

Arts as Inclusion: Connecting Learning Through Arts Languages in Upper Elementary

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Abstract

Much research explores how the arts can support inclusion in the classroom, but this is usually when they are taught as separate subject areas, such as music or visual arts, for children. This paper outlines a unique approach in the classroom using the arts as a connecting language in all subject areas. Known as Arts Immersion, this approach was used with an upper elementary class located in a low socio-economic area in South-East Queensland, Australia. The researcher - a specialist arts educator with professional experience as an actor and musician - and generalist (classroom) teacher worked together in a co-mentoring professional relationship combining their experience and expertise. Findings showed that the arts can foster inclusivity in the classroom using time-efficient strategies that support teaching practice and maximise outcomes for a diverse range of students.

Introduction

While teachers aim to support all their students, this can be a difficult task when students' abilities and behaviours vary greatly (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Student diversity can range from those who struggle to meet year-level expectations (Eglinton et al., 2017) to those who need further extension as they exceed year-level expectations (Winkler et al., 2021). To address these challenges there is continued support for developing trust through student-teacher relationships to create a welcoming class environment which is essential for student growth (Jusslin & Østern, 2020) and promoting wellbeing and belonging in schools to address the needs of a diverse range of students (Ritchie & Gaulter, 2021). It is therefore crucial to continue to explore ways in which the aspiration of inclusion can be achieved.

One such way is through the arts. Evidence in the scholarly literature supports the importance of the arts in students' lives, particularly for socially inclusive practices (Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018). For example, it has been shown that dance can provide opportunities for social connection, confidence-building, and meaningful engagement with learning to support the psychological wellbeing of students who are newly arrived migrants (Ritchie & Gaulter, 2021), and that theatrical improvisation can provide positive outcomes for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Mendez-Martinez & Fernandez-Rio, 2021). Barton (2019) also argued that because the arts provide opportunities for students to express their personal, social and cultural identities and connect with others, they should therefore be valued alongside other learning. These reports show that arts education can foster inclusivity in the classroom by supporting teachers in addressing students' diverse needs, yet the arts continue to be marginalised in schools (Ewing, 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to show how learning in and through the arts can foster inclusivity in the classroom using time-efficient strategies that support teaching practice and maximise outcomes for a diverse range of students. The research is built on a broad understanding of inclusion, exploring how schools should support *all* students through inclusive practices (Aris et al., 2019). This research is based on an Arts Immersion approach which uses arts languages as domains of learning and as vehicles to access other learning (Chapman, 2018). Arts Immersion refers to “using the Arts as the purposeful medium through which enhanced learning occurs across disciplines to inform mutual understandings” (Chapman, 2018, p. 9). This approach acknowledges that language is not merely word-based (Eisner, 2005) and that student diversity implies a need for diversity in learning. Accordingly, the research question is: What types of inclusion can occur as a result of an Arts Immersion approach?

Evidence From Literature: Arts-Based Approaches that Enhance Inclusivity

Classrooms are diverse, in terms of background, abilities, and socio-cultural needs, so it is important that teachers keep up to date with different approaches that support all children's learning. Literature suggests that the arts can play a key role in developing inclusive teaching practices. Islam and Leshkova (2017) noted that the auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic senses of students with special needs can be stimulated by the multi-sensory quality of music "which in children incites joy, pleasure, sense of belonging and self-confidence" (p. 4). Gross (2021) explained that visual art experiences can provide opportunities for individual expression and community belonging that address the needs of secondary school students with emotional disabilities. Despite the reported benefits of inclusive arts-based teaching strategies, teachers may face barriers in their application.

There are challenges facing teachers in implementing differentiated teaching strategies to cater to various student needs in their diverse classrooms. Lavania and Nor (2020) noted that the two barriers most frequently named by teachers when providing differentiated instruction (DI) were lack of knowledge regarding DI and time constraints. This paper addresses these challenges for teachers by proposing strategies for building teacher capacity in arts-based differentiated instruction which is both time-efficient and inclusive. We now turn to the theoretical framing of our research, based on Dewey's view of learning as a social and interactive process because this enables inclusion and addresses the individual learning and development needs of all students in the class.

Theoretical Framing of the Research

In this paper, Dewey's (1916) concept of learning as a social and interactive process is the theoretical lens through which an Arts Immersion approach will be explored as a means for inclusively addressing student needs and fostering individual development. Analysis will be based on three aspects of inclusion that are derived from Dewey's concept of learning: interactive inclusion, social inclusion, and experiential inclusion. Interactive inclusion in relation to learning refers to student involvement in active inquiry based on interaction with the curriculum to construct knowledge. This is underpinned by the notion of students as active learners, exploring options and extrapolating knowledge and understanding to other contexts. Social inclusion in relation to learning refers to student involvement in collaborative critical and creative thinking. This draws on peer and teacher support in learning as well as group recognition of student capacity in terms of knowledge and skills, and the value this represents to the class community. Experiential inclusion in relation to learning refers to student involvement in the embodied and lived experience of learning. This builds on the idea of kinaesthetic learning where mind and body are inseparable in the process of knowing, and students engage with and reflect on 'hands-on' learning.

Materials and Methods

The study explored in this paper is an intrinsic (or descriptive) case study, selected for its unique and individual merit (Creswell, 2020), and its ability to allow a rich description of the bounded system being explored (Schwandt & Gates, 2017). It was based on four cycles of Critical Participatory Action Research (Kemmis et al., 2014) over a period of nine months in which a generalist teacher and specialist arts teacher worked together in an upper elementary classroom (Year 6, aged 11-12). Multimodal data reflecting multiple perspectives was collected to provide thick description through crystallisation (Tracy, 2010). In this process, the multiple data sources included qualitative data in the form of audio and video recordings (Year 6 class activities as well as individual interviews and focus groups with participants), whole-class student feedback sessions, specialist arts teacher journal, and examples of student work (written as well as audio and video recorded). This qualitative data reflects the perspectives of the Year 6 generalist teacher (Chelsea - pseudonym), specialist arts teacher (the researcher), critical friend, and the two Year 6 students who are the focus of this paper. The process of researcher planning within the action research cycles is illustrated in Figure 1.

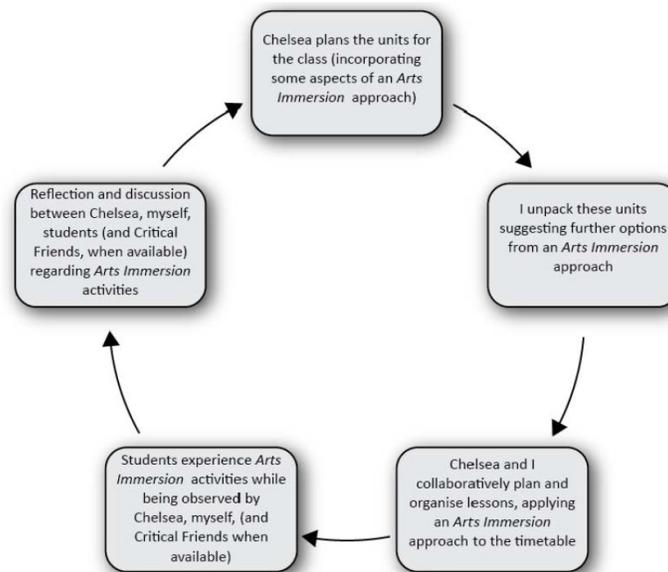


Figure 1. Action Research Cycle for the Project.

From this iterative process, a compilation of Arts Immersion activities was created to support Chelsea's planning using the relevant content descriptors and elaborations from the Australian Curriculum - the Arts – F-10 Version 8.4 (ACARA, n.d.). A table of Arts Immersion activities was constructed for each action research cycle, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Cycle 1 Arts Immersion activities: Allocations to learning areas

Subject	Activities
English	<i>High School Musical Medley</i> (Gerrard & Nevil, 2005) performance: (drama and music)- compiled class script <i>Nanberry</i> (French, 2011): drama- Hot Seating; Commentated Mime in pairs; Status Walks; and Boal Circle
Science	Earth and Space (effects of sudden geological changes and extreme weather events on the earth's surface): drama- mime and tableaux- effects on the earth's surface; visual art- replica of erupted volcano; media arts- simulate student's experience of an earthquake
Geography	Latitude and longitude: music- ukuleles Biomes: visual art- class mural; drama- postcards
History	Australian parliamentary system: drama- students memorise and perform my play; media arts- students film and edit this play (casting by Chelsea)

Selection of Participants

A low socioeconomic status, coeducational, and culturally diverse primary school was chosen to explore how an Arts Immersion approach could address inclusivity. As such, Sunny Mountain Primary School (pseudonym) included children from migrant and refugee backgrounds and children born in Australia. The three teachers involved in the research were the Year 6 generalist teacher, a specialist arts teacher (researcher) and a critical friend - a Year 3 teacher at the school who agreed to observe the research, providing an honest and confidential critique (Kemmis et al., 2014). While the whole Year 6 class participated in the research, this paper will concentrate on two students from this cohort. These two focus students were chosen in this instance to determine how an Arts Immersion approach might satisfy the needs of two students with very different profiles: a female student identified as high achieving and exceeding expectations for this year level, and a male student identified as having learning difficulties and achieving below expectations for this year level (see Appendix A).

Analytical Approach

Data was analysed in terms of the three aspects of the theoretical lens– interactive inclusion, social inclusion, and experiential inclusion– to determine the extent to which these categories were evident in student experiences of learning. This was followed by focused coding regarding emerging themes through deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While acknowledging that the learning experiences drew on all three aspects of inclusion, specific aspects of these experiences were used as focus points for analysis. When categorising data as interactive, social, or experiential aspects of inclusion, consideration was given to teacher facilitation and observation of learning, students’ experience of the learning, and the emerging outcomes generated by teacher and student perspectives.

Results

The results will be presented first as two individual focus student vignettes and then as a combined record to show areas of commonality. Most students in the class were involved in the same Arts Immersion activities but Xavier was not always present, as he was engaged in a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) with an allocated school officer in another school room.

Focus Student 1: Zoe

The class engaged in several activities involving a variety of tasks and stimuli in which English, music, visual arts, geographical changes in science, and media arts were involved using an Arts Immersion approach. Each example is explained accordingly. Zoe’s engagement in these activities is reflected in her responses.

Examples of Zoe’s work

The following examples show the quality of Zoe’s responses to learning tasks. In the example below, students were asked to draw the four stages of an earthquake based on information provided by the teacher.

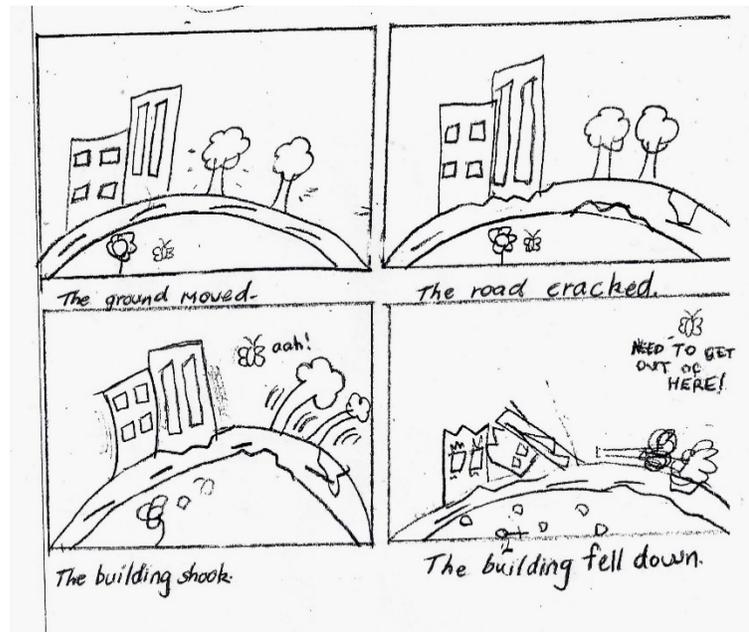


Figure 2. Graphic Representations of Four Stages of the Earthquake.

Students were provided with a photo stimulus showing an old train track in a forest and asked to write a story based on this photo. While most of the class initially struggled to begin writing from a photo stimulus, Zoe began writing straight away using an imaginative approach.

‘This has been an old train track for eternity and the imaginative true queen will be able to control it with her mind.’

A recording of instrumental music was played for the class and their task was to write a story based on this music stimulus. Zoe’s story based on the music stimulus included direct speech and themes from the *High School Musical* performance.

‘Everyone hated him, because he wouldn’t let anyone use him. He sprinted down the steps and onto the stage. Jake got his black, boring yet beautiful and amazing violin. He always used to get his sorrow and anger out by playing the violin. He danced and practiced and tried his very best. “Bullies,” he muttered under his breath. “Bullies are... are mean and cruel!” The clock ticked and chimed.’

Students were asked to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper from the time when the first fleet from England landed in Australia in 1788. Their task was to take a position on whether a young Aboriginal boy, Nanberry, should be adopted by an English surgeon who lived and worked in the Australian colony. Like the rest of the class, Zoe’s letter giving reasons for adopting Nanberry was based on the novel that the class was studying, *Nanberry: Black Brother White* (French, 2011). This activity followed the drama strategy of Conscience Alley where the students were asked to choose one of two positions to argue the question, “should Surgeon White adopt the young Aboriginal boy, Nanberry?” Having chosen their position on

this question, students form two lines facing each other, with each line representing an affirmative or negative position. One student then volunteers to state their position and then walk down the ‘alley’ between the two lines of students, asking them to argue why they have chosen their position. At the end of the ‘alley’ walk, the student then decides whether they have changed their position or not. In other words, they consider whether the arguments they heard have persuaded them to change their position. Students have therefore heard the arguments of their peers before beginning the task of writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper to explain their position. All students write from a first-person perspective of Surgeon White. Zoe’s letter to the editor included a carefully constructed rationale supported by relevant evidential details (See Appendix B).

Students were assessed on a presentation regarding an extreme weather event which was a science topic in the curriculum. Zoe was the only student who chose to do her presentation as a reporter on location. Her work was of a very high standard incorporating competent acting skills and the use of a relevant PowerPoint. The following is an excerpt from a transcription.

‘This is breaking news! ... There is a humongous, destructive tornado ripping trees out of the ground, destroying homes and devouring about 20 villages! As you can see behind me, there are ambulances... since we have estimated over 12,000 people are injured... Tornados start with cool air forming into a cloud... when it touches the ground, the funnel cloud is officially a terrible tornado!!! ...Oh no! My microphone!! Ahhh!!!’

Other Arts Immersion Activities

In the Geography assessment task, students were asked to present information regarding a biome that they had researched. Zoe’s assessment was a video representing a television travel show on Yemen. At the end of the final action research cycle, Zoe expertly shared the role of MC at a showcase showing a range of Arts Immersion activities and performances to the school and visiting academics. Zoe engaged in the drama strategy, Hot Seating, to explore the novel, *Nanberry: Black Brother White* (French, 2011). This is a strategy where a student or students agree to sit in a chair and take on a character who answers open-ended questions from their audience (class). Zoe showed empathy when taking on the role of Maria, Nanberry, or Surgeon White.

Class Discussion: Zoe’s Comments

‘I think it helps my knowledge because learning it through drama is more fun than just sitting down and looking at a board and copying it and it’s just better to learn it that way because then we can all learn it in a fun way.’

‘(Arts immersion) expresses their individuality and it helps them get more creative, more imaginative and more confident.’

‘Instead of just doing a boring slideshow or whatever... you could pretend to be a character, you could do an interview and act... like... as if you were in the Hot Seat... you can use... all the things we did and put it in a cool presentation.’

Individual Interview With Zoe

Researcher: So even though that actually took longer, you felt it was worth it?

Zoe: (nods) Yeah (laughs)... even though all of the projects we did, like the parliament play and things, we still learned more instead of just copying down things from the board. Because when people copy down things from the board, they don't really... learn the mind... like, get that information because you're just copying down... on a piece of paper, you're not copying it in your brain (laughs) ... because when you're having fun you have better experiences and you want to remember that, so it helps us remember all of the information as well.

Focus Student 2: Xavier

Other Arts Immersion Activities

The class engaged in an activity where they were given copies of the picture book, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2015). Xavier's engagement in perusing this book is reflected in his comments.

‘That's the shadows of darkness. I thought I actually learned a bit because I saw a world made... and the drawings were so well done ... Shadows and darkness taking over ...’

Xavier often volunteered to sit in the ‘hot seat’ during the Hot Seating activities. He responded enthusiastically and insightfully when watching the movie, *Rabbit Proof Fence [Motion Picture]* (Noyce et al., 2002). These responses will be analysed in the Discussion section.

Xavier's Feedback on Arts Immersion Activities

‘I like it when you're the chef (Teacher-in-role – Mathematics) and the scientist person (Mould Symposium) because I think it was pretty funny.’

Shared Experiences: Zoe and Xavier

Engagement in Arts Immersion Activities

The following Arts Immersion activities illustrate the responses of Zoe and Xavier when involved with the same learning task. Three examples will be provided below dealing with migration, a set novel, and Australian parliament within a democratic process.

Activity one: Migration Generation-class television format. In preparation for engaging as an active studio audience to interview a genuine migrant to Australia on their classroom TV show, Zoe and Xavier both produced a series of appropriate questions for their guest interviewees. Note that both students show evidence of developing empathy and Xavier had some assistance with his work from a school officer.

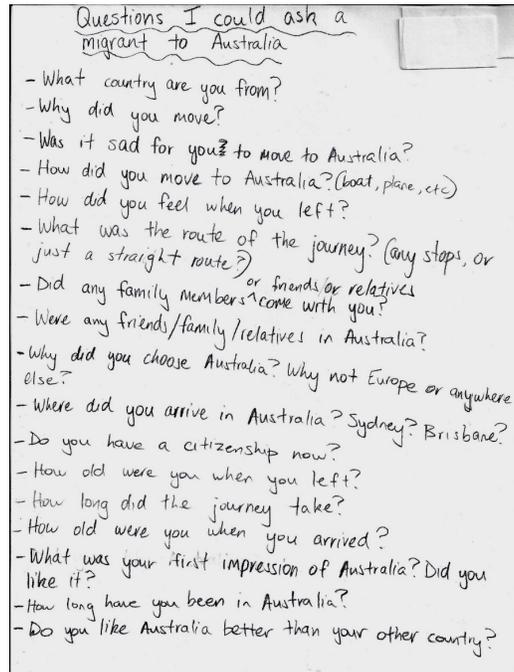


Figure 3. Zoe's Questions for Migration Generation.

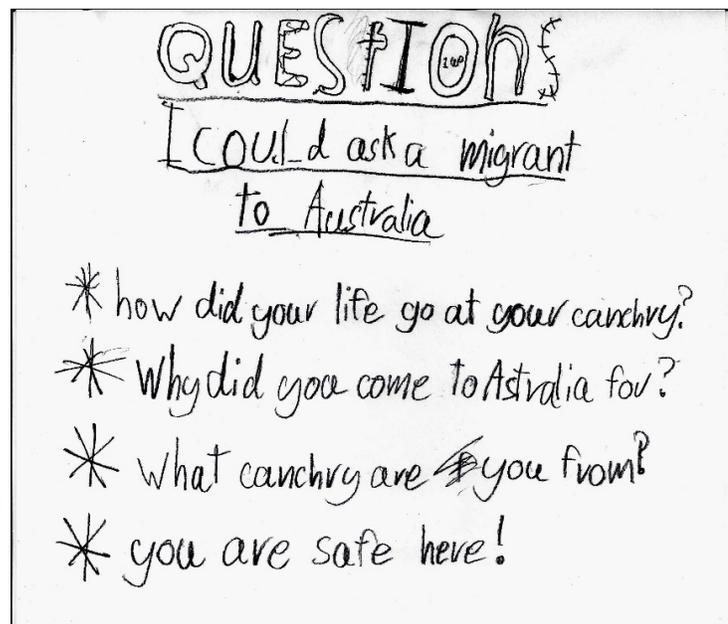


Figure 4. Xavier's Questions for Migration Generation.

When continuing to explore the topic of migration to Australia, both students created cards to explain a connected aspect in their own words. Zoe explained the positive aspect of 'home' and Xavier explained the negative aspects of 'racism'. Note that his spoken thoughts here were transcribed by a school officer.

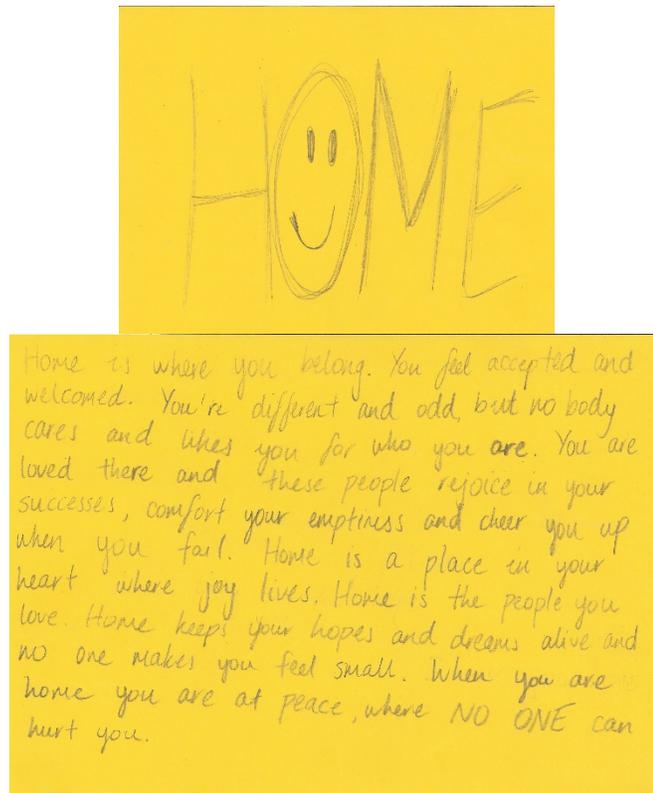


Figure 5. Zoe's Card Depicting 'Home' (Front and Back).

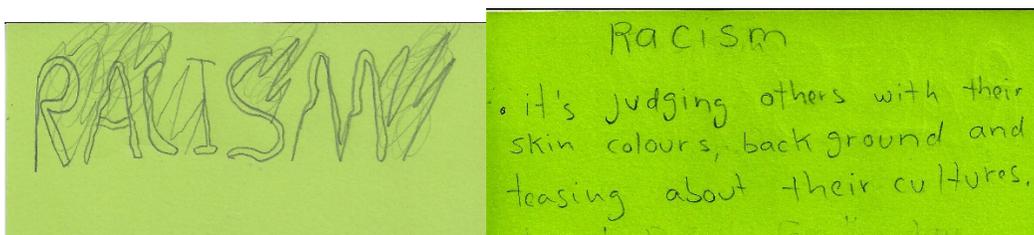


Figure 6. Xavier's Card Depicting 'Racism' (Front and Back).

Activity two: Studying a set novel as a class. When exploring the novel, *Chelonia Green, Champion of Turtles* (Mattingly, 2008), both students were engaged in the Hot Seating drama strategy which focused on an animal mentioned in the novel, writing a poem about this animal, and using the drama strategy of Conscience Ally to prepare for a writing task to justify a position on saving a species. Students could choose whether they would like the researcher to record their poem with sound effects or as a song. Zoe chose the poem format for her recording and Xavier chose a song (see Appendix C). Zoe and Xavier each created a visual post card to represent a section from the novel.

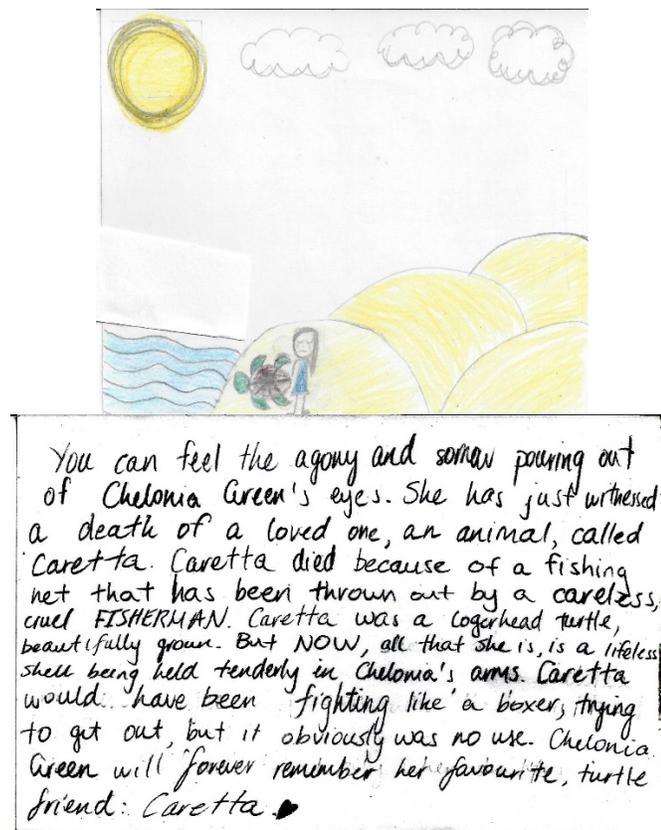


Figure 7. Zoe's Postcard from the novel (Front and Back).

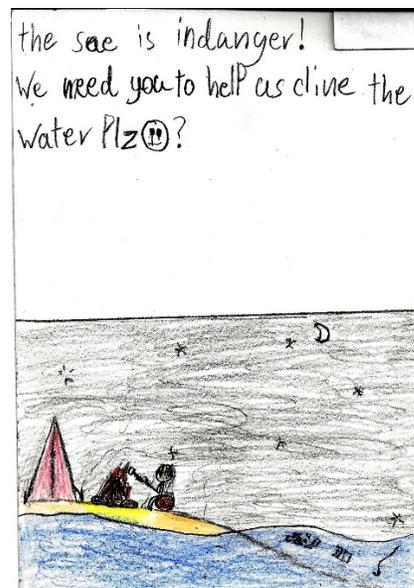


Figure 8. Xavier's Postcard from the novel (Front and Back).

Both students used the drama strategy of Conscience Alley to develop a writing piece based on this novel. Xavier was given minimal assistance with his work.

Conscience Alley – Chelonia Green

Write down your thoughts from Conscience Alley regarding the statement:

It is easy to protect endangered turtles.

Absolutely not. I disagree. SPECIES!!
and effort.

There are many endangered species, but it takes money, time, and effort? I think it is hard, because of humans, environmental hazards, diseases, and the progress.

First of all, there are many environmental hazards, such as deforestation and pollution. Why are those hazards there? HUMANS. And unfortunately, many humans DO NOT CARE about what they do to the earth. No matter how many times you plead them to stop, they'll still do it because they live for themselves. They'll cut trees and litter, and they won't care.

Secondly, there are diseases that affect many animals. We must find a cure, and sadly, we RUN OUT OF TIME. It will cost a lot of money to get the antidote.

And finally, THE PROGRESS. It is extremely LONG and difficult. We have to find professionals to find the endangered animals, then we have to store them in a safe place. After that we will have to try and breed them, so there will be multiple (of that species). Some animals don't like being held in captivity and having to be bred. They want to be alone. NOT BEING FORCED TO BREED. Also, we have to find the RIGHT food for them and we will need shifts (and many volunteers) to take care of the animals. Also, another point, humans treasure animal parts and will (illegally) poach them, (extinguishing the species furthermore). Humans will hunt down animals and keep them as a trophy. These endangered species could also be a popular prey, and that is also why they would be closer to EXTINCTION!

Figure 9. Zoe's Written Response to Conscience Alley.

Conscience Alley – Chelonia Green

Write down your thoughts from Conscience Alley regarding the statement:

It is easy to protect endangered turtles.

I say NO because people litter everyday, even when we clean the water and the next day it's there again. ~~the fish are endangered because of the litter~~
all so the sea is indanger because ~~the fish are~~ the young the fish the turtles are indanger.

Figure 10. Xavier's Written Response to Conscience Alley.

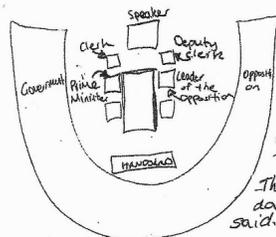
However, these students were given different strength-based roles in creating the Claymation media arts project drawing on events from the novel. Xavier was in a very small group that the class nominated as experts in visual art, while Zoe recorded the voiceovers as an audio track.



Figure 11. Xavier's Claymation Figures.

Activity three: Australian parliament and democratic process- a play and assessment. All students in the class participated in the rehearsal, performance, and filming of the Parliamentary Play, which interpreted the topic through comedic satire. Students were cast in roles that appropriately challenged and supported their current stage of development. Zoe's role as a member of parliament involved memorising written script and using her body, face, and voice to make meaning in the performance. Xavier's role as a policeman was based on using expressive gestures, primarily facial expressions, to respond to the dramatic action and reflect his understanding of the meaning-making in the performance. The whole class was involved in the same assessment task for this topic. The day before the assessment, the generalist teacher (Chelsea) asked the students to suggest questions they should address in their assessment task. These were compiled on the whiteboard and discussed by the class. On the day of the assessment, Chelsea provided each student with a blank piece of A3 paper and asked them to fill the paper with whatever they knew regarding the topic and the questions they had discussed the day before. Students were encouraged to express their understanding in whichever combination of words, pictures and diagrams they chose. Some students presented their understanding in a visual art form using either pictures drawn with commentary or a cartoon format which they had used previously when portraying the four stages of an earthquake (Science). While Zoe's assessment response was primarily word-based and supported with a small diagram, Xavier's response was primarily visually represented through a diagram with some word-based support. He was also able to speak to this document, providing further information in his verbal explanation for Chelsea to clarify his understanding.

In parliament, there are two rooms, the House of Representatives and the Senate (red room). In the House of Representatives, there are two sides, the Government (side currently in power) and the Opposition (the side not in power, but are running against the Government). These are the two main parties, although there are smaller, less known parties, such as The Greens, Keemble Party and Independent (who runs by himself). When they are in the House of Representatives they are arguing and debating upon a bill, which is a rule that is still not a law. One side could fight for the bill, whereas the other side could go against it. Sometimes a division is required, which is when both main parties go and get as many people from their group, and they count how many people are on each side. (The members/ministers actually move to a different side of the room for voting, so no one puts their hands up twice or not vote at all). When one side has more votes, the bill goes to the red room (Senate), to be decided whether or not to make it a law. If the Senate says yes, it's an official law, but if they vote no, it has to go back to the House of Representatives to get through the whole system again. Also, if there is an equal amount of people on each side, the Speaker gets to vote. Usually the members/ministers would stay on the side of their party, but sometimes the individual(s) can go to the other side, where the speaker would say, "They crossed the floor!"



The Speaker is the person who guides them all and makes sure they follow the rules. She/he will also stop fights and decide who gets to speak.

The Clerk/Deputy Clerk are people who hand documents/papers to the speaker from the Prime Minister/Leader of the Opposition.

The people from Hansard are scribes, who get everything down on a computer, such as the arguments and all that's said.

Ministers VS Members

The difference between a Minister and a Member is that a Minister looks after something (has a portfolio) and a Member just comes from a place (Exley, Inala, etc). A Minister could look after Defence, Education or Health. The Members would sit on their side but they usually sit in the back, and are called backbenchers. The Ministers would sit near the front or somewhere in the middle.

Ministers VS Shadow Ministers

A Minister would come from the side currently in power (Government) and the Shadow Minister is the Opposition side. From each main party, there is a Minister/Prime Minister/Treasurer and there are shadows on the opposite side for 2 reasons. 1) They are there to ensure that the other Minister is doing their job correctly and properly. 2) So when their party is in power, the party will have a Minister to be in charge of Defence, etc, something like that.

Other Jobs

The Prime Minister is the main person in charge of their party and Australia. The Treasurer is in charge of the money and budget. The Sergeant of Arms/Government Whip gets people required.

Figure 12. Zoe's Parliament Test Response.

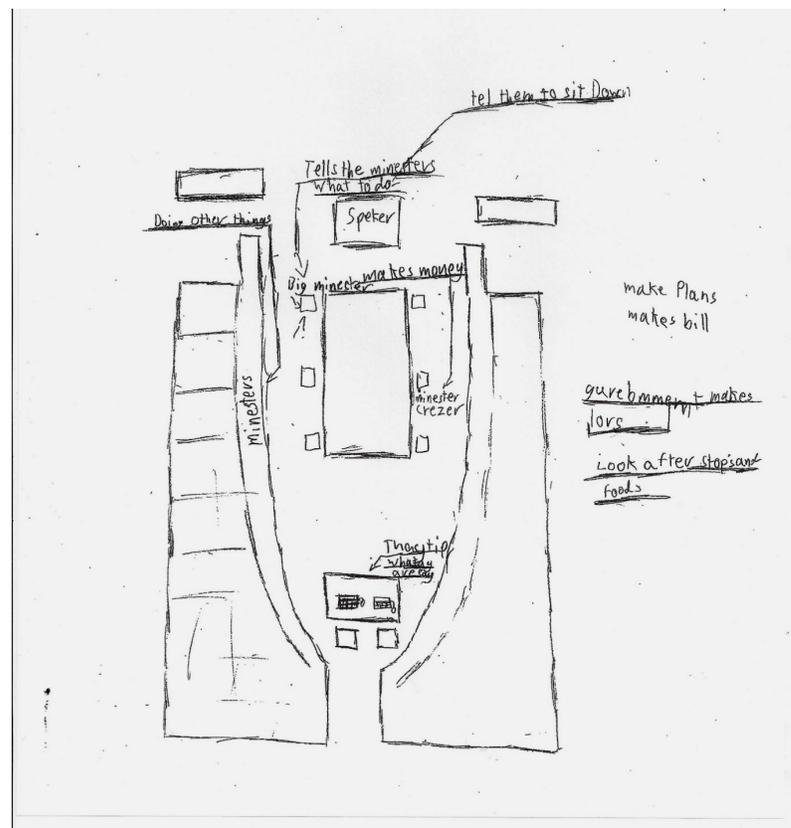


Figure 13. Xavier's Parliament Test Response.

Student Focus Group

As Zoe and Xavier were both involved in the same small focus group of eight students, an excerpt from the transcription of this discussion, where they are both featured, is provided in Appendix D. Despite obvious differences in vocabulary and sentence construction, both students offered valuable reflections on their experience of an Arts Immersion approach.

Discussion

A discussion of emerging themes is provided through the theoretical lens of three categories: interactive inclusion, social inclusion, and experiential inclusion. This analysis is relevant to the whole class but is discussed here according to the two focus students, Zoe and Xavier.

Interactive Inclusion

Data suggested that an Arts Immersion approach to inclusive teaching further strengthened students' learning attributes, contributed to broadening future options by expanding their skill set, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate and develop inferential and innovative thinking, and complimenting Xavier's PLP. The generalist and specialist teachers were able to

scaffold active inquiry tasks for both students in a range of learning areas by using the languages of the arts to communicate and make meaning. In many situations, the teachers were able to address both student's needs by scaffolding learning within the same Arts Immersion activity, for example, the Migration Generation TV Show. Similarly, following their experience of the Parliamentary Play, both students were able to suggest questions for the upcoming assessment where they expressed their understanding of the democratic parliamentary system in whatever format they chose. A recorded piece of music was played for students and they were asked to write a short story in the form of one to two paragraphs in response to what they thought the music was depicting. By providing a musical stimulus for writing instead of word-based directions, both students could respond with a narrative through a slightly different process— Zoe immediately wrote several pages while listening to the music while Xavier first drew a picture (visual art) relating to the music to reflect his understanding and then translated that to three quarters of a page of writing. Both students engaged in the Hot Seating activities, extrapolating knowledge and understanding to each character's given context. In other activities, Zoe and Xavier were active learners taking on different strength-based roles within the same learning task, such as the Chelonia Green Claymation where Zoe recorded the voiceovers and Xavier constructed the characters from modeling clay. Both students explored options during this task: Zoe, by using her voice expressively to portray the story of the Claymation, and Xavier, by considering how to create 3D representations of the characters in the story using available materials.

The teaching strategies used in an Arts Immersion approach involved both Zoe and Xavier in active inquiry as they interacted with the curriculum to construct knowledge. Both students extended their skills sets as seen through the application of Zoe's strengths in written and spoken word tasks to increasingly more complex learning using the arts languages, and in drawing on Xavier's ability and interest in visual art, media arts, and drama languages as a foundation for further learning. The choice of arts-based stimuli and artworks to communicate meaning extended both students' capacity to construct knowledge through inferential thinking. While this was an expected outcome for Zoe, Xavier's capacity to construe meaning had been underestimated and was highlighted in his comments while watching *Rabbit Proof Fence [Motion Picture]* (Noyce et al., 2002), as analysed below. All students watched this movie as a media arts extension of the work they had done on the novel, *Nanberry: Black Brother White* (French, 2011). The movie is based on the true story of three Aboriginal girls who escaped from the Moor River Native Settlement, north of Perth in Western Australia, where they had been placed in 1931, and of their 2,400 km journey to return to their Aboriginal families. Communicating through media arts and other arts languages provided learning experiences that complimented Xavier's PLP and individual instruction.

Table 2*Categorising Xavier's responses to The Rabbit Proof Fence*

Category	Xavier's response
Understands the action	<p>"He's gonna track them down."</p> <p>"Oh! It's the fence! They've found their way home!"</p> <p>"His plan failed."</p>
Empathizes	<p>"I kind of feel sad for all those people."</p> <p>"I hope it's not the whip! That must be painful."</p> <p>"Did you see the sky? It's beautiful, they're nearly home... YES!"</p>
Asks pertinent questions	<p>"Could that happen to my family?"</p> <p>"Why would they tease them like that?"</p> <p>"Don't they deserve to live in the wild?"</p>
Infers meaning	<p>"It's really really hard to find food, they've fainted because they don't have water or food."</p> <p>"It's a sign now they're close to home (spirit bird), I think they are 50 kilometres away, they're nearly over the barrier, they've come way too far (singing), I think they're praying... they're gonna escape. I think... if you're the only one of this place like Australia you're allowed to make up a law."</p> <p>"They're crying to see each other again because when you find each other when you're lost you start to get happy and run to your parents and you start to cry to see your parents again."</p>

Social Inclusion

Analysis of data collected from Arts Immersion learning experiences indicated that opportunities were provided for both students to be involved in collaborative critical and creative thinking, to experience leadership roles, to receive peer and teacher support, and to have their knowledge and skills recognised and valued by the class community. Collective problem-solving and collaborative creativity using the arts languages offered a wider selection of responsive options, such as deciding how to: present a novel as a Claymation; portray characters from other contexts; and present their understanding of age-appropriate topics in their adaptation of a *High School Musical* medley (Gerrard & Nevil, 2005). Through an Arts Immersion approach, teachers provided both students with challenges to extend their capacity, and for a wider variety of skills to be acknowledged by the whole class. Zoe's presentations, live and recorded, promoted peer engagement and enjoyment. Xavier also had opportunities to showcase his strengths in drawing, creating 3D characters and dramatic character portrayals to the rest of the class, thereby demonstrating visual art, media arts and drama literacies. New

criteria were used for valuing student capacity in strength-based groups. For example, in the group creating Claymation figures, Xavier worked with a student who achieved at a high level in most learning areas of the curriculum, but they were both equally viewed by the class as experts in this area.

Both students' successes inspired a commitment to doing one's best which lifted the standard of class. Ensuring that both students' strengths were made visible to the class made leadership opportunities more fluid and more equally shared. For instance, Xavier was given the leading role of walking down the middle of Conscience Alley to ask the opinions of his peers. This role was not difficult but gave him the chance to facilitate the activity. Collaborative learning helped to build Xavier's confidence and engage him in learning by assisting him in working with others and becoming more articulate in sharing his ideas. Through creative collaboration and problem-solving, Zoe demonstrated how to negotiate complexity in a task and consider several viewpoints, thus supporting the development of these capacities in her peers. Raising teacher expectations of his capacity, Xavier engaged in and completed a variety of learning tasks, including writing tasks, instead of playing computer games where he had previously been largely invisible in the class dynamics. An Arts Immersion approach positively influenced both students' personal and learning identities.

Experiential Inclusion

An Arts Immersion approach features embodied learning experiences where both mind and body are acknowledged as instruments of knowing. The body is not merely viewed as a container for the mind, but as an integral component of processing lived experiences in a mind-body relationship. Previous research found that embodied Arts Immersion experiences provided students with other ways of knowing beyond sitting at desks and writing (Chapman, 2018). Collected data concurs with this research, noting the following benefits generated by kinaesthetic arts-based experiences for both students: enhanced engagement in learning; improved knowledge retention; deeper cognition; and greater understanding of other perspectives. By inhabiting other characters and roles through drama, both students had the opportunity to learn *as* others rather than *about* others. While it is not possible to replicate another person's lived experience, there is value in recreating a representation of that experience to build empathy and respect for others, for example, enacting human and non-human characters in the Hot Seating activities to understand those perspectives. Drama provides metaxis, which is the ability to simultaneously inhabit two realities – actual reality and an agreed reality which is co-created through the willing suspension of disbelief. Building on Plato's use of the term to describe the space between two types of existence, Boal (1995) used this concept in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, describing metaxis as “the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds: the image of reality” (p. 4). Metaxis is foundational in Process Drama where teachers and students work in

and out of role to make meaning for themselves by exploring a dramatic context that involves a situation with a task or decision that needs to be made (Cowburn, 2013; Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Exploring other worlds developed both students' capacity for considering different views and choices through Conscience Alley (drama) activities, as well as representing the four stages of an earthquake through visual art and enacting the experience which was filmed and edited with sound effects.

The embodied nature of Arts Immersion activities revealed learning attributes in the students which may have gone unnoticed in a more writing-centric approach. Zoe was already very proficient at presenting, but the rich Arts Immersion tasks encouraged her to bring an aesthetic dimension to her presentations by developing her drama skills and to support this with newly developing skills in research (summarising, editing, and selecting relevant content). By taking on a character immersed in the learning context, Zoe was able to deepen her level of cognition, moving beyond fact learning to considering the lived experience of stakeholders in that situation and representing that perspective through the language of drama. Embodied activities led to engaging written tasks for both students, including a poem, a persuasive argument, and an illustrated postcard. Both students had acting roles based on their individual strengths in the parliamentary play so they could experience the layout, terminology, and processes of a democratic parliament. Through kinesthetically inhabiting these roles, both students were able to retain acquired knowledge using mind-body memory, representing their understanding using a strengths-based approach in their assessment.

While the pedagogical approaches of the researcher and Chelsea aligned, it was challenging to accommodate the continuous interruptions to the daily schedule that occurred in a Year 6 class. To avoid placing additional pressure on Chelsea, the compilation of arts activities was accessed in a very flexible manner to fill available time slots as they emerged, often with short notice. The researcher prepared many activities in advance so that the teacher could select from these according to her evolving schedule. To further alleviate potential stress for Chelsea in navigating the considerable number of additional tasks for which she was responsible, the researcher chose to engage in class activities that were not part of the Arts Immersion research project. This flexible approach in scheduling activities and supporting professional needs preserved respect and consideration for the research and teaching practices at the site.

The generalist teacher and the critical friend had taught Xavier at various points over the past seven years and were therefore well placed to gauge his improved outcomes. The critical friend expressed the view that an Arts Immersion approach could extend students' learning, especially those with learning difficulties who struggled in a system where learning was restricted by a narrow pedagogy. She stated:

‘Xavier, for example, he’s progressed so much but if he had had these sorts of foundational experiences from [a] younger [age], it would be interesting to see where he would be now. People would often say of him, “He doesn’t make connections between topics or different ways of thinking.” But that’s exactly what he was doing [during this lesson]. Xavier blew me away (chuckles)... I was just amazed at the opportunity for him to show what he knew.’

The generalist teacher strongly supported the contribution that Arts Immersion strategies made toward creating equity in learning. She warned against the dangers of dismissing the potential of students with learning difficulties and highlighted the importance of providing other forms of assessment, commenting:

‘[Xavier’s] been officially verified as intellectually impaired... when I first got him he basically thought he didn’t have to do anything that the rest of the kids did... but he is now writing, like chapter stories... he’s been working really hard... he’s got a school officer he goes out to a few times a week for about half an hour a day... he now listens to what’s going on and he can contribute... in a lot of areas... he is at expected level... you just have to modify how he shows the information. If it’s written based, usually you can’t get it... At the start of last year, he just didn’t do anything with the class, and I feel that that’s how he went through school. Because he was intellectually impaired, he was kind of, “Oh we won’t worry, you just do those couple of little things I’ve set you while I teach the rest of the class”... He’s really focused in the novels... even though they’re not at his reading level, he picked up on everything, especially *Nanberry*.’

Arts Immersion activities extended the development of critical and creative thinking which teachers supported by encouraging productive risk taking and innovative thinking.

Conclusion

As an expert artist and specialist arts educator, the researcher took the lead in demonstrating, through teaching and planning, how an Arts Immersion approach could work. This expertise in using the arts as languages complimented the teacher’s expertise in the elementary classroom, providing a range of new arts-based strategies to support more inclusive pedagogical choices and teaching strategies. In sum, evidence from this project suggested that the teacher was able to address a range of students’ needs by using an Arts Immersion approach. When using the same activity for the whole class, the teacher was able to differentiate and facilitate learning within a collaborative class setting. Arts Immersion tasks provided different types of opportunities for developing understanding and building skills within the same learning activity. This built a growing awareness in the class that knowledge could ‘look different’ because it could be expressed in different ways.

By way of example, differentiation emerged naturally by encouraging the case students, Zoe and Xavier, to use their arts languages according to their individual developmental levels. These languages encouraged deeper cognition for both students, fostering the flexibility required for critical and creative thinking by developing their capacity to construe meaning and empathise with different perspectives. Arts Immersion strategies were underpinned by the appropriate balance of challenge and support required to maximise each student's potential. Both students were encouraged to engage with risk taking and view mistakes as positive and helpful stages of their learning journey. An Arts Immersion approach can provide a broader pathway to support students in meeting and exceeding achievement standards for that year level. This approach offers benefits for all students in the class by using the Arts languages to broaden pedagogy and provide more opportunities for success.

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Appendix A

Focus Students' Profiles

The below profiles of each student are a summary of the attributes of each student which were identified by a combination of researcher observations and Year 6 teacher records.

Zoe's profile:

- Identified as a high-achieving student exceeding year-level outcomes
- Very social, gets on well with other students, regarded as a student leader
- Independent worker, self-motivated, works on general class program
- Strengths include speaking, writing, reading, acting, dancing, singing, creative and critical thinking, debating, confident performer, social skills, self-regulation, shows perseverance and resilience, flexible thinking, empathetic

Xavier's profile:

- Identified as having learning disabilities (not specified), possibly with ASD, achieving below year level outcomes
- Friendly, likes attention, often works on his own, doesn't always understand social cues, regarded as a bit of a 'computer nerd'
- Easily distracted except when on computer, works on general class program as well as additional time spent with a school officer on a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP)
- Strengths include drawing and other aspects of visual art, some acting skills (based more on improvising rather than remembering script), media arts and visual art literacy, some creative thinking, some maths processes (e.g. translation, reflection, rotation), computer games, often one of the first to 'have a go' in Arts Immersion activities.

Appendix B

Zoe's Letter to the Editor

To the editor,

My name is Surgeon John White and I have been stationed in Australia for quite some time now. I am writing to you, back in England, to share my story of why I have adopted a young Aboriginal boy. I know that you may be thinking that this is absolutely outrageous, but I've got many reasons to support what I've done.

The horrible disease, smallpox, has badly affected many Aboriginal people, including the little boy I was talking about earlier. I tried to save them from dying, and luckily there were some survivors; amongst them was the little boy. His name was Nanberry but I didn't like that name so I called him Andrew Douglas Keeble White.

I adopted him for many reasons; reasons for myself and reasons for Andrew. I was lonely when I had arrived, for I had no family. His family died from smallpox so I thought we'd make good company for each other. I had always wanted a son, and I knew he was a chance to get a family member. I was treating him like a son, teaching him English and telling him how to act like a gentleman. He taught me new things and I'm glad I had adopted him...he needed a place to call home and I gave it to him.

Yours truly,

Surgeon White

Appendix C

Zoe's and Xavier's Poems

Zoe's poem filled an A4 page, so an excerpt is included below.

Seagulls (by Zoe)

I soar against the deep blue sky
I spread my white wings and fly.
I find a lovely beach, to rest my weak wings,
Until I find an appealing thing.
It's food, a trophy for my eyes
I peck roughly, but I soon realise
The horrible truth of this treat,
That it is TURTLE MEAT.

Bats (by Xavier)

Bats fly away so far
It sat upside down
Then ate blue berries
Then says, "Yum yum"
Finally the sun comes up
It's time to be a bird

Appendix D

Focus Group Excerpt

Students begin by explaining why they think their generalist teacher has continued to use an Arts Immersion approach, even after the final cycle of the research had been completed at the end of Term 3 in early September. This interview takes place towards the end of November, near the end of Term 4 in the same year.

Zoe: Because the last time we used it ... like last term, everyone ... like, had a good impact on it ... everyone learned more and so (generalist teacher) probably thought it was a good idea

Xavier: I think it was great because ... One teacher working with another is really helpful for the other teacher.

Researcher: Mmm ... How is it helpful?

Xavier: Because ... You're making us learn more ... with our teacher.

Zoe: Because two heads are better than one (chuckles) and so since there are two of you, you can think more and you can plan more... more things get done.

Researcher: Mmm ... OK, cool. Do you think your teacher will keep using an Arts Immersion approach in the future?

Xavier: I think yes, because we had a big experience with you so ... she's gonna like ... go to each class and help.

Zoe: Since she's seen that Arts Immersion has made us learn more and made us have fun, she will tell other teachers, so that their kids will have the same experience as us.

Researcher: Do you think your class has changed after using an Arts Immersion approach?

Xavier: I think yes, because ... we learned more experience, what you taught us ... and we started to learn more and more and more ... all the way up to the top.

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