

# Teaching the arts in testing times



Lisa Paris, PhD: Curtin University, Western Australia  
lisa.paris@curtin.edu.au

Lisa Paris  
Visual Arts



Geoff Lowe  
Music



Christina Gray  
Drama



Angela Perry  
Dance



Lara Warwick  
Media



## Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our community by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, work and live.

We pay respect to Elders past present and emerging of the Whadjuk Nyungar Nation.



# Background

The Arts develop capabilities that are invaluable in contemporary life e.g. visual and digital literacy (Flood, 2004; Duncum, 2004); creativity (Sternberg et al, 1991); critical thinking (Aust. Curric., 2022); self-esteem and well-being (Eisner,2003).

The Arts yrs 7-12 are generally best delivered by specialists because teaching is strongly framed around 'f2f learning' encompassing praxis (learning by doing) (Dinham, 2022b)

This encompasses teacher modelling, demonstration and one-on-one teacher/std engagement for deep knowledge of making and responding (Dinham, 2022a).



# Background cont...

We know, however, that many (Australian) teachers of the Arts are working out of specialisation or are novice teachers still developing expertise (Lummis et al, 2014).

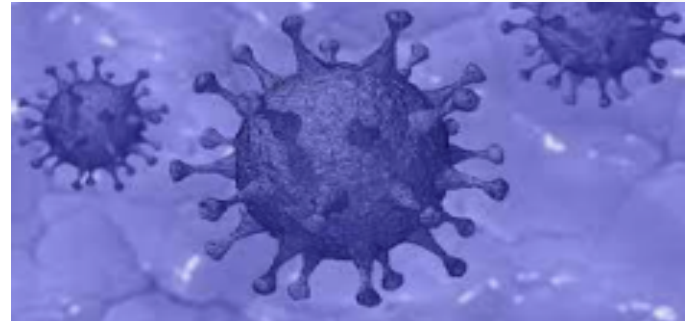
- In such circumstances novice arts teachers may experience self-doubt, stress and anxiety (Paris et al, 2022).
- Attrition rates/turnover have hovered at around 30% within 5 years for decades and stress is a key driver (Ballantyne et al, 2019; Ingersoll, 2018).
- ECR/Out of-specialization arts teachers (like all teachers) benefit from and need mentors/support (Morris et al, 2019; Lummis et al, 2014).
- This provides the context for our continuing *'Shaping The Space: Teaching the Arts 7-10'* research at Curtin and ECU



# Our Research Focus

Our research aimed to synthesize a snapshot of Aust. best practice before and during Covid

- There has not been a practitioner-focused (teachers speaking to other teachers) snapshot of teaching practice in Western Australia for a number of years and the landscape has changed.
- As PST educators our aim was to make their advice knowledge and experience available for the benefit of inexperienced teachers/ community.



The rapid shift to online teaching in response to Covid19 in 2020 had a profound impact on students and teachers alike Australia wide, exacerbating challenges (Earp, 2022).

We were therefore interested to find out how WA teachers were reflecting on their online experiences and whether anything could be learned and retained from the online teaching phenomenon.



# Research Question/s

**There were 5 questions in our semi-structured interview schedule**, however, today we focus on Q5:

- **Q1:** How would you describe your arts teaching philosophy and context?
- Q2: What approaches and strategies have you found to be most effective in creating an inclusive learning environment?
- Q3: What do you understand Best Practice Arts Responding to encompass? How do you approach teaching, learning and assessment in this part of your program/s?
- Q4: What do you understand Best Practice Arts Making to encompass? How do you approach teaching, learning and assessment in this part of your program/s?

**Q5: Could you please share some advice and insights from your recent online Arts teaching experiences in relation to COVID19?**

# Key Results Snapshot

The key takeaways in Covid Impacted periods and online Arts teaching 2020-2021 in WA:



- **We simply weren't ready** - many infrastructure and internet access challenges for staff/students
- The **most vulnerable teachers may *not* be older/experienced staff** (ie less fluent with technology), but rather early career digital natives who need guidance in how to quickly adapt for effective (online) delivery.
- **Communities of Practice and Mentors** emerged as invaluable, helping one another/sharing resources, and should be cultivated.
- **Nurturing positive relationships with kids** emerged as the most important advice our experts offered in respect of teaching the arts in testing times.
- **Children at the Centre** - Curriculum to the side.



# Participants



- **15 WA Expert Arts Teachers** (3 from each arts discipline) Dance, Drama, Media, Music, Visual Arts – mostly female participants.
- Recruited through the **Professional Industry Associations** (e.g. Drama West, AEA/WA, ATOM/WA etc.) or our collegial networks.
- Acknowledged as **exemplary practitioners in leadership roles** from Dept of Education, Catholic and Independent sectors.
- Each typically had **10 or more years of teaching** experience in Arts.
- Currently or recently teaching in the lower secondary years 7-10 within the Arts and **navigating COVID online teaching impacts**.





# Methodology



Phenomenological Qualitative Research design because The Arts are discrete/different whilst linked: shared language systems and focus on praxis.

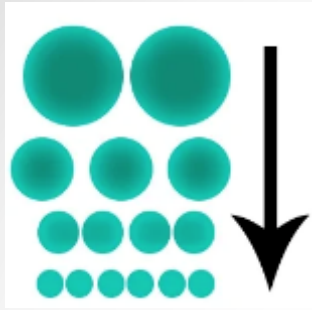
We posited a narrative inquiry approach would reveal rich experiences which were:

- discrete to specific disciplines (e.g. music education)
- as well as those that were shared across the arts.

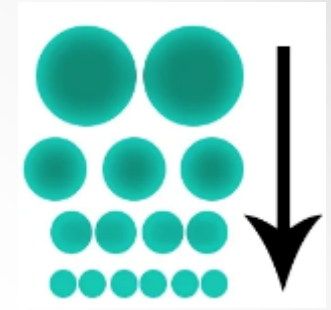
Scoping/Literature Review – International online arts teaching experience 7-10 : Challenges, Affordances, Potentialities (which then used to inform our data collection and analysis)

Recruitment through industry associations/network

- 1 x 60 minute semi-structured interview with each participant, recorded via WebEx
- Online Qualtrics Demographic Survey (qualifications & experience).



# Data Reduction



Data was coded around 3 researcher-designated themes:

- *Challenges* – phenomena that presented serious obstacles to effective teaching and learning
- *Affordances* – phenomena that were useful in achieving or approximating good teaching
- *Potentialities* – phenomena which had not been part of pre-COVID which appeared to have potential value in post-pandemic practice

We matched discipline specialists (researchers and participants) - *emic (insider)* perspective.

The whole team then reviewed the data together to confirm findings and conclusions with the participants.

# #1 Online Teaching Challenges



Participants across all disciplines reported broadly similar challenges:

- the instability of technology platforms,
- lack of assistance in the rapid move to online,
- issues surrounding platform quality.

Further analysis revealed three sub-themes

- variable quality of Arts supervision / support for students at home;
- lost social engagement and collaboration opportunities for students
- the lack of reliable internet access and computing hardware in students' home environments along with poor technology skills - students/parents.

# #2 Online Teaching Affordances



As with challenges, **commonalities emerged** – value of online video content, online groups and reframed relationships.

These included:

- **greater opportunities to connect** with other teachers online
- the opportunity to **see students in a new light** and develop a deeper appreciation of their circumstances;
- realisation **students' emotional wellbeing** outweighed strict adherence to learning programs;

Whether a product of greater agency and reflective capacity among expert teachers, **affordances offered teachers a chance to reassess** their priorities.

# #3 Online Teaching Potentialities



Overall, few online solutions as **enduring** elements of practice:

- sharing resource materials within online collaborative environments through online forums.
- the sheer number scale of high-quality resources which had 'exploded' during lockdowns – many now avid consumers/contributors

In summary, the main potentialities revolved around online resource sharing and online communities of practice.

NB: Worth noting that few participants considered permanent pedagogical practice changes were likely – they considered a return to F2F essential with CoP supports for resources as likely.



# Fault Lines



Acknowledging the limitations of our sample size and being limited to WA, we found deeply ingrained fault lines:

- ongoing poor technology connectivity and platforms access
- heavy workload burdens and competing demands on teachers' time
- low priority for Arts teaching and inadequate communication
- a digital divide for students [and teachers] working at home – unreliable access to the internet, devices, and insufficient support.



# Conclusions



- a **rapid paradigm shift** from “how to teach” in F2F Arts settings (direct modelling, demonstration) to **online equivalencies** was problematic.
- it is the **interpersonal relationships sphere of practice** that may hold the key to online teaching success.
- lower **secondary students more often than not simply “use”** technology - this is **not the same as being digitally or visually literate**.
- **“digital native status” does not guarantee success** - less experienced teachers needed mentoring in terms of reflexive teaching practice
- online environment has been important in providing space and scope for **communities of teachers** to come together



# Recommendations



- Schools need to ensure their teachers (and students) have **access to appropriate infrastructure** (devices / hardware) and support;
- Teachers need **access to mentors and professional learning training** framed around online teaching pedagogical practices (i.e., online teaching strategies) and delivery platforms Webex, Zoom or Teams;
- **Teachers need time to develop online teaching** material and support from organisations with expertise.
- **Communities of practice** appeared in response to online teaching practice, but **took time to develop** their resources and a more systematic approach is required.





# References/Key Sources

**Australian Curriculum (2022).** Critical and Creative Thinking. <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-general-capability/critical-and-creative-thinking#accordion-ceac2804ca-item-34fddd87ff>

**Ballantyne, J. & Retell, J. (2019),** Teaching Careers: Exploring Links Between Well-Being, Burnout, Self-Efficacy and Praxis Shock. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Open Access. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02255>

Buchanan, J., Prescott, A., Schuck, S., Aubusson, P., Burke, P., & Louviere, J. (2013). Teacher Retention and Attrition: Views of Early Career Teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n3.9>

Burbules, N., Fan, G. & Repp, P. (2020). Five trends of education and technology in a sustainable future. *Geography and Sustainability*, 1(2), 93 – 97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geosus.2020.05.001>

Burke, K. (2021). How can creative arts possible be taught online? Perspectives and experiences of online educators in Australian higher education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 49(3), 347 – 361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2020.1777531>

Dabrowski, A. (2020). Teacher well-being during a pandemic – surviving or thriving? *Social Education Research*, 2(1), 35 – 40.

**Dinham, J. (2022a).** Signature pedagogies of arts education reflected in the Australian curriculum: The Arts (Version 9). *Australian Art Education*. 43 (1) pp13-32.

**Dinham, J. (2022b)** Delivering Authentic Arts Education (5th Ed.) Cengage

**Duncum, P. (2004).** Visual culture isn't just visual: Multiliteracy, multimodality and meaning. *Studies in Art Education*, 45(3). 252 – 264.

**Earp, J. (2022)** the impact of COVID on Year 12s and their teachers. *Teacher Magazine*.  
[https://www.teachermagazine.com/au\\_en/articles/the-impact-of-covid-on-year-12s-and-their-teachers](https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/the-impact-of-covid-on-year-12s-and-their-teachers)

\*\*\* Red Font highlights sources that inform today's presentation/Q5 from the interview schedule.

# References/Key Sources

Eddles-Hirsch, K. (2015). Phenomenology and educational research. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 3 (8), 251-260.

Eisner, E. (2003). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. Yale University Press: New Haven

Eyles, A. (2018). Teachers' perspectives about implementing ICT in music education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* (43), 5. 110-131.

Flack, C., Walker, L., Bickerstaff, A., & Margetts, C. (2020). Socioeconomic disparities in Australian schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Melbourne, Australia: Pivot Professional Learning*, 13, 319-340.

Flood, A. (2004). Defining the visually literate individual. *Australian Art Education*, 27(1). 72 – 84.

Gall, M. (2013). Trainee teachers' perceptions: factors that constrain the use of music technology in teaching placements. *Journal of Music Technology and Education*, 6, 5 – 27. <https://doi.org/10.1386/jmte.6.1.5.1>

Hong, J. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1530-1543. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.003>

Ingersoll, R. (2018) The teacher workforce is transforming. Here's what it means for schools and students. <https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/teacher-workforce>

[Johari, J.](#), [Yean Tan, F.](#) and [Tijik Zulkarnain, Z.I.](#) (2018), Autonomy, workload, work-life balance and job performance among teachers, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 32(1), 107-120. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-10-2016-0226>

# References/Key Sources

Kassner, K. (1996). RX for technophobia. In *Teaching Music*. G Spruce (ed.). Routledge: London. pp 193 – 198.

Kraehe, A. (2020). Dreading, pivoting and arting: The future of art curriculum in a post-pandemic world. *Art Education*, 73(4), 4 – 7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2020.1774320>

Lockee, B.B. Shifting digital, shifting context: (re)considering teacher professional development for online and blended learning in the COVID-19 era. *Education Tech Research Dev* **69**, 17–20 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09836-8>

Lummis, G., Morris, J. & Paolino A. (2014). An investigation of Western Australian Pre-Service Primary Teachers' Experiences and Self-Efficacy in The Arts. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1017648.pdf>

Mattson, C. (2021). Graham Wallas: The Creative Process. *The BYU Design Review*. Available at: <https://www.designreview.byu.edu/collections/graham-wallas-the-creative-process>

Morris, J. & Imms, W. (2019). Teacher as Practitioner (TAP) program helps keep teachers in the profession. *EduResearchMatters*. <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/>

Murray, A. (2011). Mind the gap: technology, millennial leadership and the cross-generational workforce, *The Australian Library Journal*, 60(1), 54-65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2011.10722556>

Mutton, T. (2020). Teacher education and Covid-19: responses and opportunities for new pedagogical initiatives, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 46(4), 439 - 441, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1805189>

Olive, J. (2014). Reflecting on the tensions between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History Research: Lessons Learned. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*. 15 (2). <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2072/3656>

# References/Key Sources

Paris, L.F., Lowe, G., Gray, C., Perry, A. & Warwick, L. (2022). Teaching the Arts in Testing Times: A Western Australian Perspective on Covid Impacts. *Australian Journal of Education*. First Online, 7th December 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221137074>

Riemer, K. & Johnston, R. (2019). Disruption as worldview change: A Kuhnian analysis of the digital music revolution. *Journal of Information Technology*, 34(4), 350-370

Sabol, R. F. (2021). Arts education during the covid-19 pandemic: the journey across a changing landscape. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 123(3), 127 – 134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2020.1777531>

Robinson, K. (2006). Do Schools kill creativity? Ted Talk: [https://www.ted.com/talks/sir\\_ken\\_robinson\\_do\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?language=en)

Shaw, R. (2021) <https://theconversation.com/covid-19-threatens-the-already-shaky-status-of-arts-education-in-schools-168548>

Spacek, R. (2020). Teachers, students in arts struggle during pandemic. *Idaho State Journal*. Retrieved from: [Teachers, students in arts struggle during pandemic | Coronavirus | idahostatejournal.com](https://www.idahostatejournal.com/teachers-students-in-arts-struggle-during-pandemic-coronavirus/)

Sternberg, R. & Lubart, T. (1991). An Investment Theory of Creativity and Its Development. *Human Development*. 34 (1) 1-31

Thomson, S. (2020) 'What PISA tells us about our preparedness for remote learning', *Teacher*, 20 April 2020. <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/columnists/sue-thomson/what-pisa-tells-us-about-our-preparedness-for-remote-learning>

Wahlquist, C. (2021) How Melbourne's short, sharp Covid Lockdowns became the longest in the world. *The Guardian*, 2 Oct 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/oct/02/how-melbournes-short-sharp-covid-lockdowns-became-the-longest-in-the-world>