Abstract
This paper sets out Elliot Eisner’s qualitative methodologies as a basis for the design of innovative curriculum through the 'Hothouse Art Appreciation Project'. The main aim of the project is to explore teaching and learning strategies in the design of materials and activities around the experience of students’ encounter with art works. The project elucidates how different types of audiences received and processed ideas and meaning about a group of artworks. Although the project takes as its focus a specific group of images that are contemporary and traditional works of art that comprise the Hothouse exhibition, the project has application to the understanding of learning and teaching styles across the broader visual culture. As the theoretical underpinning of the design, this paper presents several significant aspects of the work of educational research by the educator and philosopher Elliot Eisner. Reflection on the philosophy of Elliot Eisner, as well as the adoption of his specific proposals as the basis for our curriculum design was integral to the initiation of the project.

The context and initial stages of the Hothouse Art Appreciation Project
In 2003, the project is conducted across three contexts: the museum of art, teacher education programs in primary and secondary art education at the tertiary level and in several metropolitan primary and secondary schools. The project has been initiated by Michele Stockley, Geraldine Burke and Julie Rosewarne Foster. Each of these art educators brings particular expertise to the project in the form of their current practice: Michele as Education Manager at the Monash University Museum of Art, Geraldine Burke as artist and lecturer in studio and art education at Monash University, and Julie Rosewarne Foster who lectures in art education in teacher education courses at Monash University. The project was conceived in an attempt to enhance and extend the influence and effect of each of our separate teaching, artistic and academic research realms. Specifically, we aim to develop curriculum and document innovative approaches to teaching and learning styles in the visual arts at levels that range from primary school children, secondary students and tertiary students undertaking teacher education courses at Monash University.

The project has several facets that derive directly from the educational propositions described in Eisner’s work (1979), (1991), (1994) and which stem from the experience of viewing and responding to the exhibition Hothouse: The Flower in Contemporary Art. This paper focuses on the influential work of Elliot Eisner. His writing that spans more than three decades, provided the necessary insight and methodological design to anchor the project and enhance the collaborative process that produced the project. The art work in the Hothouse exhibition was chosen as central to the project because of its scope and theme, which is the representation of the flower and still life in both contemporary and traditional styles of art.
Expressive meaning

‘The problem in hand may be approached by drawing a distinction between expression and statement. Science states meanings; art expresses them. Statement sets forth the conditions under which an experience of an art object or situation may be had. It is a good, that is effective, statement in the degree in which these conditions are stated in such a way that they can be used as directions by which one may arrive at the experience.
The poetic, as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one.’ (Dewey, 1934: 84, as cited by Eisner, 1991: 31)

In quoting Dewey, Eisner draws our attention to the fact that the meanings attained through the arts and sciences have their own special and distinct qualities. Eisner develops these ideas and demonstrates that for education to be truly meaningful, students must have opportunities to access different forms of representation and experience. Eisner states:

‘Since meaning in the context of representation is always mediated through some form of representation, each form of representation has a special contribution to make to human experience’ (Eisner, 1994: 19).

However, it is not sufficient in curriculum planning to merely allow access to the representation of meaning that others have created, no matter how diverse the forms of representation may be. It is vital that children and adolescents have opportunities to create their own meaning through representational activity. Art appreciation is an extremely personal activity. Initially, students tend to base their response to works largely on subjective reasons. Yet, it is possible to develop a more comprehensive basis for art criticism, that also takes into account the need to acknowledge students’ personal preference and individual association with the art work. The appreciation of art can expand students’ view of the world, and ultimately extend their understanding to a more objective stance generally in the creation of meaning in visual images.

One of the difficulties posed by the design of education programs in art appreciation is the specification of intended learning objectives planned for the child’s (or adult’s) encounter with art works. Laura Chapman suggests that:

‘We cannot teach children to appreciate art; we can teach them a critical process through which they can develop, test and refine their own artistic judgements’(Chapman, 1978: 88).

Chapman proposes that in teaching art appreciation, the presentation of narrow, simplistic or contrived views about art, or ‘ready-made judgements of merit’ about particular art works, pre-empt the child’s autonomous understanding of the aesthetic value of the art works. She says that:

‘If we value independent judgements, we should avoid these and similar value-laden claims. Instead we should nurture skills in perceiving the possible meanings of the
Chapman’s view reflects a process that values the relational and expressive qualities of the art work over formalist or historical contextualisation. While this process remains analytical, it elicits response primarily in terms of the viewer’s ideas, feelings and reactions. This response is difficult to plan in terms of learning outcomes because it is so individual.

Educational objectives
Elliot Eisner (1979) investigates the problems in prescribing behavioural or instructional objectives in arts teaching. He asserts that the expression of an individual response from each student is an essential aspect of arts learning, and that frameworks for viewing and assessing artworks, particularly those that set out the same learning outcomes for every student, largely deny the purpose of activities in the expressive arts (Eisner, 1979 : 103). In his critique of behavioural or instructional models, Eisner points out that teachers of the expressive arts may tend to stipulate objectives for student learning in overly concise or simplistic terms in attempting to specify learning outcomes around planned events in the arts curriculum. It is Eisner’s view that it is the role of the art educator to elicit an individual response from each student rather than to specify beforehand the response that all students should make:

‘Teachers face the real thing. Unlike units rolling off an assembly line, where standardized methods can yield utterly predictable results, teachers must make intellectual adaptations not only in methods but in ends as well. Furthermore, the construction of meaning is not something that teachers do and pass onto students, but something that students do for themselves. The shape these meanings take is idiosyncratic. The personal construction of meaning, is not an educational liability (except in a system obsessed with standardised outcomes) but one of education’s most prized virtues and absolutely essential for cultural viability’ (Eisner, 1994 : 9-10).

Eisner describes the notion of personal creation of meaning as vital to the education process. He asserts that the prescription of narrow ‘behavioural’ objectives in an anathema to this process. Eisner puts forward the view that it is far more important for teachers and educators to recognise ‘potentially fruitful encounters’, rather than to specify the outcomes that all students should demonstrate (Eisner, 1979 : 93-103).

Eisner’s notion of the ‘educational encounter’ with its emphasis on the provision of occasions for inquiry learning and experiential learning, appealed greatly to the initiators of the Hothouse Art Appreciation Project as a basic premise of each of our individual teaching styles. In reflecting on the way we approach art appreciation, the notion of provision of occasions for our students to encounter artworks was almost so basic and presupposed, that it tends to be lost in the scheme of curriculum planning. It was only through revisiting Eisner’s ideas that our understanding of the importance of stating this aspect of curriculum planning came to the fore. In particular, one of the important starting points for the project was to state the necessity to provide the opportunity for students at all levels to view and engage with original works of art, create meaning from these encounters and express that meaning through a variety of expressive means.
Expressive outcomes
In addition to the importance of providing educational encounters, Eisner names the term ‘expressive outcomes’ in the curriculum planning process. He explains his term in the following summary:

‘Outcomes are essentially what one ends up with, intended or not, after some form of engagement. Expressive outcomes are the consequences of curriculum activities that are intentionally planned to provide a fertile field for personal purposing and experience’ (Eisner, 1979: 103).

In this phrase Eisner distinguishes between expressive outcomes, those that are not planned - they are consequences of experience of the planned activities - and the planned series of events that are the basis for the construction of the curriculum. In other words, expressive outcomes are the unpredictable consequences of the students undertaking the planned activities. The ‘encountered curriculum’ is a combination of both of these aspects. Eisner’s further development of the notion of the encountered curriculum lent depth and validity to the project in the planning stages. The recognition by the project’s initiators that although it was possible to plan for significant experiences, the outcomes or consequences for individual students would be enormously varied, unless these outcomes were expressed in very broad or rather simplistic terms. Eisner goes on to explain the complexity involved in the formation and appraisal of the articulation of expressive outcomes. The appraisal of the value of educational encounters is patently a complex process, which employs a wide variety of criteria that may not be explicit, but which nevertheless function in our assessments:

‘The tack taken with respect to the generation of expressive outcomes is to create activities that are seminal; what one is seeking is to have students engage in activities that are sufficiently rich to allow for a wide, productive range of educationally valuable outcomes’ (Eisner, 1979: 104).

Eisner even suggests that teachers may legitimately plan activities that have no specific objectives, of either behavioural or expressive nature:

‘Yet surely there must be room in school for activities that promise to be fruitful, even though the teacher might not be able to say what specifically the students will learn or experience... curriculum planning and schooling in general need not always be single minded in their pursuits, forever focusing on objectives that are by definition always out of reach. Purposes need not precede activities; they can be formulated in the process of action itself’ (Eisner, 1979: 104).

In their text, A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the authors (Lorin Anderson, David Krathwohl, Peter Airasian and Kathleen Cruikshank et al) recognise the validity and importance of Eisner’s ideas in promoting higher level cognition, although his notion of the ‘educational encounter’ and the associated term ‘expressive outcomes’ is not taken up at length in their revision and application of Bloom’s work. The authors derive the following understanding from Eisner’s work and state:
Expressive outcome activities result in learning, but what students are expected to learn from participating in these activities cannot be stated in advance. Furthermore, what is learned will likely differ from one student to another. Note that expressive objectives may be more applicable to certain subject areas than others and to do more complex forms of cognition than less complex ones. They provide direction for learning but not a particular destination. To some extent, all objectives are expressive, in that not all students learn the same things from the same instruction even when the intended objective is the same. Ancillary learning is always going on. The current emphasis on performance assessment or authentic assessment encourages the use of assessment procedures that allow students to produce a variety of acceptable responses to the same assessment task or set of tasks. Although these newer forms of assessment do not quite mirror the nature of expressive objectives, they are clearly intended to do so’ (Anderson et al 2001 : 21).

Higher level cognition

The initiators of the Hothouse Project are interested in the association between the development of expressive outcomes and the expression of higher order thinking that may result. Eisner alludes to relationship repeatedly in his writing. For example, Eisner considers the educational contexts that may promote or inhibit conceptual acquisition:

‘Teachers cannot devote the necessary time to engage students in inductive methods of learning if the coverage of the curriculum or achievement of high scores on tests assessing low order thinking remains, for all practical purposes, paramount. I suppose the principle I am trying to articulate here is an aesthetic principle: works of art require attention to the wholes; configuration is central; everything matters’ (Eisner, 1994 : 10)

Eisner points out that the arts are less ‘rule governed’ than other areas of the curriculum. Although musical and artistic conventions suggest particular styles of expression, these are demonstrated in individual interpretations of those conventions, rather than adherence to particular ‘formally codified’ rules. Eisner gives the example of children working in the spelling and mathematics curriculum who expect: ‘if they know the operations required, produce the same responses that, without ambiguity, can be judged correct or incorrect’. Whereas, children working in the arts can rarely be expected to produce identical responses, for example, in painting or musical composition (Eisner, 1994 : 56). It is Eisner’s pertinent and interesting observation that it is more difficult to prescribe expressive learning outcomes that encourage higher order thinking. The restrictions of assessment and aspects of the school organisation may preclude curriculum design that involves ambiguity, diverse outcomes, individual expression and lengthy attention to specific ideas. Teachers consequently resort to the prescription of objectives that require children to operate in ways that do not encourage higher levels of cognition. Eisner explains this conundrum in the following scenario:

‘When students believe the text possesses a single correct meaning, it is not difficult to understand why they would regard their task as discovering the correct one, storing it in their memory bank, and being ready to retrieve it when called upon to do so. Being smart means being right, and being right means knowing the single correct literal
answer to questions that might be posed. Such an attitude toward understanding does little to promote intellectual values that celebrate multiple perspectives, judgement, risk taking, speculation, and interpretation. Visual images, music, dance, and other nonliteral forms can invite modes of thinking that reflect the foregoing values. When everything is specified, the need to interpret in diminished’(Eisner, 1994 : 71).

The Hothouse art Appreciation Project designers felt that there is inherent value in the thinking processes that some students exhibit in engaging in the arts. Hence, the emphasis in the project design is in providing opportunities for those processes to be practiced and refined. A further aim is to gain greater recognition for the importance of this type of conceptualisation in the school curriculum. Following Eisner’s ideas, we felt strongly that students generally should not be restricted to particular types of thinking that are the result of the prescription of narrow objectives. Conceptualisation occurs through a range of representational operations and students should not be limited to cognition in the representational systems of literacy and numeracy. Further, we wanted to secure a fuller picture of the conditions which produced imaginative and what Eisner identifies as ‘higher order thinking’, involved in the student’s response to the art works. The project initiators felt that we must deal what makes it possible to treat the project study experientially, as ideas are carried over into research action.

Positive characteristics of qualitative research
The project initiators still have many questions about subjectivity and the degree of objectivity associated with our qualitative inquiry and its consequent validity. The type of personal, expressive and metaphoric response that we are attempting to elucidate through our study is difficult to render as credible in some fields of study. The results that we aim to achieve are mediated at several levels in the project through personal preference and interpretation. Most emphasise the subjectivity of the viewer and their contextual or individual response to visual representation. How could we map these intellectual and emotive responses? How could our evaluation capture what is educationally significant in terms of the participants’ thinking? In attempting to frame our study, we relied on Eisner’s work. In particular, the project is structured around his notion of ‘educational criticism’ (1979). This research methodology has three aspects which are ‘descriptive, interpretative and evaluative’. Our project is based around these three significant dimensions of Eisner’s method.

In a further attempt to answer these methodological questions and focus on the essential questions of our project, we turned to Eisner’s later work that presents his formulation of ‘six features of qualitative study’ (1991). The six features may be summarised as the following:

- The study should be ‘field focused’. The project is conducted across three educational contexts including the art museum, the studio, the tertiary teacher courses and the school classroom. The project designers work together and separately in these contexts, and we exchange ideas and experience in these different fields.
- The second characteristic of qualitative study in Eisner’s scheme is that the research should relate to ‘the self as instrument’. He describes this characteristic as an ability to intuitively ‘see what counts’; it means ‘having a sense of the significant and possessing a framework that makes the search for the significant
The third aspect of a successful qualitative study is its ‘interpretive character’ Eisner describes this feature as being able ‘to account for’, to attribute meaning or ‘explain’ various observations (Eisner, 1991: 35). The notion of interpretation is central to our project across all contexts and at a number of levels.

The fourth feature that Eisner asserts is particularly important for educational research is the ‘use of expressive language’ and the ‘presence of the voice in the text’ (Eisner, 1991: 36). This is an important aspect of the project that involves the use of narrative theory, which features the authorial voice.

The fifth feature has the quality of ‘attention to particulars’, the ability to make ‘very fine grained distinctions’, ‘awareness to distinctiveness’, and ‘a sense of uniqueness of the case’ (Eisner, 1991: 38-9). This feature was familiar to all the researchers. Our separate backgrounds are all replete with art practice and fine art theory, and as such we felt that our senses were very finely tuned in this respect.

Lastly, Eisner contends that the study must have inherent credibility. ‘Qualitative research becomes believable because of its coherence, insight and instrumental utility’ (Eisner, 1991: 39). This last feature we built into the design as a crucial aspect of our project evaluation. Again we turned to Eisner’s ideas for a process that would ensure the validity of our work. A persistent problem in qualitative research, the verification of our methods and the interpretation of the variety of material sourced from the project was a vital consideration in the initial planning. Neither is this aspect complete; but we have built in a regular review process in order to attempt meet this criteria.

Validating the research
In order that our research project meets credible standards and validity, we relied on three processes in reviewing the evidence from our project. These processes are ongoing, and at this stage are incomplete. The verification process arises from Eisner’s (1991) writing on critical methodologies in educational research pertaining particularly to arts education. He asserts that there are three types of evidence that indicate credibility in research endeavours. They are ‘structural corroboration’, ‘consensual validation’ and ‘referential adequacy’ (Eisner, 1991: 110). In the initial stages of the project we attended to each of these aspects and wrote in strategic opportunities for their consideration in our overall research design, that may be briefly described in the following ways:

- The project draws upon several sets of data and brings these findings together into a relationship that either confirms or contradicts the particular interpretation of each aspect. In seeking structural corroboration we looked for ‘recurrent behaviours’ and ‘theme-like features’ in our findings (Eisner, 1991: 110).
- Consensual validation (Eisner, 1991: 112-3) is an important feature of our project and the interpretative and evaluation phases of the project will involve the contribution of invited ‘critical friends’, to this end. The project team intend to make every effort to have our work made public and open to the scrutiny of others in the field of educational research, through presentations and publications of our work at several stages of the project.
Summary

In an attempt to record, interpret, evaluate and expand upon the types of beneficial experience and higher order thinking that we believe children and older students experience in viewing and making artworks, the Hothouse Art Appreciation Project was initiated. The project is a collaborative undertaking that is conducted across several educational contexts. Although in its initial stages, the project is defined by its collaborative nature, the extent of its research into teaching and learning and styles of cognition and its unique design. The project brings together a particular group of artworks, the response of three distinct viewing audiences, the educational research and application of three arts educators working in separate domains and the theory and methodology of Elliot Eisner.

Specifically the project intends to define the particular attributes of the thinking and creative response involved in students’ encounter with artworks and the extent to which this varies or is similar in the three audiences for a selected group of artworks. The project centres around the interest in the specification of expressive and other learning outcomes that can be applied to students’ experiences involved in responding to artworks and the design of visual arts curriculum.

REFERENCES


