

Submission
No 113

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Partially
Confidential

Additional submission (previous submission made in response to survey questions)

Dr Sue Lane:

To whom it may concern,

I wish to submit additional evidence of concerns regarding Arts Education in NSW primary schools.

My PhD, completed in 2019, investigated the place of Arts Education in primary schools, comparing the perspectives of educators in three different regions (the Central Coast of NSW, the Central West of NSW and the ACT). For this parliamentary enquiry I would like to particularly highlight some findings from this research:

Lane, S. (2019). *"We need to put the Arts on the map!" - Exploring the perspectives of primary educators about the teaching of the Arts in Australian primary schools.* (Doctoral dissertation)

<https://nova.newcastle.edu.au/vital/access/services/Download/uon:35605/ATTACHMENT02?view=true>

A brief summary of several key findings:

Valuing of the Arts

Over 90% of the 196 participants (primary school educators) in this research indicated that they considered that each of the various Arts education areas were important aspects of the primary curriculum. The opportunity for self-expression and creativity that is featured in many Arts learning experiences was appreciated. The establishment and maintenance of Arts education programs within schools were described as reliant on the support and commitment of the school executive, colleagues and members of the school community. Participants also reflected on challenges that they perceived as inhibiting the implementation of Arts education in their teaching spaces.

Participants described their frustrations that the Arts were not always given recognition and priority by education authorities and members of the broader community, and that this had a significant influence on priorities within teaching spaces. Space for Arts education in the curriculum was perceived by participants as extremely limited in the current education climate, with busy classrooms, where teachers lacked confidence, and experienced feelings of inadequacy and frustration at the challenges and curriculum demands within their teaching space.

Confidence

Participants reflected on their own confidence to teach in each Arts area in the classroom, expressing their appreciation of Arts education, but also feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty in the Arts education space, leading to a need for training and ongoing support within their schools and communities.

Levels of confidence to teach in each Arts education area, varied considerably, creating a hierarchy of perceived confidence. One hundred and ninety-six participants responded to a questionnaire.

A total of 171 participants (87.25%), agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident to teach the Visual Arts in their classroom, 134 participants (68.37%) indicated confidence to teach Drama, 115 participants (58.68%) indicated confidence to teach Dance, 92 participants (46.94%) indicated confidence in the teaching of Music and only 62 participants (31.63%) felt confident in the teaching of Media Arts. When comparing regional data, the hierarchy of confidence (Visual Arts, Drama, Dance, Music, Media Arts) was generally consistent across the regional areas.

The hierarchy of confidence expressed by participants regarding Arts areas: most confidence to least confidence (Visual Arts, Drama, Dance, Music, Media Arts), did not necessarily reflect the historical focus on Music and Visual Arts in curriculum offerings in NSW and the ACT.

A teacher's personal and professional characteristics were perceived to contribute to their level of confidence in Arts Education areas, with confidence influenced by personal interest, talent or skills in the Arts. Those who were perceived to have more outgoing personalities were also perceived to be more motivated to facilitate Arts learning.

Classroom management in Arts Education spaces

Several participants perceived that Visual Arts could be presented with some structure which supported teacher confidence in the classroom. In contrast, participants described a higher level of concern and uncertainty regarding Arts areas with more of a performing focus (Drama, Dance and Music). Participants indicated that they preferred to rely on the skills of other educators. Perhaps this reflected a "misconception that the Arts concerned 'a finished product', the school concert or play or assembly item, and some lack of experience and appreciation of the important creative processes that are possible in classroom Arts education experiences." (p.37)

Management of the Arts education space was perceived to be a particular concern when confidence was lacking and subsequently the learning area was often avoided. Participants discussed their need for pre-service training and ongoing and relevant professional learning with focus on Arts Education pedagogies and facilitation strategies for the classroom.

Accessing support

As highlighted in *First We See: The National Review of Visual Education* (Davis, 2007) and *The National Review of School Music Education* (Pascoe et al., 2005), the accessing of external providers of Arts education, beyond the school, including music tutors from regional conservatoriums, not-for-profit educational programs and visiting artists and performers, were described by some teachers as supporting school programs, filling gaps in teacher confidence and ensuring the presentation of meaningful learning experiences for students.

Mentoring programs, where skills were shared, in external partnerships, or with collegial programs within a school, were valued. Previous programs involving support from Arts education consultants within regional offices had been particularly appreciated by participants. This sharing of skills was considered to enable teachers in Arts education implementation, building confidence and skills.

Specialists

Several participants expressed their appreciation of employment of an Arts specialist within a school, or a specialist in a particular area, particularly in Music. However, some participants also indicated that they did not necessarily feel able to present aspects of the Arts when a specialist was employed at a school. One participant who had been employed as a Music specialist in a primary school, reinforced this idea, feeling that they had de-skilled other teachers who were no longer practising their music education teaching skills. This participant also highlighted a feeling of isolation as a Music specialist in a school and the pressures of the extra-curricular demands within the role.

Teaching spaces and resources

A participant's commitment to facilitating Arts learning in their classroom was perceived to be influenced by their access to appropriate teaching spaces and resources. When resources were limited and teaching spaces had challenges to the teaching of the Arts, it was reported that the teaching area may be avoided, particularly if a teacher already lacked confidence in the skills.

Arts education implementation was dependent on the context of different teaching spaces and the motivation of members of the school staff, in particular, the interest and support of the school executive. However, when gaps in Arts knowledge, skills, confidence and commitment were evident, the sustainability of Arts education programs was at significant risk. Participants valued opportunities for collaboration in decision making related to the Arts, a spirit of collegiality in the design and management of Arts programs in partnership with resources within and external to the school, supporting skills and confidence for Arts teaching in the primary classroom (p.305).