Educator Beliefs and Identity:
Reflecting Upon Our Image of the Early Childhood Educator as Artistic

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Picasso – Girl Before a Mirror (1932)
Wondering...

- A niggling concern
- “I’m not very artistic...”
- Hand’s off?
- Art skills should develop naturally?
TO ENGAGE IN A “tough minded analysis of existing beliefs, including one’s own .... increase our clarity concerning what we are up to professionally”

(Eisner 1973-1974, p7.)
Presentation Aims

• The research problem
• The Australian context
• Literature about how beliefs influence practice
• Ideas from theory to support reflection
• Share stories from the “field” – inviting you to reflect and examine your own visual arts identity
“Early Childhood Educators continue to struggle with ideas about the place of art in the curriculum and the most effective way to teach it.”

(Twigg and Garvis, 2010, p193.)
Educators believe art is important **BUT**

...visual arts are not utilised regularly due to....

- Lack of educator confidence
- Low visual art self-efficacy
- Limited visual art knowledge
- Perceived lack of value for the arts (parents & society)
Benefits for Children...

- Cross-disciplinary/ holistic learning
- Motivation / enjoyment / positive attitude
- Problem solving and cognition
- Self-discipline
- Creativity / imagination
- Develop tools for communication and meaning-making

.....only when effective, quality provisions are made by teachers (Bamford, 2009)
“Without a guiding framework, educators’ individual images, beliefs and values about what children should be and what they should become influence both the planned and unplanned curriculum experiences and learning of children and can lead to wide differences in outcomes for children.”

(EYLF Educator’s Guide, DEEWR 2010, p14)
Educator Beliefs Influence Practice

- Personal experiences as a student
- Pre-service training (including pracs)
- Educational leadership in services
- Memories
- Emotions
Myths and Mantras

Provide materials - hands-off do not model
Process versus product
Variety over substance
Searching for exotic materials
Art as therapy
Art as sacred and solitary
Chaos and mess = creativity

Visual arts practice
(NULL CURRICULUM)

Pre-service training
In-house training/professional development
Leadership & Reflective Practice

Personal Beliefs

Myths and Mantras
Theoretical framework

- Role of the teacher as a co-leaner and researcher with children;
- Environmental provisions and materials;
- Beliefs about children’s learning and abilities;
- Visual art within a holistic curriculum;
- Teacher reflection and documentation for professional growth,
- Rights of children and teachers.
Respectful Reflection

“A judgment as an act of controlled inquiry demands a rich background and a disciplined insight. It is much easier to "tell" people what they should believe than to discriminate and unify. And an audience that is itself habituated to being told, rather than schooled in thoughtful inquiry, likes to be told"

(Dewey, 1934, p.312).

"Every professional person is subject to the influence of custom and inertia, and has to protect himself from its influences by a deliberate openness to life itself" (Dewey, 1934, p.316).
The purposes of visual art:

- Skills and techniques
- Make and express meaning
- Projects
- Art as language
- Holistic curriculum

Imagination and Creativity
- aesthetic awareness
- Connect with environment
- Social Learning

Freedom and Personal Expression
- therapeutic
  - no rules
  - mess=creativity
  - art for fun
  - Avoid Boredom
  - keep them busy

Extend and Enrich
- Developmental focus
  - sensory awareness
- Fine Motor Development
- Identity Development
**Hands on/hands off?**

DAP (provide materials and leave children to develop naturally – no adult guidance)

“I think the **worst** thing I could do as an educator, the way that I could **most fail** the children is by me drawing something and them seeing how I draw something as a standard... There is just **no** need. It’s **completely superfluous** and **potentially damaging**.” - (P2, Interview 2.)

Socio-cultural and Constructivism theories: Learn through experience, modeling, observation, scaffolding
The role of the educator

- **Knowledge** (of child’s interests and strengths / subject matter)
- **Experience** & empathy
- **Insight** – perceive potentials for learning and conditions for growth

“....to **guide** the children and "**lend**" the children their **knowledge** without taking away the children's initiative...”
(Malaguzzi 1989, in Moestrup & Eskesen, 200?)

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...no right to withhold from the young ...whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has given him.”
(Dewey, 1939, p.32)

- Guide
- Role Model
- Facilitator
- Balance observation and intervention
- Support skills for graphic expression of ideas.
Types of art experience
MIS-EDUCATIVE beliefs

- Quality of experience?
  “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. 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, 1939, p.49)

- Not interest/inquiry based
- Shallow and rushed engagement
- Appeals to short term excitation and “fun”
- Limited learning and growth
- Narrows the field of further experience
- Dulls perceptions
- Justifies choices because “the children love them”
- Do not link to further experience

The pupil is actually robbed of native capacities which otherwise would enable him to cope with the circumstances that he meets in the course of his life.” Dewey (1939,p.49)
experience or “Consummatory” Experience?

- Build on prior experiences
- Extending/suggesting
- Skills building
- Art as graphic/poetic language
- Inquiry/problem solving
- Holistic curriculum
- Leads to GROWTH
“I think you need to understand how to support children to express themselves creatively. If you don’t have that kind of background or knowledge, you’re not going to get the most out of them or appreciate the work that they do. .....Some art is just for the sake of it, but some things really do portray meaning, and if you’re not asking the questions or looking for it, it can be missed and undervalued.” - Interview 3.KKA
A call for honest reflection & debate

- EYLF - ongoing learning
  - examine beliefs and practice
  - discuss and debate
- Unexamined customs = less artful, less joyful, less hopeful life
- Beliefs can change and evolve
- Being open to change....
- Examine our beliefs “with all the clarity we can muster” (Eisner 1973-1974, p.15)
“And so the expressive impulse of the children, the art instinct, grows out of the communicating and construction instincts.........

Make the construction adequate, make it full, free, and flexible, give it social motive, something to tell, and you have a work of art.”

Dewey (1900, in Dworkin 1959, p60)
Image Sources:

- Case Study Research: participant services
- Lyrebird Preschool Kindergarten, Nowra.
- http://www.pablopicasso.org/girl-before-mirror.jsp

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- Moestrup, J & Eskesen, K 200?, *Conversations with Loris Malaguzzi*, The Danish Reggio Emilia Network, Odense, Denmark