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5. THE ARTS WITHIN A SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

ABSTRACT

Engagement in the arts has a wide range of benefits for students and educators. Despite such recognition of value, the journey of arts education and its sustainability in formal educational settings, such as schools and tertiary institutions, has been ubiquitously turbulent as a result of constant changes. Education is strongly influenced by the social, political, and economic contexts in which it takes place. This paper explores the place of the Arts in education and focuses on the provision of arts education in Australia. The arts are an acknowledged key learning area of the Australian curriculum, however, the Australian educators and researchers claim that providing an in-depth, meaningful engagement is unrealistic with the current situation. The authors suggest that policy makers, curriculum developers, researchers, teacher educators, arts educators, and educational institutions focus on implementing arts education effectively in formal educational settings and sustain arts education for twenty-first century learners in Australia and beyond.

Keywords: Arts education, teacher education, sustaining arts teaching, Australian curriculum and arts and society

INTRODUCTION

In the *Road Map For Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2006), the aims of arts education were being described as to: "Uphold the human right to education and cultural participation" (p. 1); "Develop individual capabilities" (p. 1); "Improve quality of education" (p. 3); and "promote the expression of cultural diversity" (p. 4). A number of policies, conventions, declarations, reports, and frameworks, including research evidence, have been used to devise these aims. It has also been identified that through arts education it is possible to provide creative and cultural education. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE of the United Kingdom) (1999) pointed out that cultural education enables students to engage and understand growing complexity and diversity of social values in contemporary multicultural societies. The development of creative thinking in children is one of the important anticipations of contemporary education.

Despite such recognition of value, the journey of arts education and its sustainability in formal educational settings, such as schools and tertiary institutions, has been ubiquitously turbulent. The Arts in the worldwide curricula face many obstacles and continues to struggle. These obstacles came with many faces and were initiated by different incentives. The intention of the authors is to explore these issues, especially related to the Australian context, and alert the stakeholders to take necessary actions.

Exploring the British context, Bamford and Wimmer (2012) articulated that "the degree to which the arts are included in national curriculum varies" (p. 4) and this has been the case globally, including Australia. It is possible to interpret this claim in different ways and, for the purpose of this discussion, we will use the following versions: the depth of arts education provided and the amount of art disciplines offered in different educational settings. There are many reasons behind these variations and this paper will explore those factors which might have influenced education in the arts. Even though the main focus is to investigate the practices of formal arts education in educational settings, it is also vital to explore the practical use of the arts in society, especially focusing on how different forms of arts are used in everyday life.

The Arts have been one of the key learning areas of Australian education since the Hobart Declaration of 1989. Similar to other educational systems worldwide, the decade of the 1990s raised awareness on the value of the arts for a sustainable society as well as the attempts to ensure universal access to arts education for every child. Over this time, there have been debates on issues such as the need of the artistic engagement and participation for cognitive and communicative development, the promotion of people's creativity and transformative problem solving through the arts, and the arts as the vehicle for cultural understanding in multicultural societies. In addition, there has been consideration of the arts as a way of transmitting social values and peacefully responding to social inequalities. Each of these issues has been the focus on a range of studies and continue to inform debates in and across the role, place, and function of the Arts as a core area in education.

Since the Hobart Declaration (1989), there has been agreement that an education in the Arts within schooling will include a variety of art forms − dance, drama, music, media, and visual arts. The identification of these forms has been to reinforce and ensure children's access to and appreciation of the five arts disciplines included the curriculum. There is a need to ensure that arts education includes the efforts to address a series of agreed general capabilities for students to develop during schooling such as Literacy, Numeracy, Information and communication technology capability, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Ethical understanding, and Intercultural understanding. In addition, approaches to arts teaching and learning are directed to meeting the cross-curricular priorities in the Australian Curriculum − Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability. There is an articulated need to define the place of each art form, the essential learning for the arts, and issues of time devoted to the arts within the curriculum. These concerns have been ongoing themes of

investigation in the agenda of arts education professionals and academics (Forrest & Watson, 2006, 2012; Jeanneret, 2010; Jeanneret, Forrest, & Watson, 2007).

CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ARTS AND THEIR EDUCATORS

The preface of Foster and Blau's (1989) *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts* suggested that Art is old and ubiquitous. Through a series of chapters exploring the relationship between the arts and society, they addressed the fact that, considering the importance of the arts for humankind, society has not reflected enough about the connections between the arts and personal and social behaviours. Although more than 25 years have passed since this publication, the process of understanding how to successfully approach the arts for students is constantly being debated, particularly among policy makers. This often enables arguments about the importance of the arts in the holistic development of children.

The role of the arts in society has changed over the years. The perceptions and realities of these changes constantly evolve and need to be rearticulated. In contemporary societies, the value attached to art is in the process of shifting into new understandings of what it means to be a good piece of art and its value. In general terms, ideologies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries regarding the value attached to the arts suggested that the good art possesses certain properties such as universality, eternality, complexity, and originality (Green, 2003). Today, within a global understanding of art, more complex ideas exist on what good art may entail. Together with striving for excellence in the performance of a certain art form, a positive aesthetic experience often involves interrelating different art forms, experiencing art in the most unexplored realms and therefore searching for creativity. The understandings of complexity within the arts have been widely explored. In relation to the idea of creativity, Peter Dallow (2004) addressed:

> Uniqueness and cultural authenticity in art withered in the Modern Era, according to Walter Benjamin, and subsequently the cultural conditions of postmodernity in turn were supposed to have made the possibility of doing anything new in art impossible. Nonetheless, it remains true that the contemporary creative arts still continue to coalesce around the formative notions of "novelty", "newness", and "difference", even if the notion of originality appears to have become redundant as a defining element. Indeed, as will be asserted later, novelty itself serves as a broader cultural metaphor for contemporary existence. But how, though, might we go about investigating the way something new is done (creativeness), in the creative arts? (p. 133)

The notion of the arts as a way of thinking and doing for people to encourage divergent thinking, originality, or novelty, and therefore exploring their creativity, is one of the strongest arguments for many educators to uphold the importance of the arts in holistic development. The idea of creativity in the arts within a creative

society – with creative economies and policies – tends to be a – or even in some context the – key element for educational agencies to argue over the sustainability of the arts in education. Furthermore, the arts have, in many cases, assumed the role to be the school subject that is aimed at developing people's creativity.

We must keep in mind that creativity and creative thinking are not exclusively the realm of the Arts, but they are central to the thinking, practice, and realities of the Arts along with many other disciplines within the school curriculum. The concept of creativity in education has been attached to "open-mindedness, exploration, celebration of the difference and originality … [It has been] taken to be an automatic opposition to the language of targets, to instrumental skills, the measurement of outcomes and the dogmas of accountability" (Cullingford, 2007, p. 133). As Díaz Gómez and Frega (1998) stated, the world of the arts revolves around the creative abilities and potential of human beings. The systematic stimulation of creativity should be indispensably considered as cross curricular to all the teaching and learning processes in arts education and the broader curriculum. The search for developing creativity through the arts has been one of the main areas of study and reflection for many artists and educators who, as Grierson (2011) posed, "find a way to argue for the sustainability of art education as a creative mode of enquiry through which self and the world may be better understood, identity might be realised as difference and being-in-time might be possible" (p. 336).

Education is strongly influenced by the social, political, and economic contexts in which it takes place. In many countries, the educational system has been constantly changing and under consideration due to changing social paradigms that promote a significantly more comprehensive understanding of what being educated entails. In many cases, these changes are targeted under the pretext of meeting global challenges and responding to actions made by certain governments that organise themselves for promoting policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people and seek solutions to common problems. For example, the OECD (2015) has self-defined. currently, a significant shift into the "objective" international evaluations of education systems, by reports such as PISA, TALLIS – or NAPLAN in the Australian context – have turned the attention of governments and educational authorities into strengthening certain knowledge areas and limiting those that are not being assessed. These underlying interests have promoted educational agendas to focus the priority on certain capabilities that, among others, are objectively easier to measure and assess.

Moreover, Myers (2008) upholds that "calls for real-world relevance are prevalent among today's global efforts to improve education" (p. 1). Political, social, and economic concerns typically provide the context for such requirements. Proponents emphasise the need to formulate and continually update a workforce that can apply its knowledge and skills to resolve real-world problems. Within that context, art educators need to return to debates aimed at justifying the importance of people's artistic development and, therefore, the need to ensure compulsory arts

education in schooling. At the same time, researchers in art and music education need to conduct investigations to ensure the implementation of arts education activities in schools is consistent with the idea of art in society, and with the social needs that the educational system must meet. Interestingly, we must not lose sight that in Australia the disciplines of music and visual art have been a part of the school curriculum for more than one hundred years. In some States (such as New South Wales) specific times were mandated for the delivery of these two disciplines within the compulsory curriculum.

The USA National Art Education Association (2016) advocated a call on policy makers and the public to re-examine support for quality arts education by answering questions such as "what does art education do for the individual and for society?; why do we teach art?; and how does art contribute to education at all levels?" Three answers to these questions stand out as crucial in today's social and economic climate: art means work, art means language, and art means values. Many researchers in art and, specifically in music, have been commissioned to investigate relationships between personal development and the engagement in the arts in different perspectives. In this line, efforts have been made to investigate the effect of music on cognitive and behavioural development (Hallam, 2010; Schellenberg, 2004), on logical-mathematical thinking (Ahlawat, Batra, & Sharma, 2012; Hallam & Price, 1998), or to improve language skills (Tierney, Krizman, Skoe, Johnston, & Kraus, 2013). Many arguments have been used by music educators to justify the virtuality of the study of different art forms, and thus provide arts education with relevance and therefore sustainability.

Perhaps, as Myers (2008) addressed, art and music educators may have focused efforts on convincing those who are responsible for educational policies of the need for the arts, even with arguments that put aside the importance of the art per se, and ignoring the cognitive, expressive, cultural, and experiential aspects derived from artistic practice and participation. It is important to centre debates to provide "(1) reflective and critical analysis of why the public is tepid in its endorsement of the arts and arts education as non-negotiable investments in schools and communities; and (2) serious consideration of the responsibility that the arts and arts education communities bear to foster enhanced public value through universal access to high-quality engagement and learning across the lifespan" (Myers, 2008, p. 2).

In a global and essentially multicultural context, the cultural aspect of the artistic and musical experience is undoubtedly important. Music education has been repeatedly used to enhance the management of cultural diversity in schools, mainly through participating in common artistic experiences that involve learning and sharing cultural practices. The figure of the music teacher has been seen as a cultural manager. Numerous investigations and experiences followed this trend (Bradley, 2006; Dillon, 2007a, 2007b; Joseph & Southcott, 2009a, 2010). In recent years, new forms of conflict are emerging in our societies as a direct repercussion of the current acute economic and social crisis. In this context, a necessary task in the

field of education is to work towards improving coexistence through encouraging the initiation and consolidation of cultural practices that enable intersubjective links between individuals.

Today, the plurality in the understanding of the artistic and musical experience is so marked that philosophers and music education theorists, let alone musicians and music teachers, cannot come to grips with all the factors that intervene in this diversity within the music classroom (Green, 2005). Recognising the complexity and hybridisation of artistic forms of this real art pervades our everyday realities – both the physical and audiovisual spaces – and integrating them into the classroom and promoting their understanding and appreciation is a challenge for teachers.

FINDING THE PLACE OF/FOR ARTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

The UNESCO *Road Map for Arts Education* (2006) recommended "Active partnerships between schools and arts organizations and between teachers, artists and the community" (p. 20). It is highly important to explore arts practices in the communities as teaching and learning in schools (and other educational institutions) should be related to the actual applied practices of art. In everyday life, various arts forms are used by people for different purposes and functions in many ways without any categorisation. For example, in contemporary societies people constantly use media such as television without differentiating various forms of arts such as visual arts, music, dance, and drama used in television program production. Therefore, the premise of a wholesome arts education (which includes all five forms) is highly recommended to attain those advocated values in the Road *Map for Arts Education* by UNESCO (2006).

Australian educators and researchers claim that in-depth engagement with the arts as part of an education cannot be provided due to time restrictions in a crowded curriculum and the lack of resources (Joseph & Southcott, 2006; Southcott & Joseph, 2007; Nethsinghe, 2012). The amount of arts discipline offered in courses also varies due to changing drive of educational trends such as the focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education. In a position paper, the office of the Chief Scientist (Australian Government, 2013) urged the Australian community to adopt the STEM practices stating that "many countries are relying on their STEM enterprise and its quality to build knowledge-based communities and economies [and] Australia must do the same" (p. 4). As recommended, the educational authorities started focusing on promoting STEM using different strategies. The Australian educational institutions embraced the STEM enterprise and, as a result, arts education eventually received less attention. In the US, there has been the extension of STEM with the inclusion of the A for Arts to produce STEAM. This will potentially reach the Australian educational context, but the current interests are focused on STEM.

It is also important to consider the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) introduced in 2008 and conducted annually in the month of May for school students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 (NAP, 2013). This assessment, which focuses on Literacy and Numeracy, has been decried by many as an activity that reduces time for arts education. Advocates such as Richard Gill, a highly acclaimed musician/music educator, asserted that "evidence is now available that schools all over the country are cutting back on arts education to devote more time to subjects which will make children literate" (Gill, 2011, para. 4). Gill (2011) has criticised the loss of the arts in Australian schools as a result of the narrow focus of NAPLAN testing.

The issue of sustainability is central to the arguments of this contribution. We are considering the sustainability of the arts in school and education and the complementary consideration of the arts in teacher education programs. As identified above, the arts are an acknowledged component of the Australian Curriculum. While there has been significant debate on the place of the arts in the Australian Curriculum over the last five years, the arts do form a part of the curriculum. The issue about the place of the arts in the Australian Curriculum comes forward when the consideration of implementation is placed alongside the policy. The Curriculum identifies that a child will experience all five arts forms through schooling. What is not articulated at the policy level is how the child will experience these forms. At the most pragmatic level, we divide a school timetable by the number of key learning areas and then by the components of these areas. There is not a lot of time for any meaningful engagement with the broader field of arts in education. It is unreasonable and unsustainable for a school to attempt to meet the requirements of the current policy. A child could not experience a meaningful and sustained engagement with all five disciplines within the arts.

Taking this view to the curriculum of a teacher education program, we are confronted with the issue that all university teacher education programs have reduced their offering of arts education courses within the overall program of study (Joseph & Southcott, 2009b). The universities are delivering what the regulatory authorities demand for a graduate to be registered as a teacher. They are not providing a broad, rich education experience as this is not mandated by the State or Territory registration authority. There is then the issue of who actually pays for the education towards the registration. It is seemingly unrealistic for a graduate teacher to be fully equipped to teach across the five disciplines of the Arts. This in itself is unsustainable.

If we return to the historic position of music and visual art in the curriculum, there is an opportunity to offer a sustainable offering of the arts within the curriculum. We need to reconsider what an education in the arts involves, and more importantly, what can be accomplished within the constraints and opportunities of the school (and university) timetable. If we returned to offering the disciplines of music and visual art, we have a legitimate opportunity to provide students with a meaningful, sequential, and engaged (Ewing, 2010) experience of the arts.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: SUSTAINING ARTS EDUCATION
IN AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND

The efforts to sustain arts teaching in schools should begin in teacher training, providing necessary skills and knowledge to generalist pre-service teachers in their teacher education courses. Then, appropriate professional development needs to be offered to in-service teachers to learn how to integrate arts in to their curricula. It is also important to establish partnerships among teachers, arts practitioners, theorists, administrators, and educational institutions to work collaboratively and learn from each other. Exploring the situation in the Northern Territory (NT) in Australia, Perso et al. (2011) claimed that:

> More sustained arts in schools programs involving partnerships between schools and local art centres, musicians and other artists have been developed in some NT communities. While the evidence of the educational and other benefits of such programs is largely anecdotal, more systematic arts in schools programs with defined methodologies designed to integrate with the broader school curriculum, and/or aim to impart arts education practice skills to teachers within the participating schools have become available in recent years. (p. 1)

We believe that this should be the case nationwide and more attention of policy makers, educators, researchers, arts practitioners, including communities, need to be directed towards enhancing the arts in education. Perso et al. (2011) explained the inclusion of arts in education as:

> … a way of teaching and learning that has the potential to be used as a strategy for learning across the curriculum impact upon on a range of educational outcomes;

> a way of teaching and learning that has the potential to impact upon teachers' professional learning and enrich classroom practices and be embedded in all content areas

> a way of collecting and using data that has the potential to inform new solutions to old problems. (p. 2)

According to UNESCO (2006) "Arts Education contributes to an education which integrates physical, intellectual, and creative faculties" (p. 2) and has the potential to transform "educational systems struggling to meet the needs of learners in the 21st century" (Ewing, 2010, p. 12). With such positive effects on knowledge transmission and fostering creativity and innovation, arts need to be in the centre of attention of all stakeholders who are interested in enhancing holistic education and finding solutions to "creativity crisis" of the modern world (Kim, 2012).

As Grierson (2011) advocated, it is important to explore avenues to sustain arts education as a creative mode of enquiry and, most importantly, to transmit the knowledge of arts practices to younger generations as a way of sustaining

and enhancing aesthetic qualities. There may be different agendas that influence approaches to arts education in various countries, and it is important to identify those reasons related to the Australian context and then enhance the provision of arts education based on those unique requirements. UNESCO (2006) advised individual countries to act upon enhancing and implementing arts education in a coherent and sustainable manner. For example, in multicultural Australia, the arts can be used as a vehicle to provide multicultural education for learners and also as a method to provide creative education for implementing the National Innovation and Science Agenda which embraces the STEM initiatives in educational settings.

In this process, it is important to investigate how to offer the most possible authentic experiences with all five art forms included in the Australian curricular framework for learners in different educational institutions. As a multicultural country, arts education agendas should also include different cultural aspects and comprise diverse arts practices of multicultural communities that reside in Australia, offering a broader range beyond traditional Western classical music approaches.

Studies have revealed how arts education benefits student achievement and has a proven impact on improving skills, including learning. It is also important to consider increasing resources needed to provide arts education and expanding time for learning as much as possible. In the process of paving the way for an effective and a sustainable arts education agenda, it is also vital to educate teachers and equip them with appropriate skills and expertise, cultivating a research culture that focuses on enhancing arts related practices.

In conclusion, we suggest that Australian policy makers, curriculum developers, researchers, teacher educators, arts educators, and educational institutions focus on exploring how to implement arts education effectively in schools considering important factors such as the inclusion of five arts forms, depth of educational engagement/provision, addressing requirements such as creativity enhancement and STEAM education, globalisation and cultural diversity in the Arts, and sustaining arts education for 21st century learners.

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