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## **“Learning The Ropes”: Pre-Service Arts Teachers Navigating The Extracurricular Terrain**

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*Abstract: Arts teachers undertake a multitude of extracurricular activities. Yet, while these activities consume considerable time and require specific expertise, little attention is afforded to developing these skills and expertise during pre-service training. This article presents findings from a study into the value of a pre-service teacher production as a form of professional development, from both the technical and personal development perspectives. Thirty pre-service secondary Arts teachers participated in the production. Through focus-group interviews, participants indicated the benefits of building technical understanding as well as personal benefits of engaging in an ensemble experience. All spoke of the potential transferability of what they learned to their future teaching practice. Given that Arts teachers are expected to facilitate extracurricular activities as part of their professional work, this article advocates the importance of examining ways in which rich experiences such as the production examined here should be formally embedded into pre-service teacher training courses.*

### **Introduction**

Secondary Arts teachers perform unique and diverse roles requiring highly developed communication skills, and inter and intra-personal skills (Norris, McCammon & Miller, 2000; Wales, 1999). They lead music ensembles, coordinate large-scale events, direct performances, choreograph dances, compose music, write scripts, perform production tasks, model performance skills and manage budgets. They may lead tours, organise theatre excursions and enter their students into performing arts festivals. These activities are frequently undertaken in addition to the regular teaching load and without financial remuneration (Ballantyne, 2007; Gray, Wright & Pascoe, 2017; Kelly, 1999). While extracurricular activities consume a considerable amount of time and require specific expertise, little attention is afforded to developing these requisite skills and understandings during pre-service training.

Previous research has identified significant shortfalls in relation to the effectiveness of pre-service courses in preparing Arts teachers for the profession (Anderson, 2002; 2003; Ballantyne, 2006; 2007; Pascoe & Sallis, 2012; Warren, 1992). Anderson (2002) stated, “A concerted effort is required by universities and schooling systems to make teacher pre-service training and induction effective to equip these teachers for the arduous journey that lies ahead” (p. 92). More specifically, Ballantyne (2007) stated: “An examination of the realities of teaching will better equip pre-service teachers for their future contexts. By ensuring that pre-service teachers experience ‘real’ teaching situations throughout their studies....students will be able to reflect on and prepare for their future context” (p. 187).

This research builds on the study by Gray (2016) which investigated pre-service drama teachers' practicum experiences. A key finding was the significant impact of extracurricular activities on participants' experience of stress during the practicum. Gray (2016) recommended investigating ways to better prepare pre-service drama teachers to manage these demands. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the extracurricular school production, a key expectation of Arts teaching. Investigating how pre-service Arts teachers can be better prepared to manage teaching demands, including extracurricular expectations, is important, particularly given reported teacher attrition rates with up to 50% of early career teachers leaving the profession within the first five years (Gallant & Riley, 2014).

Pre-service Arts teachers (art, dance, drama and music) from a Western Australian (WA) university participated in a production of Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' designed to develop understandings about the processes and pedagogy required to facilitate extracurricular activities. The production took place during semester one in 2016, and spanned a ten-week rehearsal period with three to four rehearsals per week. Participants were involved in on-stage roles (actors, musicians, dancers) as well as design and production roles (scenography, stage management, lighting, sound, music composition, dance choreography, publicity). Guided by a professional director and manager, pre-service teachers were coached throughout the process on directing techniques, administration tasks such as record keeping and budgeting, as well as decision-making processes and trouble shooting. At the conclusion of the production, focus-group interviews were undertaken with participants to determine the impact of the production on their emerging ideas about facilitating extracurricular arts activities.

### **Key Concepts and the Conceptual Terrain**

Participants in this project were all studying to be secondary Arts teachers. To contextualise the research setting, the article begins by identifying the place of the Arts in WA schools and explores the literature, albeit limited, on the extracurricular component of teaching in the Arts.

### **The Arts in Western Australian Secondary Schools**

In WA, the disciplines of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts are part of the Arts Learning Area (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2015; Western Australian Government School Curriculum and Standards Authority [SCSA], 2015). WA schools have recently transitioned to a new curriculum, the Western Australian P–10 Syllabus (SCSA, 2015). This syllabus, based on the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015), presents a year-by-year syllabus for pre-primary students through to year 10. The syllabus mandates that all students study at least two Arts subjects from pre-primary through to the end of year 8, including a performance subject (dance, drama, music) and a visual subject (media arts, visual arts). From years 9 and 10, Arts subjects become optional.

Senior secondary students graduate with a Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). Students study either Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) courses or General courses (non-tertiary admission subjects). Arts subjects are moderately popular. In 2017, approximately 1200 students enrolled in senior secondary dance, 3000 enrolled in senior secondary drama and 1200 students enrolled in senior secondary music (Sorenson, personal communication, August 15, 2017).

All Arts disciplines combine both rigorous practical and theoretical aspects. For example, the ATAR Drama examination requires students to develop an original solo performance and a scripted monologue, in addition to completing a rigorous written examination where they apply learned concepts to both familiar and unfamiliar drama texts. Similarly, the ATAR Music course requires students to present a performance recital or portfolio of original compositions, as well as an extensive written examination comprising aural, theory and a detailed understanding of music history based around the study of set works, across either a Western Art, Jazz or Contemporary music context.

Accordingly, pre-service Arts teachers need high-level practical skills, discipline knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge to deliver both practical and theoretical components of the WACE Arts courses (Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014). However, teaching in the Arts also has particular sets of demands that draws on the personal, social, intellectual, affective and expressive qualities of the teacher (Wright & Gerber, 2004). For example, the performance aspect of Arts disciplines requires teachers to model a range of performance skills with confidence and precision. Furthermore, creating 'safe places' for students to take risks and perform for their peers requires teachers to foster a supportive classroom, build relationships of trust and manage student anxiety (Lambert, Wright, Currie & Pascoe, 2016; Wright, 1999).

The challenge for teacher educators is to provide courses that cover the broad range of curriculum in suitable depth (Pascoe, 2002), whilst attending to the specialised skills required to facilitate effective lessons (Wales, 2009). This is particularly challenging given the complex social dynamic of teaching in the Arts (Wright & Gerber, 2004) and the insufficient time in teacher education programs for pre-service teachers to develop the requisite pedagogical skills and theoretical knowledge (Pascoe & Sallis, 2012; Warren, 1992). Further to this challenge is the added extracurricular responsibilities that go with teaching in the Arts.

### **Extracurricular Arts Activities**

Research confirms the benefits for students engaging in extracurricular activities. For example, students have been found to be more intrinsically motivated when engaged in activities where they feel they have a higher degree of control, natural ability and are able to work with like-minded people (Annear, 2010). According to Annear, these are states that naturally occur in extracurricular Arts activities. Furthermore, students who participate in extracurricular activities tend to perform better at school and are less likely to suffer from depression; students who do not participate, often have higher reported rates of delinquency and truancy (Mahoney, Harris & Eccles, 2005; Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010). Students learn important skills such as goal setting and time management while also gaining experience in leadership and responsibility (Verma & Larson, 2003). Students volunteering to participate in extracurricular activities develop a more defined and mature self-concept, which has also been linked to better academic outcomes (Barber, 1999). Annear (2010) posits that extracurricular activities "have been shown to be environments that benefit positive adolescent development and promote the learning of social, interpersonal, academic and general life skills" (p. 47).

Extracurricular Arts activities generally involve teachers directing and/or producing a range of small to large-scale performances over both short and long timeframes. While it is generally recognised within school communities that such activities contribute significantly to the life, culture and public perception of the school (Lierse, 1999), it is also the case that for Arts teachers, this work is time consuming, exhausting, stressful and can lead to burnout (Anderson, 2002, 2003; Ballantyne, 2006, 2007; Donelan, 1989; Faust, 1995; Haseman,

1990; Kelly, 1999; Wales, 1999). Furthermore, these activities are generally undertaken in addition to the classroom-teaching load and receives little or no financial remuneration or time in lieu (Ballantyne, 2007; Kelly, 1999). Faust (1995) described her 75-hour week carrying out additional tasks for an extracurricular production:

*I spend many hours reading potentially performable scripts; drawing up a budget; inventorying materials and equipment for each show; going through assorted catalogues and ordering supplies; running to fabric shops, second-hand stores, and seasonal yard sales to buy cheap costumes and set supplies; striking and re-storing a set and cleaning the stage and wing areas; arranging for mass washing and dry-cleaning of used costumes after a show; and re-cataloguing all of the above for use again. That's in addition to the hours spent organising student rehearsal schedules' planning the set; lighting and costume designs; and arranging for and overseeing the student and adult work crews and regular acting schedules. (p. 25)*

While undertaking such activities can be stressful and challenging for experienced Arts teachers, Faust suggested that asking a beginning teacher to run such an event "is a little short of insane" (p. 25). Therefore, the call from Ballantyne (2007) to provide 'real' experiences for pre-service Arts teachers to better prepare them would appear to be justified.

## **Process of Inquiry**

This study was guided by two main aims. First, to understand the value of a production on developing participants' ideas about facilitating extracurricular Arts productions upon graduation. Second, to understand the personal value obtained from participating in the extracurricular production. This research seeks to understand the production experience as it exists now, a relativistic view of human behaviour shared by many researchers in Arts education (O'Toole, 2006). The interpretive and descriptive nature of this work falls under phenomenology, an interpretive theoretical perspective that attempts to generate knowledge about the lived experience of individuals (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; van Manen, 2009). Therefore, in order to describe and understand this experience, focus-group interviews were used to gain insight, enabling key issues and emerging themes to be identified.

## **Participants and Setting**

Thirty pre-service Arts teachers participated in the extracurricular production. All pre-service teachers who auditioned were successful in gaining a role. At the conclusion of the production, all participants were contacted by the researchers, via email, and invited to take part in focus-group interviews. Subsequent to ethics approval, sixteen participants agreed to take part.

The first focus-group comprised eight pre-service Arts teachers in their second or third year of their degree. The gender composition included six females and two males ranging in age from 19 to 24 years old. The second focus-group comprised eight pre-service Arts teachers in their first or third-year of their degree. The gender composition included seven females and one male ranging between 18 and 22 years of age.

Each focus-group was held in a small room familiar to the participants on the university campus. Researchers chose a semi-structured interview format where several

guiding questions were asked to stimulate discussion. Questions focused on the participants' expectations, experiences, personal and professional challenges, as well as their understanding of the developmental process of creating the production. At times researchers needed to prompt the 'silent voices' (O'Toole, 2006) of individual participants who experienced difficulty contributing their ideas due to other participants wishing to be heard and have their say. Each focus-group ran between 45 and 60 minutes and at the conclusion, participants expressed their appreciation at the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

## **Data Analysis**

Researchers took on the roles of moderating, facilitating, monitoring and recording the group's interactions, as suggested by Lichtman (2009). An audio recording was taken of each focus-group and, at the completion of each interview, the audio-recordings generated were transcribed using NVivo software. Interview data was interpreted using analytic procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1994). As such, the sequence of activities for the analysis of each interview data was: 1) data was collected via each focus-group interview and a transcript generated, 2) data transcripts were reviewed via a process of selecting, sorting and sifting to identify similar phrases and ideas, 3) identified commonalities were coded to form categories of generalised information represented in a data matrix of categories and their supporting phrases, and 4) the process was repeated for the remaining focus-group interview and the analysis assisted in identifying emerging themes. Data matrixes from both sets of focus-groups were then compared to identify overarching commonalities.

## **Emerging Themes**

Through the reflection process, understandings of personal achievements and insights into the facilitation of extracurricular activities emerged among participants. Emerging themes are now discussed in turn, beginning with the various reasons for participation and expectations.

### **“Each to Their Own”: Understanding Reasons for Participation and Expectations**

Despite participants having busy schedules managing university study, employment and family commitments, participants were drawn to the production for both personal and professional development reasons. Personal development included an opportunity to take risks, to test one's ability and to extend social networks. For example, Riley described pushing himself “out of my comfort zone” as his main reason for auditioning for the production since his only other acting experience was within the safety of his school drama class while Regan wanted to “rebuild skills and confidence”.

For some participants it was more the social benefits such as the opportunity to strengthen friendships and extend social networks that drew them to audition. Regan, Ashley and Tim wanted to work with like-minded peers and as Regan highlighted, “I was really looking forward to working on something together that we were all passionate about.” For Hayley, however, her move to Perth to commence her studies had left her feeling isolated and the opportunity to meet new people was appealing.

Other participants described the professional development opportunities offered by the production, particularly in terms of strengthening their performance technique. For David,

it was an opportunity to hone his performance and direction skills so that he could “walk the talk”, while for Elaine, the production’s composer and principal musician, it represented an opportunity to apply her music skills in a cross-curricular Arts setting. For Nina, it represented an opportunity to work with a professional director while Tim and Courtney wanted to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of how to approach a Shakespearean text. Participants also recognised the opportunity to develop skills and understandings in related Arts areas in which they lacked practical experience. Sarah, who majored in music and minored in drama, described the production as an opportunity to strengthen her acting skills while for Lexie, a music major and dance minor student, the production represented an opportunity to strengthen her choreography skills.

For some, their reasons for taking part were similar to when they were students at school. Riley said, “I just loved the limelight when I was a kid at school and doing productions gave me loads of attention. And look at me now – nothing’s changed.” Elaine commented, “I was so shy at school and so doing productions helped me grow in confidence. I wanted the same out of this experience.” However, other participants indicated broader motives as they moved towards a teaching career. Shannon encapsulated this notion when she said:

*I wanted to learn how to be the best director and how to run productions. When I was a kid at school, I just wanted to be with my friends and get an opportunity to perform on stage. Now it’s more about learning the ropes.*

Participants commented on the techniques used by the director and production manager to understand the participants’ reasons for involvement and expectations. Danielle recalled, “In our first meeting, she [director] asked us to think about why we wanted to be involved in the show and what we expected to get out of it.” Regan added, “... then we emailed her so she knew what each of us wanted to achieve. I liked this and it’s something I’d definitely do as a teacher.”

Interrogating their motives for participation was important as it provided insights into the variety of reasons their future students would have for being involved in similar activities. Caleb explained, “It wasn’t until today that I realised we weren’t all here for the same reasons. I assumed you were all here to improve your performance skills like me. I never thought it was to make friends.”

Participants agreed that understanding their future students’ perspectives and reasons for participating in a production would allow them, as teachers, to support their students reach individual goals. As Shayley said, “If I know that a student wants to make deeper friendships, then I would make sure they get social opportunities.” Scott similarly noted:

*Not all kids are here for the same reason. Some kids just want the adrenalin rush of performing on stage – like me. We have to understand that so we can make sure they have the best opportunity and come back for more.*

### **“Stretched and Stressed”: Managing Additional Workload**

Participants had some understanding of the required levels of commitment. Shannon stated: “I knew from being in productions at school that it was going to be busy and stressful juggling other commitments and uni but it would be worth it to work with a director and the cast.” Similarly, Riley claimed, “I knew this production would be nothing like the ones I had done at school. I knew it was going to be harder than anything I’d done before.” While participants knew it would be hard work and time consuming based upon previous experiences of production work, they were not prepared for just how stressful it would

become.

Indeed, all participants spoke at length of the difficulties they experienced managing production commitments (rehearsals, learning lines, dances, music), while keeping up with their university assignments, family responsibilities and part-time employment. David, who lived an hour away from the university and had a young family, said, "It was a lot more full on than what I expected. I nearly cried when I saw the rehearsal schedule." Shannon described the late nights at rehearsals, the pressure to complete university assessments, the considerable hours she was working at her part-time job and the emotional strain and fatigue that caused her to "crash a work vehicle." She believed that her personal life and university commitments suffered due to the hours dedicated to the production. Other participants discussed the guilt they experienced letting people down when the production started to consume their time. Regan explained, "I struggled to stop and just breathe because I knew once I stopped, all the guilt for the things I wasn't doing would come flooding in."

While struggling with the workload, participants were also aware of the support structures they would need in place for their future students when working on a production. Riley noted, "Our students will have studies like us, family things like us and lots going on. I'll need to think about their wellbeing on and off the stage." Scott similarly highlighted, "We can't expect that they'll [future students] just cope. If it was hard for us, then it's going to be hard for them. I'm glad I've been through it so I know what it will be like for them."

Furthermore, participants were acutely aware of the support they would need when teaching, both personally and professionally, to manage the additional workload. Nina remarked, "How will I cope teaching classes all day and then running rehearsals at night? I'll need some good colleagues around me to help", while Lexie stated, "I'll need superhuman strength to direct a show like this while managing a full teaching load. I'll also need my family to understand and support me." Participants agreed that seeing their director and production manager 'work well' together and support each other was significant and as Courtney explained, "They [director and production manager] would meet before rehearsals to chat through problems, encourage each other and have a laugh. I'll need colleagues around me like that. You can't do this alone that's for sure."

### **"Learning to Shine": Developing Confidence and Honing Performance Skills**

While participants struggled with the rehearsal load, university expectations and employment commitments, they were unanimously positive about their achievements. Riley explained, "It was a real test of my determination in the end. I'm glad it got difficult because it really pushed me and I did things I never thought I could." Sarah similarly noted, "Even though the workload was intense, the director knew we could create something awesome and pushed us so that we were challenged to meet our goals." The sense of pride participants felt in their achievements, amidst a challenging workload, was shared and as Elaine explained, "It was so challenging balancing all parts of my life but what I achieved and the progress I made as a performer was incredible."

It was evident that the production, including the choice of text, challenged the participants in different ways. However, participants were able to 'dig deep' and learn from the experience. Some participants learnt new ways to direct and work with an ensemble while others honed their performance skills. For example, musicians reported feeling fatigued by having to repeatedly play instruments for long periods. Shannon recalled, "I had to push through it and learn to be patient. I'm not good at being patient and it's something I will need to be better at as a teacher." The actors were challenged by the length of rehearsals and the need to maintain focus for long periods on stage.

Other participants found learning their lines and unpacking the meaning behind the text most challenging. It was evident that their previous school experiences of drama production had not focused so heavily on this aspect and as Tim explained:

*During rehearsals I was encouraged to consider rhythm of speech; work with space in unconventional ways; be a part of an ensemble; build up my understanding of lighting and take on a lead role with a number of lines- all of which needed to be synthesised and completely understood. Never have I approached a play from such a theoretical point of view. The process made me think so much more and I really grew as a performer.*

While some participants reported growing as performers, others noted improved self-confidence from the increasing levels of accountability the director placed on them as the production evolved. These participants believed this strategy was challenging and at times intimidating yet improved their confidence and ability.

Participants' deemed the production experience increased their awareness of the range of skills they would aim to develop with their future students. Lexie stated, "The director made me aware of how subtext is revealed through action. She made Tim focus on his physicality. I hope that one day I can tailor my direction for each individual student." Danielle described the role of the director as "daunting" and "responsible for so much more than putting kids up on stage." She explained:

*When I first thought about directing a production, I thought it was about blocking the action on stage, administrative tasks. As a kid at school, all this stuff happened that we weren't aware of. I now see the enormity of it all and how the director needs to get each kid to their best possible self. The production can be a chance for kids to learn to shine.*

For Elaine, the composer, realisation of the importance of tailoring music for individuals was evident when she said, "As an emerging music teacher, I learned the importance of being flexible as I would often need to revise and edit my compositions to suit the needs and abilities of the cast."

Participants compared this production to their earlier experiences of productions when students at school. While some experiences were similar, others had not necessarily provided models of 'best practice'. Sarah, for example, said, "It was nice to work collaboratively as my previous drama teachers were very dictatorial" and Courtney recalled, "Our teacher was so stressed that she just yelled all the time. She didn't look like she was having much fun. I don't want to be that teacher." Lexie similarly remarked, "We often didn't understand why we were doing things as the director did all the thinking for us."

### **"The Bond of an Ensemble": Fostering a Sense of Belonging**

Participants described the sense of belonging as an integral part of the production. Some would meet prior to rehearsals and, as Shannon recalled, "we'd go for a coffee, a catch up and to hear the latest news." Others would assist each other with difficult scenes, learn lines and complete production tasks. Caleb explained, "We were all in it together. If someone had a job to do, then we'd be there to help".

The sense of belonging also contributed to improved self-confidence and ability to take risks without fear of judgement. Hayley explained, "I feel much more comfortable improvising and experimenting with a scene in front of others now. It's much easier taking risks around people you trust." Regan similarly highlighted, "There's nothing like the bond of an ensemble, and the trust you develop in others to save you."

Participants recalled earlier memories of their productions as school students and the close bonds they formed with their peers. Shannon said, “The best memories from those productions were the sense of connection we developed with the cast and crew. This production was the same.”

Indeed, participants were aware of the central role of the director and production manager in fostering a sense of belonging and were eager to adopt similar techniques with their future students. Sarah recalled:

*We'd start each rehearsal with some kind of bonding activity or warm-up that got us working together and enjoying ourselves. I'd definitely do this with my students. We can't just take for granted that our kids will like each other and know how to work together.*

Participants were acutely aware of the ways in which they were involved in decision-making and problem solving which they believed, contributed to a sense of belonging. Shayley said:

*We were all involved in designing the production logo, choosing the final design and layout for publicity materials. So instead of them [director and production manager] just deciding, they got us involved. They valued our input and this made us feel important and part of the gang.*

It is evident that participants thought deeply about the experience in terms of their own practice as Arts teachers. Danielle explained, “We became familiar with the skills, processes, workload, challenges and rewards of creating a school production. It was good to do this within the safety of our pre-service education before having to do it in real-life.”

## **Discussion: Emerging Ideas about Arts Teaching**

Arts teachers require unique skills, discipline and pedagogical content knowledge to deliver engaging programs, both curricular and in the extracurricular field (Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014). However, research indicates the inadequacy of teacher education programs in preparing Arts teachers for the rigours of all aspects of the profession (Anderson, 2002; 2003; Ballantyne, 2006; 2007; Pascoe & Sallis, 2012; Warren, 1992) and, therefore, finding authentic ways for pre-service teachers to learn their craft across all contexts becomes essential.

Participant reports confirm how ‘real’ teaching situations (Ballantyne, 2007; Twomey, 2007) lead to greater integration between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Hammerness, 2006). The pre-service Arts teachers involved in this production observed best practice modelled and unpacked, and were afforded the opportunity to reflect upon and articulate how to transfer these direct experiences to their future practice. These transparent processes where vision, expectations and decision-making have been made clear sets this production apart as a professional learning exercise from previous school-based production experiences. It is evident from the responses that participants gained in-depth, insider understandings into the multidimensionality and complexity of the extracurricular production, and identified the limitations of their pre-service course in offering these types of complex and grounded experiences. This was acknowledged through their initial motivations for participating in the project, whether it was to build or rebuild practical performance skills, gain insights into the technical process of putting a production together, build skills and understanding across related Arts disciplines, or to experience the social dynamic of a production.

Of importance was the participants’ responses to workload management and stress. Managing the extracurricular workload, a challenging issue for all Arts teachers, was

experienced first-hand by participants rather than in hypothetical scenarios commonly presented in pre-service education courses. Managing their own time and commitments raised awareness of the expectations and stresses placed on school students managing workloads beyond the regular timetable. Their challenging experience of negotiating the unexpected highlighted for the pre-service teachers the fundamental importance of collegiality and the need for mental and physical support structures within the school to help manage stresses placed upon them as teachers through sustained involvement in extracurricular programs. This first-hand realisation and acknowledgement of the need for additional support was powerful particularly given previous findings confirming the prevalence of stress in the lives of Arts teachers and beginning teacher attrition (Anderson, 2002, 2003; Donelan, 1989; Gray, 2016; Gray, Wright & Pascoe, 2017; Haseman, 1990; Wales, 1999).

The participants in this production acknowledged the importance of the broader social / emotional environment, and the need to generate a sense of belonging for students engaging in such an activity. This was recognised as an outcome of their previous school-based production experiences and heavily reinforced for them as beginning teachers. Ewing (2010) noted that participation in the Arts provides students with a sense of social cohesion - "an increased friendship or social network, increased contact with other cultures, a sense of 'belonging' to a particular group/club/network/community" (p. 49). Indeed, pre-service participant experiences enhanced understanding of the value of collegiality and support in times of stress, which, if managed properly, can lead to social / emotional benefits including increased self-confidence, social bonding and empathy. Accordingly, personal experiences amplifying the need for belonging was influential to their emerging ideas about the nature of student support structures required for extracurricular productions. Therefore, the value of participation in this production for pre-service teachers was acknowledged on both on technical and social levels.

Further, given that a lack of first-hand experiences can contribute to ineffectual and uninformed teaching practices (Bryan, 2003; Pajares, 1992; Uzuntiryaki & Boz, 2007), the opportunity for participants to reflect upon their prior experiences as they encountered new approaches and ideas was an important outcome of this production experience. It was during this process of reflection that some of the practices and pedagogies encountered previously in secondary school were re-evaluated as at best ineffective and at worst unprofessional.

It is evident that the extracurricular production impacted participants' ideas about facilitating and managing Arts activities from both student and future teacher perspectives. Participants gained valuable insider knowledge of the commitment and expertise needed to mount a successful production, along with the many different components and personal and social challenges they would need to manage. This production enabled authentic first-hand experience at an influential time in the pre-service teachers' training where they not only reflected on themselves as learners but as future teachers. Through direct experience, these pre-service teachers learned valuable personal and social insights and skills that will help them make informed decisions when working in schools.

## **Conclusion**

While participants in this study opted into the production in addition to their core tertiary studies, they represent a small sample of a much wider cohort of pre-service Arts teachers who would also benefit from participation in similar activities, should they be more widely available. It is also important to consider that such activities could lead to beneficial outcomes for all (both pre-service teachers and their future students) and offer valuable insights (as evident in this case) but do not need to be restricted to a formal presentational

performance (Turino, 2008). Indeed, benefits mentioned, such as social bonding, particular skill development and time management could also be realised through a range of participatory ventures. These could include skilled musicians, actors, dancers and artists, along with individuals who are yet to gain particular skills but who can benefit from immersion in the project as they work as part of an ensemble. An emphasis on inclusion would mean that all students could be involved in various ways. As Turino (2008) states, “The values and practices that underpin participatory arts, sports, festivals, and other activities are important because they inspire more people to be involved with, and to develop skills in, these life enriching activities (p. 35).

However, current university course structures, locked into semesters and trimesters with unit structures involving set hours and assessment profiles, limit the possibility of incorporating more flexible learning experiences such as this production. Given the clear endorsement of the pre-service teachers involved in this study, the principle recommendation of this article is that tertiary institutions consider frameworks for more flexible course delivery, to allow all pre-service Arts teachers the opportunity to formally engage in collaborative inter-disciplinary projects in order to experience and interrogate this vital component of Arts teaching. Creating more flexible course structures to allow the formalisation of projects such as the one described in this article also helps address the divide between pre-service training and the reality of teaching. As Danielle noted:

*As a teacher and director, you are the number one support system for everyone working in that production. Therefore, your attitudes and interactions with each member of your cast and crew becomes crucial and in turn will determine the success or failure of the production. It puts a lot of pressure on one's shoulders. I know this work is challenging but it's so important. I'm glad I got to learn the ropes within the safety of being at uni.*

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