

# Music and arts education for generalist preservice teachers in distance learning modes: A reflective discussion about learning in the arts

Fiona King, RMIT University

## Abstract

This article is a discussion about music education for preservice generalist teachers. Three central themes are explored with a focus on music; arts education as praxis, creative process engagement, and teaching and learning in the performing arts. In writing about these themes, questions arose about the essence of learning in the arts. The argument is presented that for preservice teachers to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding in the arts, engagement in the practices that comprise each art form is required. These ideas inform the discussion regarding arts in the online learning arena, and in the development of online units to reflect these notions. The article draws on my experience as a reflective practitioner teaching in a purely distance learning mode, at a major university in Victoria, Australia. It draws on information from preservice teacher texts to demonstrate arts education teaching and learning strategies. Literature about creative process further informs the discussion and references are made to the Australian Curriculum.

## Introduction

Arts education is a component of teacher preparation degrees for generalist primary preservice teachers. In the key learning area of *The Arts* in the *Australian Curriculum F-10* (ACARA, 2017), Music is one of five art forms, alongside Drama and Dance (comprising the performing arts) and Visual and Media arts (the visual arts). The Australian Institute for Teaching Standards and Leadership (AITSL), sets out the professional knowledge required by graduate teachers, in which they must, “demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 10), which applies to each of the eight key learning areas of the national (or equivalent) curriculum. This is a considerable feat in regards to the Arts, in which each strand “involves different approaches to arts practices and critical and creative thinking that reflect distinct bodies of knowledge, understanding

and skills” (ACARA, 2017, para. 1). Further, “the Arts are each individual domains of human activity, each with its own ‘language’ (Roy, Baker, & Hamilton, 2012, p. 14), and containing “knowledges, languages and skills in its own right” (Gibson & Ewing, 2011, p. 2). The art forms have developed over centuries, are diverse across the world, and reflect a myriad of styles, elements and processes (Dinham, 2016; Roy et al., 2012; Sinclair, Jeanneret, & O’Toole, 2012). Experiences of learning in each art form is indicative of the content each encompasses, such as in music, “skills and techniques developed through participation in music learning allow students to manipulate, express and share sound as listeners, composers and performers” (ACARA, 2017). Creativity is a component of arts learning, inherent within the art forms themselves.

Time allowance is a factor that underpins the limitations inherent in arts education units, regardless of delivery mode. The portion for music in generalist teacher preparation degrees, along with

that provided to the other Arts strands, is restricted by time constraints (Comte & Forrest, 2012; De Vries, 2013; Parliament of Victoria, 2013; Stevens-Ballenger, Jeanneret, & Forrest, 2009). Units in arts education may be just ten weeks (one semester) of the entire teaching degree. Attaining a knowledge and understanding of the five art forms within a short time frame, is questionable, and is discussed in this article through the presentation of the three themes relating to arts learning. An argument is presented for the engagement of preservice teachers in arts education practices, in a way that reflects the recommendations for the arts in the primary school; for example, “music in education is about encouraging an active understanding of music through participation” (Roy et al., 2012, p. 126). Arts education texts that have been designed for preservice teachers have been utilised in this article to capture ideas about arts praxis, creative processes and assessment strategies relating to arts, performing arts and music. The viewpoint is presented that in order to gain knowledge and understanding in the arts, as required by the AISTL standards, it is essential that preservice teachers engage in components of arts practice and creative processes, with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the arts, through completing assessments that are indicative of arts practice. The discussion concludes with a consideration of the three themes in the context of distance learning environments.

### Three themes for elaboration

Arts education has an undeniable component that involves action. In music, such experiences include (although are not limited to) listening, performing and composing. These experiences are examples of praxis. Arts education preservice teacher texts advocate for arts education to be a praxis-based experience (Dinham, 2016; Roy et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2012). That is, praxis “occurs as a distinct human activity through all of the senses, it is fundamentally an activity that is ‘done’ (in the sense of being a practical, intentional and conscious

action) by learners” (Roy et al., 2012, p. 19). The Quality Music Education Framework (2018) states that music in schools should include “creativity and activity”, as one of six characteristics of quality music education. Action and being active within the art form indicate a praxis approach. The curriculum supports this statement, for Music it is “through performing, composing and listening with intent to music, students have access to knowledge, skills and understanding, which can be gained in no other way” (ACARA, 2017). Stevens-Ballenger, Jeanneret and Forrest (2009) state that generalists should be able to “perform, conduct and create music” (p. 39), three of a number of skills they list for music education teacher know-how. Stauffer (2013) reinforces the logical connection between arts learning and the ‘doing’ for preservice teachers, “Dewey held that education for children occurs in genuine, meaningful doing and in thoughtful reflection that links knowledge and experience. This principle applies to teacher education as well” (p. 78).

Creativity is intrinsic to the arts. Like praxis-based arts learning, it is about ‘doing’. The idea of creativity as action, rather than imagination alone, is discussed by Prentice (2000) who states that creativity is generative and “involves making” (p. 101). Further to ‘making’ is ‘doing’ (McLaren, 2012) or from Robinson (2011), “being creative involves doing something” (p. 142). Music is abundant with creative experiences; Burnard (2012) presented a model of eleven creativities that she observed in music education. These are all action-based experiences. Creativity is a component of the arts, and is named as the first aim in the rationale of the *Australian Curriculum F-10: The Arts* (ACARA, 2017). Preservice teacher texts for arts education (Dinham, 2016; Sinclair et al., 2012; Starko, 2001) highlight creativity, and draw attention to and unpack the Wallas’ (1926) four-stage model of creative process. Creativity reaches across fields and disciplines (Runco & Albert, 2010), however, creative processes are integral in the arts because they are an acknowledged component of them, for example in music; composition and improvisation.

Knowledge and understanding of teacher modelling, collaborating, demonstrating, providing

authentic learning experiences are key and require domain-specific knowledge (skill building in music) to support such work. Performing arts assessment of preservice teacher know-how should be indicative of the art forms within it, that is, it should involve performance as a demonstration of knowledge and understanding. The Oxford Dictionary (2018) defines the performing arts as “forms of creative activity that are performed in front of an audience, such as drama, music, and dance”. As such, distinguishing the experience of performing arts from that of visual and media arts, comes not only with content but with principles and processes. Performance requires the understanding of rehearsal, the act of preparing the work. Performance skill requires practice. Preservice teachers hone their performing arts abilities through a praxis-based approach to what it is to perform, which is part of the essence of dance, drama and music learning.

## Reflective thinking about the arts online

Learning in the arts has a component of human action, experience and engagement, which must be carefully adapted and addressed by distance learning tertiary environments. For this section, the article takes a “reflective turn” (Schön, 1992) to consider online arts education units, based on personal experiences and the themes discussed so far. Baker, Hunter and Thomas’ study (2016) sought the opinions of arts education teacher educators in online environments about whether there were some Arts domains that were inappropriate for the online mode (with mixed responses). I recognise that there is important work occurring in the development and delivery of distance learning units that demonstrate praxis approaches to music education (Baker, 2013), and in dual modes in which online work complements that of face-to-face engagement (Hartwig, 2004). Additionally I recognise that distance learning has grown in popularity (Blakey, 2010) and has shown a dramatic increase over the past decade (Song, 2014). It has beneficially provided educational access for those in remote

locations. As a result, distance learners are now noted to be experienced and capable with the use of online platforms, and they are mobile and technology savvy (Andrews & Tynan, 2012). Arts education units for distance preservice teachers should provide those students with authenticity in arts learning through effective, arts-focused and practice-based utilisation of the online platform.

Technologically, online arts education units have the capacity to be written to provide arts praxis experiences as part of coursework and assessment. Whilst I have taught in units where there is coursework requiring students create and share, via video, performing and visual arts works, this has been, unfortunately, quite minimal and not a consistent feature of course work, which has spurred me to provide additional support to distance learners in live-time video sessions, to demonstrate, model and at times facilitate performing arts experiences. I am yet to work in a purely online unit where assessment features practical presentations to demonstrate performing arts skills, knowledge and understanding. There is potential for online arts units to include music education experiences of performing, conducting, improvising and composition, with listening examples embedded in the course materials or apps that engage preservice teachers in exploring and engaging with sound. Developmental guidance, teacher modelling and creative process unpacking can certainly be provided in online settings by those who deliver the units, facilitated through the written sharing of rehearsal experiences, partly completed works via video and the noting of problems within online learning platforms, encountered during the creative process in the development of performing arts presentations. It appears that such engagement would require that assessment be geared towards performance and praxis related outcomes.

Technology is established enough and so widely available, there is no question that it is adequate in capability to make online courses high level in terms of music engagement. Comte (2005) rightly suggested that we need to use the technology

judiciously and be an influence, as musicians and educators, on those who create the technology. Rather, it appears now that it may be the course writers which require the influencing. Whilst we should be well and truly experienced enough with technology programs to maximise their potentiality, it is discouraging that technology has not been utilised wholly (and creatively) to the advantage of music making in online music education courses in my experience. It is the arts-praxis focused use of technology, the adaptation and artful engagement of preservice teachers in performing arts experiences in an online setting, that is more the issue than utilising 'high tech'. As a counter to this statement, e-reading materials provided in online courses are often very well chosen and guide students to think, talk and write about music making, listening, creating and performing with children, but unfortunately, the reading materials require the support of the online unit design and delivery to contribute the praxis-based experiences of arts learning, creative processes and domain-specific skill development. It is the will to make purely online units indicative of arts praxis, creative process and to include performing arts 'doing', that is required. Where online units fail to engage preservice teachers in these essential experiences, face-to-face intensive workshops should be introduced as a complementary component of such units.

The element of the aesthetic experiences of the arts has not been discussed, however two quotations are provided to indicate this as another area for consideration and application in online arts education units. Dinham (2016) regards the arts as being, "an expression and communication of meaning, an engagement of our aesthetic sensibilities, an integral part of our existence as a species" (p. 3). Regarding music specifically; "listening to music, playing instruments, singing and composing all demand full sensory presence, and there is a tacit awareness of our role in shaping each musical moment. In short, creative music challenges us to define ourselves through our spontaneous actions" (Csikszentmihalyi & Custodero,

2002, pp. xiv-xv). There is much that requires careful translating into online settings to enable preservice teachers to experience arts learning and to engage in performing arts practices.

## Conclusion

Despite limited time frames, arts education units in teacher preparation degrees should be written to provide preservice teachers with practical experiences in the arts. A focus of the discussion has been about Music, one of the five art forms in the Australian Curriculum. For preservice teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, as per the AITSL standards, a praxis-based approach in the learning of music is essential. Praxis should guide the learning experiences of preservice teachers, reflecting the curriculum aims and rationales for arts learning. Creative process experiences are inherent in arts learning and are indicative of key concepts in music such as improvisation and composition. In the performing arts, engagement in rehearsal and performing is integral and opportunities for performance assessment should be included as components of arts education units. In preservice teacher education, it appears that the equation of arts learning versus arts time allotment is, and has been, out of balance and needs addressing. Arts education needs to be placed into distance learning environments with care, creativity and without compromise. It is the intention of this article to continue the discussion and questions about the ways in which arts education, including that of music, be translated into distance learning platforms in ways that enable preservice teachers to be involved in the doing of arts – including the performing arts – and in creative processes.

## References

- ACARA. (2017). *Australian Curriculum F-10*. Sydney, NSW: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. Retrieved from <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/>.
- Andrews, T., & Tynan, B. (2012). Distance learners: Connected, mobile and resourceful individuals. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 28(4), 565-579.

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2011). *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. Carlton, Australia: Education Council.
- Baker, W. (2013). Questioning assumptions. Vivienne: a case study of e-learning in music education. *Australian Journal of Music Education* (1), 13-22.
- Baker, W., Hunter, M.-A., & Thomas, S. (2016). Arts education academics' perceptions of eLearning and teaching in Australian early childhood and primary ITE degrees. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(11), 31-43.
- Blakey, L. (2010). The proliferation, pitfalls, and power of online education. In *Teaching online* (pp. 28-50). Hershey, PA: I Management Association.
- Burnard, P. (2012). Rethinking 'musical creativity' and the notion of multiple-creativities in music. In O. Odena (Ed.), *Musical creativity: Insights from music education research* (pp. 5-25). Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Comte, M. (2005). *Music education: Giving children a voice*. Parkville, Victoria: Australian Society for Music Education.
- Comte, M., & Forrest, D. (2012). Policy development and curriculum reform in music and arts education: Will we ever learn? *Professional Educator*, 11(4), 26-28.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Custodero, L. (2002). Foreword. In T. Sullivan & L. Willingham (Eds.), *Creativity and music education* (pp. xiv-xvi). Alberta, Canada: Canadian Music Educators' Association.
- De Vries, P. (2013). Generalist teachers and self-efficacy in primary school music teaching. *Music Education Research*, 15(4), 375-391.
- Dinham, J. (2016). *Delivering authentic arts education* (3rd ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Cengage Learning.
- Gibson, R., & Ewing, R. (2011). *Transforming the Curriculum through the Arts*. South Yarra, Victoria: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hartwig, K. (2004). *Ways of knowing: An investigation into how pre-service teachers learn music*. Paper presented at the AARME XXVth Annual Conference.
- McLaren, M.R. (2012). Arts education: Just like a day at the beach. *Creative Approaches to Research*, 5(3), 89-100.
- Oxford Dictionaries. (2018). English: Oxford Living Dictionaries. Retrieved from [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/performing\\_arts](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/performing_arts)
- Parliament of Victoria. (2013). *Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools*. Melbourne, Victoria: Parliament of Victoria.
- Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative* (2nd ed.). West Sussex, UK: Capstone Publishing Limited.
- Roy, D., Baker, W., & Hamilton, A. (2012). *Teaching the Arts*. Port Melbourne, Victoria: Cambridge University Press.
- Runco, M., & Albert, R. (2010). Creativity research. In J. Kaufman & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of creativity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Schön, D. A. (1992). *The reflective turn: Case studies in and on educational practice*. New York, NJ: Teachers College Press.
- Sinclair, C., Jeanneret, N., & O'Toole, J. (2012). *Education in the Arts* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press.
- Song, K. H. (2014). Meeting emerging needs of online coaching in teacher education: Communication, pedagogy, technology, and reflection. In T. Iyuzer & G. Kurubacak (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Emerging Priorities and Trends in Distance Education* (pp. 186-200). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Starko, A. (2001). *Creativity in the Classroom: Schools of Curious Delight* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Stauffer, S. L. (2013). Preparing to engage children in musical creating. In J. Smith & M. Kaschub (Eds.), *Composing Our Future: Preparing Music Educators to Teach Composition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Stevens-Ballenger, J., Jeanneret, N., & Forrest, D. (2009). *Teaching music: How do we prepare the primary generalist?* Paper presented at the APSMER 2009 7th Asia-Pacific Symposium on Music Education Research ISME Asia-Pacific Regional, Shanghai.
- Victorian State Government. (2018). Quality Music Education Framework. Retrieved from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/arts/Pages/QMEF.aspx>
- Wallas, G. (1926). *The art of thought*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

**Fiona King** is a tertiary arts educator, researcher and professional musician. Following two decades of performing arts teaching across primary, secondary and tertiary settings, she now delivers arts education units specifically for pre-service teachers and Master of Teaching students in face-to-face and online environments. Fiona completed a Master of Education by Research in 2016. She is currently a doctoral candidate and a sessional academic at RMIT University in Melbourne. Her main research interest area is arts education, specifically creative processes and music education in primary school settings. Fiona gratefully acknowledges the support of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.