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## Transforming Pedagogies: Encouraging Pre-service Teachers to Engage the Power of the Arts in their Approach to Teaching and Learning

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## **Transforming Pedagogies: Encouraging Pre-service Teachers to Engage the Power of the Arts in their Approach to Teaching and Learning**

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*Abstract: This paper describes and analyses, through the use of case studies, two experiences of transformative learning in an undergraduate arts education unit. Pre-service teachers designed and engaged with arts-based curriculum activities, created their own artwork, participated in a modified production of *The Tempest* and kept a reflective journal. These activities constituted the data which was analysed using creative frameworks such as case writing, script writing, narrative analysis and found poetry as ways of developing richer understanding of pre-service teachers' self-perceptions and self-awareness as teachers and as potential artists. The stories explored here uncover two different ways of encountering the challenges of learning - resistance and struggle - and highlight the significance of the educator's response to individual student needs, and the value of reflective skills in shifting pre-service teachers' cultural, political and institutional understandings.*

### **Introduction**

Providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to build their confidence and explore the potential of learning in and through the arts within teacher education programs is impeded by time restraints and reduced funding, particularly expressed through limited staffing and narrow timetabling (Barton, Baguley and MacDonald, 2013), and by limited exposure to the arts during schooling (Lemon and Garvis, 2013). Arts practice has been squeezed in schools so that pre service teachers frequently come into teacher education with very little arts experience and confidence, unless they have actively sought out experiences or had some successes in the arts at school. Nonetheless, as teacher educators with expertise in the arts, the authors of this study believe that the arts offer transformative experiences to pre service teachers. It is through the arts that many pre-service teachers learn to risk-take, improvise and make connections between feelings and learning. Such transformative contexts are often at odds with pre-service teachers' school classroom experiences, where they observe a focus on testing and encounter a belief that the educational levels of young people can be raised if educators rely more on standardization and measurable outcomes to gauge the success of their students, as well as the success of their own teaching performance (Connell, 2013; Stobart, 2008; Giroux, 2004). Apple (2009) observes that for those teachers whose understanding of student success is founded on less quantifiable outcomes, such as creative engagement expressed through performance or artwork, 'the school curriculum has become a battleground' (p. 242). The neoliberal imaginary limits and defines ways of knowing to what can be clearly tested (Angus, 2015) – a practice which is at odds with arts experiences (Apple, 2007; Kincheloe, 2003; McLaren, 2014). Michael Apple often asks the question, 'What knowledge is of most worth?' (Apple, 2014, p. vii). He reminds us that language and

knowledge are not neutral because meaning making is intrinsically connected to the lived experience. As teacher educators, we sought to build on this idea of lived experience and design a unit where pre-service teachers would engage positively with the arts, and so be equipped to transform their own learning and the learning of their students.

Hattie's analysis (2012) makes clear that the quality of teaching – teacher belief and commitment - is the single greatest variable of impact that we can control in student learning. In this study we sought to develop transformative pedagogies using the arts, which would support pre-service teachers in developing capacity in the classroom. This paper reports on an early investigation into an analysis of pre-service teacher's engagements in the arts. Focusing on two case studies, this paper is a positioning paper for a larger study to follow, which will explore pre-service teachers' sense of competence and the affect of the arts in their development. Both the larger study and this paper examine the challenges for teacher educators and pre-service teachers in a unit of the Bachelor of Education (P-12) when they engage in the arts as a process for learning. These students will qualify as teachers in primary and secondary schools. The aim of the unit is to encourage pre-service teachers, mostly fourth years, to cultivate a disposition and level of confidence to use the arts as part of their teaching and learning repertoire. As this is the only compulsory arts-based unit in the course, it is hoped that pre-service teachers will develop an understanding of, and incorporate artful practice into, primary and secondary classrooms where they teach, and so focus on designing and implementing productive pedagogies, as opposed to 'defensive pedagogies' (Lingard, 2013). By productive pedagogies we mean those ways of thinking that engage pre-service teachers in reflective practice that can insure they act inclusively and justly in the classroom. In practice, in the tertiary classroom, this means building knowledge independently and collaboratively. Reflective practice is strongly encouraged through university classroom activities, journal writing, and personal arts practice. We, as both teaching staff and researchers, believe that reflective practice in response to artful engagement strengthens links between ideas and actions, and generates a commitment in pre-service teachers to re-conceptualising themselves as learners and teachers who embraces a holistic approach to discovery for self and others (Greene, 2014; Heathcote and Wagner, 1976).

Our teaching team redesigned an existing unit with the question in mind: does pre-service teachers' engagement with the arts increase their confidence and competence in teaching generally? (Russell-Bowie, 2012) The overall aim of the project was to investigate whether an intensive arts experience results in pre-service teachers feeling more competent and being able to behave more confidently in the school classroom across all areas of curriculum (Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). This paper reports on the first part of this study by examining two case studies of pre service teacher engagement with the arts.

Teaching is considered by some to be acting: the teacher must present in the classroom with a definite persona in order to attract and maintain the attention of the class (Pineau, 1994; Oprea, 2013). We know that engagement with the arts develops confidence in children (Gibson and Ewing, 2011). Recent research undertaken with pre-service teachers in Queensland and Canada (Jones 2012; Belliveau, 2007) suggests that engagement with the arts by pre-service teachers might develop confidence and skills in versatility in the classroom. Therefore, can engagement with the arts through an intensive experience result in pre-service teachers becoming more competent, confident and transformative (Kalantzis, 2006) teachers?

For this research, 'confident' is understood in the following ways:

- Approaching the class with a belief that it will go well and that the prepared material is engaging for the students; this can be understood as self-efficacy
- Maintaining a teacher persona, even if things do not go well
- Persevering with a range of teaching strategies, even if students appear unresponsive

There is extensive literature on the notion of teacher ‘competency’ (Zhu et al, 2013). For this project, ‘competence’ is understood in the following ways:

- Having resources at hand
- Drawing on a range of strategies in class
- Being flexible to acknowledge and exploit learning moments that arise
- Making explicit connections to prior learning as they arise
- Making connections across the curriculum
- Listening to, and building on, student initiatives and responses

Our student cohort of almost 150 pre-service teachers fell, according to their surveys, into three main groups: those embracing the arts; those open but unskilled and unknowledgeable; those who were actively hostile to the arts. We found that even amongst those embracing the arts there was a lack of awareness of how they might use the arts in their teaching, and an almost total lack of awareness of strategies for integrating curriculum using the arts. Very few pre-service teachers had seen arts-integrated curriculum (or had not recognised it when they had seen it) (Gadsden, 2008). Almost none had taught it. This absence of a perceived capability to teach in and with the arts amongst our students was consistent with research (Garvis and Prendergast, 2010). MacDonald and Moss (2015) suggest that there are borders between artists and researchers, and exploring this borderland is rich in both artistic and academic practices. We suggest that many of our pre-service teachers see a chasm between the arts and teaching in a classroom. In this class we sought to provide a bridge across that chasm. Crossing the bridge between the arts and educational practice provides insight, understanding, alternative viewpoints, flexibility and spontaneity. Our aim was to get pre-service teachers onto that bridge so their work as educators could be informed by the thinking of the artist (Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin, 2013; Miller and Saxton, 2009; Catteral, 2009). Our work is influenced by the A/R/Tography work undertaken at the University of British Columbia, Dorothy Heathcote’s use of Drama, and McKenna’s articulation of artful practices (McKenna, 2012)

For the introductory weeks to the unit we ‘played’ with different arts forms, and developed some base line skills, such as an understanding of line and colour, levels, drama games and improvisation, Laban movement and pedestrian dance, and rhythm and melody. Pre-service teachers were then required, as part of the unit, to teach a different area of the curriculum through the arts each week for six weeks. During the semester they also undertook their own arts experimentation (presented as a performance or as part of an exhibition at the end of semester), and participated in the development of an arts-based learning experience, in this case, a modified production of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (also performed at the end of semester). For the purposes of this paper, our focus is on the process for pre-service teachers as they undertake these tasks. What are the conditions that support pre-service teachers’ engagement with the arts? (Ewing, 2010) With the following case studies it is our intention only to open up this question; answering it is part of a much larger undertaking.

There are several theoretical frameworks simultaneously underlying this study. At the base level is a Freirian belief in enabling pre-service teachers to become activists in support of *their* students becoming empowered to take control of their lives (Freire, 1996; Darder, 2014). The actions undertaken in the tertiary classroom, consistent with Freire’s ideas of the body in learning (Darder, 2014), were heavily influenced by the work of Dorothy Heathcote and the concept of ‘Process’ learning (Heathcote and Wagner, 1976). These two understandings of education (that of Heathcote and that of Freire) interrelated and informed the ways in which learning situations were established and maintained, and the types of engagement and feedback pre-service teachers experienced. In terms of the actual research design, this was a qualitative study, using teachers’ observations and a thematic analysis of

students' journals to provide the main data. It is expressed in this paper, a small scale introductory study, through case writing (Schulman, 1992; Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997) and narrative interpretation (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). As an ethnographic inquiry, it is about relational connections, where rich descriptive moments are brought to life (Denzin 2001), and where common experiences and events are noted, observed, and explored (Pink, 2012).

Within the framework of our larger questions, this paper focuses on the experiences of two pre-service teachers, Sam and Ella, and through these, asks what we can learn about the arts as a transformative educative experience (Mezirow, 2003; Alter, Hays and O'Hara, 2009). These stories highlight the power of transgressive behaviours in different forms (Duncum, 2009), the ways in which experimentation and risk-taking impact on learning and creativity (Brown, 2012; Douglas and Gulari, 2015), and the dynamics which influence the pre-service teachers' confidence to articulate opinions, experiment with the arts, and work collaboratively.

In the following accounts of students' engagement with learning, connections to theory are explored through footnotes. In the first story, the 'I' is the Chief Investigator of the research and coordinator of the unit.

### Case One: Resistance

There is something about body language. Sam sits in the middle of the lecture theatre and everything about the way he sits says he doesn't want to do this. But he attends. He offers ideas (often disputing what is said). His mind seems to be engaged almost against his will; his body tells us he is not interested in this rubbish. He sits back, legs crossed, arms spread, head slightly back. He is, quite frankly, intimidating. He tells his tutor he doesn't think this is the only way to teach. His tutor says that no one is saying that – but that responsible teachers must cater to diverse learning needs; that the arts are inherent in human nature; that children must have the opportunity to explore and express themselves. Sam is conservative politically and also very smart. He is a formidable opponent. It's as if only Maths matters – maths and literacy. It doesn't help that my tutorial is in one of the best rooms on the campus – lots of light, a vinyl floor, plenty of space, wifi and a decent screen and computer. Sam's tutorial group (led by Hayden), on the other hand, is in a portable on the other side of the campus. No wifi and limited facilities. They know they have the 'dud' room. Discontent rumbles.

*Week three, tutorials:* In tutorials, Sam is not alone in being hostile, but he is highly capable of articulating his hostility and disguising it as pedagogy. After a couple of weeks we do a graffiti wall: What do you like; what are you fearful of; what are you excited about? The students' fears are there, on the wall, for everyone to see. In my class, under 'fear and dread' we have, several times over: Dance. I ask for an explanation – can they tell me where this comes from? One young man becomes the spokesman: 'I don't want to dance in front of other people.' I ask: 'do you see the value of dance in a classroom?' He says: 'not really. I don't think I'll ever teach it.' 'But what about those children who learn through their bodies? How will you cater for them?' 'They can do PE.'

I think fast. How far do I push this? And I say: 'well, I'm very sorry, but you have to dance. It's not negotiable.<sup>1</sup> And because you really don't want to do this, we will do it today. You don't avoid Maths because you don't like it, and you recognise that you need to teach it. So dance is the same. Not negotiable.' So we begin with the Hokey Pokey and then some

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<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting observation to be made here with reference to teacher behaviours, and the shift from collaborative practice to an authoritarian stance.

Laban movements, and everyone moves. They do it. I'm surprised. But pleased. But I know they have done this only because I required it – not because they appreciate any inherent value in the task.

Meanwhile, in Hayden's tutorial group, he and Sam are having a heated discussion. Gradually, as the time for the tutorial ends, students trickle away. But something is happening. Sam's control over the class is drifting. Hayden puts the case for the arts. Sam concedes he must do what he must do in order to pass the unit. He does not concede interest, and he does not concede that he will ever actually teach the arts or through the arts. In this class there is a standoff. Lines have been drawn.

*Week four, tutorials:* Hayden is sick. We split up his group across the other three tutorials. I take the group with Sam. But before Sam's group presents, one of my groups presents colonisation through visual arts. It is disappointing: a lot of information (in fact a potted history of Australia) and then a drawing activity. It is my job to give meaningful feedback. I don't think these students have thought hard enough, or adequately prepared for the task. They have fallen back on poor modelling from mediocre classrooms. There is no imagination here. No deep understanding of integration. The arts is simply an activity here, and not used as a vehicle for learning.<sup>2</sup> I explain this and ask the larger group for different ideas that might better express the idea of colonisation through visual arts. Silence. I suspect no one wants to imply criticism by offering an alternative. Then Sam makes a suggestion: 'what if you took the children outside and asked them to collect natural things to make a picture. Then they come in and make a picture of bushland using dirt and gum leaves and stuff. Then, when they look fantastic, you paint them all grey – to represent the destruction of the environment and the development of industrialisation that comes with colonisation.' 'Yes', I say, 'that's the sort of thing I mean – where the learning is in the doing, not separate from it, and where there is an emotional punch for the students – they've made this lovely art, and then it is changed.'

I am surprised, and impressed. I tell Sam this is great thinking. I feel like we've been at loggerheads, simply because of the way he sits in lectures, and he comes into my class with a 'reputation'. I want to encourage him to think this way, even if he's only doing it for me (though I don't think this is his style).

*Week five, tutorials:* The morning before the tutorial, the emails begin. Sam's group has an idea. This week's theme is citizenship. Their arts discipline to focus on is Drama. They have a plan. It's ambitious and certainly dramatic. They want permission.<sup>3</sup> I give it: 'do whatever you want – this is the place to experiment'. Occupational, Health and Safety, and privacy rules raise their heads. I look at university policies. It's okay – go ahead.

During class that day my group is underway when Hayden's tutorial group arrives at our door, armed with Nerf guns. They burst in, oust my students from their seats, and take over the room. It's noisy and chaotic – suddenly there are 20 more people in our space and some of them loud and apparently aggressive. My students don't know what to do – I tell them to do whatever is asked. We'll sort it out later. Don't cross an angry leader with 20 people behind him. Immediately following the uprising Sam's group play a video from the Crimea, and directly connect their actions with the Russian invasion of the Crimea. They break down their roles in the invasion: Sam was the agitator; another was the supporter; another was the 'voice of reason'; and so on. They debriefed both groups in terms of how they felt. Sam asked: why did his whole tutorial group participate in this – most were simply

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<sup>2</sup> The use and quality of arts programs is analysed in *The Qualities of Quality* project (Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009). On arts education in Australia, see also R. Ewing, *The Arts and Australian Education* (2010).

<sup>3</sup> It is notable that students locate authority in the lecturer. They did not feel they were in control of the class or the form it would take, despite efforts to develop democratic classroom characteristics (Knight and Pearl, 2000).

followers?<sup>4</sup> We learn that some of the group didn't want to participate because it was inconvenient. Some just thought it was weird. But in the end they all came, they all walked through the door – they were all implicated in the invasion. And how did my group feel? Confused, unsure, bemused. They asked whether we were going to continue with our work: how disruptive would this be?<sup>5</sup>

Eventually Hayden's tutorial group left. My class regrouped. The next presentation was dance. The students to present had collected four quotations about the role of women in society and the push for equality. They asked the class to come up with one movement per quotation, and then to sequence these as a dance. And then everyone was up, everyone was choreographing; groups were working together effectively; no one was scared of dance. One student said – 'look how far we've come in a month'. But I wondered how far we might have come in just 15 minutes. How much of this was an 'us and them' reaction. Now defined against Hayden's group, these students would all support each other. Or maybe it was more a question of dance seeming tame now compared to being threatened with a Nerf gun by someone from a different class room. Or perhaps it was my relinquishing of responsibility for the learning environment.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the reason, these students now saw each other, and their work, differently.

## Case Two: Risky Business

The following narrative is constructed from Ella's journal entries, and the voice of the 'other' (in italics) – an imagined voice inside her head.

*Week one:* I feel confident about my strength as a teacher. I have a strong belief in my ability to engage and control a class. I think that I have rather good class management skills and a firm understanding of the curriculum, but I also believe that I struggle with integrating other areas such as the arts into areas such as literacy and numeracy and I believe that is due to my insecurities about my ability in the arts.

*What does that mean, to be confident? Engaging and controlling, yes; and managing and understanding curriculum. That sounds solid. Is it enough? Really, aren't numeracy and literacy enough? If I'm good at them, isn't that enough? Why do I need the arts as well?*<sup>7</sup>

I believe that I am a flexible teacher because I understand that lesson plans cannot always be followed to absolute perfection. But I do need to work on my confidence in areas such as the arts to be able to do so effectively.

*Lesson planning is so important – that's what they have drummed into us since first year – plan, plan, plan and overplan. Know what you are doing, why you are doing it, what you hope to achieve and how you will assess and evaluate. Now they ask if we're*

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<sup>4</sup> Sam asks a critical question about the nature of transgression. For Sam, this process of invading the classroom challenged his own preconceptions of how classroom work, how teachers work, and how authority is established and maintained. In this way his behaviour was well aligned with the transgressive behaviours described by Duncum (2009), and was working within the space of experimentation and risk-taking in order to establish new paradigms. But if others in the group were simply following, what was the nature of their behaviour?

<sup>5</sup> In these questions they began to experience the uncertainties that are experienced by displaced people. These questions, when imagined on a world scale (how disruptive will this invasion be? When will I be able to go home/go back to work?), indicate the effectiveness of Sam's classroom invasion as a teaching strategy for opening up different viewpoints on conflicts.

<sup>6</sup> The 'ownership' of the classroom has frequently been discussed in terms of power and oppression (Freire), democracy (Knight and Pearl, 2000) and student-centred learning (Vale, Davies, Weaven and Hooley, 2010). In this case, control of the learning was assumed by the pre-service teachers, and was consistent with the underlying philosophies of education we were applying.

<sup>7</sup> Russell-Bowie acknowledges this 'problem' that many teachers see 'good teaching' as not including teaching the arts. See Deirdre Russell-Bowie (2012).

*flexible – what does that mean? I know sometimes I have to adapt a lesson plan. Is that what they mean by flexible? It's hard to be flexible if there are areas you feel very unsure in. I need to work on the arts. If I want to be a good teacher, this is what they are telling me I must do. I think there's a link here between flexibility and feeling competent in the arts, but I don't know what that link is – I can't quite grasp it.*

*Week three:* Everything we do involves us moving outside of our comfort zones and moving towards feeling comfortable looking a bit silly, involving those non-creative students in creative things.<sup>8</sup> After the Hokey Pokey we moved into other areas of movement that for those who aren't dancers was embarrassing, hilarious and extremely eye opening. Overall I found this lesson comforting as even though my confidence in my dancing ability is still non-existent, I now have the confidence to explore dance and embrace being horrible at it.

*Comfort zones, feeling comfortable, being comforted – what does it mean to find a space you can work in? I'm not a better dancer because of what we did today, but I'm braver. I can accept not being good at something but still do it and feel good about it. I'm comforted by recognising that it's okay to do something I'm not good at – there's a risk space here. I'm taking a risk and the risk feels okay. We're all in this risk space together. And it's okay. This is the space for learning – because it's a space where I'm not skilled – it's exactly not being skilled that makes it so important, and it's recognising this, that makes it comforting. I'm where I need to be.*

*Week five:* I gained insight that I otherwise highly doubt that I would have thought of myself... The dance group sent a very powerful message about the effects of colonisation and conformity. The dance group took an extremely large risk because they were sending an extremely bold statement about conformity and the impact of conformity in Australia<sup>9</sup>

*This is really hard. There's a lot being asked of us here. I look at that other group, the group that did dance this week, and I realise how powerful their movement was – that it showed me something about colonisation I didn't know. I've done the units on this stuff – I 'know' about the colonisation of Australia, but now I know it differently. There was something about this dance – it was so simple – but it took me to a deeper understanding. I was moved. And because we're in this class together, and we're all learning together, I can look at that group and think – 'wow! What a risk'. To step away from every traditional, 'normal' way of teaching and to trust a dance activity to tell the story and engage the learners in an understanding of colonisation – it was brave and so effective.*

... Considering the topic of colonisation and the difficulty of representing Indigenous Australians in a non-offensive way I think our performances were innovative, creative but still culturally appropriate.

*We had to really think about this – we had to combine learning from a lot of different areas – history, ethics, citizenship, literature, plus the arts, to make this work. No one in our group is indigenous, and it's really hard to remain culturally respectful and yet push the boundaries. It's hard to even know where the boundaries are.<sup>10</sup> We had to negotiate our values, our understanding – or lack of it – the curriculum and the arts.*

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<sup>8</sup> There are clear implied links here in Ella's words, to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Newman and Holzman, 2014). However, it is interesting to also view this within the context of neoliberal educational policies. Lawrence Angus writes of this period in history being 'especially dangerous' in education (Angus, 2014, p. 395) because of paradigm shifts. For Ella, this risk-taking in the arts is a microcosmic experience of the shifts in education generally and the impact of neoliberalism on new teachers who have had reduced arts exposure at school and will work in contexts where there is pressure to continue to reduce arts exposure for their students.

<sup>9</sup> This student's acknowledgement of risk is important. The willingness to take risks is identified by Davies et al as critical in successful engagement in creative learning. See Davies, Dan, Divya Jindal-Snape, Chris Collier, Rebecca Digby, Penny Hay and Alan Howe (2013) 'Creative Learning Environments in Education. A Systemic Literature Review'.

<sup>10</sup> This is another boundary for twenty-first century Australian pre-service teachers to navigate: how do white Australians represent indigenous history? The group chose to do their performance in mime because the aboriginal people didn't speak



*Week 6:* This week I feel that we really peaked as a class; everyone is now participating willingly and really embarrassed each and every activity.

*And being embarrassed is good! I never would have thought that. But everyone is willing, everyone knows there's this space that's embarrassing and we're all going there. Because it's also the space where we find new things, new ideas, new ways of understanding, of doing, and of being.*

*They took a huge risk with this activity.*

*I look at what that other group did and what they asked us to do and I think – this is such a risk. What does that mean: risk? It's something different, something no one has tried before, something that doesn't fit easily into traditional classrooms. Risk results in innovation. We are becoming innovative teachers. We are experiencing 'risk' – that uncomfortable space where innovation grows. It's okay.*

In terms of experimentation we, as a group, have really peaked. We all took on different personas and stepped outside of our comfort zones. We took the risk by being a bit comical that the message of the task would not come across as strongly as we like. Our message absolutely came across strongly as our peers seemed extremely engaged and impressed with our performance.

*It worked! We took this huge risk – did something we'd never done before, interpreted curriculum in a new way and it worked! People were engaged, people learnt things. It is sort of surprising and exciting.*

People commented on the effectiveness of our activity and it shows how seriously our peers take this class.

*Because they don't take all classes seriously. It's funny to say seriously, when we spend a lot of class laughing and doing things that feel a bit stupid. But we are taking the risk-taking seriously. There are some classes we just do because we have to and we do the work because we need to pass the class. But this class, people are taking seriously.*

*Week eight:* This week we played it too safe in terms of the art form and actually struggled to incorporate that art form which was visual arts. I think we needed a lot more collaboration as a group and really needed to think a bit more outside of the box and our comfort zones. I would spend more time exploring different forms of visual art and find ways to incorporate that with maths rather than over analysing the maths curriculum and just finding a way to make it seem like art. I also would be more firm in encouraging that we have more time to brainstorm and plan as a group so we can make better use of the different ideas and majors that we have ... we were rushing into our ideas.

*We went backwards. We tried to be safe. Instead of experimenting we went with a conservative idea of maths and we didn't really think about the art. But our real problem wasn't the lesson; it was that we didn't collaborate enough. We have a mix of majors in our group and we didn't use them. Instead of thinking together and sharing our knowledge, we went for what seemed easy, obvious. And we got inadequate. It wasn't even that it was boring – because probably students in a classroom would do it and it would be an okay lesson. But it wasn't creative. It was less than we were capable of because we didn't experiment, we didn't think collaboratively. We didn't take a risk.*

*Week nine:* One group took a huge risk as they approached some extremely sensitive topics and confronted them extremely abruptly. But, this tactic payed off as each group really

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English and they felt a 'made-up' language may have been perceived as disrespectful, or may have distracted from their meaning. Notably, by doing so, they inadvertently highlighted the ways in which colonising Australia attempted to silence indigenous cultures.

embraced their performance and the topic they were given. They really highlighted the racism and stereotypes that unfortunately still occur in this country.

*Wow. Huge risk, great outcome. I know that risks don't always pay off, but when they do, the result is stunning. Their performance made me think about myself – my own values, the values of the people around me.*

... we tried to think outside of the box but got a bit lost along the way.... family is a tricky topic to approach as each child's definition of their family is different. ... families can be used in lessons in a way that is inclusive and interactive. I think we really needed to come together more and blend our various ideas

*We just didn't think enough today. Our intentions were good, the idea of exploring families was good, but we just didn't think enough about how we ensure our teaching is inclusive. So today we took a risk that didn't pay off. Because we thought about the process (learning through song – and that's a good idea) but we didn't think about the content. I think we rushed this task – we need to remember that each person in our group has particular strengths - we need to collaborate more. Does creativity require collaboration? Probably not, but it helps.*

*Week ten:* I have realised that I have more artistic ability than I previously acknowledged, which was none. I realised that being an artist does not just mean having the talent to paint or draw or even sing or dance. I learnt being an artist is about being able to use your artistic ability to create something, something that has significance to you. From this realisation I have also further enhanced my belief in what my role is as a teacher. I have always believed that as teachers we need to be facilitators to our students' learning and not dictators. This belief is more significant in the arts than any other subject area as I have learnt that the most important part of being an artist is having freedom of expression.

*Is this what 'flexible' is? Is it being able to create something? Is it being a teacher who does more than teach: a teacher who creates? A teacher who creates learning opportunities for students to grab and explore? Is this what flexible is?*

I have learnt that using the arts in the classroom is not about skill it is about courage.<sup>11</sup>  
*It's all about risk.*

I have learnt that as teachers we expect our students to participate in something that we would not participate in ourselves

*And that's not fair. If we want our students to act and dance and take a risk and possibly look silly, then we must know in our hearts that we can do it too, that we will do it, that we have done it. We must embrace that sense of risky space that we want them to enter in order to learn.*

This unit has opened my eyes to how much of an injustice omitting the arts from the everyday classroom would be

*I understand now, in a way that I didn't before, about different ways of learning. It's more than that – it's about different ways of being. A creative child has no other way to be, so I need to foster their creativity. And a less creative child needs the freedom of knowing that risk-taking is good, that failing is okay, and that the best experiences come from those times you are least confident.*

I would not say that my perspective of myself as a teacher has completely changed but I would say that it has shifted. ... I no longer feel restricted by my weaknesses because at the end of the day it is my students' educational journey not mine ... so it is not about what I can do, it is about what they can do and how I can facilitate that.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Artists are by nature risk-takers. They push boundaries, experiment, explore feelings and ideas. As Carr and Kemmis (1986) remind us 'Praxis is always risky' (p. 190).

<sup>12</sup> This is an example of what White identifies as an 'expressive teaching moment', when 'past experiences and present doing and undergoing are woven together in a way that alters the learner's meaning of the moment' (White, p. 16).

*I'm still me. But I see that me differently. I see my role differently. How do I design learning opportunities so my students can learn? It's not about how good I am at teaching things. It's about how good I am at nurturing their learning, their creativity, their engagement with the world. It's about them. But for me to understand that, I have to be secure in me. I need to know I can operate in an area of risk, of learning. I need to be comfortable to be uncomfortable. I need to be flexible.*

### **Connecting Ideas and Experiences**

After this experience over several weeks, and in the light of these two stories, we return to the question: can engagement in the arts create more flexible, responsive, competent and confident teachers? The change in Sam was noted by the students, teaching staff and by Sam himself. At some point he was released from a very conservative way of thinking about teaching. His 'personal philosophies and existing practices' (Walkington, 2005, p. 63) were challenged; his boundary pushing shifted from being against us as his teachers to against his own ideas of how education works. His 'colonisation' of our classroom was literally pushing the boundaries – moving the physical boundaries of his own group's learning to include our space. Through that he also identified the roles that people play in social action. He invited everyone in his own group, and in my group, to identify the role they played. One of my students later expressed the concern that if anyone had been the victim of invasion before, this might have been a very confronting experience. It is noteworthy that the impact was such that she had begun to consider the response of students in a classroom. It is interesting to consider the arts as transgressive in the story of Sam. His transgressive act literally and metaphorically took his fellow students (and their teachers) to new places. Through this transgression Sam deepened his understanding of his practice as reflexive to situation, student need, and curriculum demands (Darder, 2014). The bridge was being built between artistic practice (performance) and teaching (identifying roles and social structures, considering why invasion occurs, understanding viewpoints). Notably the bridge was built not on knowledge, but on feelings – it was how people felt about this experience that they talked about and reflected on (Darder, 2012).

The pre-service teachers' journals, like Ella's, provided a rich source of data. Reflective journals can reveal surprises. Complex and deeply personal reflections, like Ella's, provided stories of learning. Here, art encounters and educational experiences were articulated and formed the basis for reflective accounts. These narratives presented evidence of unique socially constituted learning and 'knowing'. Personal and professional recollections collided and convinced the reader to consider the strong choices that critically shape teaching and learning.

For many students establishing their identity as a professional practitioner who is creative and flexible is a very hard road. This is risky business. Students are quick to perceive the dangers, the greatest one of which seems to be embarrassment. However, Ella demonstrates perfectly that when embarrassment is embraced, and simply accepted for what it is, it creates a space for learning to take place. She also clearly identifies that aversion to risk is a significant obstacle to success.

Ella and Sam were very different students. In their difference they raise challenging questions for teacher educators. Every student in our classes, whether at school or at university, is going to respond differently to the challenges and opportunities we provide.

Sam responded to the arts and the expectation of taking risks with hostility. Ella responded with guarded enthusiasm. Ella struggled because she wanted to do well and because she could see that the creative experimentation of others was engaging and

challenging. Consequently she kept trying, kept exploring her creativity – sometimes she was successful, at others times she wasn't. Sam's behaviour, on the other hand, suggested he felt threatened by moving outside the conservative spaces in which he knew he was successful. There is an interesting lesson here for teachers about what learning looks like. For Ella it looked like struggle; for Sam it looked like hostility. Every student will encounter personal obstacles in their process of learning, and each student will respond to them differently. In the arts we see this explicitly because the risk-taking required to learn is so overt. What does this mean for us as teachers in tertiary classrooms (Carr and Kemmis, 1986)?

The challenge for us, as tertiary educators, as we take pre-service teachers through this experience, is to appropriately and supportively respond to the variety of behaviours they produce. We identified a range of responses to the arts in our pre-service teachers. Some were at times fearful; others were joyful. Across the cohort there was increasingly a sense of release, discovery and amazement at their own work and the work of others. There was also, often, a sense of resistance. We asked our pre-service teachers to take their own feelings and connect them to the feelings articulated by children in their classrooms, and to the behaviours they demonstrated, when engaged in learning. How do *they* feel when asked to do things that feel awkward? Underpinning this request was a desire to identify and support inclusive practice. For some students the space in which to learn becomes smaller and smaller as their discomfort increases. A curriculum taught with the arts, however, actively encourages risk. Failure occurs. Much of the arts is about problem solving. In the arts failure is positive because it acts as part of the aesthetic process. The arts, therefore, when well taught, are highly inclusive, because risk-taking and failure are embraced: students engage at their own level with the processes of the arts, even though skill levels in the performance of the arts may be variable.

The nature of our response to our students' learning needs, seen so clearly in this context, raises the greater issue of retention. As students come to us appearing to be apathetic, hostile, confused or bored, how do we, as tertiary teachers, understand our role? What is made transparent in the arts classroom is that each of these behaviours is a response to the challenges of the learning environment. Sam's hostility and Ella's struggle both come from the same place: uncertainty about engagement with the arts. But Sam and Ella express their needs differently, in behaviours that we, as teachers, need to read and respond to. The risky business of the arts is certainly about transformative pedagogies. But it is not only the students who are transformed. Their teachers, also, in being responsive, experience transformation.

In response to the stories of Sam and Ella, we have taken part of Ella's final reflection and created a found poem from it. We were moved by the evocative language she used in tying together her experiences as a family member, young woman and future teacher. We conclude with our artistic response to her reflection – a found poem from her words – and her accompanying art piece.

**Found Poem – Ella**

*Deep resonance  
A little girl  
How it shapes  
Core  
My Home  
Number 48  
Piece of identity  
I have lived  
And memories there  
The favourite parts  
I was preparing  
Something  
I go to Charlie's kennel  
Our first steps  
Independent  
Self sufficient  
Transitional point  
I was originally baffled  
One picture  
My piece  
My philosophy of teaching  
The sign  
The sign reads  
When I teach I am at one of the highest points of happiness that I have reached in my 21  
years of living.*



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