

2017

Primary students' engagement with the visual arts and their transition into Year 7

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**PRIMARY STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH THE VISUAL ARTS
AND
THEIR TRANSITION INTO YEAR 7**

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the degree of

Master of Education

Zoe Wittber

Edith Cowan University

School of Education

January 2017

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Geoffrey W. Lummis

Associate Supervisor: Dr Julia E. Morris

ABSTRACT

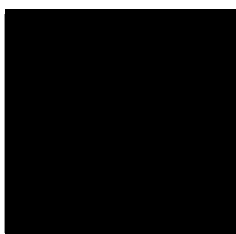
Visual Arts education is fundamental to an effective school curriculum for primary and secondary students. It provides students with opportunities for expression and personal growth, essential to a holistic education. Recently, in Perth, Western Australia (WA) several secondary Visual Arts educators expressed what they saw as a significant deficit in the outcomes of Making and Responding in Visual Arts, evidenced in their Year 7 students who had recently graduated from primary school. Consequently, this research investigated the extent of Year 7 students' prior Visual Arts experiences upon entry into secondary school.

The research engaged a qualitative research approach to gather rich narratives regarding Visual Arts experiences from both primary and secondary teachers. These teachers reflected on their own perceptions of Visual Arts education in contemporary Perth. This project provided new insights into the current state of Visual Arts education in the eastern suburbs of Perth. In particular, it identified what Visual Arts exposure the students have within primary education and, subsequently, implications for the secondary context. Although this is a relatively small study, the findings reinforce that there is a Visual Arts education deficit in local primary schools, particularly in the generalist classrooms investigated.

DECLARATION

1. *I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:*
 - i. *incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
 - ii. *contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or*
 - iii. *contain any defamatory material.*

Signature:



Date: 11/5/17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to firstly thank my supervisors for their assistance throughout this research project and for their support when things got tough. To my Principal Supervisor, Associate Professor Geoff Lummis, thank you for your support and for believing in the importance of my project and for sharing your bottomless pit of knowledge regarding Visual Arts education. To my Associate Supervisor Dr Julia Morris, your knowledge and expertise in research has been a huge help. You have been an invaluable support and always an encouraging voice when I needed it. To my Associate Supervisor Dr Lisa Paris on all your assistance early on in my research, I thank you for always believing in my abilities. Your endless encouragement over the years has helped me to succeed in my profession as a Visual Arts teacher. To Dr Jo McFarlane, thank you for all your encouraging conversations, which motivated me during the writers' block. You helped me a considerable amount along the way.

To the schools and the participants of this project. Thank you for giving up your time to tell me your stories. I hope that this research assists in building a growing awareness of the value of Visual Arts in all schools.

To my parents, David and Kaye, who instilled in me the will to succeed at the things I love. I am forever grateful for your support in all I do.

To my loving husband, Jeremy, for being my sounding board and allowing me to work so late into the night whilst also putting up with my heightened levels of stress when dealing with a career and studies.

Finally, to my son, Arlo, whose existence in utero late in the written stage of my research gave me the rocket fuel I needed to finish this project. There is nothing like the imminent arrival of your first born to motivate you!

GLOSSARY

ACARA – Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

AISWA – Association of Independent Schools in Western Australia.

Child-centred art education – “is an art education philosophy that emphasises the importance of students’ self-expression and the potentially distorting effect of adult interference.” (Brown, 2006, p. 9)

Collage – A collection, or combination of things often stuck or glued onto a surface.

Collagraph Printing - A collagraph is a collage of materials commonly glued to a printing plate, which can be a square of cardboard or wood. Once dry, it is covered in shellac or varnish so that acrylics can be rolled onto the surface for paper to be pressed to produce a print.

Cognition – action or faculty of knowing, perceiving, conceiving. (Oxford dictionary, 1979)

Creativity – is the ability to produce something new through imaginative skill, a richness of ideas and originality of thinking. (Merriam-Webster, 2013)

Diorama – “A model representing a scene with three-dimensional figures, either in miniature or as a large-scale museum exhibit.” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016)

Discipline based art education (DBAE) – “is an art education philosophy that structures the art curriculum around the study of aesthetics, art criticism, art history and studio art.” (Brown, 2006, p. 9)

Edicol Dyes – Non-toxic food colour dye. It takes on a powder form until it is mixed with water.

Elements of Art - Visual Arts terminology first introduced by Arthur Wesley

Dow. The common elements used in secondary schools in WA are: colour, line, shape, space, texture and value.

Fine motor skills – tasks that utilise the small muscles of the body. They can be developed through the use of smaller tools and materials in visual arts such as pencils and brushes.

Formalist-cognitive model – is an art education model where “...cognitive structures of art knowledge are identified in concepts, vocabularies, and elements of design seen in works of art.” (Efland, 1990, p. 16)

Gestalt – is predominantly a synthesis of many existing elements and concepts interrelated into a meaningful, new whole. (Kirchner, 2000)

Gross motor skills - are tasks that utilise the large muscles of the body. They can be developed in visual arts by moulding clay.

Innovation – is the introduction of something new, a new idea, method or device. (Merriam-Webster, 2013)

Instructables – Instructables is a web-based documentation platform where passionate people share what they do and how they do it, and learn from and collaborate with others.

Intaglio Printing – “Intaglio printing is the opposite of relief printing, in that the printing is done from ink that is below the surface of the plate. The design is cut, scratched, or etched into the printing surface or plate, which can be copper, zinc, aluminium, magnesium, plastics, or even coated paper.” (Britannica, 2016)

Life world - the lifeworld is more or less the "background" environment of competences, practices, and attitudes representable in terms of one's cognitive horizon. (Habermas, 1984)

Mimetic behaviourism – “is an art education philosophy that emphasises the inculcation of practical skills and correct habits of ordered learning.” (Brown, 2006, p. 9)

Multimodal – “an inter-disciplinary approach that understands communication and representation to be more than about language” (Bezemer, 2012, ¶2). It involves the understanding and use of a variety of modes such as visual and digital.

Multiple literacies – refer to specific skills and knowledge to read and interpret the text of the world and to successfully navigate its challenges. These can include visual, digital, emotional and multicultural literacies.

NAPLAN – National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy.

Pragmatic social-reconstruction model – is a Visual Arts educational model “suggested by themes connecting pragmatic aesthetics with the view that education is an instrument for social reconstruction.” (Efland, 1990, p. 14)

Psychoanalytic model – This is a model of arts education, “when the emotions of the artist are given form by the artistic process, they are made accessible to others, and thus, art can express ideas, feelings, and emotions in forms that can be publically shared.” (Efland, 1990, p. 16)

Visual arts – The visual expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, for example, the form of a painting or sculpture. (Oxford Dictionary, 2013)

Visual literacy – A different way of learning and seeing things, allowing students to interpret their ever-changing, highly visual world full of pictures, graphics and images of every kind. (Burmark, 2002)

Watercolour Painting – “a paint of which the liquid is a water dispersion of the binding material (as glue, casein, or gum)” (Merriam-Webster, 2016)

Zentangles – The creation of beautiful images using structured patterns. (Thomas & Roberts, 2016)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

As a secondary Visual Arts teacher involved with Year 7 students in the transition from primary schools, the researcher is concerned by personal anecdotal evidence that suggests that students are transitioning into classes with increasingly limited experiences in the Visual Arts. This perception was reinforced after conversations with a larger network of teachers in both secondary and tertiary institutions, who displayed similar concerns and questions regarding the status and value of Visual Arts education in primary schools in the eastern suburbs of Perth, WA, as this location reflects the lifeworld of the researcher. This shared concern motivated the researcher to conduct a small research study in the Catholic and Independent school sectors in the eastern suburbs of Perth, with the potential to extend the study to the public sector in the future.

It is perceived that students display limited knowledge in the areas of Visual Arts skills and responses and this is perhaps in part due to a decline in specialist Visual Arts education in the primary sector. In the absence of a specialist, the primary generalist is expected to take over the facilitation of Visual Arts experiences. It is suggested that the primary schools feeding into the secondary schools in the eastern suburbs of Perth operate in this way and the amount of rich Visual Arts exposure primary students receive is highly variable. Students who lack exposure to the subject specific language of Visual Arts often lack motivation and engagement when in a secondary Visual Arts classroom. If they use materials in a generalist classroom that are markedly different to those used in secondary Visual Arts, similar problems arise. It is perceived that rather than treating Visual Arts as a stand-alone subject with value, it is more often integrated in generalist primary classroom curriculum to compete with rising pressures associated with literacy and numeracy testing.

These perceptions motivated this Master of Education research project as a deeper exploration of the challenges in students' transition from primary to secondary Visual Arts education. In this introductory chapter the context of the research will be presented, positioning the educational climate from an Australian perspective and introducing some of the educational challenges being faced by both primary and lower secondary Visual Arts educators. In addition, insights will be offered with regard to the specific

situation in a handful of schools in the Catholic and Independent sectors in the eastern suburbs of Perth and the anecdotes that have formed the motivation for this research.

Why the Visual Arts are Important to Schools

In 2008, a \$2.1 million research project claimed Visual Arts helped improve students' literacy and numeracy (Evans, 2007). The researchers used computer-based exercises designed to mimic the strategies that students use when they engage in artistic activities. They found that Visual Arts focused students' attention, which improves cognition (Evans, 2007).

Visual Arts not only enhances students' dexterity and motor-skills, but also improves cognition by learning through free experimentation (Evans, 2007). Students who engage in Visual Arts are often more receptive to trying out new and different things: for example, those going through trauma in their life may find refuge in creating large charcoal drawings, or wire constructions. This freedom to make and express become an extension of their inner selves, and according to Efland (1990):

When the emotions of the artist are given form by the artistic process, they are made accessible to others, and thus, art can express ideas, feelings, and emotions in forms that can be publically shared. (p. 6)

The Visual Arts provide students with opportunities to manually construct their personal reality in a way that does not always require verbal explanation (Efland, 1990). A reporter identified Visual Arts teachers as some of the most important teachers in the school (Fussell, 2014). The Arts teaches creativity and innovation in a changing world where we need students to be able to 'think' rather than 'memorise', encouraging students to make mistakes and experiment (Fussell, 2014, para. 3). Students are curious by nature, so stimulating this is something Visual Arts can achieve through engagement in rich activities (Bamford, 2002). Often, primary teachers are too preoccupied with the pressures of achieving in literacy and numeracy education that they are unaware of the importance and benefit that Visual Arts can provide academically (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010). Students are encouraged to take risks and experiment with a variety of mediums, increasing the breadth of their learning experiences (Anderson, 1999). In WA, SCSA's (2016) requirements for the secondary English examination are that students need to have an understanding of visual symbols in order to deconstruct and make meaning from the elements of an image. The expectation is that students can interpret and identify concepts from visual prompts. This is the case for both English and Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), and these skills are taught in the Visual

Arts (SCSA, 2016). Pre-service teachers often have difficulties with critical response according to Geahigan (1999), with most courses resulting in a formal understanding of the elements and principles of design, rather than the complexities associated with interpreting the meanings within an image. Multi-literacy is the term used for exposing students to a range of ways to view their ever-changing world, and this encompasses the process of making meanings from visual texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

Justification of the Visual Arts

If students are to succeed in society they need to understand how to interpret and deconstruct the world around them, and this is done through the interpretation of visual imagery offered through Visual Arts education and exposure (Knight, 2010; McMaster, 2010). Educators are often confronted with the idea that engaging in Arts practice is important and valuable to an individual's overall development; however, the generalist teacher rarely understands why this is the case. Research over the years has suggested reasons for an education in the Arts to be favourable (Arnheim, 1969, 1974; Efland, 1990, 2007; Eisner, 1974, 2010; Gardner, 1983; Lowenfeld, 1987) and more recently, Armstrong and de Botton (2013) devised seven functions to assist us in our understanding of Visual Arts as an important aspect of life. They surmised, "art is a therapeutic medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves" (Armstrong & de Botton, 2013, p. 5). If students (K-12) are exposed to rich Visual Arts experiences through the duration of their compulsory schooling years they will develop an understanding of these seven functions; remembering, hope, sorrow, rebalancing, self-understanding, growth and appreciation (Armstrong & de Botton, 2013). Galton's (2008) research revealed evidence that practitioners who foster students' creative and emotional development have a positive impact on the behavioural development of the student, especially those who displayed problems with outbursts of anger and frustration. Students without school experiences in Visual Arts are being denied an integral part of their holistic education. Visual Arts provides the kind of education that balances and nurtures the whole person, which is what you would expect from an educational setting. Morris (2015) interviewed Heads of Arts departments in secondary educational settings, who were advocates for Visual Arts education, due to the subject's ability to promote: a sense of community, collaboration between students, as well as cultural sensitivity and awareness. Feldman (1982) discusses the importance of Visual Arts education through his research:

As art teachers we do not indoctrinate. But when we study the art of many lands and peoples, we expose our students to the expression of a wide range of human values and concerns. We sensitize students to the fact that values shape all human efforts, and that visual images can affect their personal value choices. All of them should be given the opportunity to see how art can express the highest aspirations of the human spirit. (p. 6)

Visual Arts in Primary Schools

It has been suggested that there is little research on the implementation of Visual Arts in Australian primary schools and that the pressures placed on primary generalists to focus on literacy and numeracy improvements has perhaps contributed to the inability to include it as an important part of the curriculum (Hudson, 2005). The expectations of NAPLAN (2015) are high in primary schools and the way many teachers approach the lead up to these standardised tests is through a rigorous program that is frequent and teacher centred. It has been suggested in research by Thompson and Harbaugh (2013), who found that teachers are spending less time on areas of their curriculum that are not covered in NAPLAN and adjusting their learning programs to suit the test. This has serious repercussions in terms of providing an authentic and engaging learning program.

Due to this, it is up to the specialist Visual Art teachers to inspire pre-service teachers that Visual Art education is enriching students' lives and teaches them that learning is a life-long process (Kowalchuk, 2000). These pressures motivated the researcher to explore the issues in the transition from primary to secondary Visual Arts education, and subsequently, to make recommendations to improve primary education in the Visual Arts.

The Significance of the Research

While there is a justification for the inclusion of visual arts at all levels of schooling, there are also the challenges for teachers at both primary and secondary levels. This research sought to illuminate these challenges based on interviews with primary teachers, both generalist and specialist. The interviews explored ideas such as:

- How students respond to their own work and the artwork of others in the class;
- Resourcing Visual Arts activities
- The duration of Visual Arts activities;
- How many times a week is set aside for this class;

- What time of day it is taught; and,
- Assessing the process and product of Visual Arts.

These types of questions constructed a picture of what visual arts learning looks like in a primary classroom. The teachers also identified how their ‘typical’ arts classroom activities linked to the curriculum, explaining whether the activities are specifically arts skills or response based helped to gain a broader understanding of what the students were exposed to. In response to the ideas of multi-arts and multi-literacies, primary teachers were asked about whether activities involving the arts were often integrated in the primary school classroom or if they built skills in Visual Arts as a stand-alone subject. In addition, teachers were asked about their own experiences. These teachers were asked about their qualifications and what exposure they had to Visual Arts over the course of their own education. They spoke about their confidence to teach Visual Arts and how they were preparing students to enter secondary school Visual Arts education. The teachers also spoke about their own perception of what Visual Arts experience their colleagues have, to determine whether their stories were representative of a school-wide perspective. All of these questions aimed to provide a contemporary view of how Visual Arts is taught in the primary school setting, and how primary teachers felt about the Visual Arts. Although only presenting the lived experiences of a small group of Perth teachers, this research provides impetus for a conversation about the experiences and resources provided to primary teachers (particularly generalists) so they can facilitate positive Visual Arts experiences for primary students.

The interviews with secondary Visual Arts specialists were conducted to construct a view of how the students’ transitioning into Year 7 coped with the new Visual Arts activities they were experiencing. The specialist teachers were asked about students’ general level of readiness to engage in Visual Arts materials when exposed in a contemporary secondary setting, in comparison to a few years ago. Reflecting on past student engagement exposed the nature of the problem in its current state. Engagement in this sense, described how students chose and manipulated materials provided to create artworks. Specific strengths and weaknesses in the Visual Arts were discussed, to determine where the deficits stood out as a whole. Questions were asked about both making and responding, to determine the breadth of exposure across the whole curriculum. The secondary Visual Arts specialists were also asked about their perceptions of how Visual Arts is taught in the primary classroom, and ideas about subject integration were deeply explored. Like with the primary teacher interviews, the

research raises relevant questions about the status of Visual Arts at a general level in WA schools. Importantly, teacher perceptions are an accumulation of broader professional and life experiences, and these were discussed.

Research Questions

This research was framed around eliciting the perceptions of both secondary Visual Arts specialists and primary teachers regarding the transition of students into Year 7 Visual Arts. The primary teachers, who were mostly generalist teachers, spoke about their experiences teaching Visual Arts. The secondary teachers were asked to convey their own personal narratives, based on their perceptions of the situation in the primary school setting. These narratives were informed from their own experiences of teaching Year 7 students in a visual arts context in their classroom. This project set out to determine the nature of the problem perceived by both parties. Accordingly, the research questions for this study were:

1. What do specialist Visual Arts teachers think of their Year 7 cohort's skill-base?
2. How do upper primary generalist teachers, teaching in Perth's eastern suburbs, perceive Visual Arts skills are taught in their schools?
 - What types of Visual Arts learning experiences are primary generalist teachers offering their students?
 - How frequent are Visual Arts learning experiences occurring; and,
 - What resources and support do the teachers receive from the school?

Research Methods: Emic or Etic approach to the research

This research sought to describe the transition of students from primary to secondary Visual Arts education, through the lived experiences of primary generalist and secondary specialist teachers. To elicit these lived experiences, a qualitative research method was used. Consequently, emic and etic approaches to research were investigated. The differences between both approaches are significant and important to discuss when determining the specific methods of a research project. Etic (or deductive) approaches to research begin with beliefs about a certain topic that frame the research questions from the outset. Emic research in contrast, relies on emerging theories that often begin with a surface exploration of a topic. Tracy (2013) describes it as:

- a) Begin with observing specific interactions;
- b) Conceptualise general patterns from these observations;

- c) Make tentative claims (that are then re-examined in the field); and,
- d) Draw conclusions that build theory. (p. 22)

An emic approach is appropriate to this particular project, as the researcher, a secondary Visual Arts specialist in the classroom, began with observation in her role as a teacher. A pattern was identified in the ability levels of Year 7 students arriving from primary schools that then had to be re-examined through fieldwork (interviews) in response to tentative claims. The teachers were interviewed between 2014 and 2015, and as such, the findings from the research reflect teachers' experiences during this time. A theory could then be drawn through the analysis of the data collected. During the data collection process, Ager and Loughry (2004) find that 'natives' of the culture being researched are the best participants. In this study, primary teachers were interviewed as well as secondary Visual Arts specialists to provide multiple viewpoints on the research topic; however, both groups had teachers with more than five years of experience in their field. It was important to note that the secondary Visual Arts specialist teachers commented on their own perception of student skills when they arrived in Year 7. Their professional opinion and exposure to students from a range of primary schools made their observations relevant to the study. The interviews with upper primary teachers were focused on in a different way, with the perceived deficiency queried initially and then explored further in an attempt to discover its source. This was best explored by asking about the kinds of Visual Arts activities students were exposed to, how frequently they were performed and the resources and support offered by the school.

Conducting this research from a bottom-up approach has offered greater insight into the nature of the situation facing Visual Arts education if it is not given greater importance in the school curriculum. The themes that emerged through the data collected and the obstacles perceived by the teachers, validated the researcher's classroom experiences teaching Visual Arts to secondary students over eight years. Through her own professional practice the researcher observed, after discussions with other specialists colleagues that there was a potential common deficit in the demonstration of Visual Arts skills. At the commencement of the research proposal, specific factors affecting students' transition into Year 7 were unclear, and these were illuminated through interviews with the two participant groups.

Structure of the Thesis

In this chapter the purpose of this research was introduced, and the context of visual arts education from primary to secondary school was outlined. The research questions and methods employed in this Masters study were also introduced.

The next chapter presents a detailed literature review of current research that has been conducted on the state of Visual Arts in an Australian context. This chapter also outlines challenges in the transition from primary to secondary school, as well as a justification for the inclusion of Visual Arts as a vehicle for empowering students.

Chapter three explains the research methods and processes. This chapter outlines the constructivist paradigm and qualitative method used in this study. It also introduces the interview questions used with the samples of primary and secondary teacher participants.

Chapter four presents the findings from the interviews with primary teachers, most of whom were generalist teachers. The findings are organised according to each interview question, with a diagram of main themes presented at the chapter's conclusion.

Chapter five presents the findings from the interviews with secondary teachers, all of whom were specialist visual arts teachers. The findings are organised according to each interview question, with a diagram of main themes presented at the chapter's conclusion.

Chapter six discusses the findings in relation to literature. This chapter presents the findings from the primary teachers first and then the secondary teachers, each organised by the broader key themes identified in chapters four and five. A comparison between the findings from each sample is then discussed.

Chapter seven presents the final conclusions and recommendations from this Masters study. This chapter also discusses the implications and significance of this research study.

CHAPTER TWO: SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

“In short, art teaches us how to be alive.” (Eisner, 1997, p. 281)

Introduction

This literature review focuses on Visual Arts in the primary and lower secondary contexts, and outlines how the Visual Arts assists emotional and cognitive development in students. Studies into the arts in education (Albers & Harste, 2007; Ewing, 2010) consider that the Arts learning area contributes to creativity and innovation across the community in many interrelated ways. The Visual Arts specifically develops creativity and innovation through the process of using materials to make art, as well as offering essential experiences that develop deeper interpersonal and intrapersonal levels of being (Arnheim, 1969, 1974; Efland, 1990, 2007; Eisner, 1974, 2010; Gardner, 1983; Lowenfeld, 1987).

A Historical Overview

Between 1860 and 1915, students in the United States of America and England participated in Visual Arts appreciation to teach them about beauty and morals. Students developed skills through a practical program that progressed through structured steps and differing levels of complexity. One example is the *Teachers Manual for Freehand Drawing* by Walter Smith, released in 1876. Smith's guide contained step-by-step drawing instructions designed for use in the classroom (Eisner, 1997). By the 1930s, America and England adopted the symbolic child-art as an education model; giving students less direction during lessons (Macdonald, 1970). Australia eventually followed this model, although it took them a little longer to implement. The Australian economy during the 1930s favoured the manufacturing industries and as a result, the focus was for a drawing based curriculum rather than the progressive child-art model (Boughton, 1989). By 1940, child-art became a popular method of facilitating Visual Arts education in Australia (Boughton, 1989). A group of Visual Arts educators called *The Progressives* believed Visual Arts education directed the natural development of the child. The teacher was seen as the facilitator of visual expression, providing the materials and motivation for students to create. Instead of instructing, the teacher took a passive role in the classroom with the idea that Visual Art was to be “caught rather than taught” (Eisner, 1997, pp. 50-51).

A more discipline-based Visual Arts approach was developed in the late 1970s, and by

the late 1980s this model had been established as an approach that justified the Visual Arts in a competitive WA curriculum (Lummis, Morris & Lock, 2016). The discipline-based model was implemented in order to increase the rigour of the subject, as Visual Arts was said to require ‘discipline’ to “build an increasingly developed understanding and enlightened appreciation of works of art” (Greer, 1987, p.227). Historically many educators regarded Visual Arts as ‘play’ and as a result, it needed to be redefined, in order to secure its place as an equal amongst the core subjects (e.g., English, Mathematics, Sciences and Social Sciences) (Richardson, 1978).

The promotion of discipline-based education in WA was a result of an American reform. The “excellence-in-education reform initiative intent upon proving this nation’s academic status” (Delacruz & Dunn, 1996, p. 71) took hold in America in the 1970s and was referred to as Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), as explained by Greer (1987). The result of its implementation in WA caused significant changes (Lummis, 1987), as the Visual Arts gained further credibility through the Beazley Report of 1984. Through this report, *The Practical and Creative Arts* was officially proposed to become part of the core learning areas in all schools (Beazley, 1984). The Western Australian curriculum was adapted to position the Visual Arts as an academically viable subject alongside other key learning areas. Senior school Visual Arts students completed an art theory examination to satisfy university entry requirements (Boughton, 1989). A National policy was introduced that divided Visual Arts into two learning outcomes: reflecting and responding to art, and art making (Boughton, 1989). This was further developed in 1987 to five outcomes within WA: studio, visual literacy, visual enquiry, art criticism and art history.

By the 1990s, the Western Australian Curriculum Framework (WACF) (Curriculum Council, 1998) named four outcomes through which the Arts were reinvented. Arts Ideas and Arts Skills and Processes were studio-based outcomes; Arts Responses addressed critical reflection, response and evaluation of artwork; and Arts in Society covered art history (Curriculum Council, 1998). Whilst the outcomes mirrored DBAE in many ways, this contemporary approach to Visual Arts education encouraged educators to experiment further. It allowed for the representation of imagery to be drawn from the popular, industrial and applied arts, and artwork from a wider variety of cultures (Delacruz & Dunn, 1996, p. 72).

Visual Arts Courses of Study were implemented for years 10-12 between 2005 and 2006 (Stephens, 2006) with two main areas of instruction: art making and art interpretation. Art making addressed both Arts Ideas and Arts Skills and Processes, whilst art interpretation mirrored the two outcomes Arts Responses and Arts in Society. Both content areas were designed to complement the WACF, which was still taught in the lower years of schooling. The most recent development in Visual Arts education has been the introduction of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2015). The most recent version of the curriculum is now fully published and is being implemented between 2016 and 2018. WA educators are implementing a WA-specific syllabus that aligns to the Australian Curriculum, but is contextualised for the State's needs (SCSA, 2016). Content descriptions are presented in two interrelated strands:

- (i) Making – learning about and using knowledge, techniques, skills and processes to explore arts practices and to make artworks.
- (ii) Responding – exploring, responding to, analysing and interpreting artworks. (ACARA, 2015, p. 3)

In addition, three cross-curriculum priorities are included in the new curriculum: Sustainability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, and Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia. As well as the three cross-curriculum priorities, seven general capabilities have been introduced. They will be developed and applied to the content descriptors of each subject. They are Literacy, Numeracy, ICT Capability, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Ethical understanding and Intercultural understanding (ACARA, 2015). They are said to promote a successful learner, confident and creative individual and active and informed citizens (ACARA, 2015). The aim of these inclusions was to assist in the awareness of an increasingly globalised society (ACARA, 2015). A key criticism of the curriculum is that the extra content of cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities could further crowd a curriculum within which teachers are already strained to deliver Visual Arts education (Dinham, 2007). The 'crowded curriculum' has been an ongoing debate in Australian education, particularly since the focus placed on literacy and numeracy testing in schools across Australia (Heyning, 2010).

The current implementation of the Australian Curriculum in The Arts (ACARA, 2015) mandates that teachers must cover a visual subject each year of primary school. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority of Western Australia have stated in the WA Curriculum framework (based on ACARA, 2015) that: "The syllabus is based on the

requirement that all students will study at least two of the five Arts subjects from pre-primary to Year 8. It is a requirement that students study a performance subject and a visual subject” (SCSA, 2016). Consequently, teachers from pre-primary (foundation) onwards are required to teach either media arts or visual arts every year until students finish Year 8. In the absence of a specialist teacher, the general primary school teacher must cover this content. An example of the curriculum required to be taught by a general primary teacher can be taken from The Year 5-6 learning area achievement standards, which state that students are to respond to artworks and that of others in different social, historical and cultural contexts (ACARA, 2015). The WA Curriculum (2016) states what a Year 6 student is supposed to be able to achieve:

In Year 6, students are inspired by observation and imagination reflecting on various artworks. They learn to apply their knowledge of the visual elements, selecting appropriate materials and technologies to create artworks that communicate ideas, beliefs, opinions or viewpoints. Students examine the messages expressed in artworks and consider how presentation will enhance meaning and audience interpretation. As they make and respond to artworks, students continue to use visual arts terminology to explain the effective use of elements and techniques. Students begin to consider how the artist uses symbolic meaning. They have the opportunity to examine factors that influence artworks from different social, cultural and historical times. (p. 20)

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure they either have a specialist teacher in place to deliver this curriculum, or to ensure their generalist teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach students Visual Arts. Research suggests that only 13% of all primary generalist teachers have the background required to effectively teach Visual Arts (Russell-Bowie, 2012). However, any subject outside the curriculum priorities of literacy and numeracy are often left out of learning programs entirely (Australian Primary Principal’s Association, 2007). Yet, mandated curriculum priorities remain and the phases of schooling are clear:

While every student will be immersed in a well-balanced curriculum there are different priorities for different phases of schooling. The relative emphasis varies across the phases of schooling and is as follows:

- Literacy and numeracy, integrated across the curriculum, are priority areas in the early years (typically Kindergarten-Year 2, and into Years 3-4)
- The emphasis moves to encompass all eight learning areas in the upper primary years (typically Years 5-6) and the first years of lower secondary schooling (typically Years 7-8). (SCSA, 2016)

Teachers are expected to take on the teaching of Visual Arts, as well as seven other learning areas. In addition, they are to maintain the priorities of teaching literacy and numeracy in the early years of primary schooling. Therefore, it is understandable that generalist primary teachers experience difficulties maintaining high teaching standards across each subject area, which primary principals describe as a crowded curriculum (APPA, 2007).

The National Review of Visual Arts Education

In the National Review of Visual Arts Education, Davis (2008) mentions a number of important messages emerging from a range of national reports, notably:

- Creativity is the new key economic driver for international competitiveness;
- The required skill set for the new workforce includes creativity as a fundamental;
- The Arts are the curriculum area that has creativity as core;
- The role of the Arts in education has been considered more tangential than central; and
- Current provisions for visual education appear not to match the direction of education, economic and social policy. (p. 8)

The Australia Council's commission research found that 85% of people agreed the Arts should be an important part of the education of every Australian child, and 86 per cent would feel more positive about the Arts if there were "better education and opportunities for kids in the arts" (Costantoura, 2001, p. 11). Visual Arts provide essential learning experiences for primary and secondary students at various stages of development, giving students the opportunity to reach their potential through the actualisation of their graphic, visual, spatial and kinaesthetic abilities (Arnheim, 1969, 1974; Efland, 1990, 2007; Eisner, 1974, 2010; Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1999; Lowenfeld, 1987). All of these key abilities are deemed essential to the development of problem solving, diverse cognitive skills, as well as important emotional and socio-cultural development (Costantoura, 2001; Efland, 2002; Gardner, 1984).

The Arts, and specifically the Visual Arts, contribute to the multiple intelligences as presented by (Gardner, 1983, 1993 & 1999), which are reinforced in the WA Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998), and supported by ACARA and SCSA's new Visual Arts curricula.

The Purpose of Visual Arts Education

Visual Arts is a fundamental cultural practice and its purpose ranges from our need to document our lives through aesthetics; to educational, social and economic benefits (Cutcher, 2014). Visual Arts education benefits students academically as well as the development of the child as a whole (Catterall, 2009; Davis, 2012; Eisner, 2011). In particular, students from more challenging backgrounds are seen to have higher graduation rates when attending a school where the Arts are valued and adequately funded (Cutcher, 2014). In an article published in early 2017, programs that provide cultural experiences to children are seen to produce adults “who are more likely to choose higher education, stay employed and enjoy good health” (Stone, 2017, para. 1). The purpose of Visual Arts is wide reaching and this study shows that students who are exposed become well-rounded, healthy individuals. Educational institutions in the 21st century value students who leave school more employable, healthier and are all round better citizens. Studies combined for the report ‘Imagine Nation’ (2017) confirm that the arts provide students with the skills to help shape their lives in a positive way (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2017). Lord Puttnam, Chair of the Cultural Learning Alliance, concludes that the report entitled ‘Imagine Nation’ combines new research which states that “Learning through culture and the arts leads to creative thinking, confidence and problem-solving – all skills which are prized by employers and which young people need” (as cited in Stone, 2017, para. 6).

Eisner (1972) reinforced the value of the Visual Arts in the classroom could be justified from two perspectives: the ‘contextualist’ and the ‘essentialist’. When viewing and interpreting the Art Making from a ‘contextualist’ viewpoint, it is primarily for the needs of the community in a functional sense; however, an ‘essentialist’ justification includes the unique visual and bodily kinaesthetic experiences not offered by other learning areas (Eisner, 1972). Students living in the eastern suburban areas in Perth have a range of emotional and self-efficacy needs, and the Visual Arts can play a very important part by allowing them access to the therapeutic process of art making (Efland, 1990). An authentic and meaningful Visual Arts education is said to positively influence a child’s education as a whole (Dinham, 2013).

A Contextual justification for the visual arts

The most common rationales for having the Visual Arts in the curriculum is the belief that related visuacy experiences (i.e., creating and critiquing visual phenomena) helps

primary and lower secondary students problem solve in unique ways: for example, by fostering creativity or divergent thinking by challenging them to think outside the boundaries (Costantoura, 2001; Davis, 2008; Eisner, 1972).

Today, students live in a complex life world (Habermas, 1984) that increasingly intersects with online technologies and requires a range of skills to be successful, as well as Gardner's (1983, 1993 & 1999) interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, which deal with the sociocultural and psychological levels of life. The Visual Arts provide an essential type of thinking to be taught within the school curriculum, one that cannot be replicated in other learning areas (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2010; Lowenfeld, 1987). Like all disciplines, the Visual Arts requires highly trained Visual Arts specialists that are pedagogically informed to engage students. According to Efland (2002) it must be realised that, "the ability to interpret this world is learned through the interpretation of [the arts], providing a foundation for intelligent, morally responsive actions" (p. 171).

An Essential Justification for Visual Arts

Visual Arts not only contributes to cognitive development, it also facilitates self-expression (inclusive of rich inter-psychological and intra-psychological neural constructions), which is key to emotional development (Costantoura, 2001; Davis, 2008; Efland, 2002; Gardner, 1983; Lowenfeld, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). The study of Visual Art enables students to reflect on sociocultural problems, as well as intrapersonal issues, intensifying their psychological development and capacities (Efland, 2002). Resilience is also built through Visual Arts activities, challenging students to engage in tasks designed to encourage and help others, improving both artistic skill levels and relationships with others (Macpherson, Hart, & Heaven, 2015).

Contextualist perspectives within a Year 7 setting

From a 'contextualist' viewpoint, the therapeutic approach (Efland, 1990) can support both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' appreciation of their culture and local life world in the low socioeconomic eastern suburbs. This approach also links to the cross-curriculum priorities of the Australian National Curriculum (ACARA, 2013). The Visual Arts can introduce students' to community role models: for example, Aboriginal artist Julie Dowling, who documents injustices felt by her people, particularly the stolen generation. She uses a mix of postmodern dot painting and European portraiture

techniques to communicate her message: for example, her work *The Nurse Maid-Biddy* (2005) depicts the way Aboriginal women were forced to raise the children of colonial families. Many Aboriginal students are able to view the work of people within their own culture and understand the importance of a shared narrative, assisting in the appreciation of their life world (Habermas, 1984).

Essentialist perspectives within a Year 7 setting

An 'essentialist' justification of Visual Arts sees the subject as providing something to all human beings that no other subject can provide (Eisner, 1972). It is this uniqueness that makes Visual Arts fundamental to the school curriculum. When teachers integrate Visual Arts education into their subject they often dilute the essential visual and bodily-kinaesthetic aesthetic experience for students and subsequently minimise the psychological and cognitive development of the individual (Arnheim, 1969; Costantoura, 2001; Davis, 2008; Dinham, 2007; Efland, 2002; Gardner, 1983).

In underscoring the essential dimension of the Visual Arts, Daniel (1974) cites Tolstoy, who believed the true abilities of Visual Arts were:

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling- that is the activity of art. (Tolstoy cited in Daniels, 1974, p. 42)

The above quote from Tolstoy is a description of the essentialist notion or belief on the communication of emotions, which Tolstoy divides into three stages: firstly, where the artist has an emotion; secondly where he or she creates a sign and presents it to another; and lastly, where that person feels the similar emotion (Daniels, 1974). This approach applies to the Visual Arts, and is achieved only through participating in the process of art making and responding. The ontological aspect of aesthetic experience in creating a sense of being is also elaborated in Heidegger's *Being in Time* (cited in Lummis, 2001). Hetland (2013) is also an advocate for the justification of Visual Arts education in schools having equal opportunity alongside other subjects. He believes that the Arts should not need justification on an instrumental basis and asserts:

Does experience in the arts change students' minds so that they can approach the world as an artist would? Students must be given the opportunity to think like artists, just as they should also be given the opportunity to approach the world mathematically, scientifically, historically and linguistically. The arts are another way of knowing the

world – as important as the other disciplines to our societal health.
(Hetland, 2013, p. 4)

Balancing the justifications

It is important to take both the ‘contextualist’ and ‘essentialist’ perspectives into consideration when deciding on the value of Visual Arts learning (Eisner, 1972). The proposed study seeks to identify whether students are missing out on valuable Visual Arts experiences in primary school, due to the tension between competing educational priorities from ACARA (2013) and NAPLAN (2013). From the ‘contextualist’ perspective, students benefit from engaging a range of Visual Arts skills and processes, as well as gaining greater understanding of their own community by responding to diverse artworks. From the ‘essentialist’ perspective, participating in the creative processes allows students to open an internal dialogue to process feelings and emotions that are integrated in both the final art product and the artist (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 1972; Gardner, 1983).

Holism and the Visual Arts

Visual Arts education is often portrayed as supporting the acquisition of broad skills, such as imagination, creativity and innovation (Albers & Harste, 2007; Ewing, 2010; O’Toole, cited in Ewing, 2010). These altruistic visions of Visual Arts are commonplace to many curriculum frameworks and policies (Eisner, 2010). In particular: “The common thread ... is that [people] are optimistic about the power of the imagination and believe this is a critical skill needed to deal with the challenges of the present century” (Choi & Piro, 2009, p. 29). The fostering of *originality* and *creativity* is so often presented in documents such as the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2015), implying Australia needs to educate the future generations in order to compete in a globalised world. Invariably, it is an instrumental or contextual justification for the Visual Arts linked to economic innovation, as discussed in the National Review of Visual Arts Education ‘First We See’ (2008), and specifically Costantoura (2001).

It is the responsibility of educators to provide a holistic learning experience for all students (ACARA, 2013). However, what students often learn in school is the recognition of facts, whereas the Visual Arts help students to perceive the world in a different way (Eisner, 1997): for example, when students push paint around a canvas they are physically experiencing the medium, mixing colours and creating patterns,

lines and shapes. The Visual Arts facilitate holistic learning, which means students perceive themselves in their environment in new ways. Exploration through Visual Arts materials accommodates the bodily-kinaesthetic skills associated with process, whilst encouraging experimental thought. Importantly, it also places personal ideas into a public form, allowing previously deeper psychological narratives to surface as expression (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 1997; Gardner, 1983; Lowenfeld, 1987). Fostering kinaesthetic-visual experiences is important (Costantoura, 2001) in preparing students for a complex 21st century. The National Review of Visual Arts Education (2006) states that students need to be developing a variety of ways to understand and make judgements about visual symbols in order to communicate effectively in our graphics based environment. When students participate in both verbal and written critical response work reflecting on artwork by both their peers and artists in society, they develop these skills. Freedman (2013) calls group discussions and communities such as these visual culture-learning communities (VCLCs). Students participate in-group discussions about artwork, providing many benefits to them socially. This in turn gives them a sense of belonging (Freedman, 2013). Visual texts work differently to written forms and students need to understand how they function:

Visual texts – just like written and spoken texts – are constructed using a range of conventions ... we are using a number of ‘languages’ to extract meaning from these conventions, for example, in our interactions with such elements as colour, angles, symbols and visual metaphors. (Atkins, 2002, p. 37)

Students can also bring their own personal experiences to how a work communicates, which is an integral part of the analysis process. They can communicate what they see in the image and how it speaks to them personally, whilst referencing the formal elements and principles (e.g., colour, line, texture, shape), which work together to create meaning (Flood, 2004). Our global workforce is competitive and students need to be creative and innovative contributors to our society in order to achieve success (The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008). The focus should be on educating the whole person and visual understandings place students at an advantage when it comes to communication and cultural discourse (Morris, 2015).

Transition from Primary to Secondary school for Year 7 students

It has been suggested that the transition that students experience between primary and secondary schooling can have significant effects on their social and emotional health and wellbeing. Students need to cope with building new peers groups, movement

between classrooms when they are used to remaining in the one stable room, forming relationships with a range of different teachers with different learning styles plus try to get used to a range of different rules and school organisation (Berlach, Coffey, & O'Neill, 2011). Students can display problems with attendance, academic performance and engagement with school in general as a result of transition to secondary school (Ashton, 2008; Dinham & Rowe, 2008). In a secondary Visual Arts classroom, some students may struggle with confidence when working with certain materials and engaging with Visual arts processes. This could be linked to the limited Visual Arts exposure students had in the primary environment (Coffey, Berlach, & O'Neill, 2011). There are a number of factors affecting students' transition and some theories that can be explored in relation to child development more broadly (multiple intelligences, phases of development), and visual arts specifically (personal experiences, therapeutic benefits, visuacy, telling stories and creativity).

Multiple intelligences

Howard Gardner (1983) believed that there are a number of integrated intelligences that cannot be measured or assessed through the use of standardised testing. In the 1980s, Gardner identified seven intelligences: bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, social or interpersonal, emotional or intrapersonal, logical- mathematical, linguistic and visual-spatial (Gardner, 1983). During the 1990s Gardner introduced naturalistic and existential intelligences (Gardner, 1999). For Gardner, emotional intelligence is one that nurtures understanding and empathy, the ability to be open to different ideas, recognising and tending to personal inner feelings, with an ability to communicate these effectively (Gardner, 1983). Importantly, the Visual Arts allows students to access and give form to their emotions, promoting empathy and a deeper understanding of others. In a social constructivist centred approach to education as exists in Australia, it is essential that the social and emotional health of all students is fundamental to learning in any learning area of notions of an integrated or cross curricula approaches advocated by ACARA (2015). In addition, students also learn the importance of persisting through frustration to acquire a skill (Stevens, 2000). This frustration frequently exists in other learning areas: for example, the fear of examinations or testing such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN, 2008). At its most intense level, frustration becomes fear associated with failure (Minarechova, 2012). However, in the Visual Arts classroom mistakes are often interpreted as risk taking and innovation, a normal part of the expressive process with an opportunity to develop a

self-psychoanalytic capacity and resilience (Efland, 2002; Gardner, 1984).

As artist Robert Motherwell recounted that, in starting a body of new work, “every painting was a mistake,” and the artwork he ended up with was “the process of correcting that mistake” (Motherwell cited in Hoffman-Davis, 2003. p. 14).

Phases of development in children

In the post WWII period, educators were reminded that children’s cognitive development occurs in stages (Piaget, 1950) and is sequenced in the following way:

- Sensorimotor (rapid cognitive growth phase);
- Preoperational (thinking in symbols);
- Concrete operational (beginning of logical thought); and finally
- Formal operational (occurs at 11 years old and continues to adulthood) (Piaget, 1950).

Lowenfeld also reinforced parallels with Piaget, but covering the graphic development of young children through to late adolescence; for example, the development of a child’s ‘schemata’ (units of knowledge) determines how one understands and responds to different situations. As children grow, they store their schema in their memory and apply them when appropriate, be it visually, linguistically or other modes.

As Piaget (1950) suggested, primary aged students have not yet built the ability to think about the world in an abstract way. Although this may be the case, with the appropriate ‘scaffolding’ and experience, students can learn to think abstractly in some educational areas (such as Visual Arts) and more concretely in others (Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2003; Morris, 2015; Piaget, 1950). Students are capable of learning through guidance and can achieve much more when given the appropriate structures (Ausubel, 1968). If students are given instructions through an individualised learning model they are able to achieve at a level beyond concrete and further into the formal operational stages of cognition (Sutherland, 1992).

Personal experiences

Visual Arts has the ability to cross both cultural and linguistic boundaries. Sometimes, the Visual Arts classroom is simply so very different from anywhere else in the school: for example, offering the students a place to sit, and watch others create and engage in conversations about skills, processes or what occurred at home the night before.

Students from all year groups interact and socialise in the art space. Some students will take risks with materials unaided; others need further guidance. All students eventually discover something new about the material, or themselves. This person-centred approach of Visual Arts education is the psychoanalytic-model (Efland, 1990). The Visual Arts are more than just skill enrichment used to improve cognition; it also promotes emotional growth (Efland, 1990; Gardner, 1983). As Efland (1990) summarises: “Art also has value for the individual creator because it enables personal growth to occur. For this reason the arts are therapeutic. Learning in this model is a process of personality integration” (p. 6).

In Visual Arts, students learn to stop, look and observe quietly, allowing them the opportunity to see things not only as a whole (the Gestalt), but also broken down into parts (Arnheim, 1969). Although a simple object being studied may appear ordinary, the Visual Arts gives them an enhanced value and importance, connected to a sense of being that can evoke a mood or a message through the use of brush strokes and colour (Efland, 1990). As Eisner (1997) explains: “Often, what we overlook or disregard, the mundane, the ordinary, becomes a source of inspiration to the artist’s eye” (p. 12). Once students see relationships between all these parts they develop a language about the artwork. Subsequently, the arts teach students that problems can have more than one solution and questions can have many answers (Eisner, 2002).

Therapeutic Benefits

Simply being exposed to Visual Art is not going to be enough to develop a more critical eye for the deeper messages and lessons visual art has to teach students. Armstrong and De Botton (2013) discuss the importance of recognising the extremes of idealisation and caricature in artwork throughout history. Artists trying to capture a moment or place in time that is beautiful and absent of anything distasteful use idealisation. In opposition, caricature highlights imperfections and uses them as the focal point for the artwork, in order to interrogate one’s lifeworld. These two extremes are often criticised for the fact that they borderline on the absurd, and are based on a version of reality that is either unachievable or overly simplified (Armstrong & De Botton, 2013). For many years, idealisation was an aspiration for artists. It wasn’t that they had no understanding of the problems faced by individuals on a day-to-day basis; it was this idea that exemplifying the good through art gave life to internal hope and longing. Valuable understandings can be watered down in ordinary or ‘real’ experiences: “Strategic exaggerations of what

is good can perform the critical function of distilling and concentrating the hope we need to chart a path through the difficulties in life” (Armstrong & De Botton, 2013, p. 22). Exposing students to artworks that deal with idealisation help them make critical emotional connections contributing to their understanding about the intentions of the art maker or to mirror longings within their own life, or the resilience that Efland (2002) explains.

Freeman (2014) talks about the value of the plenary experience of emotion through Visual Art. He believes that one can find meaning from exposure to an artwork simply because it is pleasurable to look at or because it meets a pre-existing emotional need within the individual. This experience; good or bad; could enhance the person’s emotions and put them into greater connection with their own needs, contributing to what Freeman (2014) describes as the “good life” (p. 133). He describes the need for an individual to connect with his/her own emotional condition in order to perceive emotions in the surrounding world (Gardner, 1983). “Without emotional engagement, how we feel about the world cannot take account of the emotions that we perceive in the world, leaving us in an intolerable state in which we are not at home in the world” (Freeman, 2014, p. 134). An individual’s emotional engagement with the world will help them feel comfortable with their place in the world. Not all works of art allow for this plenary experience of emotions; however, it is recognising those that do and understanding why they have had a particular effect that is important. When a deeper connection is made with an individual’s emotions balance can be achieved; especially when students learn about emotions by reflecting upon them when they engage with works of art.

In addition, exposure to a range of Visual Artworks stimulates psychological growth. Armstrong and De Botton (2013) describe the importance of engagement with works of art that would initially invoke discomfort or ill emotion. The process of becoming more comfortable with artworks of this nature makes us less fragile to:

... potentially threatening things. Art that starts by seeming alien to us is valuable because it presents us with ideas and attitudes that are not readily available in our familiar environments, and that we will need in order to accede to a full engagement with our humanity. (Armstrong & De Botton, 2013, p. 58)

Connecting to things that create discomfort also assist in this idea suggested by Freeman (2014) of being at home in our world. Visual Art provides growth in areas of need, especially as a child or adolescent. We are provoked when exposed to certain

works of art to feel more than our ordinary reality can sometimes allow. The Arts help us understand the importance of having hope, finding our place of comfort and growing emotionally in society.

Visuacy

Visuacy is a neologism that describes the ability for a student to create, process and critique visual phenomena (Davis, 2008). Students live in an ever-changing, highly visual world, rich in graphics and images. Students need to be able to interpret this world and 'Visuacy' describes how a student understands visual literacy (Burmark, 2002). Through Visual Arts making and responding, students develop unique skills and processes, and ways to interpret and engage with visual works. Eisner (1997) reinforces this essential contribution that Visual Arts education provides to negotiating the human experience. If there is only one justification for the arts, and Visual Arts in schools, it is that it is a unique and important developmental opportunity for marginalised or students at risk; to be heard and to be recognised (Eisner, 1997). Learning through the Visual Arts offers an alternative expressive voice in presenting a physical form, in contrast to a written description.

Eisner (1997) describes awakening of the senses through the Visual Arts, as a "callus remover" (p. 281). The Visual Arts in education removes the 'callus' and stimulate skin between nerve endings allowing them to be more sensitive and responsive, and enhancing bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1983). Arnheim (1969) describes this process as the intelligence of perception.

Telling stories through artworks

There are some aspects of life that can be expressed only as stories, songs, or images (Evans, 2007). In Visual Arts, students are able to tell stories through their artwork that may otherwise be difficult to communicate without the materials and processes they are exposed to in the Visual Arts classroom (Evans, 2007). The essential value is that visual expression facilitates a sense of common humanity, as the Visual Arts pleasures, instructs, comforts, and educates emotion (Evans, 2007). Visual story telling allows the student to be in touch with their emotions through their senses. Hetland and Winner (2004) say the Visual Arts involve students in the studio habits of cognition, where they have to engage with their own artwork and persist to its completion, encouraging commitment (cited in Evans, 2007; Eisner & Day, 2004). The creative process

encourages students to engage new levels of envision, which forces them to make an assumption about something they cannot see but can imagine (Eisner & Day, 2004; Evans, 2007). Visual Arts exercise the imagination, allowing students to enhance their intellectual capacity, as a metacognitive process and in creating a sense of aesthetic solidarity (Lummis, 2001). Hetland and Winner (cited in Eisner & Day, 2004) see this creative process accommodating a cognitive transfer from the Visual Arts to non-Arts areas.

Creativity

Torrance (1988) explains creativity as a natural human process, saying:

I tried to describe creative thinking as the process of sensing difficulties, problems, gaps in information, missing elements, something askew; making guesses and formulating hypotheses about these deficiencies, evaluating and testing these guesses and hypotheses; possibly revising and retesting them; and finally communicating the results. (Torrance cited in Shaughnessy, 1998, p. 442)

This description of creativity is relevant to a wide range of learning areas, but is consistently promoted when developing Visual Arts skills. Torrance (1988) explains the elements of a creative solution are teachable, but that creativity itself must be discovered through disciplines. Creativity and imagined situations of the personal narrative is part of the emotional aspect of being, and it is an important aspect of human intelligence (Gardner, 1983). Fogarty (2013) describes creativity as a necessary 21st Century skill and should be the ‘overriding mission’ for 21st Century learners. Fogarty believes that it should be a mandate for teachers to “instil the skills of creative thinking to foster a never-ending stream of innovations” (Fogarty, 2013, para. 4). Lindstrom (2006) explores creativity in children in terms of the learning that occurs whilst taking part in a creative process. Lindstrom believes that “provided the students are given the opportunity to constantly make new observations and reflect on what they have done,” (2006, p. 56) they can develop and adopt a variety of ways of looking at problems and how to solve them. Creativity is multi dimensional and difficult to measure objectively. Instead, it is best to look for “performance or process qualities” in children (Lindstrom, 2006,p.56), which can be observed during the artistic process and finished product.

Philosophies, Methodologies and Visual Arts Learning

Visual Arts pedagogy is based on the aesthetic theories of the twentieth century (Dewey, 1934; Efland, 1990; Eisner 1997; Lowenfeld, 1987). Today, approaches to

Visual Arts teaching theory outline rationales that see the arts as creativity, therapy, play, communication, and understanding (Lindstrom cited in Brown, 2006). Central to low socioeconomic school context is the child-centred repair approach offered by Efland's (1990) expressive-psychoanalytic model.

A triadic relationship

Eisner (1997) advocated a triadic relationship between child-centred, society-centred and subject-centred Visual Arts education. From a child-centred view, the teacher is expected to have an innate understanding of the way Visual Arts can be used to unlock the child's true creative potential (Eisner, 1997). From a society-centred perspective, the cultural heritage of the society in which the education is taking place has an impact on what is taught in the classroom. The school acts only as a cog in the mechanics of the broader society; if there is demand for a particular kind of skill, the school must conform to the needs of the community (Eisner, 1997). In a subject-centred approach, the qualities of Visual Arts as a subject of celebrated human achievement of both the mind and spirit are in focus. If the study of Visual Arts is not important as other learning areas it is because society deems it less worthy; however, if schools are required teach students understanding about life and culture in general, it is essential that visual thinking and visual cultural representations have some educational attention (Eisner, 1997).

Authentic and Mastery learning experiences in Visual Arts

Dinham (2013) reinforces that authentic arts experiences are only successful when regularly performed. If learning is sporadic or integrated, the experience becomes diluted, inauthentic and students will not develop the necessary skills to succeed in the 21st century. When students are 'doing' art, they are engaging with Visual Arts and skills and problem solving. Engaged students will built quickly up established skills, but for this to happen if this engagement has to occur at regular times in the curriculum. Students must "engage in the process of creating in order to gain the key benefits of arts education" (Dinham, 2013, p. 28). Skills and capabilities in Visual Arts are built in four different ways according to Bandura (2012). These mastery experiences begin with resilience, which is achieved by working through and persevering with difficult tasks. Those that remain in their comfort zone, achieving small success with little effort will not learn to cope and move forward when things become more difficult. Social modelling is important to show people that success can be achieved by persevering.

Social persuasion is the third, which talks about encouraging people to see themselves as successful, which increases their self-efficacy. Success is achieved through, “self-improvement” (Bandura, 2012, p. 13). The final experience is choice processes, which talk about the choices people make being directly related to how they feel as a person. Their beliefs and values can change their life path and depending on their experiences can put them in a different headspace.

Efland’s Typology of Methodologies

Efland (1990) developed methodologies that appropriately describe four different approaches to Visual Arts education and expression. The four models are: mimetic-behavioural, pragmatic social-reconstruction, formalist-cognitive, and psychoanalytic.

The mimetic-behavioural model

This model presents Visual Arts education as learning through imitation. The more closely an object is studied and reproduced exactly as it appears the more developed ones skill level becomes. Student behaviour is also monitored to mark progress. Reinforcement of certain methods of instruction produce increased attentiveness to a task. This suggests value and attitude changes in the student and further development in Visual Art (Efland, 1990).

The pragmatic social-reconstruction model

This model illustrates the teaching of Visual Art as a tool to understand the social problems of the time. Visual Arts is used to reconstruct societal problems by learning through one’s interaction with their environment. Students connect with their own social experiences through the creation of artworks. Depending on the way students may view the work of others; visual artworks could have a profound effect on their view of reality. Efland (1990) describes teacher instruction as organising learning around life-centred situations such as interior decorating or landscape gardening.

The formalist-cognitive model

This view of Visual Arts education celebrates the use of cognitive structures to understand, interpret and create artwork. Student understanding of Visual Arts is caught up in these structures. The most common approach to acquiring these skills is through experimentation and discovery. Efland (1990) describes this model as providing

students with the “requisite skills and conceptual content to make art and to understand the art of others ... it should also provide students with procedures that enable them to make disciplined inquiries into art” (p. 18).

The psychoanalytic model

This model of Visual Arts education is person-centred, where artwork is derived from within each individual and acts as a form of therapy. Visual Art education is instrumental to students expressing their emotions and feelings. It provides a form of escape and acts to communicate the student’s message to the world. Many artists have had Visual Arts affect them in this way: for example, Rothko was known by friends to throw himself entirely into an artwork, “his secret self not only came alive but transcended itself” (Breslin cited in Hamilton, 2012, p. 22). Rothko’s art was a reflection of his need to escape from his body and self, conveying what he thought, rather than what he saw according to Breslin (cited in Hamilton, 2012). Expression via this model encourages not only personal growth, but also cultural advance of a society. Visual Arts can highlight social and emotional problems within an individual and a society, which contributes to a greater understanding of cultural values and attitudes (Efland, 2002, p. 33). This methodology is closely linked to child-centred art education. Brown (2006) suggests:

Instead of directing students towards a narrowly defined goal, child-centred teachers encouraged children’s self-expression; self-expression being the cultivation of images that spring naturally and spontaneously from the child’s own imagination and psyche. (p. 60)

The Multimodality of the Human Brain

The emergence of ever more sophisticated imaging techniques, brain mapping methods and analytical strategies has the potential to revolutionize the concept of the brain atlas. Atlases can now combine data describing multiple aspects of brain structure or function at different scales from different subjects, yielding a truly integrative and comprehensive description of this organ. These ... approaches have ... important applications in health and disease. (Toga, Thompson, Mori, Amunts, & Zilles, 2011, para. 1)

In neuroscience, the concept of multimodality suggests the various modes of the human brain are connected. The atlases notion (Toga, et al., 2011) as an integrated neurological system is informed through polysensory information from the senses (Lummis, 1986; Paolino, 2013). Arnheim (1969) claimed that the intelligence of visual perception is an essential part of the cognitive process. Therefore, neurological modes, “rarely if ever,

occur alone” (Jewitt & Kress cited in Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 6). In particular, this insight from neuroscience underscores how the Visual Arts relates to the way humans perceive visual images and the way these images link into a broader socio-semiotic process to make meaning of an individual’s life world (Habermas, 1984). Visual Arts is genuinely multimodal (Bence, 2012) and students learn to engage with artworks through the use of modes such as photography, paint, watercolour and clay (Albers & Harste, 2007):

If we approach teaching from a multi-modal perspective, we are acknowledging that learning and meaning making can occur through a range of different modes (language, visual, spatial, digital and so on) (Greene cited in Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 15).

Within these modes, symbols are created and new meaning expressed (Greene cited in Albers & Harste, 2007).

Digital technology and neurological changes

Sprenger (2010) claims that by the time children reach school age their brains have changed as a result of overexposure to technology activities, such as: instant messaging, texting, playing on electronic tablets or game consoles. These activities cause increased stimulation of the reticular activating system (RAS), a portal through which information enters the brain. The RAS is the first filter in the brain and as a consequence of the digital revolution it has expanded, so children expect more information at a faster pace (Sprenger, 2010).

Today, teachers are challenged to prepare these students for the 21st century job opportunities (ACARA, 2012; Albers & Harste, 2007). In a commercial and visually saturated society, the aesthetic experience is becoming crowded out and more difficult to find (Cronk, 1996). Today, students are overwhelmed by dense and diverse stimuli, and their brains are processing at an increased rate (Sprenger, 2010). Visual Arts is, by nature, a subject that deals with externalising personal thoughts or ideas. Through the process of art making the students’ senses are stimulated, which in turn stimulates the RAS. If students’ brains are craving a more sensory experience to engage them in multimodal learning, Visual Arts skills and processes provide diverse experience to develop this RAS (Sprenger, 2010), as well as intelligence of visual perception in cognition (Arnheim, 1969).

Students growing up in a digital age are being exposed to multiple literacies (ACARA, 2012; Albers & Harste, 2007; Bence, 2012; Choi & Piro, 2009). Importantly, career success comes to those who can work in a range of digital platforms (Choi & Piro, 2009): for example, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, media literacy and cross-cultural expertise (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, cited in Choi & Piro, 2009). Through the use of these platforms, students are expected to communicate, collaborate and problem solve, using media in a creative way, as well as engaging interpersonal skills. Therefore, students come to the classroom having interacted with a variety of multimodal platforms (Faulkner, Oakley, & Pegrum, 2013; Nash & Mackey, 2007; Sprenger, 2010). Students experience their lifeworld not only through verbal and written modes, but also through complex digital and integrated visual literacies. The impact of digital technology on students is increasing at a rapid pace, with it being integrated into the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013) and the WA Curriculum (SCSA, 2016).

The WA Curriculum and globalisation

As schools are implementing Visual Arts in the WA Curriculum, they need to ensure their students are “sufficiently globalised and able to compete in a variety of developing sectors” (Choi & Piro, 2009, p. 28). Currently, Australia is a society of constant change and innovation as faster and more efficient ways of communicating and generating ideas become available: for example, the ability to create smart device apps was not present until the release of the Apple Store in 2008. Application creation is a new sector with students as young as seven years developing games and educational apps (Martinez, 2013). The National Education and the Arts describes the way in which Visual Arts are conducive of this digital age, noting:

Individuals’ creative skills and capacities are nurtured through a balanced and dynamic education rich in arts and cultural experiences. Every child deserves such an education, with carefully planned opportunities to learn in and through the arts. Education systems that value and develop individuals’ creative capacities help to position Australia as a vibrant nation in the global context. (Cultural Minister’s Council, 2005, p. 4)

It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that every student has the same opportunities to experience and engage in Visual Arts, and develop the rich multimodality that will allow them to participate successfully in the global age. The new era in economic growth in today’s society will require creative, flexible and

innovative thinkers and learners; which is exactly what Visual Arts education offers (Dinham, 2013; UNESCO, 2010).

The Loss of Specialised Visual Arts Education

Dinham (2007) claims that, in the Australian primary school context, traditional Visual Arts specialist teachers are diminishing and there is a greater dependency upon the generalist primary teacher. Unfortunately, contemporary primary generalist teachers often have limited Arts training, having to provide meaningful Visual Arts learning alongside the other key learning areas in a crowded curriculum (APPA, 2007). This is also occurring during a period of rigorous educational accountability associated with literacy and numeracy outcomes (NAPLAN, 2013). Funding cuts are reported across Australia, with research showing a decline in the number of public schools offering Visual Arts education and less time devoted to the Arts as a whole in school curriculum, according to reporter Colleen Ricci from *The Age* (March, 2015). As a result “fewer creative and cultural opportunities exist for children” (para. 1). Australian advocate for Visual Arts education, Professor Robyn Ewing (2015) claims that Visual Arts education needs to be considered just as important as literacy and numeracy education.

The impact of the Dawkins education reforms on pre-service teacher education

Dinham (2007) also claims that since the late 1980s (post-Dawkins period), ongoing reduced funding (i.e., as a percentage of Federal support) in the tertiary sector has resulted in a rationalisation of pre-service primary education courses. According to Ashenden (2012), John Dawkins, the former Federal Minister of Education is seen by many academics as being seen as detrimental to the integrity of the tertiary sector.

Ashenden (2012) cites Watson who:

[Blames the] Dawkins’s “reforms” ... for turning universities into “massive revenue-chasing enterprises,” academics into administrators, students into customers, and managers into royalty. Watson also holds Dawkins responsible for “the dumbing down of university education” (para. 2).

Since the early 21st century, the decline in tertiary expenditure from successive Federal governments has become pronounced (Ashenden, 2012), especially for the arts (Dinham, 2007). The gradual loss of Visual Arts units and Visual Arts electives availing in Bachelor of Education Primary courses at Edith Cowan University (ECU) reflect the decline of the Federal tertiary expenditure: for example, only a half core unit of Visual

Arts in Primary Education (AED2260) is now being offered to pre-service primary teachers (ECU Handbook, 2013). ECU is WA's largest pre-service teacher education provider, and therefore any reduction in pre-service Visual Arts learning and teaching will be culturally transferred onto the primary sector as a deficit capacity to develop both the *Essentialist* and *Contextual* justifications (Eisner, 1972) that are embedded in Australian Curriculum. It has been suggested that primary generalists are restricted by the changes in curriculum that have been made for economic gain (Codd, 2005) and that the increase in expectations in literacy and numeracy education leave little room for teachers to build confidence in their teaching of Visual Arts (Garvis, 2008; Hallam et al., 2008; Harker et al., 2003).

Visual arts specialist teacher phase out and the impact upon the tertiary sector

In 1995, the primary Visual Arts specialist-teacher education program was phased out in WA, leaving the implementation of the framework for Visual Arts in education to primary generalist teachers (Dinham, 2007). The situation has not improved since, and pre-service teacher education in the four tertiary training institutions handbooks describe a limited focus on Visual Arts as an important and essential part of the curriculum. The tertiary sector tends to follow the demands and policy setting of the major employer groups in the primary and secondary sectors. The Australian Primary Principal's Association highlight four major areas of human knowledge that are expected to take up a large proportion of teaching time: English literacy, Mathematics (including numeracy), History and Science (2007). The Visual Arts, physical education, cultural and language studies sit at the peripheral of primary school curriculum (Australian Primary Principal's Association, 2007). Universities are reluctant to spend money on training primary Visual Arts teachers if there is no demand. Across Australia, there is no standardised content for teaching Visual Arts education in any of the tertiary institutions. This inconsistency can lead to variable experiences available to pre-service teachers, lower self-efficacy and readiness overall (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, p. 5).

Currently in WA, primary teachers are trained at four institutions: Edith Cowan University, Curtin University, Notre Dame University and Murdoch University. The Bachelor of Education (Primary) at ECU allows for one unit called 'The Arts in Education' in the first year of study and another follow up unit, 'The Arts in Education 2' in the second year. Both units describe students engaging with teaching and learning through The Arts subjects in general, including: Drama, Music-Media, Visual Arts and

Dance in Primary Education (ECU, 2016). In the fourth year of study, there is an option in second semester to choose one of 29 elective units, of which the 'Visual Arts in Education' is one option. Although this appears to be a very narrow and limited exposure to Visual Arts education for primary generalist teachers, ECU dedicates the greatest amount of time to the arts in comparison to the other institutions. At Curtin University, students receive only one unit in the second year of study and it is a combined Visual and Media Arts unit. This only lasts one semester. They then have the option for one semester in third and fourth year to take an elective unit, Visual Arts being one of the choices (Curtin University, 2016). In the course description it is stated that the course has a strong focus on ICT, Mathematics and English (Curtin University, 2016). Notre Dame has subject specialisation throughout its four-year primary education course in units of: Mathematics, Science, English, History, Geography, Health and Physical Education (HPE) and Creative Arts. Visual Arts is not specified as a focus and is taught for a brief time along with the other arts subjects (University of Notre Dame, 2016).

In the absence of a strong tertiary pre-service Visual Arts program, generalist primary teachers may replace authentic experiences with simple craft activities with little educational substance (Duncum, 1999). They attempt to teach the skills; however they lack depth of knowledge and are inadequately prepared (Flockton & Crooks, 2008). This lack of understanding of the "theory behind their practice..." (Bracey, 2003, p. 186) prevents improvements and leads to ineffective skill building and versatility in the classroom.

Challenges for Primary Teachers in Visual Arts

Difficulties in primary schools when teaching Visual Arts

Primary schools are suffering a loss in Visual Arts specialists. Those that are in schools already find it difficult to gain status amongst peers, according to Miraglia (2008): ... art teachers have always faced difficulties in achieving significant other status, given scheduling constraints that often limit students' time in art. In schools lacking an art specialist, general classroom teachers are solely responsible for designing and delivering art curricula to elementary students (p. 53).

Primary generalist teachers have been reported as struggling daily when teaching the arts. Russell-Bowie identified the following challenges (2012):

1. Lack of personal experiences in The Arts;

2. Lack of priority for The Arts and not enough time in the school day; and,
3. Lack of preparation, resources and knowledge of the syllabus (p. 61).

This struggle can impede Visual Arts learning in the primary context, preventing students from having an authentic learning experience (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003). Instead, primary generalists resort to short, quick activities that take little preparation and avoid the need for cleaning up. Visual Arts lessons become more like “busy work (cutting and pasting, colouring in) and contribute little towards meeting contemporary goals” (Dinham, 2013, p. 17). Most teachers find it difficult to maintain the standards in their school when it comes to literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN, 2015), as they are expected to focus the majority of their curriculum on improvements in these areas whilst juggling the other learning areas (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009; SCSA, 2016). In addition, many schools are often governed by a ‘high stakes testing culture’, which prevents budgets from being stretched to accommodate Visual Arts (Bamford, 2009).

In a primary scenario, too often the Visual Arts are considered as an, ‘unnecessary frill’ in the curriculum because both public and political rhetoric emphasises the importance of standardised testing (Hallam, 2008). One other way primary generalist teachers are approaching Visual Arts education is to integrate the subject into the other learning areas. Problems with this method are identified by Hallam (2008) who suggests that this method only devalues Visual Arts, as it communicates to children that Visual Art is not important enough to be given the time that other subjects have. It becomes focused predominantly on product and is less about self-expression (Hallam, 2008). From a secondary teaching perspective, Visual Arts educators feel that although students often generate outcomes that can be displayed and assessed, it is still “activities that direct children through pre-determined processes to a teacher-prescribed and uniform outcome” (Brown, Macintyre, & Watkins, 2012, p. 112), which promotes manipulative skills rather than independent and creative learning. In short, primary generalist teachers are tired, finding that the possibility of anything extra in the curriculum daunting since “It’s too hard. The school day is so full, and everything has to be justified” (Laird, 2012, p. 48).

Resources

Primary generalist teachers can encounter challenges in resourcing the Visual Arts, both in terms of access to professional development (PD) opportunities as well as in locating the materials needed to facilitate Visual Arts lessons. Garvis and Pendergast (2010) report that when staff requested PD in Visual Arts they were often ignored and received little feedback. Primary Visual Arts specialist teachers often felt a sense of disconnect from their colleagues and were encouraged to participate in PD that had little to no focus on Arts curriculum (Burnaford, 2009). The National Society for Education in Art and Design (2015-16) found that in the UK, half of all art and design teachers' in the primary sector self-funded professional development in the arts, outside school hours. Overall, 25% of Art and Design teachers had attended museum or gallery training and an overwhelming 55% of primary subject coordinators rarely or never attended subject-specific professional development.

Teacher self-efficacy

Teachers' self-efficacy is determined by how confident they feel in their content knowledge when teaching a certain subject. The more a teacher believes in his/her abilities to succeed, the more positive the outlook for student education. Success is achieved when they feel supported in the curriculum they teach, and this in turn has benefits for student confidence (Lummis, Morris, & Paolino, 2014). Engagement in Visual Arts at tertiary level amongst pre-service teachers is directly related to how teachers approach Visual Arts education in their classroom. The more positive their experiences, the more effective they are at delivering Visual Arts education. As a result their classroom self-efficacy improves. This demonstrates that a balanced curriculum assists their practice personally and professionally, leading to greater classroom innovation (Bellisario & Donovan, 2012).

Lummis, Morris and Paolino (2014) conducted research on the engagement of pre-service teachers in Visual Arts education, concluding that amongst first-years, Visual Arts was the second least engaged with in terms of The Arts subjects overall. By fourth-year, this improved and it became the second most engaging Arts subject. This change in the pre-service teachers' perception indicates the importance of tertiary education on developing confidence and engagement in Visual Arts. If pre-service teachers have had limited understanding of how to implement effective Visual Arts learning into their classroom during tertiary study, they will often avoid teaching the subject altogether

(Lemon & Garvis, 2013). This avoidance is a constant cycle and reminder of how important it is for pre-service teachers to have positive Visual Arts experiences in their tertiary studies; so they are not tempted to eliminate Visual Arts from their classroom curriculum. Some researchers suggest that when generalist teachers have low confidence, they are also less likely to engage students in response tasks (Lemon & Garvis, 2013; Garvis, 2008). The arts experience cycle generated by Lummis and Morris (2014) illustrates this concept effectively:

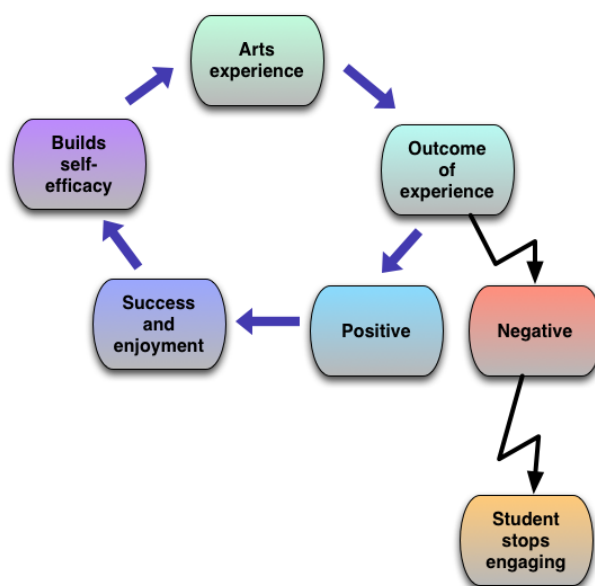


Figure 1. Pre-service teachers’ Arts experiences model conceptualised by Lummis and Morris (2014), adapted from Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory.

This concept is true for both pre-service teachers and students. This cycle is damaging to Visual Arts depending on the outcome of the experiences (Lummis & Morris, 2014). Their experiences hinge on their ability to build self-efficacy in the Arts (Bandura, 2012; Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Dinham, 2013). If teachers have encountered negative Visual Arts experiences in their personal life, this can also impact their pre-existing attitudes towards Visual Arts (Ashton, 1999; Bamford, 2002). These negative experiences directly affect the attitudes of the students they teach towards Visual Arts as well: “These past experiences have an impact of teacher self-efficacy. Affective states caused by emotional arousal may create negative beliefs for beginning teachers” (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, p. 8). It has also been reported that many teachers who believe Visual Arts is unnecessary in a classroom environment had low-self efficacy and negative experiences in the Arts due to limited pre-service teacher training (Laird, 2012).

Researchers such as Delello (2012) have looked at platforms such as *Pinterest* to assist them in building rich, positive Arts experiences. Pinterest is an online catalogue of ideas where people can go for information on certain topics. Due to it's easy to follow instructions and wide range of projects, it has become an instant resource where teachers can access lesson plans and ideas that often provide a high success rate when followed correctly and this assists in their sense of achievement.

Overcoming Challenges in the Visual Arts Classroom

Teacher Mentoring

Support structures such as mentoring programs have proven to be effective in improving attrition rates in beginning teachers. The idea behind such programs is to give the beginning teacher consistent access to experienced educators with pedagogical knowledge, building skills and confidence (Paris, 2008). Collegial support assists teachers in building their self-efficacy, as has been reported in a study by Garvis and Pendergast (2010). Participants “valued advice from other experienced teachers, which contributed to the sharing of resources, ideas, units of work and teaching strategies” (p.15). Oreck (2006) also conducted a study where teachers regularly had their students participate in Visual Arts activities with artists in the community to alleviate the pressures of standardised testing. This daily exposure to Visual Arts provided students with rich Visual Arts experiences and had benefits to the generalists teaching abilities as well. They were given more autonomy and selection for professional development opportunities and due to this, demonstrated more risk-taking, confident behaviour in the classroom, improving their confidence overall.

Summary

Regardless of the direction that is finally taken, policy makers, principals and teachers must be in agreement on their underlying beliefs regarding the education of young children, for beliefs come before policies or standards or practices (Brown, 2006, p. 6).

The literature review positions a need for WA education to move from viewing teaching in The Arts and Visual Arts as a contextual economic necessity, towards Visual Arts education model that is more inclusive of the essential aesthetic, psychological and socio-cultural dimension (Efland, 1990). The literature suggests there is a need for resourcing and facilitating authentic Visual Arts experiences for students in primary classrooms; particularly in generalist teacher classrooms where teacher self-efficacy and

limited experiences may impact on students' Visual Arts education (Dinham, 2013). The literature acknowledges the multimodal digital changes that students are negotiating and neurological demands it places on them. Importantly, the literature explains the importance of facilitating Visual Arts learning, as Visual Arts are based on the development of emotional intelligence (Gardner, 1983) and provide a vehicle for student expression to be witnessed publicly (Efland, 1990). Not only is this important for the development of the whole child, but it is a goal of Australian education: to develop confident and creative individuals (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008).

In the next Chapter I will outline the research methods and processes that were engaged in this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCESSES

Introduction

This chapter outlines the descriptive theory approach employed in this research, in which the preferred methodological paradigm was constructivism. Through this study, the researcher sought to verify the suggestion that there is a deficit of Visual Arts experiences for students in primary schools, which impacts their readiness to cope with Year 7 Visual Arts in secondary school. A constructivist methodology has its strengths in relation to exploring the perspectives of teachers and students in an authentic educational setting; however, it also has limitations. Both will be described in this chapter in detail.

The Constructivist Paradigm

A constructivist paradigm is one that provides a possible reality through the eyes of experts in a particular field. Looking at the research problem from the intrinsic perspectives of professional educators reveals a viewpoint that is constructed solely from experiential data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher is a part of the process of collecting the data and is usually observing interactions that are taking place or through conducting an interview for the study; the participant and researcher are mutually engaged as it is “undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective” (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). This paradigm is beneficial as it fills the participants with a sense of pride and importance for their particular field through their level of engagement in the research process. As they are placed in a position where they are comfortable enough to speak freely about their experiences, narratives emerge that are constructions of the participants’ own background and wealth of professional knowledge. Generally, constructivist research allows for a human connection that puts the reader in the position of the participants and to judge the research based on the principles undergoing examination (Hatch, 2002).

In a constructivist paradigm a key concept is to make the participant feel as though understandings can come to fruition through the mutual relationship between participant and researcher (Hatch, 2002). An appropriate method for this is semi-structured interviews, in which participants share their personal narratives. Stories are told to promote awareness of a particular situation within a field, and conclusions are drawn as the participants make sense of their own personal set of experiences. Elliott (2005)

asserts, “narrative can perhaps be understood as a device which facilitates empathy, since it provides a form of communication in which an individual can externalize his or her feelings and indicate which elements of those experiences are most significant” (p. 7). In the case of this research study, the most significant parts of the narrative were established through the use of semi-structured interviews, giving the participant enough freedom to express his/her thoughts candidly: however, working within a framework addressing the purpose of the research.

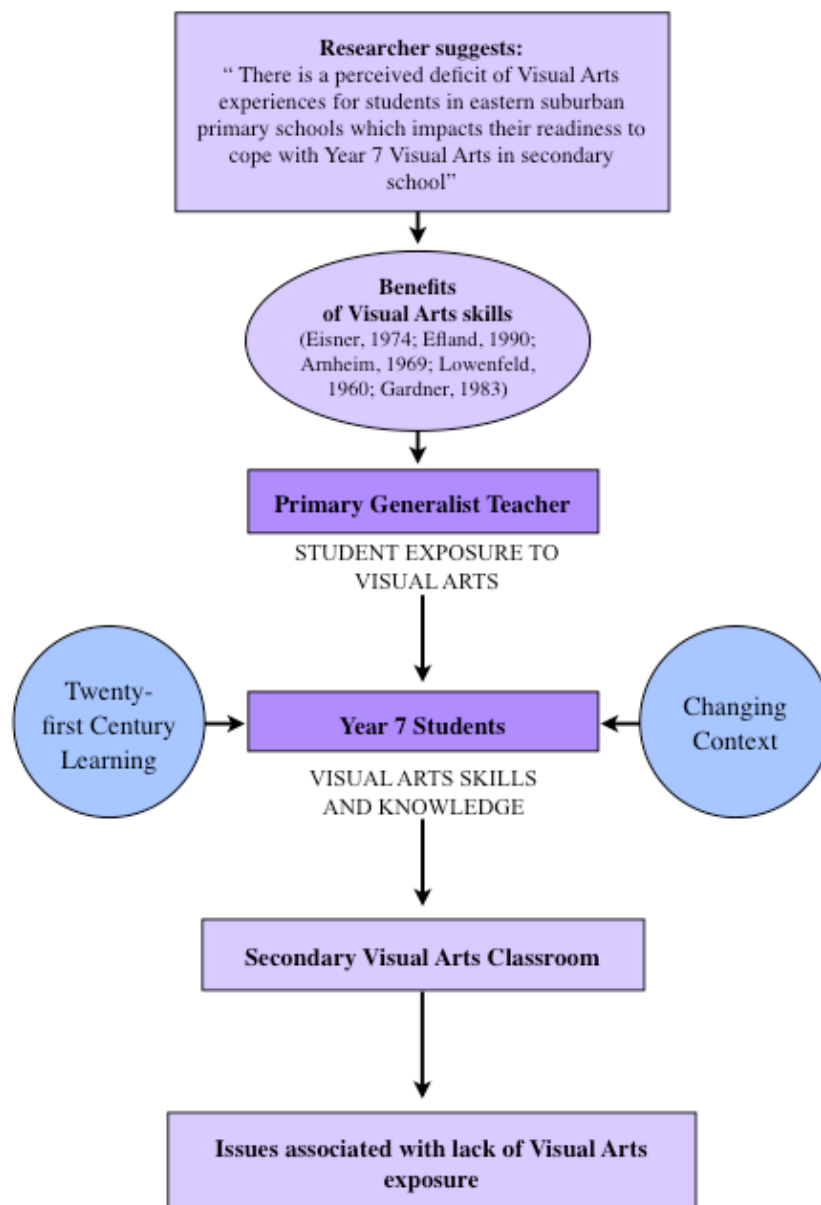


Figure 2. The Conceptual Framework.

Figure 2 describes how the researcher’s initial suggestion (hypothesis) is enacted in the context of students’ development in both primary and secondary Visual Arts. Firstly, the suggestion that there is a perceived deficit in Visual Arts in eastern suburban

primary schools is posed as a problem. Evidence from the literature suggests that there are many benefits to a quality Visual Arts education. These include the unique visual experiences offered by the subject, assistance in problem solving by fostering divergent thinking, improved cognitive development, facilitation of self-expression and assisting people from a therapeutic point of view (Arnheim, 1969; Efland, 1990; Eisner, 1974; Gardner, 1983; Lowenfeld, 1987). In the absence of a primary Visual Arts specialist, it is the primary generalist teacher's responsibility to fill this gap, as Visual Arts is a mandated subject within the WA curriculum. They are responsible for the amount of exposure to Visual Arts a child prior to the child entering Year 7, the first year of secondary school. Children are influenced by this primary Visual Arts exposure, as well as growing up in an ever-changing 21st century society. There is also a changing of curriculum context. For K-10, the WA Curriculum and Assessment Outline has replaced the WA Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998) and is currently being implemented between 2016 and 2018. Year 7 student development is affected by all of these influences, and they bring this lifeworld context to the secondary Visual Arts classroom. If Year 7 students have experienced limited exposure to Visual Arts in primary school it will have implications for their mandated Visual Arts experiences in Years 7 and 8 (prior to Visual Arts becoming an elective subject).

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research can be described as “research [that] seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it ... individuals act on the world based not on some supposed objective reality but on their perceptions of the realities that surround them” (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). Qualitative data are gathered and coded by the researcher. In other studies, the instruments often generate the data; however, in this style of research narratives are candidly captured within a structure of questions or interviews (Hatch, 2002). The researcher participates in the collection of information actively, which is described by Hymes (1982) as: “Our ability to learn ethnographically in an extension of what every human must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms, patterns of a way of life” (p. 29). In this case, the researcher is a Visual Art teacher, and therefore, the interview data could be transcribed and coded by the researcher to a deeper level of understanding that revealed commonalities between participants based on a shared understanding of the research topic.

When conducting research in an educational setting, a qualitative approach has its benefits. For this project, the researcher had a theory in mind, a perception that has come about through personal teaching experience in a Visual Arts classroom. This is not enough to determine if there is a larger story to tell, so approaching other educators to tell their own stories within a comfortable, non-judgemental environment provides a more honest insight into their specific situations. Telling stories is also something that comes naturally to many people. It is not contrived or presented in a way that poses 'right' or 'wrong' responses. It is personal and, in some cases, empowering (Elliott, 2012). Mishler (1986) describes an example of this:

Various attempts to restructure the interviewer-interviewee relationship, so as to empower respondents, are designed to encourage them to find and speak in their own 'voices'. It is not surprising that when the interview situation is opened up in this way, when the balance of power is shifted, respondents are likely to tell 'stories' (pp. 118-19).

Although this familiar way of obtaining data is effective in generating accurate accounts of a situation, there often needs to be a structure in place to maximise the relevance of the data and to also achieve thematic saturation around a given topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Narrative Research

Human stories have always been a way in which people have sought connectedness and solutions to problems. They allow for the resolve of situations that may at first seem incoherent and loose. Each story has a plot and this is how people begin to piece together the occurrences in their life, to make larger connections and eventually make sense of it all (Polkinghorne, 1995). This research is built on the model of narrative collection that attempts to connect 'strands of knowledge' that the teachers have pieced together over their years of experience. The other important part of narrative research is the in depth information one is able to take from the interview experience. Zellar (1995) talks about description in narrative research as paramount, almost as though the researcher is there, experiencing the sounds smells and sights, and "investing the data with the logic, meaning and interest provided by narration" (p. 76).

When people tell stories, they open themselves up to others in a way that allows them personal reflection on certain situations or events. Most people naturally tell stories, it helps them to order their thoughts and make sense of difficult or complicated situations.

Teachers individually and socially lead ‘storied lives’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), which make narrative research within educational settings appropriate for this project.

Hearing a storied description about a person’s movement through a life episode touches us in such a way as to evoke emotions such as sympathy, anger, or sadness. Narrative cognition gives us explanatory knowledge of why a person acted as he or she did; it makes another’s action, as well as our own, understandable. (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11)

The above personal account has less to do with the importance of narrative from a researcher’s perspective and more to do with the human necessity to share and feel valued through the telling of stories. Understanding another’s actions through storytelling is something that has been passed down from our ancestors, it is a large part of how we learn and make sense of the world around us.

Semi-structured Interviews

The structure of this particular research was developed through interviews, with semi-structured questions to keep the participant on track, however, not restricted enough for their responses to be interpreted as contrived. Hatch (2002) suggests:

Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organise their experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to the surface. (p. 91)

Interviewing can be a very difficult process in qualitative research; as it is essentially trying to decipher events or experiences from another person, who may be reluctant to speak candidly about certain points. Its success hinges on the willingness of the participant to address particular topics and the sensitivity of the researcher in asking the correct questions. Patton (1990) describes it as finding out “what is in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 278), and explains that the process must be approached with care. In this project, the researcher used semi-structured interviews as the participant was guided with questions to gain a deeper understanding about each participant’s experiences. The interviews were also designed to be formal and conducted outside the research scene (classroom environment) to ensure the participant was comfortable and free from distraction (Hatch, 2002). Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) describe the exact nature of the interviews conducted in this research:

You must be both structured and flexible at the same time. While it is critical to prepare for an interview with a list of planned questions to guide your talk, it is equally important to follow your informant's lead. Sometimes the best interviews come from a comment, a story, an artefact, or a phrase you couldn't have anticipated. (p. 233)

Limitations of semi-structured interviews

Although semi-structured interviews are an excellent way to gain a deeper understanding of a research problem, it does have its limitations. Interviews can take up a lot of the researcher's time, with very little data collected in comparison to the time outlaid. Due to the subjective nature of interviews, they can generate bias (Bell, 2010). The researcher can be biased in a few ways, particularly in views related to the research topic (Visual Arts). As a Visual Arts specialist, these views were what prompted the research in the first place: however, it must be stated that the, "human factor is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis" (Patton cited in Pyett, 2003, p. 1172). In addition, there is a level of complexity when dealing with human beings, as there can be an element of unpredictability associated with a participant's reasoning and meaning. Due to the uniqueness of participants' lived experiences, qualitative data do not 'match' like they may be expected to in a quantitative analysis; and therefore, reliable coding tools must be used to analyse all participant responses (Karami et al., 2006). There is also the notion that the participant can bias the data without his/her knowledge. Alvesson (2003) states: "Interviewees speak in accordance with norms of talk and interaction in a social situation. The research interview is thus better viewed as the scene for a social interaction rather than a simple tool for collection of data" (p. 169). This implies that it is difficult for the interviewees to take an unbiased stance on their own situations as their own internal attitudes or beliefs that are affected by a "cultural script" (Alvesson, 2003, p. 169), which influences how they 'should' respond in certain situations. This researcher was looking for an honest snapshot of the participants experiences as Visual Arts secondary specialists and generalist primary teachers intrinsic to her eastern suburban context, which meant that the participants' personal vignettes were essential to the overall research outcome. The research cannot be generalised to give an accurate representation of Visual Arts education in all WA schools, as a considerably larger study would be required. Instead, this project captures a small number of participants reflecting on their professional engagement in Visual Arts education, specifically concerning the research topic of students' transition from primary school to Year 7.

Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research

It is important to ensure that the data collected in research are trustworthy to report, meaning that they satisfy measures of credibility, dependability and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Credibility suggests that the research is valid, strong and relatable to real life situations. Dependability means it is coming from a reliable source in a similar way each time to maintain consistency. Transferability suggests that the research methods of this study can be replicated in other scenarios to yield data from similar contexts.

To ensure credibility and dependability, initial interviews with both a secondary and primary teacher were used as a pilot, where the researcher tested audio recording equipment and the participants' interpretations of the interview questions. Prompts were also tested to ensure that the meaning of the questions and the content being sought were consistent across the entire sample. During the pilot interview, both teachers showed clear understanding of the questions being asked, and so the interview scripts were unchanged for the remaining interviews. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Recording of interviews provides the researcher with an accurate account of what occurred, with the sounds of the voices and different emphasis on certain questions, which makes a far more dependable data source. The ability for the researcher to listen to the recording a number of times to check understanding improves the trustworthiness of analysis as the data are being explored verbatim (Hermanowicz, 2002).

Dependability

In terms of dependability (which can also be termed reliability) the data were collected in a similar way with all participants, making it consistent and fair. It is dependable due to the recording of each interview and the verbatim transcription process, which was then checked again by each participant. Dependability of a research project relates to how trustworthy the research process is, which can be difficult to measure due to the subjective nature of qualitative studies (Seale, 1999). Although this can sometimes present problems, Guba and Lincoln (1985) are of the opinion that, in terms of reliability of a qualitative study, it is the validity that needs to be checked. "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]" (p. 316).

Credibility

In terms of credibility (which can also be termed validity) this is measured using two factors; ‘external validity’ and ‘internal validity’. With regard to the sample size within which the research was conducted, it was inappropriate to claim external validity across a wider range of WA schools. To improve this generalisability of results, the same semi-structured research questions would have to be asked of a larger WA or Perth metropolitan sample inclusive of Government, Catholic and Independent schools. Internal validity was achieved through the structure of the interview questions. Both primary and secondary teachers spoke of their experiences with Visual Arts education within the context of the questions with little deviation. They were all asked the same questions making the results reliable and consistent.

Transferability

The transferability of this process could be difficult, in that the analysis model was mixed: however, the process was structured enough to be transferred to other scenarios. The study was essentially a pilot in a small area of Perth, with a small number of participants. Due to this, it can only be generalised between schools featuring similar contexts. During the interviews, the questions were asked directly and in the same way to each participant. This was to ensure consistency in the delivery of the questions. The researcher ensured that there were no interruptions and the participant was allowed to speak freely. If this had not occurred, it can be suggested the researcher was looking for particular responses, leading to biased results (Thompson, 1978).

Interpretive Analysis Model

The researcher has used an interpretive model of analysis and inclusive in part of both:

- a) Inductive; and,
- b) Typological analysis.

The interpretive analysis model has been used to make sense of the data. After each interview was conducted, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read thoroughly to identify an understanding of the data as a whole. Initial impressions made from the data were placed in tabular form using the interview questions as code headings, with labels to identify each individual participant’s recorded vignettes. The impressions recorded were considered carefully to ensure that the analysis included only data that were most significant to the purposes of the

research. The frequency of each emerging code was also recorded to establish whether the researcher was approaching thematic saturation. The whole data set was reviewed again and larger, overarching themes were found from the codes that emerged during the initial reading of the interviews. Further coding enabled the vignettes to form, which have been used to describe the overall narrative. The researcher reviewed the final analysis with the supervisors of the project, to ensure credible interpretations of the interviews were made, through the process of acting as ‘critical friends’ who could establish if bias was implicit in the analysis. According to Handal (1999), the use of critical friends in research “involves an obligation to analyse and criticise. Your friend ... will give you an honest and well-founded response” (p. 64). The analysis has been summarised in the following chapters, with a detailed description explaining how the concluding themes emerged.

In part, this process can also be deemed inductive, from the viewpoint of identifying frames of analysis from the research data themselves. These frames were already established in the form of interview questions. This structure allowed for the codes to be tied initially to the questions asked (i.e., frames) and then the thematic domains were established from this point onwards. Themes were discovered after re-reading the data more carefully and after looking at the patterns of frequency that were emerging. Relationships were made during the analysis of the data and this is how conclusions were drawn. Importantly, new codes emerged that were directly associated with the research questions.

From a typological point of view, patterns, relationships and themes were discovered by looking at the data within the structure of the research questions. Typological relationships emerged when looking at the frequency of codes, which then allowed for a more detailed analysis and discovery of overarching themes. Due to the fact that the researcher had a structure to the interview process and topics being addressed, this process made it easy to identify themes that were justifiable. Through this analysis, data excerpts supporting the research questions have been presented as vignettes.

Research Process

The following describes the specific research processes undertaken for this project. It describes details about the: preliminary fieldwork; selecting the sample; specifics regarding the research questions, and the problems encountered (e.g., the difficulties the

researcher faced in terms of time management). Limits to the research and bias are also addressed.

Ethics

Prior to engaging the sample, ethics approval was gained from the Catholic Education office to conduct research on their associated school sites. In addition, Independent schools were approached individually for the same approval.

Initially, Department of Education schools were also included in the sample. However, the process of obtaining ethics approval through the WA Department of Education, and the time taken for approval to be granted jeopardised the timeline of the research study and ability to collect data. Therefore, after a number of meaningful attempts to seek formal approval, permission was not achieved. Instead, the research study commenced with approval from the WA Catholic Education office and Australian Independent Schools of WA (AISWA), and the Department of Education schools were never approached; however, it is the researcher's intention to navigate the Department of Education in future studies. This smaller, purposive sample size provided enough theoretical saturation to present findings that, although limited to time restraints, were taken from a dependable interview group.

Selecting the sample

Purposive sampling is a method often used in qualitative research to determine the study participants. In this case, the research poses a specific question that was determined by interviewing a certain group of professionals about their own experiences. The research outcomes were guided from the perspectives of specific professionals, in this case, primary teachers and secondary visual arts specialists. The schools selected were from Catholic and Independent sectors. Schools were randomly selected from the eastern suburbs from the Perth metropolitan area, and data were collected from those schools that contacted the researcher within the allocated time period. The majority of primary schools selected had an ICSEA value below 1100, as it was anticipated that they were less likely to have a specialist Visual Arts teacher onsite.

All of the participating schools had teachers who met the following criteria:

- Secondary Teachers:
 - The Visual Arts teacher has been practicing for at least four years: Previous research (Paris, 1999, 2008) has demonstrated graduate teachers do not have established strategies for teaching Visual Arts and therefore, cannot serve as a reflection of teaching methods adopted and perceptions of different cohorts of Year 7 students' achievement over several years of teaching; and,
 - The Visual Arts teacher has recent Year 7 teaching experience (in the previous four years) to assure that the perceptions of Year 7 Visual Arts achievement levels are recent and comparable.
- Primary Teachers:
 - The primary teachers selected only included upper primary Years 5-6 to ensure that the Visual Arts instruction practice discussed focused on recent cohorts of students that were entering secondary school.

Participating Primary Schools

Six primary schools participated in the sample and this contributed to the transferability of results with like-schools. Having six primary schools from a similar suburban area also provided an opportunity for comparison between the primary and secondary Visual Arts teaching experiences.

All of the participating schools were given pseudonym names to protect their identities. Table 1 details the characteristics of each of the primary schools.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participating Primary Schools

School	Jacaranda Springs Primary	Correa Primary School	Banksia Grove Primary	South Hovea Primary	Tree View Primary	Everglade Primary
Teacher	Sarah	Eugene	Pauline	Harriet	Amanda	David
Catholic or Independent	Catholic	Independent	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic

ICSEA Value	>1100	1000-1100	1000-1100	1000-1100	1000-1100	1000-1100
Art Specialist in the School?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

Participating Secondary Schools

Secondary schools were selected from across the Catholic and Independent sectors. Five schools participated and, again, having schools from a similar location contributed to the transferability of results with like-schools. It also provided an opportunity for comparison of Year 7 secondary Visual Arts experiences to the primary school teachers' experiences of Visual Arts with their students. The participating schools underscore the intrinsic context of the researcher, as well as the limit of the project.

Table 2. Characteristics of Participating Secondary Schools

School	Salmon Gum Secondary College	Cassowary Secondary College	Lake Leeuwin Catholic College	Collerson Secondary College	Terrigal Heights College	Wallis Way Secondary College
Teacher	Seline	Diana	Susan	Casey	Summer	Liam
Catholic or Independent	Independent	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic
ICSEA Value	< 1000	1000-1100	1000-1100	1000-1100	1000-1100	1000-1100

Limitations of the Sample and Research Processes

The interviews were a challenge to collect due to the time restrictions already placed on the project. Time-poor school Principals and teachers found it difficult to prioritise signing paperwork for approval to participate in the research, hampering the progress of the research study. This is not an uncommon finding, as other researchers have found accommodating research within busy school schedules a challenge:

Curriculum assessments and pressures such as NAPLAN (ACARA, 2008) needed to be accommodated. Term Three was chosen as, at the time (2009) it was the term with the least disruptions, however, timetabling constraints (e.g., sports carnivals, assessments, excursions), were still prominent. (Paolino, 2012, p. 271)

One limitation of the sample of teachers interviewed is that they did not fully represent the WA school population, as Department of Education schools were not approached. Secondary schools were approached first and research approval took some time. Most secondary school teacher interviews needed to take place during the school day due to teachers' after school commitments. This proved a difficult process as the researcher also works in a school full time. This restricted the days and times that the interviews could take place; however, each time an interview was scheduled it was at a convenient time for the participant. This ensured each participant was relaxed and willing to engage with the interview process. This situation was replicated in the primary schools. Each participant was interviewed in an area where they felt most comfortable. Some elected to remain in the classroom, others preferred an administrative interview room. As the participant had control of the interview location, the researcher felt that the participants were more relaxed and engaged, and all of the interview questions were answered to the satisfaction of the researcher.

Interview Questions

The following semi-structured questions were asked, which focused on the teaching experiences of each of the two groups of participants: primary teachers and secondary Visual Arts specialists.

Primary Teachers

The primary teachers who had recently taught Years 5 – 6 were interviewed using the following questions as a guide:

- What qualifications or relevant Visual Arts experiences do you have?
- What Visual Arts learning experiences do you provide your students?
- Do students learn specific Visual Arts skills?
- Do students respond to their own artwork and the artwork of others?
- How often do you provide Visual Arts activities?
- How long do Visual Arts activities last?
- What time of the day do you teach Visual Arts?
- What do you assess in Visual Arts?
- What resources and support do you receive from your school?

Secondary Visual Arts Teachers

The secondary Visual Arts specialists were asked interview questions that were broken

down into sections: firstly asking about the teachers' experiences with Year 7 students, as well as their perceptions of the primary school context; and a final question asked about the benefits of studying Visual Arts at the secondary school level. The structure of the secondary Visual Arts specialist interviews is:

A) When Year 7 students enter your Visual Arts classroom from primary school, what do you perceive about the students':

- General level of readiness to engage Visual Arts activities when compared to students from several years ago?
- Specific strengths or weaknesses within Visual Arts?
- Readiness to engage Visual Arts language?
- Readiness to engage a range of traditional studio materials?
- Specific studio strengths and/or weaknesses?

B) From your professional perception of the primary school context, what do you perceive the:

- Status of Visual Arts to be in the primary school?
- Generalist teachers' capacity to prepare primary students for Year 7 Visual Arts?
- Status of the primary Visual Art specialist teachers?

C) What do you perceive students gain from studying the Visual Arts in secondary school?

Summary

This section has provided an overview of the methodologies used during the data collection phase. This includes the reason behind the descriptive theory approach employed in this research coupled with a constructivist paradigm. The limitations to this approach were also discussed, as well as giving a detailed description of how the sample was selected and the semi-structured interview questions devised for participants. The next section will present the findings from interviews with the primary teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRIMARY TEACHERS FINDINGS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the methods used in this study were carefully explained and the interview process outlined clearly. This chapter will present the findings that emerged from the analysis of interviews with six different primary teachers across six primary school visits. Of all the schools, two of the six had a visual arts specialist, which automatically made generalist teachers in those schools feel less pressured to deliver arts skills and response tasks in their own classrooms. One of the five schools was in a more affluent suburb with an ICSEA value of 1190 – the others were in less affluent areas, with the lowest a value of 972. The school with the highest ICSEA value had a Visual Arts specialist; however, the generalist teacher's budget was very small, resulting in the majority of arts activities taking place during the allocated specialist art lesson. Of the six schools, five were Catholic, and therefore this negates the generalisability of the research findings. In addition, the Catholic schools have one-hour per week set aside for religious education. This is a mandatory class that all Catholic schools must conform to, taking more time out of the curriculum and making it more challenging to fit in other subjects on top of literacy and numeracy education.

The presentation of research findings echoes the interview questions that were initially used to code the data.

Q1: What qualifications or relevant visual arts experiences do you have?

In terms of educational experience, some ($n = 2$) teachers reflected on art classes they took in secondary school, and one or two electives they may have taken during tertiary studies, whilst completing their teaching qualification. All had a Bachelor of Primary Education, with some describing the art electives they participated in. These electives over the four-year degree were different, depending on the institution they studied at. These units were not consistent through their degrees, they were 'one-off' electives that two teachers chose to do and four did not experience any. David, a dedicated upper primary teacher, reflected on his own qualifications with relation to visual arts:

Nothing I suppose, but at university we did the normal arts courses I guess. I didn't do any electives, only core units. It's been awhile ... I remember doing some kind of pottery thing? Like, we made a vase. Mine was horrible. We had a huge art folio ... we had to collect art samples when we went on prac. I think. That was massive. Oh, also, I made a kite, that's what I can remember.

David's memory of the electives was nebulous. Unable to pinpoint exact learning experiences from this elective, he had trouble replicating these projects in his classroom. His lecturers suggested he learn from others; collect samples from teaching practicum and perhaps adjusting these programs to suit the needs of his own students.

Amanda reflected on what she was able to remember from her own education in Visual Arts:

I like art, but didn't get to do any arts electives really. I did an intense course on all the arts over two weeks, whereas English and Maths was over two semesters. I utilise my secondary school experience when it comes to art.

Amanda completed a Graduate Diploma in Primary Education and was only introduced to Visual Arts in particular over a two-week period during her entire degree; however, literacy and numeracy were clearly given more time.

Through the interviews, it was determined that other educational experience outside of university were attained as a result of the teachers' intrinsic motivation to teach Visual Arts. Teachers commented that they researched projects and tasks on the Internet, as this was the most available resource to them. Although to them this was an effective approach, their knowledge using these resources appeared narrow and limited. Sarah mentioned skills such as "colouring in" as part of the activities in which students participated during their allocated art time. Eugene, a teacher interested in the manual arts due to his experiences outside education, had the resources to take his students to the workshop at their school to create useful items from wood. He had no formal training in The Arts; however, he did woodwork in his own time. Harriet had a Bachelor of Primary Education. She asserted: "*We have no art specialist at our school so I take the class myself*". When 'left to their own devices' and without any kind of formal training in Visual Arts education, teachers seemed to return back to the skills that they know well and feel comfortable with.

Q2: What visual arts learning experiences do you provide your students?

The interviews revealed that when formal Visual Arts educational experiences are limited and there are few knowledgeable others from which to learn, teachers resort to what they know or try to copy simple projects for a manageable and fast solution to teaching Visual Arts. In a crowded curriculum, and with more teachers placed under

pressure due to literacy and numeracy testing, the teachers interviewed expressed their concerns regarding the limited experiences they were able to provide their students within a generalist classroom environment. The interviews revealed that teachers (n = 4) implemented a more craft-based approach, mostly from their own experiences or projects found quickly on the Internet. Two teachers attempted to implement Visual Arts based skills and activities based on curriculum documents into their generalist classroom environment. Pauline was enthusiastic about her job and passionate about teaching the students about Visual Arts. When asked about the learning experiences she provided students with she responded:

Oh gosh, I am on the Internet for all sorts of things! Pinterest is a really great source. I have very limited resources so I have coloured paper, paint, and glue. I don't have much else so I have to try and be creative with what I have got there. I do things like weaving and sewing so I try and look up an activity about that ...

Both David and Sarah also mentioned Pinterest, a social networking web application for members to find ideas for certain projects. It is a quick, easy to use tool that usually provides step-by-step instructions to many craft and art based activities. Of all the teachers, Sarah integrated her student learning in Visual Arts with other curriculum Learning Areas, basing her projects on term themes that ran through all the subject areas rather than planning for the teaching of a specific skill. She commented that she had “... *nothing specifically planned. We do crafty things on Mother's day or Father's day and maybe Christmas but other than that it's mainly just general poster work – it's more integrated.*” David was similar in the way his activities were based on craft ideas he found on Pinterest. He described a portrait activity that really inspired him to teach Visual Arts. He wasn't confident he had the skills required to succeed at the activity; however, the step-by-step instructions he found were easy to follow and boasted fast and effective results:

I guess its just that I have never liked art – It's about getting my kids to see it as something that is quite good and try a little bit more. We do quite a bit now. We have a two-hour art block each fortnight. We try and mix the media up – paint, crayons – We don't really do making things, like making models? It's more just drawing, painting ...

Paint and crayons were mentioned as “*mixing the media up*”; however, no other materials were used regularly in the classroom other than pencils and textas. David also mentioned that using paint was a ‘*rarity*’ as the process for cleaning up was arduous. In terms of using materials, Eugene spoke solely about integrating Visual Arts activities into workshop projects due to his aptitude as a woodwork teacher. David explained:

I still do some artwork when I take the students for manual arts. Often it has some artwork in it, for example we made a serving tray. On the base of the tray the students needed to draw and then paint a picture.

He described the students' engagement with the project as high, inspiring him to continue with the activities. He said: "*I can show them certain aspects of drawing from my own experience*", referring to his own interest in drawing and design before he embarked on a university course in primary school education.

The focus on two-dimensional (2D) work was common throughout all interviews. Four teachers described their activities as involving 2D work only and one teacher, Eugene, predominantly integrated Visual Arts with manual arts. Amanda was one of two teachers (her and Harriet) who strove for more Visual Arts based activities requiring a higher level of thinking and application of skill. Her role in the school at one point was to be in charge of The Arts budget. Her school had a small amount of additional money that could be spread around to different teachers who presented inventive ideas for art projects that could be enjoyed by the school community. This mainly involved mural work to add artistic touches to certain areas of the school. Amanda started talking about the way her role had changed in her school: "*I am now in charge of literacy in my school – so art is not really taught in my classroom. I lack a lot of technical knowledge.*" In spite of this, the project was ongoing:

On a Friday, we split the Year 5/6 groups up and we do a program called 'Artscape' which is used to beautify the school. Students make murals and they mosaic pots and benches in areas around the school. I generally prefer to call these projects more 'crafty' as I lack the technical skills. We have no art specialist, so I like to Google things before I teach them.

This theme of 'Googling' projects in an attempt to take the complication out of Visual Arts for generalist teachers was recurring in the data. The primary generalist teachers felt they lacked the prior knowledge; skills and confidence to embark on a particular project independently and sought resources to assist them. This particular program had Year 5 and Year 6 students out of the classroom working on both 2D and 3D (three-dimensional) work. They did not have a specialist Visual Arts teacher; however, the school used a budget for group-based activities to improve the overall aesthetics of the school grounds. In the interview with Harriet, she discussed using art materials such as watercolour, illustration and collage to teach specific Visual Arts skills. She talked about trying to follow the new curriculum plans; however, found it "*challenging*":

I try to introduce the students to a range of materials. They have been looking at children's illustrators. Each week we have a different illustrator to focus on. They then try their hand at replicating this technique through a variety of media. For example – some sketching, watercolour and collage – we do lots of collage. We did a unit on watercolour last term, which was something I found on the Internet – a step-by-step guide. We worked on brushstrokes, brush care, loading the brush etc. This lasted a good term.

These activities were integrated with literacy work, where the students were exposed to the artwork associated with a particular narrative. They participated in Visual Arts activities where they replicated that style, discussing their use of skills and techniques. Not only did the students learn about watercolour, they were taught how to use Visual Arts tools and how to care for them appropriately.

Q3: Do students learn specific Visual Arts skills?

From the viewpoint of specific skill building in Visual Arts, four teachers perceived that their students acquired reasonable experience using some techniques. The other teachers (n = 2) did not feel confident enough that the students were learning much at all in the generalist classroom environment. Since this question was left quite open, the researcher allowed participants to speak fluidly about what they perceived were Visual Arts skills. Sarah was clear that her students did not learn skills in her classroom that she would class as Visual Arts: *“Definitely not. I would not teach them a skill necessarily.”* Interestingly, Amanda responded, that although the students were not doing any arts skills in the classroom currently, previous teachers she team taught with had produced an array of work with the students such as, *“zentangles, printmaking, collagraph work, intaglio printing, landscapes and self portraits”*; however, she hastened to add *“ You don’t need a degree to do these things though.”*

Pauline tried to expose her students to colour theory at the beginning of the year, as this was an area she felt was lacking: *“ At the beginning of the year they had no clue as to what colour made what colour, they didn’t know how to mix colours”*. She also stated:

I am not as familiar as I should be with the actual curriculum because I do so many other different things I am not just focused on art and unfortunately, no one really checks up on me. The other teacher [I team teach with] just wants something pretty to hang on the walls so she is fine with whatever I do! I try to link in with what they are doing but the motivation is definitely high in the art generally so they are quite happy to do whatever I present to them.

This attempt at integrating Visual Arts with other subjects in the curriculum was a common theme, also discussed by all of the other primary generalist teachers at some point during the interviews. The idea that Visual Arts was part of the curriculum for creating classroom decoration suggested that the final product was most valued at primary school, rather than the artistic process of doing ‘art for art’s sake’. Pauline took note of how intrigued the students were when they were presented with Visual Arts materials; they were easily engaged and pleased to try out new things. Harriet had her students working on specific techniques related to activities integrated with her literacy program:

My students learn things like watercolour techniques, drawing techniques – using block shapes and block colour. When they sketch we usually do it step by step with shapes and rub out the lines as they go ... Visual Arts is usually integrated but I also focus on specific skills. Specific in that they are doing work that integrates with their literacy – but I treat it as a stand-alone art lesson.

Like many primary school generalist teachers, Harriet worked with themes each term in her class. Often, the Visual Arts activities were centred around these themes, however, students were still using Visual Arts skills such as drawing, painting and digital design (illustrating picture books on the computer as well) in their basic form. David worked in a similar fashion, integrating Visual Arts skills into his numeracy program:

Maybe they do a little bit of 3D perspective. We use rulers and stuff. 3D landscapes with rulers to do with Math. To do with concept though, I don’t really have much knowledge of it anyway so I try to give them what I can.

The students also complete reflections, which David mentioned on a number of occasions as beneficial to students, as they could learn to articulate what they had achieved in the art projects and how they would improve next time. (Q4 instead of 3) In terms of specific skills, David’s class predominantly focused on drawing and, occasionally, painting. Eugene’s class used pencils with his students to “draw lightly and later darken it.” He also mentioned that “students are encouraged to draw 3D”, as he considered himself to have reasonable drawing skills, giving him the ability to demonstrate to his students.

Q4: Do students respond to their own artwork and the artwork of others?

Arts Responses, was an outcome that all participants were confident that it was covered in their classroom. Although most of what the students responded too was informal and less guided, they still made comments about how they viewed their own work. Six

teachers spoke of students responding to their own artwork during in-class discussion, however, only two teachers described responding to the artwork of others (professional artists or peers). Sarah, who admitted she did not cover Visual Arts in the classroom at all due to the fact that they had a specialist at the school, commented on how her students responded in her classroom:

I have done this in the past. I have definitely had all the students put their work on the desk and said 'let's go round and look at others work'. But I think that comes naturally though where kids say 'oh I like yours' so yeah, I guess I would say they respond in that way.

Although she did not do any explicit teaching of Visual Arts skills, her students talked about each other's' successes and where they could further improve. Sarah mentioned that they did this with a variety of work – generally dioramas or model making. Pauline tried to present the work of professional artists for the students to comment on. They often shared opinions during class discussions; however, she felt as though they had some difficulty with the task:

I find though that some artworks perhaps you need a level of maturity you have to say well we are going to look at this in a mature way. They are able to comment. They will tend to comment on each other's work ... I would like to do more of the artists and different artworks and stuff, because they obviously have not had enough of that. Art is a subject that they think if we run out of time we will just skip it.

It is clear that they viewed artwork by professionals and discussed the work as a class and amongst themselves; however, they did not speak about artwork at great length, as Pauline believed the students were not at a level of maturity to be able to cope or understand certain technical concepts, such as the elements of art. Pauline believed she did not have the skills to sustain such discussions either, making it difficult to expose the students to such tasks. Discussions were narrative based and emphasised observation skills rather than interpretation. David was excited by the idea of having students respond to each other's work: *"They definitely respond to their own. We don't do others as much ... but that's a great idea! Get them to reflect on others."*

Eugene had his students speak to him individually about their work rather than complete response tasks or participate in class discussions reflecting on project outcomes. He felt that this was all that was needed to gauge whether a student had enjoyed the process and achieved to the level that was expected. Harriet spoke about her students responding to their artwork in a more formal way: *"They definitely respond to their own. They have to do self-reflections on their own art and come up with what they want to say about their artwork. Particularly with their illustrations for their book."* She provided them with a

template and they worked through it individually, reflecting on the successes and improvements for their project, should they repeat the same process again. Amanda had a less formal approach to Arts Responses and felt that the students had difficulty with certain aspects of this process as well:

Students do not respond formally, it is more informal. Mosaics were difficult, a tiring process ... once they see it together they are impressed! The classroom teacher got them to respond to some artwork ... they are not very good at commenting in depth or in a positive way about others work. They don't really know how to it.

Q5: How often do you provide Visual Arts activities?

The frequency at which Visual Arts activities were provided in the classroom was another important factor influencing how much exposure the students had to regular Visual Arts activities. The teachers found it difficult to allocate time to Visual Arts due to the busy curriculum schedules already in place in their schools. Two teachers felt little urgency to deliver Visual Arts skills due to the fact that they had a specialist Visual Arts teacher at their school. The other teachers (n = 4) tried to make time; however, the majority of Visual Arts activities were integrated with other classroom activities, and generally centred on literacy or numeracy. Sarah, whose class participated in Visual Arts with a specialist teacher, explained:

They get the art specialist 40 minutes a week. With me, during their T&E [technology and enterprise] they get 40 minutes as well – so maybe twice a week perhaps? We don't have many resources in the classroom – better quality things are very difficult to have because they are expensive.

Sarah felt that due to Technology and Enterprise (T&E) being a predominantly practical subject, this classified as Visual Arts time. T&E classes in primary school consist of students using their imagination to encourage problem-solving skills through model making, craft and design technology. Issues with resources was a common theme that emerged more frequently later in the interviews; however, Sarah felt that this was a contributor to why she did not feel the need to explicitly teach Visual Arts skills in her generalist classroom setting. Eugene was the other participant who had the benefit of a Visual Arts specialist taking his class once a week for an hour-long session. He acknowledged: “*Even though they have art, I find students love to draw and I do let this happen as I also use Art when we are involved in manual*”. Other than the odd manual art lesson when he found time, Eugene felt that the drawing activities that students were

allowed to do informally in class equated to meeting Visual Arts time in his programming.

Pauline tried to give her students adequate time to participate in Visual Arts activities and mentioned that they have one-and-a-quarter hours per week:

You do need a substantial portion of time - a lot is preparation. I used to have my DOTT [duties other than teaching] time at the beginning of the day so I could set up, but it's hard because I have limited resources. I try to bring it all in though and get it ready.

Both Harriet and Amanda communicated that they had roughly an hour a week dedicated to Visual Arts. David's response was a little less confident and he asked:

"What do you actually class as Visual Arts?" He then went on to describe:

When we are doing literacy and integrated stuff, like inquiry based learning, we sort of draw what you think the character might look like. I would probably say though that one activity during the week would be arts based. We try to tie it in with stuff that we are doing, so for example, we did a project that was called 'all about me', our art activity was where we talked about different emotions and they created a little portrait. We tend to go on Pinterest to find things that are cool to do.

In David's classroom (similar to the other participants), the majority of activities that took place were integrated with other activities as a justification for spending time on Visual Arts. Due to this, David was not even clear about what was classified as Visual Arts content, as he described every creative activity as being 'Arts'. The students still had the opportunity to engage in creative activities once a week, however the length of each activity was short.

Q6: How long do Visual Arts activities last?

Aside from frequency, the other factor influencing how valued Visual Arts education is at primary school level is the length of time teachers dedicate to Visual Arts, including how long each project lasts. Of all the participants, five teachers indicated that the projects the students worked on took either one or two sessions. One teacher had students working on a term-long project (approximately 10 weeks), which was part of Amanda's 'Artscape' program. Pauline mentioned: "*I try to get them to finish things over two sessions*". David also had problems finishing a particular project within the one session and described: "*Things we choose are always bigger than we plan. You can pretty much guarantee that it will take the next fortnight to finish off [because we only have one session per week]*." Eugene did not appear to give a time limit to his students

when they were drawing in class. He allowed them the time to complete work, and acknowledged that some tasks took longer than others. He spoke about Visual Arts as quite informal, and this dedicated time seemed more like a ‘free’ drawing activity rather than guided activities. Harriet ensured that her students worked quickly and the work was completed within the allocated time frame each week: *“They finish a piece each week to show a technique – one illustrator per week. Five week projects.”* Interestingly, Amanda spoke about the ‘Artscape’ project as one hour a week for the combined Year 5/6 group for the whole of Term 3. This suggested that the time was not there every term of the school year, as other activities often got in the way. Term 4 was a difficult term, and this time was often used to practice for end of year Presentation Evening performances.

Q7: What time of day do you teach Visual Arts?

When asked about the time of day each teacher allocated for Visual Arts, most teachers (n = 5) mentioned Friday afternoon and only one teacher had a morning time slot.

Pauline had dedicated morning time, and even still she discussed:

Art is often the last thing on a Friday afternoon, but at this school they have all the blocks of literacy and numeracy. Often they are in the morning – but I share with another teacher and she changes on a Thursday, so I managed to get the morning. They are fresh! Art is often an afterthought though. It’s never going to be very thought provoking last thing of the day.

Sarah asserted: *“Friday afternoons, always in the afternoon – never in the morning. Anything creative we do comes after lunch.”* When asked why this was the case, often the reasons were due to literacy and numeracy allocated to morning time slots. According to the teachers, allocating mornings to literacy and numeracy was a whole school expectation and not worth questioning. According to two participants (Sonja and Pauline), younger students could not cope with literacy and numeracy education in the afternoons, as they were not as sharp or attentive. It was far easier to allocate time for a more relaxing Visual Arts activities when winding down in the afternoon, before students left for the day.

Q8: What do you assess in Visual Art?

Assessment in Visual Arts was varied amongst participants. Two teachers did not demonstrate an understanding of what skills and knowledge are supposed to be assessed

in Visual Arts. The remaining four teachers indicated more understanding about assessment requirements; however, they were hesitant in some of their responses. Sarah was not specific and seemed unsure as to what she should be assessing. In her opinion, the students did Visual Arts with the specialist, so what her students completed in the classroom was more T&E based. Sarah explained:

We don't really assess anything in particular. Usually, like with the dioramas I will test the construction or their designs and I would assess that. I am looking more at the effort put into it – can I see that the result is what they were trying to portray in the first place – that sort of thing.

Amanda was also unsure. There were no specific assessment criteria used in the 'Artscape' project; therefore, she wasn't aware any assessment was necessary. She said: "It is mainly about getting together as a group and a team". Pauline was a little more forthcoming about the kinds of things she looked for in student artwork, in terms of assessment. Although she continued to mention that her skills were limited and she felt as though she needed to do more, she at least maintained that it held importance in her curriculum and it was definitely something she put some thought into:

If we are looking at symmetry, for example, I make sure that their colours show symmetry, their folds etc. Then I obviously do, 'Do I think it's creative?' which is very subjective I feel but I am the only one looking, so that's okay I guess. Then I mark participation. I probably should do more with actually linking it to the curriculum. There are just too many different things that I have to do!

David appeared to have more knowledge of the language of the curriculum, discussing from his viewpoint what the students worked on and how he assessed certain aspects of their creative process. This was based on activities he devised from online researching and social media sites such as Pinterest:

We report on skills and processes – blending, contrast etc., how well they manage their materials and their responses, and their ideas as well. We would do society the least I think. We did it once I think last year where we looked at a painting and talked about the message it portrays, but that's about it.

David was able to mention the four outcomes from the Western Australian Curriculum Framework, which demonstrated he had some knowledge of the areas of focus when taking Visual Arts in his classroom. Eugene commented that he focussed on "creative skills and their application" and if student artwork was original or not. He did not go into any further detail about specific assessment strategies; most of it was anecdotal during the lesson and based predominantly on the finished product. He described that he would demonstrate a drawing skill and then let the students go and try the skill for

themselves, and certain students would do better than others. Harriet also focused on the creativity the students brought to the project. She didn't elaborate on what made one student work more creative than another, it was more "*subjective*" in her eyes. She also believed that the attitude and effort students brought to the task was important.

Q9: What resources and support do the teachers receive from the school?

In terms of the school support that teachers have in order to teach Visual Arts in their classroom, two teachers believed that they received what they needed if they asked for it. The remaining teachers (n = 4) didn't believe they had specific support for Visual Arts in the classroom. Support in a school comes in many forms. Part of this was resourcing, this is often expensive and difficult without the knowledge about certain materials. The other types of support required were mostly about professional development [PD] and whether the school would be willing to fund these learning experiences for generalist teachers. Sarah had the benefit of a Visual Arts specialist taking her class once a week. As a result of this, she did not have access to many supplies in her classroom and did not believe it was necessary to ask:

We don't really have much. In lots of schools its limited to your paint, brushes and paper. Very limited. The standard stuff though is your edicol dyes, felt tipped pens and paper – that's what we have. I wasn't ever doing clay or modelling or what you are supposed to do. In terms of being professionally developed on it I mean, we have nothing. I would never go to an art PD if I weren't an Art specialist. I go to the maths and literacy ones.

Sarah appeared to evade all responsibility for delivering Visual Arts in her classroom due to the fact that the school already had a Visual Arts specialist. Despite this, Sarah admitted that she did not use materials for projects that she knew she was probably "*supposed to do*". Even though this was the case, she maintained that the importance was placed on literacy and numeracy and that this was what was expected of her.

Pauline had supplies she purchased from her small classroom budget and also provided many of the art supplies herself. The Visual Arts activity depended on what supplies she was able to bring in or purchase. Due to the fact that the teacher she team taught with was unsupportive of Visual Arts, only a small part of her budget could be used on supplies:

Each class teacher has a budget that is quite small. Not much is put into buying art supplies. I mean, all they ever buy is paper and paint and unfortunately they don't buy red, yellow and blue, [so] that you can make every colour from [them]; they tend to buy ten greens and ten oranges so I am running around the school looking for red and I can't find it! All I want is black, white and those three and you can make

everything! They waste a lot of money on that.

Pauline made the assumption that the majority of teachers in her school were unaware of the money wasted buying unnecessary art supplies. She felt that, with a small budget, money needed to be spent wisely. It seemed that spending wisely on art supplies was clearly not a priority at Pauline's school. Harriet, who claimed her school was not very supportive of spending money on Visual Arts supplies, had a similar, albeit more negative view on the situation:

The support we have in our school is very limited. We have no specialist, no art room or supply cupboard. Resources are very poorly across the whole primary school. A budget for primary stationary – poster paint comes out of that. Our watercolours were bought out of Year 5 budget.

It appeared that Harriet used multiple budgets to purchase the supplies she needed, revealing she perhaps had a little more flexibility in order to do this. She also stuck to supplies that were within a certain comfort zone and used most of her budget to purchase paints. The lack of a specialist teacher also meant that both Pauline and Harriet had nobody to speak to and 'bounce ideas off' for projects, which bothered them. Other teachers, including David, who seemed to have a little more flexibility in terms of budget in his school, did not necessarily share this sentiment:

We pretty much order what we need, but things are expensive. We have no specialist art teacher but that is cool since I sort of enjoy teaching Art now so I'm glad we don't have a specialist. Support wise, I usually go about finding ideas myself. Sometimes I just see stuff though, in other teachers' classrooms that I just copy!

Over time, David accepted that he needed to teach the Visual Arts and he simply embraced it. He did not feel the need to have the collegial support of others to learn new skills and take creative risks. His school was far more obliging when he needed specific art supplies; however, David was limited in his knowledge and therefore bought similar supplies each time. He did not feel the need to ask for professional development, as he was happy to be self-taught in terms of Visual Arts skills. Eugene was in a similar situation, in that he had a supportive school in terms of budget; however, he did not ask for much or require much due to the fact that his school had a Visual Arts specialist. He still commented on the fact that he had "nil support", yet this was due to the fact that he never asked for it and did not feel the need. He commented: "*I usually don't ask for much, but we have a pretty good classroom budget. If I need something I usually get what I need. We don't need much though as they have an art teacher so she usually deals with all the 'arty' materials.*"

Amanda's situation was slightly different as they had an Arts coordinator responsible for the budget at the school. Nothing was available to teachers on an individual basis. Teachers applied for parts of that budget, should they have a Visual Arts idea in mind. This was how the 'Artscape' project was developed. It was very much designed for the school, having students out of classrooms creating artwork that could be displayed in the public spaces. She mentioned, *"our curriculum coordinator is from an arty background though, so if you are stuck, she always offers her help."* This was encouraging for Amanda, as the coordinator appeared to be a good source of knowledge in the school if teachers had questions about certain projects or initiatives. The coordinator was not a specialist, she was a generalist teacher with an interest in The Arts.

Q10: What qualifications or relevant Visual Arts experiences do the teachers have?

To conclude the interview, the primary teacher participants were asked to comment on what qualifications or relevant Visual Arts experiences they perceived other teachers in their school had. This was based on their professional experience and opinion. Five teachers believed that the experience in their school amongst the generalist teachers was limited. The two schools that had a Visual Arts specialist felt that this was acceptable, due to the fact that the students were having the relevant experiences from a qualified Visual Arts teacher anyway. Sarah was very blunt in her response and simply believed: *"No, I don't think any of us do. No art experiences or qualifications."* From a generalist perspective, Eugene believed that even though he didn't have much formal training, his own personal experiences gave him enough knowledge to teach basic skills. He believed that this was unusual though:

Some, like myself, have been involved in artwork at Uni. I did some art and others like me are teaching, however, there aren't many. Most, like me, leave it to the art teacher. There is a lot to get through so often it's easier to have the students produce artwork outside the classroom.

Both Sarah and Eugene believed that there was no room in their classroom curriculum for Visual Arts. It seemed that this attitude was shared across both their schools amongst other generalists. Pauline reported a severe lack of knowledge in her school; however, there was a willingness to attempt projects:

Teachers have way less [experience] than me. I know that because I go into different rooms and they do nice art activities but I know that most do not come from a decent art background so they do they best they can with the time they've got. It tends to get pushed to the side, as it's not a

subject that's valued. Especially when NAPLAN comes around. Its not deemed to be particularly important. We used to have a Swan District resource centre to go to buy things but we are so under-resourced now we have to purchase things ourselves. Primary teachers with their budgets, they need to spend the time on other things.

There were a number of points Pauline mentioned that contributed to the lack of Visual Arts experiences students at her school were exposed to. She commented on the lack of value that was placed on Visual Arts, primarily due to the shortage of time and priorities placed on literacy and numeracy education, and particularly when NAPLAN testing occurred. The whole school had a similar approach to literacy and numeracy, with little to no Visual Arts taught when preparing for NAPLAN. Harriet spoke about all her colleagues having a Bachelor of Primary Education. It was expected that they had very little experience in Visual Arts specifically, only electives taken at university. There was no funding for them to have a Visual Arts specialist and she commented on the difficulties with this:

I am more willing to do what needs to be done to cover The Arts in my classroom – everyone could if they put in the effort and thought about it – others just don't have the interest. I think they perceive that they don't have the time or the support.

She felt as though her efforts in the classroom were valued and respected amongst the other generalist teachers in her school; however, this wasn't enough to encourage them to attempt similar projects. Amanda believed that the most innovative group of teachers in her school were the ones in lower primary. The upper primary school students were involved in 'Artscape'; however, this did not involve the generalist teachers. She commented: "*Our lower primary is incredible. They do a lot of craft based activities. They are constantly using Pinterest for ideas. We have some art books available but mainly everyone is a generalist. Some are more creative than others.*" Craft based activities did not mean the teachers were introducing artwork of others or specific Visual Arts skill building. Most of this work was paper/glue based. David was positive regarding the staff at his school. His opinion was based on constructive changes he had seen around his school implementing Visual Arts in the classroom. He felt that although there was a lack of experience, many staff members sought out projects and ideas to produce Visual Arts in the generalist classroom environment:

I think everyone is pretty good with good ideas. Qualifications wise I think everyone is just primary trained, they might have done extra electives but that is it. I think that originally I didn't like art because originally I was bad at it. I mean, I can't really show the kids how to do an awesome drawing if I can't do it myself. I found a way around it by

finding things on the Internet. I guess my idea of art was just painting, whereas as I have gone on in teaching I have seen different examples of art and seen different ways to do it, which has motivated me. The other thing was the mess. A massive mess to clean up – that's the thing. When I was teaching it originally I didn't talk to the kids about set up but now I make it really clear at the start and they get it and the mess isn't so bad. We don't really do too much with paint though, so that is good.

Due to the attitude at David's school, that Visual Arts can be something that is easily picked up through searching internet sites and social networking platforms, there was a far more positive outlook in the way Visual Arts activities can play a part in the generalist classroom. David did not feel it necessary to ask for professional development in this area as he felt that both he and the staff at his school were capable of delivering adequate Visual Arts lessons, even without prior knowledge or expertise through formal education in Visual Arts. They supported each other and he felt that this was enough.

Summary

Figure 3 illustrates the themes that emerged during the interviews, corresponding to each question. The row of themes is a condensed version, describing the most common areas of discussion during the interviews.

**QUESTION
ONE**
Deficit in
educational
experience

ormal
discussion and
personal
response

Figure 3. Themes elicited from the primary teacher interviews.

Most participants discussed similar experiences within their own school context and these were the resulting themes that emerged through the narratives. In summary, the themes that were taken from the questions provide a brief overview of what the participants demonstrated overall through their responses. For most participants, there was a significant deficit in tertiary educational experience in Visual Arts. Of all the participants, only two recall doing art electives during university, while the remaining ($n = 4$) did not. Participants found difficulties obtaining resources to give students authentic experiences and struggled with their own limited skill set which lead directly to problems devising structured response tasks and evidence based assessment tools. Their limited budgets, which were for all curriculum learning areas, were stretched and often did not cover basic art materials. All of this combined resulted in the limited time and low value placed on Visual Arts, leading to diluted student experiences, as has been illustrated in Figure 3. The next chapter presents the findings from the secondary Visual Arts specialist teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE: SECONDARY VISUAL ARTS SPECIALIST FINDINGS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, an analysis of the primary teacher interviews was presented. This chapter will present the findings from the analysis of interviews with six different Visual Arts specialist teachers from the six secondary schools.

This chapter will follow the questions and sections of the interviews, which were slightly different to the primary teacher interviews. When looking at standardised school performance, one school had an ICSEA rank of below 1000 and the other five schools had a rank of between 1000 and 1100. There were none above this rank, and all were in less affluent suburban areas. Each teacher had more than five years of experience in teaching Visual Arts paired with recent experience teaching Year 7 students.

Q1(a): When Year 7 students enter our secondary classroom, what do you perceive about the students' general readiness to engage in Visual Arts activities when compared to students from several years ago?

The first question was related to Year 7 student skills in the classroom, when they arrived from primary school. All secondary Visual arts teachers were asked about the students' general level of readiness to engage in certain activities and what their experiences were in Visual Arts; specifically how the students reacted to certain Visual Arts activities in the secondary classroom and how they coped with certain processes and strategies that their Visual Arts teachers delivered. Initial engagement in Visual Arts activities was one major factor that influenced students' achievement. As a result, this was the first question asked during the secondary teachers' interviews. Of the participants, two teachers believed the students were adequately engaged in the activities. Usually, this was due to the fact that Visual Arts was a novelty, in comparison to what they had experienced in primary school. The sheer excitement of using diverse materials had many of them hooked and motivated to attempt most work. Some teachers mentioned ($n = 3$) that the lack of exposure students had in the generalist classroom made them a little more reserved in their choice of materials and techniques. In addition, many common artistic processes were foreign to them, resulting in slower

progress through projects. Seline, a teacher at an Independent school, elaborated on the excitement her students displayed when arriving in her classroom:

They would have a portfolio and they would say “Oh my god, what is a portfolio? Wow, I have never done anything like this before.” They take it seriously because it is no longer a fun fill in Santa with cotton wool ball thing.

Seline made sure every student had a visual portfolio for Arts Ideas work. None of the Year 7 students she taught had used a portfolio before, especially to work through a preliminary drawing process as a precursor to a studio project. Casey spoke similarly about the lack of understanding when it came to the design process. Like many secondary Visual Arts teachers, this is a key skill taught early in secondary Visual Arts courses. It allows for the documentation and generation of ideas in a particular form, visual folios being most popular amongst the participants. Casey reflected:

I taught Year 7s in Albury and they were not as familiar with the design process as they are at school now ... I really had to explain that and they really didn't understand why they had to do this preliminary work. Whereas now, they do.

She described that student understanding at a previous school in the country was minimal when it came to the preliminary design process. At her current school, over time, she was able to go through steps and scaffold students' learning so they have a better understanding of the process after a shorter period of time when they first enter Year 7. What they arrive with is still minimal; however, she felt that it was better than her previous country school. Summer was similar in her experience, in that the students lacked technical experience working with certain materials. Although this was the case, Summer's students were enthusiastic about the subject, eager to please and engaged with her classes. Motivation was never an issue, only skill level:

They are very enthusiastic. Always. When I first started, not many kids had played with clay before or had many visual arts experiences. They are keen, but they haven't been given any skills. They may have had experience playing with it but they have never actually learnt the technical terms. There were big gaps – kids weren't remembering what they learnt and their retention was not there.

What students were able to remember was a common theme amongst participants. Teachers believed that even if generalists were teaching Visual Arts skills, it was not happening frequently and the learning was not meaningful enough for students to retain. In the event that Visual Arts was taught lessons were fragmented and sporadic, without the link to particular outcomes or skills. Susan described this from her point of view:

With my prior experience, because it was a boarding school, there were kids coming from the bush. Their experiences were quite patchy and

often it was colour in the workbook, let's colour in the lines in social studies – it was integrated activities ... so there was a big range. At my current school, there seem to be three main feeders and they are coming with limited art language and they may have had experience doing things (playing with certain materials), but it was not taught in the framework of visual arts, no elements, principles or investigation experience at all. Their retention is also limited.

What Susan described was common amongst all secondary Visual Arts teacher participants. There was an attitude that the students arrived in awe of the experiences they were introduced to in the secondary Visual Arts classroom. For the most part, this was due to the fact that it was 'all new'. They had not experienced a structured art class where a framework for creative processes was in place and specific Visual Arts language was commonplace. Due to this, students were enthusiastic as they were exposed to many of these processes for the first time.

When participants reflected on how transition from primary to secondary Visual Arts was different between now and several years ago, there was not a great amount of change. The novelty of the secondary Visual Arts classroom to students transitioning from primary school is still a factor that improves motivation and engagement. Prior knowledge acquired from primary school differed, depending on which school (country or metropolitan) the teacher was appointed to at the time. Ultimately, they did not report a vast amount of change. This was reflected in the comments from Diana, who taught over two campuses in a Catholic school:

Students who have not had a specialist are quite reticent to try? Students almost don't dare! They accept that. Even though they can't do something as perfect as they wanted to, I still see the desire to try in their work. It takes them a good term to get to this point. They don't have the skills and they haven't had the exposure.

She believed that this attitude had not changed in the time she had been teaching, students who did not have primary school visual arts exposure continued to enter the secondary system with retention issues and occasionally, a fear of trying something new.

Q1(b): When Year 7 students enter our secondary classroom, what do you perceive about the students' specific strengths or weaknesses in the Visual Arts?

In terms of specific Visual arts strengths and weaknesses overall, there were a number of differences, however similar outcomes. In general, student skills were not where they were expected to be according to participants, however, two teachers could name

specific strengths in skills, one teacher discussed response and theory based strengths, and two could not name any strengths in particular. Seline was enthusiastic about what her students could achieve, however, it was mostly limited to drawing. Her students had good, *“drawing skills, drawing things in proportions, colouring in shapes and shading properly.”* This was the extent of Seline felt her students appeared to do ‘well’ when they entered Year 7. Some of the things she felt were missing were more to do with their approach to tasks, where: *“Students who do not have an art specialist or the experiences don’t step outside the box because they don’t have the knowledge yet. They tend to stay very much within the set task.”* Student experiences were directly related to how comfortable they felt with open-ended creative tasks. Seline believed that the more exposure students had to Visual Arts lessons, the more willing they were to explore their creativity.

Casey felt student strengths were written activities. Although they had not been exposed to arts language, their learned ability to apply research skills to scenarios in Visual Arts response work was good. She mentioned: *“Strengths would probably be the research and investigation side. If I tell them something they listen, they take it on board but they cannot do more than two steps at a time”*. This was the only strength Casey believed students had to begin with. They did not have many skills and therefore Casey found herself modifying projects to teach them basics with heavy scaffolding. Susan believed student attitudes were positive and the Year 7s came to Visual Arts happy and ready to work. Casey noted:

They are good at enthusiasm ... the flip side means that they are extremely critical of their abilities. They have pigeonholed themselves to be ‘I suck at art, I can’t draw’. I think the big thing at this age is trying to get their visual perception happening. Some have it, some don’t.

Year 7 students have a critical view of their own work and lack confidence. Diana believed that although students were happy to attempt all work, they did not try to challenge themselves in any way. This mimicked the findings of Susan, whose students perceived they couldn’t draw. Throughout the interview, it was discovered that this lack of confidence lead to learned habits during drawing activities, making it difficult for them to be open to new skills. Diana found that:

Where there is no Art specialist they are scared to draw. They are drawing cartoons and will go for ease over difficulty and always take the easier option – it’s not the easiest, it’s usually the worst and I have to un-teach this.

The easier option was often drawing from a made up image in their minds during observational activities. Students were ‘guessing’ rather than taking in what they were looking at and drawing using observation. Summer believed that there was not much to celebrate regarding student strengths in Visual Arts. She asserted: *“They were not good at many things to be honest ... they had no pencil control, no nothing. Working within boundaries was a problem – they were allowed to do what they wanted in primary school.”* This freedom during arts activities did not help students when they arrived in secondary school. During Summer’s interview it was clear that she was frustrated at the lack of understanding of structure students had in Visual Arts. In Summer’s opinion this was largely due to the fact that art was considered a ‘free time’ activity and not treated as a ‘proper’ subject.

Q1(c): When Year 7 students enter our secondary classroom, what do you perceive about the students’ readiness to engage Visual Arts Language?

Student ability to engage in arts language was another factor influencing how ‘ready’ students were for secondary Visual Arts. Amongst participants, all six felt that students struggled particularly with arts language tasks. Although they were able to identify certain aspects of artwork when guided, it was the application of this knowledge to a student’s own work and the work of others that proved challenging due to a lack of understanding. Seline described what they were able to do in her classroom:

They can find certain things in artwork and discuss it if I prompt them. In middle school, it’s very hard to get them to put it in writing in a formal analysis structure. Even the kids who have had art experience, they are still learning about line and colour for the first time it seems.

This was a common complaint upheld by many of the participants. Seline’s opinion was, that although some students did have a specialist teacher in primary school, they were still unable to retain some of this information; for example, when discussing the elements and principles during response work; this retention was limited. This reaction was similar in many of her classes. Casey explained that her students were able to identify certain aspects of artwork, however, she said: *“They struggle a little bit, they do. They have no problem identifying the elements and principles but if I try to use it in a sentence or a different context to it being isolated, they don’t understand what I am talking about.”* Casey went on to mention that she believed the, *“transfer is not very good”* as students were unable to apply arts language to other scenarios or activities. Susan believed that literacy in general was very low in the feeder schools in her area. She surmised, due to the fact that students arrived in Year 7 with low literacy, that

students struggled with interpretation and evaluation tasks in her classroom. Susan explained:

There are a lot of kids with learning difficulties and so often you have to work out how you are going to present that response task, so you incorporate practical components as well. I introduce art language practically and they cope quite well with it because it is structured. They understand complementary colours but when you introduce dominants and accents there will be some who just don't get it.

Susan devised a way for students to cope with the foreign nature of arts language. By incorporating practical activities alongside the introduction of arts language students were able to cope. The lessons were still simple and structured; however, she found success in some areas. Summer believed this area uncovered the real weaknesses in the education system. She felt that many primary teachers themselves lacked a proper understanding of arts language and therefore didn't even attempt to incorporate it into their curriculum, claiming:

Arts language is their weakest. They are not ready. To introduce these words and these adjectives that are subject specific, often blows their mind and they can't fathom it. In fact, I found that by the time Year 9 comes around they are only just starting to make a sentence about it. They could make a sentence and say there is colour in it but to be able to say that it is contrasting or harmonious, they can't.

The firm belief that there is a deficit in student use of Visual Arts language in primary school is mimicked in the interview with Diana. Her observations were very similar in that she felt there was a wide gap in student knowledge when it came to talking or writing about artwork using appropriate terminology. She said: “*They are not very familiar with it no matter what. As far as thinking of art in art terms they are not very good at all.*” Overall, the general consensus amongst participants was similar. Liam was the only teacher who mentioned that arts language was recognised when he introduced it:

There is a specialist in our main feeder primary school, so this helps and they are aware and have heard the language used. Overall, there are some students with good skills, but most are far weaker than our Year 8 students, who have had me for a year. Their writing skills in general are bad. I am trained for older, more capable students though and this may be why I am so critical.

Liam's comment regarding his preference for teaching older students is something that could have a bearing on how he felt about current Year 7 skills. His expectations were higher and he was disappointed by their knowledge deficit. He still believed that even

though students had a specialist in primary school, the skills they were being taught were at a far lower skill level than what is required when they enter secondary school.

Q1(d): When Year 7 students enter our secondary classroom, what do you perceive about the students' readiness to engage a range of traditional studio materials?

The interview questions regarding studio materials elicited a similar response from most participants (n = 4). The other teachers (n = 2) believed the students engaged with most studio materials due to their enthusiasm, achieving a certain amount of success. For most students, the novelty of the secondary Visual Arts classroom is enough to motivate them to attempt most activities. However, even those entering the secondary classroom from schools that were lucky enough to have a Primary Visual Arts specialist were more familiar with drawing implements and these were often the more familiar tools. Seline's school was Independent, and as the secondary Visual Art specialist, she had access to some of the primary students (Years 5 and 6 only) before they arrived in her classroom. This had its benefits; however, Seline still felt they were lacking in certain areas due to the lack of art exposure in the generalist classroom, and:

It's not just the new kids coming in, it's the ones I have had as well. I get comments like 'we were never allowed to use this, we were only allowed coloured pencils'... we used to do more 3D stuff with clay but it makes it quite difficult because we don't have a kiln.

Although Seline was in an independent school, she had no access to a kiln, so the school was limited in its infrastructure to offer clay work. Her students were excited and engaged in many of the activities she offered in secondary school due to the fact that they were limited in their generalist classrooms to coloured pencils. The limited infrastructure in primary schools to offer students rich exposure to studio materials was shared by some of the other participants. Susan was positive about how occupied her students were in certain activities. Usually, this was again due to the novelty of the situation. She explained that, "*not being exposed before literally gives them new insight into new concepts. It just 'wow, wow, and wow', most had never had a dedicated art room before.*" She felt this was positive in one respect in that they were happy to learn, however, their knowledge was scattered and minimal.

Summer felt that ceramics was one of the more chaotic arts activities that generalist teachers steered clear of. She believed that this meant that anything 'messy' was fun and they were all happy to attempt the work. She commented: "*Often when I am doing clay or print maybe half will have done it. Painting, no way, anything messy they haven't*

done. They are always enthusiastic but there is so much to teach!” She felt there was a lot of pressure to up skill her Year 7 classes quickly, or risk substandard achievement. Her school had a couple of primary schools in the surrounding suburbs that had a visual arts specialist, and those students had reasonable access to materials. However, those that were deprived an art specialist were definitely at a lower level of skill and understanding.

Diana had another take on the way her students engage in her classroom situation. She spoke about the way, if given a choice, students will often go for the media that is more familiar:

The difference lies in when they have to choose for themselves. Due to the fact that they haven’t had as much exposure in certain areas, they will choose what they know. Students who have worked with a wider range of media will choose different things, but you have kids who will choose the pencils because they want to colour in neatly. Those who are more familiar with materials will try the paints.

She found problems when students preferred the more familiar media and she had to structure activities carefully when introducing something that was unknown. The two participants who believed students had some success due to their unwavering engagement did not feel that new media was much of an issue in the secondary classroom. Casey commented: *“In my class they often do a range of drawing activities, water colour and clay work. They are fine with engagement.”* Liam was rather content with the students’ participation level, although he needed to move slowly through activities and check understanding of each step fully before moving on:

We are privileged that most students have done painting and clay before and they have had experience. They are aware of what materials are and how to use them. They still need step-by-step instructions, however, those who have come up from our primary school are confident. We do have a small percentage that struggle and they become upset and it impacts their confidence. Rather than have resilience, they need a big boost.

This issue of resilience in the Year 7 group came up a couple of times for Liam. He strongly believed that it impacted student achievement, as small issues in the art classroom could often inhibit a student’s ability to complete an activity, or attempt it to his/her full potential due to a loss of engagement.

Q1(e): When Year 7 students enter our secondary classroom, what do you perceive about the students' specific studio strengths and/or weaknesses?

Studio strengths and weaknesses were somewhat varied amongst the participants; however, most (n = 4) found that where there was weakness in 3D work. Often, it was the advanced skills that were lacking. Through the interviews it was discovered that many students had only ever dabbled in Visual Arts activities in generalist classrooms as 'free time', with limited tools; as a result, skills specific to a Visual Arts curriculum were deficient. Seline felt that most sculptural activities were a weakness due to the complex level of thinking required to make sense of certain materials, claiming:

Sculpture is a weakness because they don't do it a lot; mixed media is a weakness because we have to be really selective with the use of mixed media to make it successful. It takes a higher level of thinking and decision-making and they are still very step-by-step. I have to assist them – it's a whole other level of thinking.

A need for assistance when dealing with a range of materials is reasonable for a Year 7 level. Seline felt that more abstract sculpture was too difficult and that 3D work in general was a weakness. This was found in both the students she had taught in primary school and those who arrived from other schools. She didn't notice much change, only in the drawing skills of the students she previously taught; which were significantly more advanced. Diana had similar feelings regarding her students' capabilities in 3D activities:

Clay work is a weakness. Unless they are students with an aptitude for it they struggle. It was all beginning stuff; they don't get into it if it's new to them. I push them though. I have a standard but it is hard to get them there.

Other activities she felt they coped with when given structure and guidance. Summer described dealing with frustration at her school, with her timetable only allowing limited time with her Year 7 classes. She felt they needed a lot of extra assistance, and Visual Arts was an elective 'taster' subject at Year 7 level, so they were not able to participate all year round. She said: *"I usually do clay with them because it's fun and they have not done much 3D. I want them to be engaged with my subject so they come back. I need to get them into studio work quickly so I use very structured programs"*. The teachers kept discussing the need for 'structure' in order to 'push' students through. There was a lot of extra assistance needed according to participants for students to have success. It was necessary for them to enjoy and feel comfortable in the activities so they would pick the subject again the following year. Many elective subjects in schools are

competitive. If they are going to run, students need to be selecting them. This was a pressure felt by many of the Visual Arts teachers in secondary schools.

Susan's experiences were similar in the way she kept structure to her projects in order for students to have success. This was the sole way she felt she succeeded with many of her Year 7 students:

It is about them having a project that is pitched correctly at their age bracket so they will have success. That will then be a strength. Visual perception is so variable at that age. Where they are at is patchy. Some kids are still grappling with fine motor skills but can have success due to the structure of the activities. Clay skills however, require a lot more effort on the part of the teacher but if you do the right project it can work in their favour. Junior school stuff is prescriptive - very structured projects that have required a lot of intervention by the teacher to have them look good.

By keeping the structure students were used to in primary school, Susan helped them achieve, even in areas of weakness, such as 3D work. Liam also mentioned that it was clay and often paint that were specialist materials. The only students who had been exposed to these materials regularly had a Visual Arts specialist in primary school. He told of his students being, "very good with 2D, this was their main strength" and this was largely due to, "always doing some form of drawing as 'free time' in their generalist classes." As a result, this was familiar to them and 'safe' resulting in a confidence in their drawing ability to an extent. Casey had a slightly varied take on this and believed that although their 'free' drawing skills may have been acceptable, other forms of drawing were not as recognised and therefore, demonstrated a clear weakness. She said: "Some of them have serious issues with observation drawing. Overall they are ok with simple 3D understanding and clay work but they struggle a lot in drawing with tone and value. They struggle with anything a little more advanced." This lack of advanced drawing skills was more of a problem to Casey and she felt that with appropriate structure 3D work could be achieved relatively easily. She described a very simple 'fruit bowl' clay activity that she taught Year 7 students most years, ensuring they achieved success due to the structured nature of the project. Although drawing activities could be structured also, their understanding of more advanced techniques such as value were minimal, and this impacted their achievement in 2D activities.

Q2(a): From your professional perception of the primary school context, what do you perceive the status of Visual Arts to be in the primary school?

Of all the participants, only one teacher felt positive about the way Visual Arts was viewed in the primary school setting. Seline felt this way when it came to her own observations of generalist teachers attitudes towards art classes within her own school, where there was a primary school attached to the secondary. She did not comment on how she felt the generalists thought about art personally. Since she was the content expert that the generalist teachers had access to, perhaps her situation was more positive, as teachers did not feel as pressured to offer Visual Arts themselves and if they had ideas for projects, she was the ‘go to’ person, and explained:

I know in the school art is really important. I can't tell you how teachers perceive art themselves, but the culture is 'let's see what is going on in art'. We put their work into competitions so I feel they see it as being important. They come up for advice for stuff they want to do in their classrooms – they will use my classroom if they can.

The other participants did not share this feeling, even Diana, who was providing Visual Arts classes to some of the students in their closed system, felt like a glorified DOTT provider. Her closed school system contained a number of primary schools and Diana was only able to provide Visual Arts teaching to a couple of the schools. Diana's school did not employ any other Visual Arts specialists to fill the gaps in other schools; she was simply shifted around. Often, students received an inconsistent Visual Arts education in the Primary Schools. Diana said:

For most teachers I am DOTT relief. As long as I am there in body, they don't care about the rest. They do give me respect for the fact that I can handle a class in a situation they would hate and they treat me like a professional. However, no artwork is put up in the classrooms. No value. Some teachers want more artwork to put up, but generally the status is rock bottom.

This was in definite contrast to the experiences Seline had in her school. Diana definitely felt used and undervalued and she spoke for how she felt Visual Arts would be seen in other schools as well. Casey reflected on students coming up from primary school that did not necessarily value art as a subject, contributing to its low status. She did teach some students who had experienced Visual Arts from a specialist teacher and their attitudes were different. She felt:

It's mixed. I have kids who have not had a primary school specialist art teacher and their attitudes are that it is seen as not valued as a credible subject. They don't understand the depth. They don't know enough to know they know nothing.

This attitude that Visual Arts was not a ‘proper’ subject was something Casey noticed in a large number of her students. She believed it originated in a school environment where Visual Arts was not taught as a subject and it was more of a ‘fill in’ activity students participated in when all the ‘proper’ work was completed, giving it low status.

Susan had some strong opinions about how she felt Visual Arts was represented:

Art is at the bottom of the cesspool in the primary schools. Art is something that is in secondary schools because it has to be. Art holds in this school a fair bit of status because it's catering for a student body that would otherwise not be catered for.

It was interesting that Susan’s reasoning for Visual Arts gaining status at secondary school level was due to a need that extended beyond simply learning skills and techniques. In secondary school, Susan believed that part of the reason Visual Arts was valued was that some teenagers benefitted socially and emotionally when participating in arts activities.

Summer expressed her frustration in her response regarding primary Visual Arts status, as she had tried on a number of occasions to offer her assistance in schools in order to boost teacher awareness and confidence when teaching visual arts, noting:

Teachers think it's too hard. Too hard-basket! They are not trained in this area so they are not going to do it. I offered my services so often to the primary school but nobody took me up on it. I think that what the time is used for instead is colouring in time – free time. It's definitely not seen as a core subject or a serious subject at all.

Summer reflected on the times she offered her assistance to primary school generalist teachers. Some had good intentions, however, could not find the time to take Summer up on her offer. She perceived the only artwork completed in many classrooms was during free time, there was never any structure or lesson set aside to expose students to various materials.

Liam felt that art held some form of ‘special’ place in the primary schools – especially those schools that had a primary Visual Arts specialist art teacher. In the generalist classroom it was marginalised. He reflected: *“I feel that it gets done quite a bit but it is like the reward activity once you have done the proper work. It is seen as something special. It is not regular every day, so it is on the sidelines.”* Liam’s perception was based around Visual Arts being considered as broad, encompassing any form of creative activity. He felt that by nature, a primary school classroom was creative, however, this did not involve activities typically expected in a specialist Visual Arts classroom;

structured, rich tasks using Visual Arts materials. Due to this, he felt that students were allowed to be creative in the classroom often, after all the other ‘proper’ work was completed. The status of Visual Arts from Liam’s perspective was that it was considered after all the other subjects, making it less important in terms of curriculum.

Q2(b): From your professional perception of the primary school context, what do you perceive the generalist teachers’ capacity to prepare primary students for Year 7

Visual Arts?

Perceptions were unanimous for this question. All participants believed that generalist teachers had limited ability to prepare students for a secondary Visual Arts education. There were a number of reasons for this and Seline suggested it was due to the way art was labelled as a ‘fun’ activity in the generalist classroom. This fun translated into allowing students ultimate freedom when participating in drawing or construction activities. Due to the lack of structure, they did not learn specific skills to assist them in secondary school:

Generalist teachers use it as time to play and experiment, not as analysis. They won’t pick things apart or demonstrate shading to the same complexity and because of this, kids are not really learning anything, but having fun and playing with some materials.

Although Seline believed experimentation to be important, without the demonstration of techniques, nothing of substance was taken from these experiences. Casey was direct in her comments: “*I think it’s severely limited. Yeah, it really is, very limited*” and believed that the real learning occurred when the students first entered her classroom in Year 7.

Diana spoke fondly of a teacher she knew who wrote programs for Visual Arts in his class. In her experience of teaching, he was the only teacher she knew of who attempted a program of work with his students, related to arts skills and techniques. She went on to describe her feelings on the subject:

I only know one teacher who gets an art program and teaches it. He is one teacher out of 20 in our school system that will actually do it and try. I don’t know any others that will give it a go and prepare those kids appropriately. In general in the primary school, teachers will try – but they don’t have the brain space to do it. A generalist does not have the skills, it’s just too hard. An art specialist is unique. Generalists are group of people who know they should do it but are scared to do it themselves. Upper primary teachers perpetuate this notion that art is a special thing that people either can, or can’t do.

In this vignette Diana made a number of points to emphasise both the frustration secondary Visual Arts teachers feel when their students present with deficits and the pressure that generalists are faced with daily to succeed in educating their class across the required curricula. She described the teachers in her particular school system as lacking confidence in their ability to teach Visual Art. Due to the stigma surrounding those who ‘can do’ and those who ‘can’t do’, many failed to try to include Visual Arts activities in their teaching. This was a commonplace attitude, the result of which created deficits in student Visual Arts skills and experiences due to a lack of exposure. The greatest disappointment for Diana came from the perception that teachers knew they had a responsibility to teach Visual Arts content and would not even approach the task.

Susan believed that it depended solely on the generalist teacher’s interests and specialist skill set. Every teacher had strengths and weaknesses and she believed this was why many were not teaching Visual Arts to their classes. Susan said:

This can be varied depending on interest and motivation of the teacher. If you have a primary school teacher that is Maths and Phys-Ed focused, well Art doesn’t come into it. It is patchy. I can’t speak with great authority, but my answer would be not very good. Most have a classroom teacher that is sometimes motivated to do their best and sometimes not.

Susan’s perception was that although most try to fit the work in, not all teachers are going to feel self-assured enough to teach Visual Arts. Susan believed that some students were lucky enough to have a teacher interested in Visual Arts and will attempt to teach them skills. Susan perceived that the majority did not have the skills and therefore teachers focused on things that were familiar to them instead, leaving Visual Arts to the specialist, if available, or abandoning it altogether. Summer expressed her frustration with this similar scenario. She felt that even though generalists lacked the confidence to teach Visual Arts, they should not abandon their teaching responsibilities, simply because they did not have the skills. She believed she could assist them:

They are not prepared, but it wouldn’t take very much training to get them prepared. Which is why I tried doing professional development with them. I thought, if I can help them and show them that it’s easy for me to fire work and for them to use paint – I could probably do a little booklet up and give them art terms with ideas. I used to send them emails about exhibitions because I knew the kids never went out to see them. I don’t blame them though, because its scary and I understand. But if I had to teach Math I would just deal with it.

The concept of teaching a subject even though there may be confidence issues due to a perceived skill deficit was interesting. Summer used Mathematics (numeracy) as an example; as a subject that is given high importance in education, along with literacy. If a primary generalist was not comfortable teaching numeracy, it was Summer's perception that they would be given professional development in the area and school support. In the same scenario regarding Visual Arts, Summer felt the support is not equitable; leaving primary generalist teachers ill equipped to teach the subject unless they personally sought assistance. Liam's reflection on the way generalists prepare students for secondary Visual Arts was similar:

I think students have to be lucky to get a generalist teacher who is interested in the subject and if they don't, their skills will be very weak. I don't know how much they get, so a person with far better English or HASS skills are not going to be great at preparing them. They might resort to colouring in the worksheet.

Q2(c): From your professional perception of the primary school context, what do you perceive the status of the Primary Visual Arts specialist teachers?

After reflecting on the status of Visual Arts in general, participants were asked to consider how they felt primary Visual Arts specialist teachers were valued in their schools. Many (n = 4) of the teachers felt that the sole purpose of a Visual Arts specialist in a primary school setting was to provide DOTT to the other teachers. Only one teacher (Seline) believed she was valued, however, she was left alone to do what she pleased the majority of the time. This suited her well, and she believed it did not detract from how she was seen or respected in the school. Her situation was unusual and she was able to speak from personal experience, as she taught Visual Arts to secondary students and upper primary (Years 5 and 6 only). She said: *"I definitely feel valued. I am separate though. I am a sole entity and left to do what I do and I don't mind."*

When speaking to participants who did not have a primary school attached to their secondary school, the perception change dramatically. Casey felt that there were real problems occurring in their feeder primary schools. I can't for the life of me remember what their official 'term' is but will need to change this) and this was due to Visual Arts holding low value. She stated: *"Art teachers are not valued. I think they are seen as a fluffy extra, a bit of fun time, a bit of mucking around. Which is unfortunate. It's probably not that way at every school. I think it's varied."* In her experience teaching, she believed that if the Year 7 students were any indication of how art was valued,

primary Visual Arts was considered something offer only if the school budget allowed for it.

Summer was similar in her view: *“It’s an optional extra. I know this because we didn’t have the money to have an art specialist in our adjoining primary school. We had a generalist and she was there to fill DOTT. It was never considered a complete subject.”*

In her experience, Summer saw firsthand the problems created when placing a non-specialist in a specialist’s role. They had a gap to fill to make room for teachers to receive their DOTT, and as a result, students received minimal experiences using Visual Arts materials and limited instruction. Susan’s perception included the ‘whole school view’ on how Visual Arts specialists were valued, especially in their attempts to include extra activities within the curriculum:

On one level I would say they are valued but their perceptions are different to other staff members. They are shunted in the back room and called DOTT providers. If they were to organize an art excursion for example, everyone would have an issue, because it would be taking up DOTT time. However, if important events were organized from an administrative point of view, no consideration would be taken if it were to take up any art time.

Susan felt that there was a lack of equity when it came to the wants and needs of a Visual Arts specialist. If the needs of the teachers in the school were met in terms of DOTT relief, things ran smoothly.

Diana was also part of a school system where she was the secondary Visual Arts specialist to Years 7-12 and primary specialist to a select few classes. She was content with her position in the school and felt respected. She was aware that the school opinion of Visual Arts was low, and she was forced to remain flexible under certain circumstances when funding was available and also, when it wasn’t. She was cut from primary classes some years and removed from one primary school in the system and placed in another. It was inconsistent, relying on her to be adaptable in different situations. Diana said:

I am called a DOTT provider. I am given respect, but only professionally. The agreement is they can put me where they like though. They slot me where they need me. I think all primary schools need specialist Visual Arts teachers. They just need it.

Diana’s opinion was strong and clear. She felt all students needed to benefit from a full time Visual Arts teacher. Although Liam felt that primary Visual Arts teachers held importance in a school, it was for a similar reason. He said: *“I think they are cherished*

because they are DOTT providers in a primary school. I definitely think that they are perceived as 'not teaching a real subject'. This perception is strong everywhere in the schools in general." He did not feel that the perception of Visual Arts was any different in secondary schools. He believed that both primary and secondary schools treated Visual Arts as an opportunity to make the school look good, however, its value as a subject was often questioned.

Q3: What do you perceive students gain from studying the Visual Arts in secondary school?

It was the final question that was a true indicator of the passion the participants had for their subject. Visual Arts was clearly important to them, for a number of reasons. Each participant wanted to continue talking, even after the interview ended, as they felt they had so much to express. Seline spoke not only about how important Visual Arts was as a stand-alone subject, but how it supported others in the school:

It supports the ability to discuss things and see things in a visual way. Student artwork is trying to discuss issues or make light of something. It is not just about painting or drawing. Students tend to have a more in depth understanding of world issues when studying art you know? Most of it is about why you are doing it – I think it also supports literacy a lot.

Due to the fact that Visual Arts allows exploration of topics in a physical and personal way, students can come to new understandings through the simple act of art making. Seline believed this to be a powerful force that not many other subjects offered. Casey spoke about the emotional support that Visual Arts offered students. It allowed them to express themselves, whereas other subjects appeared less flexible:

We are such a visual culture. Students can deconstruct our world to figure out what is going on. They can also understand what is going on in an image and why we see things the way we do. In art they have to focus on something and be completely engaged and I don't think they get much opportunity to do that in other subjects. We don't use our hands enough as a society. It makes them more empathetic. I think it allows them to express things they are unable to talk about or engage with on a subconscious level. They can engage with emotions through their artwork. I think it provides the kids who might not be good at sport or academics a chance to succeed and master something that contributes to their self-identity.

Susan felt that students grew as people, learning how to cope in certain situations through the study of Visual Arts. Courage and resilience were two aspects that Susan believed were well covered in the study of Visual Arts:

I think they gain resilience as they put themselves out on view to other people. They gain problem-solving skills, as they need to think about what they are doing. Obviously creativity is important, as being a creative thinker is so important as they are going into vocations where they have to be creative thinkers. They can be more courageous with their decision making as well.

Susan believed that through the study of Visual Arts, decisions were made that don't turn out as first expected. Students learn to cope with change and to let go of control in some cases, making them resilient – which is a key life skill. These skills are transferable to many professions and it is preferred that students are proficient, innovative thinkers by the time they leave secondary school. This makes them far more sought after by future employers. This opinion was shared by Summer, who also discussed the importance of preparing students for the 'real' world once they left school. She believed students gained:

So much. I have to sell this so often to parents. Contemporary life requires us to be creative. It requires problem solving. These skills are transferable to all professions. I believe it complements the other subjects more than just being a 'rest' subject. Working on that creativity, problem solving, dealing with emotions, dealing with criticism, [as well as] expressing yourself. And then there is that whole idea that we are all good at something. Sadly, our culture values academia over the arts. That is actually very sad because there are a whole bunch of people who are great at the arts and yet they are marginalised in our society and made to feel like they are less worthy. We all have a skill set – those multiple intelligences – I am a real believer in it. Everyone is good at something, it's just whether our society values it or not. Sadly, we don't have space in our schools to work that out. Instead, they are forced into these cookie cutter moulds and it is just wrong.

Summer firmly felt that the school system failed creative students on many occasions, directing them into subjects that fitted the education system's idea of a 'road to success'. Due to what she perceived was low importance placed on the arts, students who had a particular flair for creative thinking and application became lost and undervalued. She felt that this was a problem in wider society through the lack of value placed on artistic endeavours and projects in general. Diana felt that Visual Arts was more of a way of life, a necessary skill for those who wish to get the most out of their education:

Art is a way of thinking, a way of understanding and a way of seeing. It's a way of doing. It's a more total way of educating – that is the whole concept of what education is about. You are not just teaching them 'this is a symbol and this symbol means this', it's more holistic and it comes from every angle. It's understanding through seeing and that is a very important thing.

To understand our world we need to understand how to look at it from every angle.

Diana believed that it was Visual Arts that assisted in this education and that it allowed for a holistic view on life, opening up avenues that may otherwise be overlooked. Liam felt discouraged that Visual Art education needed to be justified in a school setting. He reflected on the number of times he had to justify his own subject to parents, administration and other staff members. He believed that Visual Arts should be considered just as important as other secondary school subjects:

I think it is firstly the creative side of it – it provides students with a release so they are able to expand their creative thinking processes. Problem solving skills are also gained through Visual Arts study and it also engages different learning profiles. Some students need to work by doing and going through a process to see how they make connections. I think it is a worthy subject and it is not valued enough in schools. Teachers of MESS [Mathematics, English, Society and Environment, and Science] subjects see their students from Years 7-10 four days a week. We see them twice a week if we are lucky for a couple of those years. By Year 11 and 12, we have had half to a third of the time other subjects have had to prepare our students for upper-school. It is frustrating that we have to fight for our subject – you don't see English and Maths teachers having to store away a line of defence each time the relevance of their subject is questioned, because everyone assumes their subject is important. We have an innate need to defend why our subject is valid!

Liam felt that the education system did not work in favour of Visual Arts and students were missing out on skills that were going to prepare them for life after secondary school.

Summary

The figure below illustrates themes that emerged during the interviews, corresponding to each question. The row of themes in green is a condensed version, describing the most common areas of discussion during the interviews. Participants reported that although students displayed enthusiasm in Visual Arts, this was not enough to see them engage in art materials with enough skill to achieve at a level that would be expected by Year 7. They were not exposed, due to lack of infrastructure in the primary sector, to specialised art rooms or generalist classrooms where they had regular interaction with art materials and encouraged to explore and express themselves within a given structure. They were only at the level of identification in response tasks and could rarely apply arts language to other areas. There needed to be significant intervention on the part of the secondary visual arts specialists if students were going to have success. This then led to the low value placed on Visual Arts education in the primary sector, as perceived

by the secondary participants. Visual Arts as a subject and the teachers who taught it were treated with little value and often described as DOTT providers. To conclude, participants were asked to describe why they felt Visual Arts as a subject was important. All teachers used an essentialist justification model to describe why Visual Arts needed to be treated as a subject that was valued as stand-alone. They described with passion and honesty that their subject should not need fighting for in schools. However, in today's educational climate, it appeared to them that this was exactly what needed to happen in both the primary and secondary sector if the value placed on Visual Arts was going to improve. In the next chapter, the findings will be discussed in relation to research evidence, forming the basis of the final conclusions and recommendations in chapter seven.

I

Theme Nine: Essentialist justification

Figure 4. Themes elicited from the secondary Visual Arts teacher interviews.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings from both the primary generalist teachers and the secondary Visual Arts specialists. The discussion is guided by the condensed themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview data. The chapter is divided into two sections based on the participant sample. Each section begins with a figure showing the condensed themes found, followed by the discussion of those themes.

Primary teachers

The findings from the primary teachers' interviews were placed in a diagram (see Figure 5) that accurately described the main themes that emerged from the interviews. The following discussion is based around this summary and the headings correspond to each theme.

Deficit in tertiary educational experience

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews with primary teachers was the apparent deficit in each teacher's tertiary educational experience in the Visual Arts. Although some (n=2) had an interest in the subject, which assisted their motivation to teach Visual Arts, most found it difficult to recount their experiences, impacting their confidence to teach the subject in their own classroom. David reflected on his experiences being very scattered and could not recall specific processes he went through during the class he took, only that he participated in a pottery class (the result of which he was not proud) and made a kite. Amanda did not have the opportunity to take Visual Arts as an elective: *"I did an intense course on all the arts over two weeks, whereas English and Maths were over two semesters"*. Due to the lack of tertiary education in Visual Arts, the teachers often turned to social media for quick, easy projects with step-by-step instructions that they could facilitate with reasonable results.

**QUESTION
ONE**
Deficit in
educational
experience

ormal
discussion and
personal
response

Figure 5. Emergent themes from Primary teacher interviews.

Developing self-efficacy amongst pre-service teachers entering the primary education sector has been a challenge according to recent research. The implementation of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts (ACARA, 2015) mandates that a visual subject must be taught each year of primary school, requiring generalists to take over the teaching of Visual Arts in the absence of a specialist teacher appointed by the school. Lummis, Morris and Paolino (2014) conducted a study of primary teachers' self-efficacy in teaching The Arts and the findings were clear in terms of tertiary experiences. Visual Arts was the second least engaging discipline amongst first-year students and by fourth year, improved above the other disciplines as the second most engaging. Overall, the fourth-year students indicated they felt most prepared to teach drama and Visual Arts, even though their previous experiences were limited (Lummis, Morris, & Paolino, 2014). Research suggests that prior experiences will have an impact on the arts, especially if the teacher has little to draw upon. They will avoid the subject due to their limited understanding of how to implement a Visual Arts lesson effectively (Lemon & Garvis, 2013). It was also found that:

Although the findings present a percentage of students engaging with the arts outside their university teacher education studies a considerable number do not. When considering these students as future teachers, this has a serious implications for an already marginalised subject area situated within what is often called a 'crowded curriculum. (Lemon & Garvis, 2013, p. 5)

Further research found that although pre-service teachers felt that Visual Arts was something they should be teaching, this was not enough to influence them to take on Visual Arts lessons frequently. "While the pre-service teachers believe the Arts are important for young children's learning, it appears they have little experience to draw upon to develop positive beliefs of teaching the Arts in generalist classrooms" (Lemon & Garvis, 2013, p. 103). Due to their lack of confidence, participants in the current study were turning to social media platforms, such as Pinterest, for project ideas. Delello (2012) talks about the need for pre-service teachers to feel confident in a classroom with a group of students they have not necessarily taught before and Pinterest was a platform that assisted them. In a similar way this can be compared to the experiences of the participants for this research. Confidence was boosted when a visual resource could be found to assist them in an area of teaching they felt they had little knowledge about. This pressure on generalist teachers to take over the teaching of Visual Arts has occurred due to the disappearance of traditional Visual Arts specialist

teachers (Dinham, 2007). This has been due to a combination of federal budget cuts, leading to a lack of Visual Arts experiences offered to primary teaching students in the tertiary sector (Dinham, 2007; Ashenden, 2012). Due to this, generalists have limited training and find it an increasing challenge to provide adequate Visual Arts experiences in a crowded curriculum (Australian Primary Principal's Association, 2007).

Limited resources and experience

Another theme emerging from the research findings was in regard to resources, which was directly linked to the experiences students had in primary generalist classrooms. Those teachers who were interested in Visual Arts and felt it held value in the classroom experienced a daily battle attaining the appropriate resources. Linked to what was discussed in the previous section, teachers had limited knowledge about how to approach Visual Arts teaching, so in terms of teaching resources, they were limited to quick projects found on certain 'how-to' websites such as Pinterest. Pauline responded:

Oh gosh, I am on the Internet for all sorts of things! Pinterest is a really great source. I have very limited resources so I have coloured paper, paint, and glue. I don't have much else so I have to try and be creative with what I have got there.

It was difficult for her to maintain consistency in delivering Visual Arts lessons without access to Visual Arts resources and this was reflected across the interviews conducted. Harriet spoke about embarking on *"a unit on watercolour last term, which was something I found on the Internet – a step-by-step guide"*, whilst David described his version of *"mixing up the media"* to be the use of *"paint, crayons – we don't really do making things, like making models? It's more about just drawing and painting."* Sarah also mentioned: *"We don't really have much ... its limited to your paint, brushes and paper. Very limited."* She then went on to say she would not bother going to art PD as she wasn't a specialist, limiting her skill set considerably. Harriet also felt: *"The support we have in our school is very limited. We have no specialist, no art room or supply cupboard. Resources are poorly across the whole school."*

The findings describe, that although intentions amongst participants were good, they still had little knowledge about how to engage students in rich Visual Arts activities due to the lack of resources available to them. Russell-Bowie (2012) discovered six key challenges through her research that primary generalist teachers face daily when teaching The Arts. They were ranked in order from strongest to the least favoured (there

was very little discrepancy between points), with the results as follows for the last three points:

1. *Lack of personal experiences in The Arts;*
2. *Lack of priority for The Arts and not enough time in the school day; and,*
3. *Lack of preparation, resources and knowledge of the syllabus (p. 61).*

This lack of resources can impact a student's ability to have what Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) describes as an authentic learning experience, where the student is immersed entirely in the task and given the tools and materials required to achieve success. A list of criteria was developed that stated what an authentic learning experience would look like, with one of the points reading:

Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources: The task affords learners the opportunity to examine the problem from a variety of theoretical and practical perspectives, rather than allowing a single perspective that learners must imitate to be successful. The use of a variety of resources rather than a limited number of preselected references requires students to detect relevant from irrelevant information. (Herrington et al., 2003, p. 63)

Students need the tools and materials to have meaningful experiences in Visual Arts and schools need to provide access to the resources required. Efland (1990) describes the need for students to make and express themselves in a way that allows them to tap into the artistic process. In doing this, they provide a vehicle for others to understand their feelings and emotions differently. This is the beauty of artistic expression. Visual Arts provides a window to their inner-selves. Eisner (2002, 2007) expresses the importance of students using the materials and tools in Visual Arts to improve their bodily-kinaesthetic abilities and motor skills.

Skills based on a limited generalist skill set

The research revealed that primary generalists have a limited Visual Arts skill set and as a result, find it challenging to expose their students to rich Visual Arts experiences. The findings revealed that the projects primary generalist teachers were taking on had purpose: however, utilised a very limited range of materials. This was of course, if they attempted to teach students any skills at all. Sarah was very clear in her response:

“Definitely not. I would not teach them a skill necessarily.” Whereas Pauline attempted to *“link in with what they are doing”* even though she was *“not as familiar as I should be with the actual curriculum because I do so many different things!”* Integrating Visual Arts activities with other subjects was popular, due to the fact that they

perceived little time for much else in their curriculum. Harriet described: “*Visual Arts is usually integrated but I also focus on specific skills. Specific in that they are doing work that integrates with their literacy – but I treat it as a stand-alone art lesson.*” She taught techniques such as watercolour and drawing that were simple, yet engaging. David also spoke of the work he attempted with his class, using rulers and pencils to do “*a little bit of 3D perspective.*” However, he felt: “*I don’t really have much knowledge of it anyway so I try to give them what I can.*”

These findings demonstrate that the participants were attempting some activities, however, their limited skill set prevented them from extending them beyond simplistic tasks (Duncum, 1999). Duncum suggests that primary teachers know little about Visual Arts and fall back on craft activities with little educational substance. “At Easter for example, adult drawings of rabbits are commonly photocopied; children colour the photocopies and use cotton wool to make cute, fluffy tails” (Duncum, 1999, p. 15). This opinion is not unfounded, as many of the generalists interviewed for this study were hesitant to attempt anything other than basic drawing tasks, often integrated with other subjects. “Feeling they cannot teach skills, what they do as art is to explore numerous materials or the one material in numerous ways” (Duncum, 1999, p. 15). Some research suggests that Education in the Arts is considered an, ‘unnecessary frill’ in a curriculum that is focused solely on testing (Hallam, 2013). Dinham (2013) states:

If you are preparing to be a generalist teacher it is possible that you may have a modest background in the arts, lack confidence in your ability or feel intimidated by the challenge. However, you will find that you can deliver a worthwhile arts program if you are willing to try. (p. 1)

Research has shown that although some teachers are working hard to ensure they cover a rich and engaging Visual Arts learning, many are not. Some are trying to do the right thing, however, their art lessons look more like “busy work (cutting and pasting, colouring in) and contribute little towards meeting contemporary goals” (Dinham, 2013, p. 17). This comes from a combination of teachers feeling inadequate in their abilities, pressures from other Learning Areas in the school to emphasise skills related to standards of testing (NAPLAN, 2015) and general lack of understanding of what a good Visual Arts lesson looks like. This is happening all over the world. The Warwick commission in Britain reported that creative education is being put aside for what schools have labelled STEM subjects (Science, Technology, English and Mathematics) and many advocates for the arts believe that it should be changed to STEAM, since the Arts are mandated in Britain’s national curriculum; as it is also mandated in WA (Ricci,

2015). It appears that countries such as Finland and China value Arts education as much as the other areas and studies show that 42% of Chinese parents believe that it is a leading contributor to skills such as innovation and problem solving (Ricci, 2015). In Australia, the focus has been predominantly on literacy and numeracy (Western Australian Curriculum Framework, 2016). It has been found that NAPLAN standardised testing encourages a teacher-centred approach to pedagogy, which in turn has a negative effect on higher-order thinking skills and student creativity (Lobascher, 2011). Teachers are more likely to lecture to their students due to the high amount of content they are expected to cover in order to prepare for the testing. Thompson and Harbaugh (2013) talk about the findings from their research into teacher perceptions of the effects of NAPLAN on pedagogy in Australia. “In terms of curriculum adjustments for the test ... the findings indicate that teachers are narrowing their curriculum, spending less time on curriculum areas not assessed and that this is having a flow-on effect to the authenticity of their learning ...” (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013, p. 311). This perception raises questions about curriculum responsibility, if the majority of time is taken up with literacy and numeracy education at the expense of the other key learning areas, mandated by the WA Curriculum Framework (2016).

Informal discussion and personal response tasks

Primary generalists felt that Visual Arts response tasks were covered appropriately in their classroom. When asked specifically the activities involved, most spoke of informal conversation regarding student artwork. This was often conducted as class discussion and was rarely a structured task involving written response. Although all six teachers felt this was covered to a certain extent, only two teachers had students respond to the artwork of others. The example Sarah gave was: “*I think that comes naturally though where kids say ‘oh I like yours’ so yeah, I guess I would say they respond in that way.*” Although there was no explicit Visual Arts teaching in frameworks, scaffolding explicit response tasks, students responded to their own work (dioramas, models, artwork) during verbal discussion. Pauline mentioned: “*I would like to do more of the artists and different artworks and stuff, because they obviously have not had enough of that.*” The reason Pauline gave for this, was that she felt conceptually, students were not at an appropriate level of cognitive development to be able to comment on the artwork of others, especially artists in the wider community. Harriet had her students respond more formally in written responses to their own artwork, however, Amanda felt that things in her classroom were more informal: “*Students do not respond formally, it is more*

informal...they are not very good at commenting in depth or in a positive way about others work. They don't really know how to."

These responses clearly show that there was not much structured activity based on responding to both student artwork and the artwork of others taking place in generalist classrooms. This was in part due to generalists lacking the skills to conduct such activities and the lack of time allowed to fit it into the school curriculum. Generalists' feelings about students simply not knowing how to respond displayed their lack of readiness as teachers to try and structure such activities.

Cognitive development in children occurs in stages (Piaget, 1952). They are sequenced in the following way: sensorimotor (rapid cognitive growth phase), preoperational (thinking in symbols), concrete operational (beginning of logical thought) and finally, formal operational (occurs at 11 years old and continues to adulthood) (Piaget, 1952). These phases suggest that primary aged students are not able to think in an abstract way, which is helpful when responding to artwork. However, students may be able to think abstractly in some subjects if provided with enough educational experience (such as Visual Arts), even when they appear to be in the concrete operational phase for other subjects (Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2003; Morris, 2015; Piaget, 1950). Depending on their experiences, their ability to understand certain concepts can change.

Ausubel (1968) argued that students learn through guidance and can achieve more than originally thought if given an appropriate structure to learn within. Examples of this pedagogy could be presenting students with key concepts in a way that make it easy for them to grasp, as learning often occurs through language rather than practical material. This could explain some of the problems generalists have when presenting response work. If they are not familiar with the language of Visual Arts themselves, they may be unable to break it down into its more structured form and scaffold the learning appropriately for the student's cognitive ability level. The generalists interviewed had low self-efficacy, feeling less confident about delivering Arts Response tasks. This could lead to an infrequency dealing with the content or elimination of the content altogether (Garvis, 2008; Lemon & Garvis, 2013). Structured tasks that take into consideration the needs of students at their particular stage of cognition need to be implemented to increase student capabilities when dealing with written response work in the Year 7 classroom. A structure that involves 'individualised learning' assists

students to extend themselves beyond the concrete and further into the formal operational stages of cognition (Sutherland, 1992).

Limited time and low value, leading to diluted experiences

The frequency of Visual Arts activities, length of time teachers taught them for and the time of day Visual Arts activities took place all contributed to the feeling of a ‘low value and status’ of Visual Arts. Of the six participants, two teachers had a Visual Arts specialist teacher at their school and felt they did not need to teach it in their classroom. The other four teachers attempted to teach students skills; however, due to time constraints these activities were integrated more often with other subject areas. Pauline spoke about needing extra time; however, trying to work with what she had: *“You do need a substantial portion of time, a lot is preparation ... it’s hard because I have limited resources. I try to bring it all in though and get it ready.”* She added after further discussion:

Teachers have way less [experience] than me. I know that because I go into different rooms and they do nice art activities but I know that most do not come from a decent art background so they do they best they can with the time they’ve got. It tends to get pushed to the side, as it’s not a subject that’s valued. Especially when NAPLAN comes around. It’s not deemed to be particularly important.

David asked: *“What exactly do you classify as Visual Arts?”* He was concerned that his thoughts may be different to what the curriculum involved. Activities were usually ‘one off’, with some spanning a few sessions. David expressed: *“Things we choose are always bigger than we plan. You can pretty much guarantee that it will take the next fortnight to finish off [because we only have one sessions per week].”* In contrast, Harriet felt the need to keep the activities short and structured to fit in with her combined literacy/arts program: *“They finish a piece each week to show a technique – one illustrator per week. Five week projects.”* In terms of time of day, five teachers identified that Visual Arts was always the last thing of the day and mostly conducted on a Friday afternoon. This was mostly due to other subjects, such as literacy and numeracy being allocated to morning time slots. Sarah asserted: *“Friday afternoons, always in the afternoon – never in the morning. Anything creative we do - comes after lunch.”*

In a study conducted by Alter, Hayes and O’Hara (2009) primary generalist teachers struggled with the lack of time to dedicate to Visual Arts in the crowded curriculum.

They felt pressure to create and deliver activities without appropriate preparation time. Core subjects were deemed more important in schools, particularly Mathematics and English, due to the “department directives” to achieve “benchmark standards in Literacy and Numeracy” (p. 10). In the following reflection Tony presented a situation in which he felt there was a neglect of other curriculum areas. He stated:

In the last four or five years the government's seen how easy it has been to make schools accountable for Maths and English, and schools often teach up to 60% of their time in those two areas. That's two KLAs [Key Learning Areas] out of six! Where's the other four? And, by the way, the other four sometimes seem more difficult because we're trying to divide them up into these little boxes. (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009, p. 10)

It has been suggested by the findings of this research that many teachers have a limited understanding of the benefits of a Visual Arts education. Whilst they are so busy trying to improve literacy and numeracy education, they are unaware of the benefits Visual Arts can provide for students to succeed academically (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010). Not making time for rich engagement in Visual Arts limits essential learning experiences that students require for different stages of development, particularly through graphic, visual, spatial and kinaesthetic abilities (Arnheim, 1969, 1974; Efland, 1990, 2007; Eisner, 1974, 2010; Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1999; Lowenfeld, 1987). As well as this, Visual Arts assists students in their emotional and social development (Costantoura, 2001; Efland, 2002; Gardner, 1984). Participants found it difficult to resource Visual Arts in their classrooms effectively so instead, found it easier to integrate Visual Arts with other subjects or simply define Visual Arts activities as free time. Integration of Visual Arts into other subjects leads to diluted experiences and as a consequence, students are not involved wholly in the bodily-kinaesthetic, psychological and cognitive benefits that Visual Arts offers (Arnheim, 1969; Costantoura, 2001; Davis, 2008; Dinham, 2007; Efland, 2002; Gardner, 1983). Weekly taster activities, such as those described by participants, did not allow the child to engage fully with the materials or to benefit from rich Visual Arts experiences. Hetland (2013) talks about the importance of arts having a role in our schools and that they should not need justification on an instrumental basis:

Arts educators cannot allow the arts to be justified wholly or primarily in terms of what the arts can do for mathematics or reading. The arts must stand on what they teach directly. If along the way we find that the arts also facilitate academic learning in other subjects, then we have a wonderful side effect. But in justifying arts programs on an instrumental basis, we devalue the arts and fall prey to the anti-arts or arts-as-frills strain ... (p. 3)

Visual Arts is not a subject that should be integrated; it should stand-alone as it is listed in the curriculum (both Australian and WA), adequately resourced so students can benefit from the myriad of possibilities it has to offer. Engagement in art activities allows for the arousal of students' curiosity whilst stimulating their imaginations and creative minds, important to all learning (Bamford, 2002). It also encourages them to take the risks needed to achieve at school and to get the most out of their learning experiences (Anderson, 1999). The integration of arts activities into other Learning Areas increases the risk of de-valuing Visual Arts as an authentic subject area in its own right. Hallam (2013) describes that it can lead to children thinking Visual Arts is not important enough to engage with and that it is primarily product based and less about self-expression. Children working on cross-curricular activities are less likely to be able to involve themselves purely in the expressive process, distracted by the 'aim' of the project, which is often outcome heavy (Hallam, 2013).

Low value placed on Visual Arts education in the primary generalist classroom was a common factor in the findings in this research project and research has shown that there can be a range of reasons for this, all of which are not solely based on the attitudes of the generalist educators. Educational needs often reflect societal needs and values. On one hand, you have research that suggests reasons for learning in certain ways, highlighting the importance of certain subject areas and teaching pedagogy; on the other, you have political imperatives and demands that relate to economic wants and needs (Dinham 2013). There are a number of reasons today why our education system is in reform, and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum is revealing:

[More] sophisticated understandings and debates in education, developing globalization, shifting economic power and increasing international mobility, the shift to a knowledge society, increasing engagement with different cultures, the growing significance of the digital worlds, a concern for disenfranchised youth and fragmenting society, the changing nature of work, new fields of research along with environmental and sustainability issues. (Dinham, 2013, p. 6)

With an education needing to reflect the needs of the society, it is important to be informed, with an understanding of why and how an education in Visual Arts can assist students in the dynamic 21st century workforce. It has been widely identified that the new era in economic growth is going to require creative, flexible thinkers; which is what an education in Visual Arts has to offer (Dinham, 2013; UNESCO, 2010).

Lack of structured assessment format

Four participants spoke loosely about what they considered appropriate assessment for Visual Arts activities, whereas two demonstrated no understanding whatsoever. The findings revealed that very little structured assessment takes place in terms of looking at specific Visual Arts skills, techniques and responses. Each teacher had a different response to assessment in Visual Arts, with Sarah reflecting: *“We don’t really assess anything in particular ... I am looking more at the effort put into it – can I see that the result is what they were trying to portray in the first place – that sort of thing.”* Pauline described *“symmetry”* activities that she performed with students where she assessed (quite simply) whether they had followed the instructions and achieved a symmetrical design. She also mentioned that she added whether she thought artwork was creative or not, which she felt was a very important, however, a subjective part of assessment. Amanda spoke about teamwork being the most important part of her assessment process, whilst Eugene spoke very vaguely about *“creative skills and their application”*. David was the most specific in describing assessment with links to the language of the curriculum:

We report on skills and processes – blending, contrast etc., how well they manage their materials and their responses, and their ideas as well. We would do society the least I think. We did it once I think last year where we looked at a painting and talked about the message it portrays, but that’s about it.

Overall, the lack of knowledge displayed by all participants about the Australian Curriculum was worrying and they were not in denial about this either. Amanda mentioned openly that she lacked *“a lot of technical knowledge”* in terms of Visual Arts, revealing the reasons behind why her students had no structured assessment process. The issues associated with these findings directly relate to the requirements of the curriculum, that generalists are expected to cover in their classrooms in the absence of a Visual Arts specialist. The Australian Curriculum (2015) Year 5-6 learning area achievement standards state that students will:

[Explain] how ideas are communicated in artworks they make and to which they respond. They describe characteristics of artworks from different social, historical and cultural contexts that influence their art making. Students structure elements and processes of arts subjects to make artworks that communicate meaning. They work collaboratively to share artworks for audiences, demonstrating skills and techniques. (p. 1)

It is clear from this content overview that students are supposed to be responding to artwork of their own and that of artists from different social, historical and cultural

contexts. They are also supposed to have been introduced to materials and processes allowing them to create artworks to demonstrate particular skills and techniques, designed to prepare them for secondary Visual Arts studies. In a more detailed description, in Year 5 and 6 students are supposed to:

- Develop understanding of use and application of visual conventions as they develop conceptual and representational skills.
- Test and innovate with properties and qualities of available materials, techniques, technologies and processes, combining two or more visual arts forms to test the boundaries of representation.
- Explore a diversity of ideas, concepts and viewpoints as they make and respond to visual artworks as artists and audiences.
- Draw ideas from other artists, artworks, symbol systems, and visual arts practices in other cultures, societies and times.
- Extend their understanding of how and why artists, craftspeople and designers realise their ideas through different visual representations, practices, processes and viewpoints. (ACARA, 2015, p. 92)

Aside from this information, expectant that students have this knowledge by Year 5 and Year 6 in WA schools, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority of WA have stated in the WA Curriculum (based on ACARA, 2015): “The syllabus is based on the requirement that all students will study at least two of the five Arts subjects from pre-primary to Year 8. It is a requirement that students study a performance subject and a visual subject” (SCSA, 2016). The Australian Curriculum states that: “Schools will be best placed to determine how this will occur” (2015) leaving it up to the discretion of Principals to appoint certain specialists to Arts vacancies in schools. It is clear that in WA it is mandated that students are engaging in Visual Arts, whether this takes place in a specialist Visual Arts classroom or in a generalist classroom. It is the responsibility of generalist teachers to meet the curriculum requirements, if a specialist Visual Arts teacher has not been appointed to the school. Subsequently, it is imperative that the teacher responsible for the delivery of Visual Arts is aware of the curriculum and required assessment reporting for the subject.

Limited budgets

The findings showed that only two teachers felt adequately supported resource-wise by their school. The other four teachers felt that they were severely under-resourced and that this directly contributed to the Visual Arts experiences they were able to give their students. Sarah spoke about not having much at all and that her stock was “*very limited*”. Pauline spoke of her budget being very small and that she brought many materials in herself from home. She commented:

Each class teacher has a budget that is quite small. Not much is put into buying art supplies. I mean, all they ever buy is paper and paint and unfortunately they don't buy red, yellow and blue, [so] that you can make every colour from [them]; they tend to buy ten greens and ten oranges so I am running around the school looking for red and I can't find it! All I want is black, white and those three and you can make everything! They waste a lot of money on that.

She also spoke about the lack of available teacher resource centres to buy certain items. Instead, Pauline was often purchasing things herself. Harriet was similar in that her resources were limited and that any money for art supplies was out of the regular classroom budget. Often, there was very little left over for specific Visual Arts materials. She said, “*Resources are very poor across the whole primary school*”. David was slightly more optimistic about his school situation, explaining that he often ordered what he needed and the school supplied the materials. Eugene had no support from anyone in the school regarding Visual Arts; however, he never asked for it and didn't really understand why he would need it. Participants also did not ask for professional development in Visual Arts. David felt as though he received enough ‘ideas’ from other generalists in his school and others, such as Sarah, believed it was not her job to be taught Visual Arts skills when literacy and numeracy were her main focus.

A study conducted by the National Society for Education in Art and Design (2015-16) discussed some of the downfalls of government policy in the UK with regard to Visual Arts education. It was discovered that over half of all art and design teachers self-fund their own continuing professional development opportunities and 55% of primary subject coordinators rarely or never attend subject specific professional development. Only 25% had the opportunity to attend museum or gallery training. In another study, Garvis and Pendergast (2010) discovered that teachers reported no or limited support when teaching any of the arts subjects. The majority of teachers who asked for PD in Arts subjects received little feedback or were simply denied their requests for PD (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, p. 14). In the study conducted of 201 participants, it was discovered that:

With limited support for resources, denial of the opportunity to participate in professional development in the arts, little support from within the school and competition for curriculum time against instruction focused on the national standardised testing for literacy and numeracy, many of the respondents felt it difficult to even begin considering teaching the arts in the classroom. (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, p. 15)

In a study conducted by Burnaford (2009) it was commonplace for arts teachers to feel disconnected from their teaching colleagues in their school and forced to participate in professional development that had no focus on arts curriculum. Many arts teachers felt isolated in their schools as they were the only specialists, finding it difficult to remain current in their profession with little to no opportunity to engage in specifically arts-based professional development. If specialists have little to no opportunities, what does this then pose for generalist teachers who may want to improve their arts teaching skills? It would appear that in schools run by “high stakes testing climate/district culture related to increasing students test scores” (Bamford, 2009, p. 10) where the budget does not extend to improving outcomes for the Arts.

Secondary Visual Arts Teachers

The findings from the secondary Visual Arts specialists were placed in a diagram that accurately described the main themes that emerged from the interviews (See Figure 6). The following discussion is based around this summary and the headings correspond to each theme.

Students have a limited readiness for and exposure to Visual Arts

a) Enthusiastic with low skill

This particular theme emerged as a result of the experiences of the participants on their first encounter of Year 7 students. Initial engagement in Visual Arts activities did not appear a problem for students according to the secondary teachers. Often this indicates a sign of ‘readiness, students are happy and confident to attempt tasks and excited to engage in activities. Teachers did not find motivation a problem; however, the students’ motivations were for a number of different reasons. Visual Arts was a novelty to the majority of students, encouraging excitement due to the diversity of materials. Seline described students using portfolios for the first time as a real highlight, as “*it is no longer a fun fill in Satan with cotton wool ball thing.*” Casey reflected that students were unfamiliar with the design process, describing the way she “*really had to explain that and they really didn’t understand why they had to do this preliminary work*”. Susan felt that it was the art language that was a real issue in her classroom, with students “*coming with limited art language ... they may have had experience doing things (playing with certain materials), but it was not taught in the framework of visual arts, no elements, principles or investigation experience at all. Their retention is also limited.*” In some cases students were described as “*reticent to try*” when it came to

unfamiliar materials, especially if they had not had a specialist Visual Arts teacher. Diana spoke about the fact that although they were enthusiastic, it took them time to warm to certain activities and find success, simply due to their lack of knowledge. Some students cope with the transition from primary to secondary school quite well, others have been known to have problems. Issues can range from the need to form new peer groups to the movement between classrooms and forming new relationships with a variety of teachers. A child's social and emotional health and well-being can be affected if he/she has problems dealing with these changes (Berlach, Coffey & O'Neill, 2011).

This is often reflected in the way students engage with tasks and how they feel about themselves, although other factors such as attendance and academic performance can also be the result of problems in transition to secondary school (Ashton, 2008; Dinham & Rowe, 2008). Some of the factors influencing the way students behaved in secondary classrooms may have in part been due to difficulty in the transition period between primary school and Year 7. The Catholic Education System has only had Year 7 students in its secondary schools since 2009, and research suggests that if the appropriate communicative measures are not taken to ensure that the needs of students are met at this stage of adolescent development, problems can persist with regard to engagement in new and different activities (Berlach, Coffey & O'Neill, 2011).

Generally, student strengths and weaknesses in Visual Arts changed depending on the experiences of the teachers from the feeder primary schools and what the secondary Visual Arts teacher decided to teach in the first few months of classes. Some teachers believed that students had more developed drawing skills (in particular, the ability to draw things in proportion). This was usually the case since primary students were familiar with drawing implements. However, in their approach to tasks they were less consistent. Seline felt: *"Students who do not have an art specialist or the experiences don't step outside the box because they don't have the knowledge yet."* Although their enthusiasm was high, they were still very critical of their own work, which was a weakness when it came to completing tasks. Susan believed that students had already started to *"pigeonhole themselves"* and already had perceptions about things they could and couldn't do. This made it difficult to teach them new skills. They would always take the *"easy option"* if presented with a range of materials according to Diana, as having no art specialist meant they were scared to draw things out of their comfort zone. In Summer's opinion, they had very little in terms of Visual Arts skills. Working within boundaries was problematic and their pencil control was poor – even though they had

been using pencils daily through most of their schooling. She felt that this was due to being “*allowed to do what they wanted in primary school*” as Visual Arts was often a free time activity and rarely treated as a valued subject.

I

Theme Nine: Essentialist justification

Figure 6. Emergent themes from Secondary Visual Arts teacher interviews.

Research has shown that an education in the arts that is meaningful and authentic (Dinham, 2013) has the ability to positively influence a student's overall enjoyment of education. Students arriving in secondary Visual Arts classrooms are reticent to try new things and fall into familiar patterns in a bid to stay within their comfort zones. Visual Arts participation is said to improve student engagement whilst increasing their willingness to participate and gives them an overall interest in learning (Dinham, 2013). It is also an avenue for "self-expression and self-validation [which is] quantifiably different to other learning areas [providing] a crucial avenue for self-expression and self-validation", which in turn has a "positive effect on a child's identity formation" (Dinham, 2013, p. 19). Teachers who are effective in delivering Visual Arts education have also shown improvements in their classroom self-efficacy, which demonstrates that a balanced curriculum assists them personally and professionally, encouraging them to be more innovative in the classroom (Bellisario & Donovan, 2012).

b) Can identify arts language, cannot apply

In terms of arts language, all six participants felt that this was a large struggle for students. Most students could do the work when given structured prompts, however, they were not familiar with any form of analysis structure, so they struggled with understanding how to use the language. Casey explained that "*they have no problem identifying the elements and principles, but if I try and use it in a sentence or a different context to it being isolated, they don't understand what I'm talking about.*" She felt that the transfer was not ideal and application to other activities a problem. Susan commented on the low literacy in general being a problem, and Summer outright denied her students were ready to tackle writing in a Visual Arts context at all:

Arts language is their weakest. They are not ready. To introduce these words and these adjectives that are subject specific, often blows their mind and they can't fathom it. In fact, I found that by the time Year 9 comes around they are only just starting to make a sentence about it. They could make a sentence and say there is colour in it but to be able to say that it is contrasting or harmonious, they can't.

Diana reflected on a Visual Arts teacher in one of the primary schools in her area and that students from that particular school had heard the language before, which helped them when responding to artwork in her classroom. Liam felt that if it was being taught, it was at a far lower skill level than what was required when the students entered Year 7.

Visual Arts language is a difficult area for teachers to prepare students and is often an area of weakness in both primary and secondary contexts. Being visually literate is a specific skill that is becoming more important in our modern society and the term multi-literacy is used to describe the multiple ways students need to be exposed to make sense of the ever-changing world we live in (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Students are expected to cope with multiple literacy's and career success comes to those who are able to understand and make sense of a wide range of platforms in order to problem solve and innovate (Choi & Piro, 2009). Students who have been exposed to literacy in an English lesson as well as different language and modes of analysing in a Visual Arts lesson are better prepared with 21st century skills. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) suggests students should be creative and innovative contributors to society. This should extend to academics as well and works to educate the whole person (Morris, 2015). It identifies the competitive nature of the global workforce and that visual understandings place students at an advantage, particularly in terms of communication and cultural discourse (Morris, 2015).

Visual texts communicate in different ways and students need to understand and identify how they work in order to make understanding; for example:

Visual texts – just like written and spoken texts – are constructed using a range of conventions ... we are using a number of 'languages' to extract meaning from these conventions, for example, in our interactions with such elements as colour, angles, symbols and visual metaphors. (Atkins, 2002, p. 37)

Visual response tasks ask students to comment on what they see and feel about an image and what formal elements and principles (e.g., colour, line, texture, and shape) have been used to bring the image together. The viewer's observations allow them to make meaning from the artwork. They often bring their own personal experiences to the reading of artworks, which can also be an integral part of the process (Flood, 2004). Of all the participants in this research project, Casey felt that her students presented with good research skills and that this was one of their strengths. She claimed: "*Strengths would probably be the research and investigation side. If I tell them something they listen, they take it on board but they cannot do more than two steps at a time*". Although they were able to research, their exposure to the language of Visual arts was low, which made combining sentences and applying language to different contexts difficult.

Students need to understand how to communicate in a range of ways in our evolving society (Dinham, 2013). One way of communicating involves visual response and reflection, and this should occur at primary level if students are going to recognise and understand Visual Arts language in the secondary classroom. The National Review of Visual Education (2006) identified the need for students to be developing their communicative judgement in our graphics based environment. This development occurs when students are exposed to artworks from both peers and artists in society, and when they are encouraged to critically reflect on artworks' meaning both verbally and in written form. There are many benefits to students who participate in-group discussion regarding artwork and visual culture, such as the visual culture learning communities (VCLCs) studied by Freedman (2013). Students who found their artistic educational experience lacking relevance (due to their alternative interests in certain subcultures) found that creating their own peer groups that explored these interests (anime, urban art, cosplay) beneficial to their education as they were connecting with art makers and collaborating on projects. These processes helped students to develop critical thinking whilst improving their language abilities. This is widely applicable to secondary education as a multi-literacy approach is expected in secondary English. The ATAR English examination includes image response tasks where students are expected to identify and analyse elements of images in order to compose narratives and to inspire them to discuss certain ideas. They have to be able to breakdown certain elements of an image in order to understand its meaning (SCSA, 2016). This directly links the importance of visual understandings to develop the overall literacy of the student in the 21st century. Geahigan (1999) speaks of pre-service teachers having little understanding of critical responses: "Most courses are predominantly elements and principles focused, resulting in a formalistic understanding of art" (p. 13). When students in secondary subjects such as English and HASS (SCSA, 2016) are expected to interpret and identify concepts from visual prompts, it is important that content in Visual Arts is being taught effectively and students understand how to break down the subject matter represented in images in a thoughtful and reflective way. If this is not taught at pre-service teacher level, it is not easily transferred to secondary students in the classroom.

c) Limited infrastructure and exposure to Visual Arts

Participants also commented on student readiness to engage in the wider range of studio materials on offer in a secondary classroom. Some suggested that the problem was both access to the resources in primary school and the fact the students were not "*allowed*"

to use certain things. Comments such as ‘only being permitted to use coloured pencils’, suggest an unwillingness on the part of the generalist to even try using a range of materials, for reasons to do with preparation time and clean-up. One main example of this was ceramic work, which was usually absent from the primary school curriculum. Summer described that perhaps half her students had used clay at some point prior to entering secondary school, and in terms of paint use, “*no way, anything messy they haven’t done.*” Diana felt that the major difference in students who had a Visual Arts primary specialist and those that did not was in their ability to select studio materials:

Due to the fact that they haven’t had as much exposure in certain areas, they will choose what they know. Students who have worked with a wider range of media will choose different things, but you have kids who will choose the pencils because they want to colour in neatly. Those who are more familiar with materials will try the paints.

Two participants felt that student engagement and motivation was high enough to combat this issue. Occasionally their lack of confidence impacted their work ethic, however, for the most part they were willing to try.

In essence, if teachers have negative experiences with the arts or very little experience at all, this is going to be directly reflected in their classroom practice. Teacher attitudes towards Visual Arts influence how students see and value the arts. It is evident from the interviews that students are willing to engage with the materials, they have just had limited time to do so due to the generalist teachers’ attitudes. Perceived capabilities are developed in four ways according to Bandura (2012). These are called mastery experiences. The first is resilience and works on the basis that if people only experience success through applying little effort, they will be less likely to persevere through more difficult or trying tasks. They need to manage their failures and see them as a way to learn and move forward. There is then social modelling, social persuasion and choice processes. All these beliefs shape how someone is going to cope in certain situations and in terms of this research, many of the secondary specialist teachers perceived there was very little belief in generalist teacher ability to teach the visual arts and therefore they were not having enough positive experiences to build up their perceived capabilities in this area (Bandura, 2012). Positive experiences are important for continued success and enjoyment in a subject, as Lummis and Morris (2014) point out in their arts experience cycle:

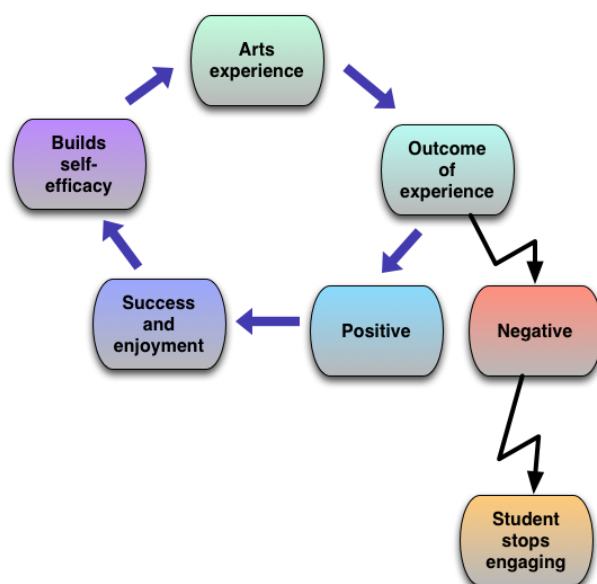


Figure 7. Pre-service teachers’ Arts experiences model conceptualised by Lummis and Morris (2014), adapted from Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory.

If the student has a negative experience, the student will cease engagement. Whereas, in positive experiences the enjoyment is increased, self-efficacy is built and the cycle continues. Teachers are key to the positive or negative outcomes of this cycle for their students. Dinham (2013) suggests that it is in an authentic arts learning environment that students learn the necessary skills to succeed. Visual Arts is classically engaged with by ‘doing it’ and learning only occurs when it is practiced regularly. Students must “engage in the process of creating in order to gain the key benefits of arts education” (Dinham, 2013, p. 28). If resources are absent from the learning, then rich experiences do not occur and students will be unfamiliar with certain materials. Teachers limited by time constraints, materials and space are forced to limit the amount of time on arts activities, however, when given more autonomy in the classroom their confidence is increased, leading to more frequent student engagement in Visual Arts (Oreck, 2006). A study of generalist teachers utilising Visual Arts often in their classroom environment alleviated pressures felt by standardised testing, with these teachers allowing visits from artists in the community and engaging their students daily in Visual Arts activities. When teachers were given more autonomy and selection for Professional Development they demonstrated risk-taking, task completion and greater confidence in their teaching overall (Oreck, 2006). Secondary teachers find many students struggling with confidence in the Visual Art classroom and although some of this could be put down to rite-of-passage transition to secondary school (Coffey, Berlach & O’Neill, 2011), most

would be linked directly to the lack of or limited Visual Arts exposure in the primary environment.

d) Teacher assistance to ensure success

As much as students needed to be willing to engage with traditional studio materials, it was important to identify what their strengths and weaknesses were within their use of these materials. Most participants felt that the sculptural work was weakest, as they were not exposed to many construction tasks in a primary Visual Arts context. Unless students had a natural aptitude for clay work, they struggled. Summer believed that they were not so bad once engaged with the task and clay usually got them motivated. She still felt they had not done much and needed to do activities that were engaging so students chose Visual Arts again the following year, due to the competitive nature of elective subject selection. She also spoke about the need for structure in her classroom as students could not cope with certain Visual Arts technique without the extra assistance. Due to time constraints forcing secondary teachers to ‘dive’ straight into studio projects, she could not rely on students having the skills to achieve highly technical work, as most of them were lacking in skills. Instead, structure and fun was what her Year 7 program was based on. Susan believed that clay work, “*requires a lot more effort on the part of the teacher*”; however, they appeared to have success in her classroom due to her structured approach as well. She commented:

It is about them having a project that is pitched correctly at their age bracket so they will have success. That will then be a strength - Visual perception is so variable at that age. Where they are at is patchy. Some kids are still grappling with fine motor skills but can have success due to the structure of the activities.

Two-dimensional (2D) work was still considered the main strength, as students in primary school were “*always doing some form of drawing as ‘free time’*” in their generalist classes. One participant did refute this though, as she felt that although students may have used pencils to draw daily, other forms of drawing were not considered, such as observed studies and the application of tone and value.

From these findings it seems clear that there is a lack of scope in the development of programs in the primary school setting. As a consequence, secondary Visual Arts specialists are limited in their own teaching methods due to the amount of skill and content knowledge they must teach students when they arrive in their classroom. Most primary generalists are confined by the increased literacy and numeracy workload and

the fact that curriculum changes have been made for economic gain (Codd, 2005), which has left little time for the arts and the ability for teachers to build on their sense of self-efficacy in the subject (Garvis, 2008; Hallam et al., 2008; Harker et al., 2003). As a result, students are not being immersed in rich Visual Arts experiences often enough (Dinham, 2013) and secondary teachers are having to ‘make up’ for this by helping students achieve success in a more structured task-by-task environment. This method of teaching by secondary teachers seems to be effective in generating an outcome, however, it could also be interpreted as “activities that direct children through pre-determined processes to a teacher-prescribed and uniform outcome ...” (Brown, Macintyre & Watkins, 2012, p. 112). This is said to promote “manipulative skills”, which lack independent and creative learning (Brown, Macintyre & Watkins, 2012, p. 112). Primary generalist teachers are run down, commenting: “It’s too hard. The school day is so full, and everything has to be justified” (Laird, 2012, p. 48), which contributes directly to the lack of depth in the primary Visual Arts program, if one exists at all.

Visual Arts has a low status

a) Low value

The theme of Visual Arts’ low status was coded from the second interview question, which centred on how the secondary teachers felt Visual Arts was perceived in the primary school context. This was only based on how each teacher felt the Visual Arts were valued in the primary schools, judged by their own professional relationship with feeder schools and from comments, attitudes and overall knowledge displayed by students in secondary classes. Of all the participants, only one felt that primary Visual Arts was valued. It was possible that part of the reason she felt this was due to the fact that she was both the primary and secondary specialist at the independent school she worked at, and as a result was an advocate for her subject. This feeling was not shared though, with other participants talking about Visual Arts specialists being, “*glorified DOTT providers*” in primary schools. Diana felt respected in that she was treated as a professional; however she commented, “*As long as I am there in body, they don’t care about the rest.*” It seemed that the students in secondary classes who did not have a Visual Arts specialist did not see art as “*valued as a credible subject*” (Casey). Susan felt that art was “*bottom of the cesspool in primary schools,*” and Summer felt this was predominantly because:

Teachers think it’s too hard - ‘too hard basket’. They are not trained in this are so they are not going to do it ... I think that what the time is used

for instead is colouring in time- free time. It's definitely not seen as a core subject or a serious subject at all.

Liam shared this belief and felt that *“it gets done quite a bit but it is like a reward activity once you have done the ‘proper’ work. It is seen as something special. It is not a regular everyday, so it is on the sidelines.”*

Research shows that that many pre-service teachers who have had a negative experience with the Arts pass this on in their own teaching experiences with their students. “These past experiences have an impact of teacher self-efficacy. Affective states caused by emotional arousal may create negative beliefs for beginning teachers” (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, p. 8).

As reported in the previous section of this chapter, if the cycle of negativity continues in arts experiences, engagement is lost (Lummis & Morris, 2014). The same model applies to teachers and the way in which their experiences directly influence what and how they teach Visual Arts (Bandura, 2012; Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Dinham, 2013). Often, teachers themselves have come from a background of negative experiences in Visual Arts. They have negative experiences around Visual Arts and it is difficult to change these pre-existing attitudes (Ashton, 1999; Bamford, 2002). Teachers value Visual Arts, however, are inadequately prepared to teach students skills in depth (Flockton & Crooks, 2008). They do not have the pedagogical knowledge to plan lessons that are rich, versatile and skill building and so a lack of understanding of “the theory behind their practice ... [means] they will be unable to improve it” (Bracey 2003, p. 186). Research suggests that generalist primary teachers believe that the inclusion of Visual Arts in the classroom is important; however, it takes time and effort to be achieved successfully. Those who felt that Visual Arts was unable to maintain its place in the generalist classroom were all teachers who had low self-efficacy in their abilities due to their limited pre-service teacher training (Laird, 2012). The Australian Primary Principal’s Association confirms that only 13% of all primary generalist teachers have the background or qualifications to teach the arts, making: “Their capacity to respond to mandated curriculum priorities beyond literacy and numeracy variable” (APPA, 2007, p. 5). Although this has been found to be the case, the mandated curriculum priorities are clearly stated in the expected phases of schooling:

While every student will be immersed in a well-balanced curriculum there are different priorities for different phases of schooling. The relative emphasis varies across the phases of schooling and is as follows:

- Literacy and numeracy, integrated across the curriculum, are

priority areas in the early years (typically Kindergarten-Year 2, and into Years 3-4).

- The emphasis moves to encompass all eight learning areas in the upper primary years (typically Years 5-6) and the first years of lower secondary schooling (typically Years 7-8). (SCSA, 2016)

It is clear that in WA, SCSA have mandated the teaching of Visual Arts in the upper primary years, highlighting that it is an expectation that generalist primary teachers are covering Visual Arts education. It is understandable that the teachers are feeling an increased burden of literacy and numeracy priorities, as this is supposed to be their main focus. The low value placed on Visual Arts education in primary schools in this study has come about, in part, due to a lack of understanding and prior knowledge of the subject. At the same time, it is a result of a crowded curriculum that has suggested the focus remains on literacy and numeracy education (APPA, 2007).

b) Preparation deficit

According to the findings, generalist primary teachers, when preparing students for secondary school, have problems passing on the adequate Visual Arts skills. All perceptions from participants were unanimous in that nobody felt students were prepared for the secondary Visual Arts classroom. Due to primary generalists using what the secondary specialists felt was time to “*play and experiment*” not enough analysis was taking place. Instead of learning skills to any great capacity, Seline believed, “*kids are not really learning anything but having fun and playing with some materials.*” Diana, in one sweeping statement, described exactly why she felt generalist teachers were unable to give students rich Visual Arts experiences:

In general in the primary school, teachers will try – but they don’t have the brain space to do it. A generalist does not have the skills - it’s just too hard. An art specialist is unique. Generalists are group of people who know they should do it but are scared to do it themselves.

Other participants shared this perception that primary generalists had a fear of the unknown. Susan had a slightly different feeling about why some generalists attempted to teach Visual Arts and others were reticent: “*This can be varied depending on interest and motivation of the teacher. If you have a primary school teacher that is Math and Phys-Ed focused, well, Art doesn’t come into it. It is patchy.*” This idea that teachers will attempt to teach a subject if they have the interest was a key finding in interviewing primary teachers for this research project. However, generalist teachers need to understand that it is not actually a choice, it is mandated that they teach it, according to curriculum (ACARA, 2015). Summer even suggested a form of peer coaching and

assisting primary generalist teachers herself, as a secondary teacher, suggesting projects and assisting them with resources. She said: *“I could probably do a little booklet up and give them art terms with ideas. I used to send them emails about exhibitions because I knew the kids never went out to see them.”*

Teacher mentoring has shown improvements in teacher attrition rates over time. Ongoing access to pedagogical and curricular content knowledge improves teacher skills and develops confidence (Paris, 2008, p. 22). Summer was definitely trying to improve the situation in her school by supporting and assisting other teachers in areas where they lacked knowledge and experience. Collegial support is important in improving teacher self-efficacy in any educational situation. Garvis and Pendergast (2010) discuss this in their research findings as a support structure important to teachers. Respondents reported “they valued advice from other experienced teachers, which contributed to the sharing of resources, ideas, units of work and teaching strategies” (p. 15). They mentioned that they felt very fortunate to have skilled and passionate colleagues in Arts education, assisting them in teaching their own students. Collegiate support is powerful in building confidence in our primary generalists’ abilities to teach Visual Arts.

c) Visual Arts teachers as DOTT providers

Discussion about students’ preparation for secondary Visual Arts lead to findings regarding how valued the generalist Visual Arts teacher was within the schools in general, according to secondary teachers’ perceptions. Due to Visual Arts as a subject holding low value, the teachers were also seen as *“a fluffy extra, a bit of fun time, and a bit of mucking around.”* Summer described Visual Arts teachers as optional extras. Once all the other subjects were catered for, if money and time was left over, a Visual Arts teacher may be employed. She spoke about this from personal experience, as the primary school she was connected to was unable to fund a Visual Arts teacher for that very reason. Research shows that funding cuts are occurring across Australia, with Colleen Ricci (2015) reporting:

Research has shown a decline in the number of public schools offering arts subjects; fewer specialist art teachers, and less time devoted to arts in the curriculum. Consequently, the report says, fewer creative and cultural opportunities exist for children ... (para. 1).

Visual Arts teachers and Arts subjects in general were labelled on the decline in Australia, with Professor Robyn Ewing (2015) asserting that the Arts need to be given

the same status as literacy and numeracy education. With regard to this research project, the participants felt that they were labelled by the term: “*DOTT providers*” (Diana), which although respected, did not fit into a category worthy of the title ‘specialist’.

Diana was part of a school system where:

I am called a DOTT provider. I am given respect, but only professionally. The agreement is they can put me where they like though. They slot me where they need me. I think all primary schools need specialist Visual Arts teachers. They just need it.

According to the research, Visual Arts specialists have always had problems gaining status within their schools:

[Visual Arts] teachers have always faced difficulties in achieving significant other status, given scheduling constraints that often limit students' time in art. In schools lacking an art specialist, general classroom teachers are solely responsible for designing and delivering art curricula to elementary students. (Miraglia, 2008, p. 53)

In addition to compulsory education, time given to pre-service generalist teachers to prepare for teaching Visual Arts is minimal in WA universities. Research suggests that there is no standardised content between the universities regarding the teaching of primary generalist Visual Arts, which leads to differing levels of readiness and low self-efficacy (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, p. 5). Currently, ECU (2016) is the institution with the most time dedicated to pre-service Visual Arts education in WA, with two integrated arts units offered over two years and then an optional visual arts only elective in fourth year. Curtin University, Notre Dame and Murdoch have minimal time dedicated to Visual Arts and often it is integrated with the other arts subjects (Curtin University, 2016; Murdoch University, 2016; Notre Dame University, 2016).

Essentialist justification

The final research theme arose from the secondary teacher participants' reasons why, in their opinion, Visual Arts was essential to schools. This was an eye opening experience, listening to their stories and justifications as to why their subject should be valued in all schools. All of the teachers felt that Visual Arts held its own due to the essential and unique teachings it has to offer (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2010; Lowenfeld, 1987). The support that it offers students was a common theme, with some referring to its importance as not only being about the skills it offers (painting or drawing), but that it allowed students to study the world in more depth and the issues surrounding certain community groups and society as a whole. The idea that Visual Arts is able to reach further than our own culture is a sentiment shared by Armstrong and de Botton (2013):

Art is an immensely sophisticated accumulation of the experiences of others, presented to us in well-shaped and well-organised forms. It can provide us with some of the most eloquent instances of the voices of other cultures, so that engagement with artworks stretches our notions of ourselves and the world. (p. 65)

The inflexibility for other subjects to allow students self-expression was another essential reason that Visual Arts skills should be offered. Casey felt that:

We don't use our hands enough as a society. It makes them more empathetic. I think it allows them to express things they are unable to talk about or engage with on a subconscious level. They can engage with emotions through their artwork. I think it provides the kids who might not be good at sport or academics a chance to succeed and master something that contributes to their self-identity.

Another key emotional skill that Visual Arts teaches is resilience. Susan believed that this was something that was transferable to all professions and important for students when learning to deal with criticism. She believed they could be more “*courageous in their decision making*” throughout their life. It has been suggested in other research that Visual Arts has many benefits, including building resilience in young people. Working through a program of Visual Arts activities, engaging in tasks that are matched to student skill level, are challenging enough and encourage sharing and helping each other, improves resilience amongst young people (Macpherson, Hart, & Heaver, 2015). The fact that all students could be successful at something was important to Summer as well. She felt that without Visual Arts in the curriculum, we were marginalising a group of students who have a need to express themselves through Visual Arts. She said that:

Sadly, our culture values academia over the arts. That is actually very sad because there are a whole bunch of people who are great at the arts and yet they are marginalised in our society and made to feel less worthy.

She went on to talk about why the multiples intelligences are so important, equipping students with the skills to be successful in life. Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences theory was about appealing to students with a range of skills in order to engage their thinking and to prepare them for the socio-cultural and psychological levels of life. Challenging them to think outside the boundaries and creating an environment of problem solving is essential for success (Costantoura, 2001; Davis, 2008; Eisner, 1972). Diana spoke of Visual Arts as being a way of seeing, unlike any other subject: “*It's understanding through seeing and that's a very important thing.*” She thought, that to understand our world and all that it offers, students needed to be able to look at it from different angles. This was something that Visual Arts offered, that no other subject

could do quite as well. Davis (2008) suggested through her research, that 21st century student needs are now different and an education system based around knowledge of literacy and numeracy will no longer meet their needs for a visual education. This is where the term ‘Visuacy’ describes a different way of learning and seeing things, allowing students to interpret their ever-changing, highly visual world full of pictures, graphics and images of every kind (Burmark, 2002). Liam, in essence, described what all the participants found most frustrating, which was the concept that Visual Arts always needed to be “fought” for in schools. For Liam, it was so blindingly obvious why we needed to have Visual Arts as a subject and yet:

You don’t see English and Maths teachers having to store away a line of defence each time the relevance of their subject is questioned, because everyone assumes their subject is important. We have an innate need to defend why our subject is valid!

Liam commented on the lack of time teachers had dedicated to Visual Arts in lower secondary school in comparison to other subjects, although students were still expected to achieve highly when they entered Year 11 and 12. The injustices he felt for his subject were strong and he felt the lack of value for the arts, despite their importance to “engage different learning profiles” and showing students how to “work through by doing and going through a process to see how they make connections.” In light of Liam’s thoughts about Visual Arts Education, the following excerpt describes just how important equal opportunity is for Visual Arts and other school subjects:

Does experience in the arts change students’ minds so that they can approach the world as an artist would? Students must be given the opportunity to think like artists, just as they should also be given the opportunity to approach the world mathematically, scientifically, historically and linguistically. The arts are another way of knowing the world – as important as the other disciplines to our societal health. (Hetland, 2013, p. 4)

Comparison between primary and secondary findings

The findings presented provide no surprises in terms of what was initially proposed for this research project. It is clear from the interviews that primary generalist teachers perceived Visual Arts education to hold low value in primary schools and that generalist teachers find it difficult to cope with increasing curriculum demands on their time. Low value was exemplified through the lack of resourcing (materials and access to specialists), time spent on Visual Arts in the classroom and the general attitude that Visual Arts holds less importance as a subject in the curriculum, in comparison particularly to literacy and numeracy education. The generalist teachers that attempted

to cover Visual Arts lacked confidence in their ability to teach it effectively and this was often due to their lack of positive educational experience in the field. The research supports the notion of low teacher self-efficacy leading to limited exposure to Visual Arts for students in the generalist classroom (Ashton, 1999; Bamford, 2002; Bandura, 2012; Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Dinham, 2013; Ewing, 2015; Flockton & Crooks, 2008; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Paris, 2008; Ricci, 2015).

In comparison, the secondary Visual Arts specialists confirmed this perceived deficit in Visual Arts skills through their own experiences with Year 7 students in the secondary context. Students arrived from primary school unprepared for what was taught in secondary Visual Arts and although their motivation and engagement was high, specialists had to resort to modifying their learning programs to highly structure content in order for students to have success. The secondary specialists believed that students were unprepared for learning due to the evident lack of understanding generalists had of Visual Arts education and the limited access to resources in order to build rich and valuable Visual Arts lessons. They were avid believers in the essential importance of Visual Arts to both primary and secondary schooling and were remorseful at the notion that Visual Arts held very little importance in primary generalist classrooms.

The final chapter will reveal the conclusions that have been drawn as a result of this research project, where it began and what it was attempting to achieve. This coupled with recommendations to consider for Visual Arts education and implications for future research in this field will be discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the extent to which Visual Arts is taught in primary schools and how students transfer this knowledge to Visual Arts in secondary school. A deficit in Year 8 Visual Arts skills was identified by the researcher, drawn from her own experiences in the secondary classroom environment as a Visual Arts specialist teacher. With the movement of Year 7 students from primary schools into secondary schools in 2015, the focus of the research was on how Year 7 students coped with the transition to a secondary school Visual Arts classroom, and how much they retained the skills they had been exposed to in a primary Visual Arts context. This skill acquisition may have been attained from a Visual Arts specialist teacher in the school or from the generalist classroom teacher.

Since it has been mandated that Visual Arts be taught in generalist primary classrooms (SCSA, 2016), Visual Arts specialist teachers in the primary context were not the focus of this study. Instead, upper primary teachers were interviewed, to identify the extent to which they were capable of teaching Visual Arts curriculum and how they went about offering Visual Arts experiences to their students. It was presumed that those students who had the benefit of a primary Visual Arts specialist had more exposure and their skills were more pronounced by Year 7.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What do specialist Visual Arts teachers think of their Year 7 cohort's skill-base?
2. How do upper primary generalist teachers, teaching in Perth's eastern suburbs, perceive Visual Arts skills are taught in their schools?
 - What types of Visual Arts learning experiences are primary generalist teachers offering their students?
 - How frequent are Visual Arts learning experiences occurring?
 - What resources and support do the teachers receive from the school?

These questions were guided by a bottom-up, emic approach to the study (Tracy, 2013), where the researcher approached the topic from an experienced perspective, with the intent to explore and discover the emerging themes by asking other like-minded specialists the aforementioned questions. This chapter aims to present the conclusions

drawn from the data collected, describing: the extent to which specialist Visual Arts teachers perceive a skill deficit in their Year 7 cohort, the deficiency of Visual Arts skills taught in primary school generalist classrooms, the types of learning experiences generalist teachers offer and the frequency of Visual Arts lessons and finally, resources and support offered by the schools to assist generalists in delivering Visual Arts curriculum.

The themes that emerged from both primary generalist teacher interviews and secondary Visual Arts teacher interviews were found to be:

1. Visual Arts Deficit
 - a. Student experiences
 - b. Generalist teacher education in the Visual Arts
2. Visual Arts has a low value/status

These themes were prominent in the evidence gathered from the interviews. Both secondary Visual Arts teachers and primary generalists noted deficits in student experiences. This was in part due to the generalist teachers having a very limited skill set to draw on in the classroom. A general low value placed on Visual Arts in primary schools compounded this limited teacher skill set, with resource access being problematic for most teachers, with other subject areas taking priority due to the school focus being directed to traditional literacies. The following provides more detail about these emerging themes.

Conclusion One: Visual Arts Deficit

The theme of a visual arts deficit responded to research questions:

1. What do specialist Visual Arts teachers think of their Year 7 cohort's skill-base?
2. How do upper primary generalist teachers, teaching in Perth's eastern suburbs, perceive Visual Arts skills are taught in their schools?

Both primary and secondary teachers felt there was a deficit in primary school visual arts. Many of the primary teachers were limited in the range of visual arts experiences they could offer their students. They openly commented about using 'how-to' websites for quick, easy activities due to their limited access to resources or lack of knowledge in Visual Arts pedagogy. The primary teachers also found engaging students in rich visual arts experiences a somewhat difficult task. They found it challenging on a daily basis due to their own lack of personal experience in the Visual Arts, which was compounded

by a lack of: preparation time, resources and the fact the Visual Arts were not viewed as a school priority (Russell-Bowie, 2012).

Skills were limited to a small range materials (e.g., pencils, crayons, and paper) these basics art materials were easy to use, prepare and clean up, with many activities being integrated with other subjects. The Visual Arts were often used instrumentally to support other learning areas. In addition, the Visual Arts was not deemed important enough to be given a specific time-slot, unless the school had a specialist primary Visual Arts teacher employed to work with all the students.

Primary teachers believed they covered response tasks in their classroom adequately; however, when asked, they felt that responding mostly involved more informal discussion at the conclusion of tasks. Structured response in the form of a framework with scaffolding was not a common activity in the primary classroom. The main reason for this was teachers believed primary students were not developmentally capable of giving an informed response other than whether they liked or disliked something. When looking at child development associated with the Visual Arts, it was suggested by some participants that primary students were incapable of thinking in an abstract way. However, some participants did suggest that given enough structured experiences in a task or subject, primary students had the ability to understand complex visual concepts, and this can be nurtured and developed (Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2003; Morris, 2015; Piaget, 1950).

Many of the primary teachers reported that they found it difficult to teach Visual Arts consistently in the class as a stand-alone subject. Many participants found teaching Visual Arts difficult without integration with other learning areas, because of time constraints. They had limited access to resources and this was also a discouraging factor when considering Visual Arts tasks. Most primary teachers allocated Visual Arts learning to the end of the week; for example a Friday afternoon activity, which generally consisted of free time if no activity could be organised. It appeared that the pressures placed on primary teachers to achieve benchmark standards in literacy and numeracy took precedence over Visual Arts teaching and learning (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009). Most participants lacked knowledge about how Visual Arts education can provide academic success for students (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010) and those that felt it held high importance felt powerless to change the situation in their own classroom due to the curriculum pressures of literacy and numeracy placed on their school.

In terms of assessment, it was discovered that although most teachers displayed good intentions, it was clear that they did not provide enough structure during Visual Arts activities to give clear guidelines regarding assessment. Most came down to effort and whether students were able to complete an activity or not. Others felt that teamwork was important as many of the art activities they provided involved group work. Following instructions was another point of assessment; although relevant, this notion was very general and could also be attributed to a wide range of learning areas. Nothing that could be specific to the Visual Arts was assessed, which implied a lack of understanding of exactly what it was they should have been assessing in the Visual Arts the first place. This is a concern, since SCSA (2016) expects that Visual and Constructive knowledge be taught at Year 5 and Year 6 level in the generalist classroom. It is also an expectation for it to be reported on, which means that valid assessment needs to occur in line with other learning areas.

Students were keen to engage in Visual Arts lessons, as they were reported to be confident and happy to attempt most tasks. It was suggested that this was due to the Visual Arts having a novel appeal, and that many students had not often experienced Visual Arts. In particular, to the extent that it is taught in secondary schools; for example, access to different materials, explicit teaching of skills, as well as an exposure to the language of Visual Arts. Transition for some students was reported as a problem (Berlach, Coffey & O'Neill, 2011); however, this was most likely due to typically linked to students dealing with the changes associated with shifting between a primary into a secondary context.

Secondary teachers perceived different levels of strengths and weaknesses in their Year 7 students, depending on the primary schools that were feeding into their secondary school; for example, whether the students had a primary Visual Arts specialist, or whether their generalist teacher attempted Visual Arts with their class. Drawing as a Visual Arts learning experience was perceived as a strength, due to this being a familiar activity for most students. Drawing using a variety of media other than pencils was not considered a strength, as many students were reported as having difficulty with new skills, as they were not comfortable to attempt activities outside what they found familiar. Students already had preconceived perceptions about what they could and couldn't do, and the secondary specialists reported this was a common problem. The interview data emphasised a lack of authentic Visual Arts experiences associated with

the generalist classroom, thus contributing to a drop in confidence with some students (Dinham, 2013).

The Visual Arts language barrier was a particular issue, as reported by the majority of participants. Students were not ready to tackle the context of specific language of the Visual Arts and this was largely due to their lack of exposure to responding to Visual Art across the primary years. Year 7 students were able to recognise surface information when coached through a response task; however, their application of this language to other activities was perceived as being weak. Having an understanding of Visual language is an important skill in preparation for our 21st century workforce, having practical implications for understanding a wide range of platforms, innovative symbolic thinking, problem solving and being able to communicate in diverse ways (Choi & Piro, 2009; Dinham, 2013; Morris, 2015). If educating the whole person is to be a focus in primary schools, then Visual Arts language is a key component to curriculum, explained by The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) and The National Review of Visual Education (2006).

Student readiness to engage in a range of studio materials was deemed to be hindered by a limited access to Visual Arts resources. Participants commented that students were not allowed to use certain materials due to mess in the generalist classroom, thus showing a considerable lack of access to appropriate areas to conduct certain constructive tasks. This problem was compounded by a lack of time allocated to Visual Arts activities including time to clean-up, and therefore, full engagement. It was also revealed that if primary generalist teachers had a negative personal experience with Visual Arts, their classroom practice was also influenced. Often a teacher's low self-efficacy suggested an increased potential to also encourage students to have a negative attitude towards Visual Arts. Perceived capabilities in subject areas define future experiences and if they are negative, the cycle will not improve and continue to generate low self-efficacy, success and enjoyment (Bandura, 2012; Coffey, Berlach & O'Neill, 2011; Lummis & Morris, 2014).

Structure was an important factor in the Year 7 Visual Arts classroom, according to participants, if they were to have success. Sculptural tasks were weak in terms of specific studio strengths and weaknesses and this was largely due again to the lack of resources available to primary generalists. Two-dimensional expressive work (e.g., drawing) was widely considered a strength, since much of the Visual Art that students

were exposed to was in the form of ‘free-time’ on a Friday afternoon. This was mostly limited to drawing with lead and coloured pencils. Other forms of drawing as a result were not explored, such as attention to tonal work or detail. Secondary Visual Arts specialists were therefore making up for their lack of skill by utilising a structured task-by-task environment (Brown, Macintyre, & Watkins, 2012). The main reasons for students’ lack of exposure to build studio skills were due to the increased literacy and numeracy workload placed on generalist teachers, placing a limit on other parts of the curriculum (Codd, 2005).

Generalist teacher education in the Visual Arts

The theme of a generalist teacher education in the Visual Arts responded to research sub-questions:

- What types of Visual Arts learning experiences are primary generalist teachers offering their students?
- How frequent are Visual Arts learning experiences occurring?

Primary generalist teachers were found to have little in terms of qualifications or experience in teaching Visual Arts. Although they knew that Visual Arts had an important place in the classroom, they did not have the knowledge of pedagogy to teach students in depth skills and techniques (Flockton & Crooks, 2008). Even those teachers who had an interest in the subject ($n = 2$) found it difficult to recall what they had actually completed in terms of units or classes at tertiary level, or experience in Visual Arts. All had completed their Primary Education Degree at a range of Universities in Western Australia and had minimal time learning about Visual Arts in a classroom environment. As a result, all teachers who participated in the interviews spoke about using social media as a resource for quick, simple and highly structured tasks to cover the Visual Arts curriculum in their class. If the project was not simple, with little preparation time and quick results, often teachers avoided the subject altogether due to their limited understanding of how to create an effective Visual Arts lesson (Lemon & Garvis, 2013). Due to the lack of tertiary education in Visual Arts and experiences since beginning their teaching profession, many teachers indicated they had low self-efficacy when it came to implementing Visual Arts in the curriculum (Lummis, Morris, & Paolino, 2014). This lack of perceived ability in teaching Visual Arts is compounded by the stress of a mandated curriculum, requiring generalists to teach Visual Arts in the classroom when a specialist is not available (ACARA, 2015).

In terms of ability to prepare their students for secondary Visual Arts, it was found that generalist teachers were not as capable as expected, according to the perceptions of the secondary Visual Arts teachers. All participants perceived that generalist teachers were ill equipped to prepare students for Visual Arts as a subject. Instead, art was considered fun, free time with no structure or appropriate learning of skills, demonstration of techniques and modelling language. The generalist teachers were described as scared and unable to take on the teaching of Visual Arts themselves without assistance. They were not appropriate substitutes for the unique skill set of the primary specialist Visual Arts teachers, who were rare in the system. They felt that Year 7 students presented with deficits as a direct result of the pressure generalists are faced with daily to ensure the valued curriculum is covered (i.e., NAPLAN - literacy and numeracy focused). They felt that the attitude amongst generalist teachers was that there was a stigma amongst those teachers who could teach Visual Arts and those who could not. This made it very difficult for the teachers as they were torn between knowing they had a responsibility to address Visual Arts in their classroom and failing due to their limited skill (i.e., low self-efficacy). If teachers themselves come from a background of negative experience, it was found that this cycle, unless broken by positive experiences, continues. These pre-existing attitudes towards Visual Arts effect how the students perceive Visual Arts as a subject (Ashton, 1999; Bamford, 2002; Bandura, 2012; Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Dinham, 2013; Lummis & Morris, 2014). According to secondary teachers, many students did not perceive Visual Arts as a credible school subject when they arrived in Year 7.

Conclusion Two: Visual Arts has a low value/status

The theme of Visual Arts having a low value/status responded to research sub-question:

- What resources and support do the teachers receive from the school?

It was discovered that Visual Arts resources in generalist classrooms were very limited, and most had to make do with basics such as coloured paper, some paint and glue. It was difficult to maintain consistency with a program when most of the funds in a primary generalist teacher budget are spent on literacy and numeracy resources. Teachers were creative with what they had access too, which was rarely specialist Visual Arts materials. Unless students had a Specialist Visual Arts teacher taking them for classes, they were rarely exposed to much more than paint and pencils (i.e., 2D

expression). The resourcing in terms of programs was also problematic, as most turned to step-by-step guides or tried speaking to colleagues in the school for assistance if they had success with a project. One particular participant stated that even though her knowledge of Visual Arts was limited, she would never bother asking for Professional Development in the Arts, as she was not a specialist in the field. It was simply not worth her time. It is evident through these results that generalists face challenges daily in the classroom in terms of creating authentic and challenging Visual Arts learning activities with what their school provides. To remedy this, integration of Visual Arts activities is a popular option, allowing teachers to cover Visual Arts through literacy or numeracy programs. This does not give Visual Arts as a stand-alone subject the attention and value it deserves and instead using it as fill in time with little educational substance or use (Dinham, 2013; Duncum, 1999).

Secondary Visual Arts specialists reported that as a subject, Visual Arts has a low status in primary schools. This judgement was made from the professional relationships that secondary specialists had with the primary schools in their area and the experiences in dealing with the students that arrived in their classrooms in Year 7. This idea was felt strongly by participants and went from one teacher describing Visual Arts, as a DOTT subject to another feeling that it was “the bottom of the cesspool” (Susan) in terms of subjects. It was not valued as a ‘real’ subject and as a result not treated as one.

Secondary teachers perceived that if generalists were teaching it at all it was treated as free time on a Friday afternoon, at the end of the week when the valued curriculum had already been covered. These negative beliefs in primary schools were fuelled by negative experiences, which in turn, added to the low status of the subject (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). Pre-existing attitudes towards the subject meant that it was not advocated for in primary schools and held a low status overall (Bandura, 2012; Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Dinham, 2013). In terms of Visual Arts teachers themselves, if the primary school actually had one (which in this case was uncommon), they were seen simply as DOTT providers or “optional extras” (Summer). Funding cuts across the board saw all the other subjects catered for before any consideration was given to a specialist Visual Arts teacher (Ricci, 2015). In general, Visual Arts teachers in a primary school setting are on the decline in WA (Ewing, 2015). This directly relates to the reason why Visual Arts has such low status amongst teachers and administrators in schools. All of this can be related back to a lack of consistency in the teaching of Visual Arts amongst tertiary institutions (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010) and without this, teachers are left feeling incapable of teaching Visual Arts curriculum.

Recommendations

As a result of the two main conclusions drawn by this research, two recommendations have been made relating to an improved communication between primary and secondary teachers in an attempt to close the gap between the deficits felt by primary school generalists and a push for improved professional learning and support for primary generalist teachers guided by Visual Arts specialists.

Recommendation One: More communication between primary and secondary teachers regarding curriculum expectations

Many of the deficits the primary generalist teachers have, stem from not only their own education in secondary and tertiary institutions but in their negative experiences with Visual Arts and the lack of communication about the expectations on students in secondary Visual Arts. There is no doubt that a crowded curriculum and increased literacy and numeracy expectations place stress on the generalist teacher in the day to day teaching of students, however, if positive collaboration could occur between primary and secondary school systems about curriculum expectations for Visual Arts, perhaps generalists would be more inclined to seek professional development and opportunities to improve or build on their Visual Arts knowledge and skills. This communication needs to be driven by outcomes and strategies to assist teachers in delivering authentic Visual Arts education and involve specific skills expectations. Although this is already stated in the WA Curriculum, clear, specific and realistic goals should be set between educators to create a sustainable program that can be followed in a primary generalist environment in which resources and time are scarce. More needs to occur in policy making to improve the status of Visual Arts in general, however, effective communication between primary and secondary institutions would improve self-efficacy for teachers and Visual Arts outcomes for students. This dialogue could occur between both administrators and teachers.

Recommendation Two: Professional Learning and Support for Primary Generalist Teachers Guided by Visual Arts Specialists and tertiary institutions

Although it is important to improve the communication and begin a healthy dialogue between primary and secondary institutions, there need to be more resources available for primary generalist teachers to access professional development opportunities in

Visual Arts. Without the knowledge about how to create authentic Visual Arts experiences in the classroom, generalists are expected to go solo or resort to simplistic ways of covering Visual Arts curriculum – such as step-by-step instructions online. Tertiary institutions need to increase the contact time the generalist primary teaching courses allow in Visual Arts, in an attempt to stop the cycle of low self-efficacy in teaching this subject. Once teachers leave these institutions, professional development opportunities need to be available to them and encouraged within the school environment. This will improve confidence and ability in the teaching of Visual Arts and encourage teachers to utilise the small budgets they have in the best way possible to create rich experiences for students in the generalist classroom. Secondary Visual Arts specialists are an excellent resource in schools and should be encouraged to begin communication between primary schools in their areas and to set up network opportunities that allow primary generalists access to their knowledge about skills and resources, to encourage a positive Visual Arts experience. Secondary Visual Arts teacher Summer suggested during the interview process that she would be willing to assist generalist teachers develop their confidence when teaching Visual Arts in the classroom. Although primary generalist teachers lack the skills or knowledge, this should not be a reason to avoid the subject altogether, instead, help should be sort. Reaching out to the primary schools in the area and speaking to the teachers may would build their confidence and take away the stigma that is attached to Visual Arts as a difficult, messy and burdensome subject to cover in the curriculum.

Implications for Future Research

The aim of this research was to test the personal anecdotal evidence of perceived deficits in Visual Arts education in a handful of primary schools in the Catholic and Independent sectors in the eastern suburbs of Perth. Due to limitations to the research involving sample size, the results were only a small snapshot of a perceived larger problem in a wider range of schools, including those in the public sector. Future research with interviews conducted using a larger sample and increasing the scope to the public education sector would produce more generalisable findings. This study achieved its aims, discovering that the perceived deficits were in fact present in the interviews conducted. If, after future research involving a larger portion of participants was to go ahead, influence to policy in terms of access to resources and time dedicated to Visual Arts education in the primary sector could occur.

Conclusion: The Significance of this Research

This study has highlighted that Visual Arts education is important for many reasons, involving development of the student as a whole person and as a creative and innovative member of society. Visual Arts assists in social and emotional health and well-being and the development of the individual. Students who show a particular flair and competence in the Arts deserve to have equal opportunities in educational institutions to develop and hone these skills, giving them increased likelihood of success in a 21st century lifeworld. The current “cookie cutter” (Summer, 2015) curriculum in primary schools does not allow students to reach their creative potential and does not value Visual Arts as a credible subject that deserves adequate resources and time. Primary school generalist teachers are expected to teach Visual Arts in the absence of a specialist in their school and yet they are met with a range of difficulties on a daily basis, preventing them from giving students rich Visual Arts experiences. Increased pressure for improved literacy and numeracy results in primary schools in WA adds to the low value placed on Visual Arts, even though it is a mandated subject in the curriculum (ACARA, 2015).

It has been suggested that if things are to improve for students and teachers in Visual Arts, further research needs to be undertaken to establish how widespread the problem is amongst other sectors, such as in public education. A dialogue between primary and secondary institutions would also improve generalist primary teacher self-efficacy; which would bring about the beginnings of positive change in Visual Arts education. Collaboration and sharing of knowledge can stop the cycle of negativity in schools, allowing for authentic and rich Visual Arts experiences to filter through to the students, given that:

Contemporary life requires us to be creative. It requires problem solving. These skills are transferable to all professions. I believe it complements the other subjects more than just being a ‘rest’ subject. Working on that creativity, problem solving, dealing with emotions, dealing with criticism, [as well as] expressing yourself. And then there is that whole idea that we are all good at something. Sadly, our culture values academia over the arts. That is actually very sad because there are a whole bunch of people who are great at the arts and yet they are marginalised in our society and made to feel like they are less worthy. We all have a skill set – those multiple intelligences – I am a real believer in it. (Summer)

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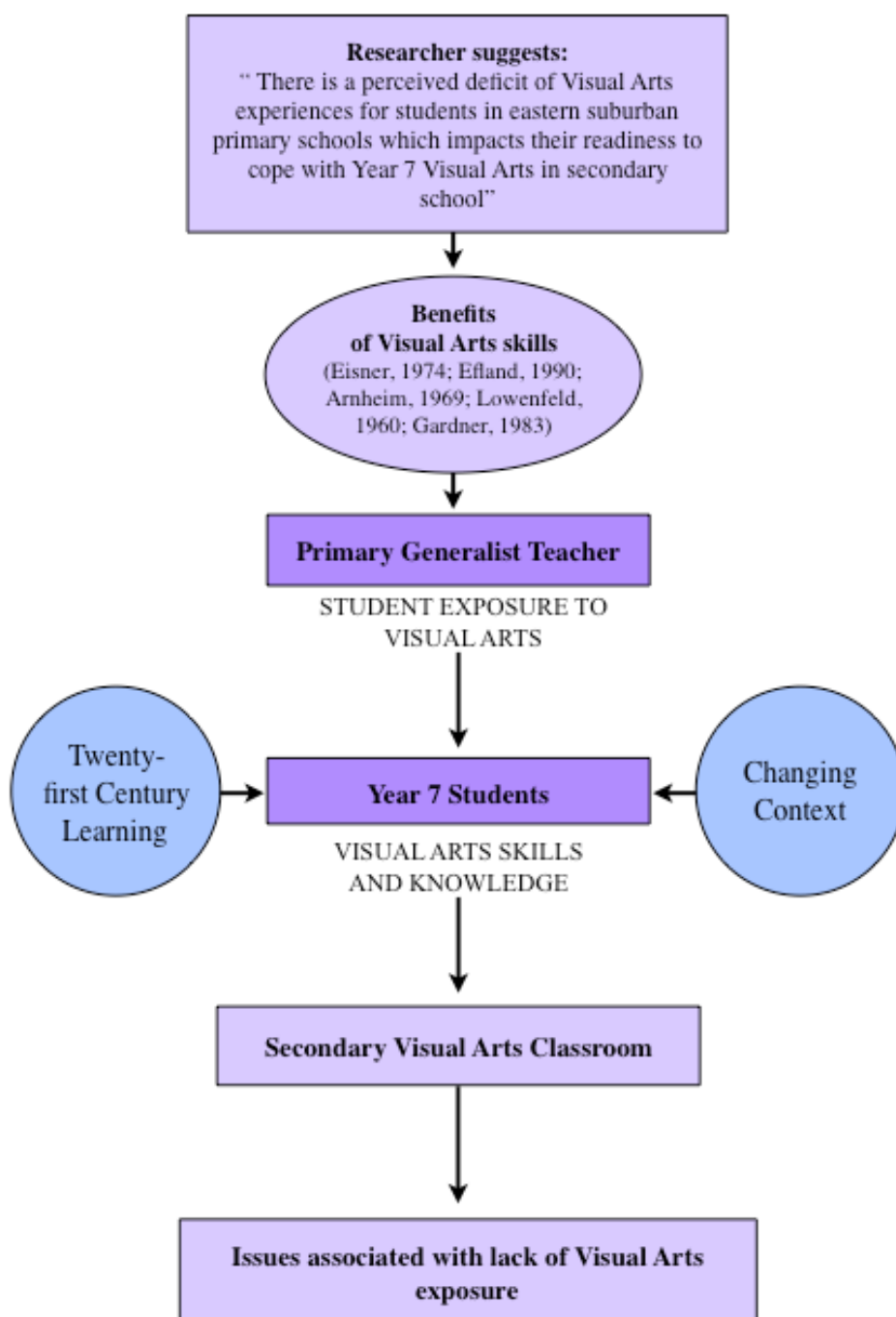
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Conceptual Framework for Research



APPENDIX B: Efland's Psychoanalytic Model

Components of Aesthetic Theories	Components of Education Theories	Prescriptions for Art Education
Nature of Art Art is the self expression of artists	Nature of Knowledge Knowledge is the experience of a unique self	Content Based on subjective experiences rather than objective facts
Creative Process The creation of images in the mind and their expression in art media	Nature of Teaching Is based on nurturance, guides students to explore inner feelings to generate images	Teaching Methods Teachers provide nurturant learning environment. Able to empathise with students
Response to Art Feelings and emotions in works of art are perceived and felt by the viewer	Nature of Learning Experience acquires meaning by integration into one's personal world view	Student Activities Free experiment with media, visualisation of images and feelings
Value of Art Is found in the originality of the work of art	Value of Education Is based upon the adequacy and originality of one's personal world view	Evaluation of Learning Is based on the student's sense of personal growth, self validation

APPENDIX C: Research design

Interview Questions

The following semi-structured questions were asked of the two groups of participants: primary generalist teachers and secondary Visual Arts specialists.

Primary Teachers

The primary generalist teachers who had recently taught Years 5 – 6 were interviewed using the following questions as a guide:

- What qualifications or relevant Visual Arts experiences do you have?
- What Visual Arts learning experiences do you provide your students?
- Do students learn specific Visual Arts skills?
- Do students respond to their own artwork and the artwork of others?
- How often do you provide Visual Arts activities?
- How long do Visual Arts activities last?
- What time of the day do you teach Visual Arts?
- What do you assess in Visual Arts?
- What resources and support do you receive from your school?

Secondary Visual Arts Teachers

The structure of the secondary Visual Arts specialist interviews is:

A) When Year 7 students enter your Visual Arts classroom from primary school, what do you perceive about the students’:

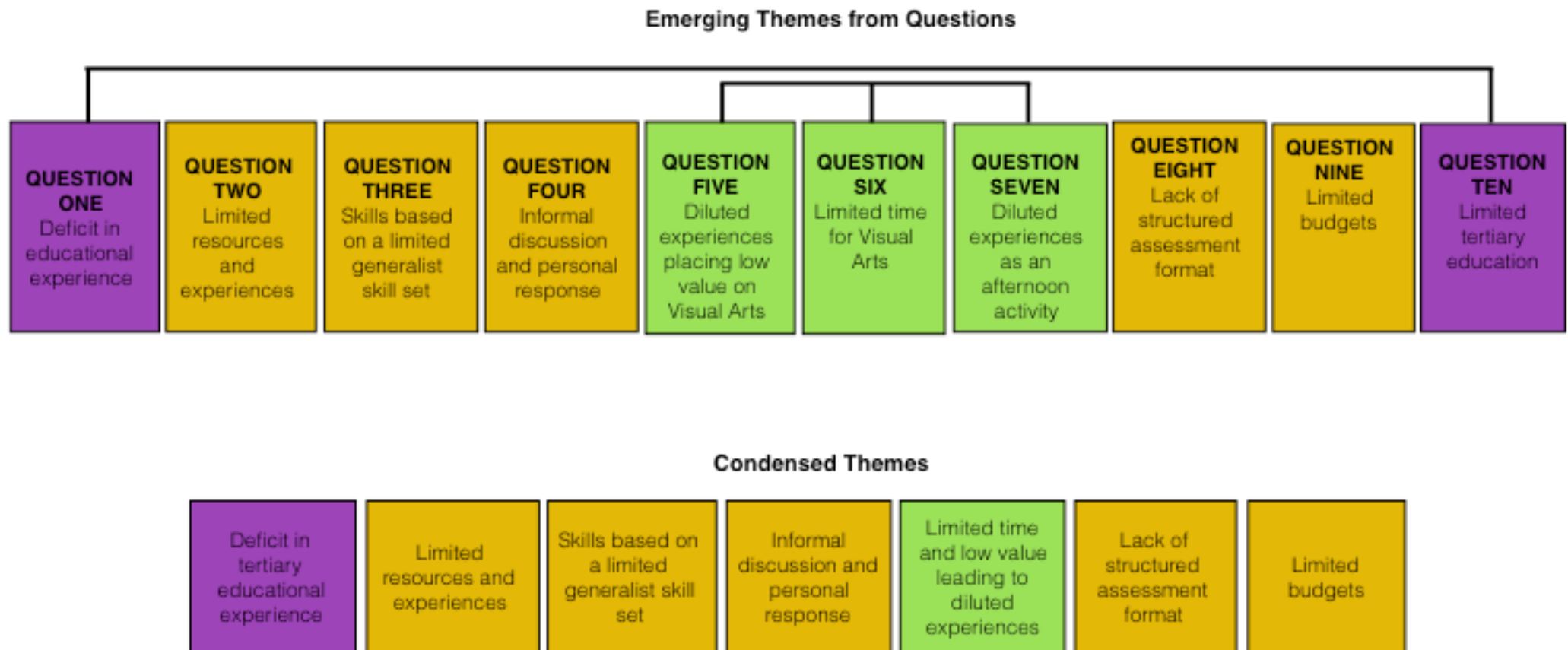
- General level of readiness to engage Visual Arts activities when compared to students from several years ago?
- Specific strengths or weaknesses within Visual Arts?
- Readiness to engage Visual Arts language?
- Readiness to engage a range of traditional studio materials?
- Specific studio strengths and/or weaknesses?

B) From your professional perception of the primary school context, what do you perceive the:

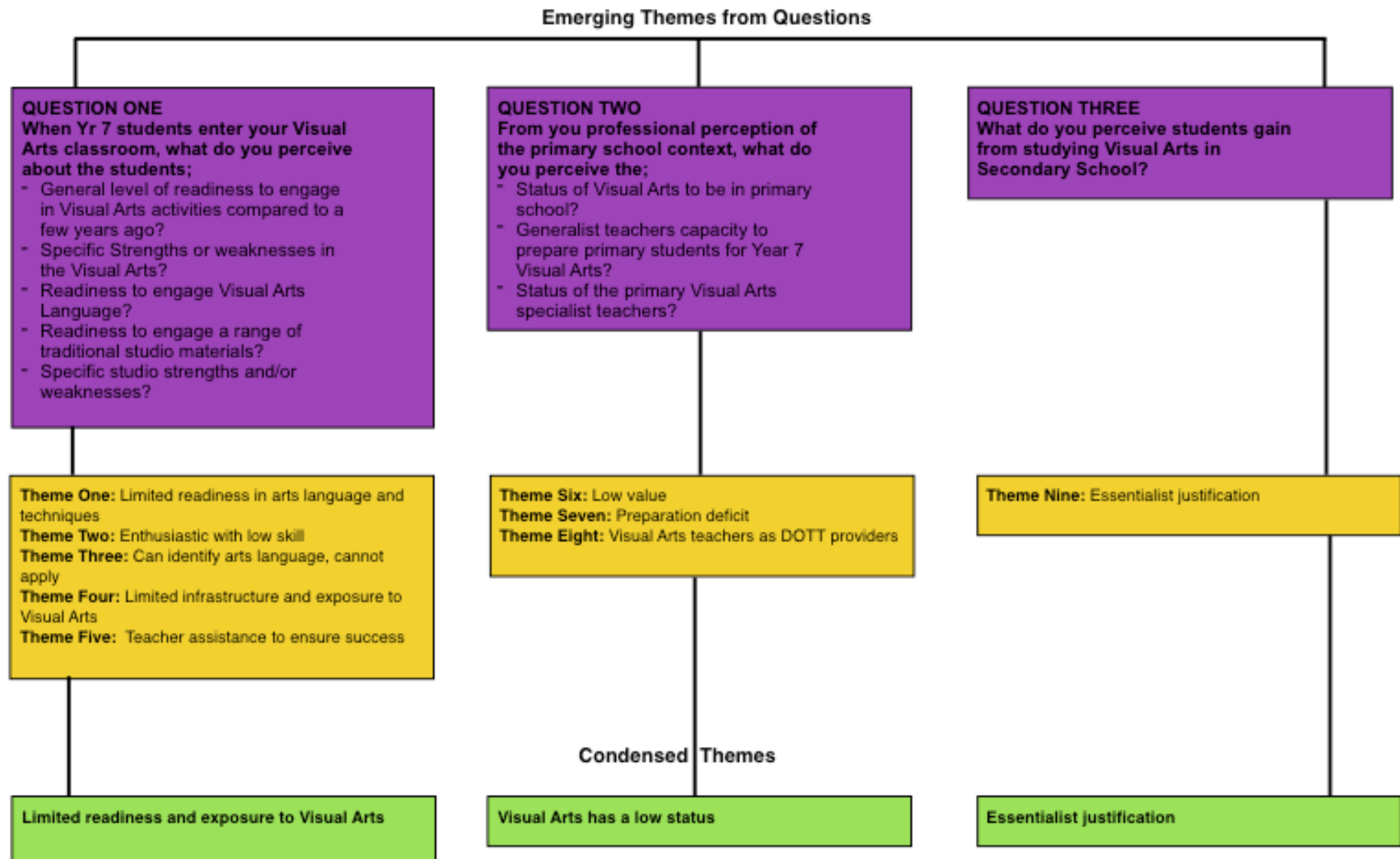
- Status of Visual Arts to be in the primary school?
- Generalist teachers' capacity to prepare primary students for Year 7 Visual Arts?
- Status of the primary Visual Art specialist teachers?

C) What do you perceive students gain from studying the Visual Arts in secondary school?

APPENDIX D: Emerging Themes from Primary Generalist Teacher Interviews



APPENDIX E: Themes elicited from the secondary Visual Arts teacher interviews



APPENDIX F: Information Letter for Primary School Principals

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

Attention: Primary School Principals

My name is Zoe Wittber and I am a postgraduate student in a Master by Research degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. I am also a specialist Visual Arts teacher at Kalamunda Senior High School. Your school is invited to take part in this research, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. I am hoping to conduct research in the Catholic, Independent and Government sectors. Your school will be one of 5 primary schools participating in this process. I seek to interview 5 secondary Visual Arts teachers, 5 primary generalist teachers and 5 yr 7 students.

This study aims to identify what student Visual Arts experiences are like in a primary classroom and how these experiences are transferred as the students' transition into Year 7. Visual Arts instruction in the primary years has an impact on students' Visual Arts skills and ability to understand Visual Arts language. I seek to explore year 7 students' primary school reflections on Visual Arts and compare these to their current year 7 Visual Arts learning. These reflections will be compared and contrasted through discussions with both primary and secondary teachers to explore strategies to enhance Visual Arts instruction in both primary and secondary school. I plan on interviewing primary school teachers about their own reflections of Visual Arts in the classroom and how much exposure students have with materials. I hope to identify what is being taught in primary Visual Arts and how this can improve student Visual Arts outcomes in secondary school. One of the main benefits of this research is to act as a starting point for further research into enhancing the effectiveness of transition from primary visual arts to secondary study and to develop strategies to assist this transition for students.

What does participation in the research project involve?

If you choose to take part in the research, I will require an interview with one of your upper primary teachers. Interviews will last approximately 30-40 minutes. I would like to audio-record the interview and provide the participant with a summary, which they will then edit to their satisfaction. The interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place to allow for maximum privacy.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

All information collected during the research will be treated confidentially. No person who participates in the interview process will be identified by name and the school name will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the research has concluded and will then be deleted/wiped. The information gathered during this research will be presented in a written report. I will also provide a summary of my thesis to school principals and the Catholic Education Office. I do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in this research, however, participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like to take part in this research, please reply to this email with the signed consent form. Once you provide consent, I will email through information letters and consent forms for you to distribute to staff to take part in the research. Contact information of staff willing to take part in the research can be emailed back to me so I can proceed.

Is this research approved?

This research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Has the researcher obtained a current Working with Children Check?

Yes. Under the working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004, people undertaking work in the Western Australia that involves contact with children must undergo a Working with Children Check. The documents attached to this application include evidence of the current Working with Children Check held.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you have any questions about the research or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher:
Zoe Wittber
XXXXXX

Supervisor
Dr Geoff Lummis
XXXXXX

Associate Supervisor
Dr Julia Morris
XXXXXX

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
research.ethics@ecu.edu.au
Phone: (+61 8) 6304 2170

Thank you for your time,
Yours sincerely,

Zoe Wittber

APPENDIX G: Information Letter for Primary Teachers

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

Dear Colleague,

My name is Zoe Wittber and I am a postgraduate student in a Master by Research degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. I am also a specialist Visual Arts teacher at Kalamunda Senior High School. I would like to invite you to take part in this research, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. I am hoping to conduct research in the Catholic, Independent and Government sectors. Your school will be one of 5 schools participating in this process. I seek to interview 5 secondary Visual Arts teachers, 5 primary generalist teachers and 5 yr 7 students.

This research aims to identify what student Visual Arts experiences are like in a primary classroom and how these experiences are transferred as the students' transition into Year 7. It aims to explore this transition to secondary school based on personal reflections from both students and teachers. Visual Arts instruction in the primary years has an impact on students' Visual Arts skills and ability to understand Visual Arts language. I seek to explore year 7 students' primary school reflections on Visual Arts and compare these to their current year 7 Visual Arts learning. These reflections will be compared and contrasted through discussions with both primary and secondary teachers to explore strategies to enhance Visual Arts instruction in both primary and secondary school. I would like you to take part in an interview about your own experiences in teaching Visual Arts in the classroom and how much the students are exposed to the materials. I hope to identify what is being taught in primary Visual Arts and how this can improve student Visual Arts outcomes in secondary school. One of the main benefits of this research is to act as a starting point for further research into enhancing the effectiveness of transition from primary visual arts to secondary study and to develop strategies to assist this transition for students.

What does participation in the research project involve?

If you choose to take part in the research I would like to interview you about your experiences in teaching Visual Arts. Interviews will last approximately 30-40 minutes. I would like to audio-record the interviews and provide you with a summary, which you can then edit to your satisfaction. Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place to allow for maximum privacy. I will also ask you a few demographic questions after the interview process. I have provided you with a copy of these in the attachments.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

All information collected during the research will be treated confidentially. No person who participates in the interview process will be identified by name and the school name will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the research has concluded and will then be deleted/wiped. The information gathered during this research will be presented in a written report. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. I will also provide a summary of my thesis to school principals and the Catholic Education Office.

What does it mean if I want to withdraw from participating?

I do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in this research, however, participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like to take part in this research, please reply to this email/letter with the signed consent form.

Is this research approved?

This research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Has the researcher obtained a current Working with Children Check?

Yes. Under the working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004, people undertaking work in the Western Australia that involves contact with children must undergo a Working with Children Check. The documents attached to this application include evidence of the current Working with Children Check held.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you have any questions about the research or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher:
Zoe Wittber
XXXX

Supervisor
Dr Geoff Lummis
XXXX

Associate Supervisor
Dr Julia Morris
XXXX

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
research.ethics@ecu.edu.au
Phone: (+61 8) 6304 2170

Thank you for your time,
Yours sincerely,

Zoe Wittber

APPENDIX H: Information Letter for Secondary School Principals

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

Attention: Secondary School Principals

My name is Zoe Wittber and I am a postgraduate student in a Master by Research degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. I am also a specialist Visual Arts teacher at Cecil Andrews Senior High School. Your school is invited to take part in this research, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. I am hoping to conduct research in the Catholic, Independent and Government sectors. Your school will be one of 5 schools participating in this process. I seek to interview 5 secondary Visual Arts teachers, 5 primary generalist teachers and 5 yr 7 students.

This research aims to identify what student Visual Arts experiences are like in a primary classroom and how these experiences are transferred as the students' transition into Year 7. Visual Arts instruction in the primary years has an impact on students' Visual Arts skills and ability to understand Visual Arts language. I seek to explore year 7 students' primary school reflections on Visual Arts and compare these to their current year 7 Visual Arts learning. These reflections will be compared and contrasted through discussions with both primary and secondary teachers to explore strategies to enhance Visual Arts instruction in both primary and secondary school. I plan on interviewing primary school teachers about their own reflections of Visual Arts in the classroom and how much exposure students have with materials. I will also require an interview with one Year 7 Visual Arts student and a Visual Arts teacher from your school. I will also ask them a few demographic questions after the interview process. I have provided you with a copy of these in the attachments. I hope to identify what is being taught in primary Visual Arts and how this can improve student Visual Arts outcomes in secondary school. One of the main benefits of this research is to act as a starting point for further research into enhancing the effectiveness of transition from primary visual arts to secondary study and to develop strategies to assist this transition for students.

What does participation in the research project involve?

If you choose to take part in the research I will require an interview with one Year 7 Visual Arts student who has given his/her consent and also has parent consent. I will also require an interview with one Visual Arts teacher who has given his/her consent. The Interview will last approximately 30 minutes for the student and 40 mins for the teacher. I would like to audio-record the interview and provide the participants with a summary, which they will then edit to their satisfaction. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place to allow for maximum privacy.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

All information collected during the research will be treated confidentially. No person who participates in the interview process will be identified by name and the school name will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the research has concluded and will then be deleted/wiped. The information gathered during this research will be presented in a written report. I will also provide a summary of my thesis to school principals and the Catholic Education Office. I do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in this research, however, participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like to take part in this research, please reply to this email with the signed consent form. Once you provide consent, I will email through information letters and consent forms for you to distribute to staff to take part in the research. Contact information of staff willing to take part in the research can be emailed back to me so I can proceed.

Is this research approved?

This research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Has the researcher obtained a current Working with Children Check?

Yes. Under the working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004, people undertaking work in the Western Australia that involves contact with children must undergo a Working with Children Check. The documents attached to this application include evidence of the current Working with Children Check held.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you have any questions about the research or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher:
Zoe Wittber
XXXXX

Supervisor
Dr Geoff Lummis
XXXXX

Associate Supervisor
Dr Julia Morris
XXXXX

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
research.ethics@ecu.edu.au
Phone: (+61 8) 6304 2170

Thank you for your time,
Yours sincerely,

Zoe Wittber

APPENDIX I: Information Letter for Visual Arts Teachers

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

Dear Colleague,

My name is Zoe Wittber and I am a postgraduate student in a Master by Research degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. I am also a specialist Visual Arts teacher at Kalamunda Senior High School. I would like to invite you to take part in this research, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. Your school will be one of 5 schools participating in this process. I seek to interview 5 secondary Visual Arts teachers, 5 primary generalist teachers and 5 yr 7 students.

This research aims to identify what student Visual Arts experiences are like in a primary classroom and how these experiences are transferred as the students' transition into Year 7. It aims to explore this transition to secondary school based on personal reflections from both students and teachers. Visual Arts instruction in the primary years has an impact on students' Visual Arts skills and ability to understand Visual Arts language. I seek to explore year 7 students' primary school reflections on Visual Arts and compare these to their current year 7 Visual Arts learning. These reflections will be compared and contrasted through discussions with both primary and secondary teachers to explore strategies to enhance Visual Arts instruction in both primary and secondary school. I would like you to take part in an interview about your own experiences in teaching Visual Arts in the classroom and how much you feel the students have retained. I will also be doing some research into Visual Arts in local primary schools to identify how student Visual Arts outcomes can be improved in the transition secondary school. One of the main benefits of this research is to act as a starting point for further research into enhancing the effectiveness of transition from primary visual arts to secondary study and to develop strategies to assist this transition for students.

What does participation in the research project involve?

If you choose to take part in the research I would like to interview you about your experiences in teaching Visual Arts. Interviews will last approximately 20 minutes. I would like to audio-record the interviews and provide you and the student with a summary, which you can edit to your satisfaction. Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place to allow for maximum privacy.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

All information collected during the research will be treated confidentially. No person who participates in the interview process will be identified by name and the school name will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the research has concluded and will then be deleted/wiped. The information gathered during this research will be presented in a written report. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. I will also provide a summary of my thesis to school principals and the Catholic Education Office.

What does it mean if I want to withdraw from participating?

I do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in this research, however, participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like to take part in this research, please reply to this email/letter with the signed consent form.

Is this research approved?

This research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Has the researcher obtained a current Working with Children Check?

Yes. Under the working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004, people undertaking work in the Western Australia that involves contact with children must undergo a Working with Children Check. The documents attached to this application include evidence of the current Working with Children Check held.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you have any questions about the research or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher:
Zoe Wittber
XXXX

Supervisor
Dr Geoff Lummis
XXXX

Associate Supervisor
Dr Julia Morris
XXXX

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
research.ethics@ecu.edu.au
Phone: (+61 8) 6304 2170

Thank you for your time,
Yours sincerely,

Zoe Wittber

APPENDIX J: Consent Form for Principals

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

- I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.
- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I am willing for this *[insert name of school]* to become involved in the research project, as described.
- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.
- I understand that the *[insert name of school]* is free to withdraw its participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the research team or Edith Cowan University.
- I understand that this research may be published in a journal provided that the participants or the school are not identified in any way.
- I understand that the *[insert name of school]* will be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.
- I have read and understood the Collection Notice about this project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX K: Consent Form for Secondary Teachers

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

- I have been provided with a letter explaining the research and I understand the letter.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and all my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
- I am aware that I can contact Geoff Lummis or the Research Ethics Officer if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact details in the information letter.
- I understand that participating in this research will involve a brief demographic survey to be filled out before the interview. From this point I may be asked to be involved in a 30-minute interview where my voice will be recorded and notes taken.
- I consent to having my voice recorded during this research.
- I understand that the researcher will be able to identify me but all the information I give will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and her supervisors.
- I am aware that the information collected during this research will be stored in a locked cabinet at ECU for five years after the completion of research and will be destroyed after that time.
- I understand that I will not be identified in any report, thesis or presentation of the results of this research.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
- I have read and understood the Collection Notice about this project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I freely agree to participate in this research.

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX L: Consent Form for Upper Primary Teachers

Research project; Primary Students' Engagement with the Visual Arts and their Transition into Year 7

- I have been provided with a letter explaining the research and I understand the letter.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and all my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
- I am aware that I can contact Geoff Lummis or the Research Ethics Officer if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact details in the information letter.
- I understand that participating in this research will involve a brief demographic survey to be filled out before the interview. From this point I may be asked to be involved in a 30-minute interview where my voice will be recorded and notes taken.
- I consent to having my voice recorded during this research.
- I understand that the researcher will be able to identify me but all the information I give will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and her supervisors.
- I am aware that the information collected during this research will be stored in a locked cabinet at ECU for five years after the completion of research and will be destroyed after that time.
- I understand that I will not be identified in any report, thesis or presentation of the results of this research.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
- I have read and understood the Collection Notice about this project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I freely agree to participate in this research.

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____