

## Teachers' Curriculum Stories: Perceptions and preparedness to enact change

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### ABSTRACT

Within the specific context of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, this paper explores how teachers of the Arts and teacher educators encounter and enact curriculum change. Adopting Ewing's notion that curriculum is a complex web of varying stories and storylines that are impacted on by teachers' underlying philosophy, we suggest that Arts teachers embrace the intent behind *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. This paper unearths and explores insights gleaned from teachers looking inward and reflecting on their own personal curriculum journeys. The learning dimensions of conceptualising, experimenting and developing, reflecting, resolving and communicating are applied to investigate the implementation of the new curriculum. This article shares data from a number of Arts teachers' interviews with the authors in relation to their thoughts on the implementation of the new curriculum. Two key themes emerged from these interviews, these being navigating challenges and the implications of personal attributes in encountering and enacting change. Interestingly, a number of qualities associated with Arts practitioners such as creative and lateral thinking, resilience and flexibility emerge as significant contributing factors in regard to how teachers encounter, enact and become curriculum change.

### KEYWORDS

Arts curriculum, Arts teachers, Arts education, narrative inquiry

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

While the Arts in varying degrees have been part of Australian school curricula since the Hobart Declaration (1989), Arts education in Australia has progressed significantly with the announcement in July 2015 that five Arts strands (dance, drama, media art, music and visual art) are now mandated across Australian schools through *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. Previous to this, the Arts were delivered to Australian school students through state and territory ministries of education in various and diverse ways from specialist delivery to generalist teacher delivery. For example, some states and territories have employed primary music specialist teachers, some have employed artists-in-residence, and some have utilised curriculum documents for individual Arts subjects. This has resulted in a wide difference in the delivery of Arts education for Australian school students across the states and territories. *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* means that every Australian child across the country will have access to the Arts during their years of schooling. However, curriculum change and consequential enactment in the classroom can be challenging yet rewarding. Successful implementation and enactment of curriculum change does depend on how quality teaching, learning and assessment are defined, interpreted and translated by educators (Ewing, 2012).

If a thoughtful, respectful and collaborative approach to curriculum change and implementation is undertaken, teachers can feel empowered due to their agency in the change process. Evidence shows the enactment of a new curriculum in the classroom often results in a top down approach, exemplified through a mandatory expectation from educational systems and administration (Barton, Garvis, & Ryan, 2014; Fullan, 2007). Today there is an increasingly strong priority for output driven initiatives when standardised testing is the focus, thus leaving the Arts in a tenuous position and Arts teachers with, at times, great stress and uncertainty. This paper explores 'What is Curriculum?', and how teachers and higher sector educators adapt to and adopt curriculum change, specifically within music and visual art education contexts. The discussion and future implications section of this paper focus on what is needed for all Arts educators to face the challenges of delivering the Arts in the twenty-first century thereby ensuring confident and successful delivery by teachers of the future.

### What is Curriculum?

It has been noted that curriculum is a difficult concept to define (Ewing, 2012; Marsh & Willis, 2003), indicating the organic nature of this term. The following extracts share three very distinct definitions of curriculum:

A curriculum is 'permanent' subjects as grammar, reading, logic, rhetoric, mathematics and greatest books of the Western World that best embody essential knowledge. (Marsh, 2009)

Curriculum is all the experiences that learners have in the course of living. (Marsh & Willis, 2003, p. 42)

Curriculum sets consistent national standards to improve learning outcomes for all young Australians. It sets out, through content descriptions and achievement standards, what students should be taught and achieve, as they progress through school. (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2015a)

These definitions show divergent understandings of curriculum. The first one, according to Marsh (2009), is a limited notion of curriculum as it emphasises a set of subjects and is distinctly west-centric in its view. The second by Marsh and Marsh and Willis (2003) is also problematic as it is an extremely open-ended understanding of curriculum and therefore nebulous in meaning. The third definition grounds the meaning of curriculum in the context of Australian educational outcomes. However, the directions for how this improvement unfolds through descriptions and standards largely rely on a teacher's capacity to interpret the curriculum document/s. It is clear that these definitions are a reflection of the time, context, and purpose for which they are written.

The way in which curriculum is perceived is influenced by people's own experience of teaching and learning as we all have particular curriculum stories or narratives (Ewing, 2012; Lortie, 1975). Therefore when we explore the ways in which teachers 'take up' and understand new curriculum, we need to take into account their personal curriculum stories and how these impact on the way they decipher the curriculum then design, implement and enact the curriculum.

Further to defining curriculum, it should also be noted that in the context of this paper, the 'Arts' is defined as the five key Arts learning areas denoted in *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, which includes dance, drama, music, media art and visual arts (ACARA, 2015a). The terms 'Art' and 'art teaching' are used interchangeably in the context of visual arts teaching and education.

### Curriculum Stories

If we are to take Ewing's (2012) concept that all educators have unique curriculum stories or narratives, ascertaining teachers' storied beliefs and perceptions in relation to curriculum enactment is imperative. Stories are powerful ways for people to express themselves. Human beings

are natural storytellers (Abbot, 2002) who 'understand the world through narrative' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It has been suggested by Abbot (2002) 'that narrative is a "deep structure", a human capacity genetically hard-wired into our minds' (p. 3). It is through the process of telling and listening to stories that people narratively construct and continually re-construct, who they are (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Given the strong Arts background of the participants and researchers, storytelling enabled us to engage, communicate and construct knowledge in ways that were familiar and exciting to us, and appealed to our value for creativity.

Narrative inquiry uses a storytelling method to describe through reflection and discussion why the participant has acted in a particular way. The data are constructed through the experiences of the participant and the researcher (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007) to create pictures of teachers enacting and becoming curriculum change. Narrative inquiry allowed us to collaboratively explore our own and the participants' reflective experiences of enacting curriculum, which in turn encouraged us to elicit deeper meaning from our collective experiences (Unrath & Kerridge, 2009). As researchers, we identified and made connections between our individual and shared experiences of curriculum change, thus aligning with the understanding that within narrative inquiry research, we can have multiple entry or view-points through which to consider the phenomena under investigation (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

### **How do Teachers/Higher Educators Adapt to and Adopt Curriculum Change?**

The ways in which teachers adapt to and adopt curriculum change is a complex process shaped by a range of variables. A diverse suite of international research (Garvis & Pendergast, 2012; Oreck, 2001, 2004; Russell-Bowie, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001) has identified factors such as poor teacher self-efficacy, pressure to perform and achieve outcomes, motivation and perceived capacity which impact on a teacher's capacity to successfully enact curriculum. For those teachers unable to cope with the challenges inherent to enacting curriculum change, there is the potential for them to 'allocate less time to the in-class teaching and learning experiences in which their students engage' (Garvis & Pendergast, 2012). When teachers resist adapting to curriculum change, regardless of the reason, those who are ultimately the most disadvantaged are the students they teach. It is therefore of critical importance to identify concrete ways in which to better support teachers to overcome the barriers that might impact upon their capacity to embrace and enact curriculum change.

Before appropriate strategies can be devised, there is a need to elucidate the complex transformations that occur when teachers grapple with re-negotiating their approaches to embracing and enacting curriculum change. To gain a better sense of what happens to, and for teachers when they adapt to and adopt curriculum change, we can look to the in-between spaces where their perceptions and expectations are challenged and existing understandings are shifted. Significant within these movements in enacting change are the critical encounters that lead to thoughts, decisions and actions. In order to enact change, teachers must *become the change*. Within this paper, we are guided by the Deleuzian definition of becoming, where experiments with the unknown and new come into being, or *be-coming* (Deleuze, 1995). This assists teachers in being able to elucidate what happens to and for them as they navigate and 'become' curriculum change. This approach allowed the researchers to perceive our actions and behaviours, and those of the participants, from a fluid perspective that is always in motion. According to Stagoll (2005), becoming removes emphasis from any particular end product, whether it be interim or final. This is a pertinent approach to realising curriculum enactment as it acknowledges curriculum as a progressive and ever evolving entity. Becoming reflects 'the very dynamism of change, tending towards no particular goal or end-state' (Stagoll, 2005, p. 26) other than the process of realisation.

If teachers are encouraged to approach curriculum change and subsequent enactment as an ongoing journey, there is the capacity to maintain the openness and fluidity that is essential to embracing new ideas, and the practices inherent to realising these ideas. Research calls for the

ongoing monitoring of curriculum change, and the implementation of professional development programmes to support teachers (Garvis & Pendergast, 2012). In order to effectively enact curriculum change in classrooms, there is an identified need for stronger co-ordination between educational institutions. This is essential in guiding education leaders to ensure teachers are adequately prepared to give school students the best chance to achieve in and through the Arts supported by a purposeful and accessible curriculum (Garvis & Pendergast, 2012).

Exploring how teachers perceive the Australian Curriculum and realise its enactment as situated and considered within the context of existing bodies of knowledge is vital to understanding both 'the personal and the social significance' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of adapting to and adopting curriculum change. It is for this reason that the examination of teachers' stories and experiences of becoming are essential. Semetsky (2010) suggests that exploration of such real-life events can deliver 'critical lessons from which we can and should learn' (p. 480).

One way teachers can examine stories and expected changes in context is through critical reflection which is extremely important in the teaching profession. According to Brookfield (Brookfield, 1998) 'critically reflective practice is a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work' (p. 197). Reflection in this way assists in making sense of our teaching and learning contexts by viewing our practice from a number of angles. When we reflect we are able to 'understand how to think and learn from [our] experiences ... and monitor the outcomes of that learning' (Moon, 1999). The complex nature of teacher requires critical reflection in order to analyse one's practice but to also become aware of 'the ethical and moral assumptions within it and be able to direct their own professional growth as well as the development of the educational environment in which they work' (Calderhead, 1989). This is equally important for our students but also for the teachers themselves. If teachers feel as though their voices have not been heard, particularly in the implementation of new curriculum or approaches to teaching and learning, then they are less likely to support the change being suggested. Therefore, if teachers have the capacity to reflect on the reasons why these changes are being made as well as participate more in a becoming process then they will feel greater ownership of the process.

Moon (1999) contends that reflection is not an innate skill but one that needs to be learnt and scaffolded. Reflection can occur in many forms whether oral, written, visual, embodied and so forth. Often due to time constraints, and perhaps because of the social nature of teaching, teachers tend to often reflect orally, through journaling or answering a set of questions. The researchers found the opportunity to reflect on our own stories and experiences was a positive place to start as we were able to identify our assumptions and critically question the focus of this research. Teachers can also work together to reveal ways in which they are able to deal with change and positively embrace this change through their practice.

### **Relating this to the Arts: Background to this Study**

Australia has experienced many curriculum changes in Arts education over the past 20 years. Hartwig and Barton (2003, 2013) have previously reported on music teachers' responses to the implementation of a new curriculum in the state of Queensland. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that although they had looked at the new document, they would continue to deliver what they believed to be a quality music programme and would not be influenced by the change in curriculum. Music teachers interviewed at the 2013 Education Queensland music conference continued to echo the same sentiments in relation to the recently mandated *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*.

The Australian Curriculum was a result of many years of fluctuation and wavering between states and territories over curriculum content and direction, school age and curriculum compatibility in what is a relatively small country. The national body, The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) takes responsibility for the development and

production of the curriculum documents, while the states and territories have been handed the implementation responsibility.

With the mandating of the new document *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* by the Australian Government (ACARA, 2015a); we are again interested to investigate if the same trends, evidenced in earlier findings by Hartwig and Barton (2003, 2013) are evident with this new curriculum in both schools and universities. The four Arts researchers have personal investment in this research as they have all trained in Arts education; currently teach Arts education in the tertiary sector across Queensland and Tasmania, and serve on state, national and/or international professional associations for their discipline.

## Research Design: Methodology and Methods

This project was a qualitative investigation that involved an interpretive and naturalist inquiry approach to the subject (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This was pertinent to our research aims and context in which qualitative researchers seek to build ‘complex, holistic pictures, analyse[s] words, report[s] detailed views of informants, and conduct[ed] the study in a natural setting’ (Creswell, 1998). The focus of this qualitative research is on understanding how people make sense of approaching curriculum change within their individual different expressions and in their natural setting.

A qualitative approach was used for this study as we sought to ‘capture and understand individual definitions, descriptions and meanings of events’ (Burns, 2000). Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were well regarded as music or visual arts educators in the university and school system across Australia (Patton, 1990). Ethics approval was granted for this study with informed consent forms signed by the participants.

Therefore the project aimed to:

- Investigate current approaches/methodologies being implemented in schools and universities;
- Explore Arts teachers’ perceptions of the new curriculum—*The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*; and,
- Identify and explore planned implementation strategies of these teachers.

The following research question was developed to enable exploration of the above aims:

*How do Arts educators’ personal curriculum stories impact on the way they enact the curriculum especially when presented with curriculum change?*

For this particular article, interviews with four music educators in Queensland and Tasmanian schools (Bridie, Rebecca, Harry and Melanie), and with four visual arts educators in Queensland and Tasmanian schools (Angus, Jane, Ashley and Leanne) were drawn from to explore the above research question. Interviews were deemed most appropriate to generate data as they provide a ‘powerful means of both obtaining information and gaining insights’ (Hannan & McKenzie, 2007, p. 44). Specifically, data were generated using a semi-structured interview schedule, with the guiding questions developed from the review of literature and also the researchers’ respective experience and expertise as school teachers and tertiary educators in the discipline areas of music and visual arts. The interview questions utilised the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007).

## Data Analysis Tools

In building a richly diverse context through the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, we were able to make connections and alliances with different people, objects and practices across our respective professional landscapes to map a picture of negotiating curriculum change. We sought to discover through the interviews how the participants have been or will be affected by the past, present and future (temporality) in relation to their prior experience with, current understandings and future concerns regarding curriculum innovation and implementation. Through co-construction during the interviews and further reflection we described the social context in which these events took place and the participants' feelings towards these (sociality). The place where these events occurred was also incorporated to provide a three-dimensional 'map' through which we could comprehend how the impact of place affected the participants and the researchers (place). In the context of our research, mapping in and through the three narrative commonplaces enabled us to establish a process of networked, relational and transversal thought (Coleman & Collins, 2006) into how teachers may, and may not, embrace and enact curriculum change.

An inductive thematic analysis was undertaken in which the themes were reviewed by the researchers and the scope and focus of each theme was collaboratively decided upon through a process of exploring themes inherent to personal/professional pasts and personal/professional futures. In doing so, we were able to identify and make connections between individual and common themes as music and visual arts educators, in much the same way that artists might engage the different strengths and skills of individuals within a group to achieve an artwork or curriculum planning objective (MacDonald, 2014; MacDonald & Moss, 2015). Collaborative discussions resulted in the discerning of two key resonant threads from the data: Navigating Change, and Personal Attributes. The researchers then selected extracts from the interview narratives which resonated with insights from the existing body of research into curriculum change and innovation, and included these as part of the constructed narrative discussion. The direct voices of the participants are denoted through the use of *italics* and interwoven into the following discussion section.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Navigating Changes*

A number of challenges emerge as significant for teachers negotiating and adapting to changes in Arts curriculum. Across the data, the implications of time restraints, value of and for both music and visual arts education, and individuals' perceptions of how to navigate change emerge as critical factors. It is evident that the teacher's breadth and depth of experience influences their willingness and perceived ability to adapt to the changes that new and evolving curriculum bring, although there are some conflicting perceptions towards how the changes are enacted. The ease of transition is affected by the individual teachers' preparedness to embrace or resist change. Those participants in the study who had been teaching music or art in excess of ten years had previous experiences in embracing curriculum change, and as such did not hold the same degree of fear or resistance of their less experienced counterparts. In saying this, it is noted that some of the more experienced teachers did hold some frustrations in regards to ongoing changes and the ambiguity of spaces in between change.

Angus described how he *won't avoid curriculum ... I always make the time to read and think about how the changes might impact what I do*. What this reveals is Angus' recognition of the importance of curriculum as the document guiding his interpretation of the learning content that he is expected to enable his students to experience. This is indicative of the value he perceives in the ongoing evolution of curriculum; where the changes are evidence of progressive visual arts education, which is essential given the need for ongoing innovative developments in professional creative Arts practice (Throsby & Zednik, 2010). If schools are to appropriately align with the development of

professional practice, the guiding information that determines what should be taught to pre-service teachers must be carefully considered and developed as appropriate.

Understanding the importance of preparing pre-service teachers to interpret and apply curriculum emerged as a point of shared challenge across the tertiary participants perspectives. In order to embrace and enact curriculum change, Bridie believes that *unless educators really take the time to familiarise themselves with the many layers, and grapple with cross curriculum priorities, general capabilities, scope and sequence, band descriptions, content descriptions, rationale, aims, and achievement standards, there is the potential to become overwhelmed and lost* [in *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*]. Bridie explained how the *curriculum has much to offer the teacher who is prepared to use it as a tool*. In order to best prepare pre-service teachers to embrace and enact curriculum, there was a shared belief that fostering pre-service teachers' positive attitude was essential to determining how they would approach the challenges inherent to adopting and enacting curriculum. Natalie's approach to supporting her students to embrace curriculum was grounded in helping them to understand the significance of their role in bringing new curriculum into schools. She would *say to students that they're going to be pioneers of this work and that they need a really—a good understanding and an integrated understanding of the value of Arts education in school, and in the value of how you approach Arts education within the curriculum so that they can be the ones to carry that curriculum*.

Interestingly, the perceived challenge for pre-service and beginning teachers' understanding, facilitation and enactment of curriculum change emerged as both a wonderful opportunity and a potential difficulty. Negotiating the assumptions and oft-ingrained perceptions and expectations of more experienced colleagues poses a notable challenge for beginning art teachers. Upon entering professional practice, they may encounter colleagues who perceive them, as a recent education graduate, to represent the vanguard of understanding for curriculum innovation. This was evidenced in Jane's observations, as an art teacher of more than 30 years' experience that *graduates have an important role to play in bringing most recent understanding about curriculum and practice into schools*. This highlights how expectations placed upon beginning teachers pose both opportunity and challenge. The tertiary educators interviewed agreed that the quality of learning in and about curriculum, and the Arts experiences inherent to quality learning in and through the Arts during teacher training was imperative to preparing the teachers to interpret curriculum. It is unlikely beginning teachers will be best positioned to either implement the new curriculum in the classroom space, or communicate understanding of how to do so with their colleagues (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010) if their pre-service learning experiences in the Arts and curriculum are lacking in both quality and opportunity for exploration. The tertiary educators interviewed agreed that their capacity to deliver on this presented an ongoing challenge, given that appropriate experiences in the teacher education context are limited due to the marginalisation of the Arts in teacher education courses (Chapman, 2015; Gibson & Anderson, 2008).

Many of the music educators similarly noted a lack of time available for them to be able to plan and implement the new curriculum well. As music teachers, they were often involved in many extra-curricular activities before and after school and it was revealed that their respective administration teams had not provided time for continuing professional development in relation to the new curriculum. The perceived complexity of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* acknowledged by the interview participants may have implications for teachers' perceptions of not having time to engage meaningfully with the curriculum changes and thus understand and enact change. Bridie revealed that *while the Australian Curriculum contains considerable detail and links to useful resources, I feel there are almost too many layers, too many links and too many connections that need to be made in order to gain a thorough conceptual understanding. We run the risk of failing to see the forest for the trees at times*. While Bridie felt *adequately prepared to deliver the new curriculum, an internal survey at my school revealed an overall disparity between personal efficacy and perceived value of the Arts in education, with many of her music teaching colleagues feeling ill-equipped to deliver on the outcomes and objectives contained within this document*. What this highlights is the importance of quality

professional learning opportunities to support teachers' in their ability to deliver upon curriculum change. Rebecca notes that the general teachers in her school, such as those who taught the core areas of English, science and history, were often attending professional development sessions on how to implement the new curriculum but this was only offered to specialist staff once as the funds had been depleted by other curriculum areas that were considered more important. Rebecca described how they [the music teachers at her school] *have planning days where the Year levels get together. We did have one specialist one but then all of a sudden there were no funds for specialists, so specialists don't get that time off class to plan.*

The music teachers interviewed elaborated upon their experiences of curriculum change in education. In doing so, it emerged that they would often continue doing what they knew worked well with their students irrespective of curriculum change. This presents a moral and ethical dilemma (Calderhead, 1989) as the curriculum may have conflicted with what they were currently teaching yet they felt that this would not impact sufficiently upon their practice to require change. The music teachers knew that their students were learning so questioned the need to change. Given that their schools were not providing the necessary professional development or time to engage with the new curriculum they believed it would be difficult for them to enact changes. For the music teachers interviewed, there is an inference that if there is a perception of the status quo working for the teacher, this can effectively circumnavigate any need to enact curriculum change.

#### *Personal attributes*

A number of studies have highlighted how an art teacher's personal attitudes, attributes and self-efficacy as teachers and artists can be critical to bolstering confidence and, in turn, proficiency across both art teaching and making (Chapman, 1982; Daichendt, 2009; Hansel, 2005; Hickman, 2010). This is evident in Ashley's attitude towards enacting curriculum as informed by her early approach as an artist; where *as a beginning teacher flailing about in my first years of practice, I held onto and took comfort in anything known ... I could never afford to simply chuck out a painting that wasn't working; I had to start over and rework. I applied this to the challenges I encountered in teaching. This perception shift was important for my whole development as a teacher.* Ashley's attitude illustrates how the expressive tools and concepts of art processes were able to provide her with endless possibilities for exploring new ways of thinking, imagining, communicating and making meaning (Wright, 2003) in, through and about curriculum. This is indicative of how the personal attitudes towards, and attributes emerging, from an art teacher's practices as an artist can inform how they traverse the challenges inherent in curriculum change.

Attitude towards who assumes responsibility for enacting curriculum emerged as an important contributing factor to embracing and enacting curriculum. Angus shared that a number of his colleagues question why *I bother to make time to do this [understand curriculum], as this is something for the 'people upstairs' to thrash out.* This perception of curriculum knowledge and understanding not being for classroom teachers is a source of concern, and indicates that art teachers, for various reasons, may not understand the significance of curriculum in relation to their daily work as teachers, or that time dedicated to understanding the curriculum is not a sensible investment in the 'bigger picture' of their work. This is indicative of reaction to, or acceptance of, what Ewing (2010) describes as the privileging of other curriculum areas and skills over the Arts. The apathy inherent in some of Angus's art teaching colleagues approaches to curriculum change is most concerning given that *ultimately it is us in the classroom, teachers and kids, that are most affected by the [curriculum] changes.*

Any sense of perceived dispiritedness towards curriculum change may not be as simple as indifferent art teachers. From Leanne's response it is evident that *generally the interest is pretty high [in external support mechanisms], although staff are exhausted.* While art teachers are indeed interested in learning more about changing curriculum and what it means for them, in an already packed schedule, organising or taking up support on offer presents as another element to squeeze



into an already overloaded itinerary. For some art teachers *it's such an intense pace, when so many students are doing so many different projects. It's a high volume of work, high resource use, high energy levels—it's all happening* (Leanne). The overload that some art teachers experience in their work may be derivative of the slashes in dedicated time and funding allocated to the Arts in Education. Less funding for resources and opportunities ultimately requires teachers having to work doubly hard to demonstrate their worth to a resistant audience. This further echoes the known disparity between the well-researched benefits of Arts education and the time allocated to the Arts to ensure meaningful opportunities and engagement in Arts practice (Barton, Baguley, & MacDonald, 2013).

The motivations that influence an artist to enter the teaching profession can have implications upon their capacity to interpret and deliver on curriculum and the ability to be fluid in their approach to navigating curriculum change. Jane describes how *some [teachers] thrive on the challenge that comes with transforming their approach to align with new curriculum, while some art teachers are very fixed in the way they like to do things, and this characteristic is also usually evidenced in their artwork*. Increased challenge emerges for those art teachers who resist change, and who Jane describes as *insisting on working in their comfort zones; denying, ignoring and keeping on doing things their own way for as long as they can get away with it*. Where teachers' personal attributes are grounded in familiar and 'safe' ways of working, the challenge may be for them to consider and confront the possibility that their resistance to curriculum change may be grounded within *a lack of understanding, or fear of being seen as incompetent if they don't understand how to implement the changes* (Jane). The fact that the majority of art specialists enter pre-service teacher training with studio art backgrounds (Davis, 2008; Grauer, 1999) does not mean that they have successfully developed the knowledge, skills or conceptual understandings necessary to successfully enact curriculum change.

Our data strongly points to the fact that music educators are flexible, diverse and busy people. While there were a number of concerns about the time available to implement the new curriculum effectively the music teachers were also willing to engage with it when they got the chance. Harry indicated the importance of choosing to adopt a positive approach in spite of the known challenges and pressures that can characterise the Arts teaching experience, whereby *having a wide range of teaching experience in diverse contexts has enabled me to understand difference and has definitely impacted on my teaching approach ... I also try to make everything fun as I have gotten so much out of music*. The challenges identified by the music teachers in regard to the work that they do every day was countered by their choice and ability to feel positive about the challenges that they face. This was due to the fact that at the core of their work is their passion for music and music education. Rebecca's passion for music education and teaching is reflected in her *love of teaching, and I enjoy being with them [the students]. I want to be able to do the best I can*. The evident enthusiasm that the teachers interviewed brought to their work was also extended to their vested interests in their students learning. Melanie explained the sense of community and inclusion that her school choir enabled, where she *loves music, and so I want them to love music and part of [that is participating in] choir*.

### *Future implications*

It is clear that the Arts are consistently at risk of being marginalised in teacher education courses across Australia (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, 2012; Gibson & Anderson, 2008; Hartwig & Joseph, 2015), which means that beginning teachers, who might be expected to bring timely understanding of curriculum innovations with them into schools, need to be aptly conversed in curriculum developments and how to enact them. Given that the Arts are consistently at risk of being marginalised in teacher education courses across Australia, it is concerning that pre-service teachers will potentially have limited knowledge and essential skills in order to implement the Arts curriculum and/or quality Arts experiences in their teaching. It is therefore imperative that Arts teachers bring a balanced approach to how they enact curriculum change; one that acknowledges

the need for ongoing professional development, but also encourages teachers to exercise their initiative and be resourceful in how they might look to approaches inherent to Arts practice to guide their approach.

Processes identified as inherent to enacting curriculum can be enhanced through drawing on personal attributes and propensities of artists and/or teachers. Maintaining a positive outlook in times where priorities lie elsewhere must continue, as must ongoing support and encouragement for art teachers' to embrace change and enactment of curriculum (Barton et al., 2013; Cutcher, 2014). Embracing change as opportunity for growth, in complement with teacher education or professional learning that duly acknowledges the complexity of curriculum development and subsequent enactment are essential.

Our investigations have found that music and visual arts educators are indeed passionate about their work and love what they do. However, this passion for art needs to extend into furthering teacher's understanding of the significance of curriculum change, and approaching its' implementation as an opportunity rather than a nuisance. Of critical importance is educating teachers, both pre-service and in-service, in the specific ways they might apply their existing skill sets and understandings to embrace and enact the progression that is our new Australian Curriculum: The Arts. This is especially important given the very recent mandating of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, where revisions have been made in response to the Federal Government Review of The Australian Curriculum (Australian Government: Department of Education & Training, 2015) to 'make the curriculum easier to manage, particularly for primary schools, and simplify the curriculum's presentation' (ACARA, 2015b, p. 1). These reported 'improvements' to the curriculum present a timely opportunity and catalyst for instigating important conversations between teachers, teacher educators, pre-service teachers, schools and Arts organisations.

Within these conversations, there is a need to acknowledge that music and visual arts educators require extensive support and professional development to ensure positive change, and to act upon this identified need across both classroom and teacher education contexts in a reciprocal and whole way. Arts teachers need opportunities to explore and in turn realise how their existing approaches may need to be adjusted to serve the needs of Australian youth and society. Essentially, this relates to cultivating an uncomplicated, positive and assertive attitude towards curriculum change across all levels of Arts education. As such, we find that there is a need for increased interactivity between schools, teacher education and professional Arts organisations to collaborate and develop resources that can help teachers adopt the appropriate mindset that will enable them to become curriculum change.

Ongoing education for Arts teachers to learn how to reconfigure and/or adapt their existing strengths and skill sets without compromising their values and pedagogical specialisations is needed. This need is affirmed in the recent media release outlining the implications of the mandating and associated improvement made to *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, where 'schools and teachers have flexibility to make decisions about how they teach the curriculum in accordance with the needs of their students, the requirements of their school and local curriculum authorities' (ACARA, 2015b, p. 1).

Our curriculum stories have highlighted how teachers' approaches to enacting music and visual arts curriculum in the twenty-first century is indeed complex, and the most successful attitudes and approaches can be realised when situated within a fluid and open perspective of becoming change. This research has at its core that change can be both rewarding and positive, and challenge is a divergent concept, where it can be risen to as a motivator, or succumbed to as an obstruction. It is within the individual teacher's attitudes and approaches towards enacting curriculum change that will either enable or deny Arts teachers in their ability to tackle the challenges of twenty-first century music and visual arts education with confidence and success.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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