Exploring first-year preservice teachers’ confidence to teach art education in the classroom

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Abstract
There is a lack of confidence amongst generalist primary teachers to teach art (Green & Mitchell, 1998). Welch (1995) claimed that poorly designed tertiary art education programs may negatively affect the confidence of preservice teachers to teach art. Hence, this study employs a pretest-posttest survey \((n=160, n=148, \text{respectively})\) linked to suggested art activities in the NSW Creative Arts K-6 syllabus (2000), pretest-posttest questionnaire \((n=160, n=148, \text{respectively})\), interviews \((n=10)\) and researcher field notes to gather data to explore and describe the confidence of first-year preservice teachers as they engage in a tertiary art education unit. Survey results indicated an increase in these preservice teachers’ confidence to teach art on each of the 14 survey items, and the qualitative data suggested that previous experiences in art education and tertiary art education can influence their confidence to teach art. Indeed, “art anxiety” (see Metcalf & Smith-Shank, 2001) that was first detected in the beginning weeks seemed to diminish as the participants gained more experience in the art activities. It was concluded that university-based courses can positively influence the confidence of preservice teachers to teach art, which may be instrumental for implementing art education in primary schools.

The New South Wales (NSW) Education Act of 1990 states that art education must “be included in the key learning area of Creative and Performing Arts” (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 5). This has implications for generalist primary teachers if they lack the skills, knowledge and confidence to teach art in the primary classroom. Indeed, many preservice teachers enter the profession with little background and low confidence in art (Russell-Bowie, 2002). According to Green and Mitchell (1998) there is a long established lack of confidence amongst generalist primary teachers to teach art. Furthermore, Duncum (1999) notes that many generalist art teachers are of the view that if they cannot draw, then they cannot teach art. This lack of confidence, combined with the already overcrowded curriculum, has meant that many generalist primary teachers often omit art from the classroom timetable (Hudson & Hudson, 2000). It is therefore important that institutions facilitate teacher education programs to ensure the training presented to preservice teachers provide the skills, experiences and confidence to teach art.
The benefits of teaching art in the primary classroom are well documented (Duncum, 2001; Edwards, 1990; Eisner, 1991; Fiske, 1999; Hurwitz & Day, 2001). Art educators are committed to the importance of art learning and have worked to convince others to share their commitment (Erickson, 2002), particularly as art can provide a “fundamental lens” for understanding and interpreting the world in which we live (Hurwitz & Day, 2001, p. 28). Quality art programs can assist students to explore the culture of others, the natural environment, and the historic development of art through the ages (Koster, 2001). The teaching of art is a mandatory requirement of the NSW Creative Arts Syllabus (Board of Studies, 2000), and with the introduction of outcomes-based education it is essential teachers meet the specified art outcomes.

**Confidence to teach art**

Although there is evidence to suggest confidence to teach subject matter influences the teaching outcomes (Bandura, 1997), there is very little research that discusses how confidence influences the performance of teachers or preservice teachers’ ability to successfully teach art in the primary classroom. However, Efland (1995) notes teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about art and its’ value are likely to affect whether it is taught or not. There is some suggestion that previous art experience can influence the values and beliefs held by teachers. For example, Luehrman (2002) found that the previous experiences of Missouri principals in art education played a significant role in determining the principal’s attitude toward implementing art education. In most cases where the principals had positive personal experiences in art their attitudes were positive. Principals noted that the influence of the family, college art classes, visits to art museums and art teachers/colleagues were important educative art experiences. In some instances, where principals had experienced poor childhood art experiences, they claimed that it made them more determined to provide positive art experiences for their students. Indeed, it has been previously noted that attitudes toward art education are generally in a large part formed and shaped by experiences and that these attitudes, in turn, provide “motivation for behaviour” (Morris & Stuckhardt, 1977, cited in Leuhrman, 2002, p. 199).

A study by Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) revealed that “art anxiety” played a significant role in preservice teachers’ confidence to teach art. They revealed that “art anxiety” was common among preservice teachers and as a result the preservice teachers felt inadequately prepared to teach art. This study also noted that negativity towards art, experienced by the preservice teachers, was a result of their own experiences in schools and the teaching strategies employed by their art educators. “Art anxiety” began to diminish as these preservice teachers progressed through two tertiary art education courses. This study concluded that the teacher’s role is imperative in the creation of quality art education programs, claiming “how” art is taught is as important as “what” is taught (p. 50). Furthermore, Metcalf and Smith-Shank purported that tertiary art educators need to reflect on their own teaching practices and the effects they have on preservice teachers.
A further study by Welch (1995) claimed that poorly designed tertiary art education programs may negatively affect the confidence of preservice teachers to teach art. In her study, first and third-year preservice teachers, as well as practising teachers, completed a tertiary art education unit. As a result of the art unit, the participants’ perception of the importance of art education decreased. Welch noted that an instructional program that negatively affects the perceptions about the value of art education may have a reciprocal negative influence on preservice teachers’ confidence to teach art education. As a result of Welch’s research, the aim of this study was to explore and describe the confidence of preservice teachers as they engage in a seven-week tertiary art education unit.

**Methods and analysis**

This interpretive study sought to understand human behaviour through the perspective of the respondents and employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection (Hittleman & Simon, 2002). This investigation involved first-year preservice teachers commencing a Bachelor of Education degree at an Australian regional university. These preservice teachers were involved in a core unit entitled Creative and Performing Arts I, which consisted of seven weeks of two-hour art workshops. A topic was selected each week and activities were demonstrated by the tutor and explored by the preservice teachers. Both teacher-directed and student-centred modes of delivering art education were demonstrated and many teaching strategies were modelled in the presentation of the activities. As noted by Grauer (1999), using a variety of teaching strategies assists preservice teachers to examine their decisions about teaching approaches and, at the same time, assists them to consider the best strategies for meeting the needs of diverse learners.

The preservice teachers had opportunities to create their own art works so they could experience manipulating the materials. Preservice teachers were encouraged and guided by the tutor. The emphasis was placed on the art experience as when emphasis is placed on the final product the freedom of self-expression can become lost, and the product is no longer a reflection of personal creative efforts (Edwards, 1990; Hurwitz & Day, 2001). The learning environment was supportive, encouraging positive teacher/pupil relationships and the development of confidence and self-esteem (see Barry & King, 1998). At the conclusion of each workshop, the participants engaged in discussions with the tutor in relation to integration ideas and the implications of the activities in terms of difficulty, classroom management procedures and organisational matters.

Pretest, posttest surveys, pretest, posttest questionnaires, field notes and interviews were used to gather data. The pretest survey was administered to all first-year preservice teachers \((n=160)\) to determine the preservice teachers’ perceived confidence prior to the commencement of the seven-week art unit. The 14 survey items were based upon suggested art activities in the NSW Creative Arts Syllabus K-6 (Board of Studies, 2000). At the completion of the art education unit in week seven, preservice teachers completed the posttest survey \((n=148)\), which was identical to the pretest survey. By completing the same survey it allowed for a comparison to be drawn between the results of the two surveys. SPSS13 provided descriptive statistics for the pretest, posttest survey (i.e.,
frequencies, and percentages). This statistical program sorted participants’ responses of those who indicated “no confidence” to those who indicated “very confident” for items on the pretest and posttest surveys. By comparing the pretest and posttest survey results for each item, it determined whether participants’ perceptions of their confidence for art education had altered as a result of the seven-week art unit. Results from pretest-posttest surveys were then compared to the data gathered from pretest, posttest questionnaires and the responses from the interviews and field notes.

The pretest questionnaire \((n=160)\) was administered at the same time as the pretest survey, in week 1, prior to the commencement of the art unit. In week seven, at the conclusion of the art unit, another questionnaire was administrated to the participants \((n=148)\). The questionnaires were designed to gather information about the preservice teachers’ previous experiences in art and provide further feedback in regards to the development of the preservice teachers’ confidence as a result of the seven-week art unit.

During the two-hour weekly art workshops field notes were kept as the preservice teachers engaged in informal discussions and completed the art activities. The information gathered from the field notes assisted to validate the information gathered from the surveys and questionnaires. First-year preservice teacher interviews \((n=10)\) occurred following the completion of the seven-week art education unit. Interviewees were selected using “random sampling” as suggested by Neuman (2000, p. 206). The semi-structured interview questions were for 30 minutes duration and assisted to determine the preservice teachers’ confidence towards teaching art in the classroom following the art unit. The interviews also assisted to gain information about participants’ feelings and attitudes toward art and the art activities experienced in this unit. Through the use of the mixed data collection methods the consistency of the findings generated by the different data collection methods were checked (Burns, 2000). Authenticity, as noted by Newman, (2000), was monitored as the conditions of the study were the same for each of the participants and an accurate portrayal of the experiences of the preservice teachers was recorded.

**Results and discussion**

Table 1 displays the preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence for all items noted on the pretest and posttest surveys. Pretest-posttest results \((n=160 \& n=148, \text{ respectively})\) showed that these preservice teachers perceived their confidence to increase for each item (Table 1). The least amount of increase in confidence was in Item 1 “Drawing a stick figure”, while Item 12 “Creating a mono print using glass” showed the greatest increase. In Item 1 “Drawing a stick figure”, 96% of pretest participants indicated they were confident hence there was little room for improvement. Without doubt, drawing a stick figure may be perceived as a simple drawing task and able to be completed by most preservice teachers. The increase for Item 12 may have been due to the participants not understanding the term “mono print” at the time of the pretest survey. A lack of knowledge of art language may have impacted on the rise of confidence in this item. Further qualitative data needs to be employed to determine the understanding of art education discourse of these preservice teachers in order to more fully analyse the results.
The posttest results \((n=148, \text{Table 1})\) for Item 9, “Planning an art lesson” and Item 13 “Conducting an art appreciation lesson” indicated perceived increases in confidence, however, these two items showed the least amount of variation in the posttest results with only 55% and 51%, respectively, of preservice teachers noting they felt quite confident or very confident in completing these tasks. This may be because first-year preservice teachers, at this stage of their course, have not yet learned how to plan and complete a lesson plan. Overall, preservice teachers perceived an increase in confidence for all items (Table 1). It can therefore be concluded that the 7-week art unit delivered to first-year preservice teachers assisted to increase the confidence of the participants in all 14 items noted on the survey.

### Table 1
**Pretest and Posttest Frequencies and Percentages of Preservice Teachers’ Responses on their Confidence to Conduct Various Art Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Pretest ((n=160))</th>
<th>Posttest ((n=148))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Drawing stick figures</td>
<td>154 96 %*</td>
<td>143 99 %*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Painting a picture using primary colours</td>
<td>112 70 %*</td>
<td>146 99 %*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mixing secondary colours</td>
<td>95 59 %</td>
<td>140 95 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mixing tones and tints</td>
<td>58 36 %</td>
<td>130 88 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creating a pen design of a face</td>
<td>64 40 %</td>
<td>140 95 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sketching/drawing a leaf</td>
<td>96 60 %</td>
<td>138 93 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Creating a collage using materials</td>
<td>120 75 %</td>
<td>141 95 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Talking about artworks with others</td>
<td>46 29 %</td>
<td>106 72 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Planning art lessons for children</td>
<td>21 13 %</td>
<td>82 55 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Painting using a variety of materials</td>
<td>37 23 %</td>
<td>135 91 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Silk screen printing using leaves</td>
<td>21 13 %</td>
<td>136 93 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Creating a mono print</td>
<td>9 6 %</td>
<td>132 89 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Conducting art appreciation lessons</td>
<td>36 22 %</td>
<td>76 51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Integrating art with other KLAs</td>
<td>18 11 %</td>
<td>108 73 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\* \%= Percentage of preservice teachers who were either “quite confident” or “very confident”

Two themes emerged from the pretest-posttest questionnaire, the interviews and the researcher’s field notes: (1) Previous experiences and preservice teacher’s confidence in art; and (2) Preservice teachers’ tertiary art education and their confidence to teach art.

*Previous experiences and preservice teacher’ confidence in art*

When discussing the preservice teachers’ previous art experiences in the pretest questionnaire, of the 160 participants, 142 referred to their own art experiences in primary or high school. Although responses varied greatly 77 of these participants noted they had experienced poor quality art teaching during their school years. Similarly, of the 10 participants interviewed, 6 reported negative or little school experiences in art.
Several participants displayed art anxiety and considerable self-doubt and insecurity about art mainly attributed to negative school experiences. A typical interview response by participant 10 was:
I had very little experience before attending university. My experience at school was limited and I would say fairly negative. In primary school, I am sure the teachers only taught art when it was raining and we couldn’t go out for sport. In high school, I felt that I couldn’t participate in art because I couldn’t draw. In fact I felt like I was going to fail this course [Creative and Performing Arts I] because I couldn’t draw.

According to 62 of the 160 participants who completed the pretest questionnaire, teachers’ approaches seemed to play a part in whether the preservice teachers felt confident in art. There were correlations between the participants’ previous experiences in art and their confidence for completing the art education unit. The findings indicated that 35 preservice teachers had experienced positive teaching approaches for learning about art with varied opportunities for expressing artworks. These preservice teachers (i.e., n=35) also expressed some confidence at the beginning of the art unit. To illustrate, one participant stated:
I studied art in high school. I had a teacher who was an artist and she gave me lots of opportunities to work with various materials that I always enjoyed. She was always positive and encouraged all her students which gave us confidence to experiment. I was always interested in drawing and painting. But I haven’t had much opportunity to do much in this area because of family commitments, however, I feel confident about participating in this unit.

Preservice teachers’ tertiary art education and their confidence to teach art
In the pretest questionnaire, 104 participants commented they were not confident in art. Of these 104 participants 58 stated they lacked skills in art and 23 noted they were concerned because they “could not draw”. Similarly, the field notes also indicated some participants were concerned that they could not draw. For some preservice teachers their perception was, if they could not draw they may not be able to succeed in this art unit. Researcher field notes recorded after the first week:
During this week several first-year preservice teachers came forward and expressed concern that they would not pass this unit because of their lack of skills in art. Some commented that they “could not draw” and had no experience in art so were fearful they would fail this unit.

In the interviews and on the posttest questionnaire preservice teachers were asked to comment on experiences in the seven-week art unit that made them feel less confident. Of the 148 participants who completed the posttest questionnaire 121 commented that none of the activities made them feel less confident. A similar response was recorded during the interviews with 9 out of the 10 preservice teachers commenting that none of the activities made them feel less confident. A typical response came from participant 4, who noted, “None of the activities made me feel less confident. It only made me feel more confident and each week my confidence grew.”
During the interviews and on the posttest questionnaire the preservice teachers were asked if there were any other factors that had assisted to increase their confidence. Of the 148 participants in the posttest questionnaire 89 commented that the teaching environment made them feel more confident. A similar response was recorded in the interviews with 7 out of the 10 participants interviewed commenting on the positive teaching environment. A typical response gained from the posttest questionnaire was:

The teaching environment was very positive. The teacher assisted us and gave us ideas and suggestions so we could explore the materials. I felt supported and encouraged. We also were encouraged to share our ideas so that we could learn from each other. (Participant 2)

The perceived rise in the preservice teachers’ confidence following the seven-week tertiary art unit was also evident in the posttest questionnaire and the interviews. In the posttest questionnaire 132 of the 148 participants indicated they felt more confident in art. A similar response was recorded with all interviewed participants, who generally claimed they felt more confident to teach art after the completion of the seven-week art unit. However, it should be noted that although most of the participants commented they were more confident in the posttest questionnaire, 45 stated they would like more practice in planning an art lesson and presenting art appreciation lessons. For example, participant 8 stated:

Yes, I feel much more confident now. In fact, I don’t think I would have tried to teach art before because my own experience was so limited and I felt so skeptical about whether I would pass this course. Even though I am more confident in teaching art I am looking forward to learning more about lesson planning and I would like to have a little more practice in conduction an art appreciation lesson.

The data collected from the pretest-posttest questionnaire, field notes and the interviews supported the findings of the surveys that indicated the overall confidence of the preservice teachers increased as a result of the seven-week art unit. Similar to the study by Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001), it seems that the preservice teachers involved in this study were experiencing “art anxiety” and “self doubt and insecurity about art” (p. 50) at the beginning of the seven-week art unit. Indeed, the “art anxiety” that was first detected in the beginning weeks seemed to diminish as the participants gained more experience in the art activities. There seems to be some evidence to support Leuhrman’s (2002) claim that attitudes toward art are generally formed and shaped by experiences, as some of preservice teachers’ “art anxiety” or lack of confidence in art, was due to their previous experiences in art before attending university. There also seemed to be an assumption among some of the participants, similar to that noted by Duncum (1999), that the teaching of art relies on the ability to draw. Of interest, were the comments by the participants that the supportive classroom environment assisted to develop their confidence. This is supported by the claims made by Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) that purport, as a result of their study, that the “how” it is taught is just as important as the “what” is taught.
Further evidence drawn from the comparison of the data collected showed that even though preservice teachers commented they felt more confident at the conclusion of the seven-week unit, the participants still have some concerns about planning a lesson and conducting art appreciation activities. This will need to be taken into consideration for the planning of the subsequent art units.

**Conclusion and implications**
This research explored and described preservice teachers’ perceived confidence as they engaged in a university art education unit. Using both qualitative and quantitative measures, these preservice teachers indicated an increase in confidence to teach art. Over a seven-week period, participants’ prior experiences and the university teaching environment contributed to the perceived increase in confidence. It appears evident from this research that well-constructed university-based art education courses can have a significant influence upon the confidence of preservice teachers to teach art. As art anxiety and insecurities about art may be due to negative experiences, art educators play an important role in facilitating preservice teacher education programs that link current literature and the presiding state syllabus in order to enhance preservice teachers’ confident and ability to teach art in the primary classroom.

According to the Education Act (1990), the teaching of art in the K-6 classroom is mandatory as a requirement of the NSW Creative Arts Syllabus (Board of Studies, 2000). This implies that tertiary education institutions need to deliver art programs that develop the confidence and competence of preservice teachers in teaching art in the primary classroom. These programs need to address art anxiety and preservice teachers’ insecurities about teaching art. Just as teachers are encouraged to reflect upon their practice (Barry & King, 1997; Marsh, 2004), art educators need to reflect upon their teaching practices, the content of their units, and the learning environment that they create, to ensure effective facilitation of positive art education experiences for preservice teachers. In addition, preparation for teaching art needs to be guided by current literature and the presiding syllabus, especially as many preservice teachers are being prepared for teaching in a particular education system mandating the syllabus. If teacher education institutions provide art units that create a poor perception of art, such as that described in the study by Welch (1995), it may be that many teachers will continue to omit art from their weekly timetable.

The teaching of art requires particular skills and knowledge that need to be developed at the preservice level. Preservice teachers’ experiences prior to commencing university are varied. Some will be quite confident in art while others will have art anxiety and insecurities about art. Yet, when preservice teachers enter the teaching profession, they are expected to teach art with some level of competency. The learning that occurs at the preservice level can be crucial for the implementation of art education in the school. Hence, preservice teachers need to be guided by more knowledgeable art educators who can contribute to their development as future teachers of primary art.
References


For a copy of the instruments employed in this study, please contact the researcher.