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“I can see the potential for this in every classroom”:
Building capacity in arts education through arts mentor practitioners using
an Arts Immersion approach

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Abstract

Capacity to teach the arts is a problem reported by many teachers in primary (elementary) school settings in Australia. This paper reports on research which explored how to build primary school teachers' capacity in arts-based pedagogy. It outlines the design and development of a co-mentoring program between arts mentor practitioners and generalist primary school teachers which used an Arts Immersion approach. The findings of this research reveal the effectiveness of co-mentoring as an approach to support professional learning in arts education, and the

use of an Arts Immersion approach to improve teachers' capacity in planning, facilitating, and assessing authentic arts experiences.

Introduction

There is much scholarly literature regarding the benefits of arts education. These cognitive, social, affective, and curricular benefits (Chapman, 2018) include contributing to disadvantaged students' success (Robinson, 2012), developing arts literacy (Barton, 2014), engaging in STEAM education (Chapman, Barton & Garvis, 2021), and building 21st century skills (Corbisiero-Drakos, Reeder, Ricciardi, Zacharia, & Harnett, 2021). Ewing (2020) states that, "(t)he Arts make distinct and unique contributions to each young person's ability to perceive, imagine, create, think, feel, symbolise, communicate, understand and become confident and creative individuals" (p. 75). However, research reveals that although the Arts offer enriched opportunities for student learning and engagement across curriculum areas, few primary school teachers in Australia have the capability or confidence to use arts in this way (Garvis, 2012). Ewing (2020) highlights four unresolved and recurring dilemmas for arts education which exacerbate this situation: (i) the lower status of arts subjects in the curriculum hierarchy; (ii) continued cuts to pre-service teacher arts education; (iii) unstable funding for the arts with consequent competition between art forms; and (iv) the difficulty of assessing aesthetic knowledge. Further research is needed regarding the most effective strategies to build teacher capacity in this area so that the benefits to students can be maximised.

To maximise student outcomes, improved teacher capacity is required in planning, facilitating, and assessing authentic arts experiences, especially when there are reductions in the allocation of time and resources to teach arts subjects. Primary school teachers facing a content-heavy curriculum may be caught in the conflict between choosing an arts-centred approach to learning and the "global education policy trend of using high-stakes testing" (Thompson, 2013, p. 62). Narrowing the curriculum to reflect national testing priorities has inadvertently contributed to the marginalisation of the Arts as non-tested learning areas (Ewing, 2012a, 2012b), and time spent in preparing students for the test has sometimes disrupted learning and teaching (Northam, 2017). Linear views of the curriculum with siloed learning areas have often resulted in insufficient time to complete a growing list of discrete learning tasks, and an emphasis on formulaic teaching using the teacher-as-instructor model (Cormack & Comber, 2013). Narrow pedagogical understanding delivered through limited teacher capacity can disengage students in learning, resulting in severely diminished potential for students to enjoy the benefits of the arts. Perceptions that the arts are not essential to core learning in the curriculum have sometimes contributed to a view of the arts as an elite, 'soft' or extracurricular offering (Barton & Ewing, 2017). Yet the arts provide unique and inclusive

ways of knowing that can enhance learning across the curriculum. This is evident in research where arts integration methods were used to build 21st century skills and address complex student needs (Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021). An integrated arts-based approach may address the challenges of a content-heavy curriculum by improving accessibility to several areas of the curriculum within the same learning task and providing a more inclusive learning path for students. The exploration of new strategies for building teacher capacity in integrated arts-based education can contribute to this field of knowledge. The purpose of this paper is to explore how to build primary school teachers' capacity in arts-based pedagogy using an Arts Immersion approach through on-the-job co-mentoring between an AMP (Arts Mentor Practitioner) and a colleague in a primary (elementary) school setting.

Key Terms

In Australia, the term generalist primary teacher (GPT) and primary school are equivalent to the terms, elementary teacher and elementary school. All aspects of this research were based on the concept of Arts Immersion, which is “the process of using the Arts as the purposeful medium through which enhanced learning occurs across disciplines to inform mutual understandings” (Chapman, 2015, p. 93). An Arts Immersion approach uses the unique languages of the arts as the home language of the classroom based on four aspects of language: they provide a sense of home; they have their own unique semiotic systems; they represent cultures and times; and they shape our identity (Chapman, 2015). Best practice in Arts Immersion is based on subject-specific knowledge and skills, and the capacity to use arts languages across the curriculum to teach other subjects and learning areas. This research also devised the term of Arts Mentor Practitioner (AMP). An AMP is a teacher with professional learning in at least one arts subject and in an Arts Immersion approach who contributes to on-the-job co-mentoring with another teacher (ideally a colleague) in the classroom.

Developing Professional Learning Through Research and Practitioner Perspectives

The development of high quality and relevant professional learning can draw on both research evidence and practitioner perspectives to identify and understand educational needs. As one factor influencing educational decisions, findings drawn from research evidence concerning arts education can be strengthened by inviting arts practitioners to provide practice-based perspectives (Heijne-Penninga, Wijkamp, Hogenstijn, & Wolfensberger, 2018). Professional learning in this field can be more accurately targeted towards the needs of teachers if their lived experiences are considered and their voices are heard (Nelson & Campbell, 2017). As Bryk (2015) notes, professional learning designed by those for whom it is developed, in conjunction with research evidence, can improve outcomes for teachers and students. New professional learning strategies are required because although deficits in primary teachers' confidence and capacity for teaching the arts were identified a decade ago (Lemon & Garvis,

2013), this problem persists.

Building Teachers' Capacity in Arts-Based Pedagogy: Research Overview

This research explored how to build primary school teachers' capacity in arts-based pedagogy using an Arts Immersion approach. Professional learning assisted teachers in fulfilling the role of Arts Mentor Practitioners (AMPs) who could then engage in on-the-job co-mentoring with primary/elementary teacher colleagues. This was undertaken through a compilation of four research projects as illustrated in Figure 1.

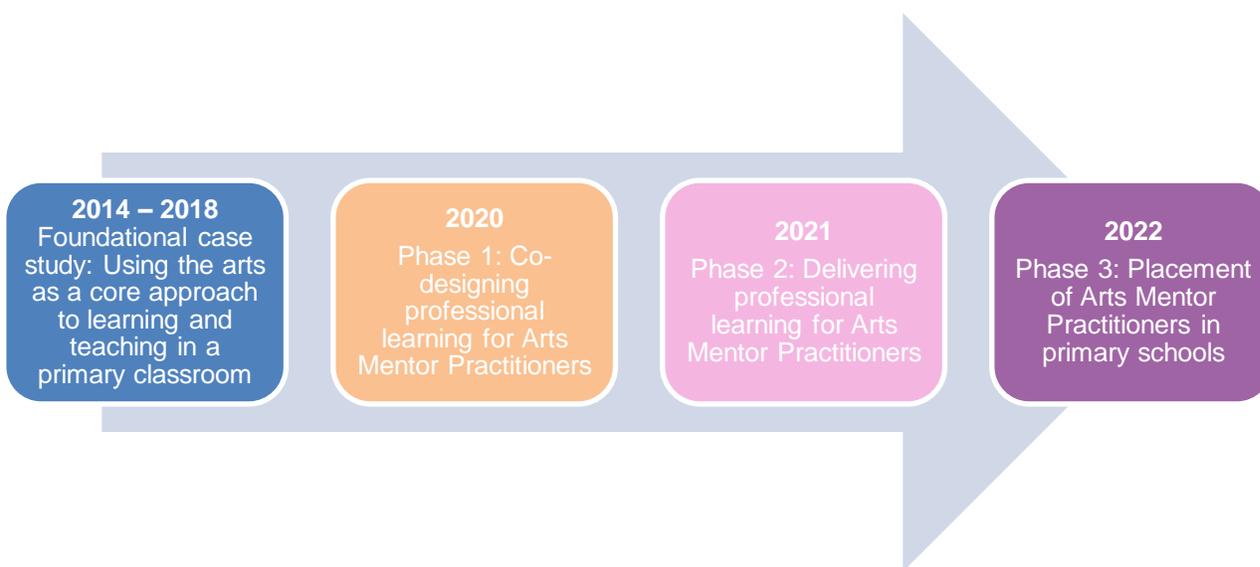


Figure 1. Chronological Progression of Research Phases.

Theoretical Lens

In this research, the foundational case study and Phases 2 and 3 focused on teaching practice. Data collected in these projects was analysed using the theoretical framework of practice architectures which highlight factors interacting within each teaching practice. These factors are categorised as ‘sayings’, ‘doings’, and ‘relatings’ (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). ‘Sayings’ are realised in ‘semantic space’ through the medium of language, ‘doings’ are realised in physical space-time through the medium of activity and work, and ‘relatings’ are realised in social space through the medium of power and solidarity. However, Phase 1 of the research was focused on developing a program of professional learning to build teacher capacity. The theoretical framework of co-design developed by Penuel, Roschelle, and Shechtman (2007) guided this phase of the research through seven sequential steps: (i) taking on “a concrete, tangible innovation challenge” (p. 53); (ii) “taking stock of current practice and classroom contexts” (p. 54); (iii) having a “flexible curricular target” (p. 54); (iv)

providing a “bootstrapping event or process to catalyze the team’s work” (p. 54); (v) timing the design “to fit the school cycle” (p. 54); (vi) having “strong facilitation with well-defined roles” (p. 54) and (vii) ensuring “central accountability for the quality of the products of the co-design” (p. 55).

Foundational Case Study

The foundational case study was a doctoral research project undertaken by the author (Chapman, 2018). The overarching research question was ‘How does using the Arts as a core approach influence learning and teaching in a primary classroom?’. Two sub-questions also formed part of the investigation: (i) What are the observable changes in students who experience learning with the Arts as a core approach? and (ii) How can learning with the Arts as a core approach influence the practices of generalist teachers working collaboratively with specialist arts teachers in a primary classroom?

Research Overview

The case study used Critical Participatory Action Research, collecting multimodal data over a nine-month period. The culturally diverse primary school (the case) was in a low socio-economic status area and many of the students had low literacy scores on national tests. Participants were the Year 6 teacher (Chelsea, pseudonym), a Critical Friend (Year 3 teacher), and a class of 29 Year 6 students (14 girls and 15 boys). The arts specialist researcher (ASR) introduced an Arts Immersion approach by explaining and then modelling relevant teaching strategies. Chelsea provided advice for addressing student needs and contextual understanding for her aspirations concerning her class. The ASR worked alongside Chelsea in her classroom for three days/week for nine months in a co-mentoring partnership, sharing their own experience and expertise.

There were five stages involved in the action research that assisted gaining a deeper understanding in how the Arts as a core approach influence learning and teaching in the primary classroom as the case: a Reconnaissance stage followed by four action research cycles. The purpose of the six-week Reconnaissance stage was to gather preliminary information regarding the research context and to begin to introduce Arts Immersion activities to address the research questions. The ASR created a range of Arts Immersion activities in response to Chelsea’s planning leading to collaboratively planned four-to-five-week cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Chelsea gradually took increased responsibility in co-designing Arts Immersion activities. Dance, drama, media arts, music and visual art were used to teach English, mathematics, science, history, geography, and religion. Multimodal data included student samples of work, teaching artefacts, interviews with students and teachers, researcher and teacher journals, video and audio recordings of performances and

classroom activities, visual representations and classroom layout plans. The ASR returned to the research site six weeks after the completion of the final cycle to investigate whether an Arts Immersion approach was still being used in the classroom. This was done through individual and focus interviews with students and with Chelsea.

The interviews in the subsequent phases (Phases 1 and 3: individual interviews; Phase 2: focus group interview) were audio-recorded and transcribed. The online anonymous surveys from Phases 1-3 included open-ended questions (Phases 1 and 3 and a combination of open-ended questions and Likert scale pre- and post-research questions (Phase 2). All ethical procedures were adhered to as approved by the relevant universities' ethics committee.

Research Discoveries

Data revealed benefits for students and teachers when using the arts as a core approach in learning and teaching in a primary classroom. These benefits were reflected in six key findings, which were categorised according to the practice architectures of 'sayings', 'doings', and 'relatings':

'Sayings'

- For students to be able to effectively engage in an Arts Immersion approach, they need to be 'Arts ready'
- An Arts Immersion approach can enhance students' engagement with learning and improve their focus in the classroom
- An Arts Immersion approach uses rich tasks to collaboratively cover several learning objectives from different subjects and learning areas at the same time

'Doings'

- An Arts Immersion approach to learning and teaching can be sustainable in terms of requiring minimal resources and in continuing after the researcher had left the research site

'Relatings'

- The practice of having a specialist arts teacher introduce an Arts Immersion approach in the classroom can be an effective strategy for professional learning through co-mentoring
- Equity may be enhanced in the classroom as an Arts Immersion approach can widen the pathway for learning by using a range of strategies across the curriculum

Having discovered that an Arts Immersion approach: (i) created improvements in student

outcomes (see Findings 1, 2, 3 and 4), (ii) relieved teacher stress in delivering and assessing a content-heavy curriculum through integrated learning (see Finding 5), and (iii) provided an effective on-the-job model for professional learning for two teachers (see Finding 3) (Chapman, 2018), it was important to create a sequence of research projects to investigate whether these findings could be replicated on a larger scale. The development of a professional learning program to build capacity in a group of primary school teachers using an Arts Immersion approach was the first step in a Professional Learning Chain (see Figure 2). Creating the role of an AMP involved a partnership between primary schools and (the institution) to generate more equitable educational outcomes.

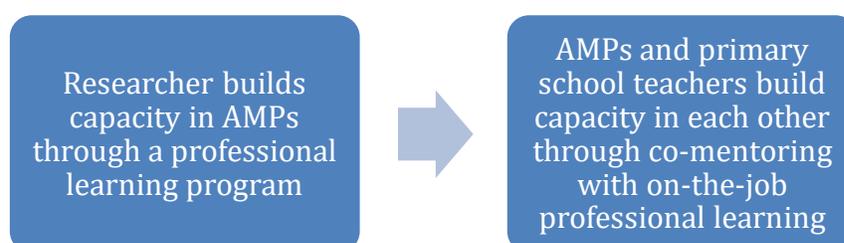


Figure 2. Professional Learning Chain.

Phase 1: Co-Designing Professional Learning for Arts Mentor Practitioners

Using the six key findings from the foundational case study, the overall aim of Phase One was to develop the design of an Arts Mentor Practitioner (AMP) training program, and to gather feedback on the draft program design from arts practitioners. The following two questions guided this phase of the research:

1. What features would arts practitioners recommend in the design of an AMP training program that incorporates an Arts Immersion approach to learning and teaching?
2. What do arts practitioners consider to be the potential enablers and barriers in an AMP training program that incorporates an Arts Immersion approach to learning and teaching?

Designing the Draft AMP Training Program

A co-design process was utilised to invite arts practitioners from school and tertiary sectors to inform the professional learning design for building teacher capacity in an Arts Immersion approach. As stakeholders in the arts education process, they were well placed to shape decision making in the co-design process due to their awareness of user needs. The design of the draft AMP training program was based on the professional learning strategy used in the

foundational case study. Features of this draft program included on—the-job learning, co-mentoring, an Arts Immersion approach (subject-specific and integrated learning), and activities based on the primary teacher’s planning and assessment requirements. Other suggested features of the draft AMP training program were an eight-week time frame, blended delivery, a suggested textbook, and no assessment requirements for participants.

Gathering Arts Practitioners’ Perspectives on the Draft AMP Training Program

Data was collected from 11 arts practitioners to inform the development of the AMP training program. Participants were identified through the researcher’s professional networks. Three categories were used to describe the level of experience of participating arts practitioners: early career arts specialist teachers who had less than five years of experience as an arts specialist (3 participants); experienced arts specialist teachers who had five or more years of experience as an arts specialist (4 participants); and university academics regarded as experts in arts education, having had experience teaching arts education as well as publishing relevant academic literature (4 participants).

Two different methods of data collection were used: (i) an online semi-structured anonymous survey; and (ii) individual semi-structured interviews. A total of 11 participants completed the survey, and 8 participants from this same sample participated in interviews. Interviews were conducted and recorded on the Zoom digital platform, and the majority of interviews were approximately 60 minutes in duration.

Questions in the survey and interviews focused on three specific areas: (i) participants’ expertise and experience as arts practitioners; (ii) the design features, planning and implementation of the draft AMP training program; and (iii) the anticipated enablers and barriers of the draft AMP training program, and its potential development into a formal qualification. In both methods of data collection, participants were provided with information regarding the professional learning strategy that was used in the foundational case study on which the emerging design of the AMP training program was based.

Developing the AMP It Up! Drama Module

The data gathered from the survey and interviews with arts practitioners was analysed, and emerging themes were derived by deductive analysis through rounds of open and then focussed coding. The findings from data analysis were then used to further refine and shape the draft AMP training program.

The decision to develop one arts module for each arts subject was made due to three factors: best practice in an Arts Immersion approach requires subject-specific as well as integrated

knowledge and skills; the Australian Curriculum for the Arts (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, n.d.) consists of five curricula (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts), one for each arts subject; and each arts subject has its own unique language and semiotic system. Drama was chosen for the first module of five and the draft design of the AMP training program was shaped synergistically by research evidence and the lived experiences of teachers' practice.

Arts practitioners' opinions regarding the draft design of the AMP training program highlighted several anticipated enablers which they regarded as potential benefits for teachers undertaking this program. These included the potential of the program to improve student outcomes in the form of cognition and engagement with learning ("You have a workable solution that can be enacted ... it looks immensely achievable"), and to support arts teachers as leaders initiating change in their schools: "We need a change in our schooling system, massive change... this is perfect... an opportunity for us to make change". . . Arts practitioners also identified several possible barriers, such as the challenges of planning and delivering a well organised training program, sustaining participant motivation, and producing targeted research data. In particular, advocating the approach to school leaders was identified as a significant barrier: "The number one challenge we face is convincing our school administration that (the AMPPLP) has value and it's not going to impede their NAPLAN data."

There was broad support for an eight-week blended program which was a hybrid combination with four weeks involving 2.5 hours of asynchronous online learning per week, and four weeks involving 2 hours of on-campus workshops per week ("Awesome program! Lots to learn and share back at school.") The online learning included padlets where participants posted applications of the Arts Immersion concepts learned, for example, creating process dramas based on literature to consider the perspective of a refugee and ideas for improvising a social interaction scenario. On-campus workshops used an Arts Immersion approach through embodied learning to build subject-specific skills using voice, facial expression and movement and providing opportunities to use the language of drama to explore other learning areas, for example, using body shapes to show different types of angles in Mathematics. There was also broad support for individual subject modules, a suggested textbook ("loved the textbook") and an Arts Immersion approach leading to on-the-job professional learning through co-mentoring ("It has been a fantastic way to change my thinking about how to encourage a more broad use of the Arts, particularly drama, within the learning environment.").

Table 1 details the design features of the AMP training program that was developed, and which was subsequently named 'AMP It Up!'.

Table 1

The AMP It Up! (Drama) Program

Course duration	8 weeks (Total of 18 hours)
Mode of delivery	Face-to-face (8 hours) Online learning (10 hours) (Self-paced, 2.5 hours/week)
Course materials	<i>Delivering Authentic Arts Education – 4th ed.</i> (Dinham, 2020) Various Blackboard materials

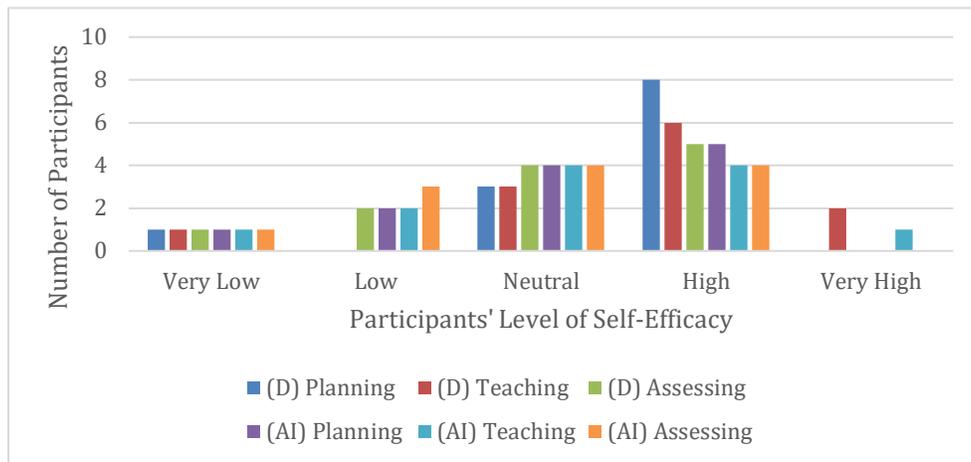
Phase 2: Delivering Professional Learning for Arts Mentor Practitioners

The overarching aim of Phase 2 was to deliver AMP It Up! training which would equip AMPs to deliver on-the-job professional learning for primary school teachers using an Arts Immersion approach. Data was collected from participants regarding various aspects of participating in the AMP It Up! program. These included: (i) data about participants' level of self-efficacy and knowledge regarding planning, teaching, and assessing a drama session, or an Arts Immersion drama session; and (ii) data about the efficacy of the AMP It Up! program. There were 12 participants in Phase 2 representing a diverse range of drama pre-service and professional learning, qualifications and experience.

AMP It Up! Program Learnings: Participant Self-Efficacy and Knowledge

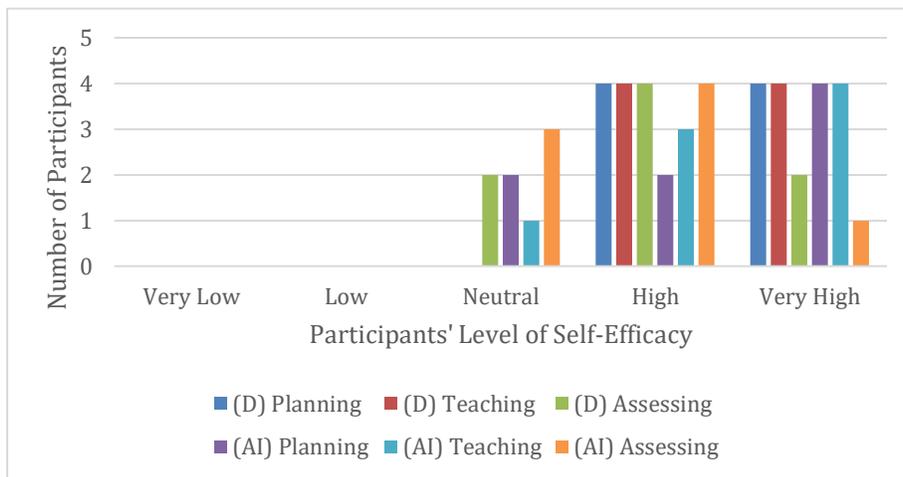
Using pre- and post-surveys (N = 12; N = 8) participants were asked to describe their level of self-efficacy and rate their level of knowledge in relation to: (a) planning, teaching, and assessing a structured drama session for around 30 minutes or more for a primary school year level; and (b) planning, teaching, and assessing a structured integrated Arts Immersion drama session for around 30 minutes or more for a primary school year level. For this study, self-efficacy was defined as “a person’s perception that he or she has the skill and capability to undertake a particular action or task” (Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma, & Smith, 2016, p. 1918–1919).

Regarding participants' level of self-efficacy, Figures 3 and 4 present the results obtained from pre- and post-surveys.



Note. N = 12. (D) = Drama session; (AI) = Arts Immersion drama session

Figure 3. Pre-Survey: Self-Efficacy.

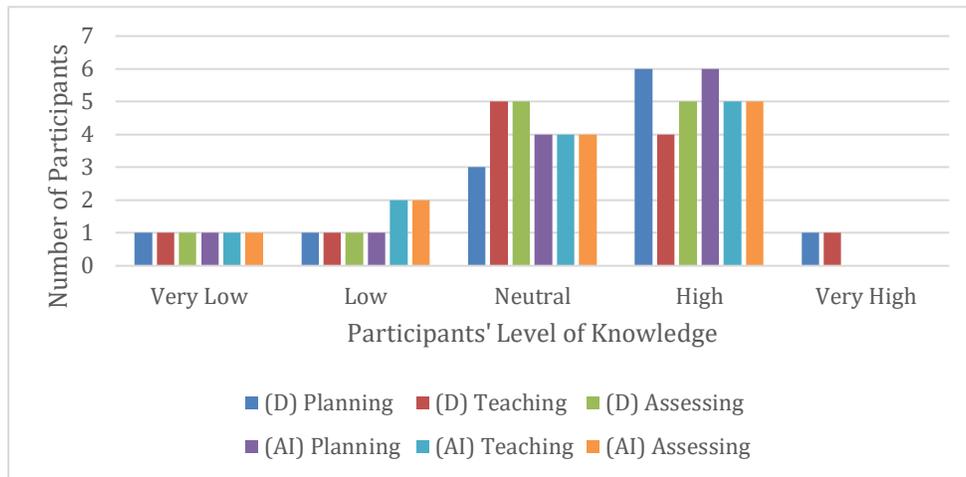


Note. N = 8. (D) = Drama session; (AI) = Arts Immersion drama session

Figure 4. Post-Survey: Self-Efficacy.

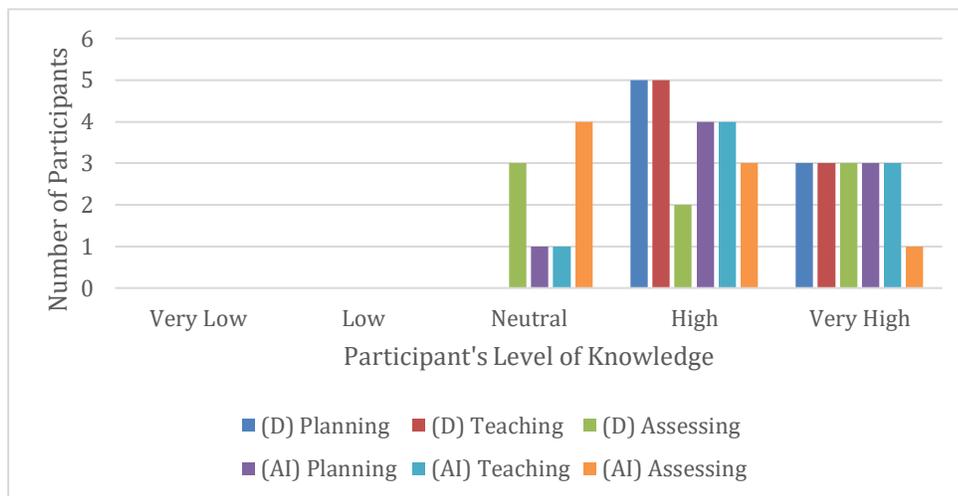
Results from the pre- and post-surveys revealed several improvements in participants’ level of self-efficacy. The strongest improvements in participants’ level of self-efficacy included assessing a Drama session (18%), teaching an Arts Immersion drama session (33%), assessing an Arts Immersion drama session (22%), and planning an Arts Immersion drama session (18%).

In terms of participants’ level of knowledge, Figures 5 and 6 present the results obtained from pre- and post-surveys.



Note. N = 12. (D) = Drama session; (AI) = Arts Immersion drama session

Figure 5. Pre-Survey: Knowledge.



Note. N = 8. (D) = Drama session; (AI) = Arts Immersion drama session

Figure 6. Post-Survey: Knowledge.

Results from the pre- and post-surveys revealed several improvements in participants' level of knowledge. The strongest improvements in participants' level of knowledge included teaching a Drama session (46%), teaching an Arts Immersion drama session (33%), and assessing an Arts Immersion drama session (22%).

AMP It Up! (Drama) Program Learnings: Practice Architectures

The following data was collected from a focus group of 11 AMP It Up! (Drama) participants immediately concluding the final face-to-face workshop. Initial open-ended questions focused

on the structure, content, and face-to-face and online delivery of the program, before moving on to emerging topics raised by the participants which included alignments with school priorities, arts advocacy, Arts Immersion pedagogy and teaching strategies, teacher wellbeing, and the future potential of the program. The data is analysed according to the practice architecture categories of sayings, doings and relatings.

‘Sayings’. Data based on ideas and language revealed that AMP It Up! targeted school focus points such as inquiry-based learning, growth mindset, multiple modalities and integrated curriculum. Participants expressed the need for school leadership teams to understand what actually occurs in authentic arts learning experiences: “Teachers still need to be educated on what integrated arts is”, and noted the suitability of this approach for remote schools as the strategies include the whole class. In addition, there was strong support for not assessing participants: “assessment is the thing we hate. It’s not an indicator, a true indicator of passion, of the degree of commitment, of connection with material...”. Furthermore, participants expressed appreciation for challenging accepted ideas in teaching: “Schools have coaches for lots of things, why not an Arts coach?”

‘Doings’. Data drawing on the use of objects and spatial arrangements showed strong support for the hands-on experiences in the AMP It Up! Workshops: “All the hands-on experiences that you had us do, that was fantastic.”. Similarly, participants liked the use of padlets in the asynchronous online learning platform that were interspersed in between readings from the textbook as a practical way to share and collect responses and ideas: “I really liked how the padlets were slotted in”; “being brave enough to post about stuff when I wasn’t sure that I was on the right track”. Other features supported by participants were the eight-week timeframe in Term 3 of the school year: “Term 3 works better because it’s not a report card term”, two-hour workshops delivered between 5.30–7.30pm, and unanimous support for the suggested textbook: “I found it really useful to read the textbook”. Suggestions for improvement included: interspersing the face-to-face workshops with online learning; developing a fully online version of the program; providing technology assistance at the beginning of the module; scheduling more social time preceding the first workshop: “just meeting each other and talking and networking”; allowing more time for designing student assessment; and having AMPs visit teachers in remote areas.

‘Relatings’. Data regarding the relationships between people focused on the positive atmosphere of the workshops where all participants felt valued: “it’s just so nice that what we’re doing is valued...Here, I feel like I’m part of something”. Likewise, participants enjoyed the opportunity for professional networking: “It... gave a renewed energy [for teaching the arts] because you’re feeding off other people’s energy”. Participants expressed concern for the lack of understanding that they often experienced in schools regarding what arts teachers do:

“Admin doesn’t understand what arts teachers do... [as in] I thought you just did painting”. Furthermore, participants commented on the extent to which decisions regarding arts education lay with the school leadership team, and how the adoption of this approach required the support of colleagues: “if they [colleagues] feel the enthusiasm it will often travel upstream.”

Phase 3: Placement of Arts Mentor Practitioners in Primary Schools

Phase 3 involved the placement of five AMPs in primary schools (one AMP per school) to each work alongside a Generalist Primary Teacher (GPT). Of the five AMPs, four were placed in Queensland Department of Education primary schools, and one AMP was placed in a private P–12 school. The five AMPs and five GPTs were purposively selected. To participate, AMPs needed to have: (i) completed the 8-week AMP It Up! (Drama) course; (ii) indicated their willingness to participate as an AMP in a primary school placement where they were currently employed; and (iii) identified a GPT who was interested in being involved in the research. The GPTs needed to have (i) a respectful professional relationship with the AMP they would collaborate with during the placement; (ii) an interest in building their capacity in an Arts Immersion approach through drama; and (iii) a willingness to participate fully in the primary school placement. The AMP placements of approximately 12 hours could be flexibly allocated over five weeks.

The focus of data collected from the AMPs and GPTs was to determine how well AMPs were prepared for their placement in the primary school; and how well the AMP placement had proceeded in terms of learning outcomes (see Table 2).

Table 2

Phase 3 Data Collection

Data collection method	Participant providing data	Focus of data collection
Online survey	AMPs	Participants’ school role and anticipated needs for the upcoming primary school placement.
Face-to-face individual interviews (via Zoom)	AMPs	Efficacy of AMP It Up! as preparation for placement and the placement experience.
Face-to-face individual interviews (via Zoom)	GPTs	Efficacy of the placement experience.

Phase 3 Learnings: Practice Architectures

The following sections will be analysed using Practice Architectures: ‘sayings’ (realised through language), ‘doings’ (realised through activity and work) and ‘relatings’ (realised through power and solidarity). Data focused on AMPs’ preparation for the placement and on the primary school placement experience of AMPs and GPTs.

Preparation – AMP It Up. All AMPs felt this was helpful preparation for their placement in providing a wide range and number of resources and ideas, building the confidence of teachers new to teaching drama and reinvigorating and affirming the teaching practice of experienced drama teachers.

Strengths. ‘Sayings’ revealed improvements in students’ assessment results, engagement with learning, and confidence. GPT’s demonstrated a more positive attitude towards drama and amazement at the potential of an Arts Immersion approach. Participants developed further knowledge and skills for embedding drama in other learning areas, which increased their confidence and expertise. ‘Doings’ showed strong support from all participants for the on-the-job professional learning model as part of the Professional Learning Chain, the many kinaesthetic learning activities, and opportunities for collaborative planning and reflection. ‘Relatings’ demonstrated much closer professional relationships between teachers based on respectful co-mentoring, and closer connections to students, both of which participants planned to continue beyond the completion of the research project.

Challenges. Participants all identified time constraints (‘doings’) as the major challenge in undertaking the planning and co-mentoring required during the placement. This was exacerbated by teacher shortages caused by the COVID19 pandemic.

Suggested Improvements. Data showed that participants were very satisfied with the Arts Immersion concepts on which the research was based and the professional relationships that were enacted at the research site (‘sayings’ and ‘relatings’) but suggested further flexibility in the allocation of time for the placement (‘doings’) to accommodate school timetables and staffing.

Schools’ Response to Placement. ‘Sayings’ reflected very positive responses from other teachers and the leadership team regarding students’ improved outcomes and enhanced teaching practices but acknowledged that some teachers in schools still hold a negative bias towards arts subjects. ‘Doings’ included participants sharing resources, providing professional learning for other staff members, and presenting a student-guided exhibition for the wider school community. Regarding ‘relatings’, the school communities were supportive of the developing professional relationships between AMPs and GPTs, the increased trust between

teachers and students, and the building of leadership capacity in participants through co-mentoring (see Figure 2).

Discussion

The foundational case study (Chapman, 2018) was the first opportunity to investigate how an Arts Immersion approach, based on the notion of arts subjects as a unique set of languages, could influence learning and teaching in primary schools (Chapman, 2015). Findings indicated that the on-the-job model of professional learning through co-mentoring using this approach strengthened professional relationships between the participating teachers through their shared expertise and experience (Heijne-Penninga et al., 2018). For time-poor teachers, it was important that endeavours to help build capacity occurred during the teaching day in a class context, where learning was collaboratively planned and delivered to specifically address the GPT's learning plan for their class. This time-efficient model also helped reduce the stress of covering a content-heavy curriculum (Cormack & Comber, 2013) by addressing several learning criteria together in a high-quality integrated approach (Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021; Ewing, 2012a). By positioning the unique arts languages at the centre of learning, rather than the periphery, it broadened the learning pathway for students by encouraging greater equity and engagement in learning through inclusive teaching strategies. The positive impact on students—evident in improvements in social-emotional wellbeing, engagement with learning, knowledge retention, assessment results and enjoyment of learning—was the strongest motivator in changing teaching practice. This was reflected in the continued use of an Arts Immersion approach after the final action research cycle in the foundational case study.

Broadening the research scope beyond the foundational case study was essential in investigating whether its findings could be replicated on a larger scale. Identifying the role of the specialist arts teacher in the foundational case study as an Arts Mentor Practitioner (AMP) provided the basis for clarifying the purpose of this role in a primary school context and developing a program to build the knowledge and skills that would be required. The years of capacity building undertaken by the ASR prior to the foundational case study needed to be translated into smaller modules to become a feasible model of professional learning for other teachers. Choosing a co-design method of creating professional learning (Penuel et al., 2007) for AMPs also ensured that the emerging professional learning program was informed by arts practitioners who were aware of teachers' needs because of their own lived experience (Nelson & Campbell, 2017).

A suggested format derived from the learning experiences of the foundational case study provided a starting point for considering the potential enablers (improvements in student cognition, engagement with learning, equity and cultural diversity) and challenges (need for

excellent organisation, participant motivation, advocacy, and targeted research) of such a program and pre-empting problems that might arise. The delivery of the AMP It Up! program as individual arts subject modules reflected best practice in an Arts Immersion approach (Chapman, 2015), drawing on a combination of subject-specific knowledge and skills and using unique arts languages across the curriculum to access other learning areas. This maximised the relevance and potential of the arts (Ewing, 2020) in enhancing learning in primary school contexts where arts expertise was urgently required (Garvis, 2012; Lemon & Garvis, 2013).

The increase in participants' self-efficacy and knowledge in drama education and in an Arts Immersion approach after completing the AMP It Up! drama module in Phase 2 demonstrated the positive impact of this professional learning program. It also revealed the potential of the program to help build capacity in arts pedagogy in arts practitioners with a variety of experience, qualifications, and pre-service training. The strong and unanimous support from participants of the design and efficacy of the AMP It Up! drama module and clear connections with current school priorities showed that the co-designing of the program was accurate and well informed (Bryk, 2015), while addressing the potential challenge of delivering a well organised training program.

Phase 3 of the research was crucial in determining that findings from the foundational case study (Chapman, 2018) could be replicated on a broader scale and attain similar benefits for both teachers and students. As discovered in the foundational case study, students showed improvements in their assessment results, engagement with learning, and confidence, and participants reported developing closer professional relationships with their co-mentors and stronger connections to their students: "I feel that they take a lot more from that lesson ... where it's more student-led than teacher-led, and they're actually up on their feet together, working as a team too, which I love to see. It's honestly making my job easier." (GPT). Likewise, participants in Phase 3 gained confidence and expertise in arts pedagogy, and strongly recommended the placement of AMPs in primary schools as a time efficient, relevant and inspiring model of on-the-job professional learning: "It's awesome to have someone come in, and work with you in your classroom, with your kids, on your content." (GPT).

GPTs spoke of refreshing tired ideas through many new embodied teaching strategies which brought fun and deeper understanding for their students: "I can see the potential for this in every classroom...this practice really could become everyday practice...in many schools...(encouraging) big picture thinking." (AMP). They had observed that more students engaged in these inclusive Arts Immersion strategies because of the broader language of drama compared to solely word-based text (Barton, 2014; Ewing, 2012b). All participants expressed the intention of continuing the professional relationship and using an Arts

Immersion approach beyond the conclusion of the research project. While participants acknowledged the ongoing negative bias of some teachers towards arts education (Barton & Ewing, 2017), they received very positive support from families, other interested teachers, and the school leadership team. Participants communicated with the school community through sharing resources and ideas, providing professional learning sessions for colleagues, conducting an exhibition to showcase student learning, and providing a two-page report for their principals regarding the research experience. Furthermore, it was particularly encouraging to have the research featured in the Queensland Department of Education's EDTV (Queensland State Schools Education Television) where classes using an Arts Immersion approach were filmed in action. EDTV digital programs are made available to primary and secondary teachers in Queensland state schools, which enabled wide dissemination of this form of professional learning and the Arts Immersion approach.

There were several limitations of this study. The first was the small sample size and second, the response rate of the participants in the post-research survey in Phase 2. Finally, except for Phase 1 of the research, the composition of the sample was restricted to teachers working in metropolitan areas so the perspectives of teachers from regional and remote areas were not included.

Conclusion

Developing a professional learning chain beginning with the AMP It Up! (Drama) module and leading to co-mentoring through on-the-job professional learning was very effective in building teacher capacity using an Arts Immersion approach. Across all phases of the research, participants recommended the experience of the on-the-job professional learning based on an Arts Immersion approach to learning and teaching. In Phases 1-3 this was reflected in participants' endorsement of the professional learning chain that began with the AMP It Up! drama module and followed through to the co-mentoring of professional learning during the primary school placement. In particular, participants cited gaining confidence, achieving many learning goals, and experiencing practical and authentic professional learning as reasons to recommend the experience.

The strength of the research impact is expressed clearly by the participants' support for custom-made professional learning on-the-job, student-led collaborative learning, and a sustainable, ongoing Arts Immersion approach to learning and teaching to enhance students' thinking skills.

The findings from this research show that participants were committed to continue using an Arts Immersion approach in their teaching and maintaining the professional relationships between the AMPs and the GPTs. The professional learning model developed by the research

addressed the identified need to build teacher competence and confidence in teaching the arts. This research developed a strategy for effective professional learning at a time when teachers are under pressure to perform with limited time and resources. The strategy was relevant to each teacher's situation, students, school and curriculum expectations, and teachers could observe this modelled in their own classroom with their students. Given the effectiveness of this approach in building teacher capacity in arts education, this professional learning model is recommended for wider implementation in primary schools to realise the potential of Arts Immersion in primary school classrooms.

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