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Arts Immersion: Using the Arts as a Language Across the Primary School Curriculum

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Abstract: Australia's national arts curriculum has potential to realise the following benefits: cognitive, social, affective and curricular. This curriculum is designed for generalist and special arts teachers, but its delivery may be hindered by the prioritisation of high-stakes-tested disciplines and pedagogies, and reduced government funding to arts education across school and tertiary sectors. This may lead to a lack of opportunities to build teacher capacity in arts education, and diminished support for arts education in terms of time allocation and resourcing. The notion of 'silos', where the separation of teaching practices persists between teachers of different disciplines, discourages meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration and can promote less effective models of arts integration. Arts education embodies a range of intelligences and semiotic systems providing for inclusive curricula and educational equity. Arts Immersion is a proposed response to these factors, intended to be implemented through democratic generalist and arts specialist team-teaching in primary schools.

Introduction

As a primary school performing arts teacher, I was planning to make a short film with my Year 6 and Year 7 students, drawing on a range of performing arts skills while making collaborations with cross-curricular themes. After sharing my thoughts with a generalist classroom teacher regarding both of us working together on this project, I was dismayed when they sighed and said, "I love all the stuff you're doing, but don't talk to me before NAPLAN. I wish I could do what you're doing". I wonder how often primary schools have prioritised practise for high-stakes testing over rich learning *in* and *through* the Arts? I also wonder how many teachers would love to use the Arts creatively in the class room, but are not sure where to start and how to fit this in to what they already feel is an overcrowded curriculum?

In discussions with other educators regarding the introduction of our new national curriculum for the Arts in Australia, I have encountered various responses, many of which align with current research into arts practice. In professional development sessions, I have often heard specialist arts teachers respond positively to the formal recognition of the Arts, yet express discomfort due to their lack of expertise in all five arts disciplines. Having usually chosen only one arts major in their pre-service training, they are often more likely to reflect their pre-service training by viewing themselves as individual subject specialists (Ardzejewska, McMaugh & Coutts, 2010) in one of the five arts disciplines: dance, drama, media arts, music or visual art. Through my involvement in curriculum planning meetings, I have observed that generalist teachers without particular arts-related skills and experience in the Arts tend to be more comfortable leaving the responsibility of arts education to specialist arts teachers (Lemon & Garvis, 2013; Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014). I have listened to

stories regarding the decisions of some school administrators to reduce time allocation and resources for the Arts (Garvis & Pendergast, 2012; West, 2012), justifying researchers' concerns that the Arts are often the first to suffer in "an already overcrowded curriculum" (Ewing, Hristofski, Gibson, Campbell, & Robertson, 2011, p. 33), which is time-poor and fiscally stretched (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012).

Is there a strategy which can address these issues by observing their interconnectedness and conceiving an approach that embraces these perspectives? This paper will discuss the use of *Arts Immersion* as a strategy responding to the challenges currently facing arts education in Australian primary schools, and as a means to maximise the educational potential in this context.

Literature Review

This section will consider the potential gains of maintaining an exemplary practice of arts education in our schools, the relationship between generalist teachers and specialist teachers in terms of arts education, and factors which may hinder the delivery of quality arts education in primary schools.

Improving Arts Pedagogy as a Response to an Overcrowded Curriculum

The pressures of an overcrowded curriculum (Ewing, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2009) could be eased by creating rich tasks that draw on a range of deeper learning experiences. In a linear view of learning, a growing collection of fragmented tasks are increasingly restricted by a finite time frame. This is rather like stringing more and more beads onto a necklace made of a limited piece of string. However, by creating more complex tasks, which can nest within each other, opportunities arise for building on different ways of knowing and learning. In this way, complementary disciplines and understandings can enrich each other and occur simultaneously within carefully planned projects. Instead of acquiring a collection of seemingly unrelated knowledge and skills in isolation, students can learn to make deeper connections between disciplines, and gain an understanding of how these various frameworks influence each other and shape our thinking. Instead of a row of single beads on a necklace, clusters of beads grow further out from their threading point on the string to make beautiful, sturdy and complex patterns, each design building on the other.

Researchers contend that the Arts are ideally suited to deep and inclusive learning experiences as they can access a range of intelligences and learning styles (Eisner, 2003, 2005; Gardner, 1993, 2006), and possess the potential to enhance other disciplines (Goldberg, 2012; Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Through integrated arts programs, student learning can be extended from reporting facts to critiquing ideas and situations, from acquiring theoretical knowledge to creative problem-solving, and from recalling information to transferring learning to other relevant contexts (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing et al, 2011). Put simply, the *quality* of learning time can increase rather than increasing its *quantity*. Further details regarding specific projects of this nature will be provided later in this paper.

Is the New National Curriculum for the Arts Written for Generalist or Specialist Arts Teachers?

Whose job is it to deliver quality arts education? A perusal of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts, Foundation to Year 10* (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013) reveals that it would be difficult to do justice to the depth and breadth of the curriculum, purely in the specialist time allocated in primary school timetables. This situation would suggest that the Arts need to be taught across the curriculum in both specialist and generalist contexts if the aims of our national curriculum for the Arts are to be fully satisfied. However, the reduction of arts education opportunities for pre-service teachers and school students in some locations continues to threaten sustainable quality arts education across our schools (Barton, Baguley & MacDonald, 2013). Therefore, specialist teachers with in-depth skills in only one arts discipline, and generalist teachers with limited introductory skills across the Arts, may be hard pressed to provide rigorous arts education in all arts disciplines, due to a lack of time, support, expertise and confidence (Ewing et al, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2012).

It is not a matter of debating whether the Arts are worthwhile. There is a vast body of literature concerning the value of arts experiences and arts education, which has been accumulated and reviewed over several decades (Abbs, 1989; Brouillette, 2010; Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Catterall, 2009; Eisner, 1994, 2003, 2004, 2005; Ewing, 2010, 2012,; Fowler, 2001; Frawley, 2013; Gardner, 1993, 2006; Goldberg, 2012; McDonald & Fisher, 2006; Russell-Bowie, 2012, Wright, 2012). Rather, the issue is whether there is a valued place for the Arts in our schools, given the pressures and challenges of those environments (Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014). The fact that the Arts are not included in our current high-stakes testing program may unintentionally contribute towards these disciplines being undervalued in the curriculum and marginalised by policy makers (Eisner, 2003, 2005; Ewing, 2012).

Considering the Need for an Effective and Sustainable Arts Education Strategy

We need a strategy that can build teacher capacity in arts education practice, facilitating greater competence in both specialist arts teachers' ability to teach more than one or two arts disciplines, and generalist teachers' ability to incorporate the Arts across the curriculum. With government funding cuts to the tertiary sector, and a consequent decrease in arts education for pre-service teachers in some institutions (Barton, Baguley & McDonald, 2013), it is timely to investigate other ways of improving arts practice in primary schools. A potentially transformative view of the curriculum, with the Arts positioned as central to core learning experiences rather than situated on the periphery of what is recognised as legitimate knowledge, has implications for future teacher education. Similarly, new models for professional development opportunities can provide a fresh and efficient approach for building teacher capacity in delivering quality arts education.

Ultimately, the uptake of the national curriculum for the Arts, or any other quality arts curriculum, will depend on decisions made by state education ministers and principals. These are the people arts advocates need to convince if they want to see quality arts education in all schools. Arts education needs to be seen as not only valuable but attainable, with an acknowledgement of the risks involved in neglecting the Arts in our children's education (Adams, 2011; Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012). The overarching question becomes whether, having acknowledged the value of the Arts (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Cole, 2011; Ewing et al, 2011), it is possible to develop a long-term fiscally and pedagogically sustainable strategy regarding arts education. By this I mean the development of a strategy which will equip both specialist and generalist teachers with an ongoing rigorous arts education

pedagogy, that is sustained through appropriate administrative and resourcing support. Such a strategy would need to convince teachers that acquiring knowledge in arts pedagogy, and developing associated skills in delivery, are attainable and represent substantial benefits to both teachers and students (Barton, Baguley & MacDonald, 2013; Garvis & Riek, 2010). Policy makers and school administrators need to be convinced not only of the value of arts education and arts experiences, but that it is possible to provide for this within the school budget.

Benefits of Arts Education

The sizable collection of literature discussing the benefits of arts education, and in particular integrated arts programs, reflects Eisner's (2005) contention that the Arts are crucial in developing minds through school curricula. The cognitive benefits of arts education are demonstrable through transformative learning (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2012), which embodies and enacts: the development of deep and unique ways of knowing (Eisner, 2003, 2005); access to multimodal semiotic systems ; artistic perception and aesthetic awareness; informed analytical judgements and interdisciplinary connections (Barton, 2014; Eisner, 2003, 2005; McDonald & Fisher, 2006); and a range of specific cognitive functions (Robinson, 2011) measurable by neuroscientific methods (Huang, 2009). The social benefits of arts education include: respect for other traditions, cultures and perspectives (Goldberg, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2012); enhanced social-emotional development (Brouillette, 2010; Clift, 2012; Luftig, 2008); and high functioning team work skills (Robinson, 2011). The affective benefits of arts education transcend demographic and developmental barriers (Stacy, Brittain, & Kerr, 2002) and provide considerable assistance to students who are marginalised or disabled (Durham, 2012; Ponder & Kissenger, 2009; Robinson, 2012), by fostering: self-awareness, imagination and creativity; an appreciation of beauty and mystery; engagement with learning; and improvements in self-esteem and wellbeing (Clift, 2012; McDonald & Fisher, 2002).

Integrated arts curricula, where the Arts are considered equal partners with other disciplines are represented by Bresler's (1995) *coequal cognitive approach*, and Russell-Bowie's (2009) concept of *syntegration*. The diverse pedagogical activities inherent in this approach provide an inclusive foundation for learning, fostering equity, which is more legitimately represented by providing equal opportunities and a voice to all students (Colley, 2012; Gardner, 1993, 2006; Goldberg, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Snyder, 2001). Robinson (2011) contends that integrated approaches empower students, embrace their individuality, encourage experimentation, and provide "a sense of organized freedom and artistic play" (p. 298). By encouraging teachers who work in different disciplines to adopt an integrated approach (Goldberg, 2012; McDonald and Fisher, 2006; Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012), complementary skills and understandings can enhance their practices and assist in changing the notion that teachers should continue to operate in their own segregated 'silos' (Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013). These concepts are crucial to the practice of *Arts Immersion*. If this research is not recognised, then conscious or unconscious decisions to neglect the Arts as a vital part of students' education can impoverish educational experiences and narrow curricula.

Challenges for the Arts in our Current Educational Climate
The Unintended Influence of High-Stakes Testing on the Arts

In their review, *The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families*, Polesel, Dulfer and Turnbull (2012) consider the benefits and disadvantages of high-stakes testing programs, including Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Despite the laudable aims of NAPLAN, which include transparency, consistency in curricular standards, and motivation for attaining benchmark achievement levels (Armrein & Berliner, 2002; Crocker, 2004; Phelps, 2006; Sloane & Kelly, 2003), other researchers have noted unintended adverse effects on the structure and nature of the curriculum, teaching pedagogies and methods of delivery, the nature and quality of students' learning experiences, and students' well-being and health (Polesel et al, 2012).

Researchers have reported unintentional adverse effects of high stakes testing on individual student needs, including: the systematic dominance of high-stakes test data on which the My School website depends (Ewing, 2012); a lack of emphasis on individual students needs and a preference for uniformity (Comber, 2012); high-stakes testing being viewed as the “de facto curriculum” (Hardy & Boyle, 2011, p. 220), which refers to the practice of having the subject content and learning style of NAPLAN determine the subject content and learning style of the class room; a narrowing of the curriculum, which reduces class room learning to practice for the test (Angelo, 2012; Caldwell, 2012; Ewing, 2012; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013); the privileging of high-stakes-tested subjects (Barton, Baguley & MacDonald, 2013, Ewing et al, 2011), and a lack of contextualised learning (Ewing et al, 2011; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013).

In critical literature, concerns have been expressed regarding perceived pressure on teachers to prioritise test practice by favouring lecture-based pedagogies, formulaic teaching styles, and narrowly conceived pedagogies (Ewing et al, 2011; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Lobascher, 2011; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). For example, the recommended NAPLAN guidelines for writing a persuasive text suggest writing five paragraphs based on a prescribed framework as a response to a written prompt (National Assessment Program, 2013). While this type of structure can assist students in providing rules to follow, several researchers contend that a limited range of pedagogic strategies (Ewing, 2012) can privilege certain students and override deep and authentic learning, creativity, enjoyment and higher-order thinking skills (Alexander, 2010; Lobascher, 2011; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). The reported disproportionate influence of these factors on disadvantaged students (Peters & Oliver, 2009) can widen the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students (Ewing, 2012). At this stage, reports regarding adverse effects of high-stakes testing on students' health and well-being is largely anecdotal (Polesel et al, 2012).

Limited Access for Building Teacher Capacity in Delivering Quality Arts Education

Teachers' capacity to deliver quality arts education can be adversely effected by poor quality pre-service training (Barton et al, 2013; Garvis & Riek, 2010), limited experiences and expertise in the Arts (Jacobs, 2008), negatively biased perceptions of the status and relevance of arts education (Lemon & Garvis, 2013; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010), and limited opportunities for ongoing professional development (Guskey, 2002; Sze, 2013). Russell-Bowie (2012) contends that the development of teacher competence and confidence in delivering quality arts education will require reform.

Models of Arts Integration

In the past, integrated arts programs have drawn criticism from arts advocates who contend that a generic view of the Arts constitutes reduced discipline-specific skills (Best, 1995; Smith, 1995; Stevens, 1993). While Ewing (2012) notes that this view may persist in some quarters, there is a considerable body of literature, including our national curriculum for the Arts (ACARA, 2013), that acknowledges the unique nature of each arts discipline while observing their natural connections. Several researchers recommend a combination of specialist instruction in each arts discipline undertaken in combination with an integrated use of the Arts across the curriculum (Brown, 2007; Ewing, 2012; Goldberg, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2009). Lack of teacher capacity to deliver quality arts education can result in superficial learning arising from shallow integration styles (Russell-Bowie, 2009).

Personal Background and Experiences in Creating and Teaching the Arts A Combined Perspective: Performing, Writing and Teaching

I have had the privilege of enjoying the Arts from three interrelated perspectives: a creator and performer in the Arts, an Arts specialist teacher, and an Arts audience member. As a musician and actor, I became aware of the communicative power of the Arts through text, image, movement and sound. When my husband and I were involved in corporate entertainment, we learned how to take an original stimulus (such as an event, industry group, concept or product) and make it accessible to our audience. We learned how a target audience can shape an artwork, and why knowing an intended audience is critical in that process. Our varied audiences included teenagers, medical staff, bursers and cucumber farmers! The following examples illustrate how these principles can be enacted through the practice of *Arts Immersion* in class room contexts.

An Integrated Perspective on High School Music Teaching

As a beginning high school music teacher in a low socioeconomic, culturally diverse school where the Arts were not considered ‘cool’, I realised the urgent need to engage my students in learning. My approach to discipline was to be firm, fair and fascinating, with the latter, often through the use of humour, being the key. I wanted my class room to authentically reflect the diversity in the world, and my students to feel valued. My aim was to encourage my students to view themselves as artists who could think deeply and creatively. For instance, when my senior students were studying music from the Romantic period, I gave them the task of becoming presenters for a ‘radio show’ from that period. They had to include all the characteristics of a radio show such as interviews, music, advertisements, special features and competitions. The students needed to understand how historical background, cultural influences, and life experiences influenced the European art music of this period. This required associated media arts skills in recording and editing, the ability to synthesize knowledge and select illustrative examples, and a creative imagination. I well remember one student’s interview with her father playing the part of Tchaikowsky, complete with a Russian accent. Similarly, when we studied Baroque music, the students used a live oral presentation to become tour guides in the Baroque Hall of Fame.

Using a Primary School Choir as a Means of Addressing Educational and Social Challenges

I was invited by the principal of a low socioeconomic, culturally diverse primary school to use singing and movement in forming a choir to address a range of social and educational challenges. We focused on acquiring skills in choral performance, building musical knowledge, responding physically and emotionally to the music, sustaining the strength and freedom of healthy posture, incorporating musical instruments, conveying the message and mood of the music through facial and vocal expression, presenting ourselves with pride and enthusiasm, encouraging self-discipline, developing skills in musical analysis and memorisation, experiencing a range of music repertoire representing other cultures and times, fostering team building, and developing commitment, endurance and focus in rehearsals. Sometimes students would have to be relocated by the police due to security issues, and students were often quite open about discussing family members currently in jail. The project was very successful, showing improvements in: self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation, perseverance, social capital, engagement with learning, motivation, family connections with the school, trust, performance skills and musical knowledge. The choir won awards at eisteddfods, enjoyed a television spot on a breakfast show, took two bus-loads of their families with them to competitive events (families who were rarely engaged with school activities), and even participated in a combined workshop and concert with the Ten Tenors at our school! However, the next two principals were not supportive and the program was shut down.

Using a Primary School Concert as a Platform for Integrated Learning

In my current role as a performing arts teacher and choir director at a primary school, I am always seeking to provide multiple pathways for learning. Our theme for a school concert, Pocahontas, was rich in possibilities, particularly relating to understanding the nature of two contrasting cultures and the tensions arising from these different perspectives. We accessed multiple intelligences using a wide range of multimodal learning activities including: role-playing scenes; making dramatic tableaux of the Pocahontas story; forming our own American Indian tribes with descriptive names and distinctive drum messages; creating visual, oral, and written stories; singing indigenous songs with drums; creating visual and musical artworks inspired by American Indian culture; comparing songs representative of the two cultures; comparing the original Pocahontas story with the Disney version; moving to music with large pieces of fabric to extend our body shapes throughout the audience in depicting the river in the song, *Just Around the River Bend*; and researching themes connected with exploration, sea travel, environmental perspectives, and social hierarchies. When I was explaining the concept of ‘standing in someone else’s shoes’ to a Year Three class, I asked the children to explain the message in the song, *Colours of the Wind*. They quickly replied that it was about Pocahontas wanting John Smith to understand how she lived and viewed the world. One boy replied, “It’s like a persuasive text!”, and the rest of the class groaned. I was impressed that the boy had made that connection, so I asked the class why they had groaned. The children said they were sick of writing about persuasive texts for NAPLAN, but they liked learning about Pocahontas. Their response suggested they were more engaged in learning within the multimodal integrated arts approach, than by the dot point text-based template provided by NAPLAN test preparation.

Unpacking an Immersion Approach to Film Making and Song Writing in A Primary School

When writing songs or making short films with my primary school students, we begin the process by moving around the room to instrumental music to activate our brains and energise our thinking. When the music stops, each student has to go to the nearest student and share their ideas about a theme or topic. We do this several times to vary established social groups. After creating a mind map with the whole class, which includes everyone's ideas, we begin a series of activities, experimenting with ideas drawing on all the arts disciplines, making connections with other disciplines in the curriculum, researching background information, and developing the skills needed for the project. An example is summarised below.

In creating a short film and an original song, two Year 6/7 classes looked at how they could combine resources and enhance the quality of class time by nesting interdisciplinary tasks and making cross-curricular connections. We drew on three thematic links: the Year 6/7 theme: *Shine* (succeeding, despite adversity, in making the world a better place); *The Lion King* school concert theme; and social issues facing Year 6/7 students. Through the process previously described, the students developed a plot where a group of nerds who are being bullied, receive a visit from two nerdy angels who encourage them to go on a quest to Africa to learn how to 'shine'. The creative thread pursued involved the following: composing and recording an original jazz-style song, *Shine*, featuring four characters - Bethany Hamilton, Mother Theresa, Stevie Wonder and Martin Luther King (discussing form, style, texture and instrumentation); creating a comedy short film (including the song, *Shine*) based on an 'Everyman' morality play style, which symbolised adversities faced by this age group in the form of a quest; participating in a jazz vocal workshop with Amanda Carr from Boston, and re-recording the song, *Shine*, with an instrumental backing provided (via internet) by professional jazz musicians from the USA.

Discussion regarding Arts Immersion

Definition of Arts Immersion and Related Terms

Arts Immersion is a term based on an amalgam of *arts integration* and *language immersion*. *Arts integration* refers to fruitful connections "with and through the arts" (McDonald & Fisher, 2006, p. 9) in which the Arts and other disciplines "inform understanding in each other" (Donahue & Stuart, 2008, p. 344). In the process of *language immersion*, a foreign language is used as the medium for teaching subject content. The *immersion* language is not treated as an additional separate discipline, but a *means* for learning this language and the content of the curriculum *together*. Research shows that just as learning a second language has the capacity to enhance skills in the first and the second language (Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013), arts education has the capacity to improve learning not only in the arts disciplines, but in other disciplines as well (Gardiner, Fox, Knowles, & Jeffrey, 1996). The construction of the term, *Arts Immersion*, will refer to the process of using the Arts as the purposeful medium through which enhanced learning occurs across disciplines to inform mutual understandings. Put simply, *Arts Immersion* is a strategy to improve learning in the Arts and other disciplines for their mutual benefit.

The Arts as a Language

The use of the Arts as a purposeful medium for learning implies that communication is inherent in the process. When a medium becomes a vehicle for communication and the understandings which flow from that process, the medium can operate as a 'language'. Eisner (2005) describes language as "the use of any form of representation in which meaning is conveyed or construed" (p. 342), and contends that the language of an art form engenders expressive and connotative meaning (2003). Eisner's (2005) inclusive description acknowledges diversity in learners and approaches to learning. In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, Eisner (2003) observes that pedagogies for learning language which cannot move beyond adherence to rules may impede understanding, and that the multiple representations inherent in using the Arts as a language can enhance meaning-making and transform minds. However, in many educational settings, the word "language" is synonymous with text-based English language where the text is in word form. Researchers have referred to this narrowed learning perspective, as being representative of a curriculum that is "word-bound" (Wright, 2003, p. 15), with a "disproportionate reverence for the printed word" (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 4). In these types of settings, other modes of meaning-making are diminished, and students' understanding is assessed only through oral and written language (Albers & Harste, 2007; Wright, 2003, 2012).

When curricula knowingly or unknowingly privilege certain modes of meaning-making, particular types of intelligence, and limited pedagogical approaches, equity in the class room may be compromised (Ewing, 2012). Just as students in a multilingual educational setting may be disadvantaged when the one language of instruction is not their 'mother tongue', so students in class rooms where only one mode of learning is offered may be marginalised when the language of instruction is not their 'mother learning mode' or 'mother intelligence'. This unequal access to learning opportunities contributes to a lack of equity in our class rooms. To complete the analogy, the diversity represented in class rooms makes every class room a 'multilingual' environment, where a range of 'languages' is required for effective learning.

Language is critical to the development of literacy skills as it becomes the vehicle for developing literacy. It functions as a means of communication, which is manipulated and interpreted within the practice of literacy. In the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts Foundation to Year 10* (ACARA, 2013), the aspects which contribute to arts knowledge and aesthetic understanding are described as "languages, symbols, techniques, processes and skills of the Arts subjects" (p. 3). This curriculum refers to "the kinetic, symbolic, verbal and visual languages of the five Arts subjects" (p. 18). Reference is also made to the languages of other cultures and the creation of multimodal artworks where meaning-making is achieved through using a variety of codes and conventions. The thinking behind this document is that language is not only a word-based concept, and that the Arts embrace a range of languages across the five Arts subjects. Thus, a range of language types has the potential to develop a range of literacies.

Eisner's (2005) description of language opens up opportunities for multiple representations of meaning beyond the spoken or printed word. A consideration of the Arts as a language will draw on descriptions of four component aspects of language in relation to the functional purpose they fulfil for the practitioner and consumer.

Firstly, languages provide us with a sense of 'home'. In *language immersion*, the language of instruction becomes the intentional vehicle of communication for the development of understandings (Quirk, 2000). In *arts immersion*, the Arts become the home language of choice - the means for communication, investigation and expression. Wright's (2003) contention that the Arts and play are the first languages children learn, is supported by

other researchers who report a need to reclaim and reawaken this ‘language’ throughout the schooling process (Greene, 1991, 1995; Noddings, 2013). Just as a ‘home’ can be a permanent place where one lives, a team’s own ground, and an instinctive returning to one’s original territory, the Arts can provide a place of belonging and welcome, as we return to those experiences that are instinctively part of the construction of our human consciousness (Eisner, 2003).

Secondly, languages are built on semiotic systems, and literacy derived from a language requires the ability to manipulate and understand a semiotic system (Innis, 1985). The Arts have their own semiotic systems (meaning-making elements of communicative behaviour) encompassed in “the kinetic, symbolic, verbal and visual languages of the five Arts subjects” (ACARA, p. 18). Livermore (2003) points out that “the language of the arts is embedded in the mode of expression of each art form” (p. 3), each requiring different methods of decoding symbolic forms of expression to process information through different semantic structures. Written language is not always the most appropriate choice of communication and expression, as there are situations when those particular semiotic systems are inadequate (Eisner, 2003). The multimodal nature of the Arts assists “the communication of ideas and feelings through multiple symbolic forms” (Barton, 2014, p. 3). Wright (2003) contends that since the Arts can be based on both verbal and non-verbal forms of meaning-making, they may be considered “supraverbal” (p. 17).

Researchers acknowledge that the Arts are multimodal in nature (Albers & Sanders, 2010; Barton, 2014; Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Eisner, 2003, 2005; Ewing, 2010, 2012; Ewing, Miller & Locke, 2014; Livermore, 2003; Wright, 2003, 2012) and can be accessed through multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993, 2006). In this manner, a democratic use of modes, including text, image, sound and gesture, can be “recognized and utilized in fluid and intrinsic ways” (Barton, 2014, p. 13) to express “a wider range of ideas and feelings” (Livermore, 2003, p. 3). This generates respect for the significance and uniqueness of each mode of expression (Albers & Harste, 2007), and encourages transduction (Bezemer & Kress, 2008), the movement of semiotic material between modes, and synaesthesia, “the transduction of meaning from one semiotic mode to the other” (Wright, 2003, p. 22). Literal or symbolic language and literal or expressive symbol systems (Wright, 2003) adopt “the character of an art form” (Eisner, 2003, p. 243). Contemporary developments in technology have added the rich semiotic resources of media arts to this diversity (Barton & Unsworth, 2014; Dezuanni & Woods, 2014).

Thirdly, languages represent cultures and times. They are a framework for viewing our place in the world (Rassokha, 2014), shaping interactions between individuals, society and the world as they pass on the rich traditions that emerge from these continued experiences. Languages represent cultures, viewpoints and shared histories (Abbs, 1987). The Arts are inseparable from the cultures that their various expressions perpetuate and challenge (Goldberg, 2012). A truly integrated multimodal language should “encourage creativity and social imaginations” (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 3), in an interactive capacity (Harste, 2003; Ewing et al., 2011). The Arts provide us with a window to our world (Farrell, 2010), drawing on world and community knowledge, which may be influenced by global marketing and corporate capitalism (Wright, 2003). Teachers have a responsibility to support students in becoming informed consumers of social and media messages (Barton & Unsworth, 2014; Dezuanni & Woods, 2014; Noad & Unsworth, 2007).

Fourthly, languages shape our identity. In providing a shared language for the interpretation and production of art, educators can influence the formation of students’ identity. In becoming creators and perceivers of the Arts (Barton, 2014), we take on the mantle of an artistic identity, expressing our thoughts and opinions through aesthetic expression and aesthetic responses (Fuller, 1987). By developing a language of reflection, the

Arts can become a mirror for self-awareness (Farrell, 2010; Goldberg, 2012), “where we can create visions of other ways of being” (Greene, 1991, p. 27). In addition, by offering greater opportunities for effective learning in more equitable settings, the use of the Arts as a language can assist in forming positive learner identities.

The Proposed Model

A rigorous approach to effective *arts immersion* would encompass equity of access to quality arts education in schools, interpreted through exemplary practice, and supported through appropriate networks and infrastructure. All students should have equal access to both arts specialists and integrated arts opportunities in the class room (McDonald & Fisher, 2002, 2006). The concept of learning *with, through* and *about* the arts (Goldberg, 2012) would be based on an integration pedagogy aligned with Bresler’s (1995) *coequal cognitive* approach and Russell-Bowie’s (2012) concept of *syntegration* to represent exemplary practice.

Introducing Arts Immersion into the Class Room

I am currently planning Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) to explore the practice of *Arts Immersion* in a Year 6 class, where a generalist teacher and a specialist arts teacher (myself) will engage in democratic team-teaching, using emerging data to reflect on our teaching practices. Using the Arts as the home language of the class room may provide an opportunity for both teachers to improve their practice, and assist in addressing the ‘silo’ notion that tends to separate generalist and specialist teachers. Students in the class will also have regular access to specialist arts classes in the form of one performing arts class (dance, drama, media arts and music) and one visual arts class per week, each of one hour duration. If effective, this style of ‘on the job’ professional development could provide a model for introducing the practice of *Arts Immersion* into primary school class rooms. This approach could potentially be extended to include team-teaching between specialist arts teachers proficient in one arts discipline and those with competence across all arts disciplines.

Conclusion

There is currently much discussion in educational sectors regarding the need for equity and improved student outcomes. While student diversity is acknowledged in the rhetoric, this is not always reflected in a correspondingly diverse range of pedagogies, or in the learning strategies employed to target a range of intelligences and modes of expression. The Arts, with their own unique semiotic systems, encompass a diverse range of intelligences and language modes, which foster deeper ways of knowing. As such they are well-positioned to provide inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. However, integrated arts approaches to learning may be compromised by high-stakes testing programs, which appear to prioritise particular pedagogical styles, disciplines, and types of learners. This situation can be exacerbated by reduced government funding, which in some cases results in limited access to arts education for teachers and students, shallow approaches to integrated arts programs, and the marginalisation of arts education. These factors may be influenced by perceptions of an overcrowded curriculum; lack of support, resources, confidence and expertise; and the ‘silo’ notion of separating teachers of different disciplines.

The concept of *Arts Immersion*, an amalgam of *arts integration* and *language immersion*, is designed to use the Arts as a language to create mutual benefits between disciplines, and provide a broader range of pedagogical activities for improved student outcomes. The preferred model for delivery is Bresler's (1995) *coequal cognitive* approach and Russell-Bowie's concept of *syntegration*, where the Arts are equal partners in learning. Specialist and generalist teachers can have complimentary roles in initiating and maintaining integrated arts curricula. Democratic team-teaching involving a generalist teacher and a specialist arts teacher operating within the context of CPAR, may provide a pathway for professional development in improving teacher practice. *Arts immersion* has the potential to foster social-emotional development and higher cognitive functioning across a range of disciplines.

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