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Mythbusting the  
difference between  
meaningful visual arts  
learning experiences and  
shallow entertainment  
activities

Dr. Gai Lindsay



UNIVERSITY  
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AUSTRALIA

# Dedicated to...



Ursula Kolbe



Professor Emerita  
Carolyn Pope Edwards

# This presentation will. .

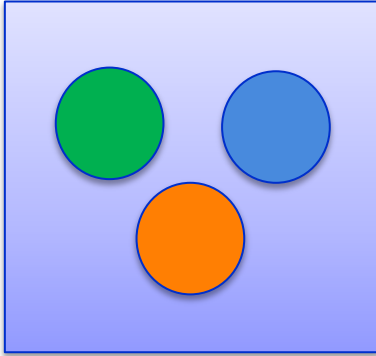
- Research context
- Conceptual framework - RE(D)
- Beliefs and practice
- Visual arts myths
- Research findings and provocations
- Hopefully challenge assumptions....



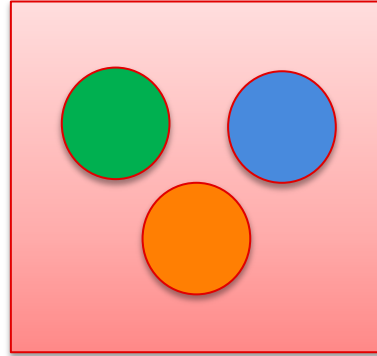
# Research context

- Interviews
- Observation
- Environmental audits
- Document analysis
- Photography

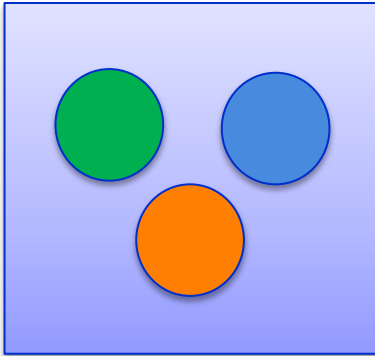
Koala LDC



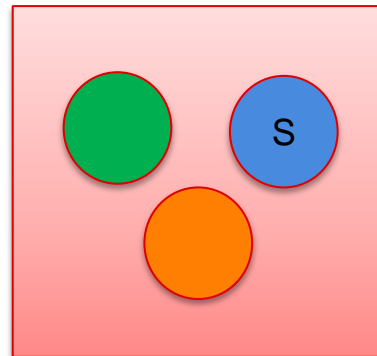
Possum Preschool



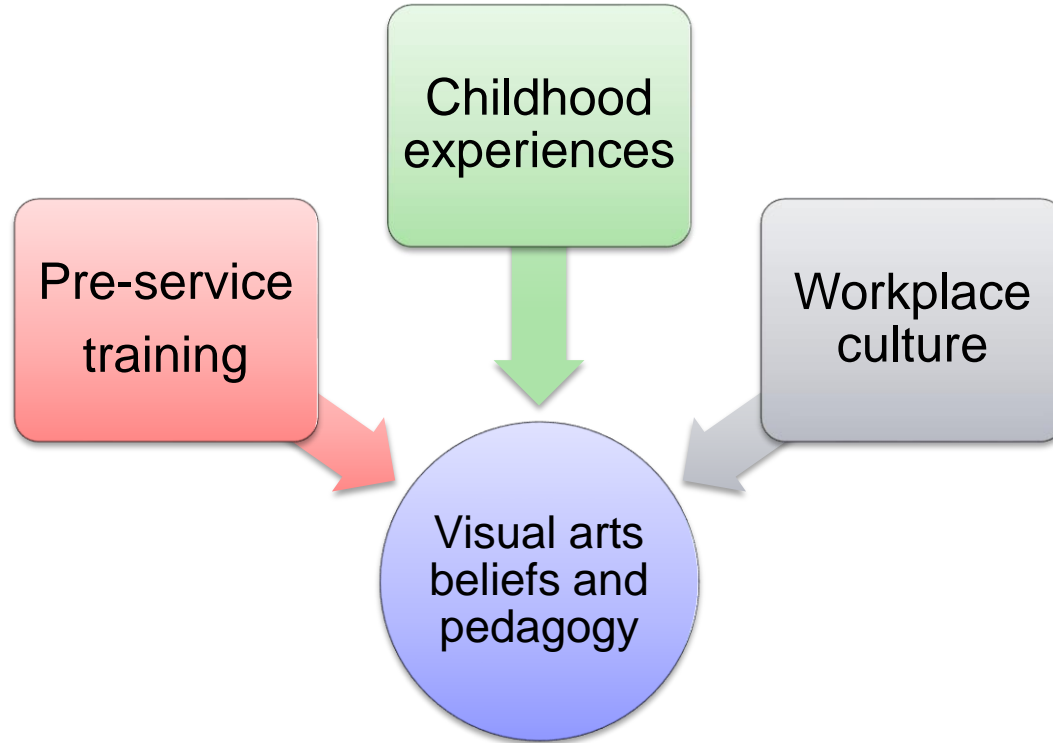
Wombat Preschool



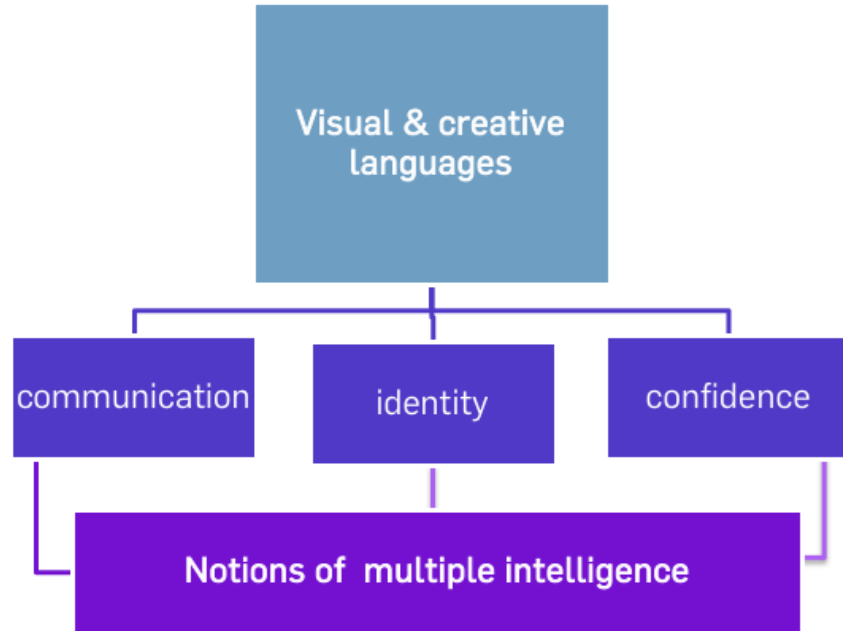
Bilby LDC



# Visual arts beliefs, knowledge and pedagogy



# Early Years Learning Framework & NQS



CONSTRUCTIVISM	
VISUAL ARTS DOMAIN	IMAGE OF THE CHILD
RE	D
ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR/ TEACHER	ENVIRONMENT & MATERIALS



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## CONTINUUM OF VISUAL ART IN ECEC

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STAGNATION  
eXPERIENCEGROWTH  
Experience

- Close ended
- Low quality materials/processes
- Adult directed crafts
- Pre-determined outcomes
- Colouring-in / stencils
- Non-intervention
- provision of materials only

Sensory, exploratory and  
experimental experiences

- Open ended-quality materials & processes
- Inquiry-based projects
- Art languages used as tools for research and making meaning
- Hands-on modelling and scaffolding of art skills

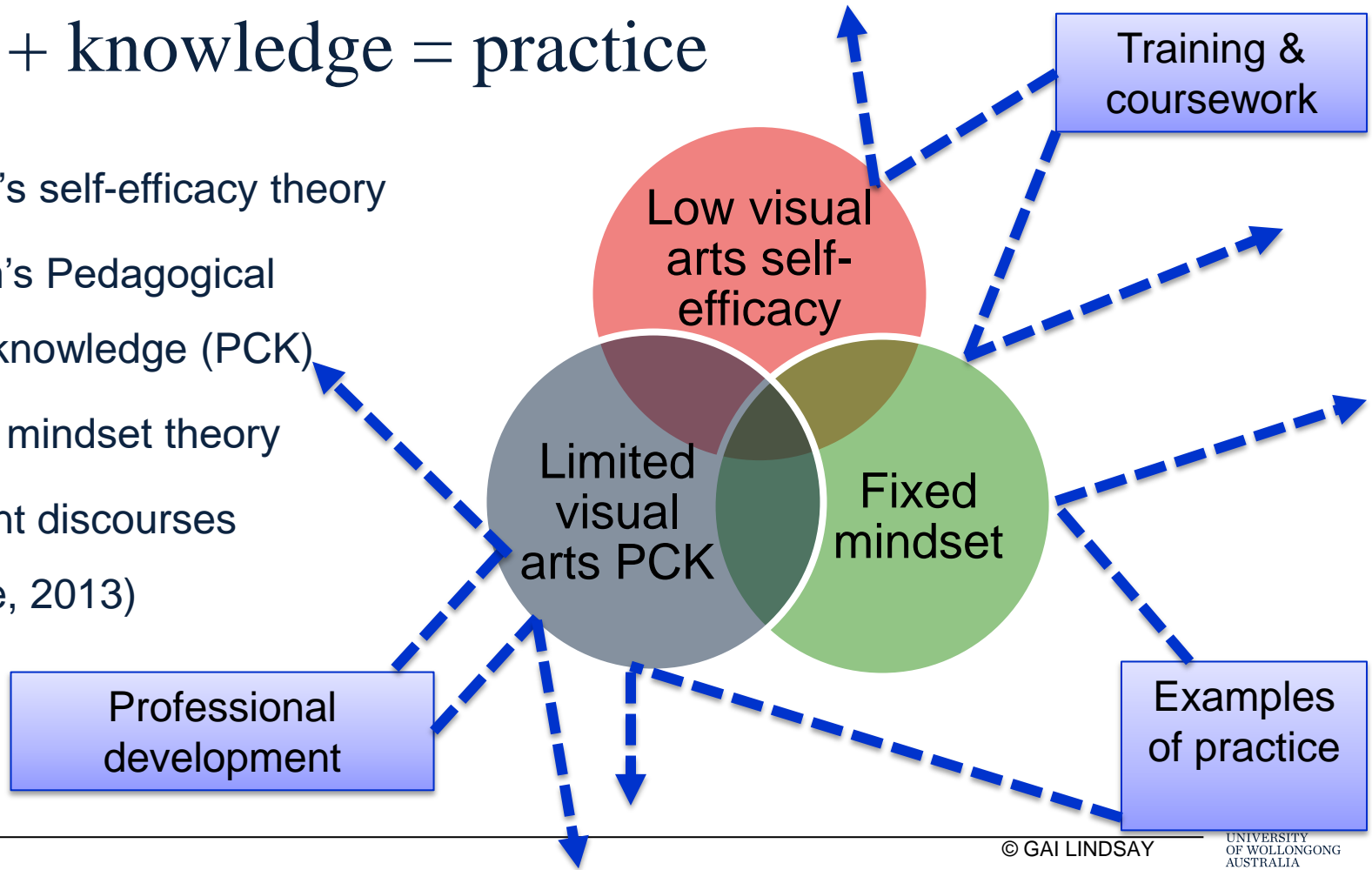
TO ENTERTAIN

TO EDUCATE



# Beliefs + knowledge = practice

- Bandura's self-efficacy theory
- Shulman's Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)
- Dweck's mindset theory
- Persistent discourses (McArdle, 2013)



# Visual arts myths and mantras

- Provide materials / do not model or intervene
- Art as natural and sacred
- Art as therapy
- Process not product
- Variety over substance / exotic materials
- Chaos and mess = creativity
- Art to entertain
- The myth of cute



# The myth of non-intervention

- Intervention or abdication?
- Modelling and scaffolding?
- Teachable moments?
- Children as corruptible



*“Reggio educators would say that it is not always sufficient to put materials, even provocative ones, on a table and expect the children to make cognitive leaps on their own” (Tarini & White, 1998, p. 379).*

# The myth of art as natural and sacred

- Naturally unfolding process?
- Genetic predisposition?
- Art as a special 'gift'?
- Artistic development takes care of itself?
- Visual art learning is different?
- Laissez-faire approach?
- Convenient abdication?



# The myth of art as therapy



*“The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience”*  
(Dewey, 1938, p. 13).



# The myth of mess

- Mess  $\neq$  creativity
- To MESS or not to MESS?
- Romanticising of messy play
- Mixed messages of mess (Bailey & de Rijke, 2014; Brown, 2006).
- Art is not a therapeutic key to creativity (Eisner, 1973-1974).



# The myth that process is more important than product



Process only?

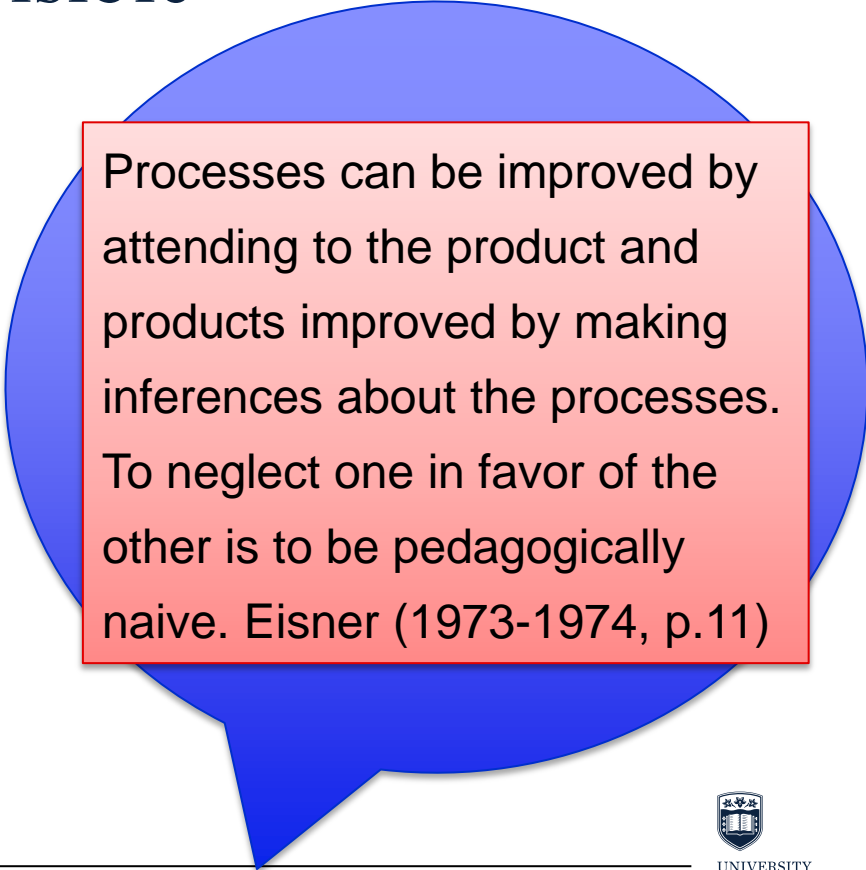
MANTRA

Product only?



# Children's learning made visible

- Product = data about learning process
- Visual form of cognition and communication (Dewey, 1919)
- Beautiful products testify to beautiful processes (Cooper, 2012)
- The quality of the process determines the quality of the product.
- Product as evidence of value in the process.



Processes can be improved by attending to the product and products improved by making inferences about the processes. To neglect one in favor of the other is to be pedagogically naive. Eisner (1973-1974, p.11)



# The myth of cute

122 reactions

61 shares

- Tagging colleagues – 48
- Cute/Cool / awesome – 15
- Third leg comments - 3
- Positive comments - 7
- Parents want it so it's OK – 7
- Dissent / challenging - 38
- Don't be a bully - 2

For Father's Day 🎨



Kids art, craft and activity ideas - Messy Little Monster  
June 9 at 11:29pm

👍 Like Page



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...but it never did me any harm...

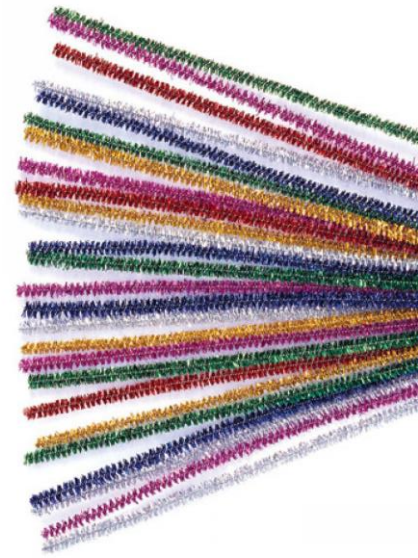
“I frequently hear **dulling devices** and **empty exercises** extolled because

*‘the children take such an ‘interest’ in them’.*

Yes, that is the worst of it; the mind shut out from worthy employ and missing the taste of adequate performance, comes down to the level of that which is left to it to know and to do, and perforce takes an interest in a ....**cramped experience**” (Dewey, 1938, p. 49).



# The myth of variety and exotic materials





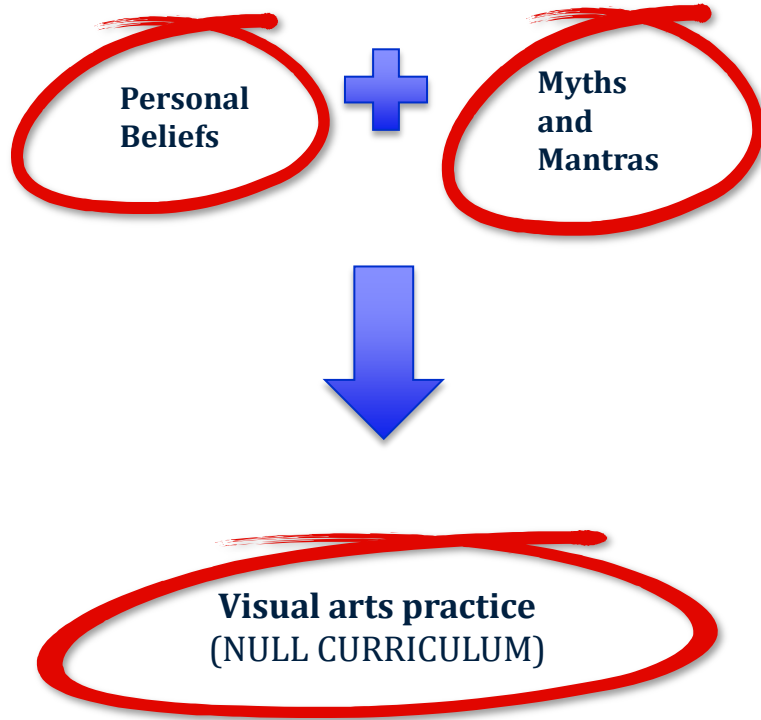
# The myth of entertainment

“Our main interest was to illustrate the extraordinary, beautiful and intelligent things children knew how to do and sweep away (or so we hoped) the widespread work circulating in early childhood services at the time, where mostly teachers' minds and hands were central and children had a marginal role, which led to the same stereotyped products for all”

(Vecchi, 2010. p. 132).



# Overcoming Myths, Mantras and Misbeliefs



*“In the absence of visual arts content and pedagogical knowledge, some educators may adopt shared myths and mantras to instil some level of confidence and certainty about their pedagogical choices”*

*(Lindsay, 2017).*

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# Overcoming Myths, Mantras and Misbeliefs



- ✓ Fostered an empowered image of children and educators
- ✓ Model visual arts methods
- ✓ Holistic multi-disciplinary curriculum
- ✓ Intentional visual arts pedagogy
- ✓ In-house professional development
- ✓ Overhaul visual arts coursework

# Mythbusting to provoke reflection

- Appreciate the arts
- Examine beliefs
- Willing to reflect
- Open to growth
- Open to change
- Question myths
- Challenge practice



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Thankyou

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Images

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