Portraits of Quality Arts Education in Australian Primary School Classrooms

Bianca Mary Power

Bachelor of Education (Primary)(Honours)

School of Education and Professional Studies, Arts Education and Law

Griffith University

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Abstract

The status of arts education in primary schools is, according to the extant literature and popular commentary, infrequent and substandard. A small number of studies reflect on what actually occurs when arts education is taught in primary school classrooms. This thesis presents thick, rich, descriptive portraits of the nature of quality arts education occurring in Australian primary school classrooms. Two case sites were involved in this study – one primary school in Victoria, one in Queensland.

Working within the interpretivist paradigm, portraiture methodology was employed, supported by a case-study approach. Crystallization was used as a methodological referent to ensure the validity and reliability of data collection and representation. The nine domains of Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) acted as a scaffold to inform instrument development, data collection, and subsequent data organisation of completed portraits of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms.

Arts education was found to be happening in the primary school classrooms involved in this study, within generalist as well as specialist classrooms. It was asserted that the nature of quality arts education needs to be defined broadly. Such a broad definition is presented.

The use of the EITM in this study was found to be highly beneficial as a way to structure data collection, analysis, and presentation. The nine domains of the EITM were found to be representative of the facets of interest in researching arts education within primary school classrooms, further providing nine different lenses through
which to view the data, encouraging the viewing of multiple perspectives and hence a comprehensive analysis and representation of the data.

Implications and recommendations for practice include: in primary schools, the arts should be seen as a part of generalist practice; in preparing generalist teachers for the teaching of arts education, further professional development is needed in this area, both preservice and inservice; in recognising what the arts have to offer, we should not lose sight of the need to educate the whole child; and in beginning to bring more arts education into the classrooms, we should begin by identifying the quality arts education that already is happening.

Implications and recommendations for policy include: structures must change around national testing to deflect focus from achievement on these tests; arts education must be seen as a priority in policy documents in order for it to become a priority in our schools; and professional development in arts education should be strongly recommended, if not mandated, particularly for teachers who self identify with feelings of inadequacy for teaching the arts.

Implications and recommendations for further research include: further observations of quality arts education in primary school classrooms, including a larger number of interviews and involvement of students, parents, and the wider school community; further research focusing on how NAPLAN has impacted upon arts education and how arts education impacts NAPLAN; further application of the EITM in broader contexts; further research focusing on quality in arts education and in education more broadly; and a push towards researchers publishing in formats easily accessible to teachers.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)__________________________________________

Bianca Power
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# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CRT</td>
<td>Casual Relief Teacher</td>
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<td>EITM</td>
<td>Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix</td>
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<td>IWB</td>
<td>Interactive White Board</td>
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<td>MACC</td>
<td>Mobile Art Craft Centre</td>
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<td>MARC</td>
<td>Mobile Area Reading Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Program for International Student Assessment</td>
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<td>QLD</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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Glossary of Terms

**arts**  Refers to dance, drama, music, and visual art. Lowercase ‘a’ is used in accordance with APA style guidelines which state that the names of academic subjects should not be capitalised (American Psychological Association, 2013).

**arts education**  Refers to education in one or more of dance, drama, music, and/or visual art.

**collective**  Refers to something taken as a whole, formed by combining several separate elements. As such, where the phrase “**arts education as a collective**” appears in this thesis, it refers to “**arts education**” seen as a whole, encompassing education in the elements (artforms) of dance, drama, music, and visual art.

**nature**  Refers to the inherent character and features of something. As such, where the phrase “**the nature of arts education**” appears in this thesis, it refers to the inherent character and features of arts education.

**quality**  Refers to something of recognised value and worth.

**quality arts education**  Is encompassed by educational experiences of recognised value and worth. It is context-specific, with commonly held beacons of quality applicable to method, structure, and environment.
Prologue

In portraiture methodology it is essential to make clear from the outset the position of the researcher. This is known as “voice as preoccupation” and “voice as autobiography”. This Prologue provides a brief autobiographical portrait serving the purpose of placing the researcher in the picture, and acknowledging potential views and biases and how these may influence the research. No attempt is made to connect this particular life story with the data specific to this research, or the literature surrounding it.

One of my fondest early memories is of Saturday afternoons and Sundays spent with my grandfather. Living with my Mum and grandparents in western Sydney, after the regular shopping trip with my Nana on a Saturday morning while Mum worked, I would eagerly wait for Pa to arrive home from his half-day shift. Saturday afternoon would then be spent in Pa’s shed, where he would put on a tape or CD of The Highwaymen, and give me jobs to keep me busy while he worked. I would happily sort out a pile of screws or put pipe fittings into bags while he hammered and sawed things and bolted other things together. As I got older, sometimes we’d just be in his shed together – he’d have a beer and I’d have a coke, and I’d laugh as he’d sing out of tune and out of time and do his signature beer-belly dance to the music of Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Kris Kristofferson. These were my first experiences with music, and they were very positive ones.

Other times Pa would need to weld something, so he would send me back into the house, where it was not unusual for Nana to make me spend hours crafting small woollen pom-poms or something similar, or in later years try to force me into learning cross-stitch. She always seems to be knitting or sewing something, usually with three or more projects on the go at any one time.
My first school “detention” is one I will never forget. I was in kindergarten (my first year of primary school), and my teacher told me I needed to stay back to speak with her after all of the other kids had left to go home. I was scared, because I knew my Mum would be waiting for me and that she would get upset if I was late. My teacher sat me down at my desk, and placed a piece of paper in front of me with a circle on it, with lines through the centre (I can still picture it clearly, and I now recognise it as most likely a blank colour wheel template). She pushed a tin of coloured pencils towards me as she sat down in the seat next to me, and she proceeded to tell me that she had seen that I couldn’t stay within the lines when I colour – so now I had to stay behind at the end of the day to learn how. She put a pencil in my hand, then with the pencil in hers, demonstrated how to colour slowly without going over the lines. I copied her, but all I was really thinking about was how I wished she would let me go now, how it wasn’t my fault I was bad at art, and how I hoped my Mum would come looking for me.

For my 6th birthday, my mum’s fiancé, Chris, bought me a keyboard. He had been playing piano and classical guitar since he was a child, so when Mum and I moved in with him shortly before my 7th birthday, she decided it would be a great bonding experience for us if Chris was to teach me how to play something on this keyboard he had bought me. So reluctantly, Chris taught me how to read music, and how to work out which note was which on the keyboard. And I was hooked. The music theory fascinated me. The idea that I could produce something that sounded like “real music” was intriguing. He gave me a pile of his old “learn piano” workbooks, and I spent hours working out how to play the simple pieces in these books, playing them over and over again until I could play them fluently. But without any more books to explore, and without much more input from Chris other than telling me to be quiet when he wanted to play his guitar (which I was allowed to watch and listen to if I was absolutely silent), my time spent at the keyboard became less and less.
influence on me at this time was the music he listened to. Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, John Michael Montgomery and James Blundell were added to my repertoire of familiar country music. It’s 1994.

Fast-forwarding to 1999, I am 11 years old, and my grandfather gives me a three-quarter-size classical guitar he has no doubt picked up second-hand somewhere. It lived next to my bed, and I would occasionally ask Chris to tune it, then I’d muck around exploring some of the sounds I could make with it, then put it away again. It was not long after this that my grandfather passed away. A month after that, I started high school. A month later again, my little sister was born – meaning I was no longer an only child. Within a few weeks, I got the idea into my head that I wanted to learn how to play the guitar. I had three reasons for this: Pa had given me that guitar; I knew it would really aggravate my step-father (circumstances at the time had me rebelling just a bit); and… it just might be fun. So as I predicted, after accompanying me to one lesson at the local music shop, Chris decided that he wouldn’t be wasting any more of his money on lessons for me (“she’s a girl, she’ll never be any good anyway”), so if I insisted on learning, he would teach me himself. He gave me some of his old classical guitar methods books and explained how to read the diagrams that indicate where each note is on the fretboard. He also showed me how to sit and how to hold my hands, and how to place my fingers on the fretboard, and gave me a few exercises to practise. I took it like a duck to water. Although our supposed “weekly” lessons happened on average once a month, I kept practising. I didn’t think I was any good at it, but that didn’t matter – I just loved doing it.

The following year we moved to a new town, and I started year 8 at the local high school. Music was on my timetable for the first afternoon. As we entered the demountable building

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A demountable building is a building designed to be portable rather than permanently located. Such buildings are popular in Australian schools, often used on a permanent basis (despite their intended purpose).
serving as a music room, little did I know that it would quickly become my favourite place to be for the three years that I attended this high school. The lesson started with our music teacher, Mr MacLennan, telling the class that we would be learning to play the guitars “again” this year. I quietly delighted in this. So far today I had automatically been placed into the bottom maths class on the assumption that “that quiet kid” must not be too intelligent (after subsequently achieving 100% in all maths tests that term, I was put into the intermediate class, where I then achieved 100% in all tests and was quickly moved into the advanced class, where I was easily the top of the class). *Maybe if we were playing guitar I wouldn’t be too far behind the others,* I thought to myself. After a bit of music theory instruction, we were allowed to play the nylon string guitars – there were enough for one each. Just as I sat down with the guitar I had collected from the storage room, Mr MacLennan came over to assess “the new kid”. He asked me if I had ever played a guitar before. I told him that my step-father had been teaching me classical guitar… but that I wasn’t very good. He then told me that he was a classical guitarist himself. He took my guitar and tuned it, then gave it back to me and asked if I would play something for him. So I did – against a backdrop of discordant sounds from guitars being played around the room, I gingerly played a short classical piece I had been learning. Mr MacLennan then did the first of many things that would change my life significantly – he praised my playing. He said that I had really good technique. After rifling through some piles of books and papers at the front of the room, he came back with a book with various pieces of music arranged for classical guitar, and told me to look through and see if there was anything in there I’d like to play, since the stuff the rest of the class would be doing would be too basic for me. He flicked to a particular page, and I started to play. “Have you played this before?” he asked me. I replied that no, I am sight-reading it. He was clearly impressed. Did this mean I was actually *good*? I wasn’t sure yet, but I had a feeling I was going to like this subject.
Pretty soon I was becoming known among my peers as being good at music. Not only could I play the guitar, I also loved the music theory. Towards the end of the year, Mr MacLennan agreed to my playing electric guitar in the school band. For the first time ever, I felt like I truly belonged. I became a valued member of the school band, and largely through music, I was finding a place among my peers. At the end-of-year school concert, I performed with the school band. This was also the night I performed solo for the first time. I walked out onto the stage of our local “opera house”, holding my guitar tightly, and sat down on the seat. The whole place was silent. I started to play my embellished rendition of Silent Night, and halfway through heard my 21 month old sister yell out from the back of the opera house “There’s Binca!” (her best attempt at saying my name). I managed not to laugh, and got to the end of the piece. As I finished, the crowd applauded, and I looked down at Mr MacLennan sitting at the sound desk at the foot of the stage. He had a huge grin on his face as he gave me a thumbs up.

The following year, we were allowed to choose elective subjects for years 9-10. I chose music (as if I wouldn’t!) and drama. Our drama teacher was the wife of our music teacher, and much loved by all of her students. I knew that I would enjoy drama. I had always loved to give speeches and recite poetry, and now I had a further taste for performing through music, and I absolutely loved it. Unfortunately though, like many teachers before her, what Mrs MacLennan saw in me was the “quiet kid”. Although I put down that I wanted a main part in our first play we were rehearsing as a class, to perform at the local eisteddfod, I was given the smallest part available. My role was to run across the stage then scream at the appropriate moment. But at least I could do that with gusto – I made the adjudicators jump out of their seats.

When Mrs MacLennan went on maternity leave towards the end of that year, our “substitute” drama teacher had us write down which roles we would each be prepared to play in an
adaptation of Roald Dahl’s Cinderella. She said that she guaranteed we would each get one of the roles that we wrote down. So I thought to myself what if… I wrote down only one role – I wanted to be Cinderella. And that’s the part I was given. Within a matter of days I had memorised the entire play – every part. It became the norm that if one or more students were absent during our rehearsals I would simply say their lines along with my own. Looking back anybody watching this without knowing what was going on may have thought the character I was playing was insane, given that this resulted in my having many hilarious conversations with myself. We performed Cinderella at the end of year school concert. I wasn’t at all impressed when I was informed that I would need to wear makeup, but I did survive it. At school the next week, my maths teacher told me she had been to the school concert. “I didn’t know you could even speak that loud!” she said, after commending me on my performance.

The following year I again scored the lead role in our drama performance for the end-of-year school concert. I played a teacher oblivious to the intended insults in the cleverly worded sarcastic remarks of her students. I also performed several songs with the school band, a solo classical guitar piece, and a country music duet with a friend. It was 2002.

That Christmas holidays we moved to another town, and the following February, after much internal debate over whether I would continue my schooling or get a job instead (the decision was left completely to me), I started year 11 at another school. Over the following years I continued to play the guitar, took up drums for a while, expanded my listening repertoire substantially, and found more and more as the years went on that listening to music was my best escape from the world.

I do believe that music helped me to find my place in the world, amongst my peers, an identity for myself, at a time when I really needed it. If not for my high school music teacher Mr MacLennan, I may still have continued playing the guitar, but I also may never have
received the encouragement that I needed to feel that I was worth something. Through music and through drama also, I, the “quiet kid” who nobody thought twice of, was able to engage with my peers in all new ways, to share a voice that only I knew I had, and to slowly become quietly confident in myself that I had a place in this world.

In recent years I look at my now fifteen-year-old sister, who over the past few years has begun to find herself and her place in the world through visual art and music. In our teenage years we have both turned to music as a means to navigate through the good times and the bad, to explore meaning, emotion, creativity. In the country town where my sister attends the Catholic high school, the only options for private instrumental tuition are at the school itself, at a rate of $20-30 per week. My sister is unable to access this however. As our Mum is a low income earner and sole parent of three young children, she has an arrangement with the school that she pay the school fees per week rather than upfront at the beginning of each school year. When she attempted to enrol my sister in private guitar lessons at the school, she was advised “not unless you pay the fees up front – if you can afford ‘extras’ for your child… well that simply should be put towards the school fees instead.” This both infuriates and saddens me.

I completed my undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Education (Primary) (Honours) in 2010, and began my PhD the following year. As part of this research I had conversations with teachers, and conducted observations, through the eyes of a generalist trained teacher with a personal background in music and a strong interest and belief in the value of arts education.

I believe that arts education has something of intrinsic value to offer to almost every individual, and that every single child should have access to this, just as they should have access to learning to read, write, and count. In Australia we do not say that only those who
can afford the fees can be taught literacy, numeracy, science, or even physical education – so why say this about arts education? It is my hope that one day we won’t.

It is with this background and set of beliefs that I entered into this research project. I write myself into the portraits of Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School as a reminder of my role in every part of the research process – from conception of research idea, through formulation of research questions, data collection, analysis, and write up. This process of writing out my “voice as preoccupation and autobiography” is itself dependent upon what I see as important and what I choose to reveal to myself, and then to the readers of my thesis. I invite the reader to view the portraits presented in this thesis, and the subsequent discussion, as deep, rich and descriptive yet thoroughly partial accounts of the phenomenon that is arts education in Australian primary school classrooms.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background to Thesis

In 2009 I embarked on an honours research project, embedded within my Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree. Upon deciding to take up this opportunity, I had a vague notion that I wanted to research in the area of music education, as this was an area that I felt passionately about and that had significantly impacted my life. My interest soon after turned to the broader area of arts education. Following discussion with my soon-to-be-supervisor, I began reading through a variety of arts education literature he suggested to me, as well as sourcing my own. The very first article I read, handed to me by my supervisor and printed on fluorescent orange paper, was *Primary Music Education in the Absence of Specialists* by R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008). The authors describe the nature and quality of elementary school music education in an unidentified country in which music is taught exclusively by generalist teachers. Throughout the article the authors touch upon a number of key issues that I was to discover over the next two years were highly relevant to my honours research – and indeed, to my subsequent PhD thesis. One quote in particular stood out for me: “We found very little literature reporting what actually goes on in the classroom when generalists teach music” (R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008, p. 4). In my subsequent reading, I began to identify with R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins’ feeling on this – I too, in looking at literature on music, visual art, dance, and drama education, and arts education as a collective, found there to be scant literature detailing what actually happens in primary school classrooms when arts education takes place. I found plenty bemoaning the lack of arts education, and a decent amount despairing over the poor quality of what is taught; however little of this described
what was actually happening. I began to realise that this was an important area. This gap in
the literature became a foundational component of the rationale for my honours thesis.

My honours thesis (Power, 2010) took a quantitative approach, using a broad survey
instrument to produce a description of arts education in New South Wales (NSW)
government primary schools. The findings of this supported those of the extant literature.
Recognising the strengths and limitations of my honours study, the key recommendation of
my honours thesis was “that further research into classroom practice of arts education be
conducted, and that this go beyond the self-report of teachers to conduct close investigation
of arts education classroom practice through a case study approach utilising survey data,
observations, and focus group interviews” (ibid). This recommendation was the starting point
of my PhD thesis.

Towards the beginning of my PhD candidature, I revisited the R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins
(2008) article. Reading through it, I realised that the process of undergoing my honours study
had given me a more comprehensive understanding of R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins’
recommendations. They called for research going beyond survey responses (as did I in my
honours recommendations). They refer to both the nature and the quality of elementary
(primar) school music education (though they focus on the nature). At the point of revisiting
this article I had already begun to bring this notion of quality into light in my PhD study –
realising it was mentioned throughout the R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) article simply
increased my confidence that I had been leaning this way from the beginning.

While I have read much literature on arts education since my first reading of R. Wiggins and
J. Wiggins (2008), the words printed on those twenty-seven fluorescent orange pages (though
I have it in digital form now) have been pivotal to my research over the past five years, and
never far from my mind as I mull over the purpose, issues, methods, and conclusions in my research.

Naturally, as I began my PhD journey, I was introduced to new concepts and methods. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s method and methodology of portraiture was the first. After reading several articles on portraiture, I ordered a copy of the “bible” on the subject, *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Coming from a quantitative background and respecting but fearing the need to move to a qualitative framework, portraiture sold me on the benefits of a qualitative approach. In portraiture, I found an approach to the research process that I was eager to immerse myself in, and that complemented both the work that I wanted to do, and what I believe in.

My research frame was beginning – working within the interpretivist paradigm, my research would constitute a portraiture case study. In developing my methodology and looking at issues around validity and reliability, I was introduced to Richardson’s (1994, 2000) concept of crystallization, which then became imbedded in the frame of my research. Following my honours recommendations, and aligning with portraiture and crystallization, I would collect data in the form of semi-structured interviews with teachers, and extensive field observations. Knowing the practical limitations of a PhD study, I decided to focus on two case sites – those most practical to my situation and research interests being one school in Queensland (QLD) and one in Victoria (VIC). I now had the frame of what I would research, where, and how. As a framework to organise data collection, analysis, and presentation, I began to explore Bamford and Glinkowski’s Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010). The EITM, which offers a scaffold of the main areas of impact relevant to arts education identified through extensive international research, was the foundation I needed from which to build my data collection instruments, and to later analyse and present my data.
The significance of this study lies in:

- its contribution to addressing the gap of scholarship in this area;
- its drive towards enhancing quality practice of arts education;
- its focus on quality and the assumption that quality is there to be found;
- its view to informing policy, practice, and further research; and
- its intention to verify use of the EITM as a scaffold for use in studies of arts education in primary school classrooms with the view to possibilities for this scaffold in broader contexts.

1.2 Rationale from the Literature

A great deal of literature is available on the benefits of arts education (Winner & Hetland, 2008). It is not the intention of this thesis to expand upon this body of work; however it is felt that, in order to provide an effective rationale for this study, a brief rationale for arts education is needed. Such a rationale is provided here, concluding with justification for this particular study.

The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011) draws attention to the current international research base about arts education outcomes, citing foundational studies including those in The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) compilations *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999) and *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002). *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999) reported on seven studies indicating links between increased participation in arts education and increased achievement levels in reading and mathematics. *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002) reported on 62 separate research studies, a large number of which indicated transfer of skills from arts learning experiences to learning in reading, language development, writing, mathematics, and science (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011).
The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011) cites additional studies indicating increased academic success as an outcome of quality arts education learning experiences (Bransom et al., 2010; Catterall, 2009; Israel, 2008); the benefits of arts integration for all, and in particular for economically disadvantaged students or students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; DeMoss & Morris, 2002; Ingram & Reidell, 2003); and neurological research indicating positive outcomes of arts education enhancing learning and skills transfer (Asbury & Rich, 2008; Rudacliffe, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2010).

Contrary to the approach of these studies, D. Davis (2008) suggests that rather than justify arts education by what it can do for other subject areas – as has been the tendency over the past few decades – we should instead identify what it is that arts education uniquely offers “in specific, constant, and invaluable ways” (p. 7). “We don’t need the arts in our schools to raise mathematical and verbal skills – we already target these in math and language arts” (Winner & Hetland, 2008, p. 31). Findings of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation Report (2007) align with this, suggesting that while extensive research has supported the notion of arts education boosting academic achievement in other subject areas, the consensus view could be summed up as “not proven” (ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, 2007) – correlation does not demonstrate causation (Winner & Hetland, 2008). There is a much stronger evidence base for the relationship between arts education and a variety of ‘non cognitive’ skills, including self-confidence and communication (ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, 2007). Ewing (2010) asserts two key arguments for the importance of arts education: “to acknowledge the central, intrinsic role the arts can and should play in the lives of all children and adults”; and “[to realise] the potential for the arts to foster the development of creativity and imagination and to facilitate social change” (Ewing, 2010, p. 5).
Indeed, there is increasing recognition of the need for education to develop students’ creative capacities in order to equip them for life and work in the 21st century, and to ensure that the future needs of our industries are met (ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, 2007; Burnard, 2006; Ewing, 2010). “Creativity, interpretation, innovation and cultural understanding are all sought-after skills for new and emerging industries of the 21st century. Arts education provides students with the tools to develop these skills” (Pratt, 2009).

Not only does arts education provide explicit instruction and exposure to the arts processes themselves, but it is also responsible for teaching and developing modes of thinking not otherwise evident in “core curriculum” (Winner & Hetland, 2008). Additionally, a large number of studies exist asserting a link between arts education and critical thinking skills (Lampert, 2006). Those who display creative habits of mind are curious, highly motivated, willing to take risks, and able to think outside the square; they can combine unusual ideas with more conventional ways of thinking, are more likely to see ideas to fruition, and possess the ability to probe ideas more deeply, ask open-ended questions, seek multiple responses, and listen to their inner voice (Ewing, 2010).

Arts education is highly valuable; however the mere existence of arts education will not provide such benefits – it is quality arts education that is needed in order for students to gain maximum benefits from arts education. Bamford (2010a) states that, with regards to arts education, if the education to take place is not of high quality it is best that it does not take place at all, as arts education taught to poor quality can have negative impacts on the children involved.

Arts education in schools, both in Australia and internationally, occurs infrequently and when it does occur it is regarded to be substandard – it is not meeting the expectations of curriculum (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009a; Anderson, 2003; D. Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al.,
While this has been well documented in the literature for over a decade (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009a; Anderson, 2003; D. Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008), what is absent is an understanding of what happens at a classroom level – in other words, an understanding of the nature of quality arts education in primary school classrooms.

In efforts to improve and capitalise upon the arts education already happening in our primary schools, it is essential that this gap in the research be addressed by exploring “from the ground up” what is happening at the classroom level. This will enable the discovery of what is working and what is not, and provide a foundation from which to find ways of supporting the positive aspects of what is happening in schools, as part of working towards improved arts education in our primary school classrooms.

Bamford (2006) argues the need for additional study of arts education in the context of Australian schools, while Power (2010) identified the more specific need for such research to investigate what actually happens in classrooms when arts education takes place. This echoes R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins’ (2008) call in their study in an unidentified country, asserting the need “to present policy makers with descriptions of what actually occurs in primary classrooms when generalist teachers teach music so they will have accurate criteria for making decisions about the future of music education in the schools” (pp. 3-4). Gibson and Anderson (2008) emphasise the need for innovative research to explore the links between education and the arts in the Australian context so as not to be left behind by the recent surge underway in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. With a view to improving the quantity and quality of arts education in our primary schools, it is crucial that an investigation of what is occurring at a classroom level be produced. This will facilitate principals, teachers, preservice teacher educators, curriculum developers, and interested stakeholders in understanding from the ground up the mechanisms of arts education, and in
working towards enhancing quality practice of arts education in Australian primary school classrooms.

1.3 Aim and Question

The aim of this research is to investigate the nature of quality arts education occurring in Australian primary school classrooms at two case sites – one in Queensland, one in Victoria.

In order to achieve this aim, the following research question was developed:

What is the nature of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms?

The focus in this research is on the nature of enacted practice. This is viewed from an abundance perspective – i.e. with assumption that elements of recognised value or worth will be found within the enacted practice – hence the inclusion of the term “quality” in the research question.

1.4 Overview of Thesis

This section provides an overview of this thesis, outlining the purpose of each chapter.

Chapter 1 Provides an introduction to this research and a rationale for the specific focus of this study. Outlines the research aim and question, and presents an overview of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 Provides a discussion and analysis of national and international literature on arts education, and that on quality.
Chapter 3  
Outlines the methodology and methods used in this research, including the theoretical framework and data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 4  
Presents a portrait of Bungadeen Primary School, a small rural school in the south of Victoria, Australia, with a focus on the arts education professional practices that occur there.

Chapter 5  
Presents a portrait of Farefield State School, a large school located in the Hinterland area of the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, with a focus on the arts education professional practices that occur there.

Chapter 6  
Concludes this thesis, beginning with a summary, followed by discussion around conclusions made, and finishing with recommendations for practice, policy, and further research. This chapter finishes with an epilogue, written in portraiture style.
2 Literature Review

Chapter Two provides a background to the field of primary school arts education internationally and nationally, including reference to arts education in preservice teacher education and the impact of this on the arts education taking place in primary school classrooms. The notion of quality and its relevance to this study is then discussed, and a definition for quality arts education provided for use in this thesis.

2.1 Arts Education

A background to the field of primary school arts education is provided, including reference to arts education in preservice teacher education and the impact of this on the arts education taking place in primary school classrooms. International viewpoints are discussed first to establish the broad context, followed by discussion of Australian arts education research.

2.1.1 International viewpoints

Arts education in primary schools has been described as falling short of expectations internationally (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Herbst, 2007; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 1993; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008). It has been found that in many instances preservice and inservice teacher education does not provide adequate preparation or support for generalist teachers to meet the expectations of the arts curriculum (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Bamford, 2006; Chappell, 2007; Ewing, 2010; Leung, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2009b). In order to better understand the impact of preservice teacher education on the arts education occurring in primary school classrooms, studies investigating this are discussed.
Hash (2010) surveyed preservice elementary teachers at Calvin College in Michigan regarding their attitudes towards music in the elementary curriculum. Specifically, Hash investigated six research questions: What musical experiences and abilities do preservice elementary classroom teachers possess?; What attitudes do preservice elementary classroom teachers hold regarding the roles of the classroom teacher and music specialist in teaching music?; How comfortable are preservice elementary classroom teachers with teaching music as a subject and integrating music with other disciplines?; How do preservice elementary classroom teachers rate the importance of music in relation to other subjects in the elementary curriculum?; How do preservice elementary classroom teachers rate the importance of various outcomes of the general music curriculum?; and What implications might these findings have for teaching music to preservice elementary classroom teachers?

Findings revealed that most of the respondents did not feel comfortable teaching music as a subject, believe music should be taught by a specialist, and do not believe that classroom teachers should need to be capable of teaching music. These findings are further suggestive of participants regarding music as less important than other subjects, and non-musical outcomes of music instruction as more important than musical outcomes. The majority of respondents are however supportive of music integration, believing in its ability to improve achievement in other disciplines.

Hash (2010) suggests that preservice music methods courses may be more effective if the focus is on integration rather than on teaching music as a discipline, due both to their positive attitudes towards it, and to the fact that “it is likely that some classroom teachers will not do an adequate job teaching music because many do not feel responsible for or capable of doing so” (p. 16). Both advantages and disadvantages to arts integration are presented in the literature, as can be seen through discussion of subsequent studies.
Lynch (2007) explored the ways in which music, drama, art and movement were integrated with classroom content at a public arts-magnet school in the United States of America. This school employs full time specialist teachers in the areas of visual art, music, physical education/movement, and drama. These teachers are responsible both for teaching their own disciplines and for the design, co-teaching and evaluating (with each classroom teacher) of arts integration lessons.

Three qualities were identified by Lynch’s (2007) study that contributed to making arts integration in these classrooms engaging learning experiences for the students: students were allowed to use their hands, bodies, and voices in meaningful ways as tools for their learning, free to move around the room and given freedom and responsibility for their own learning; students were allowed and encouraged to make choices about what they were creating and how to interact with the content, leading to students becoming more attentive to detail, more deliberate in their choices, and more thoughtful about what they considered essential; and the integrated activities were social events, where students were free to engage with one another, sharing comments, thoughts, ideas, and materials.

When fifth grade students in Lynch’s (2007) study were asked to reflect on their experiences in arts education over the previous six years, four key themes were evident, seen by the author to be the essential supportive elements of learning about, with, and through the arts: arts integration allowed for multiple perspectives, making for an inclusive classroom environment; arts integration helped create a safe atmosphere for taking risks, allowing students who may struggle in non-arts areas of the curriculum to shine; arts integration showed that learning can be enjoyable; and the arts and other areas of the curriculum naturally complement each other.
In discussing the issue of arts integration for music teachers, May (2013) cites numerous studies advocating the benefits of arts integration (including integration involving music). Difficulties music teachers face in achieving meaningful integration with other subjects were stated to be numerous: difficulty collaborating with other teachers; difficulty finding additional time needed to plan integrated curricula; difficulty finding a suitable time to work with classroom teachers (as the classroom teacher’s mandatory planning time is often during the time the music teacher is working with his or her class); and difficulty ensuring core musical objectives are met while avoiding the pitfalls of superficial outcomes and artificial activities (such as “piggy-back” songs). May (2013) advocates that to be successful in integrating the arts, collaboration is needed between teachers with expertise in various subject areas. Additionally, integration of music with other subject areas should not be solely the responsibility of the music teacher, but rather a “two-way-street” where responsibility for planning is shared by both the music teacher and the classroom teacher. One content area should not become more important than the other. In order to achieve this, a shift is needed from emphasising the differences between subjects, to making connections between them, while ensuring that integrated lessons make practical and intellectual sense. It is from this, the author states, that meaningful learning can occur. This links back to the concept of quality education, for without meaningful learning, the education taking place can not be education of quality.

Seagraves, Coutts, and Soden (2008) report on the Scottish “Arts Across the Curriculum” initiative. The six key aims of this project were to: increase pupils’ achievement in identified subject areas across the curriculum; increase pupils’ motivation to learn; support and develop the skills of teachers to work collaboratively and creatively; encourage links between different areas of learning and erode subject barriers; improve the ethos of the school; and explore the efficacy of the expressive arts as a delivery mechanism across the curriculum.
This particular paper focused on reporting the students’ perspectives. Findings indicated that the integrated approaches were curriculum focused, with arts education being used to engage students. More than 80% of students felt that it was easier to learn the content presented in an integrated fashion (by the artists), and almost three quarters felt that they could remember the ideas from these learning experiences more easily. When asked how the integrated lessons helped their learning, students spoke of being engaged with the content for longer stretches of time during integration than in other learning situations, as the integration lessons were “fun”, “interesting”, and “less boring”. Teachers likewise reported students “being excited” and “loving it”, with the students’ interests in the integration content often continuing even when the artist was not present. The large majority of students believed that taking part in the integration lessons with the artist had contributed to their feelings of confidence.

Russell-Bowie (2013b) investigated the development of self-concept of children aged 8-12 as they engaged in an integrated arts project. The students involved were from diverse cultural and social backgrounds in a low socio-economic area. Development of academic and non-academic self-concept was higher for students involved in the project than for those not involved in the project. Findings indicated that the general self-concept of students involved in the integrated arts project increased considerably more than that of the students not involved. Interestingly, academic self-concept decreased for students in both groups, though this decrease was less significant for those involved in the integrated arts project.

Robinson (2013) reviewed 44 studies in relation to arts integration implemented in disadvantaged student populations. The results of this review indicated that positive effects were reported for drama integration and “multi-arts” integration, and potentially positive effects were reported for dance integration, visual arts integration, arts integration for students with disabilities, and arts integration as a means to improve the school environment.
La Jevic (2013) researched arts integration in primary schools in the United States, with a focus on how elementary teachers understand, implement, and experience arts integration. A unique point of the study by La Jevic (ibid), similarly to the study I present in this thesis, is its focus on the “typical” primary school, as opposed to those with large-scale funded arts programs.

Acknowledging the tendency for teachers to teach as they were taught, La Jevic (2013) argues that “it is necessary … to challenge teachers in assessing why they hold onto familiar instructional practices” (p. 2). It was found that the arts are often devalued in arts integration, often used primarily for decorative purposes, with the arts component greatly diluted in arts integration learning experiences. In terms of art as decoration, La Jevic (2013) discusses the emphasis on product (as opposed to process), with that product most often being “cookie-cutter art” – simple projects that keep students working at an approximately similar pace, and increasing the probability of producing a visually appealing product (albeit one product with minor variations 25 times over) to display on the classroom and hallway walls.

I observed a lesson where second-grade students learned how to make decorative snowflakes by following sequential steps. They folded white paper, cut with scissors to make snowflakes, glued the snowflakes onto 9 x 12 blue, purple, or black construction paper, and hung them on their hallway lockers. After the lesson, I realized that the teacher never discussed symmetry, a topic they were studying in math, nor was there a link to science (e.g., an exploration of the chemistry of water and formation of crystals into unique shapes). The lesson seemed separate from any academic learning. How had this seemingly obvious connection been overlooked? Is it that teachers are trained to see the academic subjects as disconnected areas, and/or did the teacher just want to quickly create some wintry decorations for the wall? (La Jevic, 2013, p. 9)
In terms of diluting the arts component in arts integration, La Jevic (2013) reports that many of the lessons she observed were focused primarily on the non-arts subject area, with the arts used superficially for various rudimentary purposes. In other cases, the arts were used as “busy work”, primarily as a behaviour management mechanism to keep students busy and quiet, for example colouring in a worksheet or adding a visual component once their “real work” has been completed. It was also found that, in some instances, the arts component was not even written into the teacher’s lesson plan – further telling of the lower value attributed to the arts. Additionally, in La Jevic’s (ibid) observations, the arts component of a lesson or unit of work was frequently not assessed. This was the case seemingly not because there were no objectives against which to assess it, but rather because it was not a requirement to provide a grade for art on the students’ report cards. In addition to that, La Jevic (2013) argues, the teachers did not understand art as a way of learning and understanding, and further believed it to be “unfair” to assess arts education, as it is about creativity and “not cut and dry”. La Jevic (2013) asserts that in continuing to not assess arts education, the arts become further marginalised. Policy documents were also seen to contribute to the marginalisation of arts education, as the district’s written curriculum promoted the use of arts education as enrichment activities and methods of reteaching – or in other words, as beneficial to the kids who either “don’t get it”, or need to be challenged beyond the ordinary classroom activities. The author suggests that addressing these problems needs to begin in preservice teacher education – “Although teachers live in a world that is complex and inherently interconnected, their academic education does not foster teaching/learning in such ways” (p. 14). La Jevic’s (ibid) study, like that of May (2013), helps provide balance to the literature on arts integration, addressing issues in its implementation rather than merely purporting its advantages.
In line with the ideas of La Jevic (2013), in discussing the impact of integrated arts teaching on music teachers, Overland (2013) cites literature warning that encouraging use of arts education for facilitating learning in other subject areas (as in an arts integration model) runs significant risk of diminishing the value of art as being valid in its own right. While La Jevic (2013) referred to art becoming “diluted” in arts integration models, Overland (2013) cautions against the danger of arts education becoming “dangerously diffused” into the curriculum, eventually being overtaken by other “core” subjects that are perceived as having a higher priority.

There is much international literature reported on concerning integration of one or more artforms with other areas of the curriculum. Both advantages and disadvantages of arts integration are discussed. Advantages of arts integration centre around the effectiveness of teaching the artform (with suggestions that integration results in higher effectiveness) (Hash, 2010) and effectiveness of learning it (Seagraves, Coutts, & Soden, 2008). Additionally, arts integration was reported to have positive impacts in the areas of confidence and self-esteem (Russell-Bowie, 2013b; Seagraves, Coutts, & Soden, 2008). Disadvantages of arts integration presented in the literature are concerned with the difficulties that teachers may face in achieving meaningful integration (May, 2013), and the potential for arts integration to result in the arts being devalued or “diluted” (La Jevic, 2013; Overland, 2013).

Aspects conducive to successful arts integration were found to include: allowing for multiple perspectives; an inclusive classroom environment; and a safe atmosphere for taking risks (Lynch, 2007). Behind the scenes, collaboration between teachers with expert knowledge in different subject areas; and shared responsibility for planning were seen as important (May, 2013).
Additional to the literature on arts integration in primary schools is literature focused on the arts taught as discrete subject areas. Holden and Button (2006) investigated the teaching of music by non-music specialists in primary schools in the United Kingdom. More specifically, the researchers investigated attitudes to teaching music, factors affecting teachers’ confidence, the relationship between confidence and training, support for music teaching, teaching experience, and musical background. A survey was conducted with 71 teachers, with sixteen agreeing to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews. Music was given the lowest ranking overall when participants were asked to rank their confidence in teaching each area of the curriculum. Interviews revealed that participants viewed music as a “specialist” subject, more so than other areas of the curriculum. Data suggested that more recent entrants to the teaching profession felt more confident to teach music. The authors propose this to potentially be a result of early-career teachers having been involved in more music education during their preservice teacher training, when compared with that of their mid- to late-career peers. Seventy-five percent of teachers report having no musical qualifications. A significant link was found between qualifications in music and confidence to teach it.

In terms of types of support used/received for the teaching of music, the most used were a published music scheme (69%); school scheme of work (63%); text books and teacher guides (47%); inservice training in music (34%); respondent’s own knowledge and ideas (31%); advice/assistance in planning from music coordinator (28%); television programs and radio broadcasts (19%); and support in own classroom by a music specialist (9%). It is interesting to note that the higher percentages relate to physical resource materials, with “human” resources less available or utilised. That least accessed, support in own classroom by a music specialist, was also the most desired form of support, with more than half the respondents indicating this. The authors recommend development of teachers’ practical musical skills and
increasing access to support from music specialists in order to provide both students and teachers with opportunities to fulfil their full musical potential. This, of course, relates back to the preservice teacher education literature indicating the insufficiency of preservice teacher education in preparing teachers to be teachers of music.

R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) studied the nature of primary school music education in an unidentified country. Teachers, principals, and support staff in 200 randomly selected primary schools were involved in this research. A questionnaire was distributed to schools via mail. The questionnaire asked for demographic information about the school, the teacher’s background in teaching and in music, the nature of classroom practice of music education, the support provided to the teachers, and the teachers’ confidence in teaching music. Twenty-five classroom observations of music education were then conducted in seventeen different schools. This was followed by interviews with the majority of these teachers. Eight principals, eight music teacher education faculty, three regional music advisors, several preservice teacher education students, and the national arts coordinator were also interviewed.

The findings indicated that teachers had reasonable backgrounds in music, and spent a reasonable amount of time teaching music to their class. What constitutes “reasonable” in this context was not made clear. Approximately half, however, reported not feeling confident in teaching music. From their classroom observations and interviews, R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) reported that the quality of music instruction provided by generalist teachers is dependent upon both their knowledge of pedagogy and their knowledge of and background in music. They also found that the majority of teachers were, in their opinion, unable to “teach music with integrity” (p. 22), due to their lack of understanding of music pedagogy, and that this in turn caused these teachers to lack confidence in teaching music.
Unlike the vast majority of studies reported on in this review, R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) went further than the self-report of teachers by also conducting classroom observations. The authors highlight the importance of going beyond self-report through their discussion of the extent to which observational data in this study provided insights not otherwise evident through questionnaire and interview data. As well as triangulation of data-collection methods R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) triangulated data sources through contact with teachers, principals, and specialists in the field. The authors verified the themes they saw emerging in the data with each other as well as with two university music educators. One limitation of their study is that many of the claims made appear to be based solely on the judgment of the researchers – for example it is not made clear what constitutes a “reasonable” background in music or what it is to “teach music with integrity”. Contrary to this, the study reported on in this thesis will clarify quality arts education indicators that are to be used throughout this research, these being informed by relevant international literature. R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) assert that:

we need to present policy makers with descriptions of what actually occurs in primary classrooms when generalist teachers teach music so they will have accurate criteria for making decisions about the future of music education in the schools (p. 24)

Literature described throughout this review (e.g: Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; D. Davis, 2008; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Peers, 2008; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999) indicates that this recommendation can be expanded to arts education as a collective rather than just the music component. Hence the need for the study presented in this thesis, with focus on what actually happens in primary school classrooms when arts education takes place.
2.1.2 Australian context

In the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluation, a form of testing in which countries are ranked in terms of educational achievement, Australian students’ achievement in both the literacy and numeracy areas fell significantly between 2000 and 2009 (Ryan, 2013). Further slippage for Australia was seen in the 2012 results – the first round of testing in which increased emphasis was placed on creativity in each of the three tests. This may or may not be a coincidence. What is clear, however, is the increased value being placed upon creativity in education internationally.

In less than a decade, Australia’s performance on the PISA maths assessment has declined by the equivalent of more than six months of schooling (Thomson, 2013). A far more concerning fact highlighted by the PISA tests, however, is that in Australia the achievement gap between students in the lowest socioeconomic group and students in the highest socioeconomic group is equivalent to approximately two and a half years of schooling. Thomson (2013) believes that Australia must strive to improve outcomes for all students, both bringing the lowest achievers up to “an acceptable standard for a wealthy first-world country”, and also increasing outcomes for the highest achievers in order for them to “lead the country in terms of innovation and development”. Thomson (2013) further asserts:

To provide more equitable learning opportunities for all students we need to increase social inclusion – and reduce socioeconomic segregation – in our school system. That means ensuring that all of our schools provide high-quality teaching and foster a culture of high expectations for all students, alongside the development of practices to foster excellence in all schools in order to harness the influence of students on each other as a valuable learning resource (para. 14)
Though published a number of years prior, several excellent points made by Rabkin and Redmond (2006) attest to what the arts may have to offer in addressing these issues, in particular the achievement gap between low and high socioeconomic student groups. These authors explain the powerful affects that arts education can have on student achievement, and how these may in fact be most profound for struggling students – those at the bottom of the PISA achievement gap. Arts education has much to offer students in Australian primary schools; as this section demonstrates, however, the extant body of literature suggests that much is left to be desired in this area.

The two most recent national reviews in Australia relevant to arts education are the National Review of School Music Education (Pascoe et al., 2005) and First We See: The National Review of Visual Education (D. Davis, 2008). To date there have been no national reviews on drama education, on dance education, or on arts education as a collective. The key findings and recommendations of these two national reviews will be discussed here. Presentation of subsequent literature will show that little attempt has been made to address the recommendations of either national review.

The National Review of School Music Education (Pascoe et al., 2005) was commissioned by the Australian Government in 2004. The team of researchers from Murdoch University aimed to investigate and identify four themes: the current quality of teaching and learning of music in Australian schools; factors that affect the quality and status of teaching of music in Australian schools; examples of best practice of teaching and learning of music both in Australian schools and schools overseas; and key recommendations, principles and priorities for enhancing school music education. The extant body of literature on the subject was reviewed, calls were made for submissions by interested parties, the status of teacher education in higher education institutions was evaluated, site visits to a selection of schools
were conducted along with a national survey of schools, and mapping of the curriculum documents from each state and territory was conducted with subsequent analysis.

Invitations for submissions were called for via a purpose-built website, music associations, list services, offices of parliament, parents’ associations, newspapers, and magazines. Submissions were received from both individuals and groups, representing a wide range of those interested in school music education across Australia. All submissions reflected a belief in the value of school music for all students. This could be indicative of self-selection bias, where those who responded to the call for submissions are those who place value on school music. No reference was made by the review to this possibility.

Several factors were identified as contributing to or hindering the provision of quality music in schools: community support and value for music education; teacher commitment and enthusiasm; quality of teacher education programs and opportunities for professional development; adequacy of resources; and implementation of a balanced and sequential curriculum. Respondents’ descriptions of music education from their personal experiences across a diverse range of settings demonstrated significant variations in the quality and status of music education across Australia.

Schools selected for site visits within this national review were selected on the basis of the success of their music programs. Sites were chosen to be representative of a range of approaches to music education, and to include schools from all states and territories, systems and sectors. In order to obtain information from different perspectives, a range of people associated with the school and its music programs were asked to participate, including teachers (those attached to the school and those who visit the school for the purpose of teaching music); students (those who study music and those who do not); parents; and other members of the community. Based on the findings of site visits, factors that were seen to be
associated with the success of music programs in these schools included the dedication, enthusiasm and expertise of music teachers; the practical and enjoyable nature of teaching practices and programs; the schools’ principals and their support for music; and community and parent support and resources.

Separate surveys were distributed to the principals and teachers at each school. The survey data revealed that while some schools did report having active music programs in place, this was not the case in all schools. Music was reported as being taught by a range of teachers (some without qualifications in music or education); approximately 40% of schools perceive that music is not valued by the community; a significant minority of schools reported having no provision of music education for students whatsoever.

Mapping of state and territory curriculum documents revealed great variety in relation to number, relevance, level of detail, usefulness, and currency of music education curriculum policies, syllabi and associated support documents for each state and territory. Through the process of examining these documents it was found that: the focus of music in schools is influenced by the different understandings about how music curriculum should be described; the music curricular of states and territories differs greatly, and a need exists for a cohesive approach to the development of music curriculum; there are gaps in Australian music curriculum documents in some states and territories in relation to support materials for beginning primary generalists, and teaching of instrumental and vocal music, conducting, music technology, music for gifted and talented students, music for Indigenous students and about Indigenous music, appropriate music pedagogy to allow for differentiation to meet the needs of particular groups, and creativity, improvisation and composition; and arts curriculum documents are seen as downplaying the status and identity of music in schools.

Note that this review was conducted prior to the development of the Australian National Curriculum.
Provision of both preservice and inservice teacher education was seen as a significant issue emerging through the findings of the review. Time dedicated to music in preservice teacher education courses has in almost all cases been reduced over the past 10 years, and in many cases music has been submerged in the arts learning area. Teachers emerging from these programs indicate that they lack sufficient knowledge, understanding, skills, and subsequently confidence to teach music effectively.

The *National Review of School Music Education* (Pascoe et al., 2005) made sixteen specific recommendations for improving the practice and status of music education in Australian primary, secondary, and central schools: improving the status of school music education; improving equity of access to and opportunities to engage in sequential and developmental music education; improving preservice music education for generalist teachers; improving preservice music education for specialist classroom teachers; improving inservice professional development of music education; improving support for the implementation of music education including student access to learning a musical instrument, vocal music, and music technology; improving promotion of partnerships between schools and key music and arts organisations; improving provision of specialist music teachers in primary schools; and improving accountability of teachers for demonstration of quality music programs (Pascoe et al., 2005).

*First We See: The National Review of Visual Education* (D. Davis, 2008) was commissioned and released jointly by the Australian Council for the Arts and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in cooperation with the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Submissions were called for from key stakeholders, the curriculum documents of each state and territory mapped, surveys distributed to Australian universities providing teacher education programs and to schools across Australia, and a
number of case studies conducted in a variety of settings. Key stakeholders were invited to: make a brief comment about visual education; nominate an exemplary visual education programme, website or practice; and/or make a brief comment on the discussion paper.

Submissions of good practice exemplars were received, along with a large number of direct responses to the need for the review and the discussion paper. Schools across all states and territories of Australia were surveyed to identify issues of delivery and quality in relation to visual education. Site visits were conducted as one component of a case study analysis which aimed to identify good practice at different levels across a range of educational contexts.

From this, good practice exemplars were identified. The notion of “good practice exemplars” is in line with the focus on quality arts education in this thesis.

As was evident in the National Review of School Music Education (Pascoe et al., 2005), the National Review of Visual Education (D. Davis, 2008) found stark differences within the provision of visual education throughout Australia. The most prominent differences were found to be between primary and secondary schools, and between government and non-government schools, in areas such as staffing, facilities, materials, and time allocation. It was found that: arts education tends to be perceived as isolated from and of a lower priority than other curriculum areas; visual arts are not differentiated from the performing arts in most state and territory curriculum documents; on average most primary students receive much less than 40 minutes of visual education per week; in some states more than one quarter of respondent schools reported that visual education was not provided to all students in that school; classroom generalists play a significant role in the provision of visual education; and there are significant problems with the status of visual education in initial teacher education for primary generalists (D. Davis, 2008).

Four key recommendations emerged from the National Review of Visual Education review: separation of the visual education curriculum from the performing arts; improvement of
preservice and inservice training in visual education for both primary generalist and secondary specialist teachers; establishment of partnerships between schools and external organisations to contribute to visual education; and development of a national visual education research agenda.

These reviews (Pascoe et al., 2005; D. Davis, 2008) both highlight issues concerning: the quality and status of education in the artform and the extent to which this varies throughout Australia; provision of preservice and inservice teacher education in the artform; and the fact that in each case a significant minority of schools reported that some students receive no education whatsoever in the artform in question.

As an integral part of both national reviews, site visits to schools were conducted (in the case of the review of visual education this was a component of the case study analysis). In both instances sites were selected based upon reported excellence in the relevant artform. The necessity for site visits to each review may be construed as reflective of the lack of literature pertaining to the nature of visual art and music education happening in school classrooms (thus the need for further investigation). The fact that the selected sites were those of perceived musical/visual excellence means that these schools were not representative of all schools within Australia, but rather the “cream of the crop” in this area. Thus neither review made any substantial contribution to the description of everyday classroom practice in these artforms. In contrast to this, this study aims to present an overview of classroom practice in schools with a range of levels of provision in each artform: that is, the quality arts education happening in the “typical” classroom, not just in schools of perceived excellence.

In Australia the National Review of School Music Education (Pascoe et al., 2005) indicated that preservice teacher education does not adequately prepare generalist primary teachers to teach music in schools, attributing this in part to the reduction in hours dedicated to music in
preservice teacher education. The review identified improvement of preservice teacher education as an immediate priority in the improvement of music education in Australian schools. Likewise, *First We See: The National Review of Visual Education* (D. Davis, 2008) identifies inadequate preservice teacher training in visual education as a contributing factor to the poor state of visual education in Australian schools. This national review recommends that appropriate preservice training be instituted to prepare generalist primary teachers for teaching visual education. Additional studies on music, visual art, drama, and dance education, as well as arts education as a collective, in Australian preservice teacher education, are discussed here.

### 2.1.2.1 Arts education in Australian preservice teacher education

In relation to music education in preservice teacher education, Russell-Bowie (2002) reports on the results of a small component of a larger study on students’ attitudes: Creative Arts National and Overseas Associates (CASANOVA). In this article Russell-Bowie describes the findings related specifically to music. The study involved close to 1000 preservice generalist primary school teachers from five countries (Australia, Namibia, South Africa, United States of America and Ireland), investigating perceptions of their own background and abilities in music and music education, and whether these differ according to participants’ sex and/or country of origin. While a number of universities in other countries were also approached, the participating institutions were the only ones to respond. A short survey was completed by the preservice generalist teachers during their lecture time. The survey comprised solely close-ended questions in the form of a five-point Likert scale. The author found that only 21% of respondents felt that they had a good musical background and 45% indicated that they enjoyed and felt confident in teaching music. A moderate positive correlation ($r = .51$, $p = .000$) was found between these two factors. The author stated that the better the musical
background of a student, the more enjoyment and confidence they had in teaching music. No further detail or discussion on this finding is given in this article.

No significant difference was found between male and female students in relation to musical background; however female students were found to have significantly greater confidence and enjoyment in teaching music than did male students. In relation to the country in which they are studying, Australian students were found to have significantly less background experience in music than any of the other countries, and South African students indicated significantly more enjoyment and confidence in teaching music compared with those from Australia and Namibia (Russell-Bowie, 2002). Australian students’ background experiences in music being significantly less than that of students from other countries is a finding of concern, given that research shows a teacher’s background in music to be a strong indicator of the amount and quality of music education that he or she will teach in their primary school classroom.

A limitation of the study by Russell-Bowie (2002) is that some of the students surveyed were in their first year of preservice teacher education, and others in their second, third, or fourth year. It is logical that this could have some influence on the students’ confidence for teaching in general. Further to this, due to the survey being completed by students from five different countries – some in which English is not a first language – all items on the survey may not have been interpreted in the same way by each participant. The author makes no reference to these factors.

De Vries (2011) reported on the music teaching taking place by first year generalist primary teachers in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, focusing on the impact of their preservice teacher training upon the music that they teach. The data relied on teacher self-report in the form of surveys and subsequent interviews. It was found that only 37% of respondent teachers report
teaching music on a regular basis, while 54% indicated that they did not teach music to their class at all. The data suggested that teachers of lower primary level students were more likely to teach music than those of middle or upper primary, with reasons given including the content being “easier”; feeling less self conscious singing with younger students; student interest in “school music” being higher in the younger grades; and music being a “natural part” of the lower primary school curriculum. Prior and current personal engagement in music were seen to contribute to the amount of music these generalists teach, with those having greater experience more likely to report the teaching of music in their classrooms. Similarly, the amount of time dedicated to music education during the respondents’ preservice teacher education was a strong indicator as to whether they teach music; inextricably linked to their confidence for teaching it.

The presence of a music specialist was seen to influence whether these first year generalist teachers teach music in their classroom on a regular basis. In Victoria, it is at the discretion of individual schools as to whether or not they will employ a specialist teacher for music. In this study 17% of teachers indicated the presence of a music specialist in their school, with only 2 of these 19 indicating that they also taught music to their class on a regular basis. Both of these individuals self-identified as “musical”, with “extensive musical backgrounds”. Both also indicated that if they did not have a musical background, they would not be teaching music. Five interviewees cited the presence of a music specialist in their school as a reason to not teach music in their classrooms, with four of the five indicating that they had been directed by the school principal or more senior teaching staff not to teach music as it was taught by the specialist. De Vries (2011) asserts that “If this kind of message is being sent to beginning teachers, it is not surprising that they are not teaching any music in their classroom” (p. 7).
In relation to the music activities that are taught by these first year generalists, respondents listed singing (87%); listening to music (47%); responding to music through movement/dance (25%); playing musical instruments (20%); and composing music (8%). No further detail on these activities is given. While this does offer some idea of what is happening in these schools when music is taught, like the large majority of other studies it is both lacking in detail and reliant on teacher self-report. The study presented in this thesis goes beyond this, through producing detailed portraits based both on interviews with teachers and on extensive observations of their practice (hence going beyond self-report).

J. Heinrich (2012) reports on the numbers and types of music programs operating in rural Victorian primary schools and universities, and how music teachers perceive their roles and undergraduate preparation for the teaching of music. Regarding the music teaching taking place in the classrooms of these teachers, a little over half reported their music program to be sequential, with activities consisting primarily of “singing and games”. When asked their views on the inclusion of music in “The Arts” national curriculum alongside four other subjects, almost half felt that it had a negative impact on music education, particularly in relation to time dedicated to it. Similar feelings have been reported in other studies in relation to the other artforms, in particular visual art (for example, D. Davis, 2008).

J. Heinrich’s (2012) findings indicated preservice training in music to be lacking in both quantity and quality. Tertiary specialist music education in regional Victoria was seen to be scarce, and as a result, principals struggle to staff music teaching positions in their schools. Additionally, only 22% of respondent “music teachers” were actually qualified specialists. Principals’ reasons cited for choosing not to operate a classroom music program in their school included budget restrictions (65%), and availability of qualified staff (47%). J. Heinrich (2012) asserts that “despite the arts’ inclusion in the new Australian Curriculum, Victorian primary school students will not have equality of access to music education until
there is an increase in status/funding of music education and accordingly, in the number of music teachers being educated” (p. 45), concluding that “there is far from equal opportunity for access to quality music education for children across all Victorian schools” (p. 55). This study is highly relevant to the portrait presented of Bungadeen Primary School in this thesis, as both report on the situation in the state of Victoria, Australia.

In the area of visual art education in preservice teacher education, Hudson and Hudson (2007) studied the perceptions of preparedness for teaching visual art education of 87 final-year preservice generalist primary teachers in a NSW university. The authors surveyed these students using a survey instrument with items derived directly from the requirements of the visual art section of the NSW Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006). While participants in this study indicated that they believed they were generally adequately prepared to teach visual art to primary school students, more than 10% indicated that they did not feel they could provide a large portion of the syllabus requirements (20 of the 39 items). This is a concerning finding, which one may assume could impact negatively on the quality of arts education taking place in these future teachers’ (and others’) primary school classrooms. While limitations of this study lie in the use of convenience sampling in one institution in one subject taught by a co-researcher, the fact that data was gathered from a significant majority of the students in the cohort was a clear strength of this study, as was the clear and direct link between the survey instrument and the NSW K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006).

In the field of drama education in preservice teacher education, Wright (1999) conducted an exploratory study involving three successive cohorts of preservice generalist teacher education students in a NSW university. Wright investigated both the manifestations of “drama anxiety” experienced by second-year students and what the students felt could help address this problem. This notion of drama anxiety is presented by the author as a “known”
phenomenon, and the assumption is made (though not justified) throughout this article that drama anxiety exists within any drama preservice teacher education context. Three stages of data collection occurred in this study. Preservice teachers: completed a survey with open-ended questions that were then used by the researcher to delineate the area; wrote a “stream of consciousness” (narrative style) around the topic; and participated in focus groups in which they reflected on the data that were being collected and analysed.

Wright’s (1999) study reported two distinct manifestations of drama anxiety: physical expression, where an individual’s anxiety has a physical effect on them such as shaking, feeling weak in the knees, feeling sick, or stuttering; and a state of feeling, where there are no physical symptoms of the anxiety, rather an anxious or nervous feeling. The three most effective ways to minimise and/or overcome “drama anxiety” were found to be development of basic skills in drama; clear articulation of teacher expectations; and group work (not singling out the individual). Wright (1999) stated that these findings have pedagogical implications for the teaching of students at any level, although the findings of this research have limited generalisability due to three features of the research – the study was conducted by one lecturer/tutor, in one specific university, involving only second-year preservice teachers. Additional research is needed with primary school students, preservice teachers in an earlier or later year of their degree, and/or at different institutions with a different lecturer/tutor before such broad claims can be made as to the generalised existence of drama anxiety and its effects. This could, however, be a finding related to the development of an environment conducive to quality drama education.

Russell-Bowie (2013a) reported on her earlier study (Russell-Bowie, 2002) related to background and confidence in the arts; this time with a focus on drama education. Russell-Bowie (2013a) found that 15% of the sampled students felt they had a good background in drama, and 46% felt that they enjoy and are confident in teaching drama in the classroom.
Similarly to the study on dance education (Russell-Bowie, 2012), when compared with the other countries involved (Namibia, South Africa, the United States of America, and Ireland), Australian students reported the lowest level of background in drama, and third highest (behind South Africa and Namibia respectively) in terms of enjoyment and confidence in drama and drama education (Russell-Bowie, 2013a). A strong positive relationship was found between the preservice teachers’ confidence and background, indicating that the stronger they perceived their background to be, the more confident they felt in relation to their teaching of drama. This is not good news, then, for Australia, where backgrounds in drama were lowest.

In a study of dance education in preservice teacher education, Dunkin (2004) reported the prior teaching and the dance experiences and preparedness to teach dance of preservice generalist teacher education students in a Californian university completing a one-semester course entitled “Creative Dance for Children”. The purpose of this study was to determine preservice primary generalists’ views on current conditions of and feelings about dance in primary education contexts. Using a qualitative methodology, students reflected on various questions at different points during the semester. A survey with open-ended questions was used for this purpose; however no detailed description of this instrument is provided.

Approximately 50% of students indicated that they had no prior outside-of-school dance experience, and 32% could not recall participating in dance activities at school. Of those who recalled dance activities at school, 36% had pleasant memories of this while 64% remembered unpleasant experiences. When asked how their own experiences of dance in school might influence their decision to present dance in the classroom, all those who had positive experiences indicated that they were excited and positive about doing so, as did five others who had reported negative personal experiences. Other respondents indicated that they would teach dance but with particular restrictions. These restrictions linked to the students’ own bad experiences. At the completion of this one semester course, 94% of students
indicated that they felt motivated to teach dance in schools, and 95% indicated that they felt prepared to teach dance in schools. Despite this, 89% of these students also indicated that they anticipated obstacles to their teaching of dance in schools, including negative (elementary school) student attitudes and their own (teachers’) shortcomings. As with the studies by Wright (1999) and Hudson and Hudson (2007), the research conducted by Dunkin (2004) was conducted in one university with one lecturer/tutor, which may limit its generalisability. Nevertheless, questions raised by these studies are worthy of consideration.

Russell-Bowie (2012) investigated the background and confidence of preservice primary teachers from five countries (Australia, Namibia, South Africa, the United States of America, and Ireland) in relation to dance and dance education. Preservice teachers involved were enrolled in their first “creative art” unit. Data was collated and analysed quantitatively with the assistance of SPSS. In relation to background and confidence, 20% of participants felt that they had a good background in dance, with 32% indicating that they enjoyed and felt confident in relation to dance teaching. A moderate positive correlation was found between these two factors, indicating that the stronger the participant’s background, the greater their confidence in and enjoyment of dance and dance teaching. When comparisons were made between the responses of male and female students, it was found that, over all, females had a stronger background in dance, and also reported greater confidence and enjoyment in teaching it. Australian students reported the lowest background in dance, and third highest confidence and enjoyment in teaching dance (behind students from Namibia and South Africa respectively). Russell-Bowie (2012) offers a number of practical suggestions for responding to the challenges of preservice teachers’ lack of background and confidence in dance and dance education: clearly presented, relevant content in preservice dance education courses, aligning with physical resources and the opportunity to network with likeminded colleagues to provide continued professional support after leaving university; opportunities to participate
in practical classroom-related dance learning activities in their teacher education courses; opportunities to observe quality dance lessons presented in the primary school classroom (or as a substitute, videos of such lessons); the opportunity to develop their own dance skills; an extra focus on providing support and male role models for male preservice teachers in relation to dance and teaching dance; and acknowledgement and consideration of preservice teachers’ cultural backgrounds and the dances of these cultures. Russell-Bowie has made an important contribution to the literature here, as rather than merely presenting the problem she has gone further, offering potential ways to improve the situation.

Garvis and Pendergast (2012) highlight the gap between policy rhetoric for music and the arts and the pedagogical reality in generalist classrooms. Using narrative informed case study, narratives are presented from one beginning generalist teacher and one school principal in a Queensland (Australian) Catholic primary school in which the arts have been “pushed to the margins”. Both the generalist teacher and the principal commented on the “failure” of preservice teacher education and professional development to adequately prepare generalist teachers to include the arts in their teaching. With arts-related extra-curricula activities run by the generalist teachers (not the arts specialist), it was felt that these activities worked to bring the school community together. The inequity experienced by students at this school as a result of its being a Catholic (non-government) school was discussed. While students at nearby government schools had free (government subsidised) instrumental tuition, students at the Catholic school were able to access this same instrumental tuition only if their parents were able (and willing) to pay. This rang true for me personally, with my younger sister being in much the same situation in a Victorian Catholic school (see Prologue).

A limited number of studies have been conducted in relation to arts education as a collective in preservice teacher education. Russell-Bowie and Dowson (2005) report on the results of a small study included as part of a larger investigation of preservice teachers’ attitudes:
Creative Arts National and Overseas Associates (CASANOVA). Unlike Russell-Bowie (2002, 2012, 2013a), this paper reports on the results in relation to all four artforms. This study examines six specific hypotheses relating to students’ background and confidence in the artforms: for all students higher levels of background in the arts will lead to more confidence in teaching the arts; females will have more confidence in teaching the arts regardless of background; the interaction of sex and background will influence confidence in teaching the arts; males and females will exhibit different patterns of background and confidence across the arts; a moderate relationship will exist between background in one arts area and background in other arts areas; and a moderate relationship will exist between confidence in one arts area and confidence in other arts areas. The background of respondents was found to be a strong and positive predictor of confidence and enjoyment in teaching in every artform. Females were found to be much more likely to report confidence and enjoyment than their male counterparts in the teaching of music, dance, and visual art. In the area of music, student background was found to be a stronger predictor of confidence for females than for males. A moderate relationship was found between background in one arts area and background in other arts areas, with a weak to moderate relationship found between confidence in one arts area and confidence in other arts areas. The study did not, however, consider the potential effect of the year of study in which the preservice students were enrolled and its influence upon their overall teaching confidence and/or interpretation of survey items.

Barton, Baguley, and MacDonald (2013) investigated the state of arts education in Australian teacher education programs. Interview data was collected from eight tertiary arts educators, employing a narrative inquiry approach. Each of the eight participants had a wide range of teaching experience across primary and secondary schools, and also taught a diverse range of courses and programs at the tertiary level – many of which they were not originally trained
for. Each of the tertiary arts educators discussed the importance of building positive relationships and developing partnerships with external organisations such as art galleries, music organisations, orchestras, and theatre companies. They felt these to be possibly some of the most profound learning experiences that their preservice teachers encountered during their degree. Several participants raised the subject of decreased funding in the university sector, linking this to reduced arts offerings at the tertiary level. The authors reference the same significant decrease of the arts in the tertiary sector that J. Heinrich (2012) discusses with respect to Victorian universities in particular. They felt that a strong awareness of the plight of the arts is needed, along with conscious effort to be made to ensure quality arts education in schools, in order to avoid a situation in which arts education lacks rigour and depth. Barton et al. (2013) state that “the importance of quality arts education at the tertiary level is critical in ensuring the arts are valued in the school context” (p. 85); advocating for ensuring that quality and positive arts experiences are maintained in both tertiary and school contexts, in order for children, their families and their communities to continue to enjoy creative and engaging practices in education. The study presented in this thesis contributes to this by providing focused attention on quality arts education in primary school classrooms.

Through the studies presented, two main factors have been shown to have impact on preservice teachers’ confidence and self-efficacy in arts education: background experiences in arts prior to preservice teacher education; and studies in arts education undertaken within the generalist preservice teacher education course. What preservice teachers bring with them in the way of background experiences in music, visual arts, drama, and dance has been shown to affect how these individuals participate in workshops on each artform at university as well as how and to what extent they teach arts education when they are inservice. Regarding confidence in an artform, Russell-Bowie (2002) found that an increased background in music resulted in increased confidence in teaching music, and Russell-Bowie and Dowson (2005)
found this to be the case with respect to music, visual art, dance, and drama. Both of these studies indicate that females are more confident in the teaching of music, while the 2005 study found that the female participants were also more confident than males in teaching visual art and dance.

Preservice teachers’ initial lack of content knowledge in relation to arts education has also been identified. R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) make the point that when prospective teachers enter preservice education in the United States of America they have had approximately twelve years of comprehensive and sequential instruction in mathematics, English, and science, while their last formal music instruction in schools may have occurred at the age of twelve or earlier. Much the same can be said of prospective teachers entering preservice teacher education in Australia, with science and mathematics being compulsory subjects taught each semester of each year from Foundation-10, and English compulsory from Foundation-12, while music, visual arts, dance, and drama are mandated only from Foundation-8 (Australian Government, 1990), with experiences in these areas often not occurring each semester. This translates into prospective students’ experiences in arts education being distant and in many cases sporadic. R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) suggest that “We would not allow someone who had stopped studying mathematics at the fifth grade level to teach mathematics. We would be appalled at the idea that someone could teach language arts if he or she had not read a book or written a word since the age of eleven” (pp. 3-4). Teacher education institutions are hence expected to account for this lack of content knowledge and endow these prospective teachers with “everything they need to know” in order to teach arts education effectively in schools – to the next generation of teachers, all within a very short period of time.

J. Heinrich’s (2012) findings indicated preservice training to be lacking in both quantity and quality. Garvis and Pendergast (2012) report comments from both a generalist teacher and a
principal, concerned with the “failure” of preservice teacher education to adequately prepare
generalist teachers to include the arts in their teaching.

The issues highlighted in the aforementioned studies and reports point to the need for
rigorous high-quality preparation for primary generalists in order to improve confidence and
self-efficacy in teaching the artforms, along with beginning to address deficits in background
experiences and content knowledge, and hence improve the amount and quality of arts
education that these individuals teach when inservice. Russell-Bowie (2012) provides a
strong contribution in this area through the presentation of practical suggestions for
responding to the challenges of preservice teachers’ lack of background and confidence in
dance and dance education. While such suggestions are targeted at the artform of dance,
applicability may be found to other artforms also.

The research reviewed has found that in general preservice teacher education does not
adequately prepare teachers for the expectations of the arts curriculum (Alter, Hays, &
O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Duncum, 1999; Pascoe et al., 2005). The reduction in hours
dedicated to arts education in preservice teacher education (Montague, 2004; Pascoe et al.,
2005) and the preservice teachers’ initial lack of content knowledge and/or background
experiences in the arts upon entering university (Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Russell-Bowie &
Dowson, 2005; Wright, 1999) present difficulties for teacher educators who must attempt to
account for this lack of knowledge and experience in a very short amount of time. Lack of
background in arts combined with insufficient time dedicated to this subject during preservice
teacher education inevitably results, for many individuals, in lack of confidence in teaching
the subject once in schools.

Alter, Hays, and O’Hara (2009b) indicate that a significant gap exists between the
expectations of curriculum frameworks and initial teacher education in arts education. Issues
of teacher preparedness influence the quality of primary students’ artistic learning and development in Australia. The key interrelated issues in relation to preservice teachers and arts education include preservice teachers’ confidence, attitudes, self-efficacy, and prior experiences in the artforms. The value preservice teachers ascribe to arts education, and their self-efficacy and confidence in teaching the artforms, have been said to affect both the amount and quality of arts that they teach once in schools (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Hudson & Hudson, 2007).

This chapter has so far provided critical discussion of the key studies in relation to music, visual art, drama, and dance education in preservice teacher education, and arts education as a collective in preservice teacher education. Following is discussion of key studies in relation to music, visual art, drama, and dance education, and arts education as a collective in primary school classrooms. Similarities in themes evident to both arts education in preservice teacher education and arts education in primary school classrooms will be identified in the subsequent section.

2.1.2.2 Arts education in the Australian primary school classroom

The literature describing arts education in primary schools is severely limited. As is demonstrated through the unpacking of subsequent studies, in instances of research into what is happening in primary schools, the actual nature of the classroom practice is rarely discussed, and when it is, this is not done in detail. The limited discussion of classroom practice in the subsequent studies reflects the limited number of studies in this area and the need for more rigorous investigation of classroom practice to be conducted, such as that presented in this thesis.

Several research studies conducted in Australia have described current arts education in primary schools as less than satisfactory (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003).
The literature on this topic focuses predominantly on the music component of arts education, though there are suggestions that similar issues exist within visual arts, dance, and drama education. These issues will be described and discussed here.

Alter (2007) investigated the use of visual art education to promote and foster creative and higher order thinking in the primary school classrooms of generalist teachers. Two teachers and their classes were involved in this research, both from schools in the New England District of NSW, Australia. During one school term, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the class teachers as well as with a small group of students from each of the classes. The researcher also made weekly visits to each class, taking detailed field notes and photographs of student artworks. While the teachers in this study believed that they created quality learning environments in which creative and higher order thinking was occurring, they were unable to articulate how they were doing so, or how they knew that this was occurring. The observational data in the study suggested that higher order thinking did occur in art appreciation activities, but that there was little scope for creativity in either classroom. The small number of individuals involved and the small geographical area limit the generalisability of this study, though that may not have been a goal of this research. That the teachers did believe they were creating quality learning environments is somewhat unique in research on arts education, as the large majority of studies in this area primarily report on teachers’ lack of confidence in doing so.

In the field of drama education in primary schools, Anderson (2003) conducted a qualitative study involving two NSW primary school teachers with an interest in drama, to investigate the realities of teaching drama experienced by these individuals. Interviews were conducted with two teachers. These interviews were subsequently developed into narrative vignettes. While one teacher (“Ingrid”) was in her first year of teaching, the other (“Emma”) was an experienced primary educator with eight years’ teaching experience. The experiences of
these two individuals were contrasting, in that Ingrid’s school was unsupportive of teaching drama whilst Emma was well supported by her school, however disheartened by lack of appropriate space, funding, and resources available for her teaching of drama, and lack of support from the education system. Ingrid’s lack of experience was presented as a factor influencing her self-professed inability to change the school and/or classroom ecology around her to implement drama education. In contrast Emma’s years of experience were presented as enabling her to achieve this; however she remained unable to change her physical work environment. The key theme emerging from this research was a lack of support for the teaching of drama, from the education system itself as well as, in some cases, from other teachers. Anderson (2003) also points out the particular difficulty teachers face in teaching in the areas not recognised as part of the “core” curriculum (such as drama) during the beginning “survival” years of teaching.

Chappell (2007) investigated the conceptions of and approaches to creativity of three specialist dance teachers in upper primary dance education in the United Kingdom. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and students as well as observations during classes, video and photographs taken for later analysis, and reflective diaries utilised. The teachers involved in this study emphasised the importance of particular teacher attitudes to “fuelling” (p. 36) the creative process: passionate engagement in dance; and confidence in participating in and teaching it. The importance of engaging in creativity at three levels (individual, collaborative, and communal) was accentuated. These findings offer suggestions for conceptions of quality dance education.

Pedagogical issues expressed by the participating teachers included the students’ lack of prior knowledge and experience in dance, the students’ overdependence on language-based ways of knowing (wanting to ‘talk it out’) as opposed to embodied ways of knowing (physically experimenting with movements), and the successful incorporation of individual and
collaborative creative practices. These teachers also reported a lack of support from other teachers and pressure related to performance expectations. While the authors did imply broader generalisability of the findings, the small sample size of just three teachers limits the generalisability of this study outside its immediate context.

In relation to arts education as a collective in primary schools, Alter, Hays, and O’Hara (2009b) explored nineteen Australian primary school generalist teachers’ perspectives of arts education, investigating participants’ personal arts experiences and training, as well as their views of arts pedagogy. Detailed descriptions of each participant were provided; however it is not made clear how participants were selected for inclusion in this study. The value each participant ascribed to each artform (music, visual art, drama, and dance) and the confidence they felt in teaching each of these artforms was also explored. Teachers participating in this study were asked to reflect on their own arts practice in the classroom; however little on the nature of this practice is actually described. The focus is on the difficulties faced by these teachers in implementing the arts curriculum. In-depth interviews with participants were all conducted by one principal researcher. The three key findings of this research were: all participants used the skills of others to assist in their teaching of arts, ranging from working in partnership with others to total delegation of teaching responsibility; many participants admitted that the arts were taught irregularly, and that the priority given to the arts Key Learning Area (KLA) was often lower than that given to other KLAs; and participants were concerned that they could not meet the expectations of the arts K-6 curriculum (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b).

Alter, Hays, and O’Hara (2009a) reported on generalist primary school teachers’ perspectives of the challenges they face in implementing the arts curriculum. Nineteen teachers were involved in this study from 12 different schools across regional and rural northern NSW
(Australia). Focus group interviews with these teachers were conducted, followed by individual in-depth interviews. Findings revealed that participants were concerned about the teaching expectations of the creative arts (NSW) curriculum, specifically the prescribed standards and outcomes. Key challenges faced by these teachers in implementing the primary school creative arts curriculum include: inter-related issues of time and the quantity of curriculum material requiring coverage; the accountability to which teachers were held in other areas of the curriculum; the broad scope of subject content within the creative arts; teachers’ evaluation of their own creative arts knowledge and skills; the level of confidence expressed by individual teachers to teach arts disciplines; and perceptions of the value and status given to the arts.

More than a decade ago, Russell-Bowie (1993) conducted a quantitative study surveying the music education practices of primary school teachers from four departmental regions of NSW. More than 1500 questionnaires were distributed to teachers from four districts of NSW, and a different questionnaire was distributed to the principal of each of these schools. From this, over eight-hundred-and-fifty teachers (51%) and seventy-six principals (82%) responded to these questionnaires. The results of this research indicated that music education in the classrooms of the respondent teachers was generally ineffective, with little excellence or equity in the practice or priority of music in their schools or individual classrooms. The two main barriers to effective music teaching expressed by the teachers were lack of time and lack of personal music experience. Lack of departmental support and inservice training were also identified as barriers. Description of the nature of classroom practice in the investigated schools was not provided in this article.

Russell-Bowie’s (1993) research referred to the 1984 NSW Music Syllabus (Department of Education NSW, 1984) and hence is not automatically applicable to the current arts syllabus.
document. A clear strength of this study, however, is the use of responses from both teachers and principals. A further strength is the wide range of cultural and socio-economical school contexts represented.

Peers (2008) investigated both the attitudes of Victorian primary school generalist teachers to visual arts education and their classroom practice in this subject. One hundred schools were initially approached to participate in this research through teacher completion of an online questionnaire. From these 100 schools, only five teachers completed the questionnaire. Though the findings cannot be taken as a representative sample, the responses of the five participants indicated that they supported the idea of specialist teachers being appointed to every school, that they personally dedicate more than one hour a week to visual arts, and that they each value visual arts in the curriculum.

Peers (2008) suggests a number of factors that may have contributed to the poor response rate for the questionnaire: the study required teachers to respond online; the employment of specialist teachers heightened disinterest for visual art among generalist teachers; and the researcher asked school principals to respond in writing to an initial request for participation in the research.

Debenham and Lee (2005) reported on the observations they made of their own and each other’s teaching of dance during a three-day interval of teaching nine to eleven year old students in the US. They found that they had a number of teaching practices in common: they were student-focused, grounded in metaphor and imagery, created a positive atmosphere, and often needed to ‘go back’ during a lesson to redress necessary concepts and skills. This process of going back during a lesson, termed by the authors as ‘teaching backwards’, was the primary focus of this article. The authors emphasise the importance of teachers recognising and acting upon situations that may arise requiring them to deviate from their
planned lesson in order to redress necessary concepts and skills. This concept of ‘teaching backwards’ may offer something to conversations around quality dance education.

Saebo (2009) studied drama education in Norwegian primary schools. Group interviews, individual interviews, and an online questionnaire were utilised in this research to ascertain the effectiveness of drama in the classrooms of these schools. The author found that predominantly superficial learning experiences occurred in instances where the teacher lacked the knowledge and understanding necessary to structure teaching and learning in such a way as to foster particular creative processes. On other occasions when the teacher effectively used process drama (a method of teaching and learning where both the students and teacher are working in and out of role), students were fully engaged in the learning process. Overall it was found that those teachers’ creative competencies, and their reason for doing drama (i.e. because it is required or because they value and enjoy it), were two key factors influencing the effectiveness of the drama teaching and learning practices that occurred. The nature of arts education in these classrooms was not discussed in depth in this article – only the effectiveness of it.

Acting on the call by Power and Klopper (2011) and R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) for more research that actually focuses on generalist teachers teaching music, de Vries (2014) conducted a case study research project involving one Australian primary school in which a strong music program existed in the absence of a music specialist. The school reported on by de Vries (2014) is one example of generalist teachers embracing the teaching of quality music education in their classrooms, with the study aiming to identify factors facilitating the teaching of music by generalist teachers and the kinds of music teaching occurring in the school. Observations and interviews were used in order to go beyond teacher self-report. Singing is central to the music education happening in this school. The teachers believe this to be key, in part due to singing being emphasised by professional development sessions on
music education that these teachers attended. Performing is valued by the teachers and principal, but the “day-to-day” music education is valued equally so. From the description provided, it seems that what is performed at the school concert is the finished product of a lengthy meaningful music learning experience, rather than something rote learnt specifically to produce a showable product as efficiently as possible (as is the case in many schools).

Support from the principal, both in terms of funds (purchasing of instruments, and funding of professional development in music) and of moral support and belief in what the teachers are doing was seen as key to the success of the music program. The teachers reported that the professional development sessions they attended had a strong influence on the way that they teach music, stating that before attending these they primarily taught music the way that it had been taught to them. The teachers also engaged in peer learning related to music – learning from each other’s knowledge, skills, and experience – in order to take this back to their own classroom to implement with their own students. The teachers in this school who teach music believe it should be taught in such a way that it is developmental and sequential. This included planning for music in the same way as for other subjects. They also believed that music education should be provided to every child – not just those whose parents both can afford and choose to pay for it. De Vries (2014) states that “what are lacking in the literature are examples of generalist teachers embracing the teaching of quality music in their classrooms” (p. 2). This thesis aims to fill precisely this gap.

Three of the studies mentioned in this section (Anderson, 2003; Chappell, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 1993) reference a perceived lack of support from the education system as a barrier to effective teaching in the relevant artform. Of the two studies that mentioned background in an artform, Russell-Bowie (1993) found that respondent teachers felt their lack of background in music to be a barrier to effective music teaching, while R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008) stated that although the backgrounds of teachers participating in their study appeared to be
‘reasonable’ at first glance, after further investigation these teachers were found to lack sufficient content knowledge to teach music effectively. These findings are consistent with those on background in an artform in relation to preservice teacher education, as in Russell-Bowie (2002) and Russell-Bowie and Dowson (2005).

In the aforementioned studies the state of arts education in primary school classrooms has been described as less than satisfactory (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; Russell-Bowie, 1993), with particular reference to the absence of continuous and sequential music education in many schools (Pascoe et al., 2005) and with little improvement in music education in recent times (Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002). Lack of confidence felt by generalists in relation to teaching the arts has been identified as an issue impacting upon the amount, quality, and effectiveness of arts education in primary school classrooms (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005), as has teachers’ creative abilities (Russell-Bowie, 1993), the limited inservice professional development opportunities and support by the education system (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2009b), and the collegial support between teachers (Anderson, 2003). Issues of the value assigned to arts education and the crowded curriculum have also been discussed, as has the argument for specialist as opposed to generalist teachers for the arts subjects (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b). Music education in particular has been identified as falling short of expectations when taught by generalists (Pascoe et al., 2005). Small sample size was identified as a methodological issue in a number of the studies (Alter, 2007; Anderson, 2003), as was poor response rate (Peers, 2008).

Of the studies reported on in this section, two involved only a small number of individuals, which may limit the generalisability of these studies. In the case of Alter (2007) the small number of participants was intentional as part of a qualitative study; however with respect to Peers (2008), this resulted from an exceptionally poor response rate to an online
The study by Alter, Hays, and O’Hara (2009b) discusses classroom practice in the relevant artforms; however little on the actual nature of arts education in these classroom is described. This is perhaps a missed opportunity to contribute to an area of literature that is scarcely explored.

Klopper and Power (2010) provide an overview of arts education research in Australia, similar to what has been shown in Chapter 2. They reveal that there is extensive research in the fields of music education and visual arts education, with comparatively little on drama education, dance education, and arts education as a collective. The majority of studies focus on arts education in preservice teacher education, with slightly less on arts education in primary schools and significantly less on what actually happens in the classrooms when arts education takes place. Scant literature is available reporting on what is actually happening in primary school classrooms when arts education takes place, looking at all four artforms (music, visual art, drama, and dance) in the one study. Power and Klopper (2011) began to address this gap in the literature; however this is only one study with identified limitations, and the authors call for more research. Drawing on Power and Klopper (2011) and R. Wiggins and J. Wiggins (2008), de Vries (2014) calls for further research into quality examples of music education in primary school classrooms – precisely what this thesis contributes more broadly in terms of arts education. Section 2.2 discusses the concept of quality in arts education.

### 2.2 Quality in Arts Education

#### 2.2.1 Defining quality

Quality, according to Pearsall (1998), implies something that has been achieved successfully. Kissick (1993) notes that “quality is first and foremost an idea, its criteria … susceptible to influences from within a given society”. Wicks and Roethlein (2009) and Van Kemenade,
Pupius, and Hardjono (2008) emphasise that no consensus has been reached on a definition for quality, as the term is defined differently in different industries, and for different purposes within each industry. This is in line with Sower and Fair’s (2005) assertion that “every quality expert defines quality somewhat differently, and there are a variety of perspectives that can be taken in defining quality” (p. 8). Paul Borawski, the CEO of the *American Society for Quality: The Global Voice of Quality*, states that “defining quality is a difficult task because it has several definitions depending on the occasion” (American Society for Quality, 2011). Harvey and Green (1993) refer to quality as a “slippery concept”, though make some attempt towards defining it, grouping it into five interrelated sub-concepts: exceptional; perfection; fitness for purpose; value for money; and transformative. With reference to arts education, Bamford (2006) defines quality as “those arts education provisions that are of recognised value and worth in terms of the skills, attitudes and performativity engendered.”

In order to reach a definition for quality arts education to be used in this thesis, the following sections unpack the notion of quality in education.

### 2.2.2 Quality in education

Support for quality in education is widespread. It may be asserted that there are few who would argue against such a notion. Quality in education is one of the five key areas of focus of the *American Society for Quality: The Global Voice of Quality* (http://asq.org), a distinct sub-section of which is quality in primary and secondary school education. The *No Child Left Behind Act* in the United States of America (United States Department of Education, 2002) calls for quality education provision for all, as does the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Prasser and Tracey (2013) state that while much “lip-service” is paid to quality as a goal in education throughout the significant number of
education reports, policies, inquiries and statements produced by the Australian government each year, the concept of quality is rarely investigated or discussed in depth. Bamford (2010b) refers to the existence of this same issue internationally.

The discussion presented here is representative of the dearth of literature on the concept of quality in education. The work of Anne Bamford (2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011) and Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, and Palmer’s (2009) *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education* are the primary sources of literature on this concept and thus are drawn on heavily here, supplemented by additional references throughout. As a further result of this scarcity of literature, this discussion of quality in education has been expanded to include selected literature on effectiveness in education where deemed relevant to the notion of quality.

It is now widely recognised that while equitable provision of education for all is an important and admirable goal, mere provision is insufficient (UNESCO, 2006). It is education of quality that is paramount to students reaching their full potential, and to ensuring the future competitiveness of our nation in the international education arena. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluation, a form of testing in which countries are ranked in terms of educational achievement, began by testing only the areas of mathematics, literacy, and scientific achievement. However from the last round of testing onwards, one-third of each of these three tests will be dedicated to the testing of creativity (Bamford, 2010a). This suggests that education systems in which quality arts education (leading to increases in students’ creative thinking and creative capacities) is not a priority will likely fall behind on the international scale. This is strongly suggestive of the idea that arts education is a necessary component of a quality education. This aligns with Spilka and Long’s (2009) reference to “the benefits of arts education as integral to quality education for all children”
Spilka and Long (ibid) state that “in not offering … students the opportunity to learn in and through the arts, students, school districts and communities are forgoing the benefits that a high quality arts education can provide” (p. 4). The National Centre for Education Statistics (Carey, Kleiner, Porch, Farris, & Burns, 2002) also write of arts education being “essential to a high-quality education” (p. 31).

It is generally perceived that creativity exists at the heart of quality arts education (Bamford, 2010b). The role of creativity in preparing students for life beyond school is increasingly being recognised nationally and internationally, with recognition of the role creativity plays in producing individuals with the “qualities” most needed and valued in the 21st Century workforce (ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, 2007). Supporting this are neurological studies providing a strong scientific basis for the importance of exposure to – but most importantly participation in – creative experiences at a young age. This is necessary in order for these creative capacities to be available to individuals in adulthood (Bamford, 2010a).

Approximately one quarter of all arts education, according to Bamford (2011), is of such poor quality as to have a negative impact upon a child’s creativity. Arts education, by necessity, must be of high quality in order for its positive impacts to be realised. Thus it is perhaps not sufficient to say that arts education is a necessary component of a quality education. Rather, a more accurate statement may be that quality arts education is a necessary component of quality education as a whole.

2.2.3 Indicators of quality arts education

Remer (2010) suggests that we should use lessons learned about high-quality, effective arts education programs to assist in the development of educational “policy” at a school or classroom level. Remer (ibid) states that “there has been little lasting consensus about what
an effective arts education should look like in the classroom … [This] interferes with everyone’s goal of making the arts count in education” (pp. 81-82). According to Remer (2010), there is no one definitive answer to the question “what is effective [i.e. quality] arts education” – it is highly context-specific; therefore indicators of this should be established by those working in the context.

Current approaches to arts education have been referred to by Remer (2010) as an “instructional potpourri” (p. 82) in which differing approaches to instruction compete to the detriment of the quality of arts education that takes place. In a similar vein, Aprill (2010) bemoans what he refers to as the “false dichotomy” between direct instruction in the arts (i.e. teaching arts knowledge and skills isolated from other curriculum areas) and arts integration. Historically there has been a belief that arts integration may “water down” the quality of arts education. In cases where the connections made between curriculum areas are superficial, this will often be the case. “Serious arts integration”, however, has been shown to deepen learning both in the arts and other academic areas involved in the integration: Aprill (2010) asserts that in actuality the combination of direct instruction in the arts and arts integration results in higher quality arts education.

Bamford (2006) emphasises that while many of the goals and characteristics of quality arts education are shared with quality education in general, arts education retains a number of particularities. The quality indicators developed as a result of Bamford’s (2006) international study were found to be achieved more cost-effectively, more holistically, and with greatest “on the ground” (p. 89) impact within quality arts educational environments. Bamford (ibid) also states that these quality indicators hold true for both education through the arts and education in the arts.
Method and structure have been shown through international research, both small-scale and large-scale, to be of greater relevance than content with regards to quality arts education provision (Bamford, 2006). These studies suggest it is preferable that content be derived in relation to local environments, culture and resources (ibid).

The indicators of quality listed are a summary of those identified by Bamford (2006). These indicators are drawn from international research and literature, including *The UNESCO Roadmap for Arts Education* (2006). Indicators of quality identified by Bamford (2006) are outlined in Table 1.

### Table 1

*Indicators of Quality (Bamford, 2006)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships</strong></td>
<td>Active partnerships between: schools and arts organisations; and teachers, artists and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Shared responsibility for planning, implementation, assessment, and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities to showcase</strong></td>
<td>Opportunities for exhibition, presentation, and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline development</strong></td>
<td>Development in a specific discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artistic and creative approaches</strong></td>
<td>Development of artistic and creative approaches to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td>Collaboration and teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusivity</strong></td>
<td>Inclusivity within the environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment and reporting strategies

Detailed strategies for assessment and reporting on learning, experiences, and development

Professional learning

Professional learning for teachers, artists, and the community

Flexibility

Flexibility of school structures

Permeable boundaries

Permeable boundaries between the school and the community

The indicators of quality identified by Seidel et al. (2009) are summarised in Table 2, within the “lenses” the authors adopted for looking at quality: student learning; pedagogy; community dynamics; and environment.

Table 2

*Indicators of Quality (Seidel et al., 2009)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student learning</strong></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purposeful experiences creating or engaging with works of art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional openness and honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimentation, exploration, and inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogy</strong></td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modeling artistic processes, inquiry, and habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in the learning experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making learning relevant and connected to prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentionality, flexibility, and transparency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community dynamics  
Respect and trust among all participants, along with a belief in student capacities
Open communication
Collaboration

Environment  
Functional and aesthetic space and materials
Arts occupying a central place in the physical environment
Sufficient time for authentic artistic work

Seidel et al. (2009) caution that these indicators of quality should not be taken as a checklist on quality in arts education, but rather as a useful reference point from which to investigate what constitutes quality arts education in a given context. In other words, the nature of quality is to some extent context specific, and should be treated as such. This aligns with the assertions of Remer (2010) and Bamford (2006) that it be preferable for content to be derived in relation to local environments, culture and resources by those working in the environment.

In the Australian context, The National Review of School Music Education (Pascoe et al., 2005) identified a number of factors believed by respondents to underpin quality music education. These factors are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community support</td>
<td>Local and broad community support for the value of music education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher issues</td>
<td>Teacher issues such as commitment and enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like Bamford (2006) and Seidel et al. (2009), Pascoe et al.’s (2005) list of quality indicators focuses on method, structure, and environment, with little reference to content. Bamford (2006) and Seidel et al. (2009) are the two key documents cited by national and international literature (D. Davis, 2008; Ewing, 2010; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011) with respect to understanding what constitutes quality in arts education, consistent with the assertion made earlier in this thesis that due to the dearth of literature on quality in education this thesis will draw heavily on these two references with regards to quality, supplemented by additional references where appropriate.

### 2.2.4 Broad definition of quality arts education

Prasser and Tracey (2013) advise that quality is difficult to define and is open to different interpretations, and hence that quality needs to be defined broadly. Based on that outlined in previous sections, the broad definition of “quality arts education” to be used throughout this research is as follows:

*Quality arts education is encompassed by educational experiences of recognised value and worth. It is context-specific, with commonly held beacons of quality applicable to method, structure, and environment.*
2.3 Summation and Implications

This literature review began by exploring the international and national context of arts education. An overview was then provided of quality in education, and more specifically quality in arts education, followed by a broad definition of quality arts education for use in this thesis. The key findings of the review of arts education literature are summarised here, and the case for this study further substantiated. The key overarching international and national issues identified in the arts education literature reviewed include:

- teachers’ personal experience in arts (Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002);
- adequacy of preservice teacher education (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Duncum, 1999; Herbst, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005);
- teacher confidence (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Ewing, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999);
- the state of primary school arts education (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 1993; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008);
- the perceived “crowded curriculum” (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; D. Davis, 2008; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005);
- the perceived lack of support offered to inservice teachers (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; Baltagi, 2007; Bamford, 2006; Leung, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2009b); and
• the generalist versus specialist debate (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Pascoe et al., 2005; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008).

Arts education in primary school classrooms has been described as falling short of expectations in Australia as well as internationally (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; Russell-Bowie, 1993; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008). It has been found that in many instances preservice and inservice teacher education does not provide adequate preparation or support for generalist teachers to meet the expectations of the primary school arts curriculum (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2009b). Lack of confidence felt by generalists in relation to arts education has been identified as influencing how these individuals initially engage in preservice teacher education, and the amount and quality of arts education they teach once in schools (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999). Lack of value for arts education felt by teachers and the education system as a whole has also been seen as a factor, as has the perceived “crowded curriculum” (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; D. Davis, 2008; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005).

Positive examples however, though rare in the literature, do exist. De Vries (2014) identified and described quality music education in Victorian primary school classrooms, calling for further research that embraces the teaching of quality music education in primary school classrooms. This thesis, completed in the same year as de Vries’ call for action, contributes to filling this gap.

The majority of literature on arts education, when viewed in totality, indicates a self-perpetuating cycle. Potential educators in many cases enter preservice teacher education with
an initial lack of background experiences and content knowledge in one or more areas of arts education (Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2002; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999). This leads to the apparent insufficiency of preservice teacher education in addressing this deficit (D. Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005). These teachers then enter classrooms with a lack of pedagogical content knowledge and lack of confidence in teaching arts education (Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008), and subsequently the arts education their students receive is less than adequate (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; Anderson, 2003; D. Davis, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008). These are of course the next generation of potential teachers – and so the cycle continues. The literature points to the need for change in order to “break” this cycle. This research study makes a contribution to this endeavour through the investigation of what is happening at a day-to-day level, using data that emerges from a study of classrooms to inject new knowledge into the extant body of literature, thus providing a potential basis for reflection for future educators and policy makers.

A major gap exists in the literature regarding what is actually happening in the classrooms when arts education takes place. Few of the aforementioned studies describe this in detail, particularly in relation to descriptions of the nature of arts education as a collective in primary school classrooms. It is crucial that such a description of current practice be produced in order for principals, teachers, preservice teacher educators, curriculum developers, and other interested parties to ascertain what is working and what is not, and to work towards improved models and practices of arts education in our primary school classrooms, as well as in preservice teacher education and inservice professional development.
Bamford (2010b) states that “quality arts education can be seen to be believed, but also, \textit{believing in quality allows it to be seen}” (p. 57, emphasis in original). Unlike numerous studies that focus on identifying deficiencies of arts education, in alignment with portraiture methodology this study proposes to begin with the assumption that quality arts education is there to be found, with a view to identifying, capturing, and enhancing quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms. This ties in with the quality music education de Vreis (2014) found to be occurring in Victorian primary school classrooms.

Much of Bamford’s work on arts education (for example, Bamford, 2006; Bamford, 2010b; Bamford, 2011; Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010) is focused around notions of quality. As such, and in consideration of this study’s focus on quality in arts education, Bamford and Glinkowski’s Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010) provides a suitably quality-focused tool for guiding data collection and evaluation. Analysis and discussion of data was guided both by the EITM (ibid) and applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011). Applied thematic analysis is oriented towards practical problems, and addressing research questions of a practical nature – hence fitting with this study.
3 Methodology

In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodology and methods used to address the research question. The interpretivist paradigm is outlined as the overarching framework within which this study lies. Portraiture is then discussed, followed by the use of Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) and crystallization as key to the methodology of this study. Data collection instruments and procedures are then outlined, followed by data analysis methods employed. This chapter concludes with explanation and justification of the manner of presentation of research portraits, and of the final chapter in this thesis.

Two schools were involved in this research. The pseudonyms given to these were Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School. At Bungadeen Primary School, observations took place within all three classes (the total number of classes at this school), five days per week for three consecutive weeks. Observation time was spread approximately evenly across each class. Primarily as a matter of convenience for the school, observations at Farefield State School took place one day per week for one school term (10 weeks), with the addition of observation of a three-hour school concert. Observation time was spread approximately evenly across the drama, dance, and visual art classrooms.

3.1 Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist researcher views the social world as being created by the interactions of individuals and hence does not see society as having a fixed structure (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). Reality is viewed as socially constructed, complex, and ever changing (Capobianco & Lehman, 2006). Individuals continually create and re-create their world as a dynamic
meaning system that changes over time (Hughes, 2001). The interpretivist researcher accepts that the concept of objectivity is flawed (Thomas, 2008) and assumes a subjective reality whereby no one reality exists outside of individuals’ interpretations of events (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). In alignment with this, I view reality as subjective social construction that is complex and ever changing. Interpretivism seeks to explain how individuals make sense of the social world (Hughes, 2001), and asserting that individuals act according to how they interpret events (Burton & Bartlett, 2009), the interpretivist paradigm gives priority to understanding the meanings that individuals make of their own experiences (Garrick, 1999).

Knowledge is considered to be subjective “human construction” (Hatch, 2002, p. 13) and “socially constructed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). The interpretivist paradigm recognises that realities are “inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage point” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). This aligns strongly with the use of crystallization in this study (see section 3.4), and also with portraiture methodology’s emphasis on the explicit recognition of the position of the researcher, and call for collection of data from multiple vantage points (see section 3.2).

Most suited to qualitative methodologies, the interpretivist paradigm embraces phenomenology (Burton & Bartlett, 2009), as does portraiture methodology (having foundations in a phenomenological approach – see section 3.2.2). The key methods and methodology of phenomenology outlined in section 3.2.2 have been embraced throughout each stage of this research. Interpretivist studies are usually small-scale, aiming for detail and understanding rather than statistical representativeness. In aligning with this, this study is small-scale, involving only two case sites (schools), and presenting detailed portraits of quality arts education in primary school classrooms in these two schools. Data collection procedures used by interpretivists include informal interviews and observations, with
collection of individual accounts and detailed descriptions produced to give a “feel” for the environment. In this research semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, along with observations throughout the two schools, and impressionistic records (thought journals) written by the researcher on a daily basis. As both interpretivist researcher and portraitist, I was reflexive in the research process. In qualitative research, reflexivity refers to the researcher’s act of focusing on himself or herself as a constructor and interpreter of the social reality being studied (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007), involving an ongoing critique and critical reflection of the researcher’s own biases and assumptions and how these influence each stage of the research (Begoray & Banister, 2010). Reflexivity was achieved in this study through the explicit acknowledgement in the Prologue of the researcher’s understanding of her background and beliefs and how these may influence the research. This section was drafted initially prior to beginning data collection. Following this, while conducting data collection and analysis and later writing up the final chapters of this thesis, conscious attention was paid to the researcher’s interpretations of the data and how these may be influenced by the researcher’s own background, understandings of the world, potential biases and personal agendas. Subsequently, the Prologue was revisited and added to repeatedly throughout the duration of this research project.

The interplay of the methodologies outlined below and their fitting with the interpretivist paradigm as outlined here, in conjunction with their alignment with the researcher’s epistemology, deemed this methodological combination best suited for use in this research. Portraiture and case study methodology will now be outlined, followed by discussion of this study’s use of Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix, an explanation of crystallization and its application in this study, data collection and analysis procedures employed, and justification for the manner of presentation of the final chapters of this thesis.
3.2 Portraiture Case Study

Portraiture is a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot while engaged in school-based research, combining systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression. Portraiture makes use of narrative, metaphor and symbol with the intention of addressing wider, more eclectic audiences than traditional scholarly writings. It is generally less formal and jargon-laden than more traditional forms of research, and thus more widely accessible to a greater number and variety of people. This was regarded as important for this research, enabling the dissemination of portraits to the teaching community without the need for drastic alterations that may lead to a loss of meaning, authenticity, or depth in the data. Portraiture focuses on studying the successes and exemplary practices found in a given setting as opposed to the limitations or perceived failures (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). This focus on “goodness” (ibid) is deemed fitting to the present study’s investigation into quality arts education, and its intention for portraits written to serve as examples of the quality arts education that can be found in a primary school setting when attention is purposely directed to them.

Portraiture as method and methodology has been used in conjunction with a variety of other methodologies and theoretical frameworks across a range of topics. Sauer (2012), for example, presents narrative portraits of three young people with disabilities, advocating the use of portraiture to “provide a unique and credible avenue to respectfully study and learn more about people with disabilities” (p. 1); while Hackmann (2002) writes on his use of portraiture in the area of educational leadership research. A special edition of the journal *Qualitative Inquiry* focusing on portraiture was published in February 2005. Each of the articles presented in this special edition report on research in which portraiture is the central method, with the primary or secondary focus of the research being on issues of race. Dixson,
Chapman, and Hill (2005) make use of portraiture by extending it to argue for a “jazz methodology”; Hill (2005) highlights the possibilities of combining portraiture and womanist theory to understand the perspectives, experiences, and practices of “black woman teacher educators” in higher education institutions; Harding (2005) uses portraiture to examine notions of culturally relevant pedagogy for a white female teacher living in the north east of the United States of America; Newton (2005) presents a portraiture case study of two Arab American preservice teachers learning to teach in post-9/11 New York City; and Chapman (2005) presents a case study of a white teacher in a racially diverse urban classroom, using portraiture to conduct a “search for goodness”. Chapman (2007) further explores the use of portraiture methodology in conjunction with critical race theory in an evaluation of success and failure in urban classrooms.

Additional examples from the field of education include: Miranda, Robbins, and Stauffer’s (2007) use of portraiture and ethnography to engage preservice teachers in thoughtful examination of teaching and learning in music classrooms and to ascertain the effectiveness of this approach in undergraduate music education courses; Quigley, Trauth-Nare, and Beeman-Cadwallader’s (2013) presentation of two portraits of science classrooms, advocating the use of portraiture in science education research; Gaztambidee-Fernández, VanderDussen, and Cairns’s (2014) use of portraiture methodology to produce thick, rich descriptions of two specialised arts programs; and Krueger-Henney’s (2013) combining of portraiture methodology with the epistemological stance of youth participatory action research in her study of Latino/a youth’s experience of the “school-to-prison pipeline”.

A number of research studies have used portraiture and case study methodologies as supportive of one another (for further examples see: Camp, 2011; Holder & Downey, 2008; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999; Makwinja-Morara, 2009; Moore, 2011). Moore (2011) asserts that this combination allows for a focus on both the individual (individual experiences
of participants) and the whole (the larger group). Hackman (2002) outlines portraiture as fitting within both Yin’s (2009) and Merriam’s (1988) classifications of a case study approach. This suggests that the combining of portraiture and case study methodologies is, in fact, a natural fit. Case study methodology as employed in this research will be briefly outlined and justified in section 3.2.1, followed by a more in-depth account of portraiture methodology.

3.2.1 Case study

This research constitutes a dual-site investigation into quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms. Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). The phenomenon being researched, in this case arts education, is studied in its natural context (within primary school classrooms), bounded by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Subsequently, it can help to penetrate situations in “ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 181) – fitting also with portraiture methodology.

Case study researchers seek both what is common and what is particular about and between the cases under investigation (Stake, 2005). In this research, criterion sampling as purposeful sampling strategy was applied. Purposeful sampling aims to achieve in-depth understanding of particular phenomena in the cases under study. Criterion sampling involves the selection of cases that satisfy an important criterion. In multi-site case study design, multiple individuals or instances of phenomena are selected either to be similar to or different from each other in some way that is of interest to the researchers (Gall et al., 2007). In Australia, the education system is currently largely state-based, with each state and territory adhering to a different set of policy and curricula. The implementation of different curricula is of interest to me as the researcher; therefore cases were selected on the basis of geographical location, each from a
separate state of Australia. For practical reasons, two states were chosen: Queensland and Victoria. Both were government (i.e. not independent) non-denominational schools, however with different demographics. While Bungadeen Primary School caters for 83 students from middle and working class family backgrounds in rural Victoria, Farefield State School caters for approximately 750 students on the Gold Coast from a wide range of economic and cultural backgrounds. At Bungadeen Primary School, arts education is primarily the responsibility of the generalist teacher, with the exception of visual art for which there is a government-funded travelling specialist once per week. In contrast to this, the principal of Farefield State School has dedicated a portion of the school budget to employing a specialist teacher in each of visual art, music, drama, and dance, to take the responsibility of arts teaching away from the generalists. It is these similarities and differences that were the criteria for criterion sampling as purposeful sampling strategy in this dual-site case study design.

An important consideration in qualitative and case study research is that of validity and reliability. Yin (2009) outlines the four criteria for judging the quality of research designs (construct validity; internal validity; external validity; reliability) and associated tactics for addressing these in case study research. Multiple sources of evidence in the form of observations and interviews were gathered during the data collection phase to ensure construct validity. A case study protocol was developed and employed to address the issue of reliability, including: an overview of the case study project; field procedures; case study questions; and a guide for the case study report. External validity was addressed through the use of literal replication logic, with the expectation that quality arts education would be found to be occurring in the weekly classroom practices at both case sites.
Table 4 summarises how these tactics have been applied to this research in order to enhance its validity and reliability. Internal validity is not applicable to this study as it does not seek to identify causal patterns (Gall et al., 2007), so therefore was not included in Table 4.

Table 4

*Case Study Design Tactics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Case Study Tactic</th>
<th>Phase of research in which tactic occurs</th>
<th>Application in this research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construct validity</strong></td>
<td>Use multiple sources of evidence</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Sources of evidence used in this research are interviews and observations. Crystallization was employed to gather data from multiple sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External validity</strong></td>
<td>Use replication logic in multiple-case studies</td>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>According to replication logic, each case must be carefully selected so that it produces either similar results (literal replication), or contrary results but for predictable reasons (theoretical replication). In this study literal replication logic was applied, with the intention that quality arts education be found to be occurring in the weekly classroom practices in both case sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td>Use case study protocol</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Prior to data collection, a case study protocol was developed, including: an overview of the case study project; field procedures; case study questions; and a guide for the case study report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2.2 Portraiture as phenomenological standpoint

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) outline a qualitative methodology framed by the traditions and values of phenomenology, termed “Portraiture” (ibid). Portraiture was the phenomenological standpoint employed in this study. This section details the ties between portraiture and phenomenological philosophy, methodology, and methods.
The origins of phenomenological philosophy lie in the work of Edmund Husserl (1980, 1982, 1989)\(^2\), and later that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2012)\(^3\) and Alfred Schutz (1967, 1970). Phenomenologists are usually subscribers to the interpretivist or post-empiricist schools of thought (Scott & Morrison, 2006). The interpretivist paradigm is that employed in this study. Phenomenology is an investigation of lived experience, involving the study of reality as it appears to individuals (Gall et al., 2007). The phenomenologist views reality as socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The researcher does not assume that s/he knows what meaning individuals take from phenomena, but rather seeks to enter the conceptual world of particular individuals in order to investigate and garner understanding of the meanings these individuals attribute to phenomena, and how meaning is constructed by the individuals in question (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Van Manen (1990) outlines six orientations of phenomenology, as summarised in Table 5.

Table 5

*Explanation of the Six Orientations of Phenomenology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcendental phenomenology</strong></td>
<td>Characterised by the themes of “intentionality”, “eidetic reduction”, and “constitution of meaning”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existential phenomenology</strong></td>
<td>Characterised by the themes of “lived experience”, “modes of being”, “ontology”, and “lifeworld”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hermeneutical phenomenology</strong></td>
<td>Characterised by the themes of “interpretation”, “textual meaning”, “dialogue”, “preunderstanding”, and “tradition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistical</strong></td>
<td>Characterised by the themes of “textual autonomy”, “signification”, “intertextuality”,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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It is essential that the orientations outlined by van Manen (1990) be acknowledged in a comprehensive explanation of phenomenology. While portraiture does draw on each of these to varying extents, it does not fit neatly within any of the aforementioned phenomenological orientations. Portraiture has clear foundations in phenomenology, drawing on its essential philosophy and features, as is evident in the work of both Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (Hoffman Davis et al., 1996; Hoffman Davis, Soep, Maira, Remba, & Putnoi, 1993; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). The methodology and methods of phenomenology are discussed below, followed by further discussion of portraiture methodology and methods in relation to this study. Portraiture utilises the phenomenological methodology and methods outlined here.

Phenomenology as methodology investigates the lived experiences of those who have experienced a particular phenomenon. The researcher’s role in phenomenology is ultimately to extract the essence of an experience by means of a reductionist process (Lichtman, 2006). The aim of reduction is “to re-achieve direct contact with the world by suspending prejudgments, bracketing assumptions, deconstructing claims, and restoring openness” (van Manen, 2011). The element of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis, 1997) known as voice as autobiography scaffolds the portraitist through this process, and the bracketing of the researcher’s assumptions can be seen in this research through the Prologue. Van Manen (2011) distinguishes six levels of reduction that are practised most often

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>phenomenology</strong></th>
<th>“deconstruction”, “discourse”, and “space of the text”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical phenomenology</strong></td>
<td>Characterised by the themes of “otherness”, “responsibility”, “I-Thou”, “the vocative”, and “(non)relationality”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenology of practice</strong></td>
<td>Generally applicable to phenomenological research conducted by professional practitioners as opposed to that performed by professional philosophers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
simultaneously. These are outlined in Table 6, along with reference to how each level of reduction was achieved in this research.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reduction</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Application in this research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic reduction</td>
<td>Bracketing the attitude of taken-for-grantedness and aiming to awaken a profound sense of wonder about the phenomenon in which one is interested</td>
<td>I capitalised upon my own sense of interest and “wonder” around the topic of arts education in primary school classrooms, allowing this to lead me to a greater depth of attention to the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutic reduction</td>
<td>Bracketing all interpretation and reflectively explicating whatever assumptions seem to need attention in writing the research text</td>
<td>The writing of the Prologue was the means through which I made explicit my preconceived notions and assumptions, allowing for recognition and reflection on these throughout the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological reduction</td>
<td>Bracketing all knowledge, all theory or theoretical meaning, all belief in what is real, and aiming to evoke concreteness or living meaning</td>
<td>Careful consideration of and reflection upon the methods and methodologies and the paradigm employed allowed for explicit recognition of how these may impact upon the viewing of reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eidetic reduction</td>
<td>Bracketing all incidental meaning and asking: what are some of the possible invariate aspects of this experience?</td>
<td>The writing and analysis of portraits involved identification of the central and constant themes in the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological reduction</td>
<td>Bracketing all established investigative methods or techniques and seeking or inventing an approach that seems to fit most appropriately the phenomenological topic under study</td>
<td>A unique combination of methods and methodologies were employed in this research as was deemed most fitting with the topic under study (as outlined in Chapter 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontological reduction</td>
<td>Explore what recommendations for human action or social policy may be suggested</td>
<td>Implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and further research are outlined in Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of “bracketing” is for the researcher to place his/her own thoughts and assumptions on a topic aside – in brackets – so that these thoughts do not colour or influence the researcher’s thinking throughout the investigation (Lichtman, 2006). Phenomenological researchers do not assume to know individuals’ understandings of phenomena. Phenomenological inquiry begins with “silence” (Psathas, 1973, cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) – the researcher “brackets” an idea informants take for granted as true, acting as though they know nothing about it, studying the phenomena in order to find out what is actually taken for granted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Lichtman (2006) advocates that the idea of a researcher being able to set aside his or her ideas about a particular phenomenon is too simplistic. As an alternative, Lichtman (2006) suggests the researcher make explicit his or her ideas on the topic, as the process of writing these down forces the researcher into an ideal mindset for this explicit recognition to occur. Morse and Richards’ (2002) explanation of bracketing is inclusive of Lichtman’s (2006) “writing it down” process. Morse and Richards (2002) go further to explain that phenomenologists also reflect on personal experiences (along with observations and the experiences of others) during the data analysis phase. In this study the composition of the Prologue has ensured that this explicit recognition and reflection did take place.

Along with reduction, the vocative dimension is the second key element in phenomenological methodology. The aim of the vocative dimension is “to let things ‘speak’ or be ‘heard’ by bringing them into nearness through the vocative power of language” (van Manen, 2011). Lichtman (2006) asserts that the phenomenological process is completed when the available data has been reduced to its essence. Phenomenologists strive to have their writing be consistent with the data they collect. They do not claim their interpretations to be “true”, but rather claim that their interpretation is plausible given the available data (Bogdan & Biklen,
Likewise, in this study I present written portraits as valid (but not the only valid) interpretations of the data collected. Morse and Richards (2002) refer to participants affirming the validity of the finished product by giving the “phenomenological nod” – the experience of confirmation occurring as a result of phenomenology giving insights into the essences of experiences that one may previously have been unaware of, but can recognise. This is emblematic of the recognition Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) describe participants experiencing when reading their completed portrait(s).

Methods of phenomenology can be empirical or reflective. A phenomenological study generally employs both empirical and reflective methods. Empirical methods aim to explore examples and varieties of lived experiences. Techniques commonly include interviewing, eliciting written responses, and participant observation, as is the case with much qualitative research. From a phenomenological standpoint, however, the phenomenological researcher is less interested in the subjective experiences of participants and reporting participants’ points of view on phenomena, and more interested in collecting examples of positive experiences to facilitate reflection on meanings that may be inherent in them (van Manen, 2011).

Phenomenological reflection aims at attempting to grasp the meaning of something (van Manen, 2011). This involves a deeper level of thinking about phenomena that we may often think about in our daily lives. Van Manen (2011) refers to this as the difference between one’s pre-reflective lived understanding of the meaning of a phenomenon, and a self-reflective grasp of the phenomenological structure of that same phenomenon.

A study employing portraiture methodology begins with the presumption that positive educational encounters are there to be found, and to be learned from (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Portraiture is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and working well, while remaining realistic (i.e., not
becoming idealistic) and duly acknowledging the limitations and less positive aspects of the phenomena being investigated (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The portraitist does not make the assumption that s/he knows what constitutes “good” in any given situation, nor that there is in fact only one definition of “good”. Portraitists are instead concerned with documenting how participants define “goodness” in their contexts, recognising and respecting that there are a myriad of ways in which “goodness” can be expressed (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

Prior to arriving at a research site, the portraitist establishes a clear intellectual framework and guiding research questions; however acknowledges and is open to adaptation of these to fit the context and participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). With regard to this study, the Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) provided a guiding framework with which to work. The nine domains of this matrix scaffolded the instrument development, data collection, development of apriori themes for application in thematic analysis, and structuring of data presented in the portraits of arts education at Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School.

Impressionistic records (i.e. daily reflections) are a key component of portraiture methodology. In this study, whenever practical to do so without causing a disruption to the situation, the researcher made hand-written notes in a notebook whilst observing. These formed the basis of each day’s impressionistic record, which was then elaborated on at the end of that day. Observation, interviewing, and analysis of written materials also contribute to portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Observations and semi-structured interviews were used in this research; however while analysis of written materials was initially intended to be a part of this study, this proved impractical as the administrators of both schools involved made clear their disinclination to share any written documentation about their school policies or programs with the researcher. A further key
The five essential elements of portraiture, as outlined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997), are: context; voice; relationship; emergent themes; and aesthetic whole. Each of these elements and their direct application in this study will be discussed here.

Drawing on phenomenological methodology, “context” forms a key element in a portraitist’s documentation of phenomena. Context refers to the physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, and aesthetic setting in which the phenomena under investigation take place. The portraitist aims to understand human experience and behaviour as it evolves in its natural context. Portraiture employs context in five ways: internal context, personal context, historical context, aesthetic context, and shaping context. Internal context is a detailed description of the physical setting, most often providing the opening to the portrait, beginning with macro, working down to micro. Personal context represents the researcher’s perch and perspective. The researcher makes clear his/her perspectives and potential biases, sketching the researcher into the context, and hence into the “picture” or portrait. The first impressions of the researcher as “newcomer” are recorded in detail, allowing the reader to make their own judgments based on knowledge of the researcher’s perspective. Historical context refers to the history, culture, and ideology of the place, including the origins and evolution of the
organisation and the values that shape its structure and purpose. Aesthetic context involves the central metaphors and symbols that shape the narrative. Metaphors are often heard first by participants, then taken up by the researcher for use in the portrait. Shaping context refers to the participant’s role in shaping and defining context. Participants both shape context and are shaped by context. Shaping context involves recognition of the dynamic nature of context – sometimes changing, at other times static.

The second element of portraiture to be discussed here is “voice”. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) examine six ways in which the portraitist may use voice in developing the portrait. These are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7

Explanation of the Six Uses of Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice as witness</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Application in this research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice as witness</td>
<td>Underscores researcher’s stance as discerning observer</td>
<td>The observation stance undertaken allowed me to maintain a degree of distance from phenomena while remaining close enough to gain insight as would a participant-observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice as witness</td>
<td>Researcher is sufficiently distanced from the action to be able to see the whole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice as interpretation</td>
<td>Underscores the interpretive role of the portraitist</td>
<td>The portraits presented comprise rich, descriptive, complexly rendered interpretations of the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice as interpretation</td>
<td>Researcher’s attempts to make sense of the data are heard in the “story” of the portrait</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice as interpretation</td>
<td>Uses “thick description” that moves beyond surface-level descriptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice as preoccupation</td>
<td>Observations and writing are shaped by the assumptions the researcher brings to the inquiry – the lens through which she sees and records reality</td>
<td>The Prologue provides a brief autobiographical portrait serving the purpose of placing the researcher in the picture, and acknowledging potential views and biases and how these may influence the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice as preoccupation</td>
<td>Reflective of the researcher’s disciplinary background, theoretical perspectives, intellectual interests, and understanding of relevant literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voice as autobiography

- Reflects the life story of the portraitist
- Insights are shaped by the researcher’s own history – familial, cultural, ideological, and educational
- Portraitist must include enough of his/her own “story” into the portrait to inform the reader about the filter that the researcher brings to his/her interpretation of the data

The Prologue provides a brief autobiographical portrait serving the purpose of placing the researcher in the picture, and acknowledging potential views and biases and how these may influence the research.

Listening for voice

- Listening for the message and the meaning in the voices of participants
- Moving beyond what is said to interpret the unspoken

Throughout each portrait, interpretation is offered of the meaning behind the words and actions of participants.

Voice in dialogue

- Voices of the researcher and the participants in conversation
- Joint construction of meaning by participants and researcher

The voices of participants and researcher intertwine throughout the portraits as meaning is co-constructed. Snippets of conversational dialogue are evident also.

Relationship is the element of portraiture involving the relationships necessarily forged between researcher and participants. Relationships should be both productive and benign.

Relationships are dynamic, evolving, fluid, and complex. Portraitists seek to construct relationships of symmetry and reciprocity with participants, working to negotiate and continuously renegotiate appropriate boundaries of distance and intimacy. Relationships are seen as central to the empirical, ethical, and humanistic dimensions of research design.

The search for “goodness” is fundamental to a portraitist’s formation of relationships with participants. The search for goodness necessitates resisting the somewhat typical approach of social science research to document failure and suggest remedies. Instead, the portraitist seeks to present a balanced picture of strengths and weaknesses, beginning by asking “What is happening here, what is working, and why?” In this study, I entered the field with the
assumption that quality arts education is there to be found – hence beginning with the search for goodness.

Empathetic regard is another key aspect of shaping research relationships in portraiture methodology. This involves the portraitist attempting to develop understanding of the participant’s perspective through listening and responding to him/her. In this study I sought to develop empathetic regard and to demonstrate this to participant teachers through active listening, as well as through gauging the non-verbal responses of participants both in casual conversations and in semi-structured interviews and taking these into account throughout current and subsequent interactions.

The development of emergent themes is an iterative and generative process. The themes emerge from the data whilst also helping to shape the data. The portraitist undertakes a disciplined, empirical process of description, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis alongside the aesthetic process of narrative development, as data is gathered, organised, and scrutinised for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and overarching symbols. Applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011) was employed in this study, an approach which embraces such inductive analysis as is called for here.

The researcher enters the field with a guiding intellectual framework, and in some instances with explicit dimensions that form part of the researcher’s anticipatory schema. The EITM fills this role in this study (see section 3.3). Before entering the field the researcher must also identify the intellectual, ideological, and autobiographical themes that will shape his/her view (see “Prologue”). Articulation of intellectual framework, anticipatory schema, and voice as preoccupation and autobiography prior to entering the field establishes a foundation from which to begin, thereafter adapting to coincide with the research site and participants. During data analysis connections may be traced between original presuppositions and themes.
resonating from final portraits. It is not, however, intended that original conjectures remain rigid. In fact, the exact opposite of this is seen to be the ideal, with the researcher employing flexibility in allowing themes to emerge organically from the data and to flow along with the process of data collection. Daily impressionistic records (thought journals) play a key role in facilitating this iterative process.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) advocate the use of triangulation, stating that emergent themes arise out of the layering of data achieved through multiple data sources (multiple individuals [e.g. student, teacher, principal]; and multiple collection methods [e.g. observation, interview, document analysis]). It is asserted that crystallization (see section 3.4), rather than triangulation, will fulfil this role in this study. Crystallization is increasingly being recognised in qualitative research as an alternative to triangulation that is better matched to the aims and philosophies of qualitative inquiry through its rejection of a rigid three-sided approach, and embracement of a multi-dimensional view of reality accepted as ever-changing and at all times thoroughly incomplete (Richardson, 2000).

Each of the four aforementioned elements of portraiture (context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes) interact and combine to form part of the aesthetic whole – leading to the completed portrait. The portraitist constructs the aesthetic whole while attending to four dimensions: conception (development of the overarching story); structure (sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the story); form (movement of narrative and spinning of the tale); and cohesion (unity and integrity of the piece) – as was done in the drafting, re-writing, and finalising of portraits in this study.

**3.3 Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix**

The Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) was developed by Bamford and Glinkowski (2010) based on factors that have been identified through Bamford’s (2006) international
research in arts education as being consistently associated with high level impact. The EITM was utilised by Bamford and Glinkowski (2010) in their report on the impact of music learning experiences in the United Kingdom falling under the *Wider Opportunities Program* (WO). This program was established with a view to all students in years 3-6 having the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument, at no cost. The stated ideal of WO projects is provision of an “authentic instrumental experience” for pupils for the duration of at least one year (though actual provision did not always live up to this ideal) (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010). The EITM was used as a scaffold to organise the analysis of data and to report the impact on the students, teachers, schools, and wider systems involved in the *Wider Opportunities Program*. Data collected included interviews with pupils, class teachers, head teachers, school music coordinators, specialist music tutors and music service managers; observations in schools; focus groups; and an online survey made available to head teachers and music coordinators.

Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) was used as a scaffold in this research to inform instrument development, data collection, and subsequent data organisation of completed portraits of quality arts education in primary school classrooms. The nine domains provide a broad definition for effect and impact, showing the complex web of interrelationships in assessing arts education. This inductive approach is consistent with portraiture methodology outlined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997). In addition to this, the use of a scaffold focusing on high level impact was deemed appropriate to this study’s focus on quality arts education. The nine domains are defined by Bamford and Glinkowski (2010) as outlined in Table 8.
Table 8

*Nine Domains of the EITM (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Personal impact, such as the development of confidence, aspiration, enjoyment, fun and happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social impact, such as the fostering or development of networks, collaborations, partnerships and contact webs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Cultural impact, such as changes prompted at an organisational level, changes in external perceptions, changes in profile and influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Educational impact, such as new knowledge, skills development, conceptual development, professional education, education of the broader field or community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Ethical impact, such as addressing social problems or minority issues or audiences, promoting changes in attitudes, or contributing to sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Economic impact, such as value for money, changing spending patterns, income generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Innovation impact, such as talent development, the development of new pedagogic techniques, processes or products and the instigation of debates or new discourse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalytic</td>
<td>Catalytic impact, such as flow-on effects, changes in direction, transformations and journeys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative loss</td>
<td>Negative loss impact described things that had to be sacrificed, or else negative consequences of some other kind that arose. This includes opportunity costs, talent loss, personal loss, unhappiness, loss of enjoyment, loss of creativity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the processes of outlining my assumptions prior to data collection, collecting data with each of the EITM themes in mind, and preliminary and subsequent data analysis, my understandings of the application of each theme in terms of this study were constantly
The definitions of each domain that I developed are presented here in the state reached towards the end of this evolution:

**Personal impact** refers to impact upon an individual in a personal way, such as developing their confidence, self-esteem, or positive self-concept, or resulting in a positive emotional response such as fun, enjoyment, or happiness. Personal impact can positively affect both mental and physical health.

**Social impact** refers to aspects of social interactions such as group or team work, collaboration, and collegiality. This can be in relation to interactions between students, between teachers, between teacher and student, and with the broader school community. Social interactions that take place in daily school activities can have personal impacts upon the individuals involved.

**Cultural impact** relates to the culture of the community, the school, and the classroom. Culture refers to standard expectations, ways of being, and patterns of interaction between individuals. The culture of the community, school, and/or classroom may influence events that take place, while social interactions may contribute to forming the culture (at the most visible level, classroom culture).

**Educational impact** encompasses development of new knowledge, skills, and concepts. It can take place through formal learning as well as everyday interactions with people, objects, and situations. Educational impact can occur not just for students but also for teachers, and for the wider community.

**Ethical impact** is essentially about fairness. Equality of opportunity to participate, differentiation of curriculum for different learning needs, styles, and interests, and issues related to social justice.
**Economic impact** relates primarily to budgetary considerations. It can also refer to the financial impact of participation in activities for the school, teachers, and parents. Income generation is also a consideration here, as is (perceived) value for money.

**Innovation impact** involves the development of something new. This could be students’ creative thinking, innovative pedagogical techniques, processes, or products, or the instigation of new conversations around a topic.

**Catalytic impact** refers to instigation of change – flow on effects from a situation or event, something prompting a change in direction, or the beginning of a transformation.

**Negative loss impact** refers to negative experiences, often relating directly to one of the aforementioned domains. Negative loss may be one-sided, such as when a situation is experienced as negative by one individual but not another; or it may be negative for all or many involved.

### 3.4 Crystallization

Crystallization was employed in this study as a methodological referent used to ensure the validity and reliability of data collection and representation. To provide a clear understanding, justification, and motivation for the use of crystallization, this section will outline the historical development of crystallization. Methodological triangulation, its foundations, and concerns surrounding this concept are outlined first, as precursors to crystallization. Richardson’s (1994, 2000) initial conceptualisation of crystallization is then discussed, followed by Ellingson’s (2009) further development and re-conceptualisation of crystallization as a methodological framework and discussion of the application of crystallization in this study.
It should be noted that what is presented here is not a continuum from triangulation to Ellingson’s crystallization with Richardson’s crystallization in between. Triangulation did not cease to be practised after the advent of crystallization, nor did Richardson’s crystallization become superseded by Ellingson’s. All three continue to be practised in diverse areas of social science research. Richardson’s crystallization is not a replacement for, but is rather an offshoot – a crystallized growth – of triangulation, and Ellingson’s crystallization a further growth from this. These “growths” crystallize in their own directions, further developing in and of themselves, without preventing the growth and development of that in which their roots lie.

3.4.1 Triangulation

Origins of the term triangulation lie in trigonometry and geometry, where triangulation is the process of determining the location of a point based on knowledge of the location of points at either end of a fixed baseline, and the known angles from the baseline to the point of interest. Burton and Bartlett (2009) outline how this concept is applied in social science research:

Triangulation is a navigational term which means to fix one’s position from two known bearings. This process is carried out by researchers to increase the validity of their research and it means checking one’s findings by using several points of reference (p. 26)

Oliver Wendell Holmes, in 1860, was among the first to use the term “triangulation” in a way that leans towards applicability to the social science research domain, referring to “[a] sagacious person who has triangulated a race, that is taken three or more observations from the several standing-places of three different generations” (Oppermann, 2000). It was not until the 1960s, however, that the term triangulation was explicitly introduced into the social
science discipline as a research approach (Oppermann, 2000). Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) were among the first to do so:

Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement processes. If a proposition can survive the onslaught of a series of imperfect measures, with all their irrelevant error, confidence should be placed in it. Of course, this confidence is increased by minimizing error in each instrument and by a reasonable belief in the different and divergent effects of the sources of error (p. 3)

It is through triangulation of data procured from different measurement classes that the investigator can most effectively strip of plausibility rival explanations for his comparison. The usual procedural question asked is: Which of the several available data-collection methods will be best for my research problem? We suggest the alternate question: Which set of methods will be best? (pp. 174-175)

In extending this, Denzin (1970, 1978) defined four approaches to triangulation: data triangulation – use of a variety of data sources; investigator triangulation – use of several different researchers; theory triangulation – use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data; and methodological triangulation – use of multiple methods to study a single problem.

Triangulation’s potential has been advocated for enhancing the validity of research findings by combining multiple methodologies and capitalising on the individual strengths of each (Duffy, 1987; Mathison, 1988; Morse, 1991; Risjord, Dunbar, & Moloney, 2002). Flick
suggests that rather than a strategy for validating results, triangulation is an *alternative* to validation, increasing scope, depth, and consistency in methodological proceedings. While Denzin (1978) defines four approaches to triangulation (as above), it is the fourth – methodological triangulation – that is most commonly applied in studies purporting to employ triangulation. Denzin himself notes his own emphasis on methodological triangulation within his text (ibid). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in many cases pro-triangulation arguments are based primarily upon the perceived benefits of quantitative methods for complementing qualitative studies, and vice versa, i.e. arguments for mixed-method research. Furthermore, Oppermann (2000) asserts that the basic concepts are easily misunderstood, with triangulation often misinterpreted “as simply an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection on the same general subject of interest” (p. 141).

A great deal of scepticism regarding use of the term triangulation in social science research is evident almost from the outset. Critiques of the concept of triangulation as proposed by Denzin (1978) called for abandonment of the concept, or at least the terminology, from as early as 1983 (Oppermann, 2000). Interestingly, such critiques focus primarily on methodological triangulation, not on data, theory, or investigator triangulation, further supporting Oppermann’s (2000) assertion with regards to misinterpretation of the triangulation method.

Triangulation, with origins in trigonometry and geometry, is in essence quite mathematical, methodical and scientific. This is one strong argument against the use of triangulation in social science research – it is firmly rooted in a *positivist approach*. The concept of triangulation assumes one fixed point which can be triangulated – one fixed, objective reality. Research in the social sciences has moved on from positivism and associated beliefs of objectivity to an approach emphasising subjectivity and social construction of meaning.
It seems that triangulation was never completely up to the task. Yet it still exists as a key methodological component of a large range of research studies in the social sciences. Why? Because there is something there. Triangulation holds something of value. What if the essence of the principle of triangulation was retained, but with one significant modification – the central imaginary no longer being that of a fixed, rigid, two-dimensional three-sided triangle, but rather, that of a crystal. The crystal “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

3.4.2 Richardson’s crystallization

In 1994, Laurel Richardson made a seemingly simple statement, from which a new methodological tradition was born: “…we do not triangulate; we crystallize” (Richardson, 1994, p. 934). Richardson asserts that there are more than just three sides from which to approach the world, outlining her conceptualisation of crystallization as follows:

I propose that the central imaginary for “validity” for postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization. In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles.
Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic (p. 934)

In Richardson’s crystallization, there is recognition of the existence of more than just three sides to the world, with the central imaginary of the crystal representing the varied and ever-changing nature of images and views of reality. With triangulation comes the assumption that there is one – singular – object to be viewed. Richardson’s crystallization, however, makes no such claim. Crystallization provides us with a tool for constructing a deeper and more thorough understanding of a topic, whilst simultaneously bringing us to recognise the partial and necessarily incomplete nature of any understandings we come to have.

A large number of researchers have taken up Richardson’s (1994, 2000) notion of crystallization. Some simply state that their research employs crystallization without giving any explanation of what it is or how they are using it (e.g. Ashworth, Schmidt, Pioch, & Hallsworth, 2006; C. Brown, 2008; M. Brown, 2009; K. T. Heinrich, 2000; Hemming, 2007; Krueger, 2006; Marsh, 2006; Stiles, 2004; Wahab, 2004). Others make use of the concept as defined by Richardson (ibid), explaining their use of it as such, without adding to the concept in any way (e.g. Barry, 1996; Carpenter, 2005; J. M. Davis, 2007; Lorenz, 2008; Scanlon, 2005; Waterhouse, 2007). A handful of researchers, however, have not just taken Richardson’s crystallization, but have taken it further, adding their own additions and voicing their further interpretations on the concept (e.g. Arasi, 2006; Cox & Hassard, 2005; Ellingson, 2009; Graffam, 2005; Hegelund, 2005; Janesick, 2001). One could say that to do so is in the true nature of Richardson’s conceptualisation of crystallization. We each see, interpret, and understand a topic, concept, or idea in a way unique from our specific, yet ever-changing,
vantage point. One key author to further Richardson’s crystallization was Janesick (2000), who suggests involving the inclusion of different disciplines and/or “non-academic” activities such as journal writing into the design of a study. Prior to 2009, Richardson (1994, 2000), and to a lesser (but not insignificant) extent Janesick (2000), are the key references included in discussions of crystallization. In 2009, another key author furthering the conceptualisation of crystallization came into play – Laura Ellingson, with her book entitled *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An introduction* (Ellingson, 2009). The following section explores Ellingson’s (ibid) development and conceptualisation of crystallization.

### 3.4.3 Ellingson’s crystallization

Following on from discussion of the origins of crystallization, this section will outline Ellingson’s conceptualisation of crystallization. In doing so, explicit reference will be made throughout to the application of Ellingson’s crystallization to the research presented in this thesis.

In searching for a methodological framework supportive of the use of multiple genres and schools of thought within a research project, Ellingson developed her conceptualisation of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009). With roots in Richardson’s (1994, 2000) crystallization, Ellingson’s (2009) development of this concept goes much further, becoming distinct from (yet still encompassing) Richardson’s initial concept, presenting crystallization as a methodological framework.

Ellingson outlines her conceptualisation of crystallization as “a methodological framework … for bringing together not just different forms of data and analysis (as in multi-method research), but also different genres and forms of sense making within interpretive methodology” (Ellingson, 2009, p. xii). She states that studies in which crystallization exists meet five broad criteria:
1. Offer deep, thickly described, complexly rendered interpretations of meanings about a phenomenon or group.

2. Represent ways of producing knowledge across multiple points of the qualitative continuum, generally including at least one middle-ground (constructivist or postpositivist) and one interpretive, artistic, performative, or otherwise creative analytic approach; often crystallized texts reflect several contrasting ways of knowing.

3. Utilize more than one genre of writing (e.g. poetry, narrative, report) and/or other medium (e.g. video, painting, music).

4. Include a significant degree of reflexive consideration of the researcher’s self and roles in the process of research design, data collection, and representation.

5. Eschew positivist claims to objectivity and a singular, discoverable Truth in favor of embracing knowledge as situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations.

(Ellingson, 2009, p. 10)

The first criterion is applied in this study through the use of portraiture methodology. The writing of thick, rich, descriptive portraits and the rendering of complex data enabled interpretation of meanings about arts education in primary school classrooms. In addressing criterion two, the combined use of portraiture (creative approach) and Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) (middle-ground approach), complemented by the use of applied thematic analysis (middle-ground approach), offers multiple ways of producing knowledge that exists at multiple points on the qualitative continuum. The use of the nine EITM domains as apriori themes in the application of applied thematic analysis in this study also lends itself to nine contrasting ways of knowing. Criterion
three is addressed through the contrasting of presentation of written portraits (in the Prologue, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and the Epilogue in Chapter 6), with the distanced researcher writing approach of Chapters 1-3 and the beginning of Chapter 6. With regard to criterion four, reflexivity was achieved in this study through the explicit acknowledgement in the Prologue of the researcher’s understanding of her background and beliefs and how this may influence the research. This section was drafted initially prior to beginning the data collection.

Following this, while conducting data collection and analysis and later writing up the final chapters of this thesis, conscious attention was paid to the researcher’s interpretations of the data and how these may be influenced by the researcher’s own background, understandings of the world, potential biases and personal agendas. Subsequently, the Prologue was revisited and added to repeatedly throughout the duration of this research project. Criterion five was employed throughout this study through ascription to the interpretivist paradigm, application of portraiture (in particular the element of voice) and the nine domains of the EITM, and through the researcher’s conscious recognition, during all stages of conducting and writing up this study, of knowledge as situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations.

Crystallization involves multiple data collection agents and strategies. Ellingson’s (2009) crystallization, making primarily implicit use of Richardson’s metaphor of the crystal, embraces subjectivity and social construction of meaning. It invokes rich, deep description, with knowledge collected from multiple vantage points using several methods spanning the qualitative ‘continuum’ (including reflexive consideration of researcher in-situ), and likewise presented through more than one genre of writing and/or alternative medium.

Although a relatively recent concept, it is fast becoming evident that Ellingson’s crystallization has a place in social science research, having already been drawn upon by researchers in diverse fields including education (e.g. Beer, 2010; Conrad, Paul, Bruce,
Charles, & Felix, 2010; Gous, 2009; Jack, 2011), communication (e.g. Briggs, 2010; Fleming, 2011; Piemonte, 2010), environment (e.g. Tulloch, 2010), sports medicine/exercise sciences (e.g. Gardner, 2011; Joseph, 2010), and mental health (e.g. Falletta, 2011). As an emerging research methodology, Ellingson’s (2009) methodological framework of crystallization will no doubt continue to be developed by both Ellingson herself and others following suit.

A key tenet of crystallization presented by both Richardson (1994, 2000) and Ellingson (2009) is the variable nature of reality. Proponents of crystallization assert that social science has moved on from triangulation, in which a single triangulated truth is sought. Crystallization is advocated as an alternative that makes no presumption of one truth “out there” to be found. It recognises that reality is socially constructed, viewed differently from different vantage points in much the same way that a different view is gained depending on the angle at which one looks through a crystal. Just as crystals change and grow, crystallization recognises the ever-changing, growing, and developing nature of reality and the topics on which we focus our research.

Recognition and voicing of multiple perspectives, as well as the use of narrative representations, both resonate with portraiture methodology as outlined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997). Crystallization was employed in this study as a way of achieving depth of understanding and representation of a topic through compilation of numerous forms of representing, organising, and analysing data. Further explanation of its use at each stage of the research journey is woven throughout the relevant sections.

3.5 Data Collection

The Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010) acted as a scaffold to guide instrument development, data collection, and data organisation. Data was
collected through interviews and observations, with use of multiple data sources being a key component of crystallization. Development of interview and observation schedules was informed by the nine domains of the EITM (Personal; Social; Cultural; Educational; Ethical; Economic; Innovation; Catalytic; Negative Loss). Each data collection method contributes information relevant to one or more of the EITM domains. In this way, the EITM provides the “intellectual framework” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) advocated for use by the portraitist researcher. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) discuss the use of “dimensions” to guide the portraitist researcher. In this study, the nine domains of the EITM fulfil this role, additionally fostering explicit recognition of the need to consider multiple representations of reality, in line with crystallization.

Interviews can be classified into two main types: structured, where the researcher is bound to keeping rigidly to the set questions; and unstructured, where the researcher has freedom to formulate questions as they come to mind around the issue being investigated (Kumar, 2005). A third classification, lying somewhere between structured and unstructured, is semi-structured interviewing. When conducting semi-structured interviews, researchers have a list of themes to be covered, along with suggested questions; however there remains an openness and flexibility which allows the researcher to adapt the sequence and format of questions to align with the needs of the participant and to follow up on questions and responses as the interview unfolds (Kvale, 1996). I made use of semi-structured interviews in this study, as deemed most suitable within portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). A brief and extremely flexible interview schedule was used (see Appendix 1), which acted as a prompt for the interviewer while allowing interviews to flow in the direction taken by participants, to allow their voices to be heard (portraiture) and their aspects of realities to be represented in the portraits (crystallization). This also allowed the interviewer
to ask prompting and clarifying questions, in doing so working to develop empathetic regard (portraiture).

Two main types of observation are identified by Kumar (2005): participant observation, where the researcher participates in the phenomena being observed in much the same manner as do the research participants; and non-participant observation, where the researcher remains a passive observer, not participating in the activities of participants. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) describe the nature of observation in portraiture as somewhere between participant observation and “fly-on-the-wall” observation. This approach allows the researcher to maintain a degree of distance from phenomena while remaining close enough to gain insight as would a participant-observer. In line with portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997), daily impressionistic records were undertaken. This involved the researcher taking notes during observations where practical, and also making time at the end of each day to write down thoughts and impressions from the day’s observations and discussions.

Daily impressionistic records formed the basis for the writing of each case portrait, supplemented by data gathered through interviews conducted. Daily impressionistic records also played a key part in the development and consideration of emergent themes, and in consistently engaging in the reflexive process throughout the duration of the study. The writing of a portrait for each case site served to consolidate the data gathered, providing a deep, rich, descriptive ‘picture’ of quality arts education at each primary school – one acknowledged, in line with crystallization, as thoroughly partial.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis refers to the systematic approach to analysing data according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set (W. Gibson & Brown, 2009;
This approach is not particular to any one research method, being used by scholars across many fields and disciplines. In thematic analysis, qualitative data are segmented, categorised, summarised, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set. It is a primarily descriptive strategy, with the product of a thematic analysis being a description of patterns of experience within the data, and the overarching design that unites them (Ayres, 2008). Guest et al. (2011) outline their conception of “applied thematic analysis” as “a type of inductive analysis of qualitative data that can involve multiple analytic techniques”. The notion of applied thematic analysis, as the authors explain, suggests that this approach is oriented towards practical problems, and addressing research questions of a practical nature. With the research question of this study deemed suitable to applied thematic analysis as outlined here, this was the approach employed in this study.

While there are no set procedures for how to conduct a thematic analysis (W. Gibson & Brown, 2009; Guest et al., 2011), a number of texts do provide guidelines and suggestions for consideration by the researcher. The central consideration in thematic analysis is code/theme management. The general procedures involved in this are identifying a theme; providing a definition for this theme; coding data according to this theme; revising the theme definition as necessary; and revising the data coded under that theme. To facilitate this process, a codebook was developed and maintained to keep track of the names and definitions of themes, and any changes to these (see Appendix 2 for excerpt from codebook). While qualitative data analysis software can be useful for coding data, particularly with respect to large data sets, this was deemed unnecessarily cumbersome and restrictive for the purposes of this study, with thematic analysis applied to two portraits, these being richly descriptive but highly organised and efficiently arranged presentations of the data. Instead, the “track change comments” and highlighting features in Microsoft Word were made use of to code the data,
with the documents saved with a new date each time a major change was made, and this change detailed and dated in the codebook.

In this research, themes were created apriori as well as emerging inductively from the data. Inductive themes were identified as they emerged from the data, and defined, applied, revisited, and reapplied. Apriori themes were based on the EITM domains (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010). Preliminary analysis was conducted in applied thematic analysis fashion throughout the data collection process, and further applied throughout the process of writing the portraits of each primary school. In this way, the analysis of each is in fact entwined throughout each portrait. Further detail on this is provided in the next section.

### 3.7 Presentation of Data, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In consideration of the way to best present the data and final chapters of this thesis, I conducted a review of thirty-eight theses in the field of education in which portraiture was central to the methodology of the study. This began with a search for theses citing Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis’ *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), as this is the seminal text on portraiture methodology, and I hence inferred that any quality work making use of portraiture methodology as a central methodological component would cite this publication. This initial search returned 53 results. From this, the list of theses was narrowed down to include only those in the education field, and in which portraiture was central to the methodology of the thesis. Of the thirty-eight remaining theses, twenty-two were for the degree Doctor of Education, fifteen for the degree Doctor of Philosophy, and the remaining one was for the degree Master of Arts. The theses ranged in year of submission from 2001 to 2010.

It was found that the theses reviewed varied in the methodologies used to complement portraiture; however common methodologies used include phenomenology, ethnography,
case study, and feminist methodology. In several of those stating that they employ ethnographic methodology, the presentation of portraits took on an autoethnographic style of narration, with great emphasis of the researcher in the portrait. It was deemed that in this research study, not being ethnographic in nature, a middle-distance perch of the researcher was most appropriate – the role of the researcher is evident, woven throughout the portraits; however the portraitist herself does not become the focal point of the portrait at any time.

The analysis of data was most often integrated into the presentation of portraits in the theses reviewed, however in some cases was presented separately, either before or after the portraits themselves. The former is the case in this study, as it was felt that this fit best with my writing style and the aims of this research study. The method of analysis used in the majority of the theses reviewed involved the search for and application of themes, though in many cases was not explicitly referred to as thematic analysis. It is applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011) that was employed in this research (see section 3.6), with analysis interwoven into the presentation of each portrait.

The final chapters of the thirty-eight reviewed theses, in which portraiture was central to the methodology of the study, were diversely presented. While many involved one chapter only, others took two chapters to present similar sections. Several final chapters were written in the style of portraiture, with a narrative telling the story of the thesis, and in some cases autoethnographically retelling the journey of the PhD candidate. In most cases, a more traditional approach to the final chapter was taken. The final chapter in this study (Chapter 6) combines these two approaches to achieve what I believe to be the best balance between the two as suited to this particular research project. This is done by beginning the chapter with a traditional approach, and ending with a concluding portrait (the “Epilogue”).
Despite the level of variance in the final chapters of the theses reviewed, a number of elements were common across most: they began with a summary of the previous chapters in the thesis; presented a series of conclusions structured either around the research questions or around themes that emerged from the research findings; presented implications and recommendations for practice, further research, and in some cases policy; and finished either with the implications and recommendations section or with a strong concluding statement. In melding the elements common to the theses reviewed with how best to present the findings and conclusions of this particular thesis, the researcher decided on the following structure for the final chapter:

- Summary of previous thesis chapters
- Findings and conclusions presented around overarching themes evident from the data
- Implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and further research
- A concluding portrait

One further consideration in the presentation of the portraits in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 was to ensure adequate representation of the crystallization approach undertaken in this study. In aligning with crystallization, the data is presented in rich, descriptive, complexly rendered interpretations (portraits). A significant degree of reflexive consideration is made evident through the way in which the portraitist has written herself into the portraits. Eschewing claims to objectivity and a singular, discoverable truth, multiple voices are heard throughout each portrait, and additionally, each portrait is structured around the nine domains of the EITM. Imagine that the school in question exists at the centre of a nine-sided crystal – somewhat like a snow globe, though with nine sides. Each of these nine sides (the nine domains of the EITM) allows the viewer a different lens through which to view the data. The
portraits presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are presented within the domains of the EITM with mind to inviting the reader to view the data from these nine different sides of the crystal.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

3.8.1 Voluntary participation and informed consent

All participants were informed that participation was entirely voluntary, and that no consequence would occur for them should they elect not to participate in this research study. An information letter was supplied, containing sufficient information to ensure that voluntary participation was based on sufficient information presented in a way suitable to each participant, in accordance with sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2007).

3.8.2 Confidentiality

No individual or institution were or will be identified through participation in this research. Participants were assured of the anonymity of both themselves and their institution.

3.8.3 Questions of a threatening or sensitive nature

Care was taken to ensure that all questionnaire items and interview questions were asked in a non-threatening manner. During testing of the instruments any items which appeared to test participants to be of a potentially sensitive or threatening nature were adapted or eliminated.

3.8.4 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples

While this research study did not specifically target Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, those from non-English speaking backgrounds or other minority groups, the researcher acknowledges that people from these groups may have been represented amongst
participants in this study. The researcher is aware of cultural sensitivities and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research Section 4.7 (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2007, pp. 69-72).

3.8.5 Burden of time

The principal burden of this research was that of the time required by respondents. Measures were put in place to minimise this burden and ensure that participation in this research was as undemanding upon respondents as possible. The testing of research instruments assisted with this, as any questions deemed at that time to be potentially excessively demanding of the respondents were adapted or deleted.

3.8.6 Storage of data

Collected data was stored securely, with only the researcher and research supervisors having access to this. Hard copy documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet and collated data, once entered into computer, was stored as password protected files on a password protected computer. Data will be destroyed after five years.
4 Bungadeen Primary School

In the freezing Winter of 2012, I began data collection at the first of my two case sites – Bungadeen Primary School. A small school in a tight-knit rural community, the story of Bungadeen Primary School is interwoven with the stories of the people who make the school the community that it is. This portrait opens by painting the scene of the town of Bungadeen itself, then moves on to sketch the school within it. After sketching the outline of Bungadeen Primary School, we delve deeper, filling in the details, layering understandings. The voices of multiple participants are heard, bringing additional dimensions into the portrait. An image seen through a crystal will reflect and refract, and it is with this in mind that the reader is invited to engage with the picture painted here to represent multiple views, angles, and ways of knowing.

4.1 Culture

Driving down the tree-lined road, acres of farming land on either side, I enter Main Street in the quiet town of Bungadeen. On the right is a small row of stores. There is the general store, stocking the most essential of items that one might need (but would prefer not to pay for there if one can get along without it until next in a larger town), also acting as the town’s café and take-away food hub, and more recently extending their services to a bottle-shop. The announcement of the bottle-shop opening within the general store was made less than a week after word began to spread that the local pub would be “a pub with no beer”. No alcohol of any sort would be served, as something had gone awry in the contracts of the pub being sold out of local hands into those of a stranger to the town, and somehow back again. Or so the rumours told. The publican decided that without the sale of alcohol being permitted, there would be no sense in keeping the establishment open for the time being. As news of this
spread amongst the prep/1 class I was observing one particular day, the teacher and I exchanged many knowing glances while hiding our chuckles behind our coffee mugs at morning tea (we were inside with the class due to the rain), as these 4-6 year old boys and girls were heard to say to one another “We can’t go to the pub any more!” “But what are we gonna do on Friday night now?” “What do we do if we can’t go to the pub?!” There’s a saying I have heard since I was young, I don’t know where it comes from, perhaps my own mother’s wisdom, but I have always found it to be true – in every Australian country town, you’ll find at least one pub. If the town is big enough, there’ll be a school, but even if the place is too small and the school closed down, there’ll still be the pub. A town can’t survive without a pub. There was much talk among the teachers and from what I perceived, everybody in the community, about how the town would get on without it even for a short while, and when the situation was expected to be rectified. Evidently, these youngsters were feeling the strain too. As in many country towns, the pub is far more than a place to have a beer; it’s a place to congregate, where families get together, welcome friends and family friends to their table, have a meal together, watch the kids as they go off to play then come back again when it’s time to go home. In short, a good country pub, as this was and no doubt will be again, is a central feature in the culture of many families. Although it was highly amusing to us, as adults, to hear these young children speak so about the town losing its pub, it was of real and very understandable concern to them that they would no longer, until the situation were rectified, have a place to go to spend time with their families and friends of a Friday night – a much relished weekly occasion I am sure.

As mentioned, Main Street sports the General Store and the pub. Alongside these are the post office, a butcher selling “fine foods” at a price that would make one cringe to consider them anything but fine, and two second-hand stores selling a wide array of objects and accessories. One of these sells second-hand school uniforms, reasonably priced for those who can’t afford
them new, though not always in a condition of which the school (let alone parent, and child wearing it) might be grateful for such a service. Continuing down Main Street, there is the Community Hall on the left, behind which the Community Health Centre is located, including a doctor’s office within. A few metres further, we reach a chemist on the left, and on the right, the local park, with its green grass, three recently established pergolas (two with BBQs for public use, one with wooden bench seating around the edge), and recently added play equipment. This park, once a year, is the centre of the town’s largest annual social event by far – the Bungadeen Festival. Crowds of hundreds come from surrounding districts to enjoy the festivities, with stalls spilling out from the park, all the length of Main Street, up side streets, into the green area beside the Community Hall, with art exhibitions in the hall itself (an additional gold coin donation to be paid for entry here), and naturally the local stores open for business. Nobody has any mobile phone reception in town the weekend of “Bunga Fest”, as the towers become overloaded with the proportionately enormous addition of people in the area.

Driving further, I quickly come closer to the school’s road. The usually quiet town of Bungadeen is made only slightly busier at this time of day by the morning transportation of children to the local school. For a city-dweller, to call this busy would be an exaggeration. I speak of half a dozen cars seen at any one time, no more than a dozen at best, driving down Main Street, some passing through en-route to Geelong, or in opposite direction to Cotridale, while the large majority of this small number turn into the road leading to the school. Other children can be seen walking, some hand in hand with a parent, or with an older brother or sister, some making their own way with a friend or on their own. Turning down the road leading to the school, past several older style houses on both sides, on the right is a large, brand new building, the first part of the school that can be seen. As I draw nearer the main buildings and large oval come into view. I pull up out front of the school. There is one central
building, central in the sense that it is that which one faces upon entering through the school’s main vine-covered archway, and also in that it is the central hub of activity within the school. Within this building (from front to back) exist the school office (one room, the protected yet inviting territory of the school’s secretary Carey), principal’s office next door to this, a printer/photocopier stationed outside this office for use by both students and staff, and a long corridor (also acting as bag room) alongside the 3/4 room, P/1 room, year 2 room, and library respectively. To the left of the main building is a demountable serving as a staffroom. To the right, and at the front of the school, is what was once the school hall, but is now a “dedicated” visual arts room. This became the case after economic support from the government (the government school grant) was used to build a multi-purpose room – the large brand new building I mentioned – now proudly featured next to this hall-turned-artroom. The other buildings on the premises are two demountables, one serving as the 5/6 classroom, the other as the Italian room, and several sheds storing sporting equipment, and providing a place for students to park their bikes. The playground consists of two large grassy areas, asphalt areas between buildings and an asphalt basketball court behind the main building. At the front of the school, in front of the staffroom, is play equipment. At the back left of the school, on one of the large grassed areas, is a wooden fort. There is a second area of play equipment at the back right of the school, behind the Italian room, next to which is a staff- and student-built “musical experience”, involving polyethylene (poly) pipes of different sizes, and various other objects made of different materials that can be hit with the beaters that are attached to this with rope.

The structure of the school this year comprises four classes. Prep-1 led by Mrs Lonergan, 2 taught by Mr Ureo, 3/4 with Mrs Smith, and 5/6 with Mrs Winters. Multi-age classes such as these are commonplace in Australian schools, particularly in small schools such as Bungadeen, where student numbers are small enough such that all students from multiple
grades can fit within the maximum number of students who can be taught by any one teacher (maximum class sizes are regulated by the Australian government). The MARC (Mobile Area Reading Centre) and MACC (Mobile Arts Craft Centre) vans visit this school once per week, with this being the school at which they are based. These services provide a mobile library and art van to country schools in the area. In addition to the travelling MARC library, this school does have a room hosting a library, though in my time there I did not see it used as a library by any other than the MARC teacher, and otherwise used only as a place for a group of students to work with a teacher (used as a space, not as a library). Along with the teachers mentioned, there is a longstanding favourite casual relief teacher (CRT), Mrs Crouch. A local to the town, she is an interesting character. Other staff at the school on a regular basis include the school secretary, Carey, another town local and mother of five children now at or past high school age. It is clear to see that this school is unable to run smoothly without her. There is also, of course, the principal. It may seem strange for the principal of the school to be the person I mention last, but it is with good reason that this is the case. This school has, in recent years, suffered from high principal turnover – “suffered” being quite an appropriate word here. So the school principal being the last I mention in the list of staff is for good reason – she is not by any stretch a “constant” within the school. The current principal, Mrs Humphries, has taken up this position for one school term and one only, passing the interval between her station at an inner-city Geelong school, and retirement.

The 83 students at Bungadeen Primary School come from diverse family backgrounds, in diverse economic situations. Some from middle- to upper-class farming families well known in the area for generations, making their business in sheep, cattle, or wheat for the most part. Others from families of more humble means; single-parent families with multiple children, and everything in between. For those who don’t work on their own land, employment is found, for the most part, either a 45-minute drive south to the coast at Pilliard, half an hour
west to Cotridale, or a little over an hour east to the major centre of Geelong, or perhaps suburbs on the near side of it. A few individuals work in the town of Bungadeen itself; however with few stores there, there is sparse work available.

The culture of the school is influenced heavily by those who staff it. The prep/1 teacher, Mrs Lonergan, is an athletic and energetic lady in her 40s. Her broad Irish accent is clear and distinct, adding to the overall charm that she exudes. A mother of teenagers, and with many years’ teaching experience, Mrs Lonergan provides the intriguing impression of being both grounded and sporadic. Always ready with a friendly face and comforting and encouraging words both for her young students and for their parents, Mrs Lonergan offers a much needed stabilising influence combined with her own special brand of energy and humour that is appreciated by all. Mr Ureo, the year 2 teacher, is in his 20s, here in the first year of his first teaching position out of university. As the first male teacher at the school for several years, his presence is somewhat of a novelty. When it was announced that the new teacher would be male, many mothers hoped he would be taking the grade that their son was in, feeling that a strong male influence (which ‘obviously’ a male teacher would provide?) would benefit their sons. Mr Ureo is quite a reserved character. When he talks with the other staff, his shy smile is seen while his eyes are generally diverted from the others, focused on the table, or his coffee cup, or something similar. The year 3/4 teacher, Mrs Smith, grew up locally and is known in the community, though she has worked at Bungadeen Primary School for only three years. Barely taller than some of her 9-10 year old students, she is a calm, easy-going, fun character who interacts easily with students and staff alike.

Bungadeen Primary School’s year 5/6 teacher, Mrs Winters, is in her 50s, with long, straight, grey hair worn in a low ponytail. She is generally friendly, but takes no nonsense from her boisterous prepubescent charges. During our interview, Mrs Winters tells me how she has always loved art. The arts have always been a part of her life, beginning with her parents
involving her in the arts (singing with her and her siblings, going to shows, and piano and dance lessons). She is careful to point out that although she did all of these things from a young age, she didn’t realise that “art” was “all of that” until her high school years, when the various artforms were lumped together under what in her school was referred to as “the arts stream”. In her late teens, she would go to art exhibitions, go to markets to see what others had created out of recycled materials, and attend and participate in music festivals. She mentions doing some of these things with other members of her youth group, and that she “kept going with that” as she got older, “did things like that, even once I was teaching.” I wonder why the “even” – why is it surprising that she would continue once teaching? Now that her own children are a bit older, she feels “able to go and look at some of those things, and be part of those things and appreciate it.”

What I am hearing here is that her parents took her to arts-related events when she was young, she explored them herself as a teenager, continued to participate “even” once teaching, but feels she has had to wait until her own children are “older” to be able to again participate in these things as spectator. She talks a lot about aesthetic appreciation – “I might not have it in my house, for instance, even if I could afford it. But I appreciate it. And the older I get, the more I appreciate it…. An appreciation of all that’s… artistic and creative. I’m probably in awe of it… There’s just no end to the learning.”

I also had the pleasure of encountering several other staff members in my time at Bungadeen Primary School. The Italian specialist, Jane, is in her 30s with a refined though distinctly Australian accent. Her permed, dark curly hair sits shoulder length, at the top adding an inch to her slightly above average height. Her calm, approachable persona is by all reports never ravelled during her Wednesdays at Bungadeen Primary School. The school’s favourite casual relief teacher (CRT), Mrs Crouch, in her late 40s to early 50s, is a town local, living within walking distance of the school. Her usual attire is dishevelled track-pants or an ankle-length
skirt, with a loose-fitting jumper, and sneakers. Her chestnut coloured hair is long, always worn out, often partially covered by a beanie in colder months. To look at, Mrs Crouch gives the overall impression of being “slapped together”. Although known for her backing of the local sporting teams, and as the one to run sporting events at the school, her appearance is anything but athletic. Always smiling and friendly, it is well known that she loves teaching, but has recently been unwell and although probably better off to stay at home, is in need of the money. I also get the impression that she enjoys the social aspect. When she isn’t technically working at the school, she is often “around”. One day she appears in the staffroom during morning tea swinging one ugg boot in her hand (its partner not in sight), taking it around to everyone sitting at the table, telling them to stick their hand in to feel how soft it is at the bottom. Her latest “bargain purchase”. We all oblige. Another morning tea she “pops in” to check the staff notice board for when others are taking staff development days, so that she may get a day of work. Several lunch times she joins us with her own lunch. She is a homely member of staff, known by everyone with ties to the school.

There is also Miss Elliot, the travelling visual arts specialist. Based at Bungadeen Primary School, she and the art van service seven schools in this region. Of the seven schools in which she provides visual art education through the MACC services, Miss Elliot feels that this is now the best art room of the lot. At one particular school, the art room is roughly 1m wide by 3.5m long – with the expectation of fitting 21 year 4-6 bodies (plus the teacher) into this space. At another school, chicks were being hatched in the art room. As she tells me this, speaking of the putrid smell in a small space on a warm spring day, I think back to my childhood, the artificial incubator that was housed in our laundry, sunroom or verandah (depending on which house we lived in), which I would excitedly keep watch over through the little window at the top, waiting for our new ducklings, or sometimes chicks, to hatch. The smell is like something I have never experienced elsewhere. Not at all pleasant, but
tolerable, for the most part. A combination of feathers, egg, and dampness. Tolerable, for the most part – that is until a rotten egg makes it undetected into the incubator. These have a tendency, once heated for a period of time, to explode. The smell then, particularly once the incubator is opened… imagine being in a hot, humid room, engulfed by the smell of an exploded rotten egg (the smell of sulphur has quite the same effect), the smell spreading to every crevice of the available space, lingering there, gradually decreasing in potency for what seems like an eternity after. I don’t wonder at the teachers of the school spoken about not wanting the incubator in their classroom. What does this say, though, for the art room?

The school community’s approach to the visual arts education provided by the travelling specialist, Miss Elliot, appears to be emblematic of arts education being seen as less important than other curriculum areas. As I pulled up out front of the school one morning, and was sitting in the driver’s seat tying my shoelaces, Miss Elliot pulled up next to me in the art van. We both got out, exchanged greetings and small talk, walking into the school together. Having already been into the art room this morning, Miss Elliot commented that “the room is a mess, potatoes everywhere, it’s just treated like a dumping ground for everything.” During a lesson later that day, the school secretary, Carey, came in to apologise for the stacks of bags of potatoes against one wall of the art room – “there was just nowhere else we could put them!” It was part of a “potato drive”, a fundraising activity raising money for the school. During the 5/6 session (10-11am), a parent came in (with a second parent) to “sort out the orders” for the potatoes. The mother, bringing her baby with her in the pram, said hello to her year 5 son. Miss Elliot took the pram over by her desk, with students coming up throughout to say hello to the baby, while one mother carried the potatoes a few bags at a time into the kitchen area, the other writing names on the bags in permanent marker (presumably the names of those who have purchased them). The mother was traipsing in and out of the art room continuously. When Miss Elliot praises a student’s work, the mother starts
up a chant “Go Maisy, Go Maisy, …” and several students join in with this. As the noise level rises, Miss Elliot calls for the class’s attention, saying “you know that I don’t mind you guys chatting and being social, but you must remember that we’re inside, it’s just too loud.”

Teacher and students (including, but not limited to, the brother) continue to entertain the baby while the mother shifts the ton of potatoes a bit at a time. There certainly seems to be no “school/community” barrier in existence.

As Miss Elliot attempts to give pack-up instructions, the baby squeals whenever she talks, stopping when Miss Elliot stops. This sends students into fits of laughter. After this happens several times, the mother comes and collects her baby, pushing the pram out of the room.

In the case of all schools, according to Miss Elliot, the art room becomes the dumping ground. Miss Elliot is fairly accepting of this – “it just comes with the job I guess – the travelling specialist”. Is there a mark here of lack of respect not just for the art room, but also for art education itself? In the narrative above, these parents disrupting the art lesson seems to be accepted by all as just a matter of course – the norm, not the exception to the rule. I might question whether this is more to do with the culture of the school and school-community relations; however I had already witnessed numerous times in a variety of classrooms, parents coming to the classroom door for some purpose, waiting quietly until the teacher finishes a particular part of a lesson or activity and then acknowledges them, the parent then, as unobtrusively as possible, carrying out their business within or around the room. In all of these instances I perceived a dignified respect granted to the learning environment and the learning taking place within it. But in the art room? Within the art room, it seems, all have free rein.

Teacher and community attitudes to the arts and the teaching of it undoubtedly play a large role in the arts education that takes place in the primary school. According to Mrs Winters, a
flexible staff, including a flexible principal, can find ways to bring the arts in through integration, “and I think some people probably need a bit of help with it,” she tells me conspiratorially, “bring it into the literacy block and into the maths block,” she emphasises, “just means a bit of planning.” I overhear a conversation between Mrs Winters and Mrs Lonergan in the staffroom soon after. “You’re lucky to get everything in. We’ve barely got enough time to get through all the literacy and numeracy stuff, let alone actually get to the art,” says Mrs Lonergan. “That’s why I get so disappointed,” says Mrs Winters, drying her coffee cup wistfully, “I have all of these great ideas, all of this stuff I want to do, but I never actually get around to it.” A few minutes later, Mrs Winters is discussing her idea for creating audio recordings to add to the dioramas: “I’d love to do it, it’d be great, but I doubt it will actually happen. I’ll probably just fall flat on my face. I haven’t done this before.” A few minutes later again, discussing a visual art related integration idea for next term, “I’d love to, I plan to, but we’ll run out of time” (Mrs Winters).

A few days later, Mrs Lonergan is doing some photocopying, chatting with me and Mrs Crouch (who as far as I can tell isn’t working today, but is nevertheless “around”). Mrs Lonergan again laments the difficulty in “getting it all done”. “What you need to do,” advises Mrs Crouch, with an air of one who is wise with experience, “what you need to do is to do a bit of reading, ’riting, and ’rithmetic each day. You need to do a bit of each every day, and then if you do do that you might get time for the other stuff. What you find is that if you do a bit of each “R” every day, an hour on each, or even sometimes less than an hour, then you find that by the end of the term or the year you actually have covered everything that you need to. Then if you get through it all, at the end of the week, or the end of the term, or the end of the year, THAT’S when you do the art.”

We have here a mishmash of views on the possibilities for bringing the arts into the classroom. Mrs Winters purports that bringing the arts in through integration is highly
possible with the right staff, suggesting that some teachers simply need a bit of assistance in realising this as a possibility. Her later comments to her fellow teacher raise the question of whether she is one of the teachers in need of this assistance – she has “all of these great ideas”, but when it comes to putting them into action, abandons them for fear of “fall[ing] flat on [her] face”. Mrs Crouch’s approach is somewhat different, in that she sees arts education as something that should be left for after the “reading, ’riting, and ’rithmetic” has all been covered for the week, term, or year.

While the arts education that happens within a classroom is strongly influenced by teacher attitudes, classroom culture in general is shaped predominantly by the teacher and the physical environment (Craft, 2008). The prep/1 room feels quite large for the 18 small bodies and one teacher that inhabit it. There is plenty of space to spread out and to move. Quite large, but by no means too large, nor is any space wasted. At the front of the room the main feature on the wall is a double-length whiteboard, with several pin-boards next to this, on which are displayed various room-organisation type charts and memorandums. Students’ work adorns both the back and one side wall, as well as the string suspended through the centre of the room for this specific purpose. The other side wall is dominated by windows looking out onto the area of the playground bordered by this building and the demountable building serving as the Italian room. The class pet, a lizard, sits decidedly rock-like under the lamp in its glass tank. Thanks to my aversion to all things reptilian (the sight of a harmless blue tongue lizard from across the yard has been known to cause me to run inside yelling “snake!”), I position myself at the other side of the classroom. At morning tea I ask a year 1 girl whether Lizzy has ever gotten out of her tank? She assures me that HE hasn’t. Desks for students’ use are in four small clusters towards the back of the room. Each individual desk is almost petal-shaped, coming together with four others to form a flower- or clover-like desk cluster. Students have no designated seats here, and while they may from time to time be
placed on a particular table to work with a particular group, these desks are shared workspaces. For these students, there is no ownership of space within this classroom. A typical large, light brown, varnished wooden teacher’s desk is situated in a back corner of the room, out just enough to allow an adult to squeeze behind it either to access the old bookcase stacked with teacher resources, or to sit at the desk itself; however, given the seemingly organised chaos of student books and work and various items of stationery atop the desk, it appears to rarely be made use of for its intended purpose. A self-supporting interactive white board (IWB) stands at an angle, towards the front and windowed side of the room, blocking off the corner behind it. A series of cables run from there to the powerboard, and to the laptop placed on its own tray attached to the board itself. The positioning of the IWB helps to create the feeling of a cosy carpeted floor space between the IWB and two clusters of student desks, with almost all of this class’s learning experiences taking place, or at least beginning, in this area.

Within the prep/1 room, distinct differences can be seen between the classroom culture with their usual teacher, Mrs Lonergan, compared to when the casual relief teacher (CRT) Mrs Crouch is teaching for the day. With Mrs Lonergan, the prep/1 classroom culture is one where it is safe to share, and everyone’s opinions are valued. They have the class dance – something individual students are invited to perform at various times to celebrate their success on a particular task; and a “Wall Wisher”, the prep/1 class’s virtual wall, designed to encourage interactions between parents and the classroom in a time-convenient manner. Mrs Crouch also brings the parent community into the classroom, such as through use of a parent’s suggestion to graph the number of baby teeth lost by students in the class. Her overall approach with the students, however, is quite different to that of Mrs Lonergan. She prefers, and enforces upon the students, a quiet classroom environment in which students
work either as a whole class, directed by the teacher, or individually, with the expectation that there is no need whatsoever to be talking.

While Mrs Lonergan engages in two-way communication with her students, communication with Mrs Crouch is mostly one-sided – she frequently disregards what her students are telling her. Students having each begun the creation of their own Where’s W… (Wally, Wendy, Will etc) picture earlier in the morning, when it is time for fruit snack, students sit on the floor around the bin eating their fruit while Mrs Crouch holds their Where’s W pictures up one up at a time, challenging them to find the hidden characters. Several of the students protest when theirs is held up “but I’m not finished yet!” “I haven’t hidden her yet, you’re giving it away!”, but Mrs Crouch takes no notice and continues showing the pictures.

Mrs Crouch displays for the class a crude photocopied template of a “W” (the letter of the week) in block writing, in which lines have been drawn at diagonals throughout to separate the “W” into sections. She demonstrates to the students what she wants them to do with this. They are to draw a picture of something starting with “W” in each space on the template. Preps are then to practise writing a “W” word (taken from one of their pictures), while year 1s use the word for one of their pictures in a sentence. Mrs Crouch provides each student with a copy of this template, and as they are handed it, each goes to find a space to work. Some move directly to desks, others collect a pencil and a board to lean on and lie on their stomachs on the floor with their work either pushed out at arm’s length in front of them, or otherwise directly under their noses. Mrs Crouch initially tells them that they will need to sit at tables. Some time later when students have still not moved, she revises this: “I’ll make you a deal,” she says, “you can do your drawings while on the floor, but NO writing.” I wonder at the implication here – is there a need to sit “correctly” while writing, but no such need while drawing? Two particular students express a desire to sit together. “As soon as I think you are doing each other’s work I will move you,” Mrs Crouch warns them. Is this a lack of trust of
these particular students, simply a sign of Mrs Crouch’s aversion to students working
collaboratively, or both? Mrs Crouch wanders around the room, praising students on their
“W” drawings (purposively loudly enough for other students to hear), and giving hints for
other “W” words (tapping on the window, drawing a slice of watermelon on the whiteboard [I
wasn’t the only one who was initially confused by its resemblance to pizza], “I blow
something out on the netball court” – a whistle?).

There is a soft but constant level of noise throughout the room, as students communicate with
each other about what they are drawing. “We will never get all of this work done if you keep
talking to each other,” Mrs Crouch admonishes them. “Shhh!” she reminds them when their
voices rise above a whisper. I begin to see a pattern of Mrs Crouch discouraging these
students’ natural instincts to socialise, to collaborate and discuss. Soon she imposes a five
minute silence. “Look at the clock. The big hand is on the six now, I don’t want anyone
talking, not even to me, until the big hand is on the seven. Just quiet working.” Mrs Crouch
jumps on anyone who as much as whispers during this time, reminding them to be silent.

Following their five minutes of silence, Mrs Crouch encourages the preps to say their word
(that they want to write) out loud, to try to hear the sounds, then try to write it. She roams
around the room, reminding students to use writing pencils, that they are writing now not
drawing, and helping students (especially preps) to sound out words.

Next the class participate in a “fishbowl” activity – students leave their work on the desk they
were sitting at, and all gather around one desk at a time (silent, because they are fish) to look
at each other’s work. Mrs Crouch commentates each student’s work – focusing entirely on
words and sentences that students have written, with no mention of their drawings. I wonder
if the students notice this, and whether there is any negative loss attached to this situation for
them. After every fishbowl (table) has been viewed, students are instructed to “tidy up and be
on the mat by the count of ten. 1, 2, 3…” Students rush around, some putting materials away, others just going directly to the mat.

After a brief discussion on how Where’s Wally style books are designed to be used, Mrs Crouch’s dusty tub of books are quite literally thrown out into the middle of the classroom floor for students to choose from. Students spend some time looking for Wally (or some other character) in the books. Some are sharing books. Again, there is a low level of constant chatter throughout the room. Mrs Crouch reminds them “We need to do this quietly. I thought you would enjoy this but… That’s why I brought enough books for you to have one each.”

Mrs Crouch listens to students read individually from their home readers while others continue with the “Where’s …” books. Most students are holding a magnifying glass, but few are using them. “If you are working on your own you won’t be talking. Enjoy the book, not your friend at the moment.” The difference in the classroom culture with Mrs Crouch teaching, compared to Mrs Lonergan, is palpable.

Students continue to want to share their findings (various things within pictures in the book, not just what they are searching for) with peers. Periodically, they are reminded that there is no need to be talking. Reminders are given very nicely and calmly, never in an overly strict or nasty way.

After a while students are asked to pile up their books and reconvene on the carpet. Mrs Crouch opens the big book “Windy Day” that is sitting on the small portable whiteboard, and asks students if they have read it yet with Mrs Lonergan. This meets with a resounding “yes”. Mrs Crouch asks if they think they could read it to her. She then points to the words in the book as the students read them together as a group. The group uses a great deal of expression for words written in bubble writing (for emphasis). Mrs Crouch praises the students for reading together at a pace suitable for all, rather than those who are able to read faster rushing
ahead. This student collaboration, heavily structured and controlled by the teacher, is clearly one kind that Mrs Crouch approves of.

The year 2 room is modest in appearance, and sparsely decorated. Through the centre of the room, from left to right, is a line of rubber coated wire, on which “Shape Art Grade 2 2012” is displayed. The sign for this is in white block writing on a black background. The artworks consist of a series of 2D squares, triangles, circles, and rectangles drawn overlapping each other on white paper, and coloured in with pencil. Other shapes – some random, some hearts – have been cut from shiny black paper and pasted on top of these. Each A4 artwork has been stapled onto a black sheet of A2 paper, which is hung over the wire with another artwork on the opposite side. Between each of these black sheets of paper donning artworks hang colourful streamers. A sign announces these as “Our Metre Rainbows”. Between the Shape Art artworks, along with the metre rainbows, hang unevenly distributed signs with “SHAPES” in bubble writing, written vertically. The black, typed bubble writing on white paper, then pasted onto black paper and hung over the wire just like the artworks, is seemingly designed to blend in aesthetically with the artworks while still serving its informative purpose. This display of students’ artworks adds some personal ownership to the room for these year 2 students. Around the room there are some rather old-looking educational posters displayed, and shelves and tubs of resources all neatly in their places. Next to the large double whiteboard on the front wall is a material/Velcro display board on which the students’ jobs for this week have been allocated. Jobs include such things as marking the role, going online to check the weather on the radar map each morning, and checking that the correct number of each item of stationery is on each desk throughout the day. Unlike in the prep/1 room, these year 2 students have assigned desks. The year 2 class is run in such a way that it has a “let’s get down to business” feel about it. There is no messing around to happen here, no time that is not strictly ordered and controlled by Mr Ureo. None
of the students seem to be unhappy, but I also don’t see any evidence of fun happening in this classroom. Just a passive acceptance of what is, and a routine followed almost meticulously.

The 3/4 classroom has a “busy” feel about it. While the prep/1 and year 2 classrooms were for the most part clean and orderly, the 3/4 room has a messier feel to its organisation. The desks are arranged in a horseshoe, in some places with students sitting both on the inside and outside. Each student has a designated seat in this room, with these being reassigned fortnightly. Floor space in this room consists of that inside the desk-horseshoe, where students can sit as a group and/or in an awkward attempt at a circle. Mrs Smith is more friendly-co-learner than authoritarian. When students express frustration at having to copy into their books stick figures she has drawn on the board, she encourages them to “have a go”, reminding them that she isn’t good at drawing either – that it took her four attempts to draw her stick figures on the board. I also notice that Mrs Smith frequently shortens students’ names. Students seem to respond quite favourably to this. As students settle into independent work, a hush naturally descends over the room, with little more needed to maintain it than the teacher’s occasional reminder given to individual students to stay on task.

The 5/6 room is set aside from the other three classes, in a demountable building to the side of the school. Resources are stashed in cupboards along the sides and back of the room. A teacher’s desk, barely visible under piles of paperwork, marking, and other odds and ends, is shoved into the back corner. Desks are arranged in groups, to seat 4-6 students in each group. With around 18 almost adult size bodies plus a teacher in this room, there is a cramped feeling, along with the unmistakable odour of boys who haven’t yet learnt to use deodorant, and girls who overuse it; but students seem to negotiate their space well.

The Italian room is a small demountable building set up and used only once per week, specifically for this purpose. There are four groups of rectangular desks, appropriately sized
for these students. I wonder how well this works for the smallest of preps, and some of the larger year 6s. The room is bursting with vibrant colours, primarily from the educational posters on the walls (all related to learning Italian), along with students’ work on the back wall. Within the Italian classroom students’ creativity and “thinking outside the box” are encouraged and applauded.

4.2 Social

The culture of the community, the school, and the classroom help to form, and are formed by, the social interactions that take place.

Contributing to the forming of the classroom culture are the social interactions that take place. These can involve any combination of students, teachers, and parents/carers. These interactions can constitute one-way communication, where one individual communicates and the other does not reciprocate (by not listening/responding), or two-way communication, and can be positive or negative for each individual.

It is Footy Club Day today. Students are encouraged to wear the colours of their favourite football team, and make a gold coin donation for the privilege, to raise money towards a new ride-on lawnmower for the school. Looking out onto the school playground at morning tea time, there is a scattering of colours from each of the local football teams – black and yellow; blue and white; red and black; blue, yellow and white. The principal, Mrs Humphries, comments at the school’s weekly assembly on the culture of this school being so inclusive and open to individuality. Throughout the day, Mr Ureo plays his football team’s song, getting a mixture of cheers and boos from his students. (Finally, a sign of enjoyment in this classroom!). The CRT, Mrs Crouch, is seen around the school wearing a beany from one team, a scarf from another, a shirt from a third team, pants with a fourth team’s colours,
covered by a skirt with the colours of a fifth team. Several of the other staff comment that they wondered how she would manage to represent every team at once.

After morning tea is a “footy clinic”, run by the year 6 sporting house captains. It is important to note that in a school this size, due to there being only a small number of students in each grade, “Once you’re in year 6, you HAVE to be a captain of something, whether you like it or not!” as one year 5 student, Rodney, put it. This can have some negative personal impacts on students who have no desire to be in such roles. During the footy clinic, it is interesting to observe the social relationships between students from different grades. Due to the small school and small community culture, all of the students know one another. Some of the year 6 house captains are “naturals” with the younger students, while others are far less tolerant and understanding of mistakes made.

On a Tuesday morning at 9am, the prep/1 class gather on the floor while the teacher marks the roll. “Marking the roll” brings to my mind images of the teacher standing or sitting at the front of the room holding a clipboard, calling out student names one by one, students answering “yes”, “here”, or some other acceptable word. But Mrs Lonergan takes a more modern approach. A pastel yellow background is displayed on the IWB, with one simple, dark blue vertical line dividing the page into two. On the left of the line are the names of all students in the class, and a label for Mrs Lonergan as well. Mrs Lonergan moves each name from the left to the right hand side to indicate their attendance, commenting “Miriam’s here”, “I know I’ve seen Toby today… ah! there he is”, and so on. Eventually only two names, along with Mrs Lonergan’s, remain on the left hand side, and students remind her that these two brothers are still on their holiday, travelling around Australia. “But you’re here Mrs Lonergan!” one student exclaims. Mrs Lonergan stands at attention, looks herself up and down, and exclaims “Oh, you’re right Mark! So I am!”, moving her own name across the
border. Mrs Lonergan has a way of responding to her students that allows them to feel they are being listened to, as well as being light hearted and entertaining.

Another afternoon, placed into groups and given one tambourine, one pair of rhythm sticks, and one guiro to share, some groups of students demonstrate better group work skills than others. Mrs Lonergan moves between each of the groups, guiding their ideas and experimentations, with a lot of time spent mediating between members of one particular group, who all want to use the guiro and all have a different idea about how it should be used. With Mrs Lonergan’s assistance, they negotiate to each have a turn with the guiro to produce their particular sound. One student wants to bang on it with a rhythm stick. Another wants to use both rhythm sticks to “scrape” it. A third student wants to turn it upside down and scrape it along the carpet to give a softer sound, “like snow”. Their teacher scaffolds their learning experience to assist them in developing and practising the social skills required to negotiate this learning experience.

One particular Wednesday when I observe the prep/1 class, their teacher is on professional leave (sitting in the staffroom writing reports), so the school’s favourite casual relief teacher (CRT), Mrs Crouch, is taking the class. The day begins with ten minutes of singing together – “Little Cottage in the Woods”; “Three Bears Rap”; “Ching”; and “Three Blind Mice” (the students’ choice). There are repetitions of each song, varying dynamics between and within each repetition, with actions to match. Mrs Crouch takes students’ requests for songs, discusses them, then makes her own decision. “It’s fun doing the tiny version [of Little Cottage in the Woods],” she says, “but I think I like the BIG version better.” She asks for student input, but ultimately is the “ruler” in this situation.

Mrs Crouch sits on the child-sized chair in front of the class, and shows students her very dusty box of Where’s Wally books (relevant to the ‘W’ sound that is the class’s focus this
week). There are also various others, with titles such as “Where’s Frankie?” “Can you find Susie?”, and “Eye Spy” – the link to the “W” theme getting more tenuous as we go along.

Mrs Crouch pulls out one titled “For Eagle Eyes Only”, and exclaims that it has the name of one of the students’ fathers written in it. She says “it probably did belong to your dad too, because I knew him when he was little. Maybe I’ll have to give it to you to take home to him.” It strikes me that this is the kind of situation that would be reasonably unlikely to occur in a large city school, yet not at all uncommon in a school set in a small rural community where it is the norm for generation after generation of a family to go through the same school, teachers often having taught their current student’s parents, or perhaps having attended school with them as students themselves.

With students sitting in a circle on the floor, Mrs Crouch dumps a pile of solid-coloured dinosaurs in the centre of the circle. “How could we sort them?” she asks. “By colours,” suggests one student. “Ok, can you sort them into colours? Maybe some others can help him.” Three students, entering the middle of the circle on their hands and knees, sort the dinosaurs into piles based on their colour, then sit back to view their work. “Who thinks it is easier to see them now?” asks Mrs Crouch. One student offers “No, because they’re all in piles.” “Ok, so how about you sort the piles into lines? Keep the colours,” suggests Mrs Crouch. A few students do this, and decide it’s still too difficult. Other students suggest alternative ways to sort objects to make them easier to see and count. Mrs Crouch allows time for the students, as a group, to try out many of these suggestions, pausing in between each suggestion to discuss it. “How many blue are there,” she asks, “how many orange?” Then – “Why would we want to sort them into colours?” Mrs Crouch questions. “To make them beautiful!” cries one little girl. She states it in such a matter of fact way, that there really is no arguing with it. And for some reason, Mrs Crouch decides not to redirect back to the mathematical significance of sorting objects in such a way.
“Work talk” – students talking about the work they are completing, either directly or indirectly – is an element of the social domain that emerged from the data as integral to the way that education is taking place for these students. The following paragraphs display evidence of this.

Prep/1s are asked to design, on paper, their own “Amazing Machines”. Year 1 students are to write sentences about their amazing machine, while preps are to draw theirs first, then write a sentence on what their machine is or what it does. The students stand up and move around the room, some more enthusiastically than others, finding a desk to work at, talking about what their machine will be, what it will look like, its features, as they select coloured (preps) or greylead (year 1s) pencils (“greylead” being the Victorian term for what is known in NSW and QLD as a “lead pencil”), and wait for the paper to be handed out. Eventually everyone has their paper, and most students are writing or drawing, still talking amongst themselves about their machines. Mrs Lonergan moves around the room helping students with their writing, encouraging them to stay on task. Every few minutes a student will be standing next to her waiting for help, as she helps other students at their desks. She patiently attends to them all. When year 1 students finish, they are to draw a picture of their machine. No preps manage to finish. “Are you allowed to draw a boy and a girl?” one student calls out from across the room. “It’s your picture, it can be whatever you like,” responds Mrs Lonergan. Literacy is now over. A quick pack up, then morning tea time.

At the end of a discussion on drawing pictograms to represent the number of teeth lost by students in the class (following a recommendation by one of the parents), one student suggests drawing a tooth in every square to represent teeth lost, rather than just colouring in each box. This doesn’t get an audible response from Mrs Crouch, just a slight nod, before sending the students off to collect the information for their graphs. “How much tooth have you lost?” can be heard being asked by students around the room. Students discuss with each
other what they are using to fill each box in the chart, peer-monitoring. “You’re supposed to do lines” “I want to do numbers!” “I’m drawing tooths”.

In the year 2 room with Mr Ureo, we see some small group work and some teacher-led discussion. With students working on the Storybird⁴ website, the teacher places students in pairs, aiming in each case to have one who feels confident with use of Storybird with one who doesn’t. In this way social collaboration between pairs of students is being encouraged to support their learning.

Students throughout the school make use (to varying extents) of the Ultranet – a statewide, secure website accessible by students, teachers, and parents. It is an online learning management system designed to enhance opportunities for collaboration between and within these groups, as well as between Victorian government schools. While I did observe students using the Ultranet, it was to complete individual tasks that could be more easily accessed through the website directly (rather than going through the Ultranet), and with no collaborative aspect involved in these tasks. It seems that although the intention of the Ultranet is a positive one, in practice it becomes more a hindrance than a benefit. Could this be in part due to teachers’ reluctance to engage fully with what the Ultranet has to offer, or is it more to do with the actual set up of the site? Perhaps both play a part.

After morning tea one particular day, the year 3/4 students grab their netbooks from the charging station, take them to their desks, and turn them on. Their first task is to log on to the Ultranet. After logging on to the Ultranet, students are to go to the English tab, and select the link taking them to a page where they can create a word search. Chaos ensues as computers won’t turn on, won’t connect with the school’s wireless network, turn off unexpectedly and lose work, decide to restart and install updates; then there are issues with logging into the Ultranet itself; students who can’t remember their password, or have entered it incorrectly too.

⁴ Storybird.com facilitates simple construction of short art-inspired stories.
many times and their account been suspended pending teacher reset. Mrs Smith and I are flat out trying to keep up with all of the issues that technology – primarily the Ultranet – is providing. It seems that in this case, the state government’s innovative initiative (i.e. the Ultranet) is becoming a catalyst for negative loss. When students who manage to do so have created a word search, they can ask a friend to complete it. Their next task is to then create a Storybird.

After around an hour, the focus moves from literacy to maths. Mrs Smith gives out worksheets on which students are to draw vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines of symmetry on a variety of regular and irregular shapes. Those who struggle with this task are encouraged to cut out the shapes and fold them to check for symmetry. Another Ultranet activity is set, this one involving symmetry, an interactive “create the mirror image” activity. Technology issues begin again, but with not all students trying to use their computers at the same time (as some are still completing the worksheet), this time it is more manageable.

Mrs Winters speaks of the social impact for students of performing – “They’ve gotta learn to do things in a different team, often, that type of thing… they’ve had to practise, they’ve had to plan… certainly makes those connections between them.” In speaking with me about how the arts have been a part of her life, Mrs Winters reveals that exposure to the arts, for her, began with her parents involving her in the arts (singing with her and her siblings, going to shows, and piano and dance lessons), then in later years attending arts exhibitions and music festivals with her youth group peers. She also speaks of bringing community members into the school, the negotiation of relationships that is required, and the importance of making connections with the community and finding someone “that would love to come and spend a few hours with your kids,” as one way to get more arts happening in the school. Getting community members into the school, while valuable, is complicated by the regulations. “By the time you ask them to have a police check and something else, that can be off-putting.”
Within the art room with Miss Elliot, whole-class discussions take place around work content, during which students openly share their life experiences. At the beginning of one particular session, while the teacher’s attention is on three students absent from last lesson, other students are engaging each other in conversation while still progressing with their work. This social interaction seems to be detracting nothing from their progress. This is mainly one group, sitting at the back of the room, older boys. Discussions of Playstation games and levels they are on largely dominate this conversation. This is interspersed with comments and questions about *Kids’ Kingdom* (the local indoor play centre, and the one in Melbourne also). Interestingly, they are discussing, among other things, the “cool” graphics of the game. The boys’ conversation moves on to “What’s your favourite song” (from the game? I’m not sure if that’s what they were asking). For these Net Generation kids, gaming is providing a catalyst for arts related discussions.

One particular year 4 student (who sucks his thumb constantly, but I have never heard staff or students comment on this), needing to share a paint tray, searches for one, attempts to share with two different groups and has it taken away from him (repositioned so that he can’t reach). He floats around for a while, lacking assertiveness, until another boy (who had initially taken the paint away from him) says “here you go”, agreeing to share.

Students, to some extent, are self/peer monitoring throughout their social interactions. “You need to do your background now.” “There’s not enough stuff on there.” “Aren’t you going to use another colour [not just one]?” – the notion of “work talk” is evident again.

Students work mostly in silence, with the odd sound effect (made mostly by boys) – sounds that match the actions they are making. In spaces between trees on his foreground picture, one student has written numbers. “This is my password,” he tells the boy sitting diagonally across from him. The second boy writes “2+2=4” (vertically) on his, between the trees. This
takes off, with another student on the same table now featuring numbers on her picture, between trees, also. “We’re not doing sums,” admonishes Miss Elliot as soon as she sees this fad, “trees don’t have sums on them, do they?” Several students appear visibly crushed by their teacher’s disapproval of their creativity.

Of those who have begun their backgrounds, the predominant theme among their artworks is vertical stripes, of different (in some cases alternating) colours. I wonder again at the possible peer influence at play here. Having said this, a number of students are creating something completely different to the artworks of their peers. One has large patches of solid colour. Cloud shaped splotches of colour feature on another student’s artwork, a sunset scene on another.

One pair of students is discussing the colours of their water paints. “Did you know my car is blue?” Another student takes his “finished” artwork to the teacher. She advises him to do some more work on the sunset. Walking back to his workspace, “huh, all I have to do is make a bigger sunset!” he shares with his peer.

The teacher shows interest in a number of the students as individuals. She asks one about a sporting injury, another about his baby brother or sister about to be born, and discusses with others what to wear on “crazy shoe day”. Some students, however, seem to go unnoticed. It seems to me that these are the quieter students, those who keep to themselves, doing their work, not making a fuss.

Prep/1 students’ conversations around the art room are happening quietly and mostly calmly, with little bursts of excitement here and there. One student is singing “in the deep dark blue” while painting with a colour that could be described as just that. Many conversations are relevant to, or stimulated by, the artworks that students are producing. “What is it?” “I don’t
know. It’s an ‘I don’t know’.” “I saw one of those on TV.” “An ‘I don’t know’?” “Yeah.”

This is followed by a discussion of TV shows.

4.3 Personal

The culture of the community, the school, and the classroom help to form, and are formed by, the social interactions that take place. These social interactions cannot easily be separated from the personal impacts that result from and/or contribute to formation of these social interactions.

Enjoyment is a key element of the personal domain. As prep/l students embark upon their task of creating a Where’s Wally style picture, “Enjoy [doing] it,” Mrs Crouch tells them.

Students display intrinsic motivation in completing this, all other than one making a beeline directly to their work when entering the classroom (in absence of a teacher) after morning tea.

The year 2 class is run in such a way that it has a “let’s get down to business” feel about it.

None of the students seem to be unhappy, but I also don’t see any evidence of fun happening in this classroom. Just a passive acceptance of what is, and a routine followed almost meticulously. In other classrooms, we see students laughing together, enjoying their learning experiences, and even experiencing aesthetic appreciation – when sorting plastic dinosaurs into coloured piles to make counting them easier, “Why would we want to sort them into colours?” queries Mrs Crouch. “To make them beautiful!” cries one little girl.

At pack up time in a prep/l art session, “I really love doing this!” says one small girl. “I want to do art every day,” concurs her friend sitting next to her. Miss Elliot asks her students for feedback at the end of each art session, revolving around questions of “what did we like?” “what did we not like?”. As well as being evidence of this teacher’s valuing of students’ enjoyment in her lessons, this feedback session provides students with an opportunity to have
their say and feel valued within this environment. Students are also given the opportunity to talk about how they feel about the art section of their mid-year report cards.

Belonging and ownership of space are important elements of the personal domain. In the prep/1 room, students have no designated seats. The desks are shared workspaces. In the year 2 room, students have assigned desks, and their artwork displayed throughout the room. The way that Mrs Lonergan has of seemingly directing her questions to every student in the class by making eye contact with each as an individual helps to provide students with a sense of belonging in that environment. Sense of belonging is also supported by the school-community relationships that exist. When Mrs Crouch pulls out an old book and realises it once belonged to a father of one of the students, that student experiences the enveloping of the small community in which he lives.

Students are given safe opportunities to build their confidence – opportunities scaffolded by their teacher in such a way that they are supported by their teacher and peers. In the prep/1 room, Mrs Lonergan moves to sit on a child-size chair to the left side of the IWB. She asks a year 1 student sitting at the back of the group, Emily, to get Mr Frog down ready to sing his song with them. Emily stands up, tiptoeing her way delicately through the minefield of restless limbs, and reaching the IWB, stretches up in an attempt to take hold of the arms of a 30cm wide and 20cm tall green, plush toy frog, who is perched precariously upon the top of the IWB. Seeing Emily unable to reach Mr Frog, Mrs Lonergan takes the controls for the IWB in her hand and lowers its height, until Emily can just grab one of Mr Frog’s arms, as he comes tumbling down upon her head. With an assuring smile and surprised laugh, Mrs Lonergan asks Emily to introduce Mr Frog to me. Standing close by Mrs Lonergan and hugging the toy tightly, Emily’s eyes wander around the room, from the frog, to the floor, to the ceiling, and anywhere other than on me, as she informs me that Mr Frog is their class mascot, and he helps them to sing their class song. Mrs Lonergan then thanks Emily and
taking the frog from her, asks her to sit down. Led by the teacher, the class sings “Galumph went the little green frog” together, with Mrs Lonergan holding Mr Frog in her lap, opening his mouth and snapping it shut, getting closer and closer to the children with every “galumph”, exerting a giggle from those nearest the action. In the year 2 room, some students are reading out loud to the class. Mr Ureo encourages each student, in turn, to speak louder. “Take a deeep breath, now try again,” he encourages them. When a student shares a praise-worthy revelation, Mrs Lonergan praises her, and invites her to do the class dance (a privilege used to publicly reward good work or a good idea). With a shy grin on her face, she hesitantly stands up, performs the dance while giggling and looking at a friend across from her for social support, then sits down again. According to Mrs Winters, displaying their artworks either visually or through a performance “gives [students] a sense of pride… [when] they are performing… they’ve gotta have confidence enough to do it.”

Life lessons also play a part in the personal domain. After fruit snack, Mrs Crouch informs the prep/1 class that they are going to create “Wishing stars” (going along with the “W” theme). They are to come up with five wishes. The five wishes must be for: yourself; a friend; your family; your school; and your community. Each student is given writing paper to write each of their five wishes on. This will later be cut into strips, and each strip attached to one point of their star. The star is made from a large sheet of coloured paper, with the students cutting out the star themselves. Initially Mrs Crouch had out only yellow paper, then, commenting that she had no idea why she chose only yellow (that it must have been drummed into her), and that students can choose a different colour for their star if they want to, she retrieves a pile of other coloured paper from the cupboard. While Mrs Crouch has said that she will create a template star that students can use to trace around, some students have begun to draw and/or cut out their own stars. Mrs Crouch says this is fine. One student cuts out what looks more like a blob than a star, certainly not with five points. Another student
draws two triangles to create quite a well-shaped six-pointed star. The teacher uses her template star that she has drawn and cut out to roughly trace around on the paper of each student who wants this assistance. Individuality, as opposed to conformity, is certainly happening here as students create innovative ways to represent their star. Before most students are finished, and with many tears over having cut through their writing in attempts to cut their writing paper into strips to attach to the star, it is lunch time. The students pile up their strips of paper on their star, leaving this on their desk for the teacher to staple together, and head out to lunch. As I grab a second stapler and help Mrs Crouch staple the wishes to the stars, “Isn’t this great!” she tells me, “this is what it’s all about, I just want them to have a bit of fun with it, you know? Just want to get in there with them and enjoy it all. That’s what it’s all about.” At the beginning of this activity I viewed it as an opportunity for life lessons involving development of empathy and consideration of what is important. By the end of this however, in light of Mrs Crouch’s comments, I was left to wonder if she had any purpose in mind other than “fun” and a loose link to the class’s “W” theme.

In terms of life lessons, Mrs Winters believes that it is important for students to have an appreciation of what is required to produce works of art – “persistence in learning something and not giving up”, for example when learning a musical instrument. “So they mightn’t want to learn, but they need to appreciate and have an understanding of what it takes to be able to do that. Sometimes people just think it’s… either they’ve got the talent or not. Sometimes it’s just a lot of hard work.” “Being in the senior room here… kids have gotta start to realise they’ve gotta aspire to something, but it’s alright to make a mistake, or start again… so it’s all those, organisation, management… self-assessing, getting that feedback, and accepting it. And also knowing that the teacher’s not always right, or that one’s not always right.”
4.4 Educational

The culture of the community, the school, and the classroom help to form, and are formed by, the social interactions that take place. These social interactions cannot easily be separated from the personal impacts that result from and/or contribute to formation of these social interactions. The way that the education in this setting takes place is highly dependent on the individuals involved (personal), the social dynamics of their interactions, and the classroom, school, and wider community culture that this produces and exists within.

Almost every interaction an individual has with the environment around them and the people in it could be categorised as being within the educational domain, as individuals are constantly learning from the world around them. This is the case even more so with data collected in a school setting – almost everything that is recorded can be regarded an educational experience. The educational domain has been applied in a narrower sense in this portrait to encompass the elements of integration and creativity.

Integration of the arts with other areas of the curriculum occurs naturally, even when not planned for. During literacy time in the prep/1 room, on the ledge of the small portable whiteboard is a “big book” – Eggleton’s (2003) The Amazing Machine. Throughout Mrs Lonergan’s dramatic reading of the story, emphasising the “wow words” (words that add something extra, something interesting and exciting, to the story), she pauses on practically every page to discuss the illustrations – the movement lines used, visual cues given by different fonts, eyebrows “jumping off” the cat. Mrs Lonergan poses a question to the class: “Why did the illustrator draw the cat’s eyebrows like that?” A lengthy whole-class discussion follows. “You might want to use that in a drawing!” she suggests to her students.

Moving to the whiteboard on the front wall, Mrs Lonergan writes up “wow words” from The Amazing Machine, creating a visually stimulating array of words through her use of a variety
of different coloured markers. After adding a word used in the book to describe a dance of excitement (the Shuggle Shake), Mrs Lonergan pauses, and poses another question to the class: “How is our class dance different to the Shuggle Shake?”. When selected to respond, a prep girl stands and demonstrates: “The Shuggle Shake is more like this…” (arms bent at the elbows, leaning forward and shaking her bottom), “and how does the class dance go?” Mrs Lonergan prompts. “Like this…” (arms bent at the elbows again, but this time rotating her pelvis 360 degrees and moving her arms at the shoulders counterpoint to this), the girl responds. “What do we think?” Mrs Lonergan seemingly directs this question to every student in the class in the way that she makes eye contact with each personally, as an individual. A number of students nod their heads, or call out “yeah, yep” in response. That appears to settle the matter.

Later that day, a science oriented lesson on sound waves moves into a music lesson (planned integration). Mrs Lonergan calls her students to the floor area, again sitting down on a child-size chair as they all sit practically on top of her or one another. She poses her question: “What do you know about waves?” Students respond with “they’re made of water”, “you can surf on them”, “they go up and down like this” (demonstrating with arm movements). “What other sorts of waves can we think of?” Mrs Lonergan asks the class. Someone suggests that you can make waves with a blanket. Mrs Lonergan praises her, and invites her to do the class dance (a privilege used to publicly reward good work or a good idea). With a shy grin on her face, she hesitantly stands up, performs the dance while giggling and looking at a friend across from her for social support, then sits down again. “There are all sorts of different waves,” says Mrs Lonergan, “they’re not all made of water!” She then brings up a video on the IWB (from StudyJams.com), explaining sound waves. “Sometimes I can feel the vibrations when I’m listening to music,” explains one of the cartoon characters. The bell rings
as the video is finishing. Lunch time marks the end of the science based component of this learning experience.

After lunch, the class migrate to the multi-purpose room for the music component. These students know the drill – shoes off before you enter the new building – we want this new carpet to stay in good condition for as long as possible! These 4-6 year olds take a substantial amount of time in achieving this feat – there are double-knots that need to be untied, shoes get kicked off with gusto and need to be chased and retrieved from 5 metres away, socks need to be adjusted and readjusted after taking off shoes. Eventually, and after much patient explicit direction as well as physical assistance given by Mrs Lonergan, all shoes are off and students are lined up, ready to go inside. Mrs Lonergan divides them into four groups, and tells each group where to sit when they go inside. In we go. First, Mrs Lonergan shows the students some pictures of various scenes. “What might we hear here?” she asks. “How can we make those sounds with our bodies?” Teacher and students together experiment with body percussion. Mrs Lonergan then calls one student from each group to come and collect three instruments – a tambourine, two rhythm sticks, and a guiro. As each returns to his or her group, the group, with no direction on what they are to do with these instruments, starts experimenting innovatively with the sounds they can make using them. Once every group has their instruments, and while they continue their experimentation of sounds, Mrs Lonergan hands each group a picture. One group has a picture of Winter, one of Summer, one of Autumn, and the last group has a picture of Spring. Mrs Lonergan calls for their attention, and assigns them their task – they are to think about the sort of sounds that they might hear in their season, and work out how they can represent those sounds using their bodies and the instruments they were given. For around 15 minutes, Mrs Lonergan moves between each of the groups, guiding their ideas and experimentation, with a lot of time spent mediating between members of one particular group, who all want to use the guiro and all have a
different idea about how it should be used. One student wants to bang on it with a rhythm stick. Another wants to use both rhythm sticks to “scrape” it. A third student wants to turn it upside down and scrape it along the carpet to give a softer sound, “like snow”. With Mrs Lonergan’s assistance, they negotiate to each have a turn with the guiro to produce their particular sound. Once it appears that all groups have some idea of the sounds that they want to produce, and how they are going to do this, Mrs Lonergan calls for their silent attention. Each group has a chance to perform their “season” for the class. There are some pauses, some moments of confusion, several tug-of-wars over instruments (particularly amongst the group who really love that guiro), but every student at some point performs their sound(s), and every group shows evidence of their ability to work in a social situation (though some clearly more effectively than others).

Home time now. A mad dash to pack up the instruments, get shoes back on (those pesky laces!), and get back to the classroom to collect bags. A few older siblings turn up to collect the younger ones, the rest lining up to follow Mrs Lonergan either just as far as the bus, or on to where parents are waiting to take their children home.

In the year 2 room during one Friday literacy session, the students each create a “word splash” – a colourful, interestingly arranged collection of words, with the idea that this will assist them in the piece of creative writing that they are about to do. They are then instructed to draw a picture, for the same purpose, after which they are given some time to produce a piece of creative writing.

In the Italian room the 3/4 class play a game of bingo, with the teacher using a wooden “grocery bingo” set. Each table of students are given a “shopping list” with pictures of various grocery items on it. The teacher holds a box in which there are a number of square cards around 3cm x 3cm in size. Each card has on it a picture of a grocery item. She pulls
these out one at a time, calling out the Italian word for each, and students are to place a counter on their list covering that item, if they have it. The teacher checks as they do this, to ensure that they have correctly identified the meaning of each word. There are some words that this class is unfamiliar with. When this is the case, the teacher selects a student, shows them the picture, and the student acts out what the item is, charades-style.

The following week, I spend another Thursday with year 3/4. Again, the day starts in the Italian room. Today’s lesson begins with a discussion of art in 1500 Italy – Michelangelo’s artwork on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, David, and the Mona Lisa, among others. The discussion turns to the question of why the people on the cathedral ceiling are drawn naked. One student offers: “because to an artist, drawing people naked is like… real.” The teacher further explains the painting.

A short while later, the students begin to create their own artworks. Given black and white print-outs of various fruits and vegetables (these seem to have been photocopied in mass), their artworks are created by cutting out the shapes and arranging these overlaying onto black paper to create an image. The teacher suggests that they create a face, but is open to students creating something else instead. She encourages their innovations – their creativity – “Art is creativity,” she tells them, “so when I said a face… it didn’t have to be, I shouldn’t have said that. It’s your creativity coming out.”

Some students choose to look online for pictures of faces to give them inspiration. Many students are discussing their artworks. The teacher suggests that students cut out and arrange all of their pictures on the background and be happy with the arrangement of these before gluing it down. One student shows her his “leaning tower of fruit”. “Can I glue it down now?” he asks. “Have a think,” cautions Jane. “Are you completely happy with that? What
could you maybe put here [pointing to a group of butternut pumpkins near each other] for a bit of variety?"

By the end of the lesson some students’ artworks are complete, others not. Some students did not actually get around to beginning their own artwork, as they spent the entire lesson looking at pictures online (many relevant, some questionably relevant). This is the only aspect of negative loss I can detect from today’s Italian lesson. Of those who have created something, some have created abstract representations of faces, towers, and so on, others closer to literal e.g. two melons for eyes, and a banana for the mouth. One student has created a “Bilby”, which it is clear to see is just that, if you are first told that it is!

With time to fill before morning tea, the year 3/4 class plays a game of Celebrity Heads. The game continues after morning tea, and is painfully slow. It strikes me that this would be the perfect opportunity (and would assist hugely with the progress of this game) for a discussion of how to build characters – hotseating type strategies – and the sorts of questions to ask.

Snippets of integration with literacy and numeracy are also evident within the visual art room – “There are only six copies of this photo,” says Mrs Elliot, “so how many groups do we need to get into?”; “It’s foreground,” she says, writing it on the board, “spelt like this,” (underlining fore), “not like the number four.”

When speaking with Mrs Winters, she shares with me her belief that a flexible staff, including a flexible principal, can find ways to bring the arts in through integration, “and I think some people probably need a bit of help with it,” she tells me conspiratorially, “bring it into the literacy block and into the maths block,” she emphasises, “just means a bit of planning.” Year 5/6 are working on projects. Aside from a weekly spelling test and daily spelling and grammar practice, and a few pages out of their maths workbooks, the large majority of their time is spent on working towards these projects. There are two “products” to
come from this – a poster on a historical place, and a diorama on a historical event, both to do with Australia. These are to be displayed and presented by the students, in costume as one of the characters featuring in their diorama (whom they have also researched), on an afternoon designated for this specific purpose. Parents will be invited along, and other classes taken to see the exhibit also. As I observe students drafting their posters, creating the “real” versions, applying plaster sheets to create hills in their dioramas, talking with each other about how they will dress up as their character, it occurs to me that this is a perfect opportunity to use the arts to enrich the educational experiences of these students. This opportunity, however, is not taken full advantage of. Arts education is occurring, but there is no focus and little direction on how to create these artistic products. No talk of how to get into character, only of what clothes it would make sense to wear. No discussion of how to make the posters visually appealing, beyond “make sure you use a lot of colours”. No guidance on how to use the plaster sheets – the students tell the teacher how they want it to look, and she places the sheets where they need to go, with some heavily teacher-directed assistance by the students.

In some instances, teachers can be seen encouraging students’ creativity. “Are you allowed to draw a boy and a girl?” a prep student calls out from across the room. “It’s your picture, it can be whatever you like,” responds Mrs Lonergan. When a group of three prep/1 students are given a guiro to experiment with, one student wants to bang on it with a rhythm stick. Another wants to use both rhythm sticks to “scrape” it. A third student wants to turn it upside down and scrape it along the carpet to give a softer sound, “like snow”. While year 3/4 students are creating artworks in the Italian room, “Art is creativity,” their teacher tells them, “so when I said a face… it didn’t have to be, I shouldn’t have said that. It’s your creativity coming out.”

In other cases, teachers attempt to rein in their students’ creativity. In the art room, Miss Elliot expends a lot of effort to keep year 2 students realistic in their Birch tree artworks, and
even more effort with prep/1s, with students suggesting “make it [tree] look like a road”, “zig zag trees”, “I’m going to put leaves [on it]”, “dots like numbers” (like on dice). When discussing the background of these artworks, students come up with ideas such as “can I draw a bear?”. Miss Elliot explains that not all of the background will be visible. “Yeah but it would look good,” responds the student, “because it would be like the bear is walking.” “Can I do the ocean?” asks another student. “A rainbow?” asks another.

4.5 Ethical

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. We have the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical). Ethical impact is essentially about fairness – equality of opportunity to participate; differentiation of curriculum for different learning needs, styles, and interests; and issues related to social justice. There is evidence of learning being diversified for students based on their grade level, both within composite classes and within the art room. Within the prep/1 room, prep students are commonly invited to draw a picture of what they are writing about prior to doing their writing, with year 1 students completing their writing first, then drawing a picture afterward if they have time to spare. In the art room, the same learning experience is repeated with each class, with minor adjustments made to the language use for different grade levels (i.e. more sophisticated language used in explanations, and greater use of art related terminology with year 5/6 compared to prep/1 students). Students are also permitted and to some extent encouraged to work at their own pace within the art room, with some students moving on to painting while others are still drawing, or onto their background while others are working on their foreground. This only becomes a problem at the end of their three sessions on this artwork, when Miss Elliot makes clear to students that there will be no more
school time given to completing these artworks. One student, after others have packed up, is still trying to paste trees onto his background. Miss Elliot admonishes him for this, instructing him to stop and pack up now. Looking extremely unhappy, he scrunches up both the scrap paper and the trees he has not yet had a chance to paste on, throwing these in the bin. A large number of students from all classes have not finished their artworks by the end of their third session. Listening as the teacher talks to select individuals in each of the groups, suggesting that they finish these at home, I can’t help but feel for the students who indicate that they won’t be able to – due to not having appropriate materials and/or feeling that their parent(s) do not value the artwork that they take home.

Mrs Winters speaks of immersing students in as many different things as possible – “in the primary years, we’ve just got to immerse them in anything we can. Let them have a bit of everything and anything,” to give them an opportunity to experience it – “so it’s really giving them an opportunity in everything, with your music, your art, kind of hands on type things… as well as just an appreciation.” She believes that immersion gives students the opportunity to “see what they want to do”. “So, for us as teachers,” she sums up, “it’s actually providing opportunities whenever we can… and actually, if somebody’s got a bit of a talent, giving them a bit of a push, too.” This of course relates both to issues of social justice and to differentiation of curriculum.

4.6 Negative Loss

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. We have the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical), and there will of course always be negative aspects of any situation that need to be considered (negative loss), as there is a flip side to every coin.
Negative loss impact refers to negative experiences, often relating directly to one of the aforementioned domains. Negative loss may be one sided, such as when a situation is experienced as negative by one individual but not another; or it may be negative for all or many involved.

In some cases the loss relates to the integrity of the learning experiences. For instance, observing prep/1 students in a maths activity involving drawing pictures to represent number sentences, I witness several students focusing on getting details of their pictures “right”, to the clear detriment of their maths practice, as they forget what the numbers were they are supposed to represent once they have spent five minutes or more “perfecting” their picture of an apple! Issues with technology, such as Mathletics appearing in Arabic, and difficulties in logging into the Ultranet, result in much learning time being wasted.

In other instances, it is a negative experience for one or more individuals. Such experiences often (though not always) overlap with the social or personal domains. During small group performances, several prep/1 students experience confusion and other negative feelings resulting from tug-of-wars over instruments. In the art room, a year 4 boy needing access to a paint tray attempts to share with two different groups and has it repositioned so that he can’t reach. Mrs Crouch discouraging students’ natural instincts to communicate with each other while working and about their work, results in negative feelings, and students are visibly dismayed when Mrs Crouch shows their unfinished Where’s Wally style pictures to the rest of the class, “ruining” the surprise.

At times the learning task itself can cause negative loss for a student. When asked to copy stick figures from the board into their books, “Do you have to draw the people?” asks one student. “I don’t know how to draw!” exclaims another, clearly frustrated. When students run
out of time to complete a task, the negative loss is both for the student themselves as well as for the integrity of the task, as they rush to complete it.

There are hints of government pressure for a focus on literacy and numeracy creating negative loss for arts education – “these days most educators from the government or principal down are expecting... that hour on maths and two hours on literacy, and all of that.”

Budget is another inhibitor. “I’d love to be able to take kids to more displays, and get them out to places where they can feel and touch and do things more, but that’s... you know, the cost of the buses.” It also can be difficult to get access to professional development opportunities in the arts, as “if I was to say I wanted to do a professional development more in the arts line, it wouldn’t be frowned on, but I don’t think they’d find the money... whereas if I said I wanted to do some on maths or literacy, they might see that as something more pointed for us.” “You’re lucky to get everything in,” says Mrs Lonergan, “we’ve barely got enough time to get through all the literacy and numeracy stuff, let alone actually get to the art.”

In certain circumstances, situations that initially hold negative loss can act as a catalyst (albeit accidentally in the case presented here) for a positive outcome. Throughout one year 3/4 art session, the teacher, unwell with a head cold, sits at the front of the room using the laptop, dealing with student queries as they arise, stopping students (as a group) to offer explanations, prompts, and feedback along the way. One year 4 student, Jack, approaches the teacher, saying her name to get attention. She turns, snaps at him “You don’t say someone’s name over and over to get attention!”, then tells him (about his background picture) “still too much white, fill it in with more dots or something else.” Jack, looking extremely annoyed by this, looks down, shaking his head, and walks back to his workspace with his work. He grabs a paintbrush, loading it with paint, and jabs it angrily at his page. After doing this several times, he visibly calms, saying to someone else who had looked over as a result of the noise
he was making, “hey, look at these splats, they look really good!!” He then happily continues doing this. The teacher came along later, commenting “oh I like these parts” (the splats).

4.7 Economic

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. There is the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical), and there will of course always be negative aspects of any situation that need to be considered (negative loss), as there is a flip side to every coin. It is said that money makes the world go ’round, and arts education is no exception to this phenomenon (economic).

Economic impact relates primarily to budgetary considerations. It can also refer to the financial impact of participation in activities for the school, teachers, and parents. Income generation is also a consideration here, as is (perceived) value for money.

Prior to the multipurpose room being built several years ago, what is now the art room (with a kitchen section made use of for “canteen days” and class cooking activities) was previously used as the school hall / storage area. Economic support from the government (the government school grant) facilitated building of the multipurpose room, making possible turning the old school hall into a “dedicated” art room.

The prep/1 and year 2 classes are to travel over an hour by bus to Geelong on an excursion to see a pantomime. This requires financial input by the parents of these students – significantly greater than would be the case for those attending a city school – and a whole day out of the school for these classes. Netbooks are used by students from years 2-6. While year 2 students have access to these at school only, students in years 3-6 are expected to take their netbooks home with them of a weekend and evening for homework completion – and are only
permitted to do so following a deposit of $50 paid by their families, with the expectation of a further $50 to be paid to “buy out” the netbook at the end of year 6. This can become quite an expensive exercise for parents, particularly those with multiple children in those grades.

Fundraising for school resources can place further financial burden on families, as it is inevitably the families who pay the gold coin for mufti days, purchase fundraising chocolates, buy the ingredients (and put in the time and energy) to make cakes and cookies for fundraising stalls, and so on.

Overlapping with the negative loss domain, Mrs Winters asserts that school budget inhibits the arts education that can take place in a primary school. “I’d love to be able to take kids to more displays, and get them out to places where they can feel and touch and do things more, but that’s… you know, the cost of the buses.” It also can be difficult to get access to professional development opportunities in the arts, as “if I was to say I wanted to do a professional development more in the arts line, it wouldn’t be frowned on, but I don’t think they’d find the money… whereas if I said I wanted to do some on maths or literacy, they might see that as something more pointed for us.”

4.8 Innovation and Catalytic

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. There is the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical), and there will of course always be negative aspects of any situation that need to be considered (negative loss), as there is a flip side to every coin. It is said that money makes the world go ’round, and arts education is no exception to this phenomenon (economic). There is always space for something new and different within and around the foundational elements. Sometimes this will mean an individual, or a group of individuals, teacher or student or both,
trying something new (**innovation**). **Other times change will come from change (**catalytic**), with something new or different being stimulus for further, perhaps even greater, change.**

Innovation impact involves the development of something new. This could be students’ creative thinking, innovative pedagogical techniques, processes, or products, or the instigation of new conversations around a topic. There is a strong overlap here with creativity, which was discussed in relation to the educational domain.

Innovation exists at a state government level, a school level, and a classroom level. At the government level we have the Ultranet, a statewide, secure website accessible by students, teachers, and parents. It is an online learning space designed to enhance opportunities for collaboration between and within these groups, as well as between Victorian government schools. There are also the travelling visual art and library vans which provide said services to seven rural schools in this district.

In one of several areas of play equipment at Bungadeen Primary School, there is a staff- and student-built “musical experience”, involving polyethylene (poly) pipes of different sizes, and various other objects made of different materials that can be hit with beaters attached to this with rope.

Within the classrooms we see evidence of untraditional ideas put into practice – marking the roll using an Interactive White Board (IWB) application; the prep/1 class dance used to celebrate success; use of technology to accomplish various tasks that would in earlier years of these teachers’ careers have been done using pencil/pen and paper.

Staffroom conversations also reveal teachers’ innovative ideas that are not followed through. “I have all of these great ideas,” says Mrs Winters, “all of this stuff I want to do, but I never actually get around to it.” A few minutes later, Mrs Winters is discussing her idea for creating audio recordings to add to the dioramas: “I’d love to do it, it’d be great, but I doubt it will
actually happen. I’ll probably just fall flat on my face. I haven’t done this before.” A few minutes later again, discussing a visual art related integration idea for next term, “I’d love to, I plan to, but we’ll run out of time.”

Innovation can also lead to catalytic impact – instigation of change, flow-on effects from a situation or event, something prompting a change in direction, or the beginning of a transformation. Mrs Winters perceives the biggest catalyst for increased arts education in schools as being a student or teacher “with a big enthusiasm for it”. If it is a student, this may lead to a teacher seeing a need to challenge them more, therefore providing more arts opportunities. If it is a teacher with the enthusiasm, then they will show their colleagues “what’s possible”, as well as being a “go to” person to ask questions of in relation to arts activities. “The way the kids in the room feed off each other, so [do] the staff.”

4.9 Collage of Bungadeen Primary School

Bungadeen Primary School is a small, rural school in southern Victoria catering for 83 students from prep to year 6. The arts are primarily the responsibility of the generalist classroom teachers, with some of this responsibility shared by the travelling visual art teacher (a government initiative). Learning is diversified both within the generalist classrooms and the specialist classrooms. The extent of this though, for the most part, is to make small changes to the activities, language used to explain them, and expected outcomes, based on the grade level of the students.

A trend seemed to emerge in the learning experiences I observed, suggestive of the idea that the amount of creativity displayed by students is strongly influenced by the amount of teacher direction given for the activity. A high level of teacher direction seemed to lead to students being constrained in their responses to the task (demonstrating low levels of creativity), while a lower level of teacher direction led to greater spontaneity in students’ work (demonstrative
of comparatively higher levels of creativity). An adequate level of teacher direction did seem to be needed in most, but not all, cases, however, for students to have sufficient guidance as to what the overall task is they are to complete, and hence to be productive in doing so.

When considering the attitudes of teachers at Bungadeen Primary School to arts education based on my time in this school, I reflected that overall, they seem to have a strong desire to implement more arts education in their teaching, but believe that there simply isn’t enough time, that the arts are not a priority (you can do them at the end of the week or term or year if you have gotten through everything “important” [the three “R”s]), and that they (the teachers) will probably “fall flat on [their] face” if they try to teach arts education. Arts education is seen as an extra, an add-on, not as an integral part of the curriculum. It is not the “serious business” of the classroom – it is the fun that we can have if there is time (and during the teacher’s designated release time when students go to the visual art specialists). Budget, time, and attitudes were seen as the biggest potential inhibitors for arts education in primary schools.

I began my research with the presumption that quality arts education was there to be found in the daily practices of any primary school setting. With this premise, and the nature of my research leading me to actively look for arts education within everyday practices, I found numerous occurrences of arts education in the classrooms of every teacher I observed. Interestingly however, in a large number of cases these same teachers expressed to me that they do not actually believe that they are teaching the arts. Could this non sequitur actually be the teachers’ acknowledgement that they are not engaging in quality arts education, as opposed to not engaging in arts education at all?

Using the indicators of quality arts education outlined in Chapter 2 as stimulus while being careful to heed the warning given by Seidel et al. (2009) not to take these indicators as a
prescriptive checklist, reflections are made here on the quality of the arts education reported on at Bungadeen Primary School. Permeable boundaries between the school and the community (Bamford’s (2006) indicators of quality “Partnerships” and “Permeable boundaries”; Seidel et al.’s (2009) “Community dynamics”; Pascoe et al.’s “Community support”) are evident throughout: parents feeling comfortable and welcome in the art room; Mrs Crouch finding in her collection a book belonging to a student’s parent when he was a child; and incorporation of parents’ suggestions into lessons. I perceived the learning environments I observed as safe and supportive in some situations, and less so in others. As one example, while students seem to feel comfortable sharing their ideas and thoughts openly with Mrs Lonergan, they seem less comfortable with Miss Elliot, and indeed with Mrs Crouch even less so. The discouraging of students’ natural inclinations to collaborate and discuss their work, and the viewing of this as “noise” and distraction from “real learning” is not ideal (Bamford’s (2006) “Collaboration”). There are, however, snippets of quality in this area when teachers encourage students’ collaboration and communication as they engage with their work – Mrs Lonergan allows her prep/1 students to explore and discuss what they can do with musical instruments; in the Italian room students are encouraged to display their creativity, and welcome to discuss their work with those around them as they complete it.

Numerous opportunities presented themselves leaning towards arts integration, using the arts to enrich learning, and capitalising on what the arts have to offer (Seidel et al.’s (2009) “Student learning” and “Pedagogy”; Pascoe et al.’s “Curriculum”). A large number of these opportunities were ignored; however some were taken up. Small moments here and there of quality through arts integration. There are some quality, and some less than quality, aspects to the physical environment in which arts education takes place (Seidel et al.’s (2009) “Environment”). The travelling visual art specialist (Bamford’s (2006) “Shared responsibility”), Miss Elliot, states that the art room at Bungadeen Primary School is the best
of those she visits – which both speaks to some level of quality at Bungadeen, and to lower levels at other schools. Let’s not forget, however, that the “quality” art room at Bungadeen is also a space treated as a “dumping ground” by teachers and parents – quality is subjective. The multipurpose room funded by the government school grant also presents a large, open physical space for arts education to take place (primarily the performing arts) – a quality space for arts education.

Unfortunately, the place arts education holds in the eyes of staff and community is one decidedly lower than that of the “academic” (tested) subjects. I did, however, identify arts education occurring throughout Bungadeen Primary School. While not all arts education taking place at Bungadeen Primary School can be considered quality, small but visible beacons of quality arts education are occurring in the classrooms of this primary school.

The portrait of Farefield State School presented in Chapter 5 paints the scene of a school from a very different demographic to that of Bungadeen Primary School. At the end of Chapter 5 connections are drawn between the two portraits, with further discussion presented, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made in Chapter 6.
5 Farefield State School

Over a period of several weeks in late 2012 I visited Farefield State School, a large primary school catering for 750 students, tucked away in Queensland’s Gold Coast Hinterland. Unlike at Bungadeen Primary School, arts education is primarily the responsibility of “specialists” at Farefield State School. While in Victoria it is recommended but optional, the Queensland Department of Education, Training, and Employment requires all Queensland schools to employ a specialist music teacher. Employment of specialists in other artforms is not mandated nor is it commonplace, making the decision of Farefield State School’s principal to employ specialists for visual art, dance, and drama, a noteworthy one.

This portrait opens by painting the picture of the surrounding community of Farefield, then narrowing to focus on the school itself, and later on the individual classrooms in which the arts are being taught. We hear multiple voices, multiple sides to the story, and the reader is invited to view this portrait through the nine domains (or nine sides of the crystal) as a rich and complex though thoroughly partial account of arts education at Farefield State School.

5.1 Cultural

Farefield, at the foot of the Gold Coast Hinterland and bordering on a rainforest, has a rural feel, with most of its older buildings situated on reasonably sized blocks of land between one to two acres in size. Established as a small settlement of timber-cutters situated on the railway line, Farefield still retains many of its original buildings. The town hosts numerous restaurants and cafes, several bed-and-breakfasts, and art and craft galleries displaying the work of local artists. There are also a number of museums and points of historical and cultural interest, including an old pub made famous in the 1980s by a then-local artist. The rural feel of the town offers an escape from the city life that surrounds it, with major
shopping centres and tourist attractions still in close proximity. The town’s annual show is a celebration of all the area has to offer, along with the fortnightly farmers’ markets which provide a welcome opportunity for sampling the region’s fresh produce. Another noteworthy social event held in Farefield is the annual Celebration of Literature, designed to encourage a love of reading and writing in the community, and attracting acclaimed writers to the area.

One of several schools in the area, Farefield State School (FSS) has 750 students enrolled in years prep-7. Though city-like in size and layout, the actual environment, like the town itself, has more of a rural feel, filled with trees and greenery. Navigating the physical school environment reminds me of a game of labyrinth. Due to the hilly environment, there are small cement stairways carved into the ground throughout the school, and long, windy paths in others, with straighter paths alongside the buildings. Being quite a large school, it is easy to get lost in these mazes.

Along with the regular classroom teachers, the school employs a number of “specialists” in the areas of Health and Physical Education, Language Other Than English (Japanese), Information and Communication Technology, Science, Drama, Visual Art, Music, and Dance. The school prides itself on academic, sporting, and cultural excellence. The school culture is one of inclusivity. This is emphasised to me by practically every staff member I speak with in my time at this school. Students with special needs, from both this school and a neighbouring special needs school, are included in everyday activities, special interest/talent groups, and concerts. There are also a number of groups running within the school that encourage anyone with an interest to join – regardless of their aptitude in the particular area. One component of this inclusive focus is the encouragement of boys participating in activities that might usually be seen as “for girls”, such as dance, singing, and theatre.
Mr Grant, the principal of FSS, is a tall, middle-aged man, with grey, slicked-back hair, always seen wearing suit pants, a long-sleeve collared shirt, and a school-coloured tie. Although it seems that his only expression is a serious one – I did not witness him smile once in my time at the school – staff and students seem to find him approachable and converse with him at ease. Mr Grant is commonly seen around the school, always moving slowly from place to place, observant of everything and everyone around him as he goes. He is a principal with a hand always in whatever is going on within his school, creating and maintaining social networks within his school as well as with neighbouring schools in the region.

Music is presented by the music specialist teacher, Megan, with frequent assistance from Anthony, the school’s chaplain. Anthony, with his denim shorts and t-shirt, and spiked dark brown hair with blonde tips, looks nothing like the image of a traditional chaplain. Alongside his regular chaplain duties, he also assists with the school’s music extension groups. Megan was not responsive to my recruitment approach, stating that she preferred I did not observe her teaching, and was disinclined to participate in an interview. She did however agree to provide me with a written response to my interview questions (which I subsequently provided to her, in writing, for this purpose). Megan majored in music for her Higher School Certificate (HSC, year 12 in NSW) and at university. While she had always sung and played piano and guitar, she was a generalist teacher until Farefield’s principal, Mr Grant, established the arts program in 2006, at which point she became the school’s music “specialist”. Megan reports that students have opportunities to experiment with instruments, and with singing both individually and in groups, both large and small.

The visual art teacher, Rachel, is a generalist teacher who has worked in this school for some time. Although she has no training or personal background in visual art, she was asked to take on the teaching of the “specialist” visual art classes this term when the school came to be in need of a visual art teacher, and she is enthusiastic about the possibilities. She tells me that
the arts have “not really” been a part of her life. The tale she tells, however, is full of contradiction on this point. “I love art. I appreciate art. I wouldn’t say I know a huge amount about art. Being a non-art teacher teaching art. I’m a generalist teacher, I was asked to take this for the last term, and I’m happy to try new experiences. So my background, really, I did art lessons at school same as anyone else, didn’t go on any further with art past probably grade 10. Have no formal qualifications in art, but … if I see something, and I like it, that to me is what art’s about. So … and just getting kids to have a go.” When I ask her about how the other artforms may have been a part of her life, “Drama no, I was the shyest child you ever met,” she tells me, “wouldn’t say boo to a ghost. So no, drama was definitely out, I wouldn’t go up on the stage. Drama definitely not, dancing yes, love dancing, and I dance now, not formally it’s just informal. Sometimes, once in a blue moon I go to lessons. It’s long jive style, so it’s partner dancing … First time I really engaged with music was actually at uni when in our music course we had to learn a new instrument, and since I could play no instruments whatsoever … It was easy! Lots and lots of choices … I loved it. I took up keyboard, and did really well in the subject … got some of the music students from uni to actually help us learn, like they gave us free lessons. And sat with us. So, got the hang of one hand going, and the other hand doing the keys, but didn’t get them both going. But it was only a limited number of lessons, so, I didn’t continue. That was the next step. So, I was very proud of myself. But, reading music and that, it’s not something that I’ve [done], it’s something that now I would take up as a hobby, if I had time. But I don’t have time. So, no arts background.”

“I did enjoy music [in my preservice teacher education degree] but it was very much about if you’re the teacher in a small school … if you’re in a small school and you’re teaching everything, it was more aimed towards that. Most of the time we have nothing to do with music as a generalist teacher. Drama was a subject, and I excelled in coming out of my shell
because I had to…wasn’t comfortable with it at all, but did it, because I had to. Our visual arts was a tiny, tiny little part of early childhood. I only had one lesson, a two hour workshop or something, and that was about it.” And what did she get out of that? “Paint goes over crayon?” she laughs, “That was probably about it. And found that my idea of drawing, other people would go, ‘oh that’s really good’. So, that was a nice surprise…I thought I had no artistic…abilities, and other people were like, ‘that’s really good’, so maybe I’m not quite as bad as I think. The hardest thing is drawing on a whiteboard. Can’t draw on a whiteboard. Give me a piece of paper and a pen, a pencil, and I’m ok. And I can’t do portraits with paint. I think that is a talent all in itself. But other than that, I can get through.”

The dance teacher, Cindy, immigrated to Australia from the United Kingdom (UK) less than two years ago. In the UK she taught dance in secondary schools, and is currently employed as a travelling dance teacher on the days that she does not work at Farefield State School. Before the classes start Cindy informs me that she will “mix it up a bit”, for my benefit. She wants to show me the variety of dancing styles that students are taught in her classes. As the lessons proceed, she glances sideways at me every 5-10 minutes. She is very aware of my presence, and seems anxious to please.

Karen, the year 3 teacher responsible for the 3/4 theatre group, fills me in on her background. “Before I went into teaching, that’s what I did as a career, I ran a theatre school. So I have a lot of experience in the theatre, it’s my passion…I love to do it…I’ve been in theatres since I was a child,” she tells me, “went straight from high school into a theatre college, a dance college, I then did, uh, teaching programs, in dance and drama, ran my own theatre school, and then was…asked by a school…in the UK…would I go in and do some sessions in the school. Then it turned out I loved being in the classroom, I love doing this as well…So theatre’s always been a part of my life.”
The principal, Mr Grant, believes in the importance of arts education as part of the curriculum for all students. Arts education in this school takes place in “specialist” classes for visual art, music, drama, and dance. While music and visual art have dedicated rooms, dance and drama take place in the school’s performing arts hall. Each Wednesday, drama is conducted on the stage, with the curtain drawn, while dance classes are conducted on the floor at the back of the hall. Each class in the school, from prep to 7, experiences one lesson per fortnight in each artform, for the duration of two terms, resulting in students having approximately ten lessons in each artform each school calendar year. The visual art teacher, Rachel, shares her views on this arrangement. “I would love to…have this to be a bigger program, where I have all of the kids in a week, and they have one art lesson a week, or if necessary then every other week, because the weeks go past so fast. Quality would be, being able to take them from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, I don’t find this is quality at the moment, because I’m going to have five lessons with this, with each of these classes; it takes us two lessons to do one artwork, and they’re not even big artworks, it takes two lessons, I’ve only got two things I can teach them, in an entire year. That, I didn’t realise, is how they did it. So they only have art one term. So a Wednesday, one group of, say there’s four classes in grade 5, one grade 5 class will be doing drama, one will be doing music, one will be doing art, and one will be doing dance. And the following term, they’ll swap to a different element. So what they’re actually getting … they do do a bit of art in the classes, but what I’d like to be able to do with them, and what I’m able to do with them when reality hits…” She also tells me how she attempts to manage this issue. “I don’t want to introduce them to things that they will probably never ever touch again.” She aims for the type of artworks where “they can go home, and use things from around the house, to create their artworks…It’s not about what I can do,” she emphasises. “The kids have done [these artworks].”
A number of “extension” or interest groups relating to arts education also exist within the school, including a year 3/4 theatre group, Farefield Singers, Moovers and Groovers (a dance group), and Visual Art, Music, Dance, and Drama extension groups.

Every Friday afternoon, students from prep to year 4 participate in “Friday Afternoon Challenges”, involving students choosing from a wide range of activities that they can experience. The 3/4 theatre group was established by one of the school’s year 3 teachers, Karen, as one of the “challenge” options that year 3 and 4 students can select. In most cases students have the opportunity to participate in a range of “challenges”; however those who choose to be in the theatre group make a commitment to stay there for the entire year.

Students were also required to audition for inclusion in this group. “Fortunately, it was a situation where all of the children that came were of a very good standard to work with,” Karen confided to me. The group has performed at assemblies, as well as at “DanceD in the Spotlight”, a not-for-profit event run by the Gold Coast Arts Centre, featuring performances by over 700 primary and secondary students from 23 State, Catholic and Independent schools on the Gold Coast.

When asked what factors she believes contribute to enhancing, or to hindering, arts education in primary schools, Karen asserted that “first and foremost, that’d be your principal of your school, who’s in control of your curriculum … and either you’ve got someone who appreciates the arts, and sees the value in the arts, or you don’t. I think … if you don’t have a principal that values those, you may still have members of staff who will uphold those beliefs. So … definitely your principal. It’s always timetabling and time … you’re always fighting for time. So … the attitude of your principal, followed by time allowance, followed by the facilities that you have at your school. If you’ve got those three, you’ve then got to add on the expertise of your staff. If you’ve got skilled, motivated members of staff, even if they haven’t had a strong background, but they’re willing to give the kids a go, and we’ve got
members of staff here … who haven’t had full training, but they … get in with the kids and give it a go. So, you’ve got all those factors working to support the arts, but then you’ve also got all of those factors that could be a hindrance as well. They either help it or they don’t.”

Karen shares with me how the arts form part of her generalist teaching practices. “I think if you’re a teacher you’re a performer by nature,” she tells me. “I am very dramatic in the classroom, and I use music in the classroom … we start every day with some brain training activities, which we always do to music … I use sense of rhythm when we’re doing poetry … sometimes maths things we do to rhythms. I’m always putting on voices, and pretending to be other people, and, just trying to bring the curriculum alive … I suppose a major bonus for me is that I’m not concerned when other adults come into the room. Some teachers feel uncomfortable when there are other adults in the room, and they’re ok with kids, whereas a few who have a performance background, you don’t mind who’s in the room.”

5.2 Social

The culture of the community, the school, and the classroom help to form, and are formed by, the social interactions that take place.

The social domain is evident in the everyday interactions between individuals. In the visual art room, Rachel is showing students a PowerPoint presentation of famous sculptures. She tried to do this in the school’s computer lab, however due to issues with the technology (“The screen just kept going blank”), she gave up and came back to the art room to show it on her 17-inch computer monitor. Students crowd together on the floor and sitting on chairs or desks behind in order to see the screen. The presentation shows “Bronze David”, “Discus Thrower”, “The Kiss”, “Lady Justice”, “The Peta”, “The Thinker”, “Vines de Milo”, and “David”. There is a class discussion of history related facts, including the original Olympics, date lines (AD/BC), and the reason no clothes were worn (muscular bodies are what was
found attractive in those days, as it gives definition of the muscles). The discussion flows easily and naturally in line with the students’ comments and questions, giving a social feel to the situation. Lots of references are made by students to *The Simpsons*. The teacher picks up on these, acknowledging that *The Simpsons* is quite a useful source of information.

Discussing one of the sculptures, “It’s one solid piece of marble…”, explains Rachel. “You wouldn’t want to stuff that up,” comments one of the boys matter-of-factly. They discuss where the students may have seen marble in their own lives, including kitchen bench tops at home.

“How can Mary be a virgin?” questions one student. “Well the idea is that it was an immaculate conception…” begins Rachel, “I’ll leave that one to your RE [religious education] teacher I think.”

The presentation and subsequent discussion moves to modern sculptures. The students are constantly talking throughout, and the teacher continues confidently, at ease, despite this. Most students’ comments are related to what they are seeing. The discussion then flows seamlessly to the artwork the class will begin creating today and finish in the subsequent lesson. They will be making a sculpture of something they choose, out of newspaper and masking tape. Rachel demonstrates a “person” she has begun to make out of newspaper, and how she manipulated the newspaper and masking tape. Stones are used to weight the bottom to make it stand. “Can I do the Mona Lisa?” asks one boy, with a huge grin on his face. “I am glad that you want to exceed yourself so far Oliver…” begins Rachel, “…depends if you are doing it tastefully or just to get attention from your peers.”

Students move from the floor to desks, and the teacher hands blank paper out to each. She then moves back to the front of the room, and rings a yellow melody bell to get their attention. Throughout the lesson, she also uses “1,2,3, eyes on me”. Students are instructed
that it is not time to talk. They are to draw a design for a sculpture that they will create next week from newspaper and masking tape. The teacher states that if they come up with a different design at home before next week, they can use that. The only restriction is that it has to be some sort of creature.

The teacher keeps reminding students to work quietly. She seems to know most, if not all of the students by name, and appears to have formed relationships with many. Students quieten for perhaps a minute, then continue working noisily again. Many are commenting on their own work, or that of others, stating what they are doing, making comments about each other’s work – “I never knew bats had three eyes.” Students are instructed to pack up, but not put artwork away as the teacher wants to see it. Many students continue drawing as Rachel moves to speak with an adult who has come to the door. Rachel comments to me later that this is known as one of the two “worst” (worst behaved) classes in the school. I know that when I was at school we all knew which were seen as the “best” and “worst” classes. I wonder whether this is the case for these students as well, and if so, what personal or social impact this may have for them.

When one student completely finishes his positive/negative artwork, the teacher rings the bell to get students’ attention. She allows him to show his finished artwork to the class, commenting “see how good it looks when it’s finished.” This artwork is displayed on the whiteboard, held there by a magnet, and the student is given cardboard to use to begin creating his Halloween pumpkin. There seems to be a positive personal impact for this student as he is publicly praised. A social impact is also evident as several other students in this class noticeably pay close attention to aspects of his artwork that have been praised, and attempt to replicate these in their own work.
Rachel moves around the room, assisting and advising students, keeping them on track. Some students bring their work to check it with her at various points, others are content to continue doing their own work at their desks. Rachel presents as happy and positive throughout. She seems very confident and comfortable in her role as teacher; it seems more as if this is her “regular” class, not a class she has only taught once before, for one day a fortnight ago. I find out later that she has in fact taught these students before, as she substitute teaches throughout the school on non-art days, and had also done so prior to taking up the position of visual art “specialist”.

When the prep class arrives, they clamber in and sit on the floor at the front of the room. “How could we get to the moon?” the teacher asks them. “A car?” asks one student. “A rocket!” exclaims another. “Excellent!” praises Rachel, “what shapes are in a rocket?” Some time is spent discussing this, the teacher drawing a rocket on the board, made up of simple shapes. Number concepts are brought in, integration naturally happening: “If we have one triangle and we add two more, how many triangles will we have?”

Some students can be seen visibly concentrating, head to side, tongue out. Others are working, but talking also. In some cases this is self-talk, in other cases they are verbalising what they are doing to those around them.

Rachel talks of a snowballing effect coming out of some of the visual art lessons she has implemented: “My year 7s are now teaching the next class, so one class is teaching the next class what we did in our art lesson. That’s how much they enjoyed it, and the teachers want[ed] to do something similar, so they’ve asked to do my art lesson. And the kids are teaching the other kids.”

Another Wednesday, I spend the day observing Cindy’s dance classes in the school hall. The first dance class of the day is year 6. First up, students are to spend 10 seconds talking to the
person next to them about what they have done so far. They then report back to the teacher.

Today they will be doing contemporary dance. Cindy shares the lesson’s objectives with the class.

One boy tries to catch the eye of the boy next to him, to share a laugh. The second boy ignores him at first, after a while chuckling with him. The teacher moves the first boy.

One student asks the teacher if she has the “boom boom” song. She replies that she doesn’t, but did he see it on the X-Factor or one of those shows recently? He says that he had. Positive personal impact for the student as the teacher makes the effort to build and maintain rapport.

Cindy divides the students into five groups by numbering them off, with one student from the school’s J Rock team as the leader of each group, building a strong social foundation from which to work. She explains the “challenge” to students. They have ten minutes to create a dance routine in their groups. She checks for students’ understanding by asking for thumbs up (fully understand what to do), down (no idea what to do), or sideways (unsure what to do).

All students bar one give thumbs up, the remaining student indicating he is unsure. Students spread around the hall in their groups, as the teacher puts music on. At first some are just sitting or standing around talking, while others can be seen starting to make movements. The teacher roams around the room, briefly talking with each group. All students can now be seen moving around, doing their dances.

The one “difficult” student, who was moved earlier in the lesson, does appear to have some difficulty in following the moves. When in groups, there is one particular boy in the same group as him who explicitly teaches him, going over and over with him what he will need to do and when – beneficial social interaction.

With 10 minutes remaining, two to three groups at a time give their performance to the rest of the class. The next class, year 4, have arrived already, and are watching these performances. I
see negative loss as no one group gets full attention on them during their performance that they have spent an entire lesson working towards. Cindy asks each student individually: “What is contemporary dance to you?” As each responds, they are dismissed to collect their shoes and socks and prepare to go back to their generalist classroom.

The focus for the year 4 class today is “Rock and Roll”. The teacher explains to the students that Rock and Roll is traditionally boy-girl, but that she is a “nice teacher”, and will allow them to do it boy-boy, girl-girl. This is telling of the culture of this learning environment.

Students find their own space around the floor. Three students are selected to lead warm-ups. The teacher stands at the back, and these three watch her for directions on what to do.

Personal impact for students as they are allowed to become “leaders” while supported strongly by their teacher.

Students are instructed to find a partner, face each other and hold two hands. A pair of boys are together, but one pushes the other smaller boy in the chest, pushing him away. The teacher comes to the front and checks with the teacher’s aide what would be best for this particular student (the bigger boy who pushed), then re-pairs the boys with two girls.

Similarly to with the previous class, the teacher demonstrates bit by bit, getting students to copy, then with music, then add to routine, then with music again. With this younger group, Cindy often gets students to sit on the floor while she is demonstrating and wanting them to watch what she is doing. There is educational impact to this, as students overall pay closer attention to Cindy when seated in front of her.

In this style of dancing, students are required to work with their partner, and to cooperate with them. Cindy sometimes demonstrates with the teacher’s aide (who is a head taller than her), other times chooses a student to demonstrate with.
Demonstrating and explaining to students how to do a lift/jump, Cindy asks students why it is important to bend their knees. One student responds “to get more lift and acceleration?” Cindy impatiently responds “Yes, ok, but what about for safety?” Negative loss for this student, and a missed opportunity to link to knowledge outside the focus topic.

The boy who had pushed his peer earlier is not participating. The girl who is partnered with him tries to get it to work, to no avail. The boy is allowed to move to work with a pair of boys, and the girl starts crying. More negative loss. Both the teacher and teacher’s aide intervene, the teacher partnering herself with this girl.

After some more practice, Cindy brings all students to the floor. She demonstrates, without opportunity for students to practise, a variety of Rock and Roll moves. Students are to create their own set of eight moves to add to the end of their dance. The teacher puts the music on (“Johnny B Goode”), and students in pairs and two groups of three work out moves to be added. Lots of action is occurring, as students talk with each other, laugh together, and practise moves. After around 10 minutes the teacher calls all students to the floor. Two to three pairs at a time perform for the rest of the group. Each student is to answer to the teacher “What is Rock and Roll?” before being dismissed for morning tea.

After morning tea, in come a year 2 class. A boy asks the teacher if they will be doing “Gangnam Style”. She replies maybe, and that if they don’t, they will next week. Students remind her that she said they would play a dance game next time they are together. She makes it clear that they won’t have time for this. I wonder if my presence has contributed to this negative loss? They play a game of Simon Says while waiting for students to arrive from morning tea (but had no time for a dance game?). Once all students come in and are sitting on the floor, the teacher informs them that they will be doing hip-hop today. She gives students
20 seconds to discuss “what is hip-hop?”, then asks each student individually for their response.

Students find their own space on the floor, and participate in warm-ups led by the teacher. Throughout the lesson as an attention-getting strategy, when the teacher calls “Soldier!”, students are to respond with “Atteeeeeeenee-tion!” Several times, when the teacher tries this, it is met with “Yes, sir!”.

As with the previous classes, there is explicit teaching of a few moves at a time, with students to copy, do these to music, then repeat, adding additional moves. This is interspersed with intervals of students sitting on the floor, clapping the beat of the music that they will later dance to.

Again, there is one difficult student in this class. Again, it is a boy. Students asked to walk, he runs. Students asked to stand, he remains sitting. He then gets up and leaves the hall. The teacher follows, calling to other students to practise. After a few minutes he comes back inside. Simply being in this class seems to be causing negative loss for this student.

Cindy divides students into groups. She designates a leader for each group, who needs to hold up the correct number of fingers to represent their group number. One boy, the leader of group 5, is told to “put up five fingers… no, four fingers and a thumb”. He displays four fingers on his left hand and thumbs up with his right hand. The teacher shows appreciation and approval of this, of his creativity. He changes it to the more “sensible” option (one hand), but Cindy encourages him to change it back. Personal impact as his creativity is recognised.

In groups, students are to create their own hip-hop dance. There must be a starting position and a finishing position. Each student in the group has to contribute one move to the dance, and the group must include the movement – whether they like it or not. Students are instructed to not do any gymnastics or break-dancing, only hip-hop. Cindy comments to me
later that there are a lot of students at this school who do gymnastics outside of school, and that they forget or don’t realise sometimes that gymnastics is not dance, and “they just want to do it all the time”, hence why she has specified no gymnastics. She also commented how good it is to see these students communicating so well, particularly at this young age.

Students are given 100 points for teamwork, 50 per move for funky moves, and 200 for including everybody’s move in the dance, creating competition – “Who can get the most points?” The teacher stops everyone part way through, getting one group to demonstrate their dance to the rest. She tells me that she used this with the intention of encouraging students in other groups to improve their dances. Cindy tells students that this will be considered a work in progress – if they haven’t finished it, it doesn’t matter. Each group, one at a time, has the opportunity to perform their work in progress.

It strikes me that in all cases, the “difficult” students of each class have been the ones who genuinely have difficulty in learning and remembering the moves.

Now the last class of the day, year 3, enter. The drama teacher, Justine, leaves her class with Cindy briefly. Cindy has the two classes face each other, and play “copy cat”, whereby one student stands at the front (one at the front of each class, in this case) doing a variety of moves, and the rest of the group must copy them. A few minutes later, the drama group are sent off with Justine. The dance class are instructed to go outside, line up, and come back in quietly.

Once they are back inside, students are given 20 seconds to discuss with each other what they have done so far in dance this year. Today they will be doing hip-hop. Two students are selected to lead the warm-up. Students spread out around the room, finding their own space. The teacher guides them from the back of the group.
In this class, and in the second class of the day, there is one student who is injured or unwell, and unable to participate. In each case, this student is given the role of choosing the best four students from the class. Nothing is at any point said about this to the rest of the class.

The teacher does a few stretches with the group, then splits them into two groups. Students are to learn some hip-hop moves as a whole group, then have a “dance-off” – each of the two groups will face each other and dance, competing to perform the best dance.

Moves are taught in a similar fashion to in previous lessons. “Alright, so this [move] is going to be a bit harder, because you’ve been doing so good,” she tells them. Is that really a positive? Several of the students’ reactions cause me to sense negative loss. The class is divided into two groups, with three smaller groups within each larger group. They have five minutes in smaller groups to come up with what they are going to do when they go out into the middle to present their piece of the dance-off.

The dance-off begins; however it is obvious that none of the students have any idea how this is supposed to go. They all come out into the middle at once, doing their thing, then retreat and look at each other as if to say “what now?”

The following Wednesday I spend some time at the other end of the hall, on the stage with the curtain drawn, where Justine’s drama classes are conducted. To start off the first class of the morning, Justine is engaging her year 7 students in a series of drama games. In the first game, the class are standing in a circle on the stage, passing a joker’s hat around, the property of the object being changed frequently by the teacher. “It’s hot”, “slimy now”, “it’s covered in ants”, “freezing cold”.

The next activity is designed to teach the importance of cooperating with your partner during improvisation. A large black box is placed centre stage. The idea is for the person entering the scene to give the first person a reason to get off the box. The teacher demonstrates first –
she sits on the box, and asks a student to come in from the side of the stage. The student enters, and says “Quick, your kite’s flying away!”, to which Justine responds by getting off the box to chase after the imaginary runaway kite. Returning to the box, she then asks him to come back in again with another offer, to allow her to demonstrate blocking. He comes back in with “Quick! There’s a spider! Get up!”, which Justine blocks with “No there isn’t”, remaining on the box. A few more exchanges take place in which Justine further demonstrates blocking, such as not looking when your partner points at something. Justine is really getting involved in the drama, along with her students. Then it is the students’ turns. This activity continues for around 15 minutes, with students taking turns, first with a verbal offer, then later with a physical offer. Almost all members of the class are participating voluntarily and enthusiastically in this. Justine repeatedly emphasises the importance of a supportive environment, pointing as she does so to where the phrase “supportive environment” is written on the portable whiteboard at the back of the stage, aiming for positive personal impact. “It is ok for it not to work when you give it a go,” she tells them.

Next, the focus of the lesson turns to masks. Justine reminds her students of the most important rule of using masks – never face your audience while putting them on or taking them off. First, several students are given character masks to experiment with. “In drama, you can be anything you want to be,” Justine tells them, immediately after instructing the students with masks that there is a specific type of spy that each needs to get into character as. Going to the side of the stage, they re-enter, wearing the masks, as spies. Doing various James Bond style moves, the spies roam around the stage, in character. Now it is time to use the neutral masks. Different selections of students come to the front of the group, and are each handed a neutral mask. “Some people don’t like wearing masks, it makes them feel weird,” says Justine, acknowledging the negative loss experienced by some students, “and that’s ok, if that’s you, you don’t have to wear one, you can just do the assessment at the end of the year.
without using the mask”. Students turn their backs on the rest of the class, put on their masks, then turn back to face the class. After Justine instructs two of the boys to take their fringe out from under their mask, they proceed to each, in turn, do as they have been instructed – walk to the audience, scan audience (in a creepy way), turn, walk back, do a double take, continue back to their original position, then turn back to the audience and settle in a position of their choice. As the last of these students finish, the next class is arriving.

The year 4 class file sedately onto the stage. They have just been reprimanded for the noise they were making, and warned that there would be no time for “the fun stuff” if they waste time. Clearly the drama session is seen (by the drama teacher at least) as “serious business”. Today they make use of the entire hall for warm-up activities, as the dance teacher is away, so they have the hall to themselves. The warm-up activities include two quick games of “stuck in the mud”, played in only one quarter of the hall, so as not to make the game too difficult, with emphasis placed on the importance of team work – working in a social situation. Then a game of “three noses”, where the teacher calls out a body part, a number, and a level (high, medium, low), and students must get into groups with the correct number of the specified body part, and stay together on the correct level. Then a game of “tourist attraction”, evidently requiring a great deal of concentration and quick thinking (potential educational impact here), where the teacher calls out “Harbour Bridge” / “Opera House” / “Q1” and students, in pairs, perform the action designated for that landmark. When the teacher calls “Jetstar” (the name of an airline), students have until the count of five to move to a new partner.

After the warm-up activities, the class moves back onto the stage. Time for an improvisation activity – “knife and fork”. Students get into pairs. The teacher calls out two things, e.g. “wave” and “surfer”. Without verbalising, partners have to “be” one each, in a freeze frame. “Offering”, and adapting to what their partner is doing. Due to the odd number of students,
there is one group of three. Justine emphasises that this group will need to be “extra” creative, as they can still only represent two objects between them. After around five minutes of this, the pairs are put together to make groups of four (still with one group of three), to do the same activity. This time, however, they are allowed to verbalise, and are given one object to create with their four bodies. As each group holds their freeze frame, the teacher “turns it on”, and the group must demonstrate how their object “works”. Justine forgot to specify this first up though, so for several of the groups, their washing machine was non-functional.

Better luck was had with the ceiling fans that came next, as the functionality was taken into account. Next, the class is divided in half, with 13 students in one group and 14 in the other. First they are to make a rollercoaster, then a racing car. One group work well together, discussing what they will do and negotiating different ideas. The other group have some difficulty with this however, experiencing much negative loss. “I want to be the wheel”, “We’ve already GOT five wheels”, “We can’t have five wheels!”, “Well I’M going to be a wheel.” By the end of this activity, several members of this group are crying, one has punched another, and they did not manage to create a “working” rollercoaster or racing car.

Now for a quietening, focused group activity – “colours”. Similar to Chinese whispers, this activity involves multiple colours (the word of the colour) being passed around the circle, in whispers, in both directions. The teacher talks about each individual being a link, and the importance of not being a weak link in the chain.

Next class. Year 2. As we are waiting for the class to arrive at the end of morning tea, Justine puts on some “serenity music”, saying that she likes to have some music for the class to come in to. When they arrive at the door of the hall she goes to them and leads them up onto the stage. Their first activity involves standing up straight (“Imagine there is a string attached to the top of your head, holding you up straight, you’re like a puppet”), wandering around the stage “as if you are a monkey”, “as if you are scared”, “as if you are tired”, “as if you are
stretching to reach something high” (use of different levels), making eye contact with those they pass, being aware of their facial expressions as well as body language. Two students are “doing the wrong thing”, and are asked to sit to the side. One of these two boys begins screaming and crying. Justine talks about not wasting time, addressing this to the rest of the group.

They play the “three noses” game, as with the previous group. These year 2 students have much greater difficulty with this than the year 4s did, both with working out how to group themselves, as well as with cooperating. Next, the students and teacher stand in a circle. The idea is to copy the teacher in performing various “loose”, flowing actions and noises, in rhythm. Students are told they can elect to choose a noise, or not to. After around 10 minutes of this activity, the last activity of the session is improvisation. A cloth is placed in the centre of the circle, which students take turns to pick up and use as an object in their improvised mime. The rest of the class are to guess what the object is.

At 6.15pm on the third last Wednesday of the school year, I park my car, get out, and make my way down the hill towards Farefield State School. A little girl, maybe 6 years old, dressed in a black leotard and pink tutu is hanging off her dad’s arm, trying with all her might to pull him down and make him stop. She is crying, saying she doesn’t want to go. As I continue down the street, families are getting out of their cars and walking towards the school. Some children are dressed in school uniform, others in casual clothing, with sprinkles of younger children wearing colourful shirts and/or tutus, or dressed as “farmers” scattered between.

Tonight is Gala Evening, Farefield State School’s pinnacle arts event. This is the night that students in all performing arts groups have been working towards for a good proportion of the year. This year, 2012, is the school’s 7th Annual Gala Evening. Nobody seems to know or
remember what happened before 2006 in the way of an end of year concert or anything similar.

Walking into the school, everybody slowly flocks towards the large school hall. Students run around madly searching for teachers, other students, bits and pieces of costumes to change into, while family and friends queue calmly, paying their gold coin donation as they enter the hall, then find a seat. It is a hot summer night and the principal, Mr Grant, moves around the hall in his ever lurking manner, opening windows on the left hand side and roller doors on the right side, letting through a slight sea breeze that does little to relieve the increasing stuffiness as the hall steadily fills with audience members.

At last, it is time for the evening to officially begin. The lights go out. The six school captains and vice captains assemble on the stage under the spotlight, one asking for the audience’s attention through the microphone. The hall quietens, but whispered voices can still be heard throughout, both of children and adults. The captain at the microphone welcomes us to Farefield State School’s Gala Evening, informing us of the huge amount of effort that both staff and students have contributed towards making this night spectacular for all.

Although the introduction to the evening introduces it as the culmination of work in music, dance, drama, and visual art, no visual art can be seen in the hall, or at any time is it a part of any of the performances. The Gala Evening is really a performing arts showcase. Visual art does not seem to play a part in this night, despite the fact that every class within the school has participated in visual art education this year.

Another captain, speaking with a discernible lisp, introduces the first performance of the night – the Combined (junior and senior) Concert Band, performing ‘Tequila’, ‘Flight of the Banshee’, and ‘Sunset on the Sahara’. Next, after an introduction by another of the school captains, there is a solo performance by the Farefield’s Got Talent junior winner, Karl.
Farefield’s Got Talent is a competition held within the school, where students compete against each other in some sort of musical, dance, or dramatic performance.

Karl seems tiny, standing on his own, centre stage, spotlight on him. The music starts and Karl begins to sing in a small, sweet, clear voice *Now and then I think of when we were together...* He’s singing Gotye’s “Somebody that I Used to Know” *Like when you said you felt so happy you could die...* It seems such a paradoxical song choice for such a small, innocent child to be singing, yet it shows off his vocal talent exquisitely.

While Karl sings in front of the closed curtain, the Crescendo Strings group set up behind it. After their introduction, the Crescendo Strings perform “Lazy Cowboy”, “Evening Calm”, and “Rhythm Fever”. Next comes the first of four Drama Moments of the evening, a monologue entitled “First Love”, performed by a year 7 boy.

Next up, a junior group, Movers and Groovers, dance around the stage to “I like how it feels”. This is juxtaposed interestingly with the next performance, a Cabaret Dance by two year 7 girls with dance experience from outside of school, their dance choreographed by Farefield State School’s dance teacher, Cindy.

A solo performance by Farefield’s Got Talent senior winner, Benny, is up next, accompanied on piano by the school’s chaplain, Anthony. Benny is visibly nervous, constantly fiddling with his shirt, as he sings The Beatles’ “Let it Be”. Prep-2 students in the Farefield Singers follow this, singing “How Much is That Doggie in the Window”, and “Three Little Fishes”. Anthony accompanies them on piano also. As they get out of time, he adjusts his playing to match up with their singing… and they get more out of time and… it is a very cute, and very interesting, performance.

The ANZAC Dance Troupe, a group formed to present a dance at this year’s school ANZAC ceremony, perform a slow dance to “You Raise Me Up”. Then, an explanation for the farmer
outfits! The Junior Dance Troupe perform to “Cotton-Eye Joe”. Next, the Vocal Group, conducted by the school’s music teacher, Megan, sing “Shake it up”, “Bridge of Light”, and “Chim Chim Cheree”. I find it odd that they stand so still during this performance, especially during the last song. It just feels like it is lacking life, without some of Dick Van Dyke’s signature moves!

Another Drama Moment – “Tidy My Room”, displays the talent of a year 7 girl as her character agonises over why her mother can’t understand her organised chaos. The Combined Strings Group perform “Power Rock” and “Ping Pong”, followed by the Vivace Strings Group’s “William Tell” and “Limbo Rock”. The third Drama Moment, “Pippi and the Officer”, involves a senior girl and boy. There is then a performance entitled “Chrono Cross” by year 7 Girls Contemporary Dance. The last Drama Moment of the evening is a duologue involving two senior girls, “Alice & Queen of Hearts”.

The year 3/4 Dance and Drama group perform an excerpt from Annie, “Hard Knock Life”. The Singing Sisters, a group of seven year 7 girls, sing “Who Says” and “One Thing”. Then a Boys Hip Hop Group give a performance to “Skrillex Bangarang”, followed by The Beat Brothers, an all-boy singing group, singing “I Won’t Let You Go”, accompanied again by their chaplain, Anthony.

The finale of the night is the J Rock Performance, “Communities Making a Difference”. This performance was inspired by the recent Queensland floods, “In our busy lives we are often unaware of the people around us. But when times are tough, when tragedy strikes and you feel that you are all alone, it’s then that the people around you and the strength of your community shines through.” Farefield State School’s J Rock performance won first prize in their J Rock category. With impressive costumes and props, they give yet another well-rehearsed rendition.
5.3 Personal

The culture of the community, the school, and the classroom help to form, and are formed by, the social interactions that take place. These social interactions cannot easily be separated from the personal impacts that result from and/or contribute to formation of these social interactions.

The personal domain manifests in terms of life lessons, confidence, and enjoyment. In terms of life lessons, “It is not about how good you are, it is about how you improve,” emphasises the dance teacher, Cindy. “You don’t have to be the best dancer, you have to try … It is okay for it not to work when you give it a go.” Belonging to the prep-4 theatre group offers life lessons to students as they are required to commit to it being their chosen “Friday afternoon activity” for the entire year, “as opposed to origami, or, whatever else there is on offer” (Karen, 3/4 theatre group teacher), which can be selected per term.

Rachel talks about life lessons related to visual art. “The crumpling up of the artwork, some of them stood there and said ‘I don’t know how to crumple it’. Because they actually had to screw it up, and that was quite funny, and so, trying to get them to ruin their artwork, to be able to get to the next step, that was enlightening for them … [Participation in visual art] gives those that are not academic a chance to excel … if it’s not their forte to write maths and English, but they might be really talented in the art. And it’s only through … trying the different things that they see what they like, different mediums … they might not be good at drawing, but they might be awesome at sculptures, with clay work.”

Building students’ confidence through dance activities, Cindy selects three students to lead warm-ups. The teacher stands at the back, and these three watch her for directions on what to do. These students are enabled to become “leaders” while supported strongly by their teacher.
“In this school,” Karen tells me, “when they come out of grade 7, we are sending on well-rounded, well-experienced, confident kids, because right from prep, they’ve had an opportunity to stand on the stage, and perform, and they haven’t had to do that in a threatening environment where there’s … stand one kid on a stage and get them to sing a song … they perform as a group … and they’re given opportunities to extend that if they want to … So, I think, you know, confidence, is a huge one, and the idea that you … get out and give it a go.”

Enjoyment is another element of the personal domain. I observe the year 4 class file sedately onto the stage for their drama lesson, having just been reprimanded for the noise they were making, and warned that there would be no time for “the fun stuff” if they waste time. Clearly the drama session is seen (by the drama teacher at least) as “serious business”. Karen speaks of the enjoyment her class find in dance, particularly the boys – “my class have just gone down now, and it was the boys who said ‘yessss, we’re doing dance, we’re doing hip-hop’”. When Rachel speaks with me about her visual art classes, her language is full of references to her students’ enjoyment: “they liked it so much”; “that’s how much they enjoyed it”; “they especially enjoy this bit”; “having fun with the kids”; “the kids are loving it”; “the enjoyment”. “I think the main thing was the year 7 boys going home and doing art at home, is the pièce de résistance for a teacher. They actually like what you’re doing and then go and do it themselves,” she tells me.

Also related to the personal domain, Karen tells me a story close to her heart. “I’ve got three children, and I know that through music, my son found his education path … Was not an engaged learner in the classroom, found everything very difficult, found out he had an absolute flare for music, and once he started playing music, his whole demeanour in the classroom changed, and he’s now at uni. I strongly believe he would not be a university student, had he not discovered music. It’s … you know, I don’t think I would be doing what
I’m doing if I hadn’t discovered dance and drama … Before my experience with [my son], I would never have connected strongly music and thought processes, and mathematical thinking, but it seemed to click something for him.”

5.4 Educational

The culture of the community, the school, and the classroom help to form, and are formed by, the social interactions that take place. These social interactions cannot easily be separated from the personal impacts that result from and/or contribute to formation of these social interactions. The way that the education in this setting takes place is highly dependent on the individuals involved (personal), the social dynamics of their interactions, and the classroom, school, and wider community culture that this produces and exists within.

Integration with other subject areas occurred within the “specialist” arts classes that I observed. In visual art, there was a class discussion of history related facts, including the original Olympics, date lines (AD/BC), and the reason no clothes were worn (muscular bodies are what was found attractive in those days, as it gives definition of the muscles). In another visual art lesson with younger students, number concepts are brought in: “If we have one triangle and we add two more, how many triangles will we have?” In dance, Cindy plays a song, asking students to clap the rhythm, integrating with music concepts.

The pedagogical approach of each of the arts “specialists” varied, with some similarities across artforms. In dance, students have multiple opportunities to practise each small part, then the next part is added on, then the next. Then they try it to music. Then repeat, learning the next lot of moves. I notice that Cindy points out what not to do at least as often, if not more often, than what to do. She is very focused on the goals she has in mind. Demonstrating and explaining to students how to do a lift/jump, Cindy asks students why it is important to bend their knees. One student responds “to get more lift and acceleration?” Cindy impatiently
responds “Yes, ok, but what about for safety?” The drama classes had a more relaxed feel, their teacher more open to student questions, responses, and ideas. In some drama learning experiences the teacher would demonstrate an activity or concept, use students to help demonstrate, then provide students with an opportunity to have a turn. In other instances, instructions would be given throughout an activity, with no demonstration, leaving students more free to present their own ideas.

The teaching of visual art, music, dance, and drama in this school is primarily the responsibility of the “specialists” employed for this purpose. In the case of both the music and visual art teacher, these “specialists” are actually generalist primary school teachers who have agreed to take on the role of specialist. While the music teacher, Megan, does have some background in music, the visual art teacher has “an interest”, but no more than a lesson or two in her generalist teacher training that related to visual art – she is a generalist teacher teaching visual art, under the guise of “specialist”. Cindy, the dance teacher, has a strong background in dance education, but not at a primary school level.

The organisation of arts teaching and learning in this way is designed to ensure that every student has an opportunity to engage with each of the artforms. An unfortunate consequence of this arrangement, however, is the strictly limited amount of time available to spend on each artform. This also poses difficulty for continuous and sequential education in each artform. Arts extension programs, however, do exist within the school for those identified as being “talented” in an artform.

5.5 Ethical

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. We have the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical).
The school culture is one of inclusivity. This ethical focus, aimed at making a personal (and to a lesser extent social) impact, is emphasised to me by practically every staff member I speak with in my time at this school. Students with special needs, from both this school and a neighbouring special needs school, are included in everyday activities, special interest/talent groups, and concerts. There are also a number of groups running within the school that encourage anyone with an interest to join – regardless of their aptitude in the particular area.

One component of this inclusive focus is the encouragement of boys participating in activities that might usually be seen as “for girls”, such as dance, singing, and theatre. Numerous opportunities are provided for students to develop skills, confidence, and to experience success and pursue an area of interest.

“[Visual art] gives those that are not academic a chance to excel. If it’s not their forte to write maths and English, but they might be really talented in the art. And it’s only through trying the different things that they see what they like, different mediums… they might not be good at drawing, but they might be awesome at sculptures, with clay work. He said he’s ok at drawing, he came to see me at break time, he’s extension art, but he said with clay he loves sculptures, and that’s his forte” (Rachel, Visual Art teacher).

“I had a grade 2 today, and I said to his teacher, if I’m his teacher next year I want him in extension art. His ability is just phenomenal, at such a young age. I think we’re not supposed to start the art extension until grade 4, but I think there’s one in grade 3, and he’ll be in grade 3 next year so I definitely want him in. He listens, he does, but he goes and does what he wants, he doesn’t follow exactly what you say” (Rachel, Visual Art teacher).

Various equity issues and how these are addressed also come under the ethical domain. “I think equality in arts is an opportunity for all. That doesn’t mean everybody’s going to be given the same opportunities as they progress, because the arts is … you know, you get …
the different levels, and higher skills and all of those factors. What I love about this school is that we … give opportunities for the more able, but we also have groups that … anyone can come and join in. So, we have a singing group called Mudgee Singers, there’s no audition process – you wanna sing, you come sing. And there’s a group called Movers and Groovers – you wanna dance, you come dance, doesn’t matter what standard you are, you come dance … and then, we also recognise … the skill level, and say let’s give these kids another opportunity to enhance those skills, and performance opportunities.” (Karen) Discussing her establishment of the year 3-4 theatre group, “there seemed to be a gap in years, in year 4, not really a lot for them to do, so I negotiated taking in the 3s and the 4s in this extra group … I’ll have to negotiate what happens for them next year. Not really sure how that’ll work next year.” (Karen)

“Some people don’t like wearing masks, it makes them feel weird,” says Justine during a drama lesson, acknowledging the differing needs of some students, “and that’s ok, if that’s you, you don’t have to wear one, you can just do the assessment at the end of the year without using the mask”.

Talking with me about displaying her students’ visual artworks for a display aimed at a parent audience, “I’m having a think about exactly what we’re going to do with them … as to the best way to display that artwork so it looks, in some cases better than it is.” (Rachel)

5.6 Negative Loss

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservant domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. We have the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical), and there will of course always be negative aspects of any situation that need to be considered (negative loss), as there is a flip side to every coin.
Negative loss refers to a negative outcome being experienced by one or more individuals. While use of technology can have something positive to offer, it can also precipitate negative loss, particularly when it fails to work. The visual art teacher, Rachel, attempted to show students a PowerPoint presentation of famous sculptures in the school’s computer lab. Due to issues with the technology (“The screen just kept going blank”), she gave up and journeyed with her students back to the art room to show it on her 17-inch computer monitor instead. Students crowd together on the floor and sitting on chairs or desks behind in order to see the screen.

Rachel comments to me that this particular class is known as one of the two “worst” (worst behaved) classes in the school. I know that when I was at school we all knew which were seen as the “best” and “worst” classes. I wonder whether this is the case for these students as well. I imagine that negative loss may be experienced due to knowledge of such a label, in terms of how these students perceive themselves, and how teachers perceive them. Could there be an impact on the culture of the class based on their knowledge of this label, or potentially due to the teachers’ ascribing it? Are they automatically treated differently to other classes based on this? If so, what are the educational implications?

Year 4 arrive at the visual art room accompanied by their teacher’s aide. It turns out that the adult who came to the door to speak with the teacher earlier had informed her that the fortnightly timetable had been swapped. This means that the remainder of the day’s classes had art last week as well. It also means that Rachel is not prepared for these classes, as she expected to teach others today. The life of the specialist teacher. At morning tea, Rachel rushes off to do some photocopying and get prepared for the last two classes of the day – year 1 followed by prep – that she didn’t realise until an hour ago she would be teaching today. After morning tea, the year 1 class arrive. As it turns out, this isn’t the class she had last week, but rather, the class that had visual art a fortnight ago, but which Rachel has not had
for art yet as she was involved in other teaching duties elsewhere in the school that day. Rachel’s face drops as it becomes apparent that she had wasted her entire morning tea.

In some cases, the presence of a researcher can contribute to negative loss for the teacher and potentially for students also. Before classes start on the day that I observe dance, Cindy informs me that she will “mix it up a bit”, for my benefit. She wants to show me the variety of dancing styles that students are taught in her classes. As the lessons proceed, she glances sideways at me every 5-10 minutes. She is very aware of my presence, and seems anxious to please. This was interestingly juxtaposed with an interview I conducted with another teacher that same day. “Some teachers feel uncomfortable when there are other adults in the room, and they’re ok with kids, whereas … a few who have a performance background, you don’t mind who’s in the room,” Karen told me.

The physical classroom environment can cause negative loss for teachers, and by extension for their students. The dance and drama classes being both held in the same hall caused particular issues the day I observed dance, as the dance teacher Cindy was unwell and struggling to be heard as she was losing her voice. The noise from the drama classes drowned out much of what she was saying to students throughout the lessons.

There are instances in which simply being in a particular class situation seems to cause negative loss for particular students, as is the case for Justin. Students asked to walk, he runs. Students asked to stand, he remains sitting. He then gets up and leaves the hall. The teacher follows, calling to other students to practise. After a few minutes he comes back inside. Students are instructed to find a partner, face each other and hold two hands. Justin and another boy are paired together, but Justin pushes the other smaller boy in the chest, pushing him away. The teacher comes to the front and checks with the teacher’s aide what would be best for Justin, then re-pairs each of the two boys with a girl. Later, Justin is again not
participating. The girl who is partnered with him tries to get it to work, to no avail. Justin is allowed to move to work with a pair of boys, and the girl starts crying. Both the teacher and teacher’s aide intervene, the teacher partnering herself with this girl. In a different class, a similar situation occurs, whereby one “difficult” student is disruptive throughout. In both cases it is apparent that the boys in question have genuine difficulty in following the dance moves, even in their moments of compliance. On Gala Night I witness a little girl, maybe 6 years old, dressed in a black leotard and pink tutu, hanging off her dad’s arm, trying with all her might to pull him down and make him stop. She is crying, saying she doesn’t want to go.

Negative loss may also result from a teacher’s response to his or her students. Demonstrating and explaining to students how to do a lift/jump, Cindy asks students why it is important to bend their knees. One student responds “to get more lift and acceleration?” Cindy impatiently responds “Yes, ok, but what about for safety?” Here Cindy completely disregards a very insightful answer, as it was not the one she was looking for.

A lack of clear instruction by the teacher can result in negative loss also. As the summative task of a lesson, a dance-off, begins, it is obvious that none of the students have any idea how this is supposed to go. They all come out into the middle at once, doing their thing, then retreat and look at each other as if to say “what now?” In a drama lesson, students are given one object to create with their four bodies. As each group holds their freeze frame, the teacher “turns it on”, and the group must demonstrate how their object “works”. Justine forgot to specify this first up though, so for several of the groups, their washing machine was non-functional. Better luck was had with the ceiling fans that came next, as the functionality was taken into account. Later, the class is divided in half, with 13 students in one group and 14 in the other. First they are to make a rollercoaster, then a racing car. One group work well together, discussing what they will do and negotiating different ideas. Despite clear instruction, the other group have some difficulty with this for other reasons. “I want to be the
wheel”, “We’ve already GOT five wheels”, “We can’t have five wheels!”, “Well I’M going to be a wheel.” By the end of this activity, several members of this group are crying, one has punched another, and they did not manage to create a “working” rollercoaster or racing car.

Physical requirements of particular tasks may cause discomfort for some students. “Some people don’t like wearing masks, it makes them feel weird,” says Justine, attempting to mitigate this, “and that’s ok, if that’s you, you don’t have to wear one, you can just do the assessment at the end of the year without using the mask.”

Time and funding were two of the key issues reported to me by teachers at Farefield State School that constrain arts education provision in primary schools. “Time is always your biggest … you’re always fighting for time.” (Karen) “The negatives [are] really the time … time and resources.” (Rachel) “Funding is always the huge one. I mean … the children made a contribution towards the costumes, but I made 38 costumes, for the kids to perform … we didn’t have the money to ask somebody else to do them.” (Karen) A lack of access to appropriate professional development opportunities was also mentioned, as was the culture in which the students are working – “The only negative would be from the art teacher, if the art teacher isn’t nice about the student’s work. Or if another student puts down…” (Rachel) “I know, in some schools … from people that I’ve spoken to who work in other schools … they still have that strong, you know, the boys don’t do this, the boys don’t do that.” (Karen)

5.7 Economic

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. There is the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical), and there will of course always be negative aspects of any situation that need to be
considered (negative loss), as there is a flip side to every coin. It is said that money makes the world go ’round, and arts education is no exception to this phenomenon (economic).

Budget allocation within Farefield State School has made possible the employment of four teachers for one day per week, one for each artform. This has happened, according to several teachers at this school, almost solely due to the fact that the school’s principal, Mr Grant, believes in the importance of arts education as part of the curriculum for all students.

When discussing factors that impact the practice of arts education in primary schools, “I forgot to add on the hindrance of funding,” Karen says, almost as an afterthought, “Funding is always the huge one. I mean … the children made a contribution towards the costumes [for the year 3/4 theatre group], but I made 38 costumes, for the kids to perform … we didn’t have the money to ask somebody else to do them.” “Do you get much community, like parent support, and things like that?” I ask. “We’ve got quite a good, supportive bunch of parents, on the whole, and through doing this this year, I’ve already had one parent come to me and say … if you do the group next year, would you like me to be the administration person? To do all the letters and do it all. YES!!” she exclaims, laughing, “and can you do that while sitting at a sewing machine?”

“The negatives [are] really the time … time and resources,” says Rachel. “But then you have to be creative. I’ve got no resources, and we’ve got no budget to spend. Or hardly any. I mean the shoe polish were only, I think, $3 and I got three of those, so $10, and I’ve got so much of it, it really goes a long way. So the whole class will easily get done for $10. So, you can do it.”
5.8 Innovation and Catalytic

Supplementing the foundational domains (culture; social; personal; and educational) are five subservient domains; those that naturally occur and are essential to forming the whole picture, but are evident only sporadically. There is the strive for a “fair go” for all (ethical), and there will of course always be negative aspects of any situation that need to be considered (negative loss), as there is a flip side to every coin. It is said that money makes the world go ’round, and arts education is no exception to this phenomenon (economic). There is always space for something new and different within and around the foundational domains. Sometimes this will mean an individual, or a group of individuals, teacher or student or both, trying something new (innovation). Other times change will come from change (catalytic), with something new or different being stimulus for further, perhaps even greater, change.

Innovation is about something new, or something different, and can often provide a catalyst for change. Karen tells me about the year 3/4 theatre group that she established: “there was a dance group for grades prep to 3, and then there was extension programs for the higher up the school, and last year we had a particularly excellent bunch of performing children, and there seemed to be a gap in years, in year 4, not really a lot for them to do, so I negotiated taking in the 3s and the 4s in this extra group.”

Innovation can also be evident in terms of encouraging a cultural shift. “There’s a great ethos in this school about boys performing,” shares Karen. “My class have just gone down now, and it was the boys who said “yessss, we’re doing dance, we’re doing hip-hop” – which they’re not, they’ve gone down and they’re doing some sport, because the teacher’s away – but yeah I think that’s great … we don’t have … I know in some schools … they still have that strong, you know, the boys don’t do this, the boys don’t do that, but I think we’ve got
that here, we’ve got great performing boys who’ve gone on to bigger and better things,” she
laughs.

5.9 Collage of Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School

Two portraits were presented of arts education in Australian primary schools. At Bungadeen
Primary School the arts are primarily the responsibility of the generalist classroom teachers,
with some of this responsibility taken by the travelling visual art teacher (a government
initiative). The principal of Farefield State School has arranged the school’s budget and
timetable such that the arts are the responsibility of four different “specialist” teachers; one
employed for visual art, one for music, one for dance, and one for drama. In the case of both
schools, the principals’ views were that since I am researching arts education, I must want to
see as much of the specialist arts classes as possible. This in fact made it difficult to have
acceptance for time observing generalist classes, particularly at Farefield State School. This
resulted in one portrait (Bungadeen Primary School) where the focus was on generalist and
visual art specialist classes, and one portrait with a focus on specialist arts classes (Farefield
State School). The size difference between the schools played a part in this also – with only
four generalist classes at Bungadeen Primary School it was possible for me to spend some
amount of time in each; however this would have been difficult in a school such as Farefield
State School with more than thirty classes.

Learning is diversified both within the generalist classrooms and the specialist classrooms.
The extent of this though, for the most part, is to make small adaptations to the activities,
language used to explain them, and expected outcomes, based on the grade level of the
students. There is a huge focus throughout Farefield State School on inclusivity – one could
be forgiven for thinking it part of the school motto.
There were instances in both schools of generalist teachers (one employed as visual art “specialist”) telling me about their personal and professional background and how the arts have been a part of their lives, revealing experiences they have had in the arts, then telling me “so no, I have no arts background”. Conducting this research put me in a position where I was actively looking for arts education in everyday school practices. In doing so, I found it, repeatedly, in every generalist classroom situation (as well as specialist arts classes), and in school situations outside the classrooms also. The teachers, however, often didn’t perceive arts education to be happening in their classrooms. I suspect that this may both have contributed to and been a result of the numerous situations I bore witness to in which what the arts have to offer was not capitalised upon.

Looking for indications of quality of the arts education taking place, I observed that, like Bungadeen Primary School, Farefield State School has permeable boundaries between the school and the community (Bamford’s (2006) indicators of quality “Partnerships” and “Permeable boundaries”; Seidel et al.’s (2009) “Community dynamics”; Pascoe et al.’s “Community support”), working with the nearby special needs school; end of year “gala night”; and the extension arts groups’ participation in local competitions and eisteddfods being examples of this. The gala night provides both community engagement and opportunity for students to practise for a real purpose and to perform for a real audience. Extension groups (Bamford’s (2006) “Flexibility” and “Inclusivity”) provide extra time for engaging with arts education. One other indicator of quality reported by Rachel is the snowballing effect of students teaching other students what they have done in visual art classes (Bamford’s (2006) “Inclusivity” and “Opportunities to showcase”). Many of these are inclusive and open to any student with an interest; however some do require an audition process. There is in fact a focus on inclusion throughout the school – an indicator of quality (Bamford, 2006). Provision of dedicated time and dedicated teachers for each artform is
suggestive of quality – however when we dig deeper, we realise that some of these 
“specialists” are not so. Quality does exist in patches here, however, with some of the teachers having quality knowledge of pedagogy, some having quality knowledge in the artform, and one I feel to have quality both quality knowledge of pedagogy and of the artform she is teaching (Seidel et al.’s (2009) “Pedagogy”; Pascoe et al.’s “Teacher issues”). Digging deeper still, we also realise the time each student actually spends engaging with each artform to be less than what could be considered quality (Bamford’s (2006) “Flexibility of school structures). “Quality would be, being able to take them from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. I don’t find this quality at the moment” (Rachel, visual art specialist).

Some teachers (such as Rachel) seem at ease with the students, while others seem to be quite stressed and barely holding things together. A strong contrast is seen between the learning environment fostered by two teachers in particular – in the visual art room, students’ ideas are listened to, and taken in good humour, while in the dance lessons their ideas are often stilted, responded to with exasperation and impatience (Seidel et al’s (2009) “Student learning”).

There are both indicators of quality and aspects less than quality, in terms of the physical environment in which arts education takes place at Farefield State School (Seidel et al’s (2009) “Environment”). Reasonably large, dedicated spaces are provided; however disadvantages were presented regarding dance and drama being taught in the same hall at the same time.

A trend seemed to emerge in the learning experiences I observed, suggestive of the idea that the amount of creativity displayed by students is strongly influenced by the amount of teacher direction given for the activity – the more direction given by the teacher, the less creativity displayed by the students, with less teacher direction leaving greater scope for creativity (Bamford’s (2006) “Artistic and creative approaches”). An adequate level of teacher direction
does seem to be needed in most cases, however, for students to have sufficient guidance as to what the overall task is they are to complete, and hence to be productive in doing so.

The teachers at Bungadeen Primary School share with me that they have a strong desire to use the arts more in their teaching, but there simply isn’t enough time, they are not a priority (you can do them at the end of the week or term or year if you have gotten through everything “important” [the three “R”s]), and that they will probably “fall flat on [their] face” if they try. The arts are seen as an extra, an add-on, not as an integral part of the curriculum. It is not the “serious business” of the classroom – it is the fun that we can have if there is time (and during the teacher’s designated release time when students go to the visual art specialists). At Farefield State School, the arts are seen as important – and that is why their school has employed specialists to teach them (i.e. the arts become “something the specialists do”).

Budget, time, and attitudes were seen to be the biggest potential inhibitors for arts education in primary schools. Even in the school that has time allocated specifically to each artform, for every class, the visual art teacher Rachel makes sure to point out to me that time is still an issue – this arrangement allows students to have only five lessons in each artform each year, and it is simply not possible to turn this into consistent and sequential learning in any of the artforms.

The two portraits presented here are of schools with very different demographics. Despite this, a number of key themes, as outlined above, were found in the data. Chapter 6 will provide discussion of the portraits, draw conclusions from the data, and present implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.
6 Findings, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This thesis began with a Prologue, where I positioned myself as the researcher in the research frame. I introduced this research in Chapter 1, and provided a rationale for the specific focus of this study. I then outlined the research aim and question, and provided an overview of subsequent chapters in this thesis. Chapter 2 provided a discussion and analysis of national and international literature on arts education, and of quality in education. Chapter 3 outlined the methodology and methods used in this research, including the paradigm and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapters 4 and 5 presented a portrait of Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School respectively, with focus on the arts education that occurs there. This chapter, Chapter 6, concludes this thesis, beginning with a summary of the thesis, followed by discussion around conclusions made, finishing with recommendations for practice, policy, and further research, and a brief epilogue written in portraiture style.

This aim of this study was to investigate quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms, with focus on two primary schools, each from a separate state of Australia (Queensland and Victoria).

The research question leading this investigation was:

What is the nature of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms?

In order to address this question, I collected data in the form of semi-structured interviews with teachers, and extensive field observations. This study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm, employing portraiture and case study methodology utilising crystallization. Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) was used to frame and organise data derived from the research question according to nine effect and impact domains (personal; social; cultural; educational; ethical; economic;
innovation; catalytic; negative loss). From this, applied thematic analysis was conducted and simultaneously portraits were constructed. The portraits of Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School were structured around the nine domains of the EITM, facilitating viewing of the portraits through nine different “frames”, or sides of a crystal.

The Collage of Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School presented in Chapter 5 outlines a number of common themes identified in the portraits of both schools. The finding of common themes occurred regardless of the vastly differing demographics of the two schools – one small, rural Victorian school; one large school in the Hinterland of Queensland’s Gold Coast.

6.1 Findings and Discussion

6.1.1 Addressing the research question

The question guiding this research was:

What is the nature of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms?

In order to address this question it is necessary to revisit two definitions provided in the glossary of this thesis:

- The nature of arts education refers to the inherent character and features of arts education.
- Quality arts education is encompassed by educational experiences of recognised value and worth. It is context-specific, with commonly held beacons of quality applicable to method, structure, and environment.

Two portraits have been presented in this thesis, painting a textual picture of the nature of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms in two particular schools. The nature of quality arts education has been shown to be diverse and complex. In some schools,
such as Farefield State School, the arts are taught by specialists; in other cases they are solely
the responsibility of generalist teachers (as with music, dance, and drama at Bungadeen
Primary School), and in others (such as with visual art at Bungadeen Primary School) the
responsibility for teaching the artform is shared between one or more specialist(s) and the
generalist classroom teachers. I found arts education to be happening in the everyday
practices of primary school generalist teachers at Bungadeen Primary School as well as in the
specialist visual art room, and in the specialist arts classrooms at Farefield State School.
The nature of quality arts education in these primary school classrooms was sporadic, with
small beacons of quality arts education appearing often in unexpected places and situations
(for example in the Italian classroom at Bungadeen Primary School). I present here the
inherent character and features of these beacons of quality arts education through the domains
of the EITM.

Beacons of quality arts education were apparent at times when the *culture* of the classroom
was one of safety and inclusivity. At these times, students were free and safe to experiment
and to take risks. The *social* situation was one of support, often a collegial working
environment, where students were respected and listened to by the teacher. Students felt
*personally* valued, and fun, enjoyment and happiness resound. The experiences had
*educational* value. The situation was *ethical* – students were given a “fair go”. *Negative loss*
was minimised, and addressed when it did occur. Teachers made the most of what they did
have access to, not allowing the constraints of *economic* priorities to prevent them from
delivering quality educational experiences to their students. *Innovation* and *catalytic*
experiences abounded as students displayed imagination and creativity.

Prasser and Tracey (2013) advise that quality is difficult to define and open to different
interpretations, and hence that quality needs to be defined broadly. Based on the findings of
this thesis, I propose that the nature of quality arts education need also be defined broadly.
There is no simple answer to the question *what is the nature of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms?* Rather, this thesis raises more questions than it provides answers. The portraits of Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School are like photo albums documenting the nature of arts education in Australian primary school classrooms, with snapshots of the nature of quality arts education scattered throughout. The research presented in this thesis makes a contribution to the gap in the literature de Vries (2014) identifies by presenting quality-focused descriptions of arts education in Australian primary school classrooms. Moreover, it provides impetus for further research in this area, as will be expanded on in section 6.3.3. Section 6.1.3 goes further in addressing the research question.

### 6.1.2 A tool for research in primary school classrooms

The Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) was utilised by Bamford and Glinkowski (2010) in their report on the impact of music learning experiences in the United Kingdom falling under the *Wider Opportunities Program*. The EITM was used as a scaffold to organise the analysis of data and report the impact on students, teachers, schools, and wider systems involved in the *Wider Opportunities Program*. The EITM was developed by Bamford (2006) based on factors that have been identified through international research in arts education to be consistently associated with high level impact.

This study made use of an adapted version of Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) EITM as a scaffold to inform instrument development, data collection, and subsequent data organisation of completed portraits of quality arts education. The use of the EITM in this study was found to be highly beneficial as a way to structure data collection, analysis, and presentation. The interrelatedness of the nine domains (see section 3.3) adds to the authenticity of this scaffold, as the data organically flows within and between domains. The nine domains of the EITM...
were found to be representative of the facets of interest in researching arts education within primary school classrooms, further providing nine different lenses, or sides of a crystal, through which to view the data, encouraging the viewing of multiple perspectives and hence a comprehensive analysis and representation of the data.

Alter (2007) reported on a study of visual art education in primary school classrooms, in which teachers believed that they created quality learning environments but were unable to articulate how they were doing so, or how they knew that this was occurring. In the portraits presented in this thesis, self-report of teachers suggested that little or no arts education was happening in the primary school classrooms at these schools, with nothing of quality; however my observations showed otherwise. I propose that in situations such as these, the nine domains of the Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix could be used as a scaffold, a tool for use by teachers and researchers alike to identify in a more tangible way the quality arts education that is occurring in their classrooms. Such identification of what is already occurring would provide an informed foundation from which to build upon in efforts to improve the quality of arts education in these primary school classrooms.

6.1.3 Tunnel vision

In addressing the question of the nature of quality arts education in Australian primary school classrooms, I outline my perspective on this. In line with the theory of crystallization, each of us brings a different lense, or in some cases multiple lenses, to our viewing of the world. Through my lens as a researcher investigating arts education in primary school classrooms, entering the field with the assumption that quality arts education is there to be found, I identified copious instances of arts education happening in the everyday practices within the two primary schools that I visited. Within these practices, I identified small beacons of quality, shining out like bright lights of hope, signalling the possibilities for quality arts
education to be happening in not just these, but also other, primary school settings. By identifying such possibilities, knowing that there are beacons of quality arts education in our primary schools, we have a starting place, a place from which we can work to further identify and analyse what works and what doesn’t, and to capitalise upon what does work.

While through my lens I identified arts education to be occurring, what was being revealed to me by the teachers in these schools was a different perspective on the same situation. It seems that from these teachers’ viewpoints, they were doing very little, if anything, in the way of arts education in their everyday practices, and certainly nothing of quality. Likewise, when asked about their personal backgrounds in the arts, these teachers would tell me about their love of music, going to dance classes, visiting art galleries – then punctuate their tales with “so no, [I have] no arts background”.

Perhaps herein lies the inherent disjuncture – perhaps what these teachers are actually expressing is their perceptions, their feelings that what they have to offer is not of quality. These teachers are familiar with what artforms arts education encompasses – they no doubt know the curriculum, even if only broadly speaking (at a minimum). I find it surprising that in the space of five minutes someone could tell me about their dance lessons, then that they have no arts background; or that they don’t know much about the arts, then proceed to tell me of their love and appreciation for music, visual art, and “recycled” artworks. Perhaps what these teachers are actually trying to tell me is that, in their mind’s eye, their backgrounds in the arts – rather than being non-existent – are merely perceived as insufficient. This has strong links to the literature reporting on teachers’ lack of confidence in teaching the arts (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Ewing, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Pascoe et al., 2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002, 2009a; R. Wiggins & J. Wiggins, 2008; Wright, 1999), this being linked at least in part to their backgrounds in the relevant artform (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009b; D. Davis, 2008; Duncum, 1999; Herbst, 2007; Pascoe et al.,
2005; Russell-Bowie, 1993, 2002). If this is the case, it follows, then, that when these teachers tell me that little or no arts education happens in their classrooms, they may actually be expressing their views that the ways in which the arts take place within their classrooms is not what they would consider quality arts education (as opposed to there being literally no arts education happening at all). Further research is needed to determine the extent to which this notion may be accurate.

One thing is clear however – the teachers in this study do not feel that the arts education they provide for their students is satisfactory. This is the general feeling also with the specialist arts teachers, with the specialist visual art teacher summing up that she did not believe the visual art education she provided to be quality, primarily due to time constraints. A study on drama education in primary school classrooms (Anderson, 2003) reported similar findings, with one particular teacher feeling well supported by her school however disheartened by lack of appropriate space, funding, and resources available for her teaching of drama, and lack of support from the education system. She too did not feel the arts (in this case drama) education she provided to be of quality.

An excerpt from an article by La Jevic (2013) struck a chord with me:

I observed a lesson where second-grade students learned how to make decorative snowflakes by following sequential steps. They folded white paper, cut with scissors to make snowflakes, glued the snowflakes onto 9 x 12 blue, purple, or black construction paper, and hung them on their hallway lockers. After the lesson, I realized that the teacher never discussed symmetry, a topic they were studying in math, nor was there was a link to science (e.g., an exploration of the chemistry of water and formation of crystals into unique shapes). The lesson seemed separate from any academic learning. How had this seemingly obvious connection been overlooked?
Is it that teachers are trained to see the academic subjects as disconnected areas, and/or did the teacher just want to quickly create some wintry decorations for the wall? (La Jevic, 2013, p. 9)

In my time at Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School I witnessed numerous instances where, through my lens, I could see ideal opportunities for integration that were not taken. In a painfully slow game of celebrity heads in year 3/4, there was no mention of character profiles or other drama-related character building strategies, for example. In year 5/6 projects involving creation of dioramas and students giving presentations while dressed as the historical character they had researched, there was no mention let alone teaching of dramatic or visual art techniques. In a specialist dance class, when a student suggests that bending knees before lifting someone is done to gain acceleration, this is rejected as an inappropriate answer, rather than used as an opportunity to discuss the physics for a better understanding of safe movements. Like La Jevic (2013), I question why? My suspicions are that it is a combination of teachers not having deep knowledge and understanding of the arts, arts processes, and integration possibilities; and additionally, not looking for such things, focusing on the product in some circumstances, and solely on the main subject area being taught (to the exclusion of all others) in other circumstances. In his study of drama education in Norwegian primary schools, Saebo (2009) found that predominantly superficial learning experiences occurred in instances where the teacher lacked the knowledge and understanding necessary to structure teaching and learning in such a way as to foster particular creative processes. I wonder whether this could be reflected in the findings of my thesis also.

It is made clear that these teachers, whether they like to or not, are teaching to the test, rather than for the test of life. With school status and funding directly related to National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test results, and pressure from all
sides to focus solely on literacy and numeracy, it is any wonder? It quickly becomes difficult to put a value on that which NAPLAN does not measure.

Literacy and numeracy are the clear focus of many primary schools, yet when these same primary schools want to “show off” to the school community, other schools, or future parents and students, they do so through their displays of visual art, school performing arts concerts and events, arts based performances at assemblies, and photographs of such artefacts on the school’s website and in promotional materials. This surely says something about the arts – they hold some intrinsic value that we instinctively feel, yet do not always acknowledge. This may contribute to our product-focused arts education also – teachers and schools want a product to display, while simultaneously finding difficulty in assessing the arts processes. Is it possible that this focus on product, at least in part driven by principals, contributes to teachers’ dissatisfaction with the arts education taking place in their schools? De Vries (2014) offers a good practice exemplar in this area, where the process of music education in the primary school reported on was valued as much if not more than product, with products that are produced (such as school concert performances) being authentically developed through valuable learning processes. Although arts education in the primary school classrooms at Bungadeen Primary School and Farefield State School is predominantly product-focused, it can be seen throughout the portraits of both schools that process is valued by many of the teachers, with the beacons of quality arts education occurring in these primary school classrooms providing a good foundation from which a more healthy balance of focus on process and product may be formed.
6.2 Conclusions

Arts education was found to be occurring in all classrooms observed throughout this research project. Applying the necessarily broad definition of “quality arts education” used throughout this thesis, it can be said that quality arts education was found to be occurring throughout both of the schools involved in this research, albeit sporadically at times. The nature of quality arts education has been shown to be diverse and complex, and highly contextually dependent.

The use of an adapted version of Bamford and Glinkowski’s (2010) Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix (EITM) was found to be highly beneficial throughout this study. As such, the EITM could be used as a scaffold to tangibly identify the quality arts education that is occurring in primary school classrooms. This will be explored further in the recommendations below.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations

6.3.1 Implications and recommendations for practice

The arts should be seen as a part of generalist practice within the primary school. While dedicated “specialist” teachers for the arts, and time dedicated to it in this way, can in some circumstances be positive, this is not automatically the case. In the schools involved in this study, several of the so-called specialist arts teachers had in fact little or no training in the relevant artform – one without even an interest in the artform she was now in a role as specialist for! The time dedicated to the arts in these circumstances was also extremely scarce, and furthermore contributed to less arts happening in the generalist classrooms, as the responsibility for arts education fell solely on the shoulders of the specialists. This further
perpetuates views of the arts as an “other”, something that students do away from their regular classroom learning environment, while their generalist teacher gets a “break”.

In preparing generalist teachers for the teaching of arts education, further professional development is needed in this area, both preservice and inservice. We need to build teachers’ knowledge and confidence in the arts, along with their pedagogical knowledge specific to each arts discipline, in order for them to feel more capable and willing to teach the arts in their classrooms. Increasing generalist teachers’ awareness of what the arts have to offer to education in their classrooms should be a part of this also.

In recognising what the arts have to offer, we should not lose sight of the need to educate the whole child. The goal of our education system should be to prepare a child for life, rather than teaching a student to national tests. We should recognise how best to educate each individual child (including consideration of what the arts have to offer), and that maximising the educational opportunities of each child will, in turn, improve test scores by and by. The journey is more important than the destination, and students need a quality educational journey.

We should consider the recent push for creativity in the job market, which is rapidly filtering down into a push for the development of creative capacities in our students. While not the only methods of developing creativity, the arts are one natural way to address this.

In beginning to bring more arts education into the classrooms, we should begin by identifying the quality arts education that already is happening. The Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix can be used to guide this process. Team teaching, or having colleagues observe and offer feedback on the arts education that they see in our classrooms, can be a further point of orientation.
6.3.2 Implications and recommendations for policy

Educational theory resounds with recommendations against pen and paper testing as the measure of a student’s abilities, as many students display their abilities better through other mediums, and certainly should not be judged on the basis of performance during one particular hour of their lives. Short of eliminating national testing, a number of changes should be made. If such tests are to take place, then teachers should have access to as meaningful as possible results, as soon as possible afterwards. Currently, NAPLAN results are not released to teachers until many months later, making them relatively useless for teachers’ planning for the students. Most importantly, structures surrounding national testing must change to deflect focus from achievement on these tests. School administrators and teachers should not have the learning in their classrooms dictated solely by national tests, fearing funding cuts. This results in a narrow curriculum focus, schools “cheating” the system, and essentially, nothing positive.

More than just a shift in focus from NAPLAN is needed. Arts education must be seen as a priority in policy documents in order for it to become a priority in our schools. Teachers look to principals, and principals to higher administrators and policies. Policy makers should take more seriously the role that the arts can play in achieving their objectives, in ways more congenial to a natural learning environment for teachers and students alike.

Professional development in arts education should be strongly recommended, if not mandated, particularly for teachers who self identify with feelings of inadequacy for teaching the arts. This would assist principals to see greater value in funding professional development in the arts, rather than permitting teachers to attend professional development sessions in literacy and numeracy only.
6.3.3 Implications and recommendations for further research

Further observations are needed of quality arts education in primary schools classrooms, both within Australia and overseas. Ideally, more time is needed in each school observed, and a larger number and variety of schools involved. Observations of this nature are crucial in order to continue to go beyond teacher self-report, especially given the findings of this study indicating the disjuncture between the arts education teachers’ report taking place in their primary school classrooms, and that which can be witnessed when arts education is purposefully sought out by an independent observer.

More interviews are needed also, bringing in the voices and perspectives of a larger number of individuals. Interviews with students and parents, and the wider school community, would be beneficial as well. This would allow for the presentation of a wider range of perspectives, and a more complete picture to be presented of how key stakeholders view the arts education happening in our schools. Questions should also be included on what is seen as “arts education” by students, teachers, and members of the wider school community.

Research is needed that is focused on how NAPLAN has impacted arts education, and how arts education impacts NAPLAN. School curriculum plans and individual teachers’ teaching programs should be collected, pre- and post-NAPLAN, and analysed to determine any difference in the amount of arts education featured there. Investigation and comparisons of the arts education happening in schools with “low” and “high” NAPLAN results should be made also.

The contradiction of the arts being used to promote a school, and at the same time given lowest priority in the curriculum, is an area warranting investigation. Such research could focus on teachers’ and principals’ views; on whether this has any influence on parents’ and students’ school choice; and on potential reasons for this being the case.
Further application is needed of the Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix as a data collection tool in research of quality arts education in primary school classrooms. Additionally, research should be conducted into the application of this tool in broader areas of research. As one avenue of this, research is needed into the possible application of the Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix as a scaffold for teachers to use to identify the arts education that is already inherent in their daily school and classroom activities. Practitioner researchers would be ideal for such a project.

Future research should focus on quality in education, both in the arts and more broadly. Resisting the urge to take a deficit approach, beginning with the presumption of quality instead, allows for identification of beacons of quality that can be used as catalysts for future quality practices.

School principals and teachers should be encouraged to regularly engage with written research publications. Researchers should consider publishing their findings and recommendations in formats easy to read and to access such as open access journals, books/e-books, teacher magazines, as well as via blogs and other social media platforms. Methodologies such as portraiture and narrative inquiry can assist with this. We need to work to get our research findings out there into the field, making a difference, as soon as possible.

6.4 Epilogue

As I come to the close of my doctoral journey, my supervisor shares with me that it is okay to finish with more questions than you have answers. So it is with some questions, speculations, and a few suggestions, that I conclude this thesis.

I began my research journey as a generalist trained primary school teacher with an interest in, but little knowledge of, arts education in primary school classrooms. I felt its importance, but was unsure how that fit within the broader scope of the curriculum, or for that matter, my
own philosophy of education and teaching. As I read more, thought more, and was immersed in more arts education (as researcher), I learnt more, and deepened my belief in the value of quality arts education provision for all primary school students.

I am left with a number of questions, however, that have arisen from this research and my reading accompanying it. What do students, parents, and teachers see as “the arts”? What are students’ and parents’ views on the arts education that takes place in their / their child’s school? Are students better able to identify the arts that are happening than their teachers are? Why do primary schools promote themselves through the arts, the very area of the curriculum to which they attribute the lowest priority? Has NAPLAN testing influenced the amount and quality of arts education in our primary schools, and if so, how?

In the current education climate, teachers are encouraged to practise tunnel vision, with improvement in literacy and numeracy testing and standards being the light at the end of the tunnel – the light that we can get closer to but never quite reach. Arts education happens on the periphery, existing but barely noticed, for the most part ignored. We need to allow the beacons of quality arts education to shine brightly, to illuminate the periphery of these teachers’ visions, to bring about a broader view of educational practice. As the beacons of quality arts education shine brightly and begin to dissolve the tunnel, they draw focus away from the light at the end (national testing), allowing for more holistic and authentic learning experiences that inadvertently act as guiding beacons towards improved educational outcomes in literacy and numeracy, while preparing confident, creative, critical thinking, lifelong learners – individuals who are prepared for life.

Let us begin by paying attention to what is currently on the periphery. Let’s start to eliminate some of our blind spots, through using different lenses. The nine domains of the Effect and Impact Tracking Matrix can form a starting point, a scaffold that can be used to begin to
identify the arts education that is happening in primary school contexts, bringing into focus some of what is currently in our peripheral vision. This is only a starting point however. Further research is needed to identify beacons of quality arts education in primary school classrooms that can form a toolset to be used by others embarking on this journey. Greater advocacy for the benefits of the arts in education is needed in order for teachers and school systems to feel more confident that they can bring focus to improving arts education without this being to the detriment of literacy and numeracy outcomes – when in fact quite the opposite is the case. Above all, those who believe in the benefits of arts education in primary school classrooms must not give up. We must continue to spread the word, through research publications, through our school communities, through talking with our friends, families, students, and colleagues, and perhaps most importantly, through practising what we preach.

*Be the change you want to see in the world.*

- Gandhi
Appendix 1: Teacher Interview Schedule

1. How have the arts been a part of your life? (From childhood through until now)

2. What does the phrase “quality arts education” mean to you?

3. What do you believe are some factors that:
   a. promote/encourage/support quality arts education happening in primary schools
   b. hinder/discourage quality arts education in primary schools

4. In what ways do you believe quality arts education has an impact on those involved? (Teachers as well as students, possibly family/community members)
### Appendix 2: Excerpt from Code Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Caa</th>
<th>NZ</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Arts as Facilitator</th>
<th>Work Talk</th>
<th>ABW</th>
<th>Creat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aptiori - 9/3/13</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves the development of something new. This could be students' creative thinking, innovative pedagogical techniques, processes, or products, or the instigation of new conversations around a topic.</td>
<td>Catalytic Impact</td>
<td>Negative Loss Impact</td>
<td>Anything related to the arts</td>
<td>Arts as Facilitator</td>
<td>Work talks while working, primarily about their work</td>
<td>Arts as Busy Work</td>
<td>Creativity as encouraged and fostered, usually by the teacher</td>
<td>14/3/13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Ethics Approval

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

10-Oct-2011

Dear Ms Power

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the conditional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "Portraits of Quality" (GU Ref No: EDN/87/11/HREC).

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

Chris Rose'Meyer
Policy Officer, Research Ethics and Governance
Office for Research
G39 3.56 Gold Coast Campus
Griffith University
ph: +61 (0)7 5552 7227
fax: +61 (0)7 5552 9058
email: c.rosemeyer@griffith.edu.au
web:

Cc:

At this time all researchers are reminded that the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research provides guidance to researchers in areas such as conflict of interest, authorship, storage of data, & the training of research students.

You can find further information, resources and a link to the University's Code by visiting

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