The Classroom Practice of Creative Arts Education in NSW Primary Schools: A Descriptive Account

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Abstract
This article documents the current classroom practice of creative arts education of respondent classroom teachers in the New South Wales Greater Western Region, Australia. The study provides a descriptive account of classroom practice in creative arts education through the employment of a quantitative methodology. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to teachers as the sole data collection instrument and analysed to identify innovative classroom practices that anticipate the needs and challenges of creative arts education and the young people it serves. A significant gap in the literature regarding the nature of creative arts education classroom practice was identified. The criticality that such a description of current practice be produced is asserted, with a view towards illuminating current classroom practices and working towards improved models and practices of creative arts education in K-6 classrooms.

Introduction

'Arts education' is an international term referring to education in the 'arts'. The term 'arts' is seen to encompass different things in different contexts, including but not limited to the performing arts (music, dance, drama, and theatre), visual arts, media, industrial arts, and literary arts. In Australia, 'the arts' is the terminology used most commonly to refer to music, visual art, dance, drama, and media. In NSW primary schools, the K-6 Key Learning Area 'Creative Arts' encompasses only four of these artforms; music, visual arts, dance, and drama. The term 'creative arts education' in this article is used to refer to primary school creative arts education in music, visual arts, dance, and drama.

This article documents research undertaken to explore the classroom practice of the K-6 key learning area 'Creative Arts'. The study focused on Department of Education and Training (DET) public primary schools within one particular geographical region (Greater Western Region) of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The study identified innovative classroom practices that anticipate the needs and challenges of creative arts education and the young people it serves. The significance of this study lies in the researcher's intention to contribute new knowledge to two significantly under-investigated areas in this field: the nature of classroom practice of creative arts education; and the study of creative arts education as an umbrella term within a primary school setting.

Rationale for this Research

Arts education provides students with valuable opportunities to experience and build knowledge and skills in self expression, imagination, creative and collaborative problem solving, communication, creation of shared meanings, and respect for self and others. Engagement in quality arts education has also been said to positively affect overall academic achievement, engagement in learning, and development of empathy towards others (Board of Studies NSW, 2006; Cornett, 2007; Deasy, 2002; Ewing, 2010; Fiske, 1999; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2006; Sinclair, Jeanneret, & O'Toole, 2009).

Despite the intrinsic value of creative arts education, literature (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009; Anderson, 2003; Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008) suggests that arts education in schools in both Australia and internationally occurs infrequently and when it does occur it is often regarded to be substandard – not meeting the expectations of the curriculum. While this has been well documented in the literature for over a decade (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008), what is absent is an understanding of what is happening at a classroom level.

In addition to this, the vast majority of studies in the field of creative arts education have focused on music and visual arts, with very few on dance or drama. Fewer still are studies focusing on the classroom practice of primary school creative arts education as an umbrella term (Klopper & Power, 2010).

This research study addressed both of these shortfalls by describing the classroom practice of creative arts education as an umbrella term and identifying innovative practices that meet the needs of teachers and students, allowing recommendations and suggestions for further implications of continued attendance.

International and National Issues Identified in the Literature

Creative arts education in primary schools has been described as falling short of expectations in Australia as well as internationally (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Herbst, 2007; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). It has been found that in many instances, pre-service and in-service teacher education does not provide adequate preparation or support for generalist teachers to meet the expectations of the creative arts curriculum (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Bamford, 2006; Chappell, 2007; Ewing, 2010; Leung, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2009b).

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011) draws attention to the current international research base about arts education outcomes. Foundational studies are cited, including those in The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) compilations *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999) and *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002).

Champions of Change (Fiske, 1999) reported on seven studies indicating links between increased participation in the arts and increased achievement levels in reading and mathematics. *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002) reported on 62 separate research studies, a large number of which indicated transfer of skills from arts learning experiences to learning in reading, language development, writing, mathematics, and science (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011).

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011) cites additional studies indicating increased academic success as an outcome of quality learning experiences in the arts (Bransom et al., 2010; Catterall, 2009; Israel, 2008), the benefits of arts integration for all, and in particular for economically disadvantaged students or students from non-English

speaking backgrounds (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; DeMoss & Morris, 2002; Ingram & Reidell, 2003), and neurological research indicating positive outcomes of arts education enhancing learning and skills transfer (Asbury & Rich, 2008; Rudacliffe, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2010).

The key overarching international and national issues identified in the literature include:

- teachers' personal experience in creative arts (Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002);
- adequacy of pre-service teacher education (Alter et al., 2009; Davis, 2008; Duncum, 1999; Herbst, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005);
- teacher confidence (Alter et al., 2009; Davis, 2008; Dunkin, 2004; Ewing, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999);
- the state of K-6 creative arts education (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008);
- the perceived 'crowded curriculum' (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Davis, 2008; Dunkin, 2004; Espeland, 2007; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; McDonald, 2010; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005);
- the perceived lack of support offered to in-service teachers (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Bamford, 2006; Chappell, 2007; Leung, 2007; McDonald, 2010; Pascoe et al., 2005; Rusinek, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2009b; Zen Eddine, 2005); and
- the generalist versus specialist debate (Alter et al., 2009; Pascoe et al., 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

The literature indicates a self-perpetuating cycle. Potential educators in many cases enter pre-service teacher education with an initial lack of background experiences and content knowledge in one or more areas of creative arts education (Dunkin, 2004; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2002; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999). This leads to the apparent insufficiency of pre-service teacher education to addressing this deficit (Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005). Following this, these teachers enter classrooms with a lack of pedagogical content knowledge and lack of confidence in teaching creative arts (Dunkin, 2004; Ewing, 2010; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008), and subsequently their students receive a less than adequate education in the arts (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Davis, 2008; Herbst, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). These are the next generation of potential teachers – and so the cycle continues. The literature points to the need for change in order to 'break' this cycle.

This research study makes a contribution to this endeavour through the investigation of current classroom practice in Australia, NSW, using data extrapolated from a study of primary school classrooms.

The lack of confidence felt by generalists in relation to creative arts has been identified as influencing how these individuals initially engage in pre-service teacher education, and the amount and quality of creative arts they teach once in schools (Alter et al., 2009; Davis, 2008; Dunkin, 2004; Ewing, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999). Lack of value for creative arts felt by teachers and the education system as a whole has also been seen as a factor, as has the perceived 'crowded curriculum' (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Davis, 2008; Dunkin, 2004; Ewing, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005).

A major gap exists in the literature regarding what is actually happening at a classroom level i.e. the nature of creative arts education classroom practice. None of the aforementioned studies describe this in detail, and no literature has been located describing the classroom practice of creative arts education as an umbrella term. It is crucial that such a description of current practice be produced in order for principals, teachers, pre-service teacher educators, curriculum developers, and other interested parties to ascertain what is working and what is not, and to work towards improved models and practices of creative arts education in our K-6 classrooms, as well as in pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research question and sub-questions:

> *What is the current classroom practice of creative arts education in the K-6 classrooms of NSW Greater Western Region DET schools?*
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> 1. *Who is responsible for teaching creative arts in primary schools and what do we know about them?*
> 2. *What is the nature of classroom practice in each artform in the K-6 classrooms of NSW Greater Western Region DET schools?*
> 3. *What are respondent teachers' opinions and perceptions in relation to issues identified in the literature?*

Method

A descriptive research study employing a quantitative methodology was used to address the research questions. The questionnaire was distributed to teachers to produce data for analysis in order to describe the current creative arts education practices being employed by classroom K-6 teachers in the NSW Greater Western Region.

Questionnaire as Research Instrument

A questionnaire instrument was deemed most suitable for use in this research as the main purposes of survey research identified by Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) – to collect data about phenomena that are not directly observable, and to collect data about observable phenomena in a convenient way – are most applicable to this study.

Strengths of survey research include the ability to sample a large number of respondents from a wide geographical area at low cost, and also within a short amount of time (Gall et al., 2007). Limitations of survey research include not being able to probe deeply, and inability to clarify meaning of questions or responses of participants (Gall et al., 2007). These strengths and limitations are relevant to this research, with the strengths contributing to the decision for use of the questionnaire instrument. Limitations were addressed through the careful construction of the questionnaire with due consideration given to these aspects.

In designing the questionnaire, questionnaire items were derived from issues identified through a close examination of the relevant literature. Each questionnaire item serves to ascertain either: demographic information about respondents; information directly linked to one or more of the issues identified in the literature; or respondents' perceptions in relation to issues identified in the literature.

The two main response formats used throughout the questionnaire instrument were: close-ended, which simplify the quantification and analysis of results and require minimal effort from respondents (Bourque & Fielder, 1995); and open-ended, which allow the respondent to respond freely using his or her own language, and used in instances where greater detail and more options for response are desired (Bourque & Fielder, 1995).

Participants

The target population of this research study consisted of generalist classroom teachers in mainstream public K-6 DET schools in the NSW Greater Western Region. A sample of this population was obtained using proportional stratified cluster random sampling. As a

combination of the cluster and stratification sampling methods (Wiseman, 1999) this enabled the researcher to select schools (i.e. clusters) rather than individual teachers, and ensure that a proportional amount of identifiable subgroups (i.e. strata) were included in the sample.

In this study, the identified strata are school size and transfer points. Proportional stratified cluster random sampling is sampling in which 'clusters' of participants are selected by first identifying subgroups in the population, then drawing a random sample of clusters from each of these subgroups, ensuring that the proportion of clusters in each subgroup of the sample is equal to the proportion of clusters in the entire population. The sample in this study is all selected schools, and the potential participants were all teachers within the selected schools. Actual participants were all potential participants who returned completed questionnaires to the researcher.

In order to ensure a minimum 95% confidence that the sample is representative of the population, a table of sample sizes required for selected populations (Wiseman, 1999) was consulted to determine the required minimum sample size for the population. Based on this approach and a predicted return rate of 55%, 108 schools were selected. It was estimated that in total, there were approximately 500 teachers in the selected schools. Due to the fact that the sample consists of a large number of small schools (and the smaller the school the less teachers at that school), a proportionately larger number of small schools were selected in order to investigate differences in perspectives across schools of different sizes. 100% of small schools (3 classes or less) were selected, and a random sample of 50% of schools from each other category.

By the end of the data collection timeframe, 66 questionnaire instruments were returned to the investigator. This equates to a return rate of 13.2%. This being less than the estimated return rate of 55%, around which the sampling methodology was based, the authors acknowledge that representativeness of the data to the target population is limited. Such limitations were primarily due to the time and financial constraints of an honours study. This study obtained only the viewpoint of teachers, and only of teachers in one specific geographical location. The questionnaire instrument utilised mainly close-ended item formats, which are restrictive and thus limit the information that is collected and subsequently analysed.

Participants were representative of a wide range of contexts. Slightly more respondents were teaching at a large school (16 or more classes) (40.9%) or medium school (5-15 classes) (36.4%) compared to a small school (1-4 classes) (22.7%). This was to be expected given that smaller schools have fewer teachers on the faculty. With regards to class size, less than half (30.3%) of respondent teachers were teaching a class of 20 students or less, while a large proportion (66.6%) were teaching a class of 21 students or more. There was a reasonably even

representation of participants across each category of grade taught. Just less than half (48.5%) of respondents taught a multi-grade class, and just over half (51.5%) taught a single-grade class.

Procedure

Questionnaire distribution and collection

Initial contact was made with principals of schools in the sample via phone to seek permission to invite teachers at their school to take part in this research. Once this permission was obtained, a letter to principals was distributed describing the research and what was involved in participating. In order to maximise response rates, follow-up procedures were undertaken. Approximately one week after the questionnaires were distributed to each school, the researcher phoned the principal to check that the package was received and ascertain whether there were any queries or concerns. This phone call also served to politely and enthusiastically remind the principals of the importance of their school's contribution to the research project.

Data analysis

Data were pre-coded in the questionnaire prior to distribution, with numerical codes assigned to each possible response for each variable. Data from completed and returned questionnaires was entered directly into a SPSS data set by the researcher, minimising entry errors and inconsistencies and simplifying the process of preparing data for analysis by this package.

The data set was 'cleaned' prior to conducting data analysis by checking for and correcting any identifiable errors in the data set through examining the distribution of each variable and detecting any out-of-range or unrealistic values, then locating the cases containing these values and checking against the original questionnaire.

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the cleaned data set in SPSS. The distribution of responses on each variable was analysed and possible relationships between variables were explored.

Results and Discussion

The discussion has been organised into sub-sections to reflect the key issues identified in the literature. This has been done within the bounds of addressing each research sub-question.

Sub-question 1: Who is responsible for teaching creative arts in primary schools and what do we know about them?

The majority of respondents were female, late career teachers, aged 45-66 yrs old, who had obtained a teaching qualification in NSW, Australia.

Teachers' personal experience in creative arts

39 (59.1%) respondents indicated that they have a personal interest in music, 44 (66.7%) in visual art, 24 (26.4%) in drama, and 21 (31.8%) in dance. Russell-Bowie (1993, 2002) asserts that teachers' lack of personal experience in music presents a barrier to the effective teaching of music. It is conceivable that lack of experience in other artforms may also present a barrier to effective teaching of the relevant artform.

Participants were asked to indicate the extent of their personal experience and involvement in each artform prior to pre-service teacher education on a scale of 1-5, with 1 representing "none" and 5 representing "great deal". Half or more of respondents in this study indicated that the extent of their personal experience and involvement in an artform was none or limited in relation to music (50.0%), drama (68.1%), and dance (69.7%), and close to half indicated the same for visual art (48.5%). Overall, respondents reported more involvement in visual arts and music than in drama and dance.

This is consistent with the findings of Russell-Bowie (2002) in relation to music and Dunkin (2004) in relation to dance, with Russell-Bowie (2002) finding that only 21% of respondents felt that they had a good musical background, and Dunkin (2004) finding that approximately 50% of respondents had no prior outside of school dance experience, and 32% could not recall participating in dance activities at school.

Viewing the findings of the present study in light of Russell-Bowie's (1993, 2002) assertion, teaching of creative arts in the classrooms of the majority of respondent teachers may be negatively impacted due to their self-acknowledged lack of experience in this area.

Adequacy of pre-service teacher education

4 (6.1%) respondents indicated that they undertook no creative arts subjects within their pre-service teacher education course, while 14 (21.2%) indicated that they had undertaken one creative arts subject, 21 (31.8%) had undertaken two creative arts subjects, and 26 (39.4%) more than two creative arts subjects.

Participants were asked to specify what percentage of this time was devoted to each artform. The large majority of responses for all artforms indicated that less than 25% of respondents' pre-service creative arts education was devoted to any one particular artform. Only four respondents indicated that 51-75% of pre-service creative arts education was devoted to visual

art or to music, and no respondents indicated that more than 75% was devoted to any of the artforms.

The literature suggests that in general, pre-service teacher education does not adequately prepare teachers for the expectations of the creative arts curriculum (Alter et al., 2009; Davis, 2008; Duncum, 1999; Pascoe et al., 2005). The teachers involved in this study confirm this dissatisfaction with the pre-service preparation they received for teaching the artforms. Both the *National Review of School Music Education* (Pascoe et al., 2005) and *First We See: The National Review of Visual Education* (Davis, 2008) identified a need for improvement of pre-service teacher education in these artforms.

Consistent with this, the results of this study indicated that the majority of respondents felt their pre-service education in drama and dance to be less than adequate, while with regards to music and visual art, a slim majority felt their pre-service education to be 'adequate'.

Overall, respondents believed their pre-service education to be better in visual art and music than in drama and dance. This is consistent with responses indicating that more time was allocated to visual art and music respectively than to dance and drama.

Teachers entering the profession feeling ill-prepared to teach the arts is reflected in the amount and quality of the creative arts education they subsequently teach. It can thus be projected that for a large percentage of generalist teachers, the amount and quality of creative arts education they teach is not to the level that could otherwise be achieved if improvements in pre-service teacher education were instituted, as recommended by both the *National Review of School Music Education* (Pascoe et al., 2005) and *First We See: The National Review of Visual Education* (Davis, 2008).

In-service professional development

Notably, close to half of the respondents indicated that they had never undertaken in-service professional development in music (42.4%) or visual art (47.0%), and more than half indicated that they had never undertaken in-service professional development in drama (62.1%) or dance (65.2%). It is interesting to note that although more respondents perceived their pre-service education to be inadequate in drama and dance than the other artforms, it is drama and dance in which the least amount of in-service professional development is undertaken. Of those who did undertake in-service professional development at some stage during their career, in most cases it was during only one of the specified time periods. Overall, the years in which the greatest amount of in-service training was undertaken by respondents was during 2002-2005, the period in which implementation of the current syllabus first began,

followed closely by the years 1999-2001, the years in which training began for the current syllabus. With respect to the level of impact that in-service professional development undertaken had on subsequent teaching practices, 4 (6.1%) respondents perceived this to be 'none', 3 (4.5%) 'minimal', 20 (30.3%) 'some', 10 (15.2%) 'considerable', and 3 (4.5%) 'definitive'.

The findings of this study are concurrent with Garvis (2010) in which only two respondents in the sample (N=201) reported having undertaken professional development in the arts, with some reporting their requests for access to in-service professional development opportunities being denied.

Teacher confidence

Lack of confidence felt by generalists in relation to creative arts has been identified as influencing how these individuals initially engage in pre-service teacher education, and the amount and quality of creative arts they teach once in schools (Alter et al., 2009; Davis, 2008; Dunkin, 2004; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999).

Two main factors have been shown to impact upon pre-service teachers' confidence and self-efficacy in creative arts education: background experiences in creative arts prior to pre-service teacher education; and studies in creative arts education undertaken within the generalist pre-service teacher education course (Dunkin, 2004; Russell-Bowie, 2002; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005).

When asked what contributed to their level of confidence in teaching creative arts, 48.5% of respondents identified experience (personal and/or professional) as a contributing factor, 12.1% personal ability, 4.5% use of commercial kits / ideas from others, 16.7% personal interest and enjoyment in an artform, and 7.6% professional development courses. This is consistent with the literature sourced that indicates experience in an artform is one of the two main contributing factors to confidence in teaching it.

When asked their level of confidence in teaching each artform, the majority of responses for each artform fell within the 'moderate' category. This stands in contrast to the findings of relevant literature (Dunkin, 2004; Russell-Bowie, 2002; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005) given the low levels of experience and perceived adequacy of pre-service arts education that respondents reported in this study. This discrepancy could perhaps be accounted for by the central tendency effect whereby respondents opt for the middle option in Likert scale response format (Thomas & Jones, 1962). Given that the large majority of respondents were late career

teachers, an alternate explanation is that respondents' extensive teaching experience may have contributed to their teaching confidence in general.

Visual art was the artform in which respondents reported both the greatest experience and greatest level of confidence. Responses indicating 'low' or 'very low' confidence in teaching an artform however were most prominent in relation to music. This is interesting considering that overall respondents indicated greater experience in music than in dance or drama. Again this seems counterintuitive given the relationship between experience and confidence suggested by the literature. Perhaps there is another contributing factor influencing this anomaly. Further research into this area would need to be undertaken in order to determine this.

Overall, visual art was identified by the majority of respondents as the artform most preferred to teach, with music receiving the greatest number of responses as second or fourth preference. Drama and dance were predominantly selected as third preference. It is conceivable that confidence in an artform affects teaching preference, and this would certainly be consistent with the relationship between these findings and those indicating that visual art was identified by respondents as the area in which they were most confident teaching and in which most prefer to teach, and dance and drama were identified least frequently in both categories, with music in between.

Sub-question 2: What is the nature of classroom practice in each artform in the K-6 classrooms of NSW Greater Western Region DET schools?

The state of K-6 creative arts education

Creative arts education in primary schools in Australia and internationally has been described as falling short of expectations. The state of primary creative arts education has been described as less than satisfactory in a number of studies (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

In this study, respondents were asked to rate the current state of each artform as either 'extremely poor', 'poor', 'satisfactory', 'good', or 'extremely good'. The large majority of responses in relation to each artform were in the 'satisfactory' category (visual art 51.5%; music 45.5%; drama 50.0%; dance 45.5%). In relation to music, dance, and drama, the second largest number of responses was in the 'poor' category, while in relation to visual art, the second most responses were in the 'good' category. Reasons given include: "*Creative arts given low priority by schools – arts not seen as academic / focus is more on literacy and numeracy*" (15.2%); "*Lack of teacher expertise and/or confidence*" (6.0%); "*Expresses belief*

that his/her school does not provide satisfactory creative arts education for students or that teachers 'could do more'" (7.5%); "*Expresses belief that his/her school is providing satisfactory Creative Arts education for students*" (8, 12.1%); and "*Children enjoy participating*" (3.0%).

It is noted that visual art is the artform in which respondents report having the most experience, in which the majority of pre-service education is undertaken and in which respondents report the greatest level of satisfaction with their pre-service teacher education. It is also the artform in which respondents report the greatest level of confidence, and is perceived by the majority of respondents to be taught to a better standard than the other artforms. It was also found that overall, more time was allocated to teaching of visual art than to other artforms.

More than three-quarters of respondents indicated that they have access to the majority of resources listed on the questionnaire instrument (those recommended for use by the NSW Creative Arts Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006) and/or literature), with the exception of the following to which less than 70% of respondents reported having access: oil paints (42.4%), paint rollers (68.2%), clay (63.6%), plasticine (69.7%), lino tools (43.9%), lino blocks (39.4%), and fabrics (66.7%) for use in visual art; and props (47.0%) and costumes (57.6%) for use in drama.

Where respondents reported having access to musical instruments for teaching purposes, in the majority of cases they reported having access to less than 10 of each instrument (with the notable exception of recorders, in which the majority of respondents indicate they have access to more than 25 of these). Seventy percent of respondents' classes consist of 21 students or more. It can be assumed that access to instruments for each student is limited resulting in a limited provision of active music making with instruments for all children.

There are a number of resources available to teachers supplied by the DET. Findings reveal that the DET resources most used by respondent teachers in developing learning experiences in each artform are the Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006) and the Creative Arts K-6 Units of Work (Board of Studies NSW, 2000). A larger number of participants reported using these two resources in planning for music and visual art learning experiences compared to dance and drama learning experiences. Overall, respondents reported using resources more in the planning of learning experiences in music as opposed to any other artform. Possible reasons for the syllabus and units of work documents being those most used include: these being much easier to access than other DET resources (available online as well as in print, and available at every school); focus on use of these documents during pre-service training; and the syllabus being the mandatory document containing the outcomes to which

lessons must correlate. Notably, approximately 10% of respondents report not using the syllabus document in planning learning experiences for their students in music (9.1%) and visual art (12.1%), and 19.7% report not using the syllabus document in planning for dance and drama learning experiences. Given that the syllabus document is the mandatory document to which lessons must align this is less than ideal.

Nearly 50% of respondents reported that it is the class teacher only who is responsible for programming learning experiences in all four artforms, and around 10% reported this in each artform in each category for teachers of year level, teachers of stage, and whole school level program. Very few respondents indicated that the responsibility for programming learning experiences in the artforms is shared across the levels within the school.

There was little variability across the individual artforms in terms of how far in advance learning experiences are planned. The majority of respondents (62.1% - 66.7%) indicated that planning is done at the beginning of each term. Approximately 20% (music: 18.2%; visual art: 19.7%; dance: 16.7%; drama: 21.2%) indicated that planning was done at least a week before, 1-2 days before, or the same day that the learning experience was taught.

A large majority of respondents (music: 80.3%; visual art: 89.4%; dance: 83.8%; drama: 87.9%) indicated that the classroom teacher is primarily responsible for teaching each artform to students in the respondent's class. This is consistent with findings indicating that it is primarily the classroom teacher who is solely responsible for planning learning experiences in the artforms.

62 (93.9%) respondents indicated that creative arts features on his or her weekly timetable, and 2 (3.0%) indicated that it does not. 10 (15.2%) respondents indicated that 60 minutes or less is dedicated to creative arts per week, 33 (50%) respondents 1-2 hours, 8 (12.1%) 2-3 hours, and 3 (4.5%) more than 3 hours.

Half or more of respondents indicated that in relation to music, dance, and drama, 30 mins or less is allocated on their weekly timetable, and in relation to visual arts more than half indicated that 30-60 mins is allocated. Overall, more time was allocated to visual art than other artforms, followed by music, dance, and drama respectively. This is consistent with findings indicating that respondent teachers were most confident and most preferred to teach visual art compared to the other artforms.

When asked the percentage of time dedicated to particular types of activities (performing / organising sound / listening / making / composing / appreciating) within each artform, the majority of responses overall were in the 10-25% category, however a notable number of

Table 1.

How often the specified activities (recommended by the syllabus) occur during creative arts learning experiences.

	Music					Visual Art					Drama					Dance				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Students are provided with opportunities to consider some of the reasons why musical/visual art/dramatic/dance works are made	6	27	49	7	3	3	5	38	40	6	7	32	38	14	2	11	30	29	12	3
Students are provided with opportunities to use a range of traditional and contemporary technologies	2	35	44	11	2	0	11	29	41	12	17	35	30	8	3	17	26	23	9	0
Students produce works that relate to the histories and traditions of music/visual art/drama/dance	15	39	30	8	0	6	20	38	24	5	17	41	26	9	0	6	39	29	8	3
Students are provided with opportunities to appreciate their own works and those of others	6	27	39	18	2	2	5	29	44	14	3	15	44	21	9	3	17	41	14	11
Students are provided with Australian examples of music & musicians / art and artists / drama & actors / dance & dancers	3	23	38	29	0	2	12	33	36	9	17	38	27	9	2	12	36	24	6	6
Students are provided with opportunities to experience the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	0	27	44	18	3	0	15	35	36	6	12	41	33	5	2	8	32	32	9	5
Aboriginal families and communities are involved in contributing to the curriculum	35	46	8	2	2	23	42	17	6	3	38	39	12	2	0	27	38	12	3	3
Issues related to gender are taken into account at the planning stage, and students are provided with examples of practices used by both men and women	20	30	26	11	6	14	35	27	11	6	18	42	21	5	6	15	35	23	8	6
Students are provided with opportunities to explore a variety of cultural practices, including Asia and others	11	33	41	8	0	14	17	38	23	2	17	41	30	3	0	9	35	33	5	2
Students are provided with opportunities to consider environmental perspectives in the development of their work	14	47	24	8	0	5	24	42	15	6	14	38	33	6	2	11	44	26	5	0
Students are provided with opportunities to reflect on their experiences of making/performing/composing/organising sound	5	33	33	18	3	0	15	35	35	8	3	20	49	14	8	5	23	41	11	6

Table 1. *(continued)*

How often the specified activities (recommended by the syllabus) occur during creative arts learning experiences.

	Music					Visual Art					Drama					Dance				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Students perform music of different styles by singing, playing and moving using musical concepts	2	14	47	26	5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students perform music from different times by singing, playing and moving using musical concepts	3	24	42	20	3	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students perform music from different cultures by singing, playing and moving using musical concepts	3	26	50	12	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to organise sound into musical compositions using musical concepts	6	36	35	15	0	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students make artworks informed by their investigations of the world as subject matter	--	--	--	--	--	3	12	38	35	5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
In making artworks, students are encouraged to consider the audience for their work	--	--	--	--	--	2	15	41	26	9	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to recognise the roles of artists	--	--	--	--	--	2	15	46	27	3	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to make drama collaboratively	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	18	35	27	11	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to take on roles in drama	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	14	36	30	9	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to create imagined situations shaped by the elements of drama	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	21	39	23	8	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to actively engage in drama forms	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	5	15	44	20	9	--	--	--	--	--
Students are provided with opportunities to compose their own dances using the elements and contexts of dance	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	23	41	9	6

Table 1. *(continued)*

How often the specified activities (recommended by the syllabus) occur during creative arts learning experiences.

	Music					Visual Art					Drama					Dance				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Students are provided with opportunities to perform their own dances	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	17	39	17	9
Students are provided with opportunities to perform the dances of others from different times and cultures using the elements and contexts of dance	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	26	39	12	5
Taught as a separate subject	6	12	30	32	3	5	14	35	30	5	5	17	35	30	3	3	12	32	33	3
Integrated with music	--	--	--	--	--	19	21	29	11	5	6	20	44	15	5	5	9	30	35	5
Integrated with visual art	15	27	23	11	5	--	--	--	--	--	11	38	29	8	2	21	32	20	5	2
Integrated with drama	5	21	36	17	5	17	26	26	12	3	--	--	--	--	--	9	15	36	20	5
Integrated with dance	5	6	38	29	8	21	32	18	9	2	6	18	42	20	3	--	--	--	--	--
Integrated with English	11	21	36	7	5	8	12	33	26	5	5	15	47	21	2	24	29	23	3	3
Integrated with mathematics	23	27	26	3	2	17	29	24	9	2	32	38	11	5	2	33	29	17	2	2
Integrated with science	29	21	21	5	2	11	24	27	17	3	35	27	15	5	2	33	29	14	3	2
Integrated with HSIE	9	12	39	17	5	3	12	38	26	8	8	21	39	17	2	15	20	30	15	2
Integrated with PDHPE	17	14	35	14	5	18	29	26	6	6	17	17	38	17	2	8	11	30	24	9

Note 1. Numbers in table represent percentage of responses.
Note 2. -- represents the absence of data due to certain activities being relevant only to certain artforms.

respondents indicated that no time at all was allocated to certain types of activity, particularly in dance and drama. This is a further indication of curriculum expectations not being met, as is the fact that more than one quarter of respondents report teaching learning experiences in creative arts as isolated events as opposed to sequences of lessons.

Table 1 presents findings in relation to how often specified activities (recommended by the syllabus) occur during creative arts learning experiences. In relation to all artforms, the majority of responses were in the 'sometimes' category. In relation to music, drama, and dance, the next highest number of responses was in the 'rarely' category, while in relation to visual art, the second highest number of responses was in the 'often' category.

The findings reported in relation to research sub-question 2 indicate that the teaching of creative arts in the K-6 classrooms of the majority of respondents appears to be haphazard and for a minority non-existent. This confirms Alter et al.'s (2009) assumption that classroom teachers of K-6 creative arts are not able to meet the expectations of the creative arts curriculum, and Wiggins & Wiggins' (2008) findings that classroom teachers were unable to meet curriculum expectations in music. This appears to be a recurring theme throughout the literature and is supported by the findings of this study.

Sub-question 3: What are respondent teachers' opinions and perceptions in relation to issues identified in the literature?

The perceived 'crowded curriculum'

The matter of a perceived 'crowded curriculum' was noted in the literature (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Davis, 2008; Dunkin, 2004; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005). This also emerged in open-ended response items in this study, with 22.7% of respondents listing 'crowded curriculum and time restrictions' as a reason for their belief that inclusion of four artforms in one KLA has negatively impacted the time dedicated to each of the artforms. This affirmation confirms the nature of the problem as widely recognised and present in a large number of schools.

In response to the question "*Do you believe that emphasis on other KLAs results in less time being devoted to Creative Arts?*", 60 (90.9%) respondents indicated "yes", and 5 (7.5%) indicated "no". Reasons given include: "*Crowded curriculum*" (7.5%); "*Time*" (39.4%); and "*Pressure to improve literacy and numeracy as schools are publicly judged on these - other KLAs are seen as less vital*" (16.7%).

In Alter et al.'s (2009) study, a large number of participants indicated that the arts were taught irregularly in their school, and that the priority given to the creative arts KLA was often lower than that given to other KLAs. The crowded curriculum surely exacerbates these issues. Garvis (2010) reported beginning teachers' perceptions of the arts having a low status within schools compared to literacy and numeracy in particular, due in part to national testing in these areas. With teachers feeling pressure to focus on 'core' curriculum such as literacy and numeracy, creative arts is being pushed to the side. Anderson (2003) and Garvis (2010) point out the lack of support teachers receive in teaching areas not recognised as part of the 'core' curriculum. The findings of the present study indicate that inclusion of four artforms in the one KLA intensifies this issue with the subsequent result of even less time being devoted to each artform within the school curriculum. Almost one quarter of respondents in the present study recognised that the crowded curriculum impacts on the amount of time dedicated to the artforms indicating that this is a significant issue.

Lack of support given for in-service teachers

Anderson (2003), Chappell (2007), Garvis (2010), and Russell-Bowie (1993) all reference perceived lack of support from the education system as a barrier to effective teaching in the relevant artform. When asked how well supported they felt by the education system, half or more of respondents indicated 'not very well' in relation to all artforms. When asked to provide a reason for their response, 45.5% listed "lack of access to professional development opportunities", 9.0% listed "*Focus on literacy and numeracy results in less time for Creative Arts*", 4.5% listed "*Lack of resources*", and 7.5% listed "*Resources are adequate*". That 45.5% of respondents indicated a lack of access to professional development opportunities is consistent with nearly half of respondents indicating that they had never undertaken in-service professional development opportunities in music or visual art, and more than half indicating this in relation to drama and dance.

When asked the question "*Do you believe that a teacher's personal experience in an artform impacts their teaching of it?*" 93.9% of participants indicated "yes", and 6.1% of participants indicated "no". This is consistent with findings indicating that respondents identified experience as a contributing factor to their confidence. Of those who indicated "yes", 18.2% listed "*increased knowledge and understanding*" as the reason for their response, 27.3% indicated his/her belief that "*increased experience results in increased confidence*", and 19.7% stated that he/she believes "*increased experience results in increased value for / enjoyment in an artform*".

When asked what they believe has contributed to their level of confidence in teaching each of the artforms, 7.5% of participants indicated "*professional development courses*", 16.7%

indicated "*personal interest and enjoyment in an artform*", 4.5% indicated "*use of commercial kits / ideas from others*", 12.1% indicated "*personal ability*", and 48.5% indicated "*experience (personal and/or professional)*". If these factors contribute to respondents' confidence in teaching an artform then the perceived inadequacy of pre-service and in-service professional development and limited personal interests and experiences have likely impacted negatively on respondents' confidence for teaching the artforms.

The years in which the greatest amount of in-service training was undertaken by respondents was during the period in which implementation for the current syllabus first began (2002-2005), followed closely by the years in which training began for the current syllabus (1999-2001).

This raises the question of whether teachers felt a greater need to undertake in-service professional development during this time, or whether schools and/or the Department of Education and Training provided more opportunities during these periods. In light of Garvis' (2010) findings of teachers having been denied opportunities to access in-service professional development opportunities in the arts, perhaps the latter was more the case. In either case, in light of the assertions of Anderson (2003), Chappell (2007), and Russell-Bowie (1993), the lack of support by the education system felt by a substantial number of respondents likely presents a barrier to effective teaching in the artforms.
Alter et al. (2009), Pascoe et al. (2005), and Russell-Bowie (1993, 2009b) also make reference to limited in-service professional development opportunities and support by the education system, indicating that this issue has existed for well over a decade and a half, and is still apparent today as can be seen in these findings.

The generalist versus specialist debate

The argument for specialist as opposed to generalist teachers for the creative arts subjects is discussed in the literature (Alter et al., 2009; Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008), with music education in particular identified as falling short of expectations when taught by generalists (Pascoe et al., 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

Participants were asked to provide a response to the question "*Who do you believe should be primarily responsible for teaching each of the artforms*?" by selecting either "generalist classroom teacher" or "specialist teacher". It was found that the majority of respondents believe generalist teachers should be primarily responsible for teaching visual art, drama, and dance. Music is the only artform in which a greater number of respondents selected 'specialist' as opposed to 'generalist', and is also the artform in which a large number of respondents felt little confidence in teaching. It is plausible that when responding to this

question, respondents may have been influenced by their own feelings about teaching the artforms.

Reasons given in support of "specialist teacher" include: "*specialist skills are required*" (12.1%), and "*specialists have greater knowledge and/or confidence*" (22.7%). In support of "generalist teacher", 4 (6.0%) participants stated their belief that "*teaching the artforms allows classroom teacher to develop his/her skills*".

It is interesting to note that the one artform in which the majority of respondents in the current study indicated a belief that specialist teachers should be responsible for teaching (music) was also the artform that has received greatest attention in the literature for falling short of expectations. Pascoe et al. (2005) recommended improvement of pre-service music education for generalist teachers as an immediate priority. That a large number of teachers in the current study felt music would be better taught by specialists supports this, as regardless of who they believe should be teaching music, it is the generalist teachers who are almost always responsible for doing so.

Conclusion

The literature portrays a self-perpetuating cycle. Potential educators in many cases enter pre-service teacher education with a lack of background experiences and content knowledge in one or more areas of creative arts education (Dunkin, 2004; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2002; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999). This contributes to the apparent insufficiency of pre-service teacher education addressing this deficit (Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005). Teachers then enter classrooms with a lack of pedagogical content knowledge and lack of confidence in teaching creative arts (Dunkin, 2004; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008), and subsequently their students receive a less than adequate education in the arts (Alter et al., 2009; Anderson, 2003; Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). These are of course our next generation of potential teachers – and so the cycle continues.

The picture presented by the findings of this study is one of primary school generalist teachers with limited experience in the artforms, and a large percentage of whom are not personally interested in the artforms, being responsible for the delivery of creative arts education. The limited experience is compounded by the perception of their pre-service education in the artforms as being less than adequate, feeling generally unsupported by the education system in the teaching of the artforms, and perceiving the current state of creative arts education in primary schools to be just 'satisfactory' if not 'poor'.

Both this study and the supporting literature point to the need for change in order to 'break' the cycle. This research has made a contribution to addressing the need for research in the area of primary school classroom practice of creative arts education, and in doing so has contributed to beginning the process of 'breaking the cycle' by injecting new knowledge of classroom practice of creative arts education into the existing scholarship thus providing potential basis for reflection for future educators and policy makers. It is however only one study, and further research is needed to continue this goal.

Implications for Continued Attendance

Arts education in primary schools has been described as falling short of expectations in Australia as well as internationally. In many instances, pre-service and in-service teacher education does not provide adequate preparation or support for generalist teachers to meet the expectations of arts education curriculum.

While all of the research reviewed is quite relevant and essential to understanding the current state of arts education, what are missing in those accounts are close encounters with curriculum transfer at a classroom level – what is the nature of arts education classroom practice? The reviewed studies did not provide this detail.

The current study aimed to begin to address this gap. However, this is only one study, and given the limitations of an honours study, there is still much more that can and must be done. It is recommended that further research into classroom practice of arts education be conducted, and that this goes beyond the self report of teachers to conduct close investigation of arts education classroom practice through a case study approach utilising survey data, observations, and focus group interviews with a number of sources including teachers, students, and members of the wider school community.

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