

“How can the creative arts possibly be taught online?” Perspectives and experiences of online educators in Australian higher education

Many universities in Australia and internationally now offer education degrees entirely online, without any requirement for face-to-face learning on university campuses. The transition to online learning has occurred rapidly, and has had particularly strong uptake in Initial Teacher Education. This paper examines the perspectives and experiences of eight academics in Australian higher education who teach creative arts courses to pre-service teachers via online modes of delivery. Research indicates that insufficient opportunities have existed for some time in adequately providing opportunities to pre-service teachers to develop the arts teaching and learning skills, and these concerns are potentially compounded in online contexts which do not readily permit the interpersonal, kinaesthetic and collaborative engagement with arts-specific materials and processes that are usually central to creative arts learning. Using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the researcher sought to understand the individual perspectives and experiences of arts academics who now deliver creative arts learning in teacher education online. The research reveals that arts learning must be significantly re-imagined for the online learner, that the potential to do this can be realised, but that additional support will be required to ensure this is a consistent reality.

Keywords: online learning; e-learning; creative arts; arts education; praxis

Introduction

The introduction of online learning has vastly changed the tertiary educational landscape, and in particular, initial teacher education programs (ITE) (Newhouse, 2016). While pre-service teachers were once required to engage in at least some face-to-face learning, many universities now offer educational degrees in an entirely online mode. In fact, online learning is so ubiquitous that it is no longer considered a trend, but mainstream (Kentnor, 2015). This significant shift has positively opened access to

tertiary education for a more diverse range of students, many of whom were previously underrepresented in higher education (Stone, 2016). However, this rapid transition has equally left many experienced academics feeling pedagogically unprepared, and lacking the skills to transition from face-to-face instruction to the online context (Baker, Hunter, & Thomas, 2016). These new challenges are potentially pronounced for teacher education in the creative arts; a learning domain that has traditionally engaged extensively with practical learning experiences.

With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum in 2008, and its requirements for a meaningful arts education for all students, ITE programs are now required to prepare pre-service teachers to teach the five art forms outlined in this curriculum: Dance, Drama, Media Art, Music and Visual Art. Meaningful learning in the arts has traditionally involved embodied experience, centred on praxis - where conceptual knowing comes through “doing” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Arts learning has required the use of specialised tools and materials, such as musical instruments, visual art supplies, and open spaces for movement. It has rested upon kinaesthetic engagement and collaborative interactions among learners. How do online students engage in the in collaborative action and practice if many of the traditional modes of engaging in praxis-based arts experiences are not readily accessible? What is evident is that arts learning must be significantly re-imagined for the online learner, but little is currently understood about how academics are engaging in these necessitated innovations.

This study sought to gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of academics in Australian ITE to investigate the consequences of the rapid shift to online learning in delivering arts courses. The research was guided by the following question: *How do tertiary arts educators facilitate online learning in the creative arts?*

This overriding question was investigated more specifically by seeking to understand:

1. The attitudes of academics regarding online arts learning;
2. The enablers/inhibitors of teaching the arts online; and
3. The strategies academics have employed in online arts education.

Barton, Baguley, and MacDonald (2013), assert arts learning has been “offered online without critical debate regarding the consequences of such an approach” (p. 83) and as such, the research conducted here investigates some of these consequences from the perspective of those who deliver this arts learning. It provides an important insight into academic experiences in this underexplored field, and assists in identifying recommended actions and future research.

Literature review

Online learning in Initial Teacher Education and Arts learning

The transition to fully online degrees has occurred with rapidity. This is particularly evident in the field of initial teacher education (ITE), which is now offered online in a growing number of institutions (Newhouse, 2016). A range of benefits to this shift have been identified; in particular, the ability to widen participation to formerly educationally disadvantaged learners which has been promoted as an important means to enhance the diversity of the teaching profession, and potentially assist with teacher shortages in places difficult to staff (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2016). However, a range of concerns equally exist, particularly around implications and requirements of the integration of theory, practice and workplace readiness for online ITE students (Allen, Wright, & Innes, 2014). Particularly, studies indicate that student retention is often significantly lower than traditional on-campus courses (AITSL, 2016). Further, concerns are raised that the swift transformation of the HE sector into online learning is motivated by economic benefit, rather than due

consideration of learning quality (Allen et al., 2014; Baker et al., 2016). Thus, while online learning has a new reach that permits greater diversity and accessibility, the potential for diminished outcomes remains a concern (Bettinger & Loeb, 2017).

The concerns for the quality of ITE graduates is compounded when considering research that indicates insufficient opportunities for adequately preparing pre-service teachers with sufficient arts teaching capabilities (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009; Ewing & Gibson, 2015). Time allocated to the arts in ITE has diminished, and many universities now only offer one arts course in their degree (Barton et al., 2013). Importantly, an extensive body of research documents the potential for quality arts learning experiences to enhance the student creativity, the culture of learning, and social and emotional wellbeing (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010). However, a lack of teacher confidence in arts learning is revealed - based upon lack of pre-service teacher training – which is linked to diminished quality of arts learning in schools (Alter et al., 2009; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). A necessary question to explore is: If the quality of arts learning is already at stake in ITE, what is the impact of delivering this learning online? This research provides insight into the perspectives of a group of higher educators on this point.

Previous arts in HE research: the problem for praxis

Research into the impacts of delivering creative arts learning online in ITE is limited, however a small number of studies indicate that academics tend to see online learning in the arts as inferior to on-campus; while equally demonstrating acceptance, and application of innovation to their practice (Cutcher & Cook, 2016; Lierse, 2015). Baker et al. (2016) found that arts academics typically see online learning as a negative compromise, and highlighted a “dissonance between the nature of the arts and eLearning” (p. 39), owing to its embodied and visceral nature. However, in many cases

academics were under an imperative to either adopt a new approach, or “fall into obsolescence” (Allen et al., 2014, p.14) owing to low enrolment numbers.

The importance of praxis-based learning as a foundation for authentic arts experiences in classrooms is repeatedly affirmed in the literature (Cutcher & Cook, 2016; Lierse, 2015). Weida asks: “How are we to encourage developing educators to incorporate the arts into their pedagogy if they lack access to first hand arts experiences?” (p.145). This “first-hand experience” is particularly significant given the centrality of somatic experience in arts learning. As compared to “objective experience” from a third-person perspective, somatic experience involves “an embodied process of internal awareness and communication” (Green, 2002, p. 114) where inner and embodied experience is valuable for truly “knowing”. This kind of experiential knowing is considered at the heart of arts experiences, which engage the body and mind, (Eisner, 2008) and some argue this is “central to daily competence” for classroom teachers (Matthews, 1991, p.89). The literature thus suggests that the absence of praxis from online arts learning may deny pre-services teachers somatic, embodied learning that can better prepare them for the classroom.

Such insights demonstrate the need for a creative re-imagination of pedagogy for online learning if it is to engage students in praxis and somatic experience. While affirming that the interactivity afforded by online platforms permitted collaborative and social engagement, Cutcher and Cook (2016) acknowledged that these could not ultimately replace the relational and practical arts engagement that face-to-face contexts permit, and concluded that a blended delivery model is preferable when face-to-face delivery is not possible. Other researchers have similarly concluded that careful design and delivery can be successful, but requires innovative strategies to engage learners

authentically (Dyment & Downing, 2018). Based on the limitations of online learning for some situated and embodied experiences, some arts educators in HE have therefore considered virtual platforms as incompatible with arts learning (Baker et al., 2016; Lierse, 2015).

The literature thus highlights that a thorough understanding of the experiences in teaching the creative arts online in ITE is limited, but developing. Nonetheless, the external mandates upon HE to deliver ITE online, while highly contested, is evidently now “here to stay” (Kentnor, 2015) and thus it is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of academics involved, to understand their challenges more extensively, and share innovative practice. This project seeks to gain insight into, and share some of the pedagogical innovations that have been employed, and to highlight areas where future support will be beneficial.

Methodology

This qualitative project sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of tertiary educators in ITE who facilitate creative arts courses online, and was undertaken with ethical clearance from the author’s institution. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants from eight universities. Each interview took 60 minutes, and was conducted via web conference. Audio was transcribed, and participants were offered the opportunity to review prior to analysis. While general questions were prepared, these were facilitated in a manner that invited flexibility in the direction of discussion, allowing participants to share personal stories that might best express their lived experience. The group consisted of six females and two males; all who provided informed consent and who are represented herein using pseudonyms. All participants had a strong background in one or more of the five art forms in the

Australian curriculum, and most were currently facilitating learning for pre-service teachers in courses that focused on all five art forms in a single course.

Process of analysis

Thematic analysis was used as an analytic “sense making” (Lapadat, 2010) approach to develop understandings from the data that are reliable, while representing the uniqueness and richness of individual experiences. An *inductive* approach to data analysis was utilised, being explorative in nature, and permitting themes to emerge (Johnson, 2008). As such, the analysis process began with reading all transcripts to gain a sense of the “whole” before a close inspection of each transcript, during which recurrent topics, themes, or relationships were descriptively coded. A search for patterns or themes then occurred: an iterative process of working and reworking the many inductively generated codes into groups and sub-groups that helped to identify the key aspects of the participants’ experiences and perspectives, while aiming to remain true to the “sense of the whole”.

The process of analysis resulted in a series of themes and sub-themes that highlighted the varied experiences and perspectives of the participants. These themes related to:

- Attitudes to online creative arts learning;
- Key opportunities for online learning;
- Key challenges for online arts learning; and
- Mediating strategies.

These will now be explored.

Findings

Attitudes to online creative arts learning

The data revealed a unanimous and explicit conviction in the value of the arts as an essential domain of holistic learning. This belief underscored another shared conviction regarding the need for rigorous preparation to teach the arts for pre-service teachers. However, while all participants espoused these values, their attitude towards whether online arts courses could facilitate such preparation varied. For some, online learning proved an exciting challenge that could yield rich and engaging arts learning, if approached with an understanding that a different pedagogy was required:

With all respect to my learned colleagues, I think we are the problem, because we hold onto what we think it (arts learning) should be or what it was or what it looked like rather than what it possibly could be. ... Whereas ... this can be as good, or it could in a different way. (Richard)

At the other extreme was the attitude that online learning could never adequately prepare teachers without the experiences that can only be offered face-to-face:

How can you give [comparative] experience if you're not in the room with me? ... Tell me, how do you see that happening? ... I can show you video clips of children doing [drama]. I can explain the process. But I can guarantee, unless you do one and you're in it, and you suddenly realize, "Oh!" ["Now I understand"] ... And it worries me that people go in and teach the arts, who don't know that. (Abigail)

The majority of participants demonstrated a moderated view that accepted online learning as a reality that they must do their best to adapt to in order to facilitate meaningful arts learning, and that there were wider benefits to offering it online:

I was very, very sceptical of it at the outset ... It's not until I did it that I... actually began to see that it's quite different to face-to-face learning, but if you get over that and look at the affordances of the mediums such as increased levels of participation by people in tertiary education, such as access to people to tertiary education regardless of where they live... Those are great outcomes. (Leighton)

Following individual interviews, each participant's overarching attitudes towards the delivery of arts learning online were summarised by the researcher and documented in a continuum to visually represent the spread of perceived attitudes (see Figure 1).

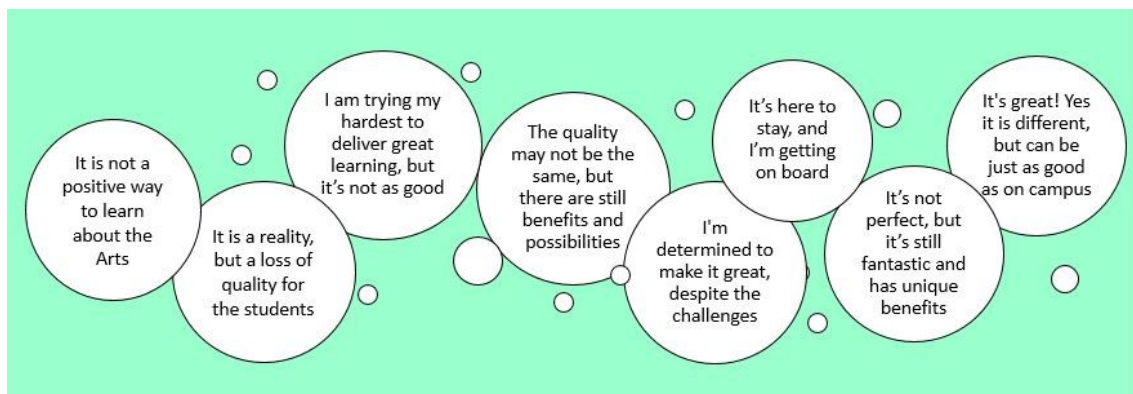


Figure 1. A continuum of attitudes of arts educators in higher education towards the delivery of arts learning online

Collectively, the data highlighted that attitudes to online arts learning were multifaceted, and that participants appreciated they were working within a complex range of demands and opportunities where no “perfect solution” existed. The sentiment unanimously expressed was that online learning lacks the opportunities for student engagement offered on-campus, however this was held in tension with a determination to work within the demands of their role to “make it as good as possible”. Participants predominantly expressed positive acceptance that online learning is “here to stay”, and therefore, worth embracing for the opportunities it yields.

Key opportunities for online learning

A range of benefits to arts learning were espoused. Interestingly, the extent to which participants promoted their perspectives on benefits aligned with their attitudes towards offering arts learning online. The various responses were noted to group around widening participation, technological innovation, and positive student engagement.

Widening participation

The most widely discussed benefit was the notion of widening participation; that by offering ITE courses and the arts courses within these programs, a greater diversity and number of students could access higher education. For many participants, “increased levels of participation” (Leighton) helped to balance some of the recognised drawbacks of online arts learning. The flexibility that online learning offers, and its ability to promote a more socially just entry to education was also raised:

...it's fantastic for people who have commitments... I think the online environment makes it a bit more equal as well for learning. I think it's a really democratic, wonderful resource for students to be able to access. (Theresa)

Similarly, the opportunity it presented to a wider range of learners, regardless of location was mentioned. “...it could be possible for you to live in Argentina and study this unit and be successful.” (Richard)

Thus, while the participants universally acknowledged that online learning was unable to offer comparative engagement to on-campus learning, many saw the added benefits of widening participation as a worthwhile “trade-off”.

Technological innovation

A number of participants discussed their belief that facilitating online learning had enhanced their teaching effectiveness. Participants referred to a range of technologies, including core technologies (hosted via their university's LMS), unique technologies (accessed separate to the university), and ubiquitous technologies (making use of student access to ubiquitous devices and apps). Participants universally engaged core synchronous and asynchronous technologies to provide content and readings, and live tutorials and video recordings. Most participants also made more extensive use of these core technologies for student collaboration and interactivity, including screen sharing to permit learners to share screens, online whiteboards, and "breakout rooms" (separate spaces for group work during live synchronous tutorials). Unique technologies included access to individually owned devices or software, including Eleanor's hover-cam to film her visual arts and Media Arts activities for sharing with students, or Anna's use of Voice Threading software which permitted students to respond and comment within shared videos at key moments in response to concepts being studied. The use of ubiquitous technology for students to share their engagement in independent arts activities was also used by approximately half of the participants, and included use of mobile phone technology to share photos, video and audio footage, the creation of student websites or similar "free virtual spaces" to showcase their arts engagement and respond to each other's work. Margaret, Nell and Eleanor even expressed hopes to harness Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality in the future, both of which are increasingly being offered as an experimental technology in some universities.

Overall, there was a strong sense that while technology could not replicate the on-campus experience, it allowed participants to approach learning creatively to yield effective student engagement.

I've taught dance through video, where we've actually looked at how a teacher might interact with the students online. Then they ... have to go away to a school in their area, do the same thing, video it and send it back online. (Nell)

... if I'm doing a breakout room, I might get them to actually respond to a stimulus and create a dance map ... The students are allowed to share their screens and ... share whiteboards in [breakout rooms] and so on. (Eleanor)

There was a general sentiment that online learning, led to the crafting of online resources with greater care and finesse, particularly as these were repeatedly accessible by students throughout the semester. Equally, multimodal online resources permitted dynamic interaction with the learning content, permitting the wealth of information online to be linked, such as “Weekly modules with suggested activities for them to do, [that are] linked in with a whole heap of little, short videos”. (Abigail)

Overall, there was a largely shared view that technological innovations and creative use of existing technologies both within and outside of the university's LMS were required professional practice for effective pedagogy.

Positive student engagement

Finally, a number of participants also highlighted their experiences of student engagement as a notable benefit. Of particular interest were the perspectives of educators who delivered their courses to online cohorts, alongside face-to-face cohorts, and their feelings that engagement was either on par, or even better for online learners. Eleanor was one such participant, who noted, “I've actually had more success with online in this unit than I've had with the campus students.” This referred not only to active engagement in synchronous and asynchronous discussions, but also academic achievement. She attributed this in part to focus: “They're less likely to sit and chat with

each other online, because it's a focused session.” Theresa agreed: “In a sense, there's probably a greater concentration from the students, because the ones who are [in tutorials] are the ones who have chosen to come.”

The benefits of collaborative technologies, such as synchronous video tutorials to facilitate genuine sharing in a safe space were repeatedly raised. Theresa felt “...there are real benefits to it, in terms of that relational aspect, but also that... encouraging, that sharing and discussion of experience”. Similarly, Anna noted:

I think they're really surprised how much they like it. So ... a lot of them will say, "I do this with my kids. I want to share a story." Or, "I want to show you a photo of us working together." (Anna)

Thus, while a number of participants raised student engagement as a challenge (explored later), it was evident the online platforms permitted positive engagement and the cultivation of a learning community.

Key challenges for online learning

A range of challenges were identified across the participant group. Most prevalent was providing opportunities for praxis and somatic experience. In addition to this, the economic imperatives driving the educational agenda, and challenges with technology and time were also raised.

Praxis, somatic experience and engagement

Praxis-based learning, which was considered so vital to forming genuine understanding of the arts in the pre-service teachers, was unanimously raised as the primary challenge:

They (pre-service teachers) need to go through that *process*, that pedagogical process themselves to gain an understanding of what students go through when

they implement those activities in their classrooms... I think the very praxial nature, particularly of the performing arts, is just something that is a really challenging barrier to overcome in virtual space. (Louise)

Nell discussed how students were “not getting the process of the interactive and the experiential learning” and how they missed out on “getting those senses; that hands on interactive collaboration”. Similarly, Abigail noted how “discovery doesn’t happen the same way” when student activity was conducted in isolation.

In addition to the praxis-based learning, numerous comments regarding the limitations of online learning to stimulate somatic experience were raised. Nell stated: “Sometimes it's about the senses; touching and feeling and sensing” and noted this was not as readily permitted online. Anna likewise emphasised the power of somatic experience, and the ineffectiveness of online learning for transmitting this:

I still don't think that you can learn the most important parts of arts education online, which are the dispositions: the way you feel, the way you connect with other humans, those sorts of things... There are things you can't put into words, things you can't capture on video, that are integral to the way we communicate through the arts... you're not going to get that powerful effect online. Not that I haven't tried.

Added to the problem of praxis were challenges with student engagement, and a number of participants raised their difficulty with connecting with “unwilling participants”:

I think the biggest challenge with online learning, when you have many, many students as well, is to actually get that community of practice going ... The challenge I guess, is when those students just don't want to talk to you... If no matter what you're saying to them, they're not responding, it's very difficult to give them the support they need to try and get through the year. (Eleanor)

A lot of online students say ... "I chose this one online because I don't want to engage. I don't want to engage with other people. I just don't have time." ... and they just chose it online because of that, so they don't have to come to campus and engage with other people. (Anna)

Hence, alongside the positive attitude many had toward online creative arts courses in ITE, there was consensus that online learning significantly limited opportunities to engage students in practical learning that could underpin their understanding of facilitating arts learning in their future classrooms.

Lack of understanding regarding the uniqueness of the arts

A number of participants referred to the difficulty that arose from poor institutional understanding of the value of the arts, and the uniqueness of their pedagogical requirements. Some participants shared perspectives on wider forces and market pressures behind the move to online learning by academic institutions. There was acknowledgement of economic rationalisation as a driving force, and that this often led to diminished opportunities for adequate arts resourcing and time allocations. Theresa discussed the "lack of time for the arts" and how wider forces kept "pushing it down", amidst an ongoing argument from arts educators regarding "how integral [the arts] are to the curriculum". Nell noted how time allocations "used to be a lot more, and then it got pushed down", and Abigail similarly remembered a time "nine, ten years ago, when students got a whole semester of music, and a whole semester of visual arts, and a whole semester of drama. And now they get two hours, if they're lucky". This was viewed as an indicator that decision-makers did not understand the significance of the arts; and the move to online learning was symptomatic of this, and made without consideration of the appropriateness of online platforms for the arts:

I think administration leadership, [and] other colleagues [need to develop an] understanding that the arts are different in really good ways. And, that ... this move to online learning, overall, is not going to suit the arts. It's not going to suit everything. (Anna)

Leighton also recognised the significant power of the forces of marketization, stating that,

... there's a real difference between what is said and what is done. And whilst senior management might bang on about how good we are at this stuff, I don't think ultimately they really care. I don't think they care at all. They care about the student numbers.

However, he could hold this in tension with a knowledge that online options ensured some courses maintained viability:

... it was also part of the strategy that the faculty wanted to employ to ensure that we stayed in a positive financial situation... We wouldn't have the course if it wasn't offered online. (Leighton)

Arts educators have long needed to advocate for recognition and inclusion of the arts in education (Ewing, 2010), and the perceptions for some was that the move online was symptomatic of attitudes that did not value the arts or the unique pedagogies they necessitated. Nonetheless, similar to the findings of Allen et al. (2014) the recognition that the choice to offer arts learning online or “fall into obsolescence” could not be overlooked as a “best case” scenario for some arts courses.

Technology

In addition to the positive opportunities for innovation presented by various forms of core, unique and ubiquitous technology, participants discussed a range of technological challenges. In particular, available technologies provided both within the university

LMS and through wider interactive applications did not always meet their needs to facilitate some arts experiences that occurred much more readily on-campus. While live tutorials were “synchronous”, there was still an issue of a small time lag between participants and diminished sound quality:

I've tried singing activities via Zoom before. It doesn't work... the lag the sound quality, it's just not good enough yet. And apparently the laws of physics will say it's just not going to be. (Louise)

Also noted was that innovative use of a range of available technologies provided through the university required time and support to effectively understand and use:

...for me the biggest part of it is the time it takes to develop really good, well thought through, well-conceived pedagogic practices in that space... Initially, the level of support that was available was really stable... [However] all of those over the shoulder supports have gone... We have to go through a queuing system in an online space to get support. (Leighton)

Eleanor agreed, although felt the investment of time was worth it for a long-term learning resource:

I've put in huge amounts of time because I think once you set those things up, they're there. It's the set up time that's the problem.

For some, access through their university to helpful external technologies were denied which left them either having to pay for these technologies themselves, or going without. Anna referred to her previously successful use of Voice Threading to engage students in response activities to videoed arts performances, and how the cancellation of this subscription by her university had negatively impacted her teaching:

I can increase their arts learning, and their knowledge base, and get closer to the skills that I would on-campus if they gave me access to that technology. (Anna)

Similarly, Eleanor desired to work with innovative unique technologies than her university was unwilling to support:

When I interviewed for this position I actually mentioned this virtual spaces and meeting online and this kind of stuff [using Second Life], and it was shut down. So there will be systemic issues with it (i.e. virtual learning).

The level of technological proficiency was unique to each participant, and thus technology proved a greater challenge for those who had less personal experience or confidence. Access to appropriate support and training also impacted the ability to counter this challenge, and for some, this was clearly lacking.

Key Mediating strategies

In light of the challenges and opportunities of teaching the arts online, a variety of mediating strategies were employed. Foremost, participants were aware of the need to enact a different pedagogy, and that this was very much in a stage of growth and experimentation. Many approached their pedagogy from a “possibility” perspective, working with what “could be done” in order to facilitate meaningful learning:

I feel like I have to engage analytical concepts more than physical concepts. That's probably one of the things that I have [done]: to find works that students can analyse, or provocations, or a painting or whatever it is that we can share the experience and talk about. That sort of [learning] is slightly less physicalized, but ... it leads a student to feel comfortable to physicalize the outcome of the discussion. (Richard)

Many participants created videos of practice for their learners to stimulate independent practical learning experiences.

...it's more about the demonstration, and I record those demonstrations ... As well as that, I supplement it with videos, so for instance if I'm teaching them how to do contour drawing, I have a suite of about five videos. (Eleanor)

Theresa harnessed the power of her students' imagination, running a process drama experience through children's literature in a live tutorial, asking students to imagine the process as they talked it through, and responding using the online chat function.

Leighton referred to a range of initiatives that had been trialled in the past, and how he continued to innovate on his practice and use of technology.

There was effort among many to provide opportunities to engage students in practical experiences through online sessions and the provision of weekly "challenges" or practical arts tasks for independent completion. However, unless such practical experiences were mandated, it was acknowledged there was no way of ensuring that students actually completed them. Only those educators who embedded the practical learning experiences in assessment felt confident their students were undertaking practical learning. Leighton noted:

...the real thing that I've learned about it is that an assessment even more than I think in a face-to-face situation actually drives [learning], and you've got to somehow work a system out whereby students can't hide; they have to show what they can do. (Leighton)

Many agreed, and spoke about the use of portfolio-based assessment that required students to present evidence of engagement in a practical arts experiences, often in authentic contexts, and then reflect on this to demonstrate connections between theory, curriculum and practice.

Importantly, a correlation was noted between participants who felt less confident about the potential for online learning to adequately prepare pre-service teachers and those who did not assess practical arts experiences. As such, the value of authentic assessment for engaging students in praxis was noted as a key mediating strategy to stimulate applied student arts learning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research reported here provides useful insights into the experiences and perspectives of arts academics who facilitate online arts courses in ITE programs, and highlights potential areas for future support, investigation and innovation.

The participants voiced a universal conviction that arts learning was not only incredibly valuable as part of a holistic education, but that pre-service teachers must be provided with a sound foundation of arts theory and practice in order to undergird effective classroom practice. The extent to which arts learning could facilitate effective practice varied, with some acknowledging its effectiveness if approached with deep consideration, and others believing it could never be as effective. As a whole, however, there was a general determination to approach the challenges presented with creativity and innovation. This was supported by a recognition that online learning presented wider benefits that on-campus learning did not permit, including widening participation, course viability for small courses, and opportunities to innovate on their current pedagogical practice.

A universal challenge was raised: that of stimulating praxis in online contexts. In light of this, individual participants made use of various pedagogical strategies to encourage students to engage in arts experiences in their own time, and/or during live online tutorials. Primarily, those who noted most satisfaction with their students' engagement in practical arts experiences were those who had mandated arts activities as

part of the assessment process. Given the repeated emphasis in research literature about the importance of practical learning for pre-service teachers (Alter et al., 2009; Cutcher & Cook, 2016) it is therefore identified that authentic and praxis-focused assessment in the arts should be considered in order to provide students with a practical foundation for future classroom learning. This is supported by previous research showing that creative learning has found to be effectively promoted in online contexts when mandated through productive and flexible constraints in assessment (Allen et al., 2014; Davis, 2018). Importantly, a number of pedagogical innovations were revealed through this study; in particular, engaging students in arts praxis through creative live tutorial activities or ubiquitous technologies that permitted sharing and collaboration. However, the research findings equally demonstrated that not all students benefitted from such innovations, and as such, only praxis as mandated through creative assessment tasks were likely to ensure most students benefit from these innovations.

Further useful findings in this study related to the use of technology, and this supports previous findings that online learning presents opportunities for innovative practice, and greater access to tertiary arts learning (Dyment & Downing, 2019). There was evidence of both core technologies utilised across the group through their university LMS, in addition to a range of unique technology uses which were dependent on individual access to opportunities offered by their institution, or confidence to make creative use of ubiquitous technologies outside the university's platform. As such, the extent of support offered by different institutions was noted as an enabler or inhibitor to the perceived ability to engage creatively with technology use in facilitating learning.

A further recognition was that transferring on-campus learning approaches to an online context was largely ineffective, as available technologies proved inadequate in facilitating many of the learning experiences that could be conducted face-to-face.

While the need for online specific pedagogy is well established in the literature (Stone, 2016), this research highlights the need to develop a more specific understanding about online pedagogy for arts learning that recognises the unique demands of the arts experiences, working with available and emerging technology to facilitate praxis-centred arts learning, and further research in this regard is recommended. This is paired with acknowledgement that such innovations require time and technical support, both of which were noted in this study as lacking. An additional recommendation is therefore the provision of adequate support (via technical expertise and time allocations) for academics to engage in meaningful and sustainable pedagogical development.

The findings from this study have emerged from in-depth interviews with eight Australian academics and as such, are not to be generalised to the wider experiences of all arts academics in higher education. Nonetheless, they help to provide a snapshot of the varied experiences and perspectives of the participating online arts educators, and provide a range of in-depth insights into attitudes towards online arts learning, the challenges and opportunities it raises for teaching the arts to pre-service teachers, and the strategies they have employed in light of these. The findings confirm previous studies that indicate that academics predominantly believe that online learning in the arts is inferior to on-campus, but that this is held in tension with a recognition of wider opportunities yielded by online learning (Baker et al., 2016; Cutcher & Cook, 2016; Lierse, 2015). Most notably, it reveals a genuine need to focus future efforts into sustainable pedagogical innovations that engage learners in meaningful praxis and collaborations, particularly through the facilitation of praxis-focused assessment and technologies for increased interaction.

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