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The (Im)possibility of Primary Arts Teacher Education

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UNESCO strategies, including the 2006 Road Map for Arts Education, the 2010 Seoul Agenda for Arts Education and the 2024 Framework for Culture and Arts Education, highlight a persistent concern regarding the insufficient emphasis on arts education competencies among pre-service teachers and the challenge of allocating adequate curriculum time in education programmes. In Australia, recent government policies have included the arts as a school curriculum learning area with five subjects: Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. This curriculum aims to ensure that all young Australians experience a comprehensive arts education by providing a framework for teachers to implement sequential learning across the primary school years. Despite these efforts, Australian research tracking the implementation of the arts curriculum within schools and teacher education programmes remains limited, revealing a problematic gap. The present paper examines how an Australian university has attempted to address this gap by providing pre-service teachers with an “Arts Specialism” within a teacher education programme. Using education policy sociology theory, the study explores the contexts of influence, curriculum text production and policy implementation. Critical discourse analysis is used to identify negotiations between influential Australian stakeholders, including university programme leaders who have supported the concept of an arts curriculum specialism. The study addresses themes of arts education content and pedagogy, revealing challenges and opportunities in implementing this specialism and concluding with recommendations for future developments.

Keywords: arts education, arts specialism, curriculum, policy, primary generalist teacher

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(Ne)možnost izobraževanja učiteljev umetnostne vzgoje na razredni stopnji

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≈ Unescove strategije, vključno z *Načrtom za umetnostno vzgojo* iz leta 2006, s *Seulsko agendo – Cilji za razvoj umetnostne vzgoje* iz leta 2010 ter z Okvirom za kulturno-umetnostno vzgojo iz leta 2024, poudarjajo trajno zaskrbljenost glede nezadostnega poudarka na kompetencah s področja umetnostne vzgoje pri bodočih učiteljih in izziv zagotavljanja ustreznega obsega umetnostne vzgoje v učnih načrtih izobraževalnih programov. V Avstraliji so nedavne vladne politike vključile umetnost kot samostojno področje v šolskem učnem načrtu, ki obsega pet predmetov: ples, gledališče, medijske umetnosti, glasbo in likovno umetnost. Cilj tega kurikuluma je zagotoviti, da bodo vsi mladi Avstralci deležni celostne umetnostne vzgoje, in sicer prek ogrinja, ki učiteljem omogoča postopno in povezano učenje umetnosti skozi celotno obdobje osnovne šole. Kljub tem prizadevanjem je na voljo malo raziskav, ki bi spremljale uresničevanje umetnostnega kurikuluma v šolah in programih izobraževanja učiteljev, kar razkriva problematično vrzel. Prispevek obravnava, kako je ena izmed avstralskih univerz skušala to vrzel nasloviti z uvedbo t. i. »specializacije za umetnosti« (Arts Specialism) v okviru programa izobraževanja učiteljev. Z uporabo sociološke teorije edukacijskih politik raziskava preučuje vplivne kontekste, oblikovanje učnih načrtov in uresničevanje politik. Kritična diskurzivna analiza se uporablja za prepoznavanje pogajanj med ključnimi deležniki v Avstraliji, vključno z vodji univerzitetnih programov, ki podpirajo koncept specializacije za umetnostni kurikulum. Študija obravnava teme, povezane z vsebino in didaktiko umetnostne vzgoje, razkriva izzive in priložnosti pri uvajanju te specializacije ter zaključuje s priporočili za nadaljnji razvoj.

Ključne besede: umetnostna vzgoja, specializacija za umetnost, učni načrt, politika, razredni učitelj splošnega profila

Introduction: The context for primary arts teacher education

The present paper focuses on arts education and the competencies of pre-service primary teachers in the teaching and learning context of an Australian university teacher education programme. We acknowledge that other nations within the Asia-Pacific region have developed arts and cultural policies that include arts education provision, for example in Japan (Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, 2024), Korea (Korea Arts & Culture Education Service [KACES], 2024), Malaysia (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2021) and Singapore (National Arts Council Singapore, 2023). Here we focus on Australia, highlighting close post-colonial policy ties with the UK, the USA, Canada and New Zealand. Working within and beyond the university context, the study is informed by our experience in arts education, curriculum development and teacher education as education policy. Framed by national policies, we examine a key global problem facing the arts in initial teacher education, i.e., limited arts education curriculum time, which results in pre-service teachers being unprepared to teach the arts. The paper addresses an overarching research question:

How has an Australian university addressed the gap in primary pre-service teachers' arts education competencies through the development of an arts specialism?*

*(*the words 'specialism' and 'specialisation' are used interchangeably according to their alternative uses in references to published documents).*

Utilising a qualitative methodology, the theoretical paper is structured to include ethical considerations, background literature providing an overview of relevant writings, findings, discussion and conclusion.

Method

The study is grounded in the education policy sociology theory articulated by Stephen J. Ball (2005). In particular, we draw upon Ball's analytic framework for policy (Brennan, 2011; Meiners, 2017), which includes "three contexts of policy-making" (Ball, 1993, p. 16): the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of policy practice (Figure 1).

Figure 1*Three contexts of policy-making (after Ball, 1993)*

These contexts provide a practical conceptual framework to examine how an Australian university sought to address a gap in primary teacher arts education competencies by developing an arts curriculum specialisation titled “Arts Specialism”.

Development of the new Arts Specialism was undertaken with the commitment of university educators and leaders who supported the integration of arts education within teacher education curriculum. Stakeholder interests were also vital contextual influences, including the perspectives and support of various key players such as policymakers, organisations and community members.

The theoretical framework provides insights into the interplay of such influences and policy texts upon the development and production of the Arts Specialism text, and the implementation of this initiative (see Figure 2: *The Arts Specialism curriculum text*).

The context of influence: Primary arts teacher education literature

This section provides an overview of the literature concerning broader forces shaping primary arts teacher education and their impact on pre-service primary teacher competencies for arts teaching.

National and state education policies, alongside sociopolitical contexts, significantly influence arts education. These influences originate in neoliberalism, a global political ideology that shifted the focus in the 1970s from social

democratic interventions to a free-market economy emphasising individual choice, personal responsibility and private enterprise (Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1993, cited in Sellar, 2005). By the 1990s, the Australian government and others had restructured education policy towards national curricula that prioritised workplace skills, vocational education and training (Meiners, 2014). This transition also led to corporate management models in education aimed at raising teaching and learning standards (Hill & Kumar, 2008).

In the early 2000s, curriculum and economic rationalisation at the university of focus reduced primary teacher arts education to just one of 32 primary programme courses. Aligned with the new *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, this course included five subjects: dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2015). The reduction in offerings at Australian universities is well documented, with arts education academics expressing concern over the feasibility of covering these vast disciplines in a single course (Barton et al., 2013).

Earlier concerns had prompted global policy initiatives supporting the integration of arts education into curricula as a recognised field of theory and practice. These initiatives reflected a broad acknowledgment of the arts in fostering cognitive and emotional development, creativity, critical thinking and cultural literacy (Gardner, 1993). Notable developments occurred with the UK's *Arts in Schools Project* (National Curriculum Council, 1990), the USA's *Core Arts Standards* (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 1994) and Australia's *Statements and Profiles for the Arts* (Australian Education Council, 1994), each affirming arts education within a balanced curriculum.

Subsequent research publications, including the USA's *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999) and *Gifts of the Muse* (McCarthy et al., 2001), framed collaboration between artists, educators, policymakers, researchers and arts managers as essential for advocacy in arts education. Research also includes Australia's *Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools* (Bryce, 2004) and the USA's *National Endowment for the Arts* project (Catterall, 2012), alongside the Dana Foundation's *Learning, Arts, and the Brain* report (Gazzaniga, 2008).

Entering the twenty-first century, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) led strategies for arts education, including the *Lisbon Road Map* (UNESCO, 2006), the *Seoul Agenda* (UNESCO, 2010) and the *Abu Dhabi Framework* (UNESCO, 2024). These publications are supported by research from Harvard's *Project Zero* (Seidel et al., 2009) and others focusing on quality arts education (Bamford, 2018). Australia's *National Cultural Policy* highlights the importance of arts education, affirming that it

fosters creative skills and cultural participation, improves literacy and numeracy outcomes, and enhances social and emotional wellbeing, particularly among disadvantaged youth (Australian Government, 2023). Despite this acknowledgment, practical implementation often falls short due to systemic issues such as insufficient time allocation and lack of specialised teacher training (Robinson & Aronica, 2009).

Problems: ‘Time’ and ‘competencies’

Despite advocacy and evidence, challenges persist regarding the capabilities of arts teachers. A mismatch between policy intentions and enactment realities is exacerbated by limited time for the arts. Barton et al. (2013) note a disparity between the well-researched benefits of arts education and the time allocated for meaningful engagement in arts practice. Persistent concerns emphasise insufficient attention to arts education competencies among pre-service teachers (PSTs) and the challenge of integrating adequate time for arts education within teacher education programmes (Ijdens & Wagner, 2018).

An early Australian government inquiry sought to improve classroom teachers’ arts teaching skills (Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee, 1995) and further concerns were raised at an Australian arts education symposium (Mooney et al., 2006). Ijdens and Wagner (2018) highlight the global urgency, stating that experts in 36 countries had indicated a pressing need to improve competencies for those teaching arts in primary and secondary schools.

Teachers frequently struggle to integrate arts education effectively due to inadequate preparation and lack of resources, signalling broader challenges related to curriculum time pressures. Australia’s participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and subsequent policies, such as the *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) (Independent Education Union of Australia, 2013), has resulted in increased time demands on schools, adversely affecting teachers’ self-efficacy in arts education (Garvis et al., 2011).

Research highlights insufficient curriculum time allocated for arts education within teacher education programmes (Chapman et al., 2018; Ijdens et al., 2018; Shaw, 2020). Thomson (2025) notes that the promised broad and balanced curriculum often fails to include adequate arts education, resulting in diminished opportunities compared to other curriculum areas. Studies indicate that PSTs typically receive minimal exposure to arts pedagogy, impacting their ability to effectively teach the arts (McCaughy & Hodges Kulinna, 2008).

A European study indicated that primary teacher education programmes often marginalise arts education, resulting in PSTs receiving inadequate preparation for implementing arts curricula (Baidak et al., 2009). In England, the *Researching the Arts in Primary Schools* project highlighted similar concerns regarding inequitable access to arts education, calling for enhanced arts knowledge within initial teacher education (Thomson et al., 2025).

The Australian curriculum aims for all primary students to experience sequential arts learning (Meiners & Garrett, 2015); however, as indicated earlier, recent policies have diminished opportunities for arts specialisation. Ewing (2020) notes that inadequate teacher education in the arts has left many teachers feeling unprepared to teach the arts. The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) have called for arts education to be an area of specialisation within initial teacher education programmes, emphasising the need for increased time allocation (NAAE, 2022). The Australian government's proposal to support specialist in-school arts education programmes may address some challenges, but evidence suggests that successful implementation is more likely when generalist classroom teachers lead arts implementation rather than relying on visiting artists (Snook, 2012).

In summary, while the literature identifies the value of arts education, its enactment often suffers from inconsistent support and inadequate resources. The introduction of an arts specialisation at an Australian university aims to address this gap. The following section discusses the development of the 2019 text *The Arts Specialism*, which introduced a new curriculum offering comprising four courses.

The context of policy text production: Use of critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis

This section illuminates contextual considerations in order to uncover the power dynamics involved in the development and implementation of the Arts Specialism as a policy text. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as a method for examining this text and associated documents from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), as well as professional associations such as the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE), which have informed policy text production.

The methodology sheds light on analysis of the processes that rationalised and finalised the Arts Specialism text, including decisions regarding its

content. The text can be regarded as determined content contributing to policy enactment, whereby university lecturers and pre-service teachers (PSTs) become active participants. The Arts Specialism text and related documents exemplify “both text and action” as components of a broader policy agenda (Gerrard et al., 2013, p. 63). Following Foucault (1971, cited in Meiners, 2014, p. 225), the curriculum text merits scrutiny to clarify explicit and implicit meanings that may be interpreted in various ways. Taylor et al. (1997) assert that policy is both process and product. The creation of the new curriculum text involved generating numerous micro-texts through collaborative efforts. Analysis is framed by the research question: How has an Australian university addressed the gap in primary PSTs’ arts education competencies through the development of an arts specialism?

Using CDA, attention is given to discourses embedded in the text’s content and structure, as well as the broader sociopolitical factors influencing its construction (Mills, 2004). Discourse shapes understandings of actions among individuals engaged in communication. CDA is applied as a method to critically analyse power dynamics within written texts, requiring an examination of the discursive interactions between speakers, writers or readers. The analysis operates on three levels – description (text), interpretation (discourse practice) and explanation (context) – and is used to facilitate an understanding of interconnections that create the whole (Janks, 1997). The curriculum text construction process involves a series of value-laden choices regarding inclusion or exclusion, prioritisation and marginalisation, all influenced by arts education discourses. This exemplifies a “two-way interactive, top-down and bottom-up approach to policy development” (Taylor et al., 1997, pp. 24–25).

CDA reveals how language and discourse shape education policies and practices, highlighting the roles of influential actors. The production of the Arts Specialism text necessitates consideration of various associated documents, including formal institutional policy publications and stakeholder communications, as explained below.

Policy formulation: Establishing an argument

Government documents provide critical top-down policy drivers guiding and controlling neoliberal education reform. An academic team member leveraged these documents to formulate an argument for the suite of arts courses that comprise the Arts Specialism. The report *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE], 2014) stated that higher education providers must equip all primary PSTs with at least one subject specialisation, emphasising areas such as science, mathematics or

language. Although the arts were not explicitly mentioned, subsequent guidance suggested opportunities for specialisations in areas such as music and physical education, thus providing a rationale for the Arts Specialism.

Additional policy documents reinforced the necessity for specialist teachers in primary education due to increasing curriculum demands and the need for strong content knowledge (AGDE, 2014). The *Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group* (TEMAG) emphasised the importance of specialisations, thereby bolstering the case for an Arts Specialism.

In this authoritative context, NAAE leaders approached the ACDE, seeking a collaborative interpretation of TEMAG recommendations and requesting support for developing an arts specialisation. Communication between ACDE and AITSL executive leadership indicated that decisions were informed by a government minister's expectations regarding primary specialisations.

Curriculum design: Creating the Arts Specialism

In subsequent phases, a university team member collaborated with NAAE to draft standards for the arts primary specialisation, which are crucial for developing course content and pedagogical strategies. This document articulated the necessary outcomes for a primary specialisation, emphasising “expert content knowledge,” “pedagogical knowledge” and “highly effective classroom teaching” (NAAE, 2017). This labour for rationalising an arts specialisation won university programme leaders' support for the development of the four courses comprising the Arts Specialism. These followed the established arts education foundation course, compulsory for all primary PSTs, which introduced the five arts curriculum subjects. A complex challenge was presented: how to include five subjects in four courses. With considerable consultation, a suite of four courses was developed as indicated in the Arts Specialism curriculum text (Figure 2). Course texts were written by the lead staff member in consultation with the university team, each with varying expertise in the arts subjects. The curriculum thus aligned with government requirements and aimed to prepare generalist teachers with an arts specialisation. Support was garnered from various professional arts education organisations, as demonstrated in letters from the *Australian Dance Council*, *Australian Teachers of Media*, *Art Education Australia*, *Visual Arts Education South Australia*, the *South Australian Department of Education* and South Australia's youth arts organisation *Carclew*.

In order to encourage enrolment, the Arts Specialism was required to be articulated in a summary one-page text for PSTs (Figure 2).

CDA and the Arts Specialism curriculum text

Figure 2

The Arts Specialism curriculum text

Arts Specialism

"Arts experiences cultivate and nourish children and young people's creative, intellectual and communication skills and capacities, enabling them to participate as contemporary Australian citizens."
Carclew Guiding Principle

In the Australian Curriculum, The Arts learning area draws together related but distinct art forms. The Arts specialism will prepare you to develop special interests and build knowledge, skills and confidence to plan, teach and inspire children across the five arts subjects (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts) in early childhood sites OR primary schools.

Building upon the foundation arts education course, you will take four courses over the program and an elective focusing on a specific arts subject. Across the courses you will develop an in-depth knowledge of diverse approaches to the arts including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and traditional cultural knowledge. You will develop understanding of the arts' contribution to culture, society and the economy as well as its place in education.

The specialism will provide you with experiences of 'making and responding' in each art form:

Arts specialism 1: you will study each of the five arts in contemporary audio-visual cultures including the use of digital technologies to develop a visual arts portfolio and media arts presentation.

Arts specialisms 2 & 3: focus first on dance and music, followed by drama and visual arts to help you gain mastery of these subjects for planning and teaching via projects and presentations.

Arts specialism 4: through creative processes you will develop your interests and skills in one or more of the arts by developing a performance, presentation or display with plans for high quality arts education with a specific age range.

(Final Specialism Brochure, April, 2019)

The following section summarises the use of CDA, providing an account of recurrent themes, discourses and negotiations surrounding the Arts Specialism curriculum text. Reading against the text counterbalances reading with the text (Janks, 1997), as follows.

Aiming to stimulate PSTs' interest in opting for the Arts Specialism, the arts team agreed to include a quote as a header from *Carclew*, the leading local youth arts organisation, as above.

The quote includes the active verbs "cultivate", "nourish" and "participate", connected with the nouns "children", "young people" and "citizens". These are indicative of a discursive educative theme, which may resonate with PSTs' interests and aspirations as beginning teachers.

The introductory paragraph then provides a brief explanation of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* in order to directly communicate the intention

that students will be prepared to plan for teaching. A further active verb “inspire” is associated with “children” and may stimulate desire, enthusiasm and excitement about the prospect of arts teaching in schools.

The second paragraph then outlines the structure of the Arts Specialism. Key terms such as “in-depth knowledge”, “diverse approaches” and “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts” signal an inclusive approach in curriculum developments that support PSTs’ understanding of Australia’s indigenous heritage. Similarly, the final sentence of this paragraph locates learners’ understanding of the arts beyond education and the curriculum to wider contexts, with the terms “culture”, “society” and “the economy”.

The feature of modality is used as a tool for textual analysis pertaining to “claims to authority [...] of the writer/s [...]” (Thomas, 2008, p. 326). The use of “will” as a textual feature of modality in this text is common in the Australian curriculum and establishes a tone of authority that may evoke both confidence and apprehension among prospective PSTs. “Will” is futures focused, and reading with the text (Janks, 1997), the repeated use of “will” may indicate a convincing interpretation that suggests the learning intended by selecting this specialism (“will prepare you”; “you will develop”, “the specialism will provide you”, “you will study”, “you will develop”). This combination of textual features of repetition and modality may point to a strongly affirmative text. However, reading against the text, the repetitive use of “will” may indicate a declarative tone and authority. Other modal verbs such as “may/might”, “must” or “shall/should” are not used. A reading of the verb “will” may lead to an interpretation of assertive compliance with the Arts Specialism content. An alternative reading could cause concern for generalist teachers who do not feel they have the ability, confidence or resources to embark upon an Arts Specialism.

An important point regarding active experiential learning is given emphasis through its location in a single separate line: “The specialism will provide you with experiences of ‘making and responding’ in each art form.” Active experiential learning across art forms is emphasised here. These terms are used as active verbs in the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* and indicate that this specialisation option will involve embodied arts practices, rather than passive learning experiences.

The remaining three sentences then provide a succinct overview of the agreed resolution for the four Arts Specialism courses, signalling first the “study” component, followed by nouns such as “mastery”, “interests” and “skills”, which indicate the empowerment of learners leading to their agency as planners and teachers of “high quality arts education” with a specific age range. Other key nouns flag a wide range of agreed assessment modes that would be

experienced during the Arts Specialism, including “portfolio”, “project”, “presentation”, “performance” and “display”. The presence of these terms provides scope and flexibility for interpretation by staff members who may be responsible for implementation of the four courses. In addition, the key terms “digital technologies” and “creative processes” are indicative of an agreed practice-based approach to the Arts Specialism.

The context of policy practice: Towards effective implementation

The developed courses needed to align with university protocols for documentation and approval. Effective implementation of the Arts Specialism requires continual planning for resource allocation, including staffing and costs. The key pedagogical principle emphasises experiential learning across the five arts subjects, ensuring that students engage deeply with the curriculum with courses outlined as follows:

Course 1: Becoming a Primary Teacher with an Arts Specialisation aims to cover all of the arts, so that all students will have interests included. A focus on knowledge and practices examines the nature and presence of each of the five arts in diverse contemporary audio-visual cultures, including the use of digital technologies for deepening content and pedagogical knowledge in visual arts and media arts.

Course 2: Dance and Music: Social Dreaming reflects collaborative experiences inherent in dance and music practices, deepening and extending students’ traditional and contemporary dance and music knowledge, along with a futures orientation for the implementation of indigenous dance and music for all young Australians.

Course 3: Drama and Visual Arts: Story Landscapes deepens traditional and contemporary drama and visual arts subject knowledge, with active and collaborative drama and visual arts methodologies and strategies for the school setting.

Course 4: Production, Presentation and Audience in Arts Education involves a collaborative project, focusing on content knowledge in the arts with production processes integrating various arts domains, culminating in a final performance, presentation or display, supported by documentation.

The courses can be delivered in six-week blocks for each arts subject. Depending on staffing, it is also possible to alternate them weekly or fortnightly, or to integrate them weekly or in blocks. The goal is to achieve mastery of the subjects for the school setting, with assessments including projects in dance,

drama, media arts, music and visual arts. Assessments across the courses were scaffolded to provide opportunities for multiple modes of reflective practice, including oral presentations, project planning, implementation during placements and final group presentations to peers and guests, culminating in individual evaluation essays.

The arts education team faced initial hurdles in managing the coordination, teaching and assessment of the four new courses while maintaining the demands of existing programmes. Careful negotiation between programme leaders and the teaching team was essential for effective costing and timetabling. The arts team developed four Arts Specialism courses, each lasting 12 weeks, aligned with their arts expertise and incorporating support from casual staff.

The onset of COVID-19 during the first year required a shift from Course 2 on-campus classes to an online format. This transition led to the development of robust external learning tasks, garnering positive feedback from PSTs. The arts team focused on innovative strategies to deliver quality online arts education, designing community-based arts projects for fourth-year students to facilitate engagement in arts teaching practices and to bridge the gap between on-campus and remote learning environments.

Courses 2 and 4 allowed students to engage in school-based projects focused on planning, implementing and practising teaching in primary classrooms. Feedback emphasised the depth of learning experiences provided through these projects. For example, one PST noted:

Creating and implementing the arts project in a school context [...] provided me with further teaching experience and insight into the complexity involved in planning and implementing an arts project. (PST1)

Ongoing assessment and refinement of the Arts Specialism based on feedback and outcomes were integral to the courses. For example, Course 4 established a biannual partnership with a children's arts festival, providing PSTs with real-world experiences as teaching artists alongside professionals, as one PST reflected:

Through my involvement in the festival, I saw the benefits of arts education for children first-hand [...] active participation in the arts fosters deep learning, personal growth and a valuable sense of belonging. (PST2)

Each course allocated 120 hours for PSTs, translating to a total of 600 hours of arts education across the four-course suite, marking a significant

innovation in incorporating arts education into existing teacher education curricula.

The next section summarises findings regarding the three contexts of influence, policy text production and policy practice, with implementation aimed at addressing gaps in primary PST arts education competencies through the development of the Arts Specialism.

Findings

The literature reviewed by Ijdens and Wagner (2018), influential to the Australian context, identifies a paucity of training in arts education. There is an absence of opportunities for developing competencies for highly effective teaching within primary arts teacher education (Ewing, 2020) and insufficient time within the broader curriculum offered by universities (Barton et al., 2013), asserted as follows:

A lot of institutions around our country do not dedicate time to arts education to pre-service teachers. At the tertiary level, very little is done towards preparing these teachers to teach the arts in the classroom. (Newton-Turner, 2023, cited in Lei, para. 2, 2023)

The Arts Specialism initiated at this university attempts to counter this situation, empowering generalist primary teachers through transformative school-based experiences.

CDA, used as a method for examining the text and associated documents, provides insight into the development and production of the Arts Specialism as a policy document. Significant themes within the Arts Specialism text are revealed, particularly concerning the content areas of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, as well as approaches to pedagogy. The Arts Specialism curriculum text outlines the programme's structure and objectives, emphasising the importance of fostering creativity and engagement among students. Analysis shows the interplay of text and context, providing a critical account of carefully managed negotiations surrounding the Arts Specialism.

The Arts Specialism was introduced from 2019. Its implementation coincided with disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted face-to-face delivery in Australia's teacher education programmes. PST voices illustrate positive responses to early stages of implementing Arts Specialism courses. One PST shared:

My journey as an arts educator [...] has been profoundly transformative, challenging my personal and professional perspectives. (PST₃)

Despite the various challenges identified, the phased implementation of the Arts Specialism courses over four years alleviated some pressure on the arts education team. The immediate introduction of the first course required collaboration between Media Arts and Visual Arts staff, as these art forms primarily drew PSTs into the Arts Specialism. The impact of teamwork is illustrated in the reflection of one PST:

I have grown an understanding that art forms rarely stand-alone [...] often a rich tapestry of multiple arts disciplines. (PST4)

This course also included excursions to learn about art gallery education programmes, highlighting the value of industry partnerships in successful course implementation (ACARA, 2015). Considerable effort was devoted to collaborating with other educational and arts partners to make a rational and well-supported argument to support the realisation of the Arts Specialism text and enactment of the four courses. This resulted in PSTs developing competencies in required standards for expert arts content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and effective teaching.

Discussion

Implementation of an Arts Specialism in teacher education programmes presents numerous challenges and, as noted in the literature, “much responsibility falls on the shoulders of teacher education programs” (Barton et al., 2013, p. 78).

Struggling with equitable time allocations for each of the arts subjects continues as an ongoing contestation within and beyond the university context. Widespread consultation for a new school arts curriculum included significant contentious debate (Meiners, 2014). Ultimately, this curriculum settlement was agreed for the arts as a learning area with five subjects, including the new term “media arts” replacing “media”. This school curriculum settlement perhaps pacified strains for power within the university arts education team, who at the time rejoiced in the success of winning a new arts curriculum (O’Toole, 2013). Rather than assertions for positioning art forms, this paper shows the value of university arts team negotiations and deliberations, centred on language that would embed and communicate the essential practices necessary for the development of core expert content knowledge and pedagogical skills to develop competencies.

The successful organisation and integration of four courses for an Arts Specialism into the teacher education programme signifies a commitment to

expertise in arts education and progress toward equipping generalist teachers with the skills and knowledge they require for effective arts teaching (Alexander et al., 1992). The initiative aligns with government requirements and national arts education curriculum content, enabling PSTs to explore interdisciplinary connections and enhancing their effectiveness as arts educators:

It has highlighted my strengths for working with children and intensified the confidence I have for being an arts specialist teacher. (PST5)

The Arts Specialism has provided specialised training, fostering PSTs' pedagogical skills for implementing culturally responsive pedagogies. One PST reflected:

This experience has not only given me the confidence and skills to teach quality music and dance education but has also transformed my understanding of the arts' value in children's education. (PST6)

PST feedback illustrates the transformative impact of the arts (Bamford, 2018), noting the joy derived from inclusive arts-based methods, referring to course coordinators and teachers who model passion and enthusiasm in each arts subject, and providing some resonance with the debate on evolving teacher professionalism integral to neophyte teacher identity (Saqipi & Vogrinc, 2021). PSTs identify the deep content and pedagogical knowledge they are gaining for highly effective teaching, bridging the theory-practice gap in fostering supportive classroom environments for culturally responsive teaching (Melchior, 2011).

Sustaining professional teaching partnerships with current educators is crucial for quality teacher education programmes. For instance, one course coordinator collaborated with a dance educator and a music educator to develop coursework, tutorials and assessments, including weekly three-hour tutorials, online lectures and various learning tasks. With limited resources, the team sought innovative approaches to enhance expertise in emerging curriculum areas, prioritising the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. An *Aboriginal Content in Undergraduate Programs* (ACUP) grant facilitated a partnership with a prominent First Nations dance artist, aiding in the incorporation of First Nations dance into the curriculum, which is significant for social justice in Australia (Rowlands et al., 2022).

However, a persistent challenge remains: ensuring sufficient time for PSTs to deepen expertise while developing agency and confidence in planning. Opportunities for self-selected project sites, such as youth justice centres and primary schools, encourage PSTs to engage with communities aligned with their values, professional aspirations and learning as future teachers (Aliu &

Kaçaniku, 2023). Feedback highlighted the value of applying theoretical learning in practice and establishing ongoing collaborations with schools, teachers and arts organisations. Regional and remote communities, which often lack arts projects, have particularly benefited from PSTs conducting projects on-site, with thirty recent regional arts education projects receiving positive participant feedback.

Conclusion: Challenges and opportunities

The present paper concludes with the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating an arts specialism into primary teacher education, informed by education policy sociology theory and critical discourse analysis. An earlier Australian government report noted the insufficient preparation of generalist primary teachers for teaching arts, but made no recommendations (Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee, 1995). This has remained a concern in and beyond Australia.

The establishment of an arts specialisation represents a significant advancement in bridging the gap between policy and practice in the context of Australian primary teacher education. Approved by the AITSL, the Arts Specialism provides a pioneering model for universities seeking to improve arts education. Despite challenges such as limited curriculum time, curriculum development with stakeholder involvement offers promising opportunities for progressing generalist teacher competencies.

In conclusion, time constraints in teacher education programmes and broader demands on educators present significant challenges for the Arts Specialism. These pressures affect programme leaders and PST participants, who must balance the specialism with other curriculum requirements, while changes in industrial relations laws complicate support for casual staff, potentially impacting the enactment of quality primary arts teacher education.

Looking ahead, opportunities for expansion include implementation of arts specialisms across more institutions. Enhanced support from policymakers and educational leaders, along with arts industry collaboration, can further facilitate the development and implementation of the Arts Specialism. Additionally, two key mixed-methods research focus areas are identified: a university study tracing the professional journeys of Arts Specialism graduates, and nationwide longitudinal research tracking successful school-based arts curriculum implementation.

Ongoing dialogue between policy, practice and research leaders is essential for addressing challenges and opportunities, transforming the perceived

impossibility of primary arts teacher education into real possibilities for advancing arts education in the preparation of primary generalist teachers.

Ethical statement

The research was carried out following ethical standards for pedagogical research as articulated by the Australian Association for Research in Education (2024), with the rights to privacy, dignity and sensitivities of research populations respected. Consent from University of South Australia contributors was obtained to use evaluative and reflective comments, illustrating responses conveying the voices of university PSTs. All identifying information is removed from evaluative extracts with identities protected through codes. Document analysis did not require ethics approval, as no human participants were named or identified.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no financial or conflicts of interest to declare.

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