Middle years teachers' past experiences of the arts: Implications for teacher education

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Abstract

In the middle years of schooling, spanning grades four to nine, it is common practice for generalist teachers to deliver integrated arts education. Research confirms that teacher effectiveness with the arts is influenced by their sense of efficacy, which is derived from a coalition of factors including confidence, competence, subject mastery and past experience. This paper investigates one of the factors contributing to teacher self efficacy – their past experience of arts education, at six key life stages, culminating in their current experience as an arts educator. Two hundred and one beginning teachers in the middle years completed a questionnaire with open-ended questions designed to investigate past experiences as one of the factors contributing to teacher self-efficacy. Teachers were located in Queensland, Australia. Responses were analysed and categorised with a positive or negative valence. The results reveal that the cohort of respondents reported profoundly divergent past experiences with the arts over the life stages selected, ranging from a predominance of positive valence experiences during childhood, to predominantly negative valence experiences during pre-service teacher education and in the early months of teaching. The relationship between past experiences and the formation of teacher efficacy beliefs is outlined, and implications for teacher education shared.

Key words: middle years, teacher education, teacher effectiveness.

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Introduction

In the 21st Century knowledge economy there is an increasing demand for creative, flexible, adaptable and innovative members of the workforce and of the general community (UNESCO, 2006). Concomitantly, education systems are expected to evolve to accommodate these new conditions. Arts education (in this case defined as music, dance, drama, visual arts and media in Queensland) is argued to equip students with these capacities, enabling them to express and critically evaluate ideas, and allowing nations to develop the human resources necessary to tap their valuable cultural capital (UNESCO, 2006). Consequently, arts education is increasingly regarded as an essential component

of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual and ensuring participation in cultural and artistic life (Australian Ministerial Council on Education Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEEYTA, 2005). The teaching of the arts in the middle years (in this case defined as grades four to nine) is typically undertaken by generalist trained teachers, yet, it is in the main agreed that quality arts education requires highly skilled professional teachers with high levels of self efficacy (Andrews, 2006; Kane, 2008; Oreck, 2001). The teaching of the arts by generalist teachers with a wide range of self-efficacy beliefs is reportedly problematic around the world. Until now, the problem has been researched from a 'confidence' perspective.

However as Bartel, Cameron, Wiggins and Wiggins (2004) argue, 'confidence' alone is meaningless in determining self-efficacy unless it is accompanied by understandings around 'competence'. When both elements of confidence and competence are investigated, then efficacy is determined. In Australia few studies have explored generalist teachers from the perspective of self-efficacy, especially in Queensland where this study was conducted.

Teacher self-efficacy

Teacher efficacy or self-belief is the "extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (Bergman et al., 1977, p. 137). It is constructed within the broader understandings of self-efficacy theory, which emphasises that people can exercise influence over what they do (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Self-efficacy theory is one of only a few conceptualisations of human control that describes a distinction between competence and confidence, used as a future oriented judgment. People use efficacy beliefs to guide their lives by being self-organising, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting (Bandura, 2006). This means that people may regulate their own behaviour through motivation, thought processes, affective states and actions or changing environmental conditions based around their efficacy beliefs. Perceived self-efficacy provides guidelines for enabling people to exercise some influence over how they live their lives, leading to enhanced confidence and competence.

Self-efficacy beliefs influence thought patterns and emotions that enable actions in which people can pursue goals, rebound from setbacks and exercise some control over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1986, 1993, 1996, 1997). Effective functioning requires skills as well as the belief to use them well (Bandura,

1997). They affect performance both directly and by influencing intentions. Moreover, they are not considered a stable character trait of an individual, but rather an active and learned system of beliefs in context (Bandura, 1997). From this perspective, self-efficacy operates as a key aspect in a generative system of human competence. Bandura (1997) notes that people with high self-efficacy choose to perform more challenging tasks. They will set higher goals and commit to them. Once an action has been taken, highly self-efficacious people invest more effort and persist longer than those with low self-efficacy. High self-efficacy also allows individuals to select challenging settings, explore their environment and create new environments if needed. Alternatively, low efficacy beliefs are easily negated by disconfirming experiences that may cause anxiety, depression and helplessness within the specific context.

Teacher self-efficacy is dependent upon their own beliefs about their competence, school context, and 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. Enactive mastery experiences are considered to be the most powerful influence as it provides authentic evidence of one's performance in a given situation (Bandura, 1997), and this applies to beginning teachers (Mulholland & Wallace, 2001). A successful performance by a teacher may lead to increased self-efficacy, while a failed performance creates a decrease in self-efficacy. Efficacy feedback however is not related to the performance but the cognitive processing of the diagnostic information provided by the performance (Bandura, 1997). As such, as teachers develop mastery experiences, they will rely on these heavily as memories and interpretations of similar past teaching experiences (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Mastery innovations

have included forms of self-reflection (Henson, 2001; Moss, 1997; Shachar & Schumuelevitz, 1997), that facilitate the use of self-regulatory processes in interpreting enactive mastery experiences, enhancing self-efficacy (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

Past experience is also seen as a contributor to the development of teacher efficacy. Russell-Bowie and Dowson's (2005) study of 936 generalist primary teachers across five countries found that most "had very little formal background in any of the art forms," and that "in every creative arts area, background is very strongly, and positively, predictive of confidence and enjoyment in teaching", regardless of gender (p. 7). In her study of New South Wales pre-service teachers Kane (2008) found that although many had studied music and played instruments at one time, they confessed they were no longer musically active and had forgotten much of what they had learned. This suggests that the level and amount of previous experience is an important contribution to teachers' self-efficacy in the arts.

Jeanneret et al. (2006, p. 79) observed that "many pre-service primary teachers have had negative prior experience with the arts and that 'unpacking baggage' brought with the students is almost as important in some cases as acquiring knowledge and skills associated with the discipline". These past experiences impact teacher self-efficacy. Affective states caused by emotional arousal may create negative beliefs for beginning teachers. For example, an individual with previous personal failure may create high emotional arousal, leading to fear provoking thoughts that far exceed what would actually occur if the individual attempted the feared task (Tosun, 2000). High emotional arousal may also be created by observing failure in a similar situation, or from negative verbal persuasion. Science teacher self-efficacy research has found that beginning teachers who lacked confidence in teaching science deemphasized or avoided teaching science altogether for fear of failure (Tosun, 2000). This suggests that the emotions attached to certain subject domains relay fear provoking thoughts to the cognitive processing for self-efficacy, creating patterns of avoidance behaviour. The problem of emotional arousal as a negative source for efficacy in science teacher education may also be present in arts education, explaining patterns of avoidance behaviour. However, without clear evidence of when or how these affective states are created and impact upon self-efficacy development, it is impossible to provide suitable support structures necessary to develop self-efficacy.

Importantly, research about the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and student outcomes reveals a positive relationship, that is, increased teacher self-efficacy is correlated with improved student outcomes (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992). This can be attributed in part because teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to provide challenging and rigorous learning opportunities compared to those with lower self-efficacy (Coladarci, 1992; Allinder, 1994).

The study

There is limited research that investigates the relationship between past experiences and the efficacy of generalist arts teachers in Queensland, Australia. Furthermore, in Queensland there is no previous research focussed on beginning generalist teachers' efficacy in teaching the arts, and how this self-belief is influenced by their past experiences. This paper focuses on this one factor influencing beginning teacher efficacy and is drawn from a larger study (PhD thesis) investigating teacher self efficacy and arts teaching. In this study the middle years is defined as grades four to nine. In Australia there is not consistent definition for middle years of schooling.

Memory cues as life stages were used to explore personal 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).

Seven selected past experiences were recalled for each respondent: their childhood; as a teenager; as a young adult; during pre-service teacher courses; during practical experience as a pre-service teacher, as a new teacher within the first months of being employed; and finally, as a beginning teacher with less than three years experience. The past experience associated with the respondents as pre-service teacher were further divided into two sections for greater insights when reporting: the pre-service teacher in education related courses; and the pre-service teacher engaged in professional experience in the classroom. The seven stages were selected as they are significant developmental stages and times of transition for self-efficacy beliefs and are likely to serve as filters at key times of change. This is explained by Burke-Spero and Woolfolk Hoy (2003) who argue that when investigating teacher self-efficacy in its development in unfamiliar contexts, it is important to consider the possibility of a cultural lens that may filter information creating instability of interpretation. A cultural lens is considered a cognitive filter, influencing interpretation of efficacy sources. Interpretations are made about personal beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes that have their origin in a specific sociocultural frame (Burke-Spero & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003). The filtering process creates unstable teacher efficacy beliefs and shifts according to the specifics of the content or context (Burke-Spero & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003). In this study, the changing context is different time frames in the participants' lives.

Method

In 2008, two hundred and one (201) beginning generalist teachers (within the first three years of teaching since graduation) responded to an invitation to take part in teacher self-efficacy research. Respondents were recruited by advertising in professional teacher publications, at schools and at beginning teacher conferences. An information letter was provided to potential participants detailing the study. If a beginning teacher expressed an interest in participating, they were provided with contact details of the research team. The questionnaire was then emailed to the participant. Respondents were advised that on return of their questionnaire, all information would immediately be de-identified. Two hundred and one beginning generalist teachers responded to the initial invitation, with an almost 100% response rate of returned questionnaires.

Beginning teachers were asked to write what they could remember about the Arts in each of the six stages of the past experiences. The question was open-ended, providing opportunity for beginning teachers to discuss the past experience.

Responses were given a valence of either positive or negative. No responses about prior experience created a neutral value response. Positive and negative response were then analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). An adapted version of Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran's (2003, p. 171) 15 stages of content analysis (based within the constant comparative method) was used to identify key themes and meanings in life experiences. This process allows newly identified themes to be compared with previously identified themes to ensure that the new theme does add more understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. Themes were located with frequency counts, with 100% responses for all life stages in the questionnaire. Coding for manifest content (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001) was employed which acknowledges what was directly said in the questionnaires, as opposed to latent content which is implied.

Context of Queensland

In Queensland, arts education is defined as music, dance, drama, visual arts and media. It is expected that all generalist teachers are capable of teaching the arts as a key learning area alongside maths, English, Health and Physical Education, Technology, Science and Studies of Society and Environment.

In Queensland state schools, all primary school students have access to a thirty minute music lesson with a music specialist. In independent schools this may or may not occur. In schools that do not have a music specialist, music is considered the responsibility of the generalist teacher.

Demographics

The respondents were 201 beginning (less than three years since commencing teaching) generalist teachers of grades four to nine throughout Queensland. Participants were aged between 21 and 52 years. Results for the gender of teachers (65.2% female and 34.8% male) were similar to the reported ratio of 68.7% (female) and 31.3% (male) by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002) for the general teacher cohort. The majority of beginning teachers were under 35 years of age (76.7%).

Results

The past experiences of beginning teachers were analysed to reveal whether these experiences were positive or negative, and to explore the details of the comments as they impacted on their self efficacy beliefs in the arts. Prospective teachers bring to their classrooms beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices that they have learned through their lifetime (Pajares, 1992). Experiences during the teenage years (when self-esteem was developing) and pre-service teacher education seemed to hold the strongest emotional arousal for beginning teachers not to engage with the arts. This psychological arousal appeared to add to feelings of incompetence. Thus, it was possible to see evidence of a cognitive lens (Burke-
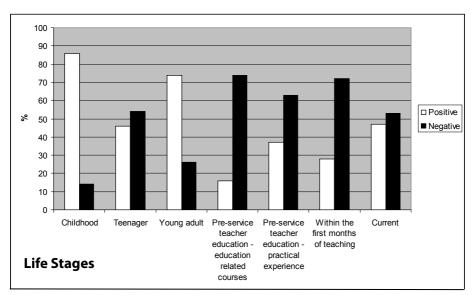

Figure 1: Positive and negative valence of past experiences related to arts education

Spero and Woolfolk Hoy, 2003) during cognitive processing of efficacy beliefs as beginning teacher's perceptions of self-efficacy became unstable as they shifted into unfamiliar contexts. A summary of the valence of past experiences is presented in Figure 1 and each stage is discussed in turn.

Childhood

As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority of beginning teachers reported positive experiences (86%) with the arts either in school classrooms or in private lessons during childhood.

Respondents often used the word "like", "love" and "enjoyment" to describe their childhood experience. For example:

I wasn't shy and loved to be part of live performances, public speaking or anything 'artsy'. Good memories and feelings towards the arts as a child. (Respondent, 10)
Always played with paints, loved to draw and was encouraged to bring my artwork home and stick on the fridge. Nothing negative ever came from art in this time of my life. (Respondent, 64)
I always enjoyed artistic ventures, was into art and crafts, visited galleries and museums, performed in plays and choirs etc.(Respondent, 9)

Respondents described influences with a positive valence from family towards the arts. They suggested their parents were encouraging of the arts and would often model arts engagement for them:

Some of the happiest family memoires in some way involve the arts (family concerts, activities). (Respondent, 1)
I learned piano at a young age and was always surrounded by a variety of music from my Welsh parents who were always singing. I loved art and drawing and dancing with my friends. (Respondent, 16)

A minority of respondents (14%) reported not having experienced arts education during their primary schooling, or had negative memories associated with the arts from their schooling. For example:

Criticism has a definite effect and way of discouraging a shy child from stepping outside the bounds of security and the known to venture into the unknown. Taking risks was not part of my make-up. (Respondent, 17)
I cannot recall having many experiences in drama, and occasionally we did an art project at school. I dearly would have loved more visual arts activities as a child (as I loved to draw) but so few of our teachers ever did art with their classes. It was an "if we have time activity". (Respondent, 96)

The emotional arousal associated with these negative experiences may hinder the development of beginning teacher self-efficacy for the arts.

Teenager

During the teenage years, respondents reported more negative experiences (54%) of the arts than positive (46%), a shift from their childhood experiences which were mostly positive (86%). The use of emotive terms such as "love" and "like" of the arts were replaced with the word "study", showing the academic shift towards high school studies of the arts. The arts were no longer considered for enjoyment, but rather a pursuit of skill. A number of respondents described negative experiences from specialist arts teachers. Critical comments appeared to create negative emotions towards the arts, with students immediately disengaging with the arts at school. Examples of such comments include:

The arts teachers were too critical and did not encourage enjoyment. (Respondent, 161)
I studied visual arts up to year 10 at school but the teacher was very negative and critical of what I produced so I didn't take up any more visual arts for a number of years. (Respondent, 16)
I hated all of it due to lack of confidence and ability. [I] tried out for choir and was told I had a terrible voice and did dance in high school to discover I had bad rhythm. (Respondent, 4)

Some respondents described having to consider future job prospects, as they were asked to

study other subjects that were considered more academic and necessary for their future. Respondents also suggested their high school did not support the arts. It did not appear that all of the arts had been taught, or were considered of low importance in the school compared to other endeavours, such as reported by Respondent 25 below:

> High school music continued, however the high school programme was not as advanced as the primary school. Competing interests from sport saw a lack of motivation to continue beyond school. I attended an all boys high school and there was a sporting culture in place that thwarted teachers efforts to initiate choirs etc. (Respondent, 25)

The minority of respondents who described enjoying arts activities in their high school years were sometimes involved in arts communities or private lessons outside of high school. These were described by respondents as being engaging and interesting, for example:

> Very involved and interested in various arts communities. I feel I have still retained a lot of knowledge from these experiences. (Respondent, 10)
> I had a vibrant theatrical society in Fiji which was committed to putting on productions (Respondent, 21).

The high school experiences of the beginning teacher respondents report a strong shift in their perceptions towards arts education compared to what they reported from their childhood. Criticisms from specialist teachers, the shift to "study" as opposed to "enjoyment", the undervaluing of arts in schools and job prospects appeared to contribute to negative perceptions towards the arts.

Young Adult

The majority of respondents described various positive experiences with the arts (74%), during the time of being a young adult.

Positive experiences included undertaking classes in the arts, joining arts communities, personal enjoyment, appreciation of performances and undertaking degree and careers in arts related professions, as reported by the following respondents:

> I started folk art lessons in my mid thirties and really enjoyed the experience. This started my love of painting however, I still lack confidence in this area. I also joined my daughter's dance classes and performed on stage at the Christmas concert. This gives me an understanding of what my students face each time they engage in drama (Respondent, 4).
> My arts degree I majored in Drama and I was involved in my own amateur theatre groups. I also taught drama at the local dance school. I sing and play guitar and have worked in bands (Respondent, 39).
> I loved participating in the arts. I engage with films on a regular basis and use those as entertainment as well as education. In my spare time, I like to paint pictures which can go on my wall. I enjoy expressing myself through colours and imagery rather than through words (Respondent, 64).

Twenty-six per cent of respondents suggested having experiences with a negative valence or no experience with the arts as young adults. They reported that they were not 'artistic', the arts did not relate to their university studies, job or life and there was not enough time to engage with the arts due to busy lives. For example:

> I moved away from the arts as I did not study any of those subjects and they didn't pertain to my life or job. (Respondent, 45)
> No time for the arts in personal life-too busy. (Respondent, 50)
> I am not an 'artistic' person. [I] wished I had done Art as a subject in high school but felt I wasn't good at it. (Respondent, 116)
> I feel worlds apart from musical knowledge and see it as a very difficult and out of reach area of knowledge. (Respondent, 22)
> I was not good at the arts and therefore stopped engaging with them. (Respondent, 33)

Pre-service Teacher
Experiences in education related courses

Seventy-four per cent of beginning teacher respondents described negative experiences

with arts during their teacher education courses. Problems included: the need for application of their arts courses to a teaching context; conflict with lecturers/ tutors; limited exposure at university to the range of arts subjects; competing subject interests with Maths and English; assessment and general pressure within arts subjects.

Respondents described arts courses as needing more application to the teaching context. Arts courses were considered to be too theorised. Some beginning teachers also suggested the arts course did not improve their skills or knowledge, as reported following:

> Arts education courses at university were very airy fairy, due to the fact that they didn't provide any hands on experience. Theory is good in a university situation, but in the real world all that theory goes out the door the minute you walk into a classroom…MAKE IT RELEVANT TODAY! NOT YESTERDAY. (Respondent, 64)
>
> I studied externally so I learnt everything from texts. No observations of arts teaching during university at all. (Respondent, 82)
>
> I felt the uni[versity] arts class was a waste of time. I did not learn how to teach any form of the arts comprehensively. (Respondent, 132)
>
> I undertook one unit at university "intro to literature and drama". I didn't enjoy this unit at all. We seemed to learn little theory or understanding of components of theatre. Much of the contact [time] was spent doing 'embarrassing' drama activities, in which I always felt uncomfortable. I remember feeling very frustrated at having to pay for a course that had me "galloping around like a horse". We were also given numerous contact hours to put together our own skit-rather than learning how to by our lecturer. (Respondent, 58)

Respondents also described lecturers and tutors who were too critical, unsupportive and inequitable in their teaching and learning of the arts. For example:

> We had a lecturer that was a bit over the top in terms of her criticism of the arts pieces that we had to do for assessment. (Respondent, 6)
>
> As it was the first year my degree was run I felt some of the lecturers made excuses for disorganisation in my course. Some of the arts

> courses were changed after our year as they did not meet expectations of the uni[versity] or the students. (Respondent, 95)
>
> Lecturer were not very interesting and/or incomprehensible. (Respondent, 27)

Respondents reported what they perceived to be a lower valuing of the arts within teacher education programmes. They suggested the university placed greater emphasis on maths and English, viz:

> General education lecturers only provided a 'duh' kind of common sense outlook and overview of schooling life for the teacher. Too much focus was placed on maths and English and middle years and not enough focus placed on the importance of arts education. (Respondent, 12)

Sixteen per cent of the respondent beginning teachers did, however, present positive comments towards their arts education course in teacher education. These positive experiences were based around some arts courses being seen as relevant to teaching, peer interaction and assessment, as evidenced in the following comments:

> I was confident that I was going to have an 'artsy' classroom where all forms of meaningful arts experiences were implemented (Respondent, 114).
>
> I enjoyed working with my peers at uni[versity] when completing visual art, music and drama activities (Respondent, 14).
>
> My best learning experiences in this course were tutorial based whereby each group would get to teach the rest of the group a lesson in the arts (Respondent, 24).

Overall, the majority of beginning teachers did not consider they had adequate teacher training and considered this a major deterrent to teach the arts.

Experience whilst undertaking professional learning in school classrooms

Practical experience during teacher education helped examine the socialisation of beginning teachers into the schooling culture. Sixty-three

per cent described negative experiences towards the arts while on practical experience.

Respondents described limited opportunities to observe arts teaching, with the school curriculum focusing on other key learning areas and a general struggle with behaviour management. Comments revealing these scenarios include:

> Many of my prac[tical experiences] teachers did not do the arts. If they did do the arts, it was visual arts, and it was just drawing of something related to the current theme of the unit. No techniques were explicitly taught. At one school, they did have an "Artist in Residence" programme which was fantastic! (Respondent, 56)
>
> On my first prac[tical experiences] at a public state school I was involved in art groups that consisted of all of the things that I had avoided in my work in my work in early childhood centres. Stencilled outlines of horses that children had to collage over, bubble blowing painting- where was the freedom of expression in that? When doing a maths lesson in subtraction for a year 2 class, I sang ten green bottles with the class. The children sang along happily but my supervising teacher told me to keep the noise down so as not to disturb the children next door. (Respondent, 16)
>
> I had no practical experience during pracs, because the focus was on maths and English. (Respondent, 11)
>
> I only saw a focus towards maths and English, especially before the national exams. (Respondent, 146)

Nevertheless, 37% of beginning teachers described scenarios with a positive valence while on professional practical experience. These were largely reflected by a school culture that valued the arts. Respondents reported of the opportunity to form relationships with students through the arts, 'on a different level'.

> I had many opportunities to teach the arts on prac. One prac[tical experience] I did a dramatisation of the pied piper that was challenging. The children enjoyed it. On prac[tical experience] the school had a dance group come in and teach the children to dance. (Respondent, 130)
>
> I was at a private school that valued music.

> There were abundant resources for the students and their achievement level was above average across the board. The students also wanted to learn, they could see that resources were being provided for them and they wanted to know how to play on an instrument or record on a music program. (Respondent, 12)

For these respondents, practical experience could therefore be viewed as an important time for teacher self-efficacy development, when beginning teachers take on values and beliefs associated with the school's collective efficacy towards the arts.

Within the first months of commencing teaching

The majority of respondents described negative valence experiences during the first months of beginning teaching (72%). Respondents frequently reported that they lacked confidence, were continually struggling, lacked time to focus on the arts and didn't have supportive teaching colleagues who valued the arts. Comments typical of these responses include:

> I have a negative teaching partner who didn't like the arts. (Respondent, 160)
>
> I lacked confidence. Limited time to develop skills- English and maths units were far more demanding of my time. (Respondent, 61)
>
> I lacked confidence to experiment with different classroom situations in my first few months of teaching. Thus, I was hesitant to do drama and whole class painting or construction to begin with. (Respondent, 2)
>
> I sometimes had difficulties knowing what I could and couldn't do in a particular school because what was outlined on paper was not what actually occurred. (Respondent, 9)

Just under one-third (28%) of participants described positive experiences teaching the arts during the first months of teaching. Beginning teachers appeared to have a "realisation" of the importance of arts in their classroom. For some teachers, this was achieved by having supportive teaching partners:

I realised the arts (in many forms) generally connect with the students in some way therefore it is important to integrate the concepts across all subjects. (Respondent, 22)
I was fortunate to pair up with a teaching partner who was also passionate about teaching in the Arts. We established a classroom environment that adopted the diversity of the Arts which ensured each and every student had the opportunity to learn both in a theoretical and practical sense to appreciate the Arts. (Respondent, 20)
It was daunting to teach any subject in the first month let alone the arts! But I found the teacher aides to be invaluable in assisting me to find suitable activities and resources during my lessons. (Respondent, 59)

Again, the school culture appears to contribute to teacher's self-efficacy for the arts. Teachers' beliefs became unstable as they shifted to an unknown context, however they valued the support from other school colleagues.

Beginning teacher (currently)

Respondents, now at the stage of being beginning teachers with less than three years experience, commented on their current experiences with arts education. Almost half (47%) described positive valence experiences.

Respondents revealed that because of the overcrowded curriculum, integration was a way of addressing the absence of arts education. Respondents commented:

[I] love using the arts as a teaching tool rather than running specific lessons in the arts. I am trying to integrate it into my classroom and use activities as a way of learning. (Respondent, 1)
I enjoy arts in my classroom because students enjoy it and it allows me to see another side of their character. (Respondent, 6)
I enjoy teaching within the arts and find that I am able to have positive relationships and experiences with my students. (Respondent, 9)

However, over half (53%) of beginning teachers reported negative experiences. Some beginning teachers found it hard to integrate the arts, were restrained by school policy, negative student behaviour and problems with suitable planning. The following comments reveal such challenges:

At the moment I am worried that I'm not covering certain strands properly- sorry that students are missing out on potentially good experiences- thinking about how I can improve things for next year. (Respondent, 71)
Dance and drama are not taught often in primary school and when we do dance and drama, students are over excited and this can spoil the learning experience. (Respondent, 56)
I wish the curriculum wasn't so overloaded so I would have more of an opportunity to teach the arts, especially visual art and drama. (Respondent, 29)
I struggle with a new grade to combine/integrate the arts at a higher level. I integrate drama and media with ease. I attempted a great visual arts unit but failed (the art process did not work) but I did feel it was educational. (Respondent, 22)
Due to mandated additional remedial programs at my current school, [there is] very little time for arts (Respondent, 116).

Discussion and implications

This study reveals that the cohort of respondents reported profoundly divergent past experiences with the arts over the seven stages selected, ranging from a predominance of experiences with a positive valence during childhood, to predominantly negative valence experiences during pre-service teacher education and in the early months of teaching. This pattern of past experiences is one of the coalition of factors shaping their sense of efficacy as teachers of arts education (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Teachers' beliefs appeared to become unstable as they underwent cognitive filtering in new contexts. While primary school might be considered a 'golden age', it was deeply contrasted against the negativity associated with the teenage years. Likewise, pre-service teacher education and practical experience appeared to be a negative experience for many beginning teachers. When these beginning teachers

entered schools, they felt they did not have the confidence or skills to teach the arts and were often exposed to a school culture that did not value the arts. Since teacher self-efficacy is still forming within the first three years of teaching (Bandura, 1997), many of the sources of efficacy did not appear to contribute positively to teacher self-efficacy for the arts. Support structures to sustain teacher self-efficacy with the arts existed in very few schools reported in this study.

Ironically, the cohort of respondents in this study (Queensland beginning teachers of students in their first three years of teaching in the middle years) report similar levels of positive and negative experiences in their current teaching of the arts (47% positive, 53% negative) as they reportedly experienced as teenage students (46% positive, 54% negative). In their current classrooms they are teaching this age group. It is interesting to consider whether their experience and that of their current teenage students would align so closely.

The results from this survey suggest that beginning generalist teachers, as respondents in this study, revealed more negative past experiences of the arts at the survey points of interest in the study than positive experiences, and this was true of their current experience as a beginning teacher. Specifically:

• While childhood was viewed as a 'golden age' for the arts for most of the beginning teachers, the teenage years appeared negative for the majority of respondents because of teacher criticism, negative school culture towards the arts and competing subjects. A general shift was evident from enjoying the arts to studying the arts.

• During teacher education, some respondents reported that lecturers and tutors were critical, learning objectives in the arts courses inappropriate, and there was a perception of competing demands between the arts; and English and maths. Some beginning teachers did not study arts as part of their pre-service teacher education. While on professional practical experience the majority of respondents reported being exposed to a negative school culture towards the arts, with a greater emphasis on English and maths.

• During their beginning months of teaching, they were again exposed to a negative school culture towards the arts, with little support in their teaching.

The results of this study also reveal differences between personal enjoyment of the Arts and professional enjoyment of the Arts. When beginning teachers were young adults 74% enjoyed Arts experiences. Currently when teaching the Arts, only 28% reported positive experiences. Results again highlight the well documented gap between Arts activities undertaken outside of school and Arts education in schools. This study suggests the gap is not only limited to school students, beginning teachers also experience a difference between personal and professional Arts experiences (in the classroom and during teacher education). While teachers may actively engage with the Arts outside of school, within the classroom teaching the Arts is not a positive experience. Subsequently, negativity towards teaching the Arts may lead the beginning teacher to reduce or remove Arts education from their teaching altogether.

For teacher educators, this study serves as a reminder that pre-service teachers bring with them a range of past experiences which impact on their beliefs about arts education. It is paramount to provide opportunities for the development of positive experiences and mastery in the arts, and for self-reflection and the opportunity to confront negative beliefs. Part of this is ensuring that pedagogical experiences in lectures and tutorials do not reinforce cycles of failure as may have typified past experiences. Teacher educators should develop greater awareness of their contribution to developing positive teacher self-efficacy through the experiences they create for their students.

Teacher educators must also acknowledge pre-service teacher engagement with the Arts outside of teacher education. Pre-service teachers may actively engage in attending concerts, art galleries, dance classes and drawing classes. Teacher educators must find a way to include and build on pre-service teacher's personal experiences in teacher education by re-examining current Arts education content taught within generalist teacher training. Content must first focus on the interests of the pre-service generalist teacher before further knowledge development can occur.

This paper raises interesting questions about the continual cycle and impact of deficient arts education in Queensland schools. It documents the overall valence of past experiences which impact on the development of teacher self-efficacy. It also provides a platform for future research into creating supportive school cultures and teacher education that supports positive arts engagement. In particular, it would be interesting to investigate the impact of enhanced in-service training and school support for the arts for beginning generalist teachers and their subsequent perceived self-efficacy. Do these support structures change negative past experiences associated with the arts? If we are dedicated to improving arts in schools so all students can develop positive engagement with the arts, we must look at intervention in all life stages, to help develop positive values and beliefs towards the arts.

Results from the respondents, who are defined in this case as beginning generalist teachers with no more than 3 years teaching experience, reveal influences from past experiences in teaching the arts towards their current teacher self-efficacy. While this relationship was not tested statistically, it can be confidently predicted that there is a significant relationship between teacher self-efficacy and the impact of past experience (Bandura, 1997). Past experiences create emotional arousal that may sometimes further

hinder the likelihood of beginning teachers engaging with the arts. There is considerable evidence in the comments cited in this paper to support this belief. This hypothesis however, requires further investigation. A study involving multivariate statistics would enable further investigation of this hypothesis. If it is true, as teachers, teacher educators, administrators and policy makers we must look at past experiences as a significant contributor to the motivational construct of arts teacher self-efficacy, which ultimately impacts on student learning outcomes.

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