In their own voice: The role of the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts* Paper Writers in ensuring equitable access to quality Arts education in Australia

Abstract

This paper examines the personal and professional experiences of the five arts leaders who co-wrote the foundation document for Australia's first national curriculum in the Arts. Their personal and professional backgrounds, which were explored during in depth interviews, drove the complex collaborative process that informed the first iteration of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. Though each couched their responses in the context of their background and arts discipline, they shared an awareness of the important role of the Arts in providing the analytical tools for children and young people to identify and subsequently challenge social injustice. The findings, which are presented as a group narrative using a Narrative Inquiry approach, reveal how the five arts leaders' individual lived experience, disciplinary experience and expertise, and commitment to collaborative leadership informed their approach. It was one driven by their shared belief that all Australian students, regardless of their background, are entitled to a quality arts education.

Keywords: Arts education, Australia, Australian Curriculum, collaboration, national curriculum, leadership, lived experience, social justice

Introduction

The term 'curriculum' is often employed with a marked lack of precision, and in a school context is regularly used to describe everything from a lesson plan to a legally mandated national curriculum. As Robyn Ewing (2013) observes, it has a complicated storyline and means different things to different people. Linda Lorenza (2021) describes curriculum in more accessible terms, yet in doing so implicitly recognise the broadness of its use, by characterising it as what can be taught and to whom, when and how. Seddon (2001) adopts a more philosophical approach by arguing that it is cultural construction, one that invariably includes debates about core beliefs and values. Students are exposed to these core beliefs and values when they explore issues such as gender, racial and social equality, which are often grouped under the umbrella term 'social justice'. Ewing (2010) places these issues at the very core of an authentic national curriculum, for such an endeavour must be driven by "equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students" (p. 127). As the arts shape paper writers were well aware, a national curriculum should therefore shape a holistic education consistent with what a country expects for, and of, its children and young people (Bezzina, et al., 2009).

The government endorsed national curriculum in Australia, known as the Australian Curriculum, attempts to position this altruism within a pragmatic framework that makes it accessible to the classroom teacher. Its core ambition is to "develop successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens" (ACARA, n.d., para 1). The curriculum thereby explicitly links conceptions of what is socially just and the responsibilities of citizenship, a deceptively controversial decision given the ideological clash between those intent on using the curriculum as a nation building tool and those more concerned with challenging the status quo. Though far from being apolitical themselves, it is often the classroom teachers who are left grappling with these competing agendas and the pragmatic challenge of delivering on the curriculum's commitments to helping students acquire the skills, abilities and learning dispositions they require if they are to achieve success in the 21st century workplace and in society more widely (Brennan, 2011; Ewing, 2020; Moss, et al., 2019; Scarino, 2019).

Despite an initial uncertainty about their inclusion in the curriculum, the Arts are widely acknowledged for their power to contribute to students' understandings of other people's stories and experiences, thereby helping them to "imagine, enact and examine the world from different perspectives" (Donelan, 2017, p. 43; Eisner, 2004). Their ultimate inclusion in the curriculum was therefore entirely compatible with the desire to link education with citizenship. In addition, the Arts also facilitate an engagement with a range of social justice imperatives by providing students from diverse social, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds the opportunity to demonstrate learning and express themselves through arts forms such as Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts rather than exclusively through text-based forms (Barton & Baguley, 2017; Ewing, 2010; UNESCO, 2006).

This paper investigates how the five Australian arts discipline experts negotiated a range of historical and institutional challenges to write the foundation *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts* document which subsequently helped to guide the writing of the Arts learning area in the *Australian Curriculum.* Through this process they drew upon their "lived experience, social capital and complex factors associated with their academic identity"

(Baguley, et al., 2020, p. 184) in order to ensure all children and young people in Australian schools would have access to a high-quality arts education. The arts shape paper that emerged from this collaboration is an example of the 'third entity' during which the group's purpose moved from their individual participation and potential personal gain to focus on the aims and goals required of such an important undertaking (Baguley, et al., 2020; Baguley et al., 2018).

Context

Any reform such as the development and implementation of a national curriculum is inevitably confronted by significant challenges (Apple, 1993; Brennan, 2011), including the pervasive suspicion of any attempt to centralise the control of education (Mueller, 2021). Since Federation in 1901, the state and territory governments retained constitutional responsibility for schooling. From the 1970s onwards, the federal government increasingly began to encroach on this responsibility for education (Kennedy, et al., 1995). During the first half of the 1970s, the Whitlam Labor Government, driven by social idealism and a reformist agenda, challenged the status quo by providing funding directly to schools (Bartlett, 1992). It was not an entirely new idea; indeed, in 1968 Malcom Fraser, the Liberal Minister for Education, argued in favour of the Commonwealth reducing unnecessary differences in the educational content taught across the various states (Reid, 2005); a sentiment echoed two decades later by John Dawkins who advocated for a national approach across a range of areas, including education.

The journey to a national curriculum is well-documented, having attracted the attention of a variety of researchers, including Brennan (2011), Ditchburn (2012), Gerrard and Farrell (2013), Harris-Hart (2010), Marsh (1994), Reid (2005; 2019), and Yates, Collins, and O'Connor (2011). It was a particularly complex process, marked by "a range of social, political and economic imperatives and ideological positions" (Savage, 2016, p. 868). Nevertheless, the driving motivation, at least at a governmental level initiated by the Liberal/National coalition, was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of governance and public service delivery by "reducing duplication and overlap between federal and state governments" (Savage, 2016, p. 868). In hindsight, this jostling over state and federal prerogatives pervaded the slow move toward a national curriculum, beginning with the development of national goals in the late 1980s, and then subsequently *The Hobart Declaration on Schooling* which included common and agreed goals for schooling in Australia (MYCEETA, 1989). Five years of intensive development resulted in the 1994 national Statements and Profiles for eight key learning areas (Mathematics, Technology, English, Science, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), Languages other than English (LOTE), the Arts, and Health (which included Physical Education and Personal Development) (Kennedy, et al., 1995). In 1999, *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MYCEETA, 1999) enabled the federal government to exercise greater influence by making funding contingent on "recipient jurisdiction implementation of requirements" (Bezzina, et al., 2009, p. 547; Brennan 2011).

Despite these measured steps toward a national curriculum, educators expressed concern about its impact on their traditional autonomy in the classroom (Batra, 2006; Brennan, 2011); the potential for coercive and corporate compliance with national curriculum policies that

have not been informed by or consulted with practitioners (Lingard, et al., 1995); what constitutes 'official' knowledge and whose knowledge matters (Riddle & Apple, 2019; Brennan, et al., 2021), and the potential for inconsistent implementation exacerbated by a lack of professional development (Barton, et al., 2013; Kennedy, et al., 1995; Lingard et al., 1995; Mueller, 2021). Nevertheless, some studies have also shown that as teachers became more familiar with the requirements of a national curriculum, and confident in their "pedagogical artistry" and renewed agency, they adopt a more positive approach (Helsby, 2005; Henderson & Slattery, 2008, p. 1).

The election of the Rudd Labor government in November 2007 removed some of the ill-feeling between the Federal government and their State and Territory counterparts, with the latter offering a "wary and somewhat qualified" support for a national curriculum (Reid, 2019, p. 200). As Meiners (2017) explains, the hopes for a national curriculum were furthered by the "establishment of economic and social agendas", which Lingard believed (2010) had both neoliberal and social democratic aspirations. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MYCEETA, 2008) articulated the agreed national purposes and role of schooling, central to which was the economic aims of both education and economic prosperity (Carter, 2018). The Federal Education Minister, and later Prime Minister, Julia Gillard established the National Curriculum Board (NCB) in January 2008 comprised of representatives from each of the States and Territories, who were tasked with developing K-12 courses in Mathematics, Science, History and English for a proposed rollout in 2011. The NCB became the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in December 2008. The current Australian Curriculum was, and remains, the responsibility of this independent statutory authority. Like the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which developed the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, ACARA eventually assumed an unprecedented policy development role (Savage, 2016). Policy documents throughout 2009 included the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF), the Early Development Index (AEDI), the Digital Education Revolution (DER), and the Building Education Revolution (BER). In 2010 the My School website was launched which provides information about individual schools' performance in areas such as the national literacy and numeracy tests.

One of the most pressing challenges in developing and implementing a curriculum grounded in a commitment to social justice, at least in the Australian context, is the question of race. The *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901) was the first passed by the new Australian parliament at Federation, and for the next half century a 'White Australia' remained one of the core aims of the nation's defence and foreign policies. It was not fully dismantled until the early 1970s. The Australian Curriculum responded to this context by establishing three Cross-Curriculum Priorities (CCP), two of which challenge widely held beliefs about the benign nature of Australian domestic history. The historical commitment to a white Australia and the fear of the 'yellow peril', with its modern incarnation being refugees, was juxtaposed with the CCP *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia*. "By knowing something of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments", the writers of the broad curriculum framework believed, students "will deepen their intercultural understanding, enrich their own lives and increase the likelihood of successful participation in the 'Asian century', for themselves and Australia as a whole" (ACARA, 2021a, para. 3). If anything, the language used to describe one of the other CCPs, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures*, was even more

infused by a social justice imperative. In its opening statement, ACARA (2021b, para. 1) acknowledged "the gap in learning outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their non-Indigenous peers". The Curriculum was intended, from the very outset, "to provide every opportunity possible to 'close the gap'".

The focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures sought to redress two centuries of dispossession and cultural and human devastation. Prior to European settlement in 1788, Australia was peopled by several hundred diverse Aboriginal nations, each possessing its own linguistic, legal, political and cultural tradition and managing the country communally and relationally based on rights, responsibilities and intimate knowledge of country (Stocker, et al., 2016, p. 845). Between 1788 and 1928, at least 22,000 people, 20,000 of them Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, were killed either in official or non-official actions. Appalling though these figures are, Raymond Evans and Robert Ørsted-Jensen (2014) argue that the death toll was more than 65,000 in Queensland alone. Until recently, one would have searched in vain for a meaningful commemoration of this conflict in a public space, let alone school curricula. To do so would be to challenge the quasi-legal designation in 1788 of Australia as terra nullius (nobody's land) which was deemed to justify the entire program of colonisation. The concept of terra nullius, which altered Australian land law, would not be overturned until 1992 with the High Court of Australia finding in *Mabo No. 2* (High Court of Australia, 1992). Until then, Australia was legally designated as unimproved land still in its natural state in 1788, supported and widely disseminated by the complementary narrative of a benign and successful development of an independent nation (Banner, 2005; Connor, 2005). Stanner (2001[1968]) characterised this as a "cult of disremembering, " thereby reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to little more than a "melancholy footnote" in Australia's history which all but erased the "invasion, massacres, ethnic cleansing and resistance" that characterised their experience for much of the period after 1788 (p. 120). The repercussions of the conflict now referred to as the Frontier Wars continue to reverberate through Australian society, as the ready adoption of the Black Lives Matter rhetoric has shown (Jenkins, 2020; Stansfield, 2021). Not until recently has it been acknowledged in mainstream education (Brennan, 2018; Reynolds, 1987; University of Newcastle, 2019; Wegman, 2021). In educational terms, as Reid et al. (cited in Ewing, 2010, p. 92) contend, being white in Australia is a "highly resilient construction as both 'normal' and 'natural' in our curriculum and cultural practices". Any discussion of social justice in Australia therefore requires an acknowledgement of the ongoing impact of British invasion on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and occupation of their lands.

The acknowledgement of the value of the Arts and their potential to drive social justice initiatives is hardly new. However, during the writing of the arts shape paper this acknowledgment did not shield the five discipline experts from being buffeted by competing agendas. These included discipline specific concerns, state rivalries, and a general suspicion of a national curriculum which would replace state and territory-based curriculum documents. Yet there was also a greater weight of responsibility that exerted considerable influence on the arts shape paper writers. The curriculum focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders brought the ethics of responsibility for social justice to the very forefront of the debate. The curriculum needed to facilitate in students the development of:

> … the critical analytic tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems, and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive behaviours in themselves and in the institutions and communities of which they are a part. (Bell, 2007, p. 2)

The writers were well aware that their responsibilities transcended parochial concerns, for their collaboration needed to create a framework for a curriculum that inculcated an awareness of, and active engagement with, social justice principles and practices, providing students with access to an education without discrimination or exclusion (UNESCO, 2006).

Research Approach

Narrative Inquiry is an appropriate research approach due to its inquiry practices being "deeply linked to future possibilities" (Caine et al., 2018, p. 142). By commencing with people's experiences, researchers can focus on living, telling, and reliving those experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (1986, p. 385) describe how "humans make meaning by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future". This allows an authentic exploration of the ongoing reverberations of storied experience by "attending inward, outward, backward, forward and to place or places" (Seiki, et al., 2018, p. 12). It is through this process that Narrative Inquiry is positioned as a social justice practice (Caine et al., 2018). Indeed, Chase (2011, p. 427) identifies a close relationship between the work of narrative researchers and possibilities for change and social justice. Narrative Inquiry is well placed therefore to challenge hegemonic structures because of its acknowledgement of personal experience narrated and examined as knowledge serves to "problematiz[es] modern forms of knowledge that seem natural but, in fact, are contingent on sociohistorical constructs of power" (Munro, 1988, p. 5).

Though Narrative Inquiry is an often contested methodology, it has some impressive antecedents. It draws from Dewey's (1938) theory of experience and uses a storytelling method to describe through reflection and discussion why the subject of the inquiry has acted in a particular way (Carrillo & Baguley, 2011; Clandinin, 2007). With its emphasis on responsible knowledge practices such as sensitivity towards others and mindful participation, storytelling contrasts with approaches that emphasise objectivity and neutrality with an "ethics of indifference" (Stone-Mediatore, 2007, p. 16). It is therefore rendered inseparable from ethical considerations, for as a way of making meaning, it allows the researcher to "represent, interrogate and interpret experience and come to know ourselves and others" (Barrett & Stauffer, 2012, p. 1). Though it threatens to simplify a complex process, the description of data as 'stories to live by' is often used in Narrative Inquiry to describe who we are, what motivates us and what shapes our experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). The drive to understand motivation and experience facilitates a deep engagement with social justice; it is therefore an active process in which "our identities and experiences shape and influence what we teach and how we teach it" (Müller et al., 2018, p. 88). As Caine et al. (2018, p. 142) observe, there are "multiple visions and ideas of social justice" which are not readily characterised.

The approach undertaken in this study is a form of collaborative narrative inquiry which contrasts with the "colonial desire of categorisation and order" and the "neoliberal demand for competitive individualism" (Müller et al., 2018, p. 92). The three commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry – temporality, sociality and place – create the three-dimensional inquiry

space for this exploration (Clandinin, 2007). Temporality refers to how the participants and the events referred to in the narratives have been, and will be affected, by the past, present and future and the unfolding and enfolding of events over time. Sociality describes the participants' responses to events, the social context in which they occurred, and the interaction of personal and social conditions. Place is the actual location where the events occurred which is also important due to participants' social, cultural and language backgrounds. The approach taken in this study therefore commenced with an autobiographical inquiry of the five arts shape paper writers. This background helped to set the "personal, practical, and theoretical/social justification[s] and shape[d] the emerging research puzzle". As Seiki et al. (2018, p. 15) reveal this is a "deeply reciprocal, recursive, and reflexive process" and "often, inward and outward tensions are felt". This enabled a dynamic interchange of relational understanding and sharing in creating the narrative of the experience under study (Clandinin, 2007).

Criticisms have been raised about narrative research, including that it is self-indulgent (Josselson et al., 2003), that narratives do not provide conclusions or solutions (Barone 2001, 2001b), and that narratives can be viewed as objects without an appropriate theoretical structure (Brinthaupt et al., 1992). Barone (2001a) contends that the heuristic goal of narrative inquiry is "the enhancement of meaning, rather than a reduction of uncertainty" (p. 153). To address these concerns the researchers have adapted Huberman's (1995) measures of access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy which can provide an assessment of the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative data.

Access has been provided through the inclusion of transcripts of the narrative data. Honesty has been achieved through constant clarification and exploration through the creation of the group narrative. Verisimilitude for the participants was the common experience of their role as the arts shape paper writers which included the complexities and challenges faced by educators in making decisions that include the diversity of learners. Authenticity has been sought through ensuring the narrative was written with integrity. Familiarity with the narratives enabled opportunities to provide additional insights. Transferability was achieved through providing enough detail for the reader to facilitate a similar study in another setting. Economy was addressed through the combination of the five individual narratives into one group narrative from which extracts have been drawn in the resonant thread sections.

An initial individual in-depth interview was undertaken with each of the five arts shape paper writers. The transcripts of the interviews were shared with each participant to ensure accuracy and for any modification. Once approved, the transcripts were then annotated with questions for further exploration and discussion with the participants. Individual narrative accounts were then written and shared. The two lead authors identified themes from the five individual narratives and a larger group narrative was then written based on the following two intertwined and resonant themes: access to quality arts education throughout schooling; and the importance of educational leadership based on social justice principles. Narrative Inquiry seeks to honour the voices of the participants, therefore extracts from the direct voices of the participants in the group narrative are presented in the following section in italics.

Discussion – Resonant Threads

An important aspect of Narrative Inquiry is the opportunity to engage with the past, present and future through significant events and the people associated with them (Connelly &

Clandinin, 1988). For example, the Australian arts education community owes much to the dedication and commitment of past and present arts educators and theorists. As Kitchen et al., (2011) remind us, any curriculum is informed and alive with feeling and emotion; it has an aesthetic and moral component which includes "the interaction of persons, situations, from the past, present and future" (p. 7). The five people who developed and wrote the foundation *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts* paper were: Professor John O'Toole (lead writer/Drama), Professor Margaret Barrett (Music), Professor Elizabeth Grierson (Visual Arts), Professor Michael Dezuanni (Media Arts) and Dr Jeff Meiners (Dance). They brought to their respective roles "personal practical knowledge" informed by past and current experiences and future plans and actions (Kitchen, et al., 2011, p. 7). Although the choice of the arts shape paper writers was not particularly diverse in terms of race or ethnicity, they were certainly not part of an artistic elite. They were teachers and academics of considerable experience and standing, both in university contexts but also across a range of different schooling contexts. Their experience highlights the extent to which "education identity and experience have been shown to have a major impact on the curriculum" (Müller et al., 2018, p. 98).

Resonant Thread 1: Access to quality arts education throughout schooling

The early engagement of the arts shape paper writers with the Arts was driven by their embodied cultural capital which was itself an expression of their class and educational backgrounds. This knowledge was passively inherited through childhood experiences and consciously acquired through socialisation to culture and tradition (Stevenson & Magee, 2017). The arts shape paper writers' shared commitment to creating a curriculum that responded to the social justice imperative that all students are entitled to quality arts education was grounded in an appreciation of the Arts inculcated during childhood, further opportunities provided through their schooling, and the professional recognition of their expertise evident in their standing as advocates for their discipline. Bourdieu and Darbel (1991, p. 54) might have been describing these writers when they observed that "the love of art is not love at first sight but is born of long familiarity".

John revealed that his mother was a music teacher who instilled in him *a love of literature very early*. His interest in people's stories saw him *hooked on drama* during his secondary schooling in England. His second appearance was on stage at 12 years of age in the *Merchant of Venice which sold me on drama ever since.* By taking on a female role, John's experience lends weight to McDonald's (2007, p. 136) argument that the feminisation of drama and the subsequent suspicion of males who engage in it creates a tension for boys as they "walk the gendered tightrope". Margaret recalled from her childhood in Tasmania that her father was *an Irish tenor* who had a *repertoire of beautiful Irish ballads.* Her paternal Grandmother, who she never met, was an opera singer, so *there was a history of musicianship and music making in the family, even though I never met it tangibly.* Margaret began receiving piano lessons when she was 10, *then after a year or two of lessons we got a piano at home.* She recalls school lunchtimes when she would sight-read her way through *quite difficult works, well before I had the technique to play it.* In her final year of schooling her father took her to meet a *magnificent teacher ... the doyenne of piano teachers in Launceston at the time.* During the meeting she informed her father that h*er technique is appalling. However, she's very musical*

so I'll take her on. DiMaggio (1982, p. 190) argues that teachers tend to communicate more easily with students who participate in elite status cultures, perceiving them as "more intelligent or gifted than students who lack cultural capital".

Elizabeth had a varied exposure to the arts during her schooling in New Zealand, including dancing, music, art and theatre. In particular she had a passion for art, drama and music, the latter being an integral part of her upbringing during which she *studied piano and violin with private teachers and adored music and singing at Intermediate and Secondary School.* She also took private lessons in speech and drama. Elizabeth joined the school choir and orchestra, and participated in all the drama activities and performances on offer, emphasising the interplay between school based and private exposure to arts opportunities. This is a vital consideration, for though she was always interested in visual arts, she was unable to pursue it at school. However, she recalls one day in class being asked to draw her hands. A visiting artist wrote on her drawing "this augers well for your future career". She felt *proud my artistic ability had been noticed and reinforced.* Ewing (2020, p. 75) well understood the intensity of this memory, for she has long championed the Arts as a vehicle to assist in the development of identity, confidence, social participation and inclusion.

Michael, who grew up in Queensland, said that *even as a child, I was always interested in media, how it was made and the kinds of messages that media were trying to present to you.* His early engagement with the Arts was through learning to play percussion in primary school. Again though, the school could not provide everything that a student interested in the Arts requires. He was also a member of his town's brass band and in secondary school played drums in the school concert band and later in a high school rock band. His engagement with the Arts was quite different to the other arts shape paper writers as media was not until recently recognised as an arts form, though he has always been *very passionate about the Arts.* He recalls *always having a love of film and television, and I remember being fascinated by how advertisements were made, even from a young age.* Although he grew up in the pre-digital age, Michael had an early interest in the potential of the media to tell stories in particular ways (Dezuanni, 2017; 2018). Michael studied Film and Television in Years 11-12, and credits this academic engagement as a further contributor to his nascent interest in Media Arts.

Like Elizabeth and John, Jeff was born and raised overseas. Growing up in England, he recalled his Grandmother looking after him while his parents worked; *she encouraged me to play a lot and use my imagination.* Jeff remembered *lots of parties around a piano … my Grandmother insisted that everyone danced at parties.* When Jeff went to primary school in the late 1950s and early 1960s *there was a shift from sitting in desks to a more creative approach to learning and creative dance was part of our curriculum.* His mother loved dancing and music and taught Jeff *the quick step, the foxtrot and the waltz.* Jeff's idyllic experience of primary school was shattered when he won a place at a boys' grammar. Here he was confronted by *a culture of violence,* which was given an official imprimatur through the liberal use of corporal punishment, *so I had a pretty tough time at high school.* McDonald (2007, p. 138) describes the complexity of young masculinities in elite all boys' schools, noting that "if gender is performative, then the stability of masculinity is not guaranteed". The arts curriculum, which otherwise may have provided an outlet for his interests, was limited to the Visual Arts; *that was the only thing I could so … I didn't have a pathway to pursue the arts really.*

Though culturally sensitive and committed to social justice, the five arts shape paper writers were white educators who in Applebaum's (2010) view, were systemically privileged by their whiteness. The privilege ascribed to the arts shape paper writers is evident in their selection as national advocates for their discipline and the Arts as a whole, which authorised them to make aesthetic judgements, which are a "marker and justification of social power" (Stevenson & Magee, 2017, p. 843). Whatever the surface differences in their background, each had emerged from a similar cultural milieu, a point of connection that each recognised and valued. John recalled that *as soon as I met my fellow lead and my fellow art shape paper writers, I felt comfortable because we were all pretty well on the same page.* Margaret confirmed that *sitting in a room with others who are thinking, so you've read, X, Y and Z, so that means we've got this amount of common language.* Elizabeth noted that *it was wonderful to be with such capable people who were leaders in the different arts forms.* Michael's memory was that *there was no sense at all that anybody was kind of an outsider to the group ... or trying to push a separate agenda.* Jeff recalled *there was an interesting excitement and tension about how we would work together ... what were our underpinning philosophies.* This connection was vital, for "art requires a social language or set of interpretive tools" (Stevenson & Magee, 2017, p. 843). This allowed for a shared recognition that though the Arts might have had to fight for inclusion in the Curriculum, there was no need for each writer to mount a defence of their discipline when dealing with the other four writers. For as Savage (2015, p. 101) argues, there is an "ease and confidence that stems from the belief that one's cultural tastes are legitimate". Indeed, how more legitimate could one's tastes be than to have them included in a national curriculum on an equal footing, and in alphabetical order (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts) with other art forms? This was particularly important to the success of the collaboration given the traditional pre-eminence granted to visual arts and music.

The official imprimatur of ACARA's endorsement ensures that the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts* paper enjoys the status of official discourse (Gee, 1996). As Dutro (2010, p. 259) argues, these types of official discourses "have consequences for how material resources are distributed, how the efforts of individuals and groups are valued and evaluated, and whose perspectives are privileged in social institutions such as schools". Jeff concurs, noting that there is an elitist approach to the arts: *I think we're always rubbing up against notions of how to teach the talented, those that have a predisposition or particular leaning towards each of our arts forms and how we manage that with those that are not interested and not engaged and how we work together to make that happen.* Hardy (2016) describes how there is often a lack of recognition by many teachers of the knowledges and resources students bring to the classroom, which he contends is a key reason for the difficulties experienced, particularly by Indigenous students. Marginalised students often have less "funds of knowledge" to draw on in relation to areas such as the Arts, resulting in an 'educational debt' that inhibits their participation as active members of their communities" (Hardy, 2016, p. 662). The writers were well aware of this reality, having taught in schools that were often under-resourced, and sought to shape a curriculum that took into account not just the students' funds of knowledge, but that of teachers and schools as well.

Though the arts shape paper writers were aware of context, they were advocates, not apologists for the Arts. They were convinced, both by temperament and training, that "Art-enriched schools and classrooms have been proven time and again to meet the academic and

social diversity of students found in today's classrooms" (Irwin, 2018, p. 26). As John explained, *all five of us were fairly familiar with the sort of curriculum theory and contemporary curriculum theory which is very flexible – and understanding the politics of schools. We'd read people like Michael Apple and radical theorists as well as the strict formalists* (O'Toole, 2019). In discussing on agreed understandings of the group Margaret stated that the *focus on students as the central meaning maker, regardless of whether it's drama or visual arts or music or dance or whatever it happens to be, that is key to it.* In describing the role of the arts shape paper writers she revealed … *I thought my role in there was not to be the special pleader for any one particular view of music or the arts but to commit, as had everybody else within that group, to a collective view and a view that every child was entitled to have access to all of the arts forms. To be able to teach those arts forms with integrity and in ways that would allow children to exercise agency in what they did within their work.*

Though the writers shared a language, they were also pragmatic enough to know that not all arts teachers were equally fluent. For as Dutro (2010) observes, language should be used "to construct worlds that appear neutral and natural [which] applies to both policy documents and the curricula constructed to enact policy in classrooms" (p. 261). The arts shape writers were well aware of the central role played by their language choices. Michael believes that the main thing was *to get the language right that would work across the five areas.* Margaret remembers that at an earlier national meeting the five writers all came to the conclusion that *the language was not selling to the constituency and we had more work to do in terms of finding a language of advocacy to our peers. A language that would accommodate their particular interests without losing the vision that we had developed as a group.* In the case of the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Arts* paper John recalled that ACARA stipulated that it *was accessible and readable by any teacher … therefore, we were never able to fully explain our philosophy to the arts specialists who needed to read it and know what we were doing … we really needed to get the whole reasoning behind our … and the context of the curriculum out to all the people out there in the systems, the arts teachers, the people who had to manage it. Who needed to know the detail and needed to know why, and we were never really able to do that satisfactorily.* This is a perennial problem for curriculum designers, for as Scarino (2019, p. 63) observes, "the absence of a rich discussion of the conceptual bases and … and how they guide the elaboration of the curriculum" confines discussion to "structure and form rather than meaningfulness".

Recognising the tensions between the loaded nature of official discourse and the support required to ensure all students have access to quality arts education throughout their schooling, Margaret remains confident that *we have a workforce that understands the value of the arts in children's lives, but has not the systemic structures that allow them to do it, or the professional resourcing that assists them in developing those skills.* This is not an idiosyncratic view; Irwin (2018) spoke for many Arts teachers when he observed that "professional development in the arts can make a positive difference to classroom art practices" (p. 26). In considering the importance of access to quality arts education, Elizabeth was cognisant of the importance of students being able to both access and build cultural capital as an intrinsic social justice issue: *it is the birthright of every child in Australia, an entitlement, to have access to the arts as part of their creative learning and to build their cultural capital, as well as for well-being in life. This is a social-justice approach.*

Resonant Thread 2: The importance of educational leadership based on social justice principles

The second resonant thread that emerged was the non-elitist approach adopted by the arts shape paper writers. This was grounded in an acknowledgement that not all students "have access to the privilege and power that an elite education can afford" (Anderson, 2014, para. 13). This type of professional knowledge is "composed of relationships among people, places and things … both an intellectual and a moral landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, pp. 4-5). For the arts shape writers, this landscape had been shaped by a commitment to social justice inculcated during their upbringing and formative professional experiences. As Donelan (2017) observes, the arts classroom, where the arts shape paper writers first engaged with the intersection of the Arts and arts curriculum, encourages "a collaborative and participatory teaching approach [which] fosters dialogue between different voices, traditions and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 43). Though the arts shape paper writers benefitted from their possession of institutionalised cultural capital, it was this shared inheritance that facilitated "the development of co-membership, respect, and affection out of which new networks are constructed" (DiMaggio, 1982, p. 189; Weber, 1968).

As an undergraduate student, John studied for three years in the latter part of the 1960s with Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote, two of the pioneers of process drama. They immersed their students in dramatic situations during which they also were in-role (See *Three Looms Waiting*, Wason, 2012). This immersion is a social justice practice which enables students to move beyond their own worlds, consider multiple perspectives, and provides the tools "for dynamic transformation from mere spectators to social actors with agency to act in the world" (Holland, 2009, pp. 530-531). They are thereby able to acquire the "empathic imagination needed to transform society" (Freebody & Finneran, 2016; Landy & Montgomery, 2012). This exposure to the power of both drama and education inspired John to become a teacher educator, though he remains cognisant of the synergies between the two: *if you're interested in the pedagogy of the arts and drama – then you're interested in teaching teachers – or helping teachers to teach better.* Bolton and Heathcote cast a long shadow over John's pedagogy, for he never lost sight of the social justice imperatives that Drama responds to, even in the case of students he affectionately describes as *last chancers*. As the lead writer of the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts* paper, he drew on his experiences as a teacher to describe the entire process: *I think one of the valuable things I learned as a classroom teacher was that you've not got to look just at the people in the front of the room, you've got to look at the people in the back of the room. The ones you should be teaching are the ones who aren't listening. Therefore, I think as a leader – if anything – I find it most important to be working with the ones who are most resistant.*

After her schooling Margaret auditioned for and was accepted into the Conservatorium in Tasmania, but noted that *at the time, our family could not have afforded to send me,* [fortunately] *these were in the ancient days of studentships.* After four years at the Conservatorium, Margaret was required to complete a two-year bond with the Education Department in exchange for their financial support over the course of her undergraduate study. Her first experience of teaching was as an *itinerant music teacher in primary schools.* Margaret recalls that most of the schools were low to medium socio-economic status,

certainly not the Sandy Bays. This ignited her passion for teaching, and in particular the need to find *more effective, engaging ways to work with the students ... I used a lot of dance and movement in my teaching.* Margaret formalised her approach with the financial support of an Education Department of Tasmania traveling scholarship which allowed her to enrol at the Longy School of Music in Boston where she completed their certificate in Dalcroze eurhythmics for music educators. This experiential approach encourages students to listen to the rhythm of music and express what they hear through movement, thereby connecting music, movement, and mind and body in a holistic way (Altenmüller & Scholz, 2016). These experiences and her research into the impact of music on marginalised students, incarcerated students, children's independent song making, and community music organisations (Barrett, 2019a; 2019b; Barrett & Baker, 2012; Barrett & Bond, 2015) informed the approach she adopted as the Music discipline expert in the arts shape paper writing process. The valuing of children's existing cultural capital, including their unique knowledge bases through a constructivist approach, cultivated in Margaret a sensitivity to social justice issues. In particular, it encouraged an appreciation of diversity, the promotion of equity, the enhancement of broad-mindedness, and the encouragement of voice and expression (Brooks & Thompson, 2005). Throughout the process of writing the arts shape paper, Margaret was aware of the traditional and elite positioning of visual arts and music, which was *where we began to see those particular subject area defences.* However, her experiences with dance and drama complemented the view of her colleagues that the five arts forms were equally important, thereby offering students the opportunity to access these through their schooling.

Elizabeth initially taught secondary art in South Auckland, New Zealand which has a large Polynesian population and learned firsthand how marginalised the arts were. *The art department was always in the worst buildings, furthest from the centre. Yet the products of the art department were desired by the school management when officials came to the school.* She recalled a time when official visitors came to the art room to view an exhibition of student portraits. Elizabeth said the Principal *went apoplectic* when he saw a portrait of himself and demanded the painting be removed, although it *was a very good portrait.* Elizabeth refused and recalled how this event, and other similar ones, *gave me a strong political awareness of the politics of marginalisation* which subsequently shaped a leadership style grounded in social justice. This was further emphasised during her experience of the Polynesian communities outside the art room. Their forms of expression *were marginalised yet their artworks spoke more of identity than any strictures and structures allowed by the syllabus.* Her later studies in Art History encouraged her to learn more about *women artists and women of colour and indigeneity and how the politics of marginalisation play out through history, culture and the visual arts.* She was surprised during the writing process at the *state differences and strongly held loyalties ... coming from New Zealand I was ill-prepared for this ... and the politics of difference, marginalisation, protection and self-interest which started to rear their rather ugly heads.* Elizabeth was a devotee of Dewey's contention that art is an intrinsic part of life, part of the "everyday domain of situational experience" (Grierson, 2017, p. 1248). This eventually saw her characterising her greatest contribution as the Visual Arts discipline expert as ensuring *that the visual arts was seen as having value beyond an aesthetic product for a consumer culture.*

Michael has always been interested in the media, particularly how students "can employ digital materials for creative, communicative, or productive purposes" (Dezuanni, 2017, p.

129). He acknowledges that digital forms of communication are "ubiquitous and vernacular" and that students "deserve the opportunity to learn to participate with these technologies in ways that will enhance their life opportunities" (Dezuanni, 2015, p. 436). Michael also believes that in addition to participating and being empowered to make their own media *kids need to learn how to think critically about the media.* He believes that world events and changes in technology have contributed to a rise in misinformation and the possibility of 'deep fakes' – misleading representations that are difficult to detect. In his view, challenging this process is particularly relevant to the Arts *because it's about the cultural capacity to create a representation of something using digital skills ... but you can't discuss that without discussing the ethics of representation and the ethical choices that you're making, and the consequences of making that kind of art.* Social justice education has a responsibility to encourage students to critique information and to "think about the implications of ideas and about how classroom learning relates to social and political realities" (Hytten, 2015, p. 4). Michael notes with satisfaction that *we're the only country in the world that has created a curriculum for Media for pre-school right through to Year 10 that maps out the content at each stage of development.* He is adamant that being literate in the 21st century requires students to have the ability to "deploy media technologies and concepts to materially participate in digital culture" and that "digital culture and its role in all our lives are central to understanding society and culture (Dezuanni, 2015, p. 436). Engagement with digital technologies therefore enables students to access a range of semiotic tools or modes of representation for their meaning-making (Price-Dennis, et al., 2015). In acknowledging the pace of change in this discipline area, Michael admits *like lots of media teachers, I was one step ahead of the students in terms of actually making the media* which reflects the substantial knowledge and expertise many students already have in digital technologies. In terms of leadership he remembered *the strong passion amongst the entire group that Arts education is important and that the worst thing we could do is become divided across the Arts.* Michael recalled during the process that he *didn't ever feel like there was a point where in that group I wasn't being listened to or we weren't getting our way or that we were over-compromising or trying to challenge Media too much.*

Beginning his teaching career in London in the 1970s, Jeff was aware from his earliest classroom experiences of a policy emphasis on gender equity and multiculturalism. His teaching approach reflected this pre-occupation, as did his belief that his parents "recognised the potential of schools for personal transformation" (Meiners, 2014, p. 222). He recalled that he was *really lucky to work for a long time in the East London borough, which had strong Afro Caribbean communities as well as Indian and Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, with big changes happening, including policies about equal opportunity.* After completing his teacher training, Jeff worked in a *very progressive primary school with an amazing visionary head teacher.* The school had implemented a co-constructed curriculum driven *by a Reggio approach ... with primary school students of varying ages.* Jeff learned very quickly *that these kids in this very tough London borough ... that their way into learning was through the arts.* He subsequently used painting, drawing and music – playing the piano and singing – in addition to dance. Jeff utilised the power of the arts to "create a unique platform for creativity and interaction, allowing responses to flourish in ways that are unique from other forms of human expression and experience" (Eisner, 2000; Griffin, et al., 2017, p. 5). At another primary school he was appointed the head of performing arts with another *inspirational Principal ... she said to me, I want every kid in this school to love music and dance and the*

arts. Jeff worked with every teacher in the school to meet this goal. It was a *very innovative school in a tough area, very working class, white, racist kind of area with a trickle of migrant kids coming in and dealing with very racist parents a lot of the time … I got every teacher in the school teaching music and dance and I worked alongside a visual arts co-ordinator as well … I got the parents involved in workshops so that they would understand what we were trying to do with the arts.* The same Principal encouraged Jeff to attend a week-long curriculum leadership course which *increased my self-awareness of the role of the curriculum leader and in particular for me of course the arts and how I did that in the school.* This stood Jeff in good stead during the arts shape paper writing process during which there were "struggles between conflicting ideologies of privilege and inclusion that polarized stakeholders" (Meiners, 2014, p. 230). Jeff remains a strong advocate for a democratic approach to dance, informed by critical pedagogies, which would include all body types, shapes and sizes. This was in opposition to a curriculum which focussed on elite dance practices that require encoded and power-elite knowledge dependent on a person's cultural, social and economic capital (Meiners, 2014, p. 230).

Conclusion

The adoption of the National Curriculum was a significant achievement, yet in the ensuring years its opponents have continued to voice their concerns, which often reflects state-based preferences. Despite the degree of consultation that was undertaken, which Scarino (2019) argues was the most extensive in the history of curriculum development in Australia, shortly after its implementation a review of the Australian Curriculum was undertaken. Dr Kevin Donnelly and Professor Ken Wiltshire led the *Review of the Australian Curriculum – Final Report* (Australian Government, 2014). Anderson (2014, para. 4) criticised their efforts to dismantle the hard-fought positioning of the five arts forms by recommending that "dance, drama and media arts be 'elective subjects'. He saw the recommendation that much of their content be reduced or absorbed into other areas of the curriculum" as narrow and retrograde and "hark[ing] back to a world that has not existed (with the exception perhaps of elite private schools) for decades" (Anderson, 2014, para. 12). This view also recognises that some students have access to quality arts experience through extra-curricular activities which are not available to all students. In regards to the social justice imperative underpinning the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, Anderson (2014, para. 11) argues that the review:

> … has used elite perspectives at the expense of the opportunity for young people everywhere to have access to a strong and sustained arts education … the recommendation of the review in the arts generally fly directly in the face of all of the prevailing evidence that the arts is a distinctive and critical set of understandings that young people will need to navigate the 21st century.

The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) felt the 2014 review was premature and strongly urged the review panel to implement the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* "in its present form, allowing processes of refinement to be managed by classroom teachers. It is a living document that can be refined by expert arts educators as it unfolds across the country" (NAAE, 2014). Professor John O'Toole recalled that Julie Dyson, the Chair of NAAE, *absolutely went to the barricades on that one.*

At the time of writing, another review of the Australian Curriculum was taking place as part of the six-yearly cycle of review endorsed by the Education Council in 2015. ACARA (2021)

stated that "the review will aim to improve the Australian Curriculum F-10 by refining, realigning and decluttering the content of the curriculum **within its existing structure** and underpinned by the education goals of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019)" [authors' emphasis]. In the current review of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, ACARA proposes to replace the existing two major and interrelated strands of Making and Responding, agreed to through the extensive consultation process due to their simplicity and accessibility, with the following four strands: Exploring and connecting; Developing skills, practices and ideas, Creating, and Sharing and Communicating. These changes appear to reflect a desire on the part of some stakeholders to see portions of their state curriculum replicated at a national level. In addition, ACARA have proposed reconceptualising Making and Responding as core concepts, when in fact they are processes. Aside from the obvious structural issues that this would create, the impact on primary and secondary teachers and initial teacher education (ITE) would be equally significant. Given that such a reconceptualization is seemingly at odds with the stated aim of the review, it is difficult to see how a compromise can be reached. In addition, creating unnecessary complexity for students and teachers does not align with the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019) which has two distinct and interconnected goals informed by social justice imperatives:

- Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity;
- Goal 2: All young Australians become: confident and creative individuals; successful lifelong learners; and active and informed members of the community. (Education Council, 2019, p. 4)

The type of major change proposed by ACARA destabilises the foundation on which the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* is based and subsequently public confidence in the processes which underpinned it. The public consultation phase has recently closed regarding feedback and the outcome of the review and its impact on the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* will be known towards the end of 2021.

Throughout the five year consultation and writing phase each of the arts shape paper writers adopted social justice principles and practices in the approach to their arts discipline and their role as arts leaders in the writing process. They had to negotiate the rhetoric around excellence and equity which can obscure practices and processes that marginalise students, particularly when the social and cultural capital they bring to schooling is ignored and devalued (Savage, 2011). Hytten (2015, p. 3, citing Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2012, p. 145) argues that social justice advocates "recognise that unequal social relations are prevalent at both individual and systemic levels; understand their own positionality in relation to inequalities; think critically about systems, structures and knowledge; and 'act from this understanding, in service of a more just society'". The 2014 and current 2021 reviews of the *Australian Curriculum* reveal that the social justice imperatives underpinning the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* is still in tension with views that position the arts as elite and only accessible to students and teachers with high levels of singular views of social and cultural capital. As John succinctly summarised *It's a wonderful, one-off chance to get the arts as an entitlement for all Australian kids, let's not blow it. So we've got to get it as right as we can.*

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