

ECP 711
Assignment 1

Arts Education Philosophy

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As a pre-service teacher, it is imperative that I reflect on learning experiences and educational literature in order to identify my own values and beliefs of education. Specifically, as a primary teacher, it is important to consider the role of arts in education and the ways in which these can be implemented into the classroom. Through reflection, I have identified that teaching the arts through an array of learning areas is a valuable way of delivering rich learning experiences. This allows teachers to provide students with the knowledge and skills to develop their social, emotional, intellectual and physical development through the Australian Curriculum's (**AC**) general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. In order to achieve these learning outcomes, it is vital that teachers understand the place of the arts in the curriculum and how to use this to support students' aesthetic learning.

When considering the role of the arts educator in developing student learning, it is important to reflect on personal experiences. These experiences guide my values and beliefs of the arts and help form my personal philosophy of teaching the arts in a primary school setting.

Prior to undertaking professional placement, I was only able to draw on experience within the arts from school. At this time, I did not relish the opportunity to participate in the arts as I found it challenging and uninteresting. Consequently, upon my first teaching practicum, I was nervous to teach the arts and assumed that this would be difficult to implement in the classroom. Brookfield (1995) suggests that these are receptive assumptions, which will guide my expectations of teaching and learning.

These assumptions were challenged during practical experience where I had the opportunity to discover how the arts should be implemented in a primary setting. Through observation, it became apparent that arts education should not be taught in isolation, but should be integrated into all learning areas. This can be considered as 'teaching through the arts'. In light of this, it became apparent that a specialist teacher does not always teach the arts. As such, I am reminded that although a specialist teacher can offer expertise by 'teaching in the arts', schools may not always have access to these

resources. Therefore, it is the generalist primary teachers responsibility to learn how to effectively include arts into the classroom (Klopper & Power 2010).

Fortunately, I had a myriad of opportunities on practicum to apply the arts into other learning areas. This was possible during English lessons where students utilized painting and drawing to explore the themes of Indigenous texts. Similarly, I applied the concepts of drama by allowing students to act out scenes from these texts. Moreover, music was addressed within inquiry, as students were able to construct their own musical instruments. However, the most significant learning experience was when students attended the Melbourne Museum to cement their understanding of the concepts explored during history lessons. According to Garvis and Lemon (2013), visits to museums, art galleries and school art incursions are a valuable way for implementing the arts into the curriculum outside the classroom. Thus, in future I will endeavor to afford students with these opportunities.

Each of these experiences has guided my beliefs about arts education and accordingly, I now recognise that incorporating the arts into individual lessons is relatively straightforward. The aforementioned experiences provided me with confidence to teach the arts, which I did not possess previous to this experience. As such, Garvis and Lemon (2013) suggest that self-efficacy and confidence will allow teachers to successfully implement creative learning practices.

In order to succeed in effectively teaching the arts, it is crucial that teachers understand its place in the curriculum. The arts are one of the AC's key learning areas and encompasses five key subjects including dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts. According to ACARA (2011), the place of the arts in the curriculum is to ensure that young people have the opportunity to develop, express and create their ideas through aesthetic learning. This supports the Melbourne Declarations goals, which aims to provide young people with an education that promotes 'confidence' and '[creativity]' to become '...active and informed citizens' (MCEETYA 2008). Consequently, the

five learning areas form part of the Foundation to Year 6 curriculum, which support the views of what adults believe is significant to learning (NAEA, 2002).

It is important to note that although the curriculum outlines these as five separate subjects, there should be a connection between them. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the teacher to make links between the arts and other areas of the AC. This is reiterated by ACARA (2015) who reinforces that the arts make direct links to geography and history as well as drama and media through the exploration of literacy. More obvious connections are apparent between dance and physical education, visual arts and ICT. As such, schools and educators must make decisions about how to appropriately implement the arts curriculum. The aforementioned examples highlight that there are a plethora of opportunities to incorporate arts within and outside the classroom.

Moreover, the arts make clear connections to the AC cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities. Specifically, the exploration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (**ATSI**) is suitable within visual arts and drama as students learn to develop a knowledge and understanding of Indigenous traditions. Similarly, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is addressed through '...art forms of Asia and the way these have arisen from the rich and diverse cultures, belief systems and traditions of the peoples of the Asia region' (ACARA, 2015). Additionally, creativity can act as a vehicle for the investigation of sustainable practices.

A number of general capabilities are considered within the arts curriculum. Undoubtedly, literacy is evident through creation and interpretation of texts. Numeracy is also addressed '...as students are asked to learn, design make [and] create]... activities that require significant numeracy skills' (ACARA, 2015). Interestingly, the arts exercises students' higher order thinking and therefore adheres to the 'critical and creative thinking' capability. Students engage in thinking strategies through communicating with others and identifying individual strengths thereby fulfilling the 'personal and social competence' capability. Lastly, the arts allows students to 'develop their

understanding of values and ethical principles' as well as learning to appreciate a variety of cultural traditions and experiences (ACARA, 2015). Consequently, this adheres to the AC general capabilities of 'ethical behaviour' and 'intercultural understanding' (ACARA, 2015).

The arts are extremely beneficial for students overall development. The place of arts in the AC is to enrich student learning through the development of individual expression, which can aid physical and cognitive development. ACARA (2015) suggests that the arts provide an opportunity for students to 'create, design, represent communicate and share their imagined and conceptual ideas, emotions, observations and experiences.' Therefore, students learn to express their individuality and demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a creative platform. This process encourages confidence, a necessary skill for students' emotional and social development. With this confidence, students develop 'sophistication across their years of learning' and this promotes cognitive development through more complex creations (ACARA, 2015).

Literature reveals that the arts are unique to other learning areas as it allows for 'whole' learning (Gardiner, 2003). Aesthetic learning encourages multi-tasking and therefore children learn to develop socially, emotionally and academically. Simultaneously, this prompts students to apply different ways of learning and establish their individual learning style. This supports Gardner's view of multiple intelligences, which suggests that student learning and engagement is enriched through the application of a learning style, which is suited to their learning (Churchill, 2013).

One of the greatest affordances that the arts offer children is that it does not concentrate on a 'right' or 'wrong' answer. Subsequently, students are less likely to focus on the short-term outcomes of success based on assessments and instead strive for their personal best (Garvis & Lemon, 2013). This supports National Art Education Association (2002) research, which highlights that the arts prompt students to consider problems that '...can have more than one solution...' Concurrently, students learn to deliberate multiple

perspectives, which is skill vital for their ability to interpret the world they live in.

A common theme within the literature is the academic benefits that the arts offer children. For example, Ruppert (2006) outlines that music exercises mathematics skills through the exploration of space and time, and that drama can assist students' comprehension of literature. Moreover, visual arts are vital for increasing young children's physical development through the practice of fine motor skills by learning how to hold brushes, pens and pencils. These examples reiterate the extraordinary value that the arts offer young children and consequently it is vital that I continually draw on its principals for enriching student learning.

Additionally, research by Ewing (2010) reinforces the social and personal benefits of undertaking the arts. Ewing suggests that the arts offer children intrinsic benefits, as they are motivated to learn because they find enjoyment in the activity. Intrinsic benefits include developing empathy, confidence and tolerance, which are imperative for forming and maintaining social relationships (Churchill, 2013). Additionally, children who find the arts enjoyable are more likely to be engaged and take risks within their learning. Thus, teachers must recognise the immense benefits of the arts for student learning. Professional experience reinforces the difficulty of maintaining student engagement and motivation and therefore it is imperative that I find ways to enrich students learning by teaching 'through the arts'.

In order for my students to truly experience the personal and academic benefits of learning the arts, I must consider my role as an arts educator. Research reveals that student learning within the arts is most effective when teaching is authentic (Russell-Bowie, 2012). Authentic learning is suggested to be one of the best ways to learn, particularly within the arts (Churchill, 2013 p. 346) as it draws on connections between creativity and the real world. Likewise, Russell-Bowie (2012) highlights that authentic learning in the arts allows children to 'collaborate' and 'reflect' through an array of resources to integrate and build upon prior learning. In light of this, I believe that the arts

curriculum should be implemented through the exploration of concepts that are familiar to students. This will compel me to embrace aesthetic learning by drawing links between the arts curriculum and students social and personal lives (Nilson et al. 2013).

Effective teaching of the arts also requires the teacher to promote a safe and positive environment in which students can explore their creativity. Nilson and colleagues (2013) reiterate that teachers must value the arts as a subject within their classroom. With the knowledge and belief that the arts are a multifaceted area, teachers are more likely to extend students opportunities to explore their creativity. Interestingly, it is suggested that students ‘...cannot be taught to be creative by direct instruction...’ Subsequently, as a teacher of the arts, I will strive to provide a space that fosters my students’ independent creativity in order for their learning to ‘come alive’ (Nilson et al. 2013).

Upon reflection of the literature, I believe that the arts should be implemented as an opportunity for students to explore their personal strengths. My role as an arts educator will be to guide, rather than instruct students learning. This supports McKenna (2013) position that leading students to uncover their individual style will encourage them to develop their own set of skills and knowledge. However, as a pre-service arts educator, I recognise that it may be challenging to always guide student learning if I lack confidence teaching within some of the arts subjects. Consequently, I must seek support from experienced arts educators and utilize professional development opportunities. Russell-Bowie (2012) proposes that these steps are necessary for beginning teachers to ensure that they ‘...do not lose their enthusiasm and confidence...’ teaching the arts, and to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach with confidence.

It is evident that the arts curriculum affords primary students with a plethora of knowledge and skills for their overall development. Through reflection on my arts teaching experiences, I have recognized the value of integrating the arts curriculum into all learning areas. This highlights what the arts can be, and reinforces the power it has to inspire and challenge all student learning. I

believe that I have overcome my early apprehension in regard to teaching the arts and will relish the opportunity to inspire and challenge students learning through the arts. Ultimately, I will continue to seek guidance from experienced teachers and reflect on my teaching in order to further my development as a teacher of the arts.

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