Dynamic Markers for arts education in schools

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This paper describes distinctive features of contemporary arts education in schools as markers of quality and tools for making judgments about teaching, learning and supporting this curriculum field. The paper has two sections. The first outlines markers of arts education in schools based on field work in two Australian sites of exemplary arts education and other research. It highlights the concept of arts education in schools as an ecosystem. The second part building on the first, looks forward to reflective and reflexive qualitative tools for making judgements using these dynamic markers for arts education in schools.

1. Dynamic Markers for arts in schools

In my current research project, there has been a distillation of contemporary research and scholarship about arts education in schools coupled with field work in two Australian arts education sites involving interviews with teachers, school administrators, parents and students along with observation of practice and reviews of documents. The purpose of this research has been the articulation of principles of contemporary arts education expressed as dynamic markers.

The study acknowledges and draws on the researcher's background in arts education curriculum. As qualitative research located in an artistic-aesthetic paradigm, there is an interweaving of subjectivity, context and meaning making. There is a commitment to transformative purpose and acknowledgement of how social and political dimensions impact on curriculum decisions in four related nested contexts: in the classroom; in the immediate contexts of the school; in system decision making and policy; and, in the community. The research practice involved braiding of literature and professional experience to forge a draft set of principles for arts education that were then investigated in fieldwork. This work was subjected to analytical lenses that led to refinement and development of dynamic markers and associated tools for making judgments about arts education in schools.

Australian context

In an Australian context, the Arts are a curriculum component identified in the Hobart, Adelaide and Melbourne Declarations (MCEETYA Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1988, 1999, 2008), iterative statements of national educational goals for young Australians. The Arts include learning in the art forms of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts. There have been two significant national development projects for arts education – in 1992-94 the development of *A statement on the arts for Australian Schools* and *The arts—a curriculum profile for Australian schools* (Curriculum Corporation, 1994a, 1994b); and, the current development being undertaken by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority http://www.acara.edu.au/arts.html. Within the Australian federal system of government, states and territory educational authorities have also developed Arts curriculum documents for Kindergarten to Year 12. This has led to duplication and differing approaches to the arts in Australian schools, compounded by issues in initial teacher education, professional development, resource provision (Pascoe, et al., 2005; Wright, et al., 2006).

Evidence of national reviews of arts education in Australian schools (e.g. Pascoe, et al., 2005) along with surveying curriculum documents, policy and practice shows contradictory trends. On the one hand, there is curriculum policy commitment to the arts in schools. Yet there is also evidence of neglect; inconsistent teaching and learning though occasional pockets of excellence; and gaps in provision, leadership and teacher education. There is dissonance between commitment and delivery. There is underlying disconnection between theory and practice suggesting a need for more effective theorizing of the field accompanied by explicit attention to pedagogic and leadership practices.

There is a need to cut through this clamour of competing voices through a clear re-statement of contemporary principles for arts education in schools.

Arts education in schools

In the arts in schools, young people develop their arts practice and their aesthetic knowing. They learn how their artistic practice is built on knowing about the arts and applying that understanding in practice. In this applied aesthetic understanding, they engage in inter-connected activities in generating ideas artistically, developing them towards satisfying conclusions and communicating and sharing them with others. They learn what it is to be an artist themselves and come to understand the role of the arts in the lives of individuals, communities and societies. They respond to and reflect on their own arts experiences and make informed judgements on their own arts works and the arts works of others.

Focus on principles of arts education

The research project is timely given the commitment to the development of an Australian National Arts Curriculum and in light of development work internationally (e.g. Hetland & Winner, 2006; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007; Seidel, Tishman, Hetland, Winner, & Palmer, 2008). Rather than adding to the considerable amount of existing arts in schools activities or syllabus documents, the focus of this work has been on distilling principles and conceptual frameworks for the arts in schools. It articulates and explains dynamic markers for contemporary arts education in schools.

The concept of dynamic markers

Dynamic markers are observable signs or indicators of pedagogic practice - they reflect how concepts are put into action. They are observable - noticed, perceived and interpreted as significant or meaning making. Yet they are not fixed and static. They are dynamic - responsive to change and development in shaping contexts that are themselves in states of flux; they are malleable, flexible, fluid, pliable, and able to be bent without breaking. The concept of dynamic markers is built on the recognition that arts education is not fixed but diverse, situated and personalized. Its contexts are variable and impact on pedagogic practice. These dynamic markers have the advantage of being more than checklists. They serve as tools for teachers, principals, parents, policy makers and the broader community when they make judgments about the quality of arts education in schools. In parallel and intrinsically linked with these dynamic markers, the study outlines ways of judging standards of excellence, the extent to which arts education can be considered outstanding, desirable, functioning optimally and meeting its stated purposes.

Dynamic markers for arts education in schools

This research identified that there are four inter-connecting sets of dynamic markers. They can be considered as nested contexts each impacting on the other – the concept of ecosystem for arts education in schools expanded later in this paper. There is a need to consider dynamic markers in the frames of what happens in the classroom; what happens immediately outside the classroom in the school; what happens in the world of parents and community; what happens in the broader education sphere through systems and curriculum authorities; and, what happens in the broad field of the arts and society.
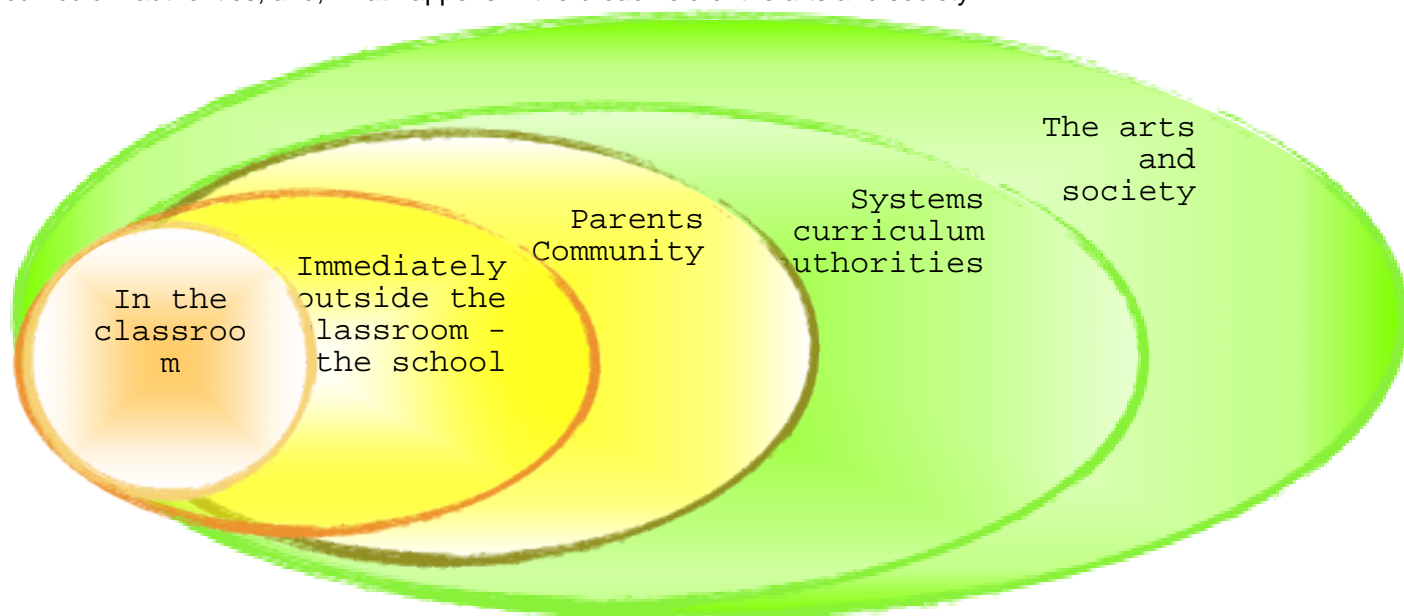
Nested contexts for arts education in schools

This project has identified three clusters of dynamic markers for arts education ***in the classroom*** that weave together: outcomes of learning in the arts in schools; content and processes of that learning; and,

approaches to teaching the arts in schools. The dynamic markers focus on overarching and unifying principles while also recognizing the unique and distinctive nature of each of the art forms of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts and a diversity of approaches, mediums of expression and emphasis within each of them.

Dynamic markers for arts education in classrooms[1]

1. Students developing
   i. personal, social and cultural identity and agency through their arts learning
   ii. Enactive, iconic and symbolic meaning making in and through the arts
   iii. Embodied learning - cognitive, somatic and empathic learning
   iv. Engagement , enjoyment and success in the arts

2. Learning opportunities for
   i. Arts Practice in Dance, Drama, Drama, Music, Media and Visual Arts
   ii. Aesthetic knowing applied to Arts Practice and Responding
   iii. Responding to their own and others art experiences in Dance, Drama, Drama, Music, Media and Visual Arts
   iv. Working with touchstones of the arts: *creativity, imagination, play, story, improvisation, transformation, design, symbol, metaphor*
   v. Action **and** reflection in the arts
   vi. Process **and** product in the arts

3. Teaching approaches that provide
   i. Multi-modal arts rich experiences
   ii. A range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles
   iii. Arts rich learning and teaching environment
   iv. Co-construction of learning in the arts
   v. Balance between teacher structured delivery **and** student exploration
   vi. Pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness in teaching the arts

To recognise fully the implications of these markers, there is a need to unpack further these complex concepts. For example, it is important for teachers, administrators and parents to understand the concept of personal agency, identity and autonomy developed through learning the arts. Similarly, the role of teachers in balancing teacher-directed technical skills development and mastery with enabling student agency and identity, needs to be understood when reading a listing such as this. Unpacking the role of the identified Touchstones is also rich ground for developing understanding. As has been increasingly identified (e.g. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (UK), 1998), creativity has a role in

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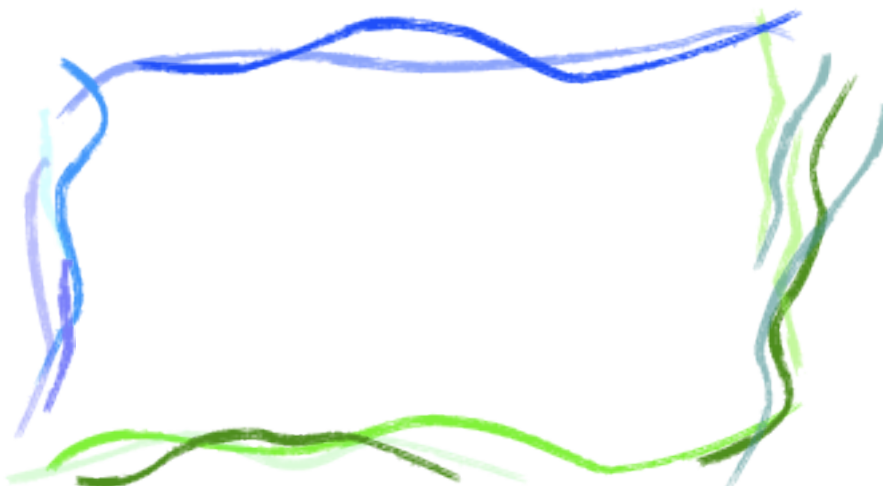
[1] In the limited space of this paper, these markers have been listed but have been fully detailed in other work by the author.

education as well as across innovation in the nation. In the current Australian National Curriculum development it is an identified general capability. Creativity is also especially pertinent to arts education with a mission-critical role. Each of the markers listed need similar unpacking.

This complex set of markers for the arts in classrooms can be visually represented as an interweaving of what is learnt, what is taught (content) and how the arts are taught (pedagogy and environment) . These markers are mutually dependent; all of them are necessary for contemporary arts education. They are the weft and warp of the fabric of contemporary arts education.

Just as dynamic markers can be identified for learning and teaching in the classroom, so too can they be identified for school administrators, parents, community and curriculum systems/authorities.

School administrators demonstrate their action on arts education as well as their underlying attitudes, beliefs, dispositions and values through the ways they develop a climate that supports arts education as well as their provision for arts education through resource decisions. While there are additional questions for school administrators to ask and answer, what underpins their processes of reflection and reflexivity are the dynamic markers for quality arts education identified earlier.

Dynamic markers for arts education leadership in schools

1. School administrators providing leadership through
    i. Whole school planning and monitoring for arts education using the dynamic markers
    ii. Evidence of dynamic markers for arts learning and teaching in all classes in the school
    iii. Action to address gaps in learning and teaching in the arts
    iv. Resource provision:
        - arts rich physical spaces for learning for **all** students
        - arts rich opportunities for **all** students
    v. Professional learning opportunities for identified gaps in teachers' knowledge, understanding and application of dynamic markers for arts in schools
    vi. Developing open, collegial, collaborative learning community providing for teachers' own creativity and success through arts is taught
    vii. Foregrounding arts education in the school through communication to parents, supervisors, community

What is taught

What is learnt

How it is taught

Similar dynamic markers are under development for the other nested context groups in this research study.

The arts in schools as ecosystem

This work is further built on the concept of the arts in schools as an ecosystem.

The research outlines arts education as an ecosystem of the interconnecting dimensions already described. Like counterparts in the biological world where interactions between organisms and environment are the focus (Haeckel 1866), the arts education eco-system envisaged here considers the physical, cognitive,

social and emotional components of arts teaching and learning in relation to each other and as a whole. Existing in dynamic relationships, the various elements included in this model don't operate in isolation but interact and are inter-dependent. Highlighting the complexity of teaching and learning, these relationships are shifting and re-forming as they exist in time. They are porous containers of concepts (limited by words used to describe them). There are frequent border crossings ((Giroux, 1992) and overlaps. Brelser's (2007) formulation in describing arts education as "autonomous disciplines and soft boundaries" (p xviii) is useful capturing something of this complexity.

As indicated in the diagram below, the circle of the classroom sits inside the world of the school which is, in turn part of a local community and a community of parents. Schools operate within the structures of systems and authorities. All operate within broad arts and social contexts.

The lines of the diagram are deliberately shown as porous. Overlaps and connections are a necessary part of the diagram (which works best as an animation rather than a static image).

Effective arts education can be thought of as when the elements of the eco-system are mutually supportive and mutually generative. There is effective arts education when there is adaptive capacity and resilience of the elements and their environment and their relationships.

Systems and curriculum authorities

This modeling serves as an informed context for considering how arts in schools exemplify these principles of arts education and how teaching might change and develop in possible futures.
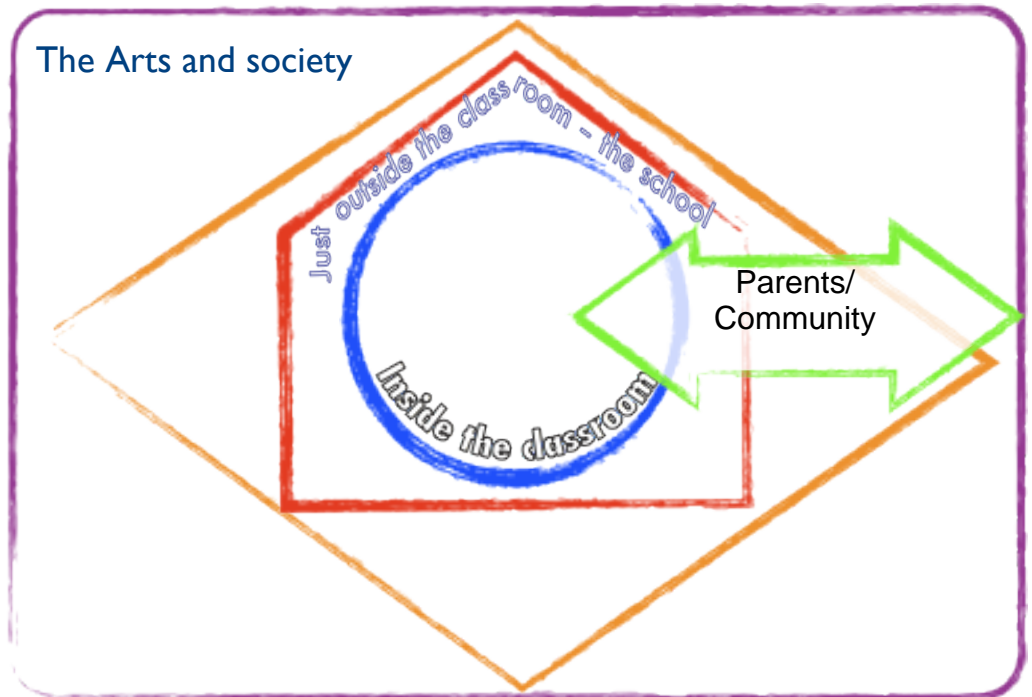
2. Making judgments about the arts in schools

A qualitative evidence-based approach to making informed judgements about arts teaching and learning steps beyond compliance or tick box forms. It calls on those involved in making judgments to engage in a process of reflection and reflexive action.

Reflection

Schön (1983, 1987) models reflection in–, on– and for–practice. Teachers are frequently *reflective in* the moment in the classroom as they make adjustments to their planned teaching and learning in response to the changing contexts of students and classrooms. Teachers and school administrators engage in *reflection on* past practice as a tool for moving into new cycles of planning and action. Teachers, school administrators and curriculum planners reflect with a futures orientation: *reflection fo*r future practice.

The Arts and society

Just outside the class room – the school

Inside the classroom

Parents/Community

Arts education as eco system

Anecdotally in discussions with teachers and school administrators and through observation, in Australian schools a culture has developed of superficial checklist approaches to making judgments. The focus on compliance rather than purposeful and thoughtful reflection serves as timely reminder that any approach to making judgements on arts teaching and learning must move beyond a compliance mindset, in the sense that compliance is undertaken merely to fulfill requirements set by an external authority. While delivering curriculum requirements set by authorities is undoubtedly a part of the picture, it is not a satisfying or complete approach to making informed judgments about the arts in schools.

More powerfully for moving beyond compliance or checklist models is the concept of making judgements as a form of *internal conversation* (Archer, 2007), the application of reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity carries with it seeds of reflection for the purpose of further action. In this context, reflexivity extends beyond the use of the term in sociology where there is a focus on individuals recognizing how the forces of socialization impact on perceptions. Reflexivity is the capacity of observers and their actions – in this case teachers and those interested in the arts in schools – to affect both their observations and to effect changes in their actions. In this sense, reflexivity is a subjective self-aware process of inquiry. It recognizes the perspectives of self-interest and focus but provides aesthetic distance (Bullough, 1912) through futures oriented action.

Reflexivity is a dance between agency and structure. Barker (2005 p 448) identifies agency as capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices; and, structure as recurrent patterned arrangements which seem to influence or limit the choices and opportunities that individuals possess. Since both agency and structure are intrinsic to the arts and to arts in schools, they also serve as useful conceptual frames for the reflexivity intrinsic to making judgements about the arts in schools.

Making judgements: engaging in process

The purpose of the reflective and reflexive internal conversation about arts education for a teacher or school administrator, curriculum developer or parent, is to review what has happened in order to confirm or change what might happen in the future. To undertake that reflexive course of action, there needs to be clear statement of what was intended coupled with evidence of what happened informed by a statement of standards – measures or principles of quality.

The intended purposes, methods and approaches reside in teacher's planning, school administrator's strategic planning and curriculum writer's frameworks and syllabus documents. The standards for quality for arts education are variously stated through compliance documents (Department of Education and Training Western Australia, 2010) – though there are examples of these sorts of standards being criticized as ambiguously expressed, naively interpreted and sometimes ignored (e.g. Alderson & Martin, 2007; Andrich, 2010; Tognolini, 2006).

Evidence of achievement of standards is similarly sketchy; there are rare attempts to provide summative snapshots of arts (such as the Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education (Department of Education and Training Western Australia, 2005, 2009); in the United States, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Arts assessment (National (USA) Center for Educational Statistics, 1998); and Australian national arts education reviews (Pascoe, et al., 2005; Senate Environment Communications Information Technology and the Arts Committee, 1995). There are few examples published of school-based reviews of achievement of standards.

The purpose of my research is to articulate dynamic markers for arts education in schools – to establish principles for quality arts education in schools. In doing so I add Australian perspective to the growing research base for these principles (for example, *The Qualities of Quality* (Seidel, et al., 2008), New York City Department of Education *Blueprint for the Arts* (2004) and *Studio thinking: the real benefits of visual arts education* (Hetland, et al., 2007). The future use of these dynamic markers is to develop tools that assist teachers, school administrators, curriculum authorities and departments of education as well as parents and members of the community, to make judgements about the arts in schools.

The development of these tools is predicated on a reflective and non-condemnatory or censorious approach - it has an improvement orientation rather than a negatively critical one. There is focus on developing skills of reflection and reflexive action through using a set of qualitative principles - dynamic markers – as the basis for the necessary internal conversations of teachers, administrators, curriculum writers, parents and community members. Providing further structure to this process is a set of rating scales focused on knowing and understanding of principles of arts education – the dynamic markers themselves; and how these dynamic markers are being used or applied. These tools for measuring are based on similar descriptive and qualitative rating tools used in education. They are not numerical scores to be summed or averaged.

These rating scales have been developed specifically for arts education following the lead provided by models such as *Concerns-Based Adoption Model CBAM* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987) and *Level of Use of Technology* (RMC Research Corporation, 2005). Using an analytical ratings model (Andrich, 2010) the ratings scale sets out to provide a descriptive continuum of possible responses.

For example, for application and use of an arts education concept/process/approach identified in the set of dynamic markers the following possible ratings have been identified:

Rating Scale B:
Using and applying dynamic makers for art education in classroom

UA0	Non-use/application	No evidence of use in your classroom
UA1	Awareness	Exploring value and demand on use of recently acquired knowledge and understanding of concepts/processes/approaches
UA2	Exploration	Supplementing the application of existing concepts/processes/approaches Using concepts/processes/approaches for extension or enrichment not yet an integral part of primary program
UA3	Mechanical application	Begins to use concepts/processes/approaches relying on pre-packaged materials and step-by-step operations with a short term focus on own classroom
UA4	Routine application	Concept/process/approach used regularly in own classroom with short term and mid term focus Little thought towards developing use or application beyond routine
UA5	Expansion	Use and application moves beyond routine through developing use in new contexts with increased understanding of short, mid and long term consequences Shares examples of use with colleagues
UA6	Autonomy and collaboration	Concept/process/approach used with autonomy, confidence and full integration in teaching and learning Collaborates with colleagues to apply concepts/processes.approaches
UA7	Renewal and innovation	Active reflection and reflexivity in use of concepts/processes/approaches with a focus on developing alternatives, exploring new developments for both personal, classroom and school applications

The language of the ratings scale aims to be more objective and based on observable events. While recognizing subjectivity as intrinsic to making judgements, there has been a commitment to avoiding over-emotionalized or personally-skewed responses. There is a commitment to aesthetic distance. This is in keeping with the description of dynamic markers outlined earlier in this paper.

Therefore, in this example from the reflective tool for classroom teachers [2], the teacher completing the review is directed towards making a specific response using the ratings tool about their own knowledge and understanding as well as their use and application of a concept/process/approach. This rating is supported by both recent and historic evidence that can be directly quoted – if there is evidence. Both these steps are a preliminary scene setting to reflective engagement with the concept/process/approach in their own classroom and with their own students followed by a reflexive commitment to action.

Dynamic marker	Knowledge	Use	Evidence		Reflection	Action
			Recent	*Archived*		
Learning opportunities for						

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[2] A draft for a classroom based review of arts education is provided as an appendix.

iv. Touchstones of the arts: *creativity, imagination, play, story, improvisation, transformation, design, symbol, metaphor*					

While this is emerging work, these reflective and reflexive tools are being tailored for the different perspectives and needs of teachers, school administrators, curriculum and system educators and parents/community members. Each of these groups necessarily asks and answers different questions. The dynamic markers identified overlay all four groups. The processes used and the judgements made will also be qualitatively differentiated. Since there is a need to move beyond simplistic compliance based checklists, the tools will be essentially qualitative balancing both agency and structure. They recognise the need for balancing both subjectivity and aesthetic distance in making judgments about arts teaching and learning.

3. Conclusion

This paper presents an overview of ongoing research project that also looks forward to additional research.. The complexity of arts education in schools is highlighted along with some current issues in Australian arts education in schools. The challenges are acknowledged while suggesting that there is research-based ways of addressing those issues. The research argues for a set of clearly articulated dynamic markers that provide foundations for reflective and reflexive tools for making judgements about the quality and qualities of arts education in schools.

The dynamic nature of changing contexts and the complex interconnections between the dimensions of quality arts education in schools needs a nuanced approach in the use of dynamic markers. Simply listing them could potentially encourage reductive and simplistic checklist approaches. What is needed is knowledge and applied understanding of them in context.

This work on dynamic markers for arts education in schools suggests further implications for initial and on-going teacher education, leadership development in education, parent and community education. They are a necessary first few steps towards developing stronger and more effective arts education in schools.

Additional examples are available from the author of this paper.

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Appendix

Making informed judgments about the arts in your classroom

Reflective tools to help you think about your arts teaching and learning

A National commitment has been made to every child having a satisfying arts education through active engagement in learning in dance, drama, media, music and visual arts.

To move towards achieving this commitment in your school, the whole school is engaging in a review of arts learning and teaching. This is one part of that process. You will be using a tool developed to simulate your reflection about the teaching and learning of the arts in your classroom. It has been designed to be used as an integral part of reflection on what has happened that is directed towards what will happen in the future. This process is designed to be forward looking rather than backward judgement.

To support your reflection you are prompted to consider dimensions of arts education in schools that research has shown to be significant markers of quality. These serve as *dynamic markers* - recognizing that they are not fixed or static but responsive to change and opportunities. They are not a checklist for compliance but stimulus for thought. Their value lies in *your reflective thinking* and *your reflexive action* that follows in your own classroom.

In the process of using these tools you are asked to provide evidence – in brief accessible ways – that helps paint the picture. The process then is driven by what is observable as well as accurate and honest judgements you make about your own classroom.

To support your thinking you are first asked to rate your self on each of these dynamic maker prompts using two scales.

The first scale describes your knowing and understanding about principles of arts education – the dynamic markers themselves.

The second is about how you think these dynamic markers are being used or applied in your classroom.

These measuring tools are based on similar descriptive and qualitative rating tools used in education. They are not numerical scores to be summed or averaged.

The dynamic makers and rating scales are designed to support you making an informed judgement about arts teaching and learning in your own classroom. Therefore, it is important that you use these tools with integrity based on evidence rather than subjective opinion. They are a stimulus to your internal conversation about the arts in your classroom.

There are similar reflective tools to support School Administrators, Parents, Curriculum Authorities and the broader community to make judgments using the dynamic markers for arts education n schools.

Together, these tools for reflection provide opportunities for sharing different perspectives on arts education in schools.

You may also consider asking students for their viewpoints.

This tool is designed to be used digitally or in handwritten form. Evidence can be cross referenced to other documents rather than being repeated here.

Arts Education in schools: Teachers and their classrooms

To help you make more objective judgements about the identified dynamic markers for arts education, the following descriptive ratings scales have been developed.

As you reflect on each dynamic marker, begin by identifying your current judgement about where you see your own knowledge and application of the marker.

Rating scale A:

Knowing and understanding dynamic markers for arts education in classrooms

KU0	Non-knowing/understanding	No evidence of knowledge/understanding **DRAFT**
KU1	Awareness raising	Introduced to the concept/process/approach
KU2	Developing personal knowledge	Acquiring knowledge and understanding of concept/process/approach, how to use it and consequences of use
KU3	Collaborating	Building personal knowledge of concept/process/approach through use in own classroom and discussing and sharing experiences with colleagues
KU4	Reflecting	Examining own knowledge and understanding based on own use of concept/process/approach with own students and other students
KU5	Reflexing	Adapting and deepening knowledge and understanding of concept/process/approach based on reflection

Rating Scale B:

Using and applying dynamic makers for art education in classroom

UA0	Non-use/application	No evidence of use in your classroom
UA1	Awareness	Exploring value and demand on use of recently acquired knowledge and understanding of concepts/processes/approaches
UA2	Exploration	Supplementing the application of existing concepts/processes/approaches Using concepts/processes/approaches for extension or enrichment not yet an integral part of primary program
UA3	Mechanical application	Begins to use concepts/processes/approaches relying on pre-packaged materials and step-by-step operations with a short term focus on own classroom
UA4	Routine application	Concept/process/approach used regularly in own classroom with short term and mid term focus Little thought towards developing use or application beyond routine
UA5	Expansion	Use and application moves beyond routine through developing use in new contexts with increased understanding of short, mid and long term consequences Shares examples of use with colleagues
UA6	Autonomy and collaboration	Concept/process/approach used with autonomy, confidence and full integration in teaching and learning Collaborates with colleagues to apply concepts/processes.approaches
UA7	Renewal and innovation	Active reflection and reflexivity in use of concepts/processes/approaches with a focus on developing alternatives, exploring new developments for both personal, classroom and school applications

These rating scales are developed specifically for arts education based on an approaches to reflective teacher practice such as Concerns-Based Adoption Model CBAM (Hord, et al., 1987) and Level of Use of Technology (RMC Research Corporation, 2005).

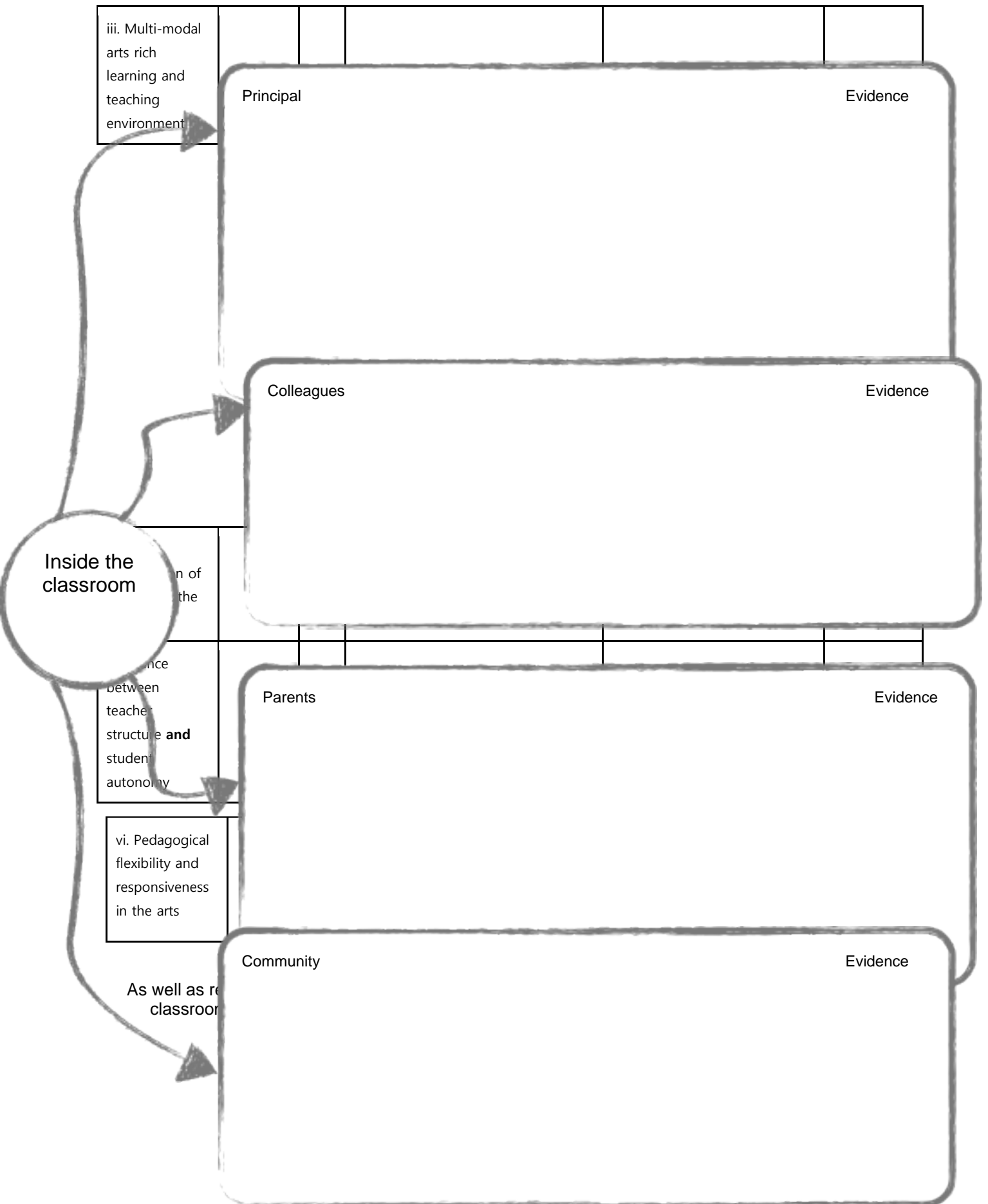# Primary Generalist Teacher: reflecting on arts education in the classroom

Thinking about the arts learning and teaching in your own classroom:

Dynamic marker	Knowledge	Use	Evidence Recent	Archived	Reflection	Action
Students developing						
i. personal, social and cultural identity and agency through their arts learning						
ii. Enactive, iconic and symbolic meaning making in and through the arts					DRAFT	
iii. Embodied learning - cognitive, somatic and empathic learning						
iv. Engagement, enjoyment and success in the arts						
Learning opportunities for						
i. Arts Practice in: • Dance • Drama • Media • Music • Visual Arts						
ii. Aesthetic knowing applied to Arts Practice and Responding						

iii. Responding to • Dance • Drama • Media • Music • Visual Arts					

Dynamic marker	Knowledge	Use	Evidence		Reflection	Action
			Recent	Archived		
iv. Touchstones of the arts: *creativity, imagination, play, story, improvisation, transformation, design, symbol, metaphor*						
v. Opportunities for action **and** reflection in the arts						
vi. Focus on process **and** product in the arts						
Teaching Approaches that provide						
i.Provisions of multi-modal arts rich experiences						
ii.Provision of a range of visual, aural and kinaesthetic learning styles						

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iii. Multi-modal arts rich learning and teaching environment

Principal   Evidence

Colleagues   Evidence

Inside the classroom

n of the

ce between teacher structure **and** student autonomy

Parents   Evidence

vi. Pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness in the arts

As well as re classroom

Community   Evidence

Summarizing current situation and future action

Informed by your reflection, summarize your current situation and your plan for future action.

Current situation

Future action

Signature

Date

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