

RUS05351

**Effects of Background and Sex on Confidence
in Teaching the Creative Arts:
Tests of Specific Hypotheses**

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**Fully Refereed Paper
for the
Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Sydney,
Australia, 2005.**

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Effects of Background and Sex on Confidence in Teaching the Creative Arts: Tests of Specific Hypotheses

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Little is known about how generalist primary pre-service teacher education students perceive their own background and confidence in relation to the arts and arts education. This paper reports the findings of a large international study involving 939 pre-service generalist primary teacher education students in five countries. The study tests specific hypotheses concerning the relationship between creative arts background, sex and confidence in teaching in the creative arts. The study also explores sex differences in patterns of background and confidence across the creative arts, as well as relationships between background and confidence in one creative arts area and background and confidence in other creative arts areas. Results of the study indicate that students' background in the creative arts and their sex predicts confidence in teaching in the creative arts, although the interaction between background and sex does not, in general, predict confidence. The study also identifies different profiles of background and confidence in teaching the creative arts for males and females. Moderate associations between background and confidence in different creative arts areas are also identified. The educational implications of the findings of the research are discussed in detail in the paper.

Background

Teacher self-concept is an important issue with potential implications for students, teachers and teacher educators. This situation arises because not only are the beliefs, attitudes and self-perceptions of teachers likely to influence the students' own self-perceptions (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Greene, Anderson and Loewen, 1988; Midgely, Feldlaufer and Eccles, 1989), but they may also have a more direct influence on how much and how well particular subjects or activities are pursued, both by students and by teachers (Guskey, 1988).

There is some support in empirical research for the relation between family background in the creative arts and children's performance and perceptions. For example, Russell-Bowie (1993) has shown that family background factors such as income, language background, and urban living were significant factors related to the amount of musical experiences children have at home, the priority their local primary schools give to music, and the priority their parents give to music. In a study with 168 kindergarten children, Liikanen (1975) found that the more interest the parents had in art and creative activities, the more creative their children tended to be. However it was unclear whether such relations would be domain specific such that a child with a

strong family background in visual arts would have more positive perceptions about themselves in visual arts than in other creative arts areas (Russell-Bowie, Roche and Marsh, 1995).

Research and anecdotal evidence have indicated that if student teachers feel confident about themselves, both as teachers and students of given subjects, they are more likely to be confident and effective teachers of these subjects (Russell-Bowie, Roche and Marsh, 1995). As a case in point, the subject of music belongs within one of the six Key Learning Areas in the NSW Primary School Curriculum, that of the Creative Arts. Students are taught about the five concepts of music, (Dynamics, Pitch, Duration, Tone Colour and Structure) through the participatory activities of singing, listening, moving, playing instruments and organising sound. In many classroom situations music is seen to require more of the whole child's participation (e.g. physical, emotional, vocal, tactile, etc) than other subjects, e.g. Mathematics or English. From a teacher's perspective music is often perceived to require musical skill, ability and knowledge to teach it effectively, and this in turn requires using one's own body and physical and musical skills as central teaching resources. Thus it is likely that teachers' own feelings about themselves and their formal musical skills would have a significant impact on their ability and inclination to teach the subject, as well as impacting significantly on their students' attitudes towards themselves and music.

Further research indicates that generalist primary preservice teacher education students often enter their teacher education programs with very little background and low confidence levels within the arts. In their primary school experiences, they have had little satisfactory arts education as their teachers were generally ill equipped by their preservice training to provide them with sequential, quality arts experiences (Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee, 1995). Added to this, the number of face - to - face teaching hours in arts education is being constantly reduced in preservice teacher education courses. As students receive less and less training in the arts, we hypothesise that their confidence levels in teaching the arts will decrease and that this decrease in confidence will negatively affect their competence as teachers of arts education.

In a study by Russell-Bowie and Yeung (1999) family background and self-concept in each artistic area were positively correlated and domain specific. This study also provided extended support for the multidimensionality of self-concept found in previous research (Byrne & Gavin, 1996; Marsh, Hey, Johnson, & Perry, 1997; Marsh & Yeung, 1997a, 1998; Vispoel, 1993, 1995). Particularly, the domain specificity of family background and self-concept in the four creative arts areas supported Vispoel's (1993, 1995) findings

that not only was artistic self-concept distinct from self-concepts in other curriculum areas, but the self-concepts in subdomain areas such as music, visual art, dance and drama were distinct psychological constructs.

Added to the research above, there is a rising acknowledgement that girls are achieving much better academic results than are boys in many subjects of the curriculum (Epstein et al, 1998; Mahony, 1996, 1997). Girls are reported to make up 57% of straight-A students and boys make up 57% of high school dropouts. When boys are involved in the arts, they are often seen as wimps or homosexuals; fewer boys are involved in the arts, and although girls playing hockey is acceptable, boys doing ballet is often seen as surprising (Young, 2001). Not only is there a trend for girls to achieve higher results than boys, there is significantly less participation by boys than girls in secondary school arts programs and music and dance are seen to be 'feminised' subjects (Roulston & Mills, 2000). In a study by the Department of Employment, Education and Training in Australia examining Year 12 enrolments in selected tertiary - accredited arts subjects, only a third of all students enrolling in art were males, (1985: males = 31%; females = 69%; 1993: males = 37%; females = 63%), (Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee, 1995).

Aim of Study

This study examines specific hypotheses concerning the relationship between creative arts background, sex and confidence in teaching in the creative arts. This present study is nested within a larger study: the Creative Arts: Students' Attitudes – National and Overseas Associate (CASANOVA) study, the aim of which was to survey a sample of generalist primary preservice teacher education students from various countries to investigate their attitudes towards the Creative Arts. Very few, if any, similar studies examine all four art forms. Most research is domain specific, with music educators researching music education, art educators researching art education, etc. So this study is unique in that, not only does it sample students from five different countries, it surveys them on their attitudes in relation to the four art forms of music, dance, drama and visual arts. This paper is based on results from the larger survey, using specific items related to background and confidence in relation to gender across the four art forms.

Specifically this study examines the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: For all students higher levels of background in the arts will lead to more confidence in teaching the arts;

Hypothesis 2: Girls will have more confidence in teaching the arts regardless of background;

Hypothesis 3: The interaction of sex and background will influence confidence in teaching the arts;

Hypothesis 4: Males and females will exhibit different patterns of background and confidence across the arts;

Hypothesis 5: There will be a moderate relationship (between .40 and .70) between background in one arts area and background in other arts areas; and

Hypothesis 6: There will be a moderate relationship between confidence in one arts area and confidence in other arts areas.

Method

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed specifically for this study, but was based on a similar previously validated survey used in 1991 to ascertain the attitudes of teachers to music and music education in New South Wales state primary schools (Russell-Bowie, 1993). Similar questions were asked in both surveys. However the instrument for this current study was focussed on primary preservice teacher education students, covered all four strands of the Creative Arts (music, dance, drama and visual arts) and was administered in five different countries. Apart from the demographic questions, this survey included items regarding the students' formal and informal experiences, attitudes and training in relation to music, dance, drama and visual arts education. Each of the other questions had one stem with four endings, and each of the endings related either to music, visual arts, dance or drama, eg.

I think that elementary schools should give a high priority to:

| |
|--------------------|
| <i>Music</i> |
| <i>Visual Arts</i> |
| <i>Dance</i> |
| <i>Drama</i> |

Responses were given by circling a number to indicate one answer in the demographic questions, or one number on a Likert scale for the creative arts items. The Likert scale ranged from 1 – 5, with 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 5 = *Strongly Agree*. This study reports on those items related specifically to background and confidence across all four art forms.

Participants

As Table 1 indicates, the participants were 936 university students enrolled in tertiary generalist primary teacher education programs in Sydney and Newcastle, Australia (n = 385 = 41%), Windhoek,

Namibia (n = 187 = 20%), Durban and Pretoria, South Africa (n = 254 = 27%), Urbana Champaign, Illinois, USA (n = 59 = 6%) and Dublin, Ireland (n = 51 = 6%).

The demographic details of the sampled students are included in Table 2. Of these students, 82% were females and 18% were males, 82% were aged 18 - 25 years, and 18% were aged 26 years or older. Responses indicated that 30% of the sampled students were in their first year, 25% were in their second year, 28% were in third year, 15% were in their fourth year and 1% responded with 'other'. It should be noted that some of the sampled institutions had three years of teacher education while others had a four-year course. Sixty-two percent of the responding students spoke English at home, and the rest spoke a variety of other languages including Arabic, various African languages, Vietnamese, Spanish and Greek.

In most of the sampled countries, the Creative Arts is one of the key learning areas in the primary schools and comprises a crucial component in the teacher education program. Most of the countries (Australia, Namibia, South Africa and Ireland) at the time of this study were in the process of introducing a new integrated Creative Arts syllabus instead of separate curriculum documents for music and visual arts. Dance and drama, if taught, tended previously to be part of other subjects such as Physical Education and English. Within this context, the sample students were training to be generalist primary school teachers, not specialists in any of the particular art forms.

Data Collection procedure

Students were asked to complete the survey during lectures at each University or College and the same instructions were printed on the front of the instruments and were read out to every group of students. The students were given a practice example to ensure they understood how to complete each question, and then took between 15 and 30 minutes to complete the survey.

Analyses

The first three hypotheses stated above are related. The first hypothesis relates to the main effect of background on teaching confidence, regardless of sex. The second hypothesis relates to the main effect of sex on teaching confidence regardless of background. The third hypothesis relates to the interaction of background and sex on teaching confidence. These three hypotheses were investigated in the one set of regression analyses. Specifically, four regression analyses were conducted – one for each of music, visual arts, dance and drama. In each analysis, the dependent variable was confidence and enjoyment in teaching the

given creative arts area. The independent variables in each analysis were background in each area, sex, and a background x sex interaction term (the product of background and sex for each creative arts area).

Hypothesis 4 relates to differential patterns of background and confidence between males and females. This hypothesis was investigated by the use of Profile Analyses (e.g., Dowson, Marsh, & Martin, 2004). Profile Analysis uses a Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance framework to (in this case) assess the different levels of background and confidence across the creative arts areas in this study. Specifically, this meant that the reported levels of background and confidence in each of the creative arts areas were modelled as the within-subjects variables, and sex was modelled as the between-subjects variable. The usual statistics for within-subjects and between-subjects main effects, and the interaction effect of both, are provided in Profile Analysis. In this study, the interaction effects are of most importance (indicating varying sex differences across the arts areas), and override the main effects if present.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 hypothesise a moderate relationship between background and confidence across the creative arts areas. These relationships were evaluated using simple bivariate correlations.

Results

Hypotheses 1 to 3

Table 1 records the results of the regression analyses investigating Hypotheses 1 to 3. Table 3 indicates that, in every creative arts area background is very strongly, and positively, predictive of confidence and enjoyment in teaching. Also, with the exception of Drama, sex is significantly and negatively predictive of confidence and enjoyment. Females were coded '1' and males '2' in the data set, so the results indicate that females were more likely to report confidence and enjoyment in the three art forms where a significant sex difference was found. In only one art form (music) was a significant interaction effect found, indicating that background made a different contribution to the prediction of confidence for each sex with respect to music. (Females: $\beta = .594$, $t = 20.487$, $p = .000$; Males: $\beta = .633$, $t = 10.40$, $p = .000$). The t-values indicate that background was almost twice as strong a predictor of confidence in music for females as it was for males.

Hypothesis 4

The Profile Analysis indicated significant linear ($MS = 3.380$, $F = 4.66$, $p = .031$) and quadratic ($MS = 10.775$, $F = 18.223$, $p < .000$) interaction effects for background and confidence (i.e., Linear: $MS = 9.614$, $F = 11.953$, $p = .001$; Quadratic: $MS = 13.225$, $F = 22.542$, $p < .000$). In both cases the cubic interaction effect

was non-significant. These interaction effects indicate that males and females displayed very different profiles of background and confidence. These effects are represented in Figures 1 and 2.

Hypotheses 5 and 6

Hypotheses 5 and 6 concern the relationship between backgrounds across different creative arts areas and confidence across different creative arts areas. We hypothesised a moderate relationship between domain specific backgrounds and confidences. The correlations between backgrounds and confidences are presented in Table 4. Table 4 indicates that all correlations between domain specific backgrounds (upper bold-faced triangle in Table 4) are moderately correlated, as are all domain specific confidences (lower bold-faced triangle in Table 4).

Discussion

Most preservice primary teachers enter their teacher education courses with little formal background in the arts. The results associated with Hypothesis 1 indicated that background is clearly related to confidence in all areas. Given that many preservice teachers have little background in the creative arts, and that the face-to-face hours devoted to creative arts instruction in preservice courses are continually decreasing, it is possible to speculate based on the results of this study that graduates of teaching courses may exit with less confidence in teaching the arts in their classroom than would otherwise be the case. This study provides empirical evidence of the link between developing students' background and enhancing students' confidence in teaching the arts in the primary classroom.

The results indicated that sex is strongly related to confidence in teaching the arts, with females being more confident than males. This result could be obtained because females are generally more confident than males at teaching in *any* subject during their teacher education course. Another possibility could be that males think teaching the arts is not a strong masculine activity, and that they would have to take on a more feminine identity in order to be confident in teaching these subjects. This sex-role conflict may undermine male's confidence in teaching the arts.

When examining the relationship between background and confidence, in dance, drama and visual arts, background appears to contribute to confidence in a largely similar way between sexes. However, in music, background contributes more to music confidence for females than for males. This result suggests that females may be particularly responsive (in terms of teaching confidence) to background experiences in music. However, the sex-role conflict described earlier may moderate the effect of background on males teaching

confidence in music. In other words, background and sex-role conflict may be working in opposite directions with respect to male's music teaching confidence.

Males and females exhibit very different profiles of background and confidence in the arts. Overall the general background in each of the art forms is lower than the students' perceptions of their confidence and enjoyment in teaching each of the art forms. When examining each art form individually, in music, visual arts and dance males are lower than girls in both background and confidence (and they follow roughly the same profile in each case). In relation to visual arts, both genders indicate they have less formal background in this art form than in the other art forms, with males scoring very low. Despite this, both males and females indicate they are fairly confident that they could teach visual arts. This result could be due to their having seen many more visual arts lessons being taught in the primary school than any other art forms, as generally visual arts is the one art form teachers tend to teach more frequently than the others.

However, in relation to drama, the reverse is the case for both background and confidence. Males seem to have a stronger background in drama and are more confident in teaching drama than their female counterparts. These results raise interesting questions as to why males have higher responses than females in relation to drama. It may be that drama is not perceived as a great threat to males' masculinity, in comparison with music, dance or visual arts. Alternatively, males may perceive drama being more structured and less 'creative' (and hence less threatening) than the other art forms.

As predicted, domain-specific backgrounds and confidences are moderately related. In general, backgrounds (all correlations above .4) are more strongly related to each other than confidences (only one correlation above .4). This could be explained by the common observation that families who are involved in one arts area socially and/or culturally are more likely to be involved (or at least positively disposed to involvement) in other arts areas. Confidence may be somewhat less strongly related because preservice teachers differentiate their perceived expertise in teaching more strongly than their perceived backgrounds. These perceptions could also be related to an uneven pattern of exposure to teaching the arts. For example, visual arts or drama may be preferred teaching areas to dance or music. Also, as indicated above, primary teachers in general tend to teach many more visual arts lessons than lessons from other art forms, with some drama being taught as part of English and some dance being taught as part of the PDHPE program. Generally, however, little music is taught unless the teachers are confident in teaching this subject. So preservice

teachers' observational experiences with respect to arts education may be uneven, leading to uneven patterns of perceived confidence across these teaching areas.

Implications

Following on from this research a longitudinal study could be implemented, following teachers into at least the first years of their teaching careers. This could give us 'hard data' about the effects of reduced exposure to the Creative Arts to actual teaching practice and reported confidence. It would also be of interest to complete a study which explored the questions 'just how little is too little' when it comes to exposure to the Creative Arts; i.e. when does a reduction in Creative Arts exposure (controlling for background in Creative Arts) become critical to a substantial loss of confidence and expertise in teaching practice?

Conclusion

Not surprisingly, preservice teachers' background in the creative arts predicts confidence in teaching the creative arts – regardless of the specific domain in question. However, females are generally more confident in teaching the arts, regardless of background, despite the fact that across the arts, males and females report different patterns of background and confidence in the arts. A moderate relationship between background in one arts area and background in other arts areas is noted, and a similar though not so strong relationship between confidence in one arts area and confidence in other arts areas is also noted. Although females tend to have more background in the arts than their male counterparts, most of the sampled students had very little formal background in any of the art forms. As teaching confidence is in many cases related to background, and as students enter their primary teacher education courses with very little background yet are expected to teach the arts when they graduate, we strongly suggest that there must be a change in policy and practice in teacher education institutions to include an adequate amount of face to face input in each of the arts subjects. Students should also be given the opportunity to practise teaching lessons in each of the art forms during their study so they can build their confidence across all arts areas. If this does not happen, both teaching confidence and subsequent academic outcomes in the creative arts in primary schools may suffer significantly.

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Table 1: Number and percentage of generalist primary preservice teacher education students from five countries who completed the survey

| Country | n | % |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| Australia | 385 | 41 |
| Namibia | 187 | 20 |
| South Africa | 254 | 27 |
| USA (Illinois) | 59 | 6 |
| Ireland (Eire) | 51 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 936 | 100 |

Table 2: Demographic details of sampled students

| Item | Category | n | % |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Sex | Females | 750 | 82 |
| | Males | 162 | 18 |
| Age | 18 – 21 | 508 | 55 |
| | 22 – 25 | 252 | 27 |
| | 26 and over | 165 | 18 |
| Home language | English | 573 | 62 |
| | Other | 350 | 38 |

Table 3. Regression Analyses

| | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>Beta</u> | <u>T-Value</u> | <u>Significance</u> |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Music | | | | | |
| Background | .42 | .09 | .42 | 4.90 | .000 |
| Sex | -.21 | .07 | -.08 | -3.04 | .002 |
| Back x Sex | .15 | .07 | .19 | 2.17 | .03 |
| Visual Arts | | | | | |
| Background | .41 | .09 | .41 | 4.53 | .000 |
| Sex | -.33 | .07 | -.13 | -4.48 | .000 |
| Back x Sex | .10 | .07 | .12 | 1.33 | .183 |
| Dance | | | | | |
| Background | .59 | .09 | .59 | 6.83 | .000 |
| Sex | -.16 | .07 | -.06 | -2.35 | .019 |
| Back x Sex | .03 | .07 | .03 | .40 | .695 |
| Drama | | | | | |
| Background | .72 | .08 | .73 | 8.56 | .000 |
| Sex | .03 | .07 | .01 | .40 | .690 |
| Back x Sex | -.10 | .07 | -.12 | -1.43 | .152 |

Table 4. Correlations between Domain Specific Backgrounds and Confidences in the Creative Arts

| | Music Back. | VisArts Back. | Dance Back. | Drama Back. | Music Conf. | VisArts Conf. | Dance Conf. | Drama Conf. |
|-------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Mus B | - | | | | | | | |
| Vis B | .401 | - | | | | | | |
| Dan B | .406 | .430 | - | | | | | |
| Dra B | .454 | .516 | .561 | - | | | | |
| Mus C | .599 | .257 | .280 | .231 | - | | | |
| Vis C | .220 | .532 | .183 | .193 | .363 | - | | |
| Dan C | .250 | .208 | .631 | .336 | .389 | .263 | - | |
| Dra C | .239 | .288 | .318 | .611 | .367 | .384 | .477 | - |

Note: All correlations in bold font were significant at the .01 level.

Figure 1: Profiles of background in the creative arts.

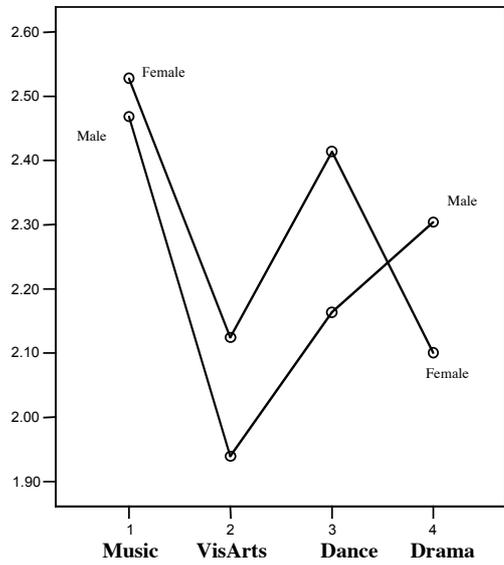


Figure 2: Profiles of confidence and enjoyment in teaching in the creative arts.

