highlighted a good deal of agreement between participants on the issue of what they perceive to constitute "authentic" arts learning. Focus was upon developing in-depth arts exploration according to individual interests rather than attempting to superficially cover a multitude of areas. Participants believed such an approach mirrors how art is engaged with "in the real world," and assists with the development of passion, which they considered to be the most genuine form of engagement in learning to assist with the development of a lifelong learner. The connection between arts learning as authentic when aligned with personal interest or passion was a clear theme among a number of participants:

> Being able to plan and execute a long-term project based on interests and passions is a far more "authentic" way to experience art in my opinion… I believe that my job as an educator is to equip my children with the ability to access information themselves and the confidence to do so...Hopefully, I will have passed on a passion for life-long learning and they will see themselves as active participants in their own education rather than passive consumers. (Tarryn)

> I think that it is ok to only delve into the parts of the arts, that you as the parent, or one of your children are really excited about, and ignore the rest….My point being that without passion there might not be any real learning….I really think that the only resource that really matters in art education is passion….I am much happier that my kids are enjoying the arts experiences that they have than that they manage to tick a few boxes on a syllabus document. (Amber)

What these responses show is that authentic engagement with the arts is considered to occur when there is a personal point of resonance with the student, meaning an authentic arts education will be individualised according to the expressed interests of individual children.

Many participants also considered a broad arts education—one that introduces children to a variety of art forms—as a valuable approach. This allowed the children's interests to be included, thus allowing for deeper, more authentic engagement.

> A broad arts education (dabbling in lots of things) is to show our children (and learn myself) how other people express themselves, in order for our children to find out how to express their own creativity but also for them to appreciate the way that others express themselves….Perhaps one of these little tastes will spark a life-long interest, passion or even a career! (Liz)

This approach, which essentially provides students with a broad variety of experiences and opportunities, closely resembles what Dinham (2017) terms the "smorgasbord," which she deems is a poor arts practice, best avoided. Of the smorgasbord approach, Dinham asserts that it

> …can turn out to be little more than a series of tasty treats from a whole array of lesson suggestions found on websites and in books. In a smorgasbord approach there is little attention given to the on-going improvement of children's overall performance in The Arts learning area. (2017, p. 46)

Whether home educators who use this approach engaged their children in what Dinham (2017) terms "the ongoing improvement of children's overall performance in arts learning" was not ascertained in this study; however the attitudes of home educators with regard to Dinham's definition of authentic arts learning highlighted that arts-specific knowledge and skills were not necessarily their highest goal. What participants valued most highly was the stimulation of genuine engagement of their children's interests, of life-long learning capacities, and a picture of the "whole person."

> Whilst schools are striving to implement project and inquiry based curriculums which focus on the provision of real life and authentic experiences, I feel that I'm ideally placed as a parent to provide exactly that which schools try to replicate! We are not restricted by policies, procedures, time frames or even curriculum requirements (to some extent). This enables us to engage in experiences that are worthwhile and meaningful. (Eve)

Forum discussions highlighted a good deal of agreement between participants on the issue of what they defined as authentic arts learning, and did much to reflect their view of home education as a process of enculturation: the acquiring of fundamental cultural understandings naturally through everyday social interaction (Thomas, 1998). Such situated learning was valued by participants, who believed they could provide the advantage of an authentic educational approach, with the

theme of the individual at heart. This aligns with a body of research which collectively highlights that home educating parents believe they can cater to their children's unique learning needs better than schools through their individualised approach (Allan & Jackson, 2010; Croft, 2013; English, 2015a, 2015b; Jackson, 2009; Morton, 2010; Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

Participant discussions affirmed that an authentic approach to the arts does not constitute "busy time" or "useless frills" (Nussbaum, 2012) in an educational program. However, whilst Dinham (2017) sees the view of the arts as fun "down-time" as inauthentic, some participants encouraged the inclusion of the arts in their children's spare time with an intention to stimulate personal, self-initiated arts exploration, thereby turning it into—what they perceived to be—an authentic, child-centred approach. Such findings affirm that a different set of values are at work for the home educating participants. Their values elevated the nurturing of their children as individuals over the development of specific competencies, as outlined by curriculum documents. This aligns with research demonstrating the educational objects for many home educators differ from those in institutional settings and go far beyond traditional views of academic achievement (Neuman & Guterman, 2016a, 2016b). Parental views on what is valued as meaningful and authentic learning underpins their decisions as to how they approach all learning, including their employment of arts learning strategies.

Conclusion

The first phase of the project offered insight into the variety of ways arts learning experiences are incorporated into the educational and life-wide practices of individual families. Catering to the needs and interests of the individual child was found to be a central concern of all participating parents. This was the primary factor determining the strategies they selected while facilitating arts learning. This central concern sometimes posed a dilemma for parents. Should the child's interests be the sole factor to steer the arts-learning experiences, or should a "negotiated curriculum" (Forman & Fyfe, 1998) be employed? Such a curriculum includes the use of additional prescriptive resources and the outsourcing of arts learning to private tutors or organised workshops. When the employment of a negotiated curriculum was present in participants' approaches it included recognition of the child's interests, but was also found to be heavily dependent on opportunities that existed in different contexts. Finally, the integration of the arts with other learning domains was not extensively employed, but was recognised as important by all participants. Many acknowledged a lack of current confidence or skill to be able to include arts integration in their teaching.

When reflecting upon these arts-learning strategies with respect to "authentic arts processes," we identified that the participating home educators generally valued the arts highly and strove to improve their children's engagement with arts skills

and concepts. However, their primary concern was not related to what we would interpret as "authentic arts learning" but to the wider concern of developing their children holistically—of developing life-long learning capacities and stimulating their children's innate interests. As such, with the needs of the learner as central to the process, the perception of the parents was that they were indeed approaching the arts "authentically."

As academics and arts educators we began with our own specific understandings and perceptions of what authentic arts practices entail and these did not always align with the perception of the participants. However, our findings from the field of home education do align with previous research that suggests the educational goal for many home educators transcends academic views of achievement by focusing on the "whole person," over academic outcomes (Neuman & Guterman, 2016a, 2016b). As arts educators, we believe the goals of authentic arts processes are the development of critical thinking, aesthetic sensibilities, cultural understanding, and expressive capacities (Dinham, 2017). We recommend that further dialogue, discussion and inquiry should continue into how the specific interests and needs of home educated students *and* authentic arts processes might be more fully realised.

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Appendix A
Forum focus questions according to research phase

Forum Questions	Forum Thread	Underpinning research focus
• Introduce yourself: How long have you been home educating? What ages are your children? Why did you choose to home educate and how are you enjoying the journey? • Why did you decide to become a part of this research project? • What is your understanding of an arts education? • How do you feel about your ability to facilitate an arts education? How do you feel about the arts experiences that are currently part of your home education practice?	1	• Generate an atmosphere of mutual encouragement and support in which members feel a sense of community. • Inform parents of curriculum expectations, and of understanding the five arts strands. • Develop understandings of what constitutes a quality arts education and why this is important
• How do you currently approach teaching your children about the arts in your home education practice? What kinds of experiences/approaches have you used? • What resources have you used? • What emphasis are the arts given in your home?	2	• In what ways is arts-learning incorporated into the family's educational and life-wide practices?
• What difficulties have you encountered when engaging your children in the arts? What do you find hard about arts education? • What factors in your home/environment/personal skills do you find influence how you engage your children in arts experiences?	3	• What specific difficulties do home educating parents experience regarding the incorporation of an arts education into their children's education? • What contextual features impact upon arts-learning in home education?

• What specific needs do you think would need to be fulfilled in order for your home education to incorporate a high-quality arts education? • What kinds of resources do you think would be helpful?	4	• What do home educating parents identify as specific needs that, if fulfilled, would assist in facilitating a quality arts education practice?

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