



The aims of art education: An analysis of visual art in Tasmania's Essential Learnings Curriculum

Sofia Shillito, *University of Tasmania, Australia*
Kim Beswick, *University of Tasmania, Australia*
Margaret Baguley, *University of Tasmania, Australia*

Abstract

The study reported in this paper examined the aims of visual art education implicit in Tasmania's recently introduced Essential Learnings curriculum documents and the explicit views of experts who were influential in the development of the Tasmanian curriculum. Substantial overlap between these aims those presented in the reviewed arts education literature were identified as well as some interesting distinctions. In addition, discrepancies were identified between the views of the experts and those conveyed in the documents.

The reasons for which visual art is seen as important for students will shape the way programs are structured, supported and delivered. The place of art in the curriculum and the outcomes and aims for students are decided by the functions it is perceived to have in education and the lives of students. It was with this in mind that this study sought to uncover both explicit and implicit aims of art education in Tasmania's curriculum. The findings may serve as a stimulus for arts educators in other jurisdictions to reflect upon the aims inherent in relevant curricula and the ways in which these aims are communicated to the teachers whose understanding thereof is crucial to their achievement.

Introduction

Tasmania's Essential Learnings (ELs) curriculum framework was designed to break down boundaries between traditional school subjects in order to focus on thinking, inquiry, and deep understanding of overarching ideas considered essential for students in contemporary society. The framework was structured around five essential learnings: Thinking, Communicating, Personal Futures, World Futures, and Social Responsibility (Department of Education, Tasmania (DoET), 2002). The arts, including visual art, are encompassed in the key element, Being arts literate, and are included, along with Being numerate, Being literate, and Being information literate, in the Communicating essential (DoET, 2002). This study set out to analyse the extent to which the aims for art education implicit in the ELs curriculum were consistent with its placement in the Communicating essential and with aims for art education espoused in the literature. The specific research questions that guided it were:

1. What are the aims for art education implicit in the Essential Learning curriculum frameworks?
2. In what ways are these aims consistent with the placement of visual art in the Communicating essential?
3. In what ways do these aims represent the views of experts involved in its development and the aims for art education represented in the literature?

The paper begins with a review of literature on the aims of art education and then focuses on the role of art as communication and the notion of arts literacy, both concepts central to the Being arts literate strand of the ELs curriculum.

Aims of art education

In 2002 the Australian Council for Education and the Arts (ACEA) listed several reasons for which learning in the arts is considered to be valuable. These included: the development of personal capacities, described as creative capacities; a sense of connectedness with oneself,



others and the environment; and cultural capacities which develop Australia's cultural and artistic future and reflect the cultural diversity of the country. Capacities for the 21st century include technology skills and the ability to have access and exert influence within the 'knowledge society' (ACEA, 2005). The ACEA also claimed that research has demonstrated that the inclusion of arts programs in education engages students and improves their learning by developing imagination, communication, critical thinking, creativity and adaptability.

Ideas about art and its purpose in education and society as a whole, affect the emphasis and approach of an art program in a school (Wright, 2003). Wright (2003) stated that art can be viewed as self-expression, emotional therapy, spirituality, cultural artefact, a discipline, and/or an essential part of being human. This description encapsulates spiritual, emotional, cognitive, expressive and cultural elements. Parr, Radford and Snyder (1998) described the value and importance of the arts for energizing the school environment, developing critical life skills, improving student performance in other areas, exposing students to a range of cultural perspectives, and reaching students they described as 'hard-to-teach'.

Art is a tool for thinking, for both adults and for children (Bae, 2004; Kolbe, 2001; Millikan, 2003; Rauch 2001; Svendson, 2004). Connected closely to the process of thinking, and the clarification of ideas which are inherent in art, is the way art making helps children to make meaning. This is part of the multi-modal and multi-dimensional aspect of art, which encompasses many ways of knowing and expressing thoughts and feelings in one process (Rauch, 2001; Wright, 2003).

The connection of art to cultural history and traditions, as well as the influence of art on current culture was emphasised by Thompson (2005) and Wright (2003). Wright contended that the link between art, culture and life is so strong that through the study of traditional and past art forms, aspects of past culture and life can be reconstructed. Yet Wright (2003) also indicated that the significance of art is in not only recording and decoding culture but also in shaping it. Culture changes over time and also within different groups of people in concurrent time frames. The possibility of exploring multiple cultural perspectives through art may also be valuable in an educational setting (Parr et al., 1998). Chapman (1978) claimed that art programs in schools support the development of understandings about the connection of art to past and present culture, and the function of art as a way in which society encounters life. Danko-McGee and Slutsky (2003) also claimed that art experiences that allow children to view the world from a variety of perspectives make an important contribution to their quality of life, for example, developing their tolerance for and acceptance of the diversity of other cultures.

Other writers concur with Wright (2003) regarding the role of art making in shaping culture. Freedman (2003) contended that the current generation of students have grown up surrounded by visual imagery and have at their disposal the tools (e.g., digital cameras and video-recorders, internet sites) to make and widely distribute their own visual images. Art making therefore, can constitute social action as well as self expression and can therefore be regarded as a means of inquiry by which students are both influenced by and influence their social environments (Freedman, 2003). Duncum (2002) who, like Freedman, is a proponent of a visual culture view of art education see its purpose as about helping students to understand the meanings of visual images, including the purposes for which they are used, with the ultimate goal of empowering students to respond to and shape visual culture through their own art making.

One of the more traditional views of the value of arts in education is the connection of the arts to the world of the senses. Education of the senses is viewed as a starting point for learning about the world (Kolbe, 2001; Svendson, 2004; Arts, Education and Awareness Panel, 1977, cited in Danko-McGee & Slutsky, 2003). Svendson viewed the senses as the way in which young children take in new impressions of the world, and asserted that; 'All of these experiences have to be absorbed, analysed, sorted, tested and made their own through some sort of expressive output ... Is there a better way to achieve this than through the innate or instinctive forms of the arts?' (2004, p. 103). Eisner also believed in the important



role of the arts to 'refine our senses so that our ability to experience the world is made more complex and subtle' (2002, p. 19).

Gardner (1990) believed that the visual arts are important because they allow us to think visually, which he claimed is a particular form of thinking that is able to encompass and express unique forms of meaning. The idea of a specialised form of visual thinking occurs in Gardner's writings on the theory of multiple intelligences, as the unique intelligence Gardner labelled 'Visual-Spatial' (Gardner, 1985). Eisner (2002) focused on the forms of meaning that only the arts can convey and strongly believed in the role of the arts in the development of visual perception. He claimed that, 'one cognitive function the arts perform is to help us learn to notice the world' (2002, p. 10). Eisner believed that this type of noticing or 'seeing' requires greater attention than that which we normally apply in living, and that seeing is the result of making sense of a part of the world. This faculty is developed through artistic representation because the act of representation influences the way we look at or experience that which we aim to represent. In other words, by visually representing something, we pay attention to its visual qualities or the visual symbols of its qualities and therefore experience these qualities in a way that otherwise would not occur (Eisner, 2002). Eisner stated that 'which aspects of the environment will be attended to, the purposes for which such attention is used, and the material the child employs to represent it, influence the kind of cognitive abilities the child is likely to develop' (2002, p. 22).

The skills and ideas accessed through art education are also applicable to other disciplines and, according to Svendsen (2004) these are also part of the value of art in the curriculum. Both Wright (2003) and Rauch (2001) have focused on the multiple ways in which children can express themselves and learn. Wright considered the arts as a holistic tool for the development of learning in which 'The arts enhance multiple intelligences, multiple modalities, multiliteracies, mind/body interdependence, and emotional and spiritual connections to learning and understanding' (2003, p. 2).

Social or emotional skills such as concentration, self-motivation, self-confidence and decision-making can be developed through art (Svendsen, 2004). Such characteristics were described as contributing to EQ or emotional intelligence by Goleman (1995, cited in Wright, 2004) who described emotional intelligence as including self-awareness and control, empathy, listening to others and cooperating. Eisner (2002) also pointed out the distinctive role of the arts in self-expression, and the construction of identity and self-awareness, because the arts emphasise the expression of individuality and focus on the ways that vision and meaning are personalised. Chapman (1978) described school art programs as encouraging personal fulfilment. Similar to the concept of emotional intelligence is the idea of spiritual intelligence or SQ (Zohar and Marshall, 2000, cited in Wright, 2003). Wright linked this intelligence with the effective working with problems of meaning and value and an ability to find a meaning-giving context for the events of our lives. Wright argued that; 'the arts provide a powerful mechanism for developing such capacities because they reach the deepest, richest, most abstract aspects of our existence' (2003, p. 10).

Many educators believe that the arts are an essential part of a child's education because they are a part of the learning process itself (Lim, 2004; Wright, 2003; Danko-McGee & Slutsky, 2003; Fraser, 2000). Danko-McGee and Slutsky (2003) argued that art should be placed at the forefront of the curriculum. They recognised it as one of the multiple ways in which children can explore new knowledge and represent it by transforming feelings and ideas into a visual form. They also believed that through engagement with visual art children develop aesthetic awareness and appreciation for the social, cultural and historical quality of artwork. Eisner (2002) pointed out the many cognitive functions of artistic thinking which can be used for problem-solving, and which promote imagination and involve students in complex thinking through the process of representation. Chapman (1978), argued for the importance of visual arts in education, claiming that:



Art education can acquaint children with more subtle forms of feeling and more precise images of the human spirit than they are likely to discover on their own. Through instruction in art, the child can acquire the know-how to explore the deeper meanings of visual forms (p. 5).

This study employed Eisner's (2002) aims of education as a framework for its inquiry. Eisner offered a list of eight examples of aims of arts education. He recognised that each view is unlikely to occur in isolation in any educational setting, but rather a combination of these views is usually employed. Eisner also pointed out that a range of views on the function of art are likely to exist in different contexts and that they are likely to change over time. The views presented by Eisner (2002) are summarised as follows:

1. Discipline-based art education is especially likely to occur in the visual arts. This approach focuses on the development of skills and imagination for high quality performance as well as students being able to see aesthetic qualities in art works. Students also develop understanding of the cultural and historical significance of art as well as the value of art in society.
2. Visual culture is a focus on the ability to read the arts as a text in order to uncover hidden meaning so as to make informed choices and to understand the culture of the society producing the particular art form in this way..
3. Creative Problem-solving is a focus on the design aspects of the arts.
4. Creative self-expression is a view promoting the role of art in allowing students to express emotions and ideas which free them from tensions and leads to flexibility in attitudes as well as fostering individualism.
5. Preparation for work is a view that values the development of vocational skills such as creativity, initiative, imagination, pride in craft, planning skills and teamwork through working with the arts.
6. Cognitive development is a view that working artistically develops complex and subtle thinking including the ability to reflect on one's own work, and to connect art forms to culture. Visual perception, developed through the arts, is another important type of thinking.
7. Promoting academic performance is a view based on the idea that the inclusion of arts education in schools increases performance in other educational areas.
8. Integrated arts is a perspective in which the arts may be integrated with other disciplines such as history, or within several arts forms, or to explore a central idea, or to solve a problem using ideas from many disciplines.

To these views was added a ninth – art as inquiry, reflecting the views of Freedman (2003). These views represented a useful framework in terms of which the ELs documents and views of experts were interpreted in this study.

Art as a Form of Communication

In order to communicate, humans use a variety of symbol systems or 'languages,' which involve the representation of meaning so that another can understand it. Wright (2003) cites signs, sounds, gestures and words as symbols through which children express thoughts and feelings, and describes media such as drawing, block building, dancing, play, musical experimentation or clay modelling as modes or 'languages' in which children do this. Of all the written languages it is argued that visual art is the first that children use in forming a concept of their world, representing what they know, and conveying ideas and emotions to others (Bae, 2004; Koster, 2001; Svendsen, 2004). Svendsen stated that, 'from their earliest scribbles, which we do not even pretend to understand, children may be telling us about something they know by attaching meaning to the marks they make' (2004, p. 103). Gardner (1980) also cited studies demonstrating that a child's drawings or symbolic representation



can symbolise something to the child before such symbols become recognisable to others. Through developing their artistic skills, children come to understand that their actions can communicate. Gardner described the work of young children claiming that, 'One feels that the child is speaking directly through his (sic) drawings, that each line, shape, and form conveys the inner feelings as well as explicit themes of the young child' (1980, p. 97).

The process of recording ideas and thoughts is one of metacognition in which children must consider, consolidate, reconstruct and clarify what their ideas, thoughts and feelings are in order to find the symbols to represent them and communicate them to others (Bae, 2004; Clay, 1986, cited in Abramson, Robinson & Ankenman, 1995; Kolbe, 2001; Millikan, 2003; Rauch, 2001; Svendsen, 2004). Gardner (1990) drew the parallel between art and written language, likening the processes of 'reading' with decoding or artistic perception, 'writing' with manipulating, and creating with the symbolic forms of art.

Building from the concept of art as a language is the concept of *artistic literacy* (Wright, 2004). Wright explained that the concept was originally used to refer to communication through film and electronic media, but was then used by artists and educators to refer to 'the ability to understand and use the fine arts' (2003, p. 130). The purpose of becoming literate is to develop the potential to have something to say, and to share thoughts and ideas with others in a meaningful way (Wright, 2004). To be literate is to have the ability to participate in rich personal experiences, and to use written symbols to encode a variety of meanings (Wright, 2003).

Wright (2004), like Gardner (1990), described the process of becoming literate in the arts as learning how to 'read' and 'write' using artistic symbols. Literacy in the arts is developed in the same way as other literacies. Gardner paralleled the stages of development in a child's visual artwork with the stages of language development, such as the 'scribbling stage' and the 'babbling stage'. Wright (2004) described understanding of the basic design elements and principles as a 'vocabulary' for art, and Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1998) emphasised that a language is more than a set of symbols (or vocabulary), because it also includes the rules of combining the symbols to convey meaning. The visual arts are a non-verbal language in which symbols, rather than verbal meaning, allow direct experience of meaning through the work itself (Wright, 2003).

Art is viewed as a form of communication by many educators and theorists (Bae, 2000; Fraser, 2000; Millikan, 2003; Parr et al., 1998; Wright, 2003). As Eisner, (1994, cited in Bae, 2004) explained, 'Art is a form of representation through which privately held personal ideas and concepts are publicly shared' (p. 247). The process of communicating using graphic symbols, requires us to think deeply about the subject at hand, and incorporates many ways of understanding the subject, allowing us to *make meaning* from it. It is however, this very idea of expression for the purpose of communication, in which others share in our ideas, that causes our thinking to be clarified. This enables our meaning to take form in our relationship to the audience who are the recipients of this communication, even if this audience is ourselves (Bae, 2004; Millikan, 2003).

The Study

The study reported here was part of a larger study that included an investigation of the visual arts teaching practices of a sample of Tasmanian early childhood teachers. The data reported here focus on the aims of arts education as encapsulated in the Essential Learnings and in the views of two visual art education experts who were influential in the development of the relevant parts of the Essential Learnings documents. Two important sources of data for this study were:

Documents

The documents analysed were chosen to give a succinct description of the Arts Literacy strand of the Essential Learnings curriculum because the focus of this study was on Arts



Literacy. The sections of the Curriculum chosen for analysis were the description of the Communicating essential in the Framework 1 document (DoET, 2002), the description of Being arts literate from the same source, and the Key Element Outcomes and Standards for Being arts literate, which are part of the Framework 2 document (DoET, 2003).

Experts

The ELs experts interviewed were the Principal Education Officer (Arts) for the DoET, who has been given the pseudonym Tim, and a second expert, recommended by Tim as having been involved in the development of the Arts Literacy key element of the curriculum. At the time of the study this expert was employed by the DoET as Principal Project Co-ordinator Curriculum Review. He has been given the pseudonym Greg. The voices of the experts who participated in this study contributed to the understanding of the aims of Arts Literacy in the Tasmanian curriculum, and the purposes of these documents. The experts were selected as 'key informants' with special knowledge, status and communication skills who were considered best able to share information with the researcher (Le Compte, 1984, cited in Wellington, 2000).

Procedure

Content analysis provided a descriptive account of the content of relevant curriculum documents based on the frequency of key terms and concepts used (Wellington, 2000). These data were presented in paragraphs outlining the definitions of key concepts, summarising the meanings of frequently used terms, and noting those concepts which appeared infrequently.

The two ELs expert interviews were conducted in the form of emailed questions to which emailed responses were provided. One of the emailed interviews was followed up by an interview conducted in person. Both interviewees received the same key questions which were open ended and designed not to 'lead' the interviewee towards any particular response (Wellington, 2000). The interview conducted in person gave the opportunity to probe responses to a greater degree, while the interviews, which occurred by email, allowed each interviewee more time to reflect on responses and to support them with written information. The interview schedule is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1:
Interview Schedule

1. What main ideas were taken into consideration when developing the arts literacy strand of the Essential Learnings?
2. Why have the arts been placed in the communication EL?
3. What would you say is the unique contribution of the arts to students' education?
4. To what extent do you think that viewing the Arts as a form of literacy is a new way for many educators to view them?
5. In your opinion, what are some of the challenges for teachers to include arts literacy in their programs?
6. Are there any good examples of arts literacy teaching in early childhood that you are aware of and you could briefly describe?
7. Is there other comment you would like to add about Arts Literacy?

The analysis of interview data involved the examination of the transcripts and the exclusion of irrelevant data, a process referred to by Wellington (2000) as data reduction. At this point the data was de-contextualized and re-contextualized by being grouped under preliminary themes (Wellington, 2000). From an initial stage of open coding (Denscombe, 2003), the grouping of data was trialled in several categorising frameworks which were informed by the purpose of the study, and the knowledge of the researcher, as well as by the types of groupings suggested by participants as evident in the data (Burns, 1997). This process of trial and experimentation continued until the categories and structure in which the data best responded to the research questions posed by the study was established.



Results

Content analysis of the curriculum documents

Communicating: The two page description of the Communicating Essential (DoET, 2002, pp.19-20) defines communication and describes the purposes of communication and its importance in the curriculum. The description of communication is consistent throughout the document, although a range of related words that express similar concepts are used in different parts of the document. According to this document communication can be summarised as being about using language/symbol systems/codes and conventions with skill/mastery/ability to communicate/articulate/express meaning for a purpose as well as critical interpretation of the communications of others.

The importance of Communicating is described in terms of its role in learning, living productively (work and community participation), making informed decisions (critical interpretation of texts and accessing information) and personal and social reasons (relating to others and personal benefits) (DoET, 2002). Skills in multimedia are specifically mentioned twice in the document, which suggests that such skills are considered to be important.

Being arts literate: In a single page description of the Key Element of Being arts literate (DoET, 2002, p.23), the arts included in the definition are 'Visual Art, Media, Movement, Music, Drama and Literature'. Art is described as a form of communication in phrases such as, 'creative forms of expression, representation and communication', 'communication through arts forms', 'language of art', and 'a universal language of communication'. The term 'arts forms' is used in the Essential Learnings curriculum documents in reference to multiple forms from more than one of the arts e.g., Dance, Music, Visual Art. The description of art thus focuses on the view of art as a form of communication. The arts are described in the key element of Being arts literate (DoE, 2001, p. 23) as, 'A way of communicating, which aids learning, is connected to culture, influences and reflects society and is part of personal and social experience'.

Outcomes and Standards for Being arts literate: The frequencies with which various concepts were mentioned in the outcomes and standards document (DoET, 2003, p. 6) were interpreted as an indication of the relative importance of various ideas. Several main concepts emerged by virtue of being most frequently mentioned. These were: *use*, *expression*, *communication*, *meaning*, *purpose* and *response*. *Use* of art suggests that art is viewed as a tool or a method. *Expression* and *communication* are related concepts. *Expression* focuses on the representation of a meaning or concept while *communication* extends this to imply a receiver of the meaning or message. *Meaning*, *purpose* and *response* are also related concepts concerned with the reasons for expression and communication. *Meaning*, in this document is often referred to in the phrase 'make and share meaning', which is described as the purpose of communication. *Purpose* therefore refers to the specific meaning the artist intends to communicate through their work. *Response* relates to the interpretation of art works including the ability to identify the elements the artist has used to create the work, analysis of the artist's purpose and articulation of a personal response to the work.

Analysis of the outcomes listed across the five standards covering students from kindergarten to grade ten identified two categories of outcomes which are shown in Table 1. These categories were; *Making*, which includes the ability to use tools in the creation of arts works and the ability to communicate for a purpose; and *Responding*, which includes the ability to identify the arts elements (tools) in works of art, the ability to read the intention of the artist and the ability to respond personally to arts works. A change in emphasis is also evident across the five standards. This is illustrated in Table 1. Enjoyment and fun, as well as the drawing on experience, reality, play and imagination are listed as examples of performance in the first two standards but not in subsequent ones. The comparison of art works as an expression of various cultures is listed as an example of a performance at Standards 3 and 4 but not at earlier standards. The outcomes for Standard 5 include the understanding that arts



forms 'may be used to reflect, challenge and shape the values and understandings of a society'. The ultimate goals of the student's development in Being arts literate, could be summarised as the ability to have a purpose, to communicate to society, to choose the art form best suited to this purpose and use that form skilfully. Being arts literate also includes the ability to respond to arts works in sophisticated ways including identifying intentions, personal responses, drawing on critical analysis and forming opinions about art works.

Table 1:
Being Arts Literate – Making and Responding to Art

Category of Outcome	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4	Standard 5
Making	Use art forms	Use basic elements of arts forms	Produce with confidence, applying simple concepts about art elements	Use specific skills, techniques and processes	Select, combine and manipulate art elements using a range of skills, techniques and processes
Ability to use the tools					
Ability to communicate for a purpose	Express and communicate personal meaning	Communicate with and to others	Achieve desired purposes	Appropriate to particular audiences and purposes	The art form best suited to their expressive needs, present to a variety of audiences.
Responding		Identify the arts and discuss the way they were made.	Recognising the ways in which elements have been combined for particular effects.	Describe how elements of arts forms are selected deliberately and combined for specific expressive purposes.	Identify and interpret arts works, discuss intentions and responses to them.
Ability to identify the elements (tools)		Use appropriate vocabulary to describe the elements of arts works.	Respond to key features of arts works		
Ability to interpret the purposes		Discuss where, how and why they (the arts) might be used.	Articulate the ways ideas and feelings can be communicated. Being able to identify the purposes for which they were made.	Describe how arts works may communicate multiple meanings.	Draw from critical analysis, personal research and reviews to interpret and provide informed opinion on arts works.
Ability to respond personally					
	Respond to art works in personal ways.	Respond to and make personal meaning	Respond to arts works giving reasons for preferences		
Early years focus	Draw upon reality and experience, play and imagination in making arts works	Use experience, play and imagination to represent, express and communicate			
Middle years' focus			Identify...differences and similarities between those (arts works) produced in varying cultures.	Compare, contrast and respect works from different cultures.	

*Comments of the ELs experts*

Greg described the Essential Learnings framework as having two central components; Thinking, which forms the heart of the document, and Communicating, which enables the learning process to take place. According to Greg, the development of the Essential Learnings curriculum created a 'significant discussion' about the place of the arts within it. One argument was that the arts were personal and therefore should be an optional part of the curriculum, however, there was also a strong and prevailing argument that the arts were in fact *essential* literacies. Greg defined the arts as, 'powerful symbol systems which provide particular ways of looking, thinking, describing, recording and analysing.'

Greg posed the question 'What does it mean to be literate?' and then answered it by saying 'It means to function in the world. Now to function in the world means you've got to have some ways of dealing with experience.' Greg related this concept to the arts, explaining that by defining the arts as a literacy we acknowledge the arts are required for everyday living and functioning; that they are necessary for all students and are practical, and transferable. Greg stated that ultimately, 'arts forms provide an opportunity to symbolise – to shape experience, to make meaning and communicate information, ideas and feelings'. Tim's views echoed this statement. He believed that, 'the notion of communication is at the core of arts processes' and went on to describe the communicative process within the arts as 'highly sophisticated'. Tim paralleled development in being arts literate with the development of language literacy. He said, 'We experiment and approximate as emergent learners and become more conversational as we develop skills and confidence. At the height of our proficiency we are articulate and persuasive'. For Tim, the purpose of the arts lay in their potential as a way of telling stories and he viewed all arts forms as having the dimensions of a narrative.

According to Greg, there were three functions of art in the curriculum. Firstly, the arts take account of students' preferred learning styles, including those intelligences not traditionally valued in schools. Secondly, the arts allow students to develop deep understanding, which is a focus of the ELs curriculum. Thirdly, the arts include a range of valuable tools for demonstrating the understandings students have developed. Tim reiterated each of these important functions of art, and both experts described several further aspects of the important role of the arts in education.

For Tim, aspects of thinking and deep understanding that can be developed through the arts included higher order thinking, inquiry, problem-solving, imaginative thought, a sense of aesthetics and critical analysis. Greg confirmed the connection of art to thinking and deep understanding, expressing it poetically when he declared that, 'powerful meanings, ethical positions, questions of great wonder and solutions of elegance and adventure are more often than not conveyed artistically'.

Both Tim and Greg commented on the use of the arts to create 'performances of understanding' as well as the relevance of the arts in including all learning styles and intelligences. Tim made the further point that the arts are very student-centred disciplines in which learning is often project-based and self-paced, allowing students to develop their own answers and to initiate extensions to their learning.

Tim and Greg also agreed on several other key ideas, one of which was the relevance of being Arts literate in the 21st century. Greg described the 21st century as 'a world that has become increasingly chaotic and increasingly complex' in which students need to 'cope' and 'survive'. According to Greg the reason the arts are important in this chaotic and complex reality is due to the profusion of multi-media communication, which relies on image and sound as well as on written text to convey meaning. This necessitates the development of a broader range of communication skills which go beyond linguistic skill and, according to Greg, include the ability to 'decode images and multi-media products.' Tim also believed that 'The arts build capacity for creativity and innovation within students – very important commodities in the 21st Century economy.'



Tim and Greg both described the potential to develop a sense of community, connectedness with others, and interdependence as a team, through participation in arts activities. This included developing the school community's experience of itself, and its own values. Both experts also viewed the arts as important ways of celebrating diverse cultures and transmitting cultural traditions. In this way, they saw the arts as fundamental to cultural participation, including in youth culture. Greg also emphasised the potential of the arts as 'powerful agents of social change – 'showing us back to ourselves''.

The ELs experts also claimed that the arts enhance the self-esteem, confidence and resilience of students. Greg commented that the arts are a non-competitive area, in which students are able to recognise, and celebrate each other's strengths. Tim cited the potential for the arts to reach disengaged students and improve learning and participation in the whole curriculum. Greg agreed, and referred to research that supported these claims.

Greg also described the role of the arts in the development of the whole person through education and identified the value of the arts in developing relationships: 'Teaching is essentially a relational activity – nothing develops relationships more powerfully and purposefully than engagement in the arts.' Whereas Tim pointed out the benefit of the arts as an opportunity for students to play, experiment and have fun, Greg emphasised the importance of art as a cognitive and communicative process which is vital in early childhood as the first means of communication for pre-literate children.

Another point raised by both experts was the development of a sense of self and identity through engagement with a range of arts forms. Tim described this as 'telling own stories' while Greg used the term 'expressive voice'. Greg also offered his own opinion (not necessarily reflected in the Essential Learnings framework), that 'the arts (and indeed arts pedagogy) are critical in the development of a sense of self ... and of that self in relation to others ... and indeed in the midst of that immense confusion that is the complexity of living.'

Discussion

The discussion that follows is organised around relevant themes from the literature, particularly the views of Eisner (2000), and the findings of this study. From this answers to the research questions are presented.

Both experts discussed the ways in which engagement with the arts supports learning through developing deep understandings, demonstrating those understandings, as well as increasing student participation and motivation. Although these ideas are related to the view of art as intrinsic to the learning process (Wright, 2003; Danko-McGee & Slutsky, 2003) the emphasis was on the role of the arts in equipping students to meet the demands of modern life. The ideas expressed by the ELs experts on the needs of students for living in the 21st century included the need to decode and critically analyse visual and multi-media messages, which increase students' ability to make informed decisions about the messages they receive in this form. Eisner (2000) also described the role of art in relation to 'the world that students now live in and that they will enter as adults (which) is riddled with ambiguities, uncertainties, [and] the need to exercise judgement in the absence of rule' (2002, p. xii). The ELs experts also considered the development of skills in the areas of visual and multi-media presentation as valuable for the work place of the 21st century, which is also supported by the curriculum documents. Personal and social benefits of engagement with the arts were also emphasised by the ELs experts including access to cultural participation, the development of self-esteem, community spirit and the expression of identity. Each of these contributions of art education was also listed by the ACEA (2002).

Other reasons, from the literature, for the inclusion of art in education included the connection of art to culture (Thompson, 2005), the activation of multiple and integrated intelligences through participation in the arts (Wright, 2003), and the development of social and emotional skills through learning in the arts (Svendson, 2004). Chapman (1978) described the benefits of art as personal fulfilment, supporting the development of social consciousness, and as an important part of our cultural heritage. The functions of art in the Essential Learnings



curriculum contain many of these elements with an emphasis on art as communication. Specifically, the curriculum conveys the role of art in terms of the development of literacy in the arts, which helps students learn through this form of communication, and develop personally through this form of expression. Arts literacy, thus described, allows students to decode information expressed visually or artistically, and to develop skills in encoding and manipulating art forms which will be valuable in the work place.

The aims of art in education as represented in the Essential Learnings documents and the views of the experts interviewed in this study were analysed beginning with the eight example categories cited by Eisner (2002). This analysis shows that the Tasmanian curriculum has varied approaches to the value and function of art in education. The substantial agreement between the documents and expert views included in this study, with the aims described by Eisner (2002) are shown at the top of Table 2 below. The groups are referred to as ELs (Essential Learnings curriculum documents), and Experts (Essential Learnings experts interviewed in this study).

It is also necessary to consider other views apparent in the data gathered in this study, but not in the examples offered by Eisner (2002). In particular, it was evident that the central view of art expressed within the Essential Learnings curriculum documents is the view of art as a form of communication. This was clearly demonstrated by the framing of art as part of the Communicating essential, and the description of the goal of students' learning as Being arts literate. Unsurprisingly, given that the experts are extensively involved in the development and dissemination of the new curriculum, this view is entirely consistent with that expressed by the experts.

A further view of the aims of art in education that emerged from expert interviews was that of art as a form of cultural participation which develops community spirit and teamwork. They also viewed art as a way to influence and shape culture and this view was also reflected in the curriculum documents. There was also evidence, in both the interviews and documents, that art was seen as a way of developing deep understandings about topics and concepts as well as a way to demonstrate those understandings. Each of these additional views was evident in the literature and is included in Table 2.

Table 2:
Views on the Aims of Arts in Education

	Views on the aims of art in education	Sample groups indicating agreement
Eisner's examples	1. Discipline-based approach	ELs, Experts
	2. Participating in visual culture	ELs, Experts
	3. Creative problem-solving	Experts
	4. Self-expression	Els, Experts,
	5. Preparation for work	ELs, Experts
	6. Cognitive development	Els, Experts
	7. Promoting academic performance	Experts
	8. Integrated arts	
	9. Inquiry	
Examples from data	Cultural participation	ELs, Experts,
	Developing understandings	ELs, Experts
	Influencing and shaping social values	ELs, Experts
	Art as a form of communication	ELs, Experts



It is evident from this analysis that the ELs experts discussed the importance of art in education from almost every perspective described in Table 2. Due to the fact that the ELs experts are also experts in art education, it is reasonable to assume that their broad knowledge of the area had led them to consider the importance of art from many perspectives.

Although not among Eisner's (2002) examples of the aims of arts in education the most consistently emphasised view that emerged from this study was the view of art as a form of communication. This was strongly presented in the content analysis of the Essential Learnings curriculum and the interviews with experts. The learning content focus of this view builds from a discipline-based approach (Eisner, 2000) and contains many of its elements. However, in the discipline-based approach the purpose of art is understood as intrinsic to the discipline of art. In other words, in the discipline-based approach art is studied in order to better understand art and to perform it well. In the view of art as a form of communication, the development of skills, awareness of arts elements and aesthetic sensibility is developed solely to enhance students' abilities to communicate and receive messages through the language of art. The aims of discipline-based programs include the development of knowledge about the cultural and historical relevance of art as well as its value from a philosophical point of view (Eisner, 2002). In the views of the Essential Learnings curriculum documents, these elements are replaced by the aim of allowing students access to cultural participation through the arts. The need to value art from a philosophical perspective is replaced by its utility as a unique language and form of communication.

The ELs experts described the concept of art as a form of self-expression as the development of 'expressive voice'. This concept is, however, less explicit in the curriculum documents where it appears in a reference to 'using art forms to communicate personal meaning', and 'expressive needs' which may refer to personal expressive needs (DoET, 2003, p. 6). It is also suggested by the idea of art as a 'life-enhancing part of personal ... experience' (DoET, 2002, p. 23).

The view of art as a cognitive process includes the ability to develop visual knowledge, visual thinking and observational skills. The cognitive processes of reflective thinking, comparing, contrasting and interpreting works are described in the curriculum documents but the emphasis is on the cognitive processes involved in responding to artwork rather than on creating it. This view is also closely linked to the view of art as a way to develop and demonstrate understandings about ideas that are the focus of students' learning. The Essential Learnings Framework 1 described the arts as, '... important ways of coming to know and understand through direct, intimate, intuitive experience. They provide a particular way of looking, thinking, describing, recording and analysing' (DoET, 2002, p. 23). This description is suggestive of a view of art as a means of inquiry.

This description is, however, not reflected in the description of standards and outcomes for Being arts literate which focus on understandings about the arts themselves rather than their use in the development of other understandings. This can be seen as a limitation of the curriculum structure which, despite discussing the interrelatedness of curriculum elements and the centrality of the process of inquiry to learning, proceeds to describe outcomes for each element separately. Since the description of outcomes tends to focus and drive the delivery of programs in schools (Eisner, 2002), it may be that the emphasis on the use of art in the development of understandings across many curriculum areas and as a vehicle for student inquiry will not be seen as an important function of the arts in the curriculum.

The concept of art as a way of accessing cultural participation is linked to the idea of influencing and shaping the values and beliefs of a culture which therefore could be seen as an aspect of this aim for art in education. The Essential Learnings Framework 1 states that literacy in the arts is fundamental to cultural participation (DoET, 2002, p. 23). The outcomes and standards also include aims for art in developing students' understanding of various



cultures and ultimately, the ability to use arts forms to 'reflect, challenge and shape values and understandings of a society' (DoET, 2003, p. 6). The ELs experts also described these outcomes.

Research question 1: What are the aims for art education implicit in the ELs curriculum frameworks?

The ELs curriculum documents reflect all of the views of the aims of art education listed in Table 1 except for those which should, according to the over-arching philosophy purporting to underpin the documents, be most central. These absent views are: art as a contributor to the development of academic performance in other curriculum areas; the integration of art with other disciplines to explore an issue that transcends discipline boundaries; and art as a form of inquiry in its own right.

Research question 2: In what ways are these aims consistent with the placement of visual art in the Communicating essential?

The aims for art education evident in the ELs documents are entirely consistent with this positioning of visual art in the curriculum. Indeed, it appears that the structuring of the curriculum framework which resulted in the arts being placed in the Communicating Essential and being described as Being arts literate, dominated other concerns in the preparation of further detail of the curriculum.

Research question 3: In what ways do these aims represent the views of experts involved in its development and the aims for art education represented in the literature?

The experts described the importance and role of visual art in education in terms of all but one of Eisner's (2000) views and each of the others identified from the literature, apart from art as a means of inquiry (see Table 2). The one exception from Eisner's list related to the integration of the arts with other disciplines in order to explore a central idea or to solve complex problems using ideas from more than one discipline. This is surprising given the stated intention of the ELs to provide, 'a more holistic organisational structure' and, 'to meet current educational needs by making legitimate connections between disciplines' (DoET, 2002). Similarly the omission of an inquiry view of the role of art making is at odds with one of the major principles claimed to underpin the ELs.

Conclusion

The ELs curriculum, as it concerns the arts, and particularly visual art, encompassed many of the views of the purposes of art education that were described in the literature. The experts who were instrumental in the development of the curriculum were knowledgeable and articulate with regard to a broad range of ideas related to the purposes of art education and most of their views were reflected in the documents. The study did not provide data that could address the reasons for discrepancies where they existed, but one could speculate that the debates such as that described by one of the experts as to whether the arts literacies should be optional or essential may have necessitated compromises.

It is possible that the curriculum's emphasis on utilitarian aspects of the arts may be related to the particular debate mentioned by the same expert which resulted in the inclusion of the arts as a compulsory part of the curriculum in the Communicating Essential along with Being numerate, Being literate, and Being information literate. The emphasis of literacy and numeracy is very much on the application of discipline knowledge and so it may have been necessary to couch descriptions of Being arts literate in similar terms. Indeed it is reasonable to speculate that a concern to have the arts viewed as central to the curriculum led to an over-emphasis on art as a means of communication at the expense of its other roles.



The absence of Eisner's (2000) integrated arts view and Freedman's (2003) inquiry view from the curriculum documents is counter to the stated overarching aims of the curriculum and perhaps reflects the tensions inherent in necessarily relying on experts in particular disciplines to inform the development of such a curriculum. Neither of the experts interviewed articulated these aims.

Although this study concerned one particular arts curriculum the findings have implications for arts educators in other jurisdictions and raise questions worthy of further investigation. Achieving complete consistency between the views of curriculum developers and those conveyed by documents would seem to be a difficult task, possibly influenced by the compromises needed to accommodate competing views and agendas. The difficulty of incorporating interdisciplinary ideas into curricula for specific disciplines is also clearly difficult. Research that examined and documented the process of curriculum development, particularly in diverse areas such as the arts could shed light on this. It would also be of interest to explore in detail the ways in which arts curriculum documents are interpreted by teachers and, in particular, the extent to which such interpretations concur with the intentions of their authors.

Interestingly, shortly after the completion of this study the Tasmanian government, in response to negative publicity arising from difficulties with the implementation of the ELs, announced a 'refined curriculum' structured around more traditional disciplines. The seven subject areas are: English – literacy (including LOTE – Languages Other Than English), Mathematics – numeracy, Science, Society and History, Health and wellbeing, the Arts and Vocational and Applied Learning (VAL). It is claimed that skills in ICTs and thinking are developed in all of these areas. In this structure it could be argued that, as has been documented in other jurisdictions (e.g., Holcomb, 2007), the arts have been returned to the fringes of the curriculum so as to make way for disciplines seen, in contrast to the arts, as inherently academic and cognitive. This perception was given further weight when it was revealed that the arts would not be assessed under the refined curriculum. [However, given the emphasis of art as communication and the omission of most the cognitively oriented views of the aims of art education from the ELs documents, perhaps this is not really much of a shift at all.

References

- Abramson, S., Robinson, R. & Ankenman, K. 1995, 'Project Work With Diverse Students: Adapting curriculum based on the Reggio Emilia Approach', *Childhood Education*, vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 197–202.
- Australian Council for Education and the Arts 2005, '*Principles of Art Education*', Retrieved 16 September, 2005, from http://www.ozco.gov.au/council_priorities/education/contemporary_principles_of_art_education.html
- Bae, J. 2004, 'Learning to Teach Visual Arts in an Early Childhood Classroom: The teacher's role as a guide', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 247–254.
- Burns, R. 1997, *Introduction to Research Methods* (3rd ed.), Australia, Longman.
- Chapman, L. 1978, *Approaches to Art Education*, USA, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Danko-McGee, K. & Slutsky, R. 2003, 'Preparing early childhood teachers to use in the classroom: Inspirations from Reggio Emilia', *Art Education*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 12-18.
- Denscombe, M. 2003, *The Good Research Guide* (2nd Ed.), USA, Open University Press.
- Department of Education Tasmania 2002, *Assessing and Reporting Student Achievement against the Essential Learnings Framework: Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Policy*, Hobart, Australia, Author.
- Department of Education Tasmania 2002, *Essential Learnings Framework 1*, Hobart, Australia, Author.
- Department of Education Tasmania 2003, *Essential Learnings Framework 2*, Hobart, Australia, Author.



- Duncum, P. 2002, 'Clarifying visual culture art education', *Art Education*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 6-11.
- Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (eds.) 1998, *The Hundred Languages of Children, The Reggio Emilia Approach – Advanced Reflections* (2nd ed.), USA, Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Eisner, E. 2002, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, New Haven, London, Yale University Press.
- Fraser, S. 2000, *Authentic Childhood, Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*, Canada, Nelson.
- Freedman, K. 2003, 'The importance of student artistic production to teaching visual culture', *Art Education*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 38-43.
- Gardner, H. 1980, *Artful Scribbles: the Significance of Children's Drawings*, USA, Basic Books.
- Gardner, H. 1985, *Frames of Mind*, USA, Basic Books.
- Gardner, H. 1990, *Art and Human Development*, USA, The Getty Centre for Education and the Arts.
- Holcomb, S. 2007. 'State of the arts', *NEA today*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 34-37.
- Kolbe, U. 2001, *Rapunzel's Supermarket*, Australia, Peppinot Press.
- Koster, J. 2001, *Growing Artists* (2nd ed.), USA, Delmar.
- Lim, B. Y. 2004, 'The magic of the brush and the power of color: Integrating theory into practise of painting in early childhood settings', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 113-119.
- Millikan, J. 2003, *Reflections, Reggio Emilia Principles within Australian Contexts*, Pademelon Press, New South Wales.
- Parr, C., Radford, J. & Snyder, S. 1998, 'Kaleidoscope: Building an Arts-Infused Elementary Curriculum', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 181-188.
- Rauch, K. 2001, 'This land we walk: Children's paintings and writings', in M. Robertson, & R. Gerber, (eds.), *Children's ways of Knowing and Learning through experience*, Victoria, Australia, Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Svendson, J. 2004, *There you go camel: a celebration of young children's art*, Victoria, Australia, Lothian Books.
- Thompson, C. 2005, 'Under construction: Images of the child in art teacher education', *Art Education*, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 18-23.
- Wellington, J. 2000, *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*, New York, Continuum.
- Wright, S. 2003, *The Arts, Young Children, and Learning*, USA, Pearson.
- Wright, S. 2004, *Children, meaning-making and the arts*. NSW, Australia, Pearson Prentice Hall.

About the authors

Sofia Shillito recently graduated, with first class honours, from the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Tasmania. This paper is based on part of her honours research.

Kim Beswick and Margaret Baguley are lecturers at the University of Tasmania in mathematics education and art education respectively, and were co-supervisors of Sofia's honours project.

Contact details

Sofia Shillito, *University of Tasmania, Australia*
PLEASE SUPPLY POSTAL (INSTITUTIONAL) AND EMAIL ADDRESSES

Dr. Kim Beswick
Faculty of Education



University of Tasmania
Launceston Campus
Locked Bag 1307
Launceston, Tasmania 7250
Australia
Kim.Beswick@utas.edu.au

Dr. Margaret Baguley, *University of Tasmania, Australia*
Faculty of Education
University of Tasmania
Launceston Campus
Locked Bag 1307
Launceston, Tasmania 7250
Australia
Margaret.Baguley@utas.edu.au