

Examining personal experiences on pre-service teachers engagement with arts education

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Many beginning generalist teachers are responsible for the delivery of integrated arts education as part of their curriculum. This responsibility is dependent on their own beliefs about their competence, school context, pressures of the curriculum and benefits of the arts for students. These beliefs operate as a key factor in a generative system of human competence (Bandura, 1997), leading to the assumption that they are powerful influences on the overall teachers' effectiveness with students. Little is known about the impact of personal experiences on pre-service teacher beliefs and confidence levels for arts education. Greater recognition of confirming and disconfirming experiences that shape teacher engagement with the arts is necessary. This paper provides insights into a research project that attempts to contribute towards filling this void, in order to improve teacher effectiveness within the arts domain in the middle years. It is part of a bigger study exploring beliefs of beginning generalist teachers.

This study explores the life stages of 15 generalist pre-service teachers undertaking a graduate diploma in education. Each participant's life stage was analysed before being compared to their level's of teacher self-efficacy for arts education. Results indicated that negative arts experiences at school and little engagement with the arts during each life stage informed teachers' beliefs for their future teaching practice. The study reveals important information that informs teacher training and induction programmes about pre-service teachers experiences within the arts domain.

Introduction

In the 21st century, societies are increasingly demanding workforces that are creative, flexible, adaptable and innovative (UNESCO, 2006). Subsequently, education systems are expected to evolve to accommodate these new conditions of a knowledge economy. Arts education equips students with these skills, enabling themselves to express and critically evaluate ideas, allowing nations to develop the human resources necessary to tap their valuable cultural capital (UNESCO, 2006). This means that arts education can be considered an essential component of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual, ensuring participation in cultural and artistic life (Australian Ministerial Council on Education Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEEYTA), 2005). However, quality arts education requires highly skilled professional teachers to achieve quality education (Andrews, 2004).

The inclusion of arts education in the curriculum helps student development, increasing the social and intellectual knowledge and skills of students. Research has found that the arts can increase multi-cultural understandings (Goldberg, 1997), deepen understandings of text (Cecil & Lauritzen, 1994), increase self-esteem and confidence (Harland, Kinder & Hartley, 1995), further comprehension of mathematical and scientific concepts (Goldberg, 1997) and be a valuable entry point for educating under-achieving students (Arnold, 2001). Arts education has also been linked to improved student motivation (Mussoline, 1993).

Many generalist teachers are responsible for the delivery of integrated arts education as part of their curriculum. This includes beginning teachers. Within Australia, arts education is considered a key learning area endorsed by the *Hobart Declaration* (MCEETYA, 1988) and *National Education and the Arts Statement* (MCEETYA, 2005). It is comprised of music, drama, dance, visual arts and media. Research in Australia (Russell-Bowie, 1993; 2004) and around the world (Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy, 2001; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Upitis, Smithrim & Soren, 1999) however, highlight problems of lack of confidence, motivation and knowledge faced by pre-service teachers in delivering arts education.

The responsibility of the generalist teacher (for students aged 10-15 years) to engage with artistic practice in their classroom is dependent on their own beliefs about school context, pressures of the curriculum and benefits of the arts for students. Subsequently, a generalist middle years teacher may feel that the arts are enjoyable with social and cognitive benefits for students, yet be unconvinced that the learning in the arts is a judicious use of teaching time (Oreck, 2001). This may be reflected by Russell-Bowie's (2004) findings that the arts are considered the 'frills' subjects, equating to being the first subjects to leave the timetable if time is short and the first to receive budget cuts (Winner & Hetland, 2000; Bresler & Thompson, 2002).

Confidence, motivation and self-knowledge inform a teachers' belief system. These beliefs operate as a key factor in a generative system of human competence (Bandura, 1997), leading to the assumption that they are powerful influences on the overall teachers' effectiveness with students. They are therefore determined by two key elements in making an efficacy judgement, an analysis of the teaching task and its context, and an assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses in terms of the tasks' demands (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). According to self-efficacy theory, teachers who do not expect to be successful with certain students are likely to put forth less effort in preparation and delivery of instruction, and to give up easily at the first sign of difficulty, even if they know of strategies that could assist these students if applied. From this assumption, self-efficacy beliefs are self-fulfilling prophecies validating beliefs of capabilities. Teacher self-efficacy beliefs are raised if a teacher perceives their performance in teaching arts education a success, which then contributes to the expectations that future performances will also be proficient.

In an investigation of student teachers' experiences of teaching the arts and the factors which influenced their professional development, Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy (2001) noted the emergence of confidence as a significant factor in the determination of arts engagement. This confirmed Hennessy's (2000, p.183) earlier study where "feelings of confidence were a significant feature in the profile of successful students", with low confidence connected to prior beliefs and experiences, as well as the marginalization of the arts curriculum. Moreover, the student teachers appeared most comfortable when they could recreate, quite accurately an activity they had previously experienced (Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy, 2001). These activities included (Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy, 2001, p.68):

- Those they had positively experienced as learners themselves (i.e. on the university course)
- Those which allowed them to adapt the task to their own skill level;
- Those with a clear organizational framework; and
- Those that reflected their own interests.

From this perspective, these activities seemed to increase confidence because self-efficacy for these particular tasks were high, with prior experience appearing as a major factor contributing to their own self-knowledge of arts education. Greater research of prior experiences and their relationships to beliefs will provide a potential basis for future guidance for supporting pre-service and beginning teachers engaging with the arts. By looking at personal experiences in the arts, it is possible to advance the understandings of how pre-service teachers' regulate their own beliefs for teaching arts through changes to their confidence and actions. This research tries to fill this void, by looking at the impact of prior experiences during various life stages on efficacy judgements to teach the arts.

Hypotheses

Based on the theory and research just reviewed, the purpose of this study was to recognise important personal experiences of pre-service teachers that impacted their beliefs to engage with the arts in their teaching practice. In particular, positive and negative previous experience during childhood, high school and university were investigated. It is hypothesized that negative experiences with arts education during life stages impacts upon future beliefs for arts education engagement, based on the analysis of the teaching task and assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses in terms of the tasks demands within arts education.

Methods

This study examined pre-service teachers' prior experiences with arts education in different life stages to construe if further effectiveness within the arts domain was dependent on previous experiences. 15 pre-service teachers currently on their first practicum, voluntarily completed a qualitative questionnaire based on their personal experiences in each life stage. All were enrolled in the graduate diploma teacher education programme for middle years school teaching, in the School of Education within the University of Queensland. These participants were between 20 and 45+ years ($M=25-29$ years). 10 participants were female and 5 male. All teachers exhibited the same levels of limited teaching experience, with minor teaching experiences of English as Second Language overseas.

The pre-service teachers were currently based at various schools throughout Queensland on their first practical experience. 60% (9) of pre-service teachers were at schools located in suburban areas, while 40% (6) of pre-service teachers completed their practicum at inner-city schools. 14 were based in a high school, while one pre-service teacher was based in a middle school. The classification of schools that students were at was nearly even, with 53% at an independent school and 47% at a state school. 13 pre-service

teachers reported a specialist in the arts being at their school, while 1 pre-service teacher was unsure and 1 pre-service teacher reported no specialist teachers within the arts.

Memory cues as life stages were used to explore personal positive and negative experiences with the arts from childhood to the present through the use of ordered recall. Working backwards from the present, a successful item is primarily a function of recency (Whitten & Leonard, 1981). Moreover, the item recalled acts as a cue for the next item in the ordered list (Foddy, 1993). The six life style cues were; currently, as a pre-service teacher on practical experience, as a pre-service teacher in education related courses, as a young adult, as a teenager and as a child. Participants were then asked to conclude if these experiences had shaped their current beliefs and practices to teach the arts.

Results and Discussion

This study recognised important personal experiences that impacted on beliefs about engagement with the arts domain. Based on confidence, motivation and self-knowledge, pre-service teachers reflected on the two key elements (analysis of the teaching task and its context, and an assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses in terms of the tasks' demands) when making efficacy judgements. Three types of pre-service teachers emerged; pre-service teachers who would engage with the arts in less confronting ways that they had experienced, pre-service teachers who realised that the arts had helped with their own development and pre-service teachers who had negative experiences or limited exposure to the arts and decided never to engage with the arts in their practice. These findings suggest that negative personal experiences during certain life stages and the lack of exposure to the arts during teacher training created negative pre-service teacher beliefs towards arts education. Each life stage has been discussed below in greater detail.

Life Stage: Current Personal Experiences

Many pre-service teachers surveyed, appeared to engage with some form of arts during their own free time. This included church bands, personal music training, cosplaying, drawing and painting. Many concluded however, that even though the arts were enjoyable, they would not teach it within the classroom. These activities were for personal enjoyment only, with pre-service teachers stating:

I enjoy teaching but it is important that I keep up my own music making e.g. choirs and bands, to keep up-to-date and motivated (Jack¹):

I'm heavily involved in a personal hobby of mine called 'cosplay' which in away is roleplay. The idea of 'cosplay' is to dress up as the character from a movie/ game/ cartoon) and portray their personality. I sew some of my costumes by hand or machine and it has been a valuable experience where I have been able to gain a lot of confidence from. My skills with art and craft comes in handy too with props (Sarah).

¹ Pseudonym names have been used at all times.

Sarah showed strong beliefs about the impact of personal arts learning on her own teaching practice. She made special note of keeping her current arts hobby private, worried about the opinion of the public and students toward her:

I believe that limiting students to text book education limits their learning abilities. By teaching arts education to students, we open the door to new ideas and enable them to think outside the box. Cosplaying is something I'd keep to myself because public opinion of it is both good and bad. Some students could look up to me because of it, other might look down on me for it. Being an arty farty person however, wants me to incorporate craft work, or at least hands on activities in the classroom. Because I have experience in the school band/performing arts, I would love to volunteer for anything that I can implement my skills into (Sarah).

Sarah later confirmed she would teach the arts, but only in ways that were not confronting or daunting. While she enjoyed cosplaying, it would never enter the classroom.

Of concern were negative comments made towards the arts by pre-service teachers. Some pre-service teachers did not engage with arts in their current lives as they felt it was not cost-effective. They felt money, time and resources could be better used elsewhere. These remarks were again reflected in their current beliefs of teaching the arts in their classroom.

I have no flair for the arts. I have a prejudice that Arts education does not calculate cost/benefit in terms of quantitative measurement of output that is not subjective as a believe it is (Bill).

On further investigation of Bill, it appeared he has had little exposure to the arts throughout his entire life, based on a hatred of the arts. Bill had a firm belief that he would never engage with arts education in his classroom, based on his perceptions of calculating the ratio of cost to benefit in terms of effort, motivation and time. It appeared his negative prior experiences toward the arts created negative pre-service teacher beliefs toward teaching the arts.

Experiences as a pre-service teacher on practical experience

Many of the pre-service teachers talked about their limited experiences with arts education during their current practical experience in schools. Many mentioned that teachers did not use or model arts education within their generalist classrooms. One pre-service teacher asked why and was told by their supervising teacher that the class would become too restless and noisy. This suggests that the pre-service teachers were not exposed to arts integration within generalist classrooms, especially middle years classroom when integration of subjects is encouraged. Subsequently, pre-service teachers felt that the arts were not considered important by their supervising teacher.

In a rare case, one pre-service teacher wrote of a positive experience with the arts while on practical experience with their supervising teacher:

I went to a great music and arts school, where I was able to really hone my teaching craft. My supervising teacher was really supportive of integration (Jack).

This positive experience mentioned by the pre-service teachers suggests the school was dedicated to engaging with the arts for all students. The pre-service teacher recognised this dedication from the school and supervising teacher and was able to improve their teaching craft of the arts accordingly. However, this pre-service teacher also concluded that not all schools value the arts. He would only teach the arts if the school supported the arts. His beliefs toward the arts were based upon future school contexts.

Experiences as a pre-service teacher in education related courses

Most of the pre-service teachers surveyed did not engage with arts education theory or practice in their education related courses at university. This was largely because of the time restraint within the one year course where subjects are often combined. As one student summed up their experiences in pre-service teacher education:

I have found that the majority of information presented in [my] uni[versity] course is fairly impractical and not realistic to my experience in schools so far. It would have been nice to learn at least something about the arts. It would have given me more confidence to teach it. (Lucy).

Experiences as a young adult

Reflecting on experiences as a young adult, many of the pre-service teachers talked about their enjoyment in pursuing the arts. This appeared largely within the music domain with engagement in musical groups, experimenting with music and listening and attending musical events such as concerts. Pre-service teachers enjoyed participating in musical groups at church, at work and in their personal life. To a lesser extent, some pre-service teachers enjoyed engaging with art and photography, with an interest in aesthetic beauty.

Only 2 pre-service teachers wrote they did not engage with arts as a young adult. One pre-service teacher explained his answer mentioning negative feelings of self-indulgence towards stereotypes of artists:

No interest in the arts. [I have] some disgust with the world of self-congratulation of arty types when in my opinion their efforts had no little value on the discipline (Bill).

This teacher later confirmed he would never teach arts education in his classroom based on this belief and experience with the arts profession. He further felt that self-indulgence should not be taught within the classroom.

Experiences as a teenager

During the teenage years, many pre-service teachers talked about being unsupported when undertaking arts subjects at high school. High school arts experiences were

expressed with hatred, gloom and fear. In particular, these pre-service teachers talked about the unprofessionalism of some teachers towards their own ability:

Music teachers [were] terrible-they focussed on 2 or 3 kids with talent and ignored the rest for entire year. (Tom).

As a teenager I did art and found my 2 arts (MYS) teachers to be quite unsupportive to the difficulty I had. I was quite challenged in Arts and found teachers quite critical (Kim).

These pre-service teachers had negative experiences with specialist arts teachers and later discussed this may have influenced their choice not to engage with the arts in their teaching practice. They felt the negativity and emotional arousal surrounding the experience was too great. This returned every time they considered an efficacy judgement to teach the arts.

Pre-service teachers also talked about negative feelings towards arts engagement in their personal lives as teenagers. These feelings were caused by a realisation of negative societal attitudes towards the arts and the sometimes time-consuming training required for arts domains.

[I] grew less fond of the arts as its seen as a less manly endeavour. (Jack).

I did music and dance- most of the time between ages 12-16 it was a chore. Then I got back into it (Lucy).

Jack's response is not unusual. There is significantly less participation by boys than girls in secondary school arts programmes, where music and dance are seen to be 'feminised' subjects (Roulston & Mills, 2000). Moreover, although girls playing hockey is acceptable, boys doing ballet is often seen as surprising (Young, 2001).

After disclosing these negative feelings towards the arts, a small number of pre-service teachers talked about re-connecting with the arts in their late teenage years. One pre-service teacher talked about realising their love of music and the arts with a strong desire to reconnect this past enjoyment, despite negative high school experiences. This suggests that the arts had a strong impact on student enjoyment and engagement, even when negative experiences were encountered during the beginning teenage years. For a teenager to return to a previous activity after some time, strong levels of previous positive enjoyment must have existed from prior engagement in the primary years. Subsequently, this pre-service teacher had positive beliefs toward the teaching of arts, and suggested they would teach methods similar to those in primary school for arts enjoyment. For some pre-service teachers however, the negative emotional arousal associated with the high school experience was too great, informing negative beliefs toward the arts with few experiences able to redirect this emotion.

Experiences as a child

The majority of pre-service teachers engaged with some form of arts education during their childhood. It was generally considered a ‘golden age’ within arts experiences. Their explanations of engagement with the arts was usually delivered with a form of positive or negative beliefs. These have been summarised in table 1. Some pre-service teachers talked about the positive experiences of being allowed to be creative and expressive during childhood. Many of these experiences however were negated with negative experiences with the arts during the teenage years. Similarly, pre-service teachers who had negative beliefs about the arts during childhood stated they would not engage or integrate the arts in their classroom.

Table 1 Positive and negative beliefs about the arts during childhood

Positive beliefs about the arts during childhood	Negative beliefs about the arts during childhood
I have always enjoyed being creative	Drama activities were always scary
I had some wholesome experiences and lived a very natural life in a country town	Didn't appreciate it, because of my ignorance
I had a very rich and supported musical education as a child	There wasn't much social interaction for creative persons
As a child in primary school I have good memories of Arts and crafts- teachers allowed and were supportive of individual creativity and expression whether it be a picture of a dog that looked more like a truck. It did not matter	I took mime classes but have memories of the atmosphere as not being fun and friendly
	Art was very unstructured drawing and painting, weaving
	Only painting, with little/ no direction, few facilities

The impact of child experiences in the arts is important for educators. If future research determines child experiences are the key to future teacher practices within the arts, greater understanding of the experience is needed by teachers, parents and children.

Beliefs about these experiences that have shaped their perception to engage with the arts

Pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on their life experiences and how this impacts on their engagement with the arts in their teaching practice. Results across the life stages suggested limited or negative exposure to the arts informed teachers' beliefs for their future teaching practice. Findings suggested three main categories of pre-service teachers emerged; pre-service teachers who would engage with the arts in less confronting ways that they had experienced (small group), pre-service teachers who realised that the arts had helped with their own development (small group) and pre-service teachers who had negative experiences or limited exposure to the arts and decided never to engage with the arts in their practice (largest group of participants). Pre-service teachers who wanted to teach the arts in less confronting ways concluded:

“I will incorporate arts in the classroom but not in the manners I found confronting. Arts can make an otherwise boring task fun (Lilly).

Pre-service teachers reflecting on their own positive development through engagement with the arts further suggested:

Arts was the majority of my high school subjects, and I really think it was very important to both my educational development at school and my university education (Mia).

I see great potential in this area especially in regards to the developmental benefits. Arts need to be engaged here by all students to be encouraged to continue in it (Jack).

This small number of pre-service teachers were more positive towards engaging with the arts in their practice. These findings are similar to those made by Russell-Bowie and Dowson (2005), that background is clearly related to confidence in teaching the arts. They speculate that given that pre-service teachers have little background in the creative arts, with little exposure to the arts in pre-service courses, they may graduate with little confidence in teaching the arts (Russell-Bowie and Dowson, 2005).

Of concern, were the negative comments expressed by pre-service teachers towards engaging with the arts, based on past personal experiences through childhood and the teenage years. These included:

I never regained an interest in music because of high school teacher. I enjoy art theory in my own time. I would never teach the arts (Tom).

Pre-service teachers with negative personal experiences in their responses were very definite about never engaging with arts education in the classroom or integrating arts into other subject domains. The emotional arousal associated with the negative experiences was too great for some pre-service teachers to overcome. This may be seen to decrease motivation, confidence and self-knowledge for the teaching of the arts. Pre-service teachers concluded:

I do not engage with arts in the classroom (Nicole).

I would never use arts in science/maths classroom (Alex).

It is difficult to include arts in junior science classrooms (Matt).

These negative assertions may also be dependent on the limited exposure in teacher education that generalist teachers may experience within Australia. Without positive experiences in teacher education to develop confidence in teaching the arts, negative perceptions towards the arts and its' importance for student development will continue. It is not known whether these beliefs towards the arts were formed from personal negative experiences or an uneven exposure to the arts during teacher training. What is clear is that pre-service teachers re-examine these experiences in evaluating an efficacy judgement to carry out the task to teach the arts.

Of specific mention is one pre-service teacher who had limited exposure to the arts during childhood but decided to actively engage with the arts in adulthood. This pre-

service teacher stated that she had grown up in a society that did not appreciate the arts or women. The teacher commented about her own teaching practice:

I am inspired to bring out the best in all students and allow them to be individuals in their approaches. I wish to encourage a 'love of learning for life'. I believe the arts is beneficial even essential for all ages, but this particular age group needs to express themselves rather than just being receivers. I believe the arts has many benefits for whole personality development which is occurring very fast during this time of life (Amy).

This suggests that positive exposure to the arts in adulthood may instigate positive beliefs towards the arts. She had high levels of self-efficacy, based on internal attributions. Greater research into this changing of perceptions towards the arts is necessary to provide greater insight into the possibilities of encouraging positive beliefs for the arts by all teachers.

Limitations of this study

The main limitation of this study was that fact that all of the data that was collected was self-reporting. Actual observations of the pre-service teachers, as well as qualitative data in the forms of interviews would have enriched the understanding of the pre-service teachers. Labone (2004) and Wheatley (2005) both present compelling arguments for greater interpretive methods. Self-selection is another possible limitation of the results for this study. It is possible that the pre-service teachers who volunteered for involvement in the study were more efficacious than their peers for certain subject areas.

Conclusion

The results of the present investigation into pre-service teacher experience impacting upon arts engagement is important for teacher education and schools. It would appear pre-service teachers within this study had little formal arts education training within teacher education. Subsequently, many negative beliefs toward the arts prevailed. This may lead many beginning teachers, arriving at school with little formal music education, and have negative attitudes and low self-esteem in relation to their ability to teach these subjects (Russell-Bowie, 1997). Some pre-service teachers appear to pursue the arts in their own time. This suggests that even though they may be capable of the task, there may be problems that over-ride their instigation with the arts in their teaching practice. Again, this may depend on the efficacy judgement made to complete the task, based on the emotional arousal associated with the experience. Results indicated that negative arts experiences at school and little engagement with the arts during each life stage informed teachers' beliefs for their future teaching practice.

Intervention programmes teaching arts education, may be productive in changing beliefs in relation to the arts. Positive learning experiences in music have been found to be a significant factor in breaking down barriers, changing students' attitudes, lessening their anxiety, giving them confidence and new teaching ideas, and developing their self-esteem in relation to teaching each of the subjects in their classroom (Russell-Bowie, 1997).

Moreover, these need to be implemented at all stages of teacher development to change existing negative or limited experiences.

This research is part of a larger study looking at beginning teacher beliefs for arts education in the middle years. Further development and investigation in relation to each of the arts areas (visual arts, dance, drama, music and media) seeks to identify beginning teacher beliefs on their perceived competence for teaching arts in the middle years. This extended project will give teacher educators, administration and policy makers further information to assist with planning suitable curriculum, assessment and professional development. Moreover, it will create positive arts experiences that beginning teachers can draw upon. While it may take 'a village to raise a child', it takes a 'well-rounded teacher training programme to raise a teacher to teach the arts'.

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Appendix 1 Life Stage Experiences

1. Describe your experiences (positive and negative) with the arts:

<i>Life Stage</i>	<i>Description</i>
a. Currently	
b. Within the first months of starting teaching	
c. As a pre-service teacher on practical experience	
d. As a pre-service teacher in education related courses	
e. As a young adult	
f. As a teenager	
g. As a child	