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Teaching the Arts Across the Curriculum: Meanings, Policy and Practice

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Abstract

As arts educators, we are concerned that the teaching and learning of the arts is remaining static within New Zealand primary school classrooms. Despite acceptance of research promoting the importance of arts education for students; a clear and valued arts curriculum in New Zealand since 2000; and, UNESCO policy strongly advocating for the role of arts education, there remains a relatively minimal implementation of arts education in New Zealand primary classrooms. Our research examines a proposition that in order to provide the benefits of an arts education to children in what is a crowded curriculum, generalist teachers may need to focus on teaching the arts across the curriculum. Informing this proposal is the ongoing government policy focus on literacy and numeracy. This article documents a research project that examined how the arts were and were not being taught across the curriculum by one teacher in one primary school in New Zealand.

Introduction

The importance of the arts in education is evidenced widely. If education is to be transformed through the arts, then research may assist in offering a way forward in what is proving to be a challenging journey. Many years have passed since Gardner (1983) proposed the idea of multiple intelligences and while an awareness of catering for different learning styles exists, education in many countries currently leans toward scientific testing. New Zealand schools test to National Standards, (New Zealand Curriculum online, 2016) focusing on literacy and numeracy and in Australia the equivalent testing is NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2011). While strong statements in the curricula of both countries support the inclusion of the arts in their curriculums, the focus on literacy and numeracy ensures that the arts remain on the periphery.

Eisner (2014) states, “imagination is no mere ornament, nor is art. Together they can liberate us from our indurated habits. They might help us restore decent purpose to our efforts and help us create the kind of schools our children deserve and our culture needs” (p. 11). In advocating for ‘arts across the curriculum’ support is given to promoting creative classrooms where the arts are at the centre of every creative practice. As competition in job markets intensify, employers are beginning to seek employees who can think and work creatively, adapt to an ever changing environment and communicate well with others (World Economic Forum, 2016). In promoting ‘arts across the curriculum’, not only would UNESCO’s goals for arts education be met, but children could become creative thinkers going forward in the 21st century able to meet the challenges of an ever-changing society. Evidence also suggests that through an arts process, creative connections can be developed that are at the heart of cognitive development (Jensen 1998; Marshall, 2005). By providing challenging arts activities as a process in which to learn various concepts in other subject areas, brain development and academic achievement is positively influenced. It is from this understanding that we proceed to document our research project on ‘arts across the curriculum’.

While this research is focused specifically on one New Zealand case study, reference is made to projects where research has documented ‘arts across the curriculum’ globally. This provides a context in which an in-depth analysis of a particular classroom, dedicated to teaching in and through the arts, has been situated. Teachers are individuals, each with their own strengths and biases toward the arts. It is expected that individual teachers would approach ‘arts across the curriculum’ in different ways. The singularity of this research is acknowledged and while this may be seen to limit the outcomes and findings, it is suggested instead, that this in-depth research focuses on a situation common to many teachers. Research suggests that teachers are generally nervous about teaching the arts, and are unfamiliar with using the arts to teach ‘across the curriculum’ (Buck, 2003; DeMoss & Morris; Snook, 2012;

Wilkinson, 2010). This study supports current evidence by highlighting a lack of understanding in the implementation of an arts process in a school where a classroom was set up specifically to teach in and through the arts.

Within the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) the arts subject area is articulated in terms of dance, drama, music and visual arts. The curriculum policy states that four arts disciplines are mandated to be taught in every primary (elementary) school classroom (Ministry of Education, 2007). That is, all primary school aged children in New Zealand are expected to learn dance, drama, music and visual arts. The policy is clear, but is the practice?

Research regarding the teaching and learning of dance in New Zealand schools (Buck, 2003, McDonald & Melchior 2008, Snook, 2012) reveals that the teaching of dance is sporadic and that while teachers support the dance curriculum they feel unconfident to teach it. Research in drama, music, and visual arts reveals similar evidence (Alter, Hays & O'Hara, 2009; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; LaJevic, 2013; Russell-Bowie, 2009). According to Alter, Hayes & O'Hara, (2009) teachers are shying away from implementing the arts curriculum because of a lack of time, and the government's policy focus on numeracy and literacy.

Concerned about the lack of arts in classrooms, the present researchers looked for primary or junior secondary schools in NZ who were creatively engaging with different and comprehensive approaches for implementing the arts curriculum. We were most interested in schools teaching arts across the curriculum. Conscious of political policy imperatives that advantage numeracy and literacy, we were interested in how teachers may be valuing the arts curriculum while also meeting policy drivers. The New Zealand Ministry of Education, National Standards Information for Schools (Ministry of Education, 2010) advocates for,

Achievement in relation to the National Standards (Numeracy and Literacy) will be an integral part of teaching and learning across the New Zealand curriculum (p. 2).

We contend that achievement in relation to National Standards (in literacy and numeracy) could be reached by including the arts as mandated in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). As such, arts across the curriculum could be an integral part of teaching and learning across New Zealand classrooms. Our argument rests upon research that consistently reveals the impact of prioritising arts education (Hui, He & Ye, 2014; Bonbright, Bradley & Dooling, 2013; Smitherim & Uptis, 2005; Wilkinson, 2010; Winner & Hetland, 2000). Our argument also rests upon our experience as parents and teachers watching children increasingly bored and frustrated by classrooms held back by tests, standards and silo

curriculums. We note arguments against ‘using’ the arts to improve “cognitive achievement and behavioural outcomes” (Hatfield, 2007, p. 10) as arts advocates lobby for the teaching of discrete arts disciplines. We too advocate for inclusion of arts within the classroom for their intrinsic value and learnings. However, as observed, as arts advocates, we are not winning the timetable wars. We need to look for other ways, and hence we ask; should primary school classrooms adopt an ‘arts across the curriculum’ pedagogy? By this we mean that arts activities are taught and assessed for their intrinsic value as outlined in the arts curriculum, but also may be employed in meaningful ways to teach concepts belonging to other subject disciplines.

We found several schools in our immediate geographic vicinity that were respecting the importance of arts education and creatively advocating for and implementing the arts in their schools. We also found much confusion and need for support. While our study did not formally recognise conversations and observations with other schools, our informal discussions with them were supported by our concentrated research in one school. This article outlines our journey in researching the delivery of the arts across the curriculum in one school in Auckland, New Zealand.

We begin by reflecting on meanings of teaching arts across the curriculum. In turning to the literature we found a great deal of diversity in terms and expectations. We then outline our journey in finding our case study school and report on what we found, the questions we ask and actions we take.

The Research Problem and Questions

The problem initiating this research was that NZ primary school teachers continue to shy away from teaching the mandated arts curriculum. Research within New Zealand (Alter, Hayes & O’Hara, 2009; Snook, 2012, McDonald & Melchior, 2008) reveals that this problem is by and large informed by teacher’s lack of experience in arts practice; lack of experience in teaching arts education in the classroom; and, lack of dedicated arts time within the timetable due to government policy that prioritises numeracy and literacy.

Our preparatory research identified strong interest from teachers for implementing the arts across the New Zealand primary school curriculum. With this expression of interest from practicing generalist teachers, this research aimed to identify a primary school where the arts were being taught across the curriculum by a generalist teacher. As such, the research question driving this research was: How is a generalist primary school teacher teaching the arts across the curriculum in his/her classroom?

Sub questions stemming from this main question included:

- What arts disciplines are most taught?
- What pedagogical approaches or strategies are utilised?
- How does policy align with teaching the arts across the curriculum?
- How does the school principal inform the classroom practice?
- How are students responding to an arts across the curriculum approach?
- What does teaching arts across the curriculum mean to the teacher?

Teaching the Arts Across the Curriculum: What's Happening?

The idea of using the arts to support learning across the curriculum is not new. Wilkinson (2010) documented a community-system programme in the U.S.A. integrating arts across the curriculum. This was a collaboration between Segerstrom Centre for the Arts and the Orange County Department of Education and is currently resulting in students “better grasping the basics of earth, life and physical sciences” (UC Irvine News, 2014, p. 1). In another example, students in Great Barrington, U.S.A. were learning scientific concepts through the Jacobs Pillow educational programme; Curriculum in Motion (Smith, 2015). LaJevic (2013) a visual arts educator, documents,

Large scale programs, such as Arts for Academic Achievement, Chicago Arts Partnership (CAPE), North Carolina A+ Schools Program, Transforming Education through the arts challenge (TETAC) and Project Zero have shown positive effects on education. (p. 2)

Brehm and McNett’s (2008) publication ‘Creative Dance for learning: the kinaesthetic link’ takes some of these ideas further by documenting lesson plans that show how movement activities can be linked with different curriculum areas. These examples document how arts integration can work successfully across the curriculum. Many other programmes, mostly in the U.K. and U.S.A., have been successfully implemented in classrooms, (Betts, 2010; Bonbright & Bradley, 2013; Chappell, Rolf, Craft & Jobbins, 2011; Coutts & Soden, 2009; Hui, He & Ye, 2014; Smithrim & Uptis, 2005; Winner & Hetland, 2000). After content analysis of a diversity of documented arts integration models, we note that they may be categorised as different models or approaches. These approaches include:

Artists in schools programmes where visiting artists lead specific arts centric programmes that relate to a classroom theme such as climate change for specific time periods.

Community education partnerships, where parents/university students/guests work with specific classrooms in a school.

Professional development for teachers who then choose whether or not to work through an art medium with self-selected classes

The employment of arts' specialists in schools. These staff members are either full time or part time.

Teachers volunteering to teach an arts class in a primary or intermediate school where an artistic practice is translated. These teachers may or may not have specialist training in one or more arts subjects and generally do not receive professional development.

The examples above illustrate differences in focus and implementation that are informed by the policy documents and decisions informing the school. Many of these examples require funding and/or a specific focus in order to be successfully implemented. Again, funding decisions are closely related to policy requirements within school systems. This suggests that such programmes might only run during periods when funding is available and rely on sympathetic principals who value the role of the arts as part of a comprehensive education or to utilise the arts in order to increase student achievement levels in other discipline areas. The arts may also be used to raise the profile of a school at specific politic times of the year, such as school open days, speech nights and other such events when a school wants to impress parents and visitors.

More often than not, an 'arts across the curriculum programme' focuses upon one arts subject alone being incorporated into a teaching pedagogy rather than integrating multiple arts disciplines. That is, for example, a music specialist may be employed to work in the classroom with the aim for maths outcomes expected to rise. Not only are such differences in approach evident, but an understanding of arts integration presents a wide range of different meanings. The Kennedy Centre's (2008) definition for 'Arts Integration' states,

Arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process, which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both (p. 1).

For many arts educators, these objectives seem clear and well developed. A general understanding of the arts as performance however, has meant that even where definitions such as The Kennedy Center's are available, teachers, and even arts educators at times, fall back on

an understanding that excludes process and favours performance. This was evident in recent research where we observed a teacher in an arts classroom.

Methodology

This qualitative research began by obtaining ethics approval from the University of Auckland. Permission was then gained from the classroom teacher, principal, parents and students allowing observations and interviews to take place.

A constructivist epistemology drove our methodology. A constructivist epistemology argues that the relationship between the researcher and the research focus is “interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). The process of the present study involved the dialectical interaction of the researchers and a teacher sharing and co-constructing understanding of arts education across the curriculum as created in her classroom.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) commented upon the connected and interactive nature of the inquirer and the “object of inquiry” (p. 94). Tolich and Davidson’s (1999) descriptions of reflexivity reverberated with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) account of the interaction between the observer and the observed, wherein interaction cannot be absent or eliminated. Interaction occurs, we are participants in the research along with those we are studying. Eisner (1998), Tolich and Davidson (1999) and Wolcott (1992), presented arguments that supported Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) account, that rather than seeing interaction as an “intrusion leading to error” (p. 101) as might a positivist study, the interaction is more usefully regarded as “an opportunity to be exploited” (p. 101). Lincoln and Guba reasoned that interaction provides the means for dealing with the indeterminacy of knowing, the emergent and changeable nature of studying the social world, the use of and uniqueness of personal judgement, the contradictions in findings, the authentic relationship between the researcher and the researchee, and the realistic and adaptable expectations placed upon the research relationship.

Constructivism enabled engagement as we continually uncovered new questions to be asked, at the same time as uncovering new meanings related to the principal’s and teacher’s understandings.

Constructivist inquiries need to develop not only objectified (or experience-distant) but also subjective (experience-near) knowledge about social and international life (Poulit, 2007, p. 359).

This was the case in our research. Both researchers were able to employ Eisner’s (1998) educational connoisseurship where he places value on using ‘the expert’ as researcher in

addressing emergent issues. As former school-teachers, we were relatively expert in conducting research about teachers and teaching in the classroom. The present study established a teacher and her classroom as a case study, providing scope to observe and note a depth and variety of information from several sources (Patton, 1990). We gathered the data through observations and audio recorded semi structured interviews that were then reflected upon, coded and analysed alongside current literature. Through these observations and interviews we were able to construct a picture of an arts programme being run in a particular school.

The research aimed to focus on one teacher and aspired to gain a deep and detailed insight into her classroom practice. We acknowledge the methodological limitation of a sample of one, but also respect the opportunities it offered.

Identifying an Arts Classroom

The research focused upon observing a teacher who was implementing the arts across the curriculum. We use this term ‘arts across the curriculum’ as we found in our conversations with several school principals that this was the most often used phrase that came close to what we were seeking. Our research began by identifying a school that was advocating for and implementing an ‘arts across the curriculum programme’.

Using our school teacher networks we identified several schools implementing ‘arts classrooms’. We began by telephoning school principals and asking if they were interested in participating in our study. The first principal responded favourably, but could not participate because of mostly operational issues within his school. To our delight the second principal we contacted was very interested in our research and invited us to his school to meet with him and his deputy. This meeting went well. Both the principal and deputy understood the relevance of the research and were keen to be involved. When we inquired as to the wishes of the classroom teacher regarding being observed, we were assured that she would be comfortable with a person sitting in her classroom observing her teaching for one day a week. We exchanged contact information and the principal included the teacher in the correspondence.

Barbara began emailing the teacher who shall be known as Sally. Barbara and Sally arranged to meet for a coffee and talk through the possibility of spending a full day in Sally’s classroom once a week. Sally was generalist teacher with some arts experience mostly in theatre and dance. Sally was not exceptional in her interest nor experience and as such fit our research interest of observing a generalist teacher.

Classroom Observations

Barbara and Sally initially met in a café and discussed the research, ethics, ideas, pragmatics and any issues. Sally responded positively to the research and happily signed the ethics form. On Barbara's first visit to the school, Sally met Barbara in the office at the end of the day. Sally had to leave a meeting in order to meet up with Barbara. She had also been at meetings after school the day before and commented that she was not as prepared as she'd hoped to be.

Barbara's first visit to the classroom found the class in full swing. The classroom was very small for 30 x thirteen-year-old students without any extra space for Barbara. Sally organised for three boys to dismantle three computers that did not work and clear a desk space in the back corner of the room. Again, the lack of preparation revealed a degree of unpreparedness for the research, but also revealed the reality of the busyness of the classroom teacher where much happens spontaneously as it needs to.

Each day the programme was written on the board. Below is an example of one day visited:

Block One	Maths
Block Two	Air New Zealand Videos
Block Three	Music Video
Block Four	Music Video
Mini Block	Science Inquiry

The maths lesson was conducted like many other maths lesson with Sally copying ideas and questions from a textbook onto the board. Students wrote in their books and raised their hands to answer questions. The first activity concerned the mathematical concepts of 'direction'. Students worked independently in solving the maths problems.

It was clear that a topic such as 'direction' could have been conducted through an arts-based pedagogy, but there was also awareness that Sally was time-poor and that space in the room was a concern for someone wishing to have students move around.

After the maths lesson, Sally focused on video work the class had recently completed. Her class had achieved a place in the top ten for a video competition run by Air New Zealand. Their entry was played so that Barbara could appreciate their work and then other videos were selected to view in order to analyse them. The students wrote lists of what they liked about each film and what could have been improved.

While the students had been engaged in creating and critiquing a work of art, the art was the focus and not another curriculum area. While they learned about media, they did not use their

study of media to investigate any other area. Within the music video block of time this was the same. They engaged in an animated fashion negotiating plot, timing and shots and lip-synched and moved to their chosen music. Most groups worked outside on a grassed area where they regularly had to pause between rain showers. While the class was again involved in the arts, working cooperatively and developing self-confidence, they did not appear to be crossing the arts learnings over into any other curriculum area.

The final part of the day focused on science. The science inquiry involved students going to a computer room and working on their research. After the students had gone to the computer room, Sally mentioned that she expected a high standard in the “conventional subjects”, but she then said that she tries to, “push through as quickly as possible to allow time for the arts subjects”. She believed that in order to meet the policy expectations of the school’s curriculum, she must teach the curriculum in a conventional manner. Sally stated when interviewed later,

The way the school works and what we have to report on as a whole school is literacy and numeracy. So if there is no proof of us doing that then we will be held accountable. We have to get through that, [literacy and numeracy] even though we incorporate as much of this stuff [the arts] as we can. The collaborative activities we do are separate to that. It wouldn’t be possible if we weren’t meeting the school curriculum. The time frame is very short and they have to be completed by a certain time and sometimes that time frame doesn’t allow for activities I’d love to include.

Over the next few weeks of visits, observations and discussions, Sally reiterated that time and space were against her. Barbara observed similar content material and pedagogy practices each week. Over this time it was increasingly clear that Sally’s meanings of teaching arts across the curriculum differed from the school principals’ meanings and also our meanings of teaching the arts across the curriculum.

During the weeks that Barbara was in the school, she saw evidence only on one occasion when the arts were being taught in some degree in a cross-curricular manner. Students had been researching the past, present and future of the Waikato River. At the end of the study students had been asked to create a symbolic photographic triptych as a summing up, or conclusion. While the arts were not included as part of the research process, visual art was being included as a means for distilling findings.

On another occasion when the students had been sitting working quietly for some time, Sally took the class outside to a grassy hilly area and arranged them into teams. One by one, a team

member was to walk down the hill as though on a fashion catwalk. Along the way they needed to strike 5 catwalk poses and at the end make a ten-second acceptance speech for their Oscar before running back up the hill and tagging the next person. Sally inferred that this activity included some arts activity. If it did, then it appeared that performance was the focus. During the final two weeks that Barbara was in the school, some time each day was dedicated to rehearsing the students' J-Rock dance performance for an upcoming competition. It seemed clear that while Sally's classroom was an 'arts' classroom, the focus was on performance and while that suited Sally and her students, the pedagogical focus was not on the process driven 'arts across the curriculum' as we, nor, as we found, the principal had imagined it might be.

Checking in with the Principal

At the commencement of the research in the school it was agreed that the principal would be interviewed in order to ascertain his understanding and expectations of the 'arts' classroom. A suitable time was arranged and Barbara and he met in his office. The first question he asked as Barbara walked in the door was, "How is Sally going?" Barbara faced up to the question directly and inquired if the classroom was designed toward performance outcomes rather than focusing on integrating arts across the curriculum. After all, the school did not create an arts classroom for the specific benefit of our research. He responded,

That's possibly the discussion we need to have and work out what's important. It is possible that Sally has taken it on from what was there [performance] and she has some great ideas. We've carried on from the previous teacher who was very serious about performance and we've been remiss about not sitting down and saying what can we do here, what can we do better? So when you guys came along I thought, wow, that's brilliant. What I'd really like to do is go back to the basics and say, what is a performing arts class, what is it?

During the discussion with the principal it was revealed that what he had currently, and what he aspired to in the school was quite different. He agreed with Barbara's description of teaching and learning arts across the curriculum, and that implementing this approach had been his aim. Barbara went on to describe an arts across the curriculum activity, noting the importance of valuing the process of making, presenting and appreciating arts disciplines and these within other curriculum areas in such a way that students integrate learning in the arts with other curriculum areas. The principal did appreciate the benefits of such an approach and while he wanted it for his school, he did not seem entirely sure about how it would work or what could be taught. He suggested that Barbara sit down with Sally and discuss what an arts class could look like. He also suggested that Barbara observe another class in the school that

integrated sports across the curriculum. The principal stated,

He's using the sport to teach other subjects. The kids know where the learning is. They can sit down and say, this is what I know in literacy and numeracy.

Barbara did take the time to spend a day in the sports classroom. It was everything that we had hoped the arts classroom might be. With sport as a focus, the other curriculum areas were employed as pedagogical tools to teach concepts and skills. An example viewed was where students had created videos in pairs, breaking down a particular netball turn, stage by stage, repeating each section slowly and adding detail each time with spoken explanations, until finally the entire turn could be seen demonstrated in real time. In order to meet literacy requirements, the teacher asked students to create an infograph regarding the questions, "What are the major muscles and bones of the body?" and "How can leverage, levers, load/resistance and fulcrum in a see saw be applied in sport or exercise movement?" He asked students to make connections with the real world and explain how having this knowledge can improve performance and health. This was in the form of an information report. The students were also researching 'smoothies' (drinks) and what should be in them, dependent on why they are having them, and then making their own smoothies. The teacher did state that he had been teaching this class for eleven years and he felt that it was only in the last few years that he had really mastered the reality of students being fully engaged in the process.

The benefits to the students were obvious, with students taking responsibility for their own learning and goal setting. The teacher stated, "Assessment results across the curriculum for these students reflected better than average results". Of note was that numeracy and literacy results were strong for these students. The point to make here however, is that one teacher had developed a sports-rich pedagogy on his own, through his passion for teaching, students and sport. He admitted that other teachers approach him for lesson plans and ideas. He is often asked by other schools to come and speak and he agreed that an average teacher would not know where to start when asked to teach through a different process such as the one he was using.

Feedback with Sally

With support from the principal it was clear that a discussion needed to take place with Sally. There seemed little point in continuing to observe conventional teaching alongside performance rehearsals for J-Rock. This was not an easy discussion to have. We surmised that Sally may feel that she was being judged, despite Barbara's best efforts to assure her otherwise. We nonetheless had the conversation and Sally agreed that she was experiencing difficulty in creating cross curriculum arts tasks in her classroom. We discussed meanings of

arts across the curriculum, integrated curriculum and students' interests in electing to be involved in this classroom. As with the discussion with the principal, the term 'arts across the curriculum' made sense to Sally, and she believed that this approach "was a good way to go".

At this point, the focus of the research shifted to working with Sally, exploring how to create and deliver arts activities across the curriculum. While not our original intent we believed that supporting the teacher was paramount. Sally agreed to work with Barbara in creating some arts-rich activities with which to teach literacy and numeracy (given their priority within the school). Together they planned how much time might be required to set up a broad plan and then to work on specific tasks each week. During the discussion, Barbara provided Sally with examples of tasks that might work in the classroom. She explained how students might learn about compass direction through a movement task as an example. Sally responded,

Yes, I'm still hesitant about doing that; you know I would love to. I like what you said about the compass thing, get up and everything, but then we'd have to go back and do it in the books, only because I need to know that they're ready for Secondary School next year, otherwise I will feel that I'm failing them. I know that you are saying that they'll still learn, but they need to take a paper test.

It was apparent that Sally was attempting to negotiate school assessment and reporting expectations, student expectations and her own understandings of arts as performance. This was despite assurance that students could still take a paper test (say, in maths) once they learned a concept through the arts. This lack of surety affirmed our prior research findings, that when political and policy imperatives foregrounding numeracy and literacy were combined with personal lack of experience/confidence, teachers felt unsure about implementing any sense of arts integrated curriculums or art-rich pedagogies. Sally, was struggling to know what she did not know, despite a willingness to learn. The principal was also struggling to articulate what he wanted from Sally.

Early Outcomes

After several attempts to establish times with Sally to complete planning and go over arts integration ideas no time was suitable for Sally. After several weeks of uncertainty it was apparent that a larger picture meeting was required between Barbara, Sally, her team leader and the principal.

The principal agreed to speak with Sally. Following this meeting he advised Barbara that Sally had felt uncomfortable having an observer in her classroom and did not wish to continue. With regret both the principal and Barbara agreed to end the research project within

the school. They both agreed that while this was not an ideal ending, we had both discovered important issues concerning the delivery of the arts across the curriculum. This discussion brought our school based research to an end. However, much had been learned through the process and we deemed that the time spent in the school was extremely valuable for our research.

Our experience revealed unspoken tensions and meanings held by policy, the teacher, and the principal. The principal had a vision, yet was also beholden to government policy demands and his own demands for achievement in numeracy and literacy. His rhetoric of supporting an arts across the curriculum classroom was not followed up with realistic support for that teacher. If nothing else, this research revealed the vital importance of the need for clarity in developing shared meanings and expectations.

Discussion

It appeared that despite research exposing the benefits of the arts for student learning, there remain barriers to teaching the arts within primary school classrooms. We both reflected on our respective past research that found that if teachers have not had arts experiences in their own education, it is unlikely that they will have the confidence to implement an arts discipline let alone implement an arts across the curriculum programme in their classrooms (Crews Stitt-Gohdes, 2001; LaJevic, 2013; Snook, 2012).

A similar American study by LaJevic (2013) uncovered similar problems in arts integration,

Teachers equated art with doing and making a product, and did not associate art as an entry point or space of learning/teaching that could promote discussions and learning...the arts were not being fully integrated into lessons with integrity (p. 10).

LaJevic (2013) was looking specifically at arts integration in primary classrooms and discovered that teachers had varied responses as to the meaning of arts integration. She stated, "I witnessed a devaluing, or a reducing or underestimating the worth of the arts in the classroom" (p. 6).

It was becoming clear in terms of literature and the present research with Sally, that it was at the day to day classroom level of implementing the arts where assistance was required. The present study reiterated the value of any classroom support beginning with an initial very honest discussion between the principal, the lead teacher (Head of syndicate) and the teacher. Meanings and expectations needed to be aired in respect to how curriculum could be taught;

how policy imperatives will be (or not) met; how pedagogy would vary and be open to risk; how classroom resources such as space, may need adjusting; and, how student achievement would be captured and reported.

The importance of arts in the curriculum has been argued and accepted, with John Dewey (1920), Howard Gardner (2011), Eric Jensen (1998) and Ken Robinson (2006) amongst those providing evidential source material. Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) reiterate the value of the arts stating, “UNESCO considers education in the arts to be a universal human right, implying that its absence or sidelining is a breach of the Convention on the Rights of a Child” (p. 9). Much has been documented regarding the importance of the arts, and as Gelineau (2012) states,

In the classroom, arts play a vital role in the problem-solving process by strengthening the right or intuitive side of the brain to aid in finding alternative solutions and more creative thinking (p. 4).

Our research, however, determined to move forward from documenting the advantages of arts in education, and rather sought to examine at a micro level the problems that a teacher encountered when attempting to teach arts across the curriculum in her classroom. While attention is given to the fact that the arts are not being included in the classroom (Buck, 2003; Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; LaJevic, 2013; Snook, 2012), little is known about the problems that teachers encounter when they do attempt to include arts across the curriculum in their classrooms. As this article reveals, our ambition to examine classroom-based issues was not fully realised. Yet, at the same time in terms of school realities and policy, this research has been useful in revealing what conditions support and thwart arts integration in the classroom.

Four findings emerged from the present classroom research:

1. Arts education is often seen in terms performance/presentation silos.
2. Teachers rely on personal arts experiences/strength/bias with the reality being that some arts areas are taught more comprehensively than others.
3. There is considerable scope for key stakeholders to have different meanings of teaching and learning arts across the curriculum.
4. Meanings and expectations of educational aims and objectives must be shared such that policy, the principal and the teacher are all on the same page.

The first theme presented a broader problem than the specific school situation. That is, parents, students, careers advisors view the arts as a dance performance, or drama performance, or music performance, or a visual art show. Seldom are the arts regarded as

being interconnected and anything but a 'showing of talent'. Shifting perceptions to see both intrinsic and instrumental roles of the arts and then applying this across the curriculum requires a considerable pedagogical shift from principals, teachers, students, parents. We note that performance offers many benefits and opportunities for students, however maintaining this limited perspective limits scope for developing teaching and learning experiences. While both Sally and the principal in this study appeared to understand the values of the arts in general, their backgrounds and experience kept directing their expectations towards performance outcomes.

Understanding the importance of the arts within the curriculum becomes complicated when understanding the pedagogical demands of teaching and learning all the arts (dance, drama, music and visual art). Teachers and students will have a bias toward one or more arts subject. We acknowledge that this skill base bias can be seen as both a strength and a problem when delivering four arts disciplines in the classroom. Teachers have interests and experience that informs their teaching and learning. Cognisance is taken that teachers need to stand back from their own experience, large or small, and see how to simply begin a lesson or programme that stretches their knowledge base. How to just get a lesson going that is inclusive of the students is often the hardest step (Buck, 2003). Taking this seemingly small step requires an epistemological swing away from knowledge as given, to knowledge as being created (Eisner, 2002). A swing that many teachers are not able /willing to make in the teaching and learning of the arts (Buck, 2003).

An important theme emerging from our research is that teachers, even when enthusiastic about the arts, find it is difficult to develop an understanding of what teaching and learning arts across the curriculum looks like. When we get down to the micro level of implementation, teachers need to know the 'what' and 'how' of arts pedagogy so that they gain the necessary experience to go forward in delivering purposeful and arts inclusive curriculum lessons. This research revealed the critical importance of the teacher and principal, building together a shared meaning of an arts classroom. It is to the detriment of the aims of New Zealand Curriculum's arts education policy if a cycle of misunderstanding of what the arts offer within the classroom is allowed to persist along with teachers perpetuating limited opportunities for valuing the richness of the arts. For this reason we believe it is important to continue our research in this area.

Possible Ways Forward

One way forward in changing perceptions of the arts as being only a discreet performance or product, is to provide teachers with embodied experiences in engaging in arts across the curriculum activities. It is through practical implementation where teachers are engaged in the 'doing' that understandings may begin to change. With this research finding at the fore we

believe a next step is to operate various workshops and ‘test’ various ideas about arts across the curriculum pedagogy. Again, valuing generalist teachers’ insights, facilitating workshops and then documenting the activities that work may provide the basis for a teacher support resource.

While this proposal may seem limited to the number of people it can reach, it is a relevant starting point in New Zealand. It comes at a time when teachers are groaning under policy expectations of constant standards assessment in limited subject areas. It comes at a time when children are increasingly disconnected with classroom experiences (Hutton, 2015). It comes at a time when teachers are positive about arts education, yet struggle to find time and abilities to deliver the arts. The fact that several schools that we know of in Auckland have introduced arts classrooms suggests that some principals and teachers are looking for new ways to encourage learning in their classrooms. As experienced arts educators, it is acknowledged that an arts across the curriculum approach offers relevant and engaging ways of learning for students. We also accept that we must persist in examining how policy dictum, principal’s aspirations and teacher realities intersect.

We also acknowledge however that our suggestions rely on government support, and regardless of our findings, change is not possible in school classrooms without such support. As the importance of creative classrooms is highlighted in many countries, it is suggested that research is geared toward government bodies, providing specific information on how to develop creative classrooms through the arts. While change in education can be a gradual process, connections need to be made between arts education researchers and education policy makers.

We believe that the arts can lie at the heart of every child’s education rather than be seen as being only for one classroom in a school of 20 classrooms. As arts education advocates we aim to continue to research and work with principals and policy makers, and most importantly, teachers. We look forward to reporting on the teacher workshops that form the next stage of our research.

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