

Becoming an educator in and through the arts: Forming and informing emerging teachers' professional identity

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Abstract

This article examines student experience and identity formation within an arts education module (involving music, drama and visual arts) on an initial teacher education programme in Ireland. Student reflections (n = 106) and interview data (n = 33) are analysed to explore the complex nature of becoming an arts educator within a general-education model. Using student voice, findings are presented through a series of dualisms to problematise teacher development and identity-building in and through arts education. Findings reveal the importance of practical and reflective arts experiences to shape emerging teacher identities but also to inform the values and approaches to teaching the arts in schools.

Keywords:

Arts education, Teacher education, Teacher identity, Student experience.

1. Introduction

Teacher education has undergone significant changes both in policy and practice in recent years. Ireland has responded to these changes quite rapidly including significant landmarks such as the establishment of a teaching council, restructuring of institutional provision, lengthening of degree programmes and a new prominence of postgraduate provision in the last number of years (Coolahan, 2007; Galvin, 2009; Government of Ireland, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2002; Hyland, 2012; The Teaching Council, 2011). Alongside these changes, there has been a growing body of research internationally and nationally into the student experience of teacher education with particular focus on pre-service teacher identity and self-efficacy (Alsup, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Deegan, 2008; Haniford, 2010; Korthagen, 2004; Lopes & Pereira, 2012; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sugrue, 2004). This article seeks to contribute to this developing discourse with a particular focus on the student experience of arts education (music, drama and visual arts) within teacher education programmes and more specifically within initial primary (elementary) teacher education in Ireland. An examination of where the teaching of the arts fits into the views of pre-service general-education primary teachers is put forward to uncover some of the complexity involved in shaping arts educator identities within an overarching emerging teacher identity frame.

Arts Education, akin to teacher education in Ireland has also seen significant changes in recent years. On a macro level, the two government departments with responsibility for Education and the Arts jointly signed the Arts in Education Charter (Department of Education and Skills & Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2013). The Charter aims to promote and develop arts education and the arts in education amongst children and young people through an integrated and collaborative approach across government departments, education agencies and arts organisations. At university level, there is an

increased call to interrelate and integrate across subject disciplines within teacher education courses (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Therefore, the findings of this study are presented here within the context of systemic change both within teacher education and arts education in Ireland. It is hoped that the study will provide educationalists, academics and policymakers with insights into teaching and learning in arts education. In addition, the research presented highlights the significant value of hearing and seeking to understand the student voice within teacher education.

Primary schools in Ireland involve eight class levels which span the age ranges of 4e12 approximately. Arts Education within the primary curriculum in Ireland is one of six identified key areas encompassing the disciplines of visual art, drama and music (Government of Ireland, 1999). This curriculum is to be delivered in all Irish schools by generalist teachers and so teacher education programmes provide courses to all student teachers in arts education. There is currently a significant gap in research regarding arts education within teacher education in Ireland. The research presented here is the first of its kind nationally to investigate student perceptions and values of the arts, and student emergent identities as pre-service teachers engaged with the arts.

2. Student teacher identity: being and becoming

The formation of teacher identity for student teachers begins long before their entry into teacher education courses. Values, assumptions, perceptions and beliefs about teachers and teaching are established largely based on student school experiences. While these preconceptions are often simplistic in nature and ignore the complexity of the teaching profession (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Korthagen, 2004; Sugrue, 2004), they form an important beginning in identity construction as part of teacher education.

Within arts education, prior knowledge and experience of the arts further adds to the multi-faceted development of this emerging teacher identity. Pitfield (2012, p. 440) stresses the importance of, “prior experience in shaping the student-teachers’ particular standpoints about the subject and in reconciling what must be taught with what they are able to teach and what they are happy to teach”. It has been well researched that teachers' beliefs about the arts, prior experience of the arts and self-efficacy in teaching the arts has important consequences for how it is taught in schools (Collanus, Kairavuori, & Rusanen, 2012; Greene, 1995; Kenny, 2014; Kokotsaki, 2012; Pitfield, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones, & Bresler, 2011; Winters, 2012). For instance, Mills on writing about music education for generalist student teachers, claims that it is vital for students to practically participate in music-making in order to build confidence to teach music in schools (Mills, 1991). This research study examines preservice teacher's first year of engaging with arts education within their teacher education degree to explore their developing relationship and emerging teacher identity with the arts. How the students' emerging identity is influenced by developing a relationship with the teaching of arts is also of interest here.

Much has been written about student teacher identity within a sociocultural framework (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Cochran-Smith & Boston College Evidence Team, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Alsup (2006) refers to “situated identities” where the interface between oneself, others and their environment shape an identity development that continually transforms due to changing contexts. Rodgers and Scott (2008) similarly put forward a discussion on teacher identity development that is dependent upon and formed in relationship to others, within varied contexts with particular social, cultural, political, and historical influences that continue to shift and reconstruct over time. To provide a more nuanced term for this standpoint, Beauchamp and Thomas use the term ‘shaping’ in relation to identity

development to acknowledge “the role of the self and external forces in the dynamism of identity” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178). This study takes up this socio-cultural lens of inquiry to teacher identity research and broadens its use to arts education within the field of teacher education.

The theoretical framework used to conceptualise this study and analyse the data draws from key writers such as Dewey (1897, 1934), Greene (1995, 2001) and Eisner (2002). Learning through experience is core to the Deweyan philosophy. Dewey also espouses to the construction of knowledge within a community of learners which is relevant to this study in examining student learning within groups. Maxine Greene building on the work of Dewey argues for knowledge to be constructed through aesthetic experience highlighting the potential for transformation in this process (Greene, 1995, 2001). The arts are viewed as a medium through which one can “release the imagination”, and she believes this release is as important for educators as the children they teach, claiming (1995, p.36):

Imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively or of releasing the students to encounter works of literature and other works of art are probably unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies.

Eisner (2002) similarly sees the arts as an integral facet of any education. Through arts experiences, he believes, “...education is a process of learning how to become the architect of your own experience and therefore learning how to create yourself” (2002, p.24). An examination of student engagement with arts education during their first year of their teacher education degree then draws on these writers to explore the distinctive contribution of the arts to informing students' emergent teacher identities and approaches to teaching the arts in schools.

Underpinned by these theorists, the study puts forward arguments for meaningful, ‘real-life’ student engagement in the arts in order to inspire innovative and imaginative approaches to teaching in schools. This philosophical and ideological stance of engaging student teachers in arts experiences also underpinned the arts education course structure, content and delivery examined in this study. In this way, Mansfield (2007, p. 164) points out:

To avoid a merely pedestrian outlook in music, visual art, dance and drama education, we will need to offer beginning teachers a well-researched philosophical and critical theoretical framework for the arts in education ‘Being musical’, ‘being artistic’ become critical issues.

This idea of ‘being artistic’ resonates strongly with the concept of teaching as ‘becoming’. Within this understanding of identity construction through “knowledge-in-the-making” (Ellsworth, 1997), the research study reveals the importance of both practical and reflective experiences across the arts where “participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (Greene, 1995, p. 123). Through data gathered on student teacher perspectives, the study offers insights on identity-building, arts participation, arts values and knowledge-building across arts education experiences within initial teacher education.

3. The study: methodology and methods

The students involved in the study were undertaking the first iteration of an arts education module on newly designed Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Bachelor of Education in Education and Psychology (B.Ed. & Psy.) degree programmes at undergraduate level. The

location of the study was at a leading college of education in Ireland. All three researchers were involved in the design of the module and two directly taught on the module alongside other colleagues. As part of these revised undergraduate degrees in primary teaching, a new arts education module was introduced which aimed to more closely align learning outcomes across three subject disciplines of visual arts, music and drama. The focus of the module was on the student themselves as learner, all the while acknowledging their future identity and role as a primary teacher.

The module sought to re-engage the student with the art-forms of music, drama and visual art as well as the processes of making, performing and responding to the art-forms. There was a strong focus on confidence-building in their engagement with the arts, and on collaborative learning experiences, primarily in workshop settings which often incorporated new technologies. To give an example, a music education workshop might include a focus on certain musical elements such as pulse and rhythm. In such a workshop students carry out performing, listening and composing activities (individually, in pairs and/or in groups), where pulse and rhythm feature significantly in the work. Opportunities for discussion and reflection are a recurring feature of these sessions. Across the three art forms, student teachers constructed a personal rationale for the arts taking account of its artistic and educational functions. This was largely achieved through participatory practical activities coupled with an integrated reflective assignment across music, visual art and drama. The reflective assignment had four sections set out as follows: (1) pre-workshop experience of the arts/ arts education, (2) workshop experience with particular reference to their emerging identities as teachers, (3) post-workshop reflections where a personal rationale for arts education was put forward and (4) conclusion where consideration of how undertaking the assignment impacted on their understanding of the arts and arts education. The journal was

open to the inclusion of images (e.g. screenshots, photographs, sketches etc.) and hyperlinks alongside the text.

This qualitative research study aimed to offer insights into how students perceive and value the arts as part of their daily lives; and in what manner the arts form part of their emergent identity as student teachers. As well as this, the study aimed to give sustained feedback to the creators of new modules in arts education as to how students engage with the arts in class and how those modules aid students to teach the arts in schools. Student written reflections and focus group interviews allowed for varying interpretations and opinions. The students involved would have had no previous third level involvement in any of the arts subjects, and had one, observation-only, school placement module the previous semester. The research was carried out with one specific availability sample (De Vaus, 2002) of student teachers participating in the arts education module. The possible student target population totalled 449 students, registered between both the B.Ed. and B.Ed & Psy. Degrees.

The fieldwork was carried out between January 2013 and June 2013. In respect to sample size, 106 students provided consent for their assessment material from the module to be collected for analysis. These were written reflections and represented over 23% of the student cohort. These written reflections are labelled by gender, number and type of assessment within this article, for example 'M15, SC1' (male, number 15 in data collected, student coursework one). 33 students participated in focus group interviews on site at the college at the end of the module, comprising of 25 females and eight males. These interviews were segmented into eight separate focus groups, based on their class group. The interview data are labelled by gender, number, transcript number and date within this article, for example 'F1, T3, 23/4/13' (female, number one in data collected, transcript three and date of interview).

The focus group interviews were conducted by a trained research assistant acting as focus group discussion leader for ethical reasons and to provide objective validity and rigour. An interview schedule of seven overarching topics of (i) prior-experiences of the arts, (ii) affect of prior-experiences, (iii) value of the arts, (iv) module influence on arts participation, (v) module influence on arts teaching, (vi) current engagement with the arts and (vii) general course engagement was agreed in advance by the researchers. This topic guide was adhered to following a semi-structured interview approach. The discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and stored for reference. The qualitative focus group data that was generated was analysed by a single researcher using computer assisted qualitative data analysis through NVivo, where initial free node coding was then further analysed through the development of hierarchal tree-nodes. These codes were discussed with the other researchers at varying points of analysis. Along with multiple readings of this data and its associated coded materials, emergent themes were documented.

Student assessment transcripts of their modular reflective essays were obtained, after permissions were sought from participating students. These transcripts were collected, sorted and stored after grading was completed, and were furthermore anonymised by a single researcher, different from that who analysed the focus group interview data, and who for ethical reasons was not involved in the grading or teaching of the module. The data that was already generated within these transcripts was analysed using constant comparative methods, following a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Through multiple readings of this data, patterns emerged and these patterns were documented as themes; multiple discussions were held with the other researchers during this phase of analysis.

3.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the college's internal ethics committee and granted. Student participants were provided with detailed information sheets and signed informed consent forms. Focus group interview sessions with student participants occurred with a trained research assistant who did not input into the module and were transcribed in an anonymous fashion. Concerning the assessment transcripts, a researcher not involved in assessment or teaching on the module adhered to data protection regulations of anonymous cataloguing of student documents after grading was completed. Lecturers who taught on this module received information detailing the research process. Student participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, in relation to all data collection methods, including the assignment transcripts and the focus group interviews.

4. Discussion of findings

The research findings are presented here across four themes in the form of 'dualisms'. These themed dualisms are not presented as being in conflict with each other but rather set up along a continuum that is fluid, dynamic and connected. The dual nature of these themes is reminiscent of Deegan's research (2008) into teacher-writer memoirs where data was presented as 'couplets' to reflect the interrelated dimensions of student teacher identity. During data analysis these dualisms emerged as dilemmas for student teachers and so are explored here in this manner to 'stay true to the data', but also to highlight the complexities of the student experience within the arts education module. The themes for discussion are: (4.1) personal/professional, (4.2) practical/theoretical, (4.3) previous experience/current experience and, (4.4) marginalised arts/valuing the arts.

4.1. Personal/professional

The data revealed conflicting opinions about the value of engaging in personal arts experiences and building up pedagogical approaches within this module to informing the profession of teaching the arts in schools'. Tensions emerged in the data where the notions of 'being artistic' and 'becoming' a teacher (explored in section two) were not always working in tandem as part of students' identity development. While the module design and delivery intended that the personal experiences would influence professional approaches, not all students made this connection. The comments below from the focus group interviews reflect a strong level of dissatisfaction from some of the students in this regard:

I was the one who got caught out when we were teaching because what we were teaching wasn't suitable for first class.1 But like ... how are we supposed to know? I know we're supposed to go and look up the curriculum and things and incorporate that into your lesson plan. But at the same time we don't actually know what is for what class, what's suitable. (F5,

T3, 23/4/13)

What we did [in the module] was for us e it wasn't stuff you could do in primary school at all.

(F1, T3, 23/4/13)

As seen above, students felt disadvantaged on subsequent school placement, due to the personal focus within the creative arts module. Students who held this opinion consistently remarked on a lack of 'activities' to draw upon in visual art, music and drama for primary school. In this regard, the students appeared to equate teaching with delivering a series of activities in classrooms. This goes against a vision for teacher education which Loughran

(2006, p. 18) argues should go beyond “a store of tips and tricks” to include reflective practice.

Students who recognised the inter-related nature of personal experiences and pedagogical approaches, spoke reflectively about the module experience. One student commented, “I think it's important that you do the activities yourself first. Because to try and teach them from a book would just be really hard ... you kinda' need to experience them first yourself so you can pass that on to the children” (M1, T4, 24/4/13). Within the written reflections, a ‘coming to know’ through the module experience was often articulated. For instance one student wrote, “I hope that I will adopt some of these teaching methodologies into my own teaching, so that I will be able to provide my students with the same great experience I had” (F39, SC1) while another mused:

Instead of the lecturers focusing on activities to teach primary school children, they instead focused on teaching us about the basic information and themes ... I did not fully understand why they were doing so, but now know that they were taught in this way so we could firstly try out the activities and understand (F24, SC1).

Students who made the connection between building personal experiences in the arts in order to teach the arts, went a critical step further to reflect on what type of teacher they might become in the arts. Here, students placed a high importance on facilitating and encouraging creativity, imagination, and individuality within their future classrooms, as they themselves experienced this within the module. This was not simply a matter of transferring experience, but rather the students appeared to be using the experiences to ‘shape’ part of their emerging teacher identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, their belief and value systems on the arts were being ‘shaped’ through experiencing the arts first hand. This finding held a strong resonance to the writings of Greene (1995, 2001) examined earlier where personal arts

experiences are argued to be key to valuing the place of the arts in education. A student espousing such an approach noted:

We were given the chance to use our imaginations once again and this echoed individuality.

Therefore, I have learned that while teaching any of the arts education subjects, I should encourage children to use their imaginations and make all of their work unique and different

(F5, SC1).

In addition, there was a realisation noted repeatedly in the written reflections that ‘talent’ was not necessarily required to engage with the arts. This again, impacted heavily on student's vision for teaching the arts in schools. A student commented:

I enjoyed how the emphasis was rarely on how talented you were at any particular art-form or how much experience you had. This was important in making us feel comfortable, enabling

us to take part in the workshops. This will be an important aspect of my arts lessons as a teacher (F26, SC1).

The arts education module very much espoused such an approach drawing on literature from John Dewey (1897, 1934), Maxine Greene (1995, 2001) and Elliot Eisner (2002) in advocating for ‘real-life’ arts experiences for students to construct knowledge and build confidence. In coming to terms with the dualism of a personal/professional approach in this module, the students were continually forming and informing their emerging professional identities based on their own personal arts experiences.

4.2. Practical/theoretical

Across data sets, students remarked on the ‘hands-on’, practical nature of the module as highly beneficial. This privileging of the ‘practical’ within teacher education courses is in keeping with recent research findings (Burnard, 2012; Burnard, Dillon, Rusinek, & Saether,

2008; Elliott, 1995; Finney & Philpott, 2010; Kenny, 2014; Ní Chróinín, Mitchell, Kenny, Murtagh, & Vaughan, 2013; Swanwick, 2008; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). In one of these studies, also carried out with pre-service teachers, it was found that creative immersive group activities were highly valued by the students and had a positive effect on student's confidence to teach in creative ways in classrooms (Kenny, 2014). This focus on activity based learning stems from a social constructivist theoretical model which informs the current primary curriculum in Ireland and therefore teacher education approaches.

The main aim of the module was that through meaningful arts experiences, students shape their arts and teacher identities through knowledge-building. Some students were keenly aware of this process and related this 'coming to know' to their experience of facilitating such knowledge-building with children:

The module has shown us that collaborative work between teacher and student is a main priority for us, and by engaging in the arts ourselves we can safely integrate our knowledge with the children's knowledge (M9, SC1).

From this extract, this student is linking their own personal learning journey in the arts with collaborative arts experiences in the module to how children in their classes might be facilitated to construct their own learning. Here, the student demonstrates an understanding of constructivism and collaborative learning where contextual issues and prior knowledge are given due consideration.

In dealing with the practical/theoretical dualism, students continually referred to their school placement and future teaching careers. Despite being in the first year of their four-year degree, the resultant professional qualification for the students was never far from their minds as the data from the interviews and reflections demonstrated. This echoed previous studies where student teachers' learning and identity formation are continually framed by their future

profession (Britzman, 2003; Loughran, 2006). As well as linking to the future however, students also made connections to the past to inform their identity development (as also seen in Section 4.1). Students with strong pre-existing arts identities found that teaching the arts demanded a different skill-set and set of understandings not previously encountered as seen in the quotations below:

I loved learning about the pedagogy of just, like, teaching the subjects ... because I have a lot of experience in the arts. So I was really interested in finding out how you would, like, teach them to children. I have a lot of knowledge, you know - as in knowledge about music, drama. But to teach it is very different (F1, T2, 23/4/13) I had a good bit of experience in music but when you got thrown in it was kinda' like understanding how the children think about stuff and how you can explain it to them. It was just a lot different. (F2, T2, 23/4/13)

Here pedagogy is given a high status by the students who have come to the realisation that knowledge content and practical expertise is 'different' to holding pedagogical expertise in order to teach the arts effectively. These students appear to be attempting to re-interpret and as Greene (1995, 2001) might claim, 're-imagine' an education in the arts from both learner and now teacher perspectives.

Many students explicitly linked the practical with the theoretical in their writings and the reflective nature of the journal assignment appeared to aid this connection as seen from the extracts below:

It [journal] provided me with the opportunity to revise all new information I have learned in the workshops, as well as the chance to learn more about the three arts from the assigned readings...has also allowed me to compare my pre-existing beliefs about the arts and arts education with the fresh insight I have gained (F41, SC1).

I was given a chance to look back on all of the classes in this module and really analyse why we did everything that we did (F39, SC1).

However, there was some dissatisfaction with the assessment where it was felt that a more creative or performative approach should be taken to an arts assessment. One student commented, “It doesn't reflect the creative point of the whole module” (M1, T8, 25/ 4/13). Despite this minority view, the assessment clearly provided students with an opportunity to apply critical and reflective thinking to their practical engagements with the arts, while making appropriate connections with literature. In keeping with the philosophy underpinning the module, this it appeared consolidated learning for the students and facilitated a means to link theory with practice explicitly.

Despite being taught the same module, informed by the same literature, student pre-existing assumptions about teaching often had a significant influence on the way they envisioned their future classrooms and so this led to varied beliefs and values on the profession. This resonated strongly with Sugrue's research (Sugrue, 1997, 2004) where student teachers rely on ‘lay theories’ of teaching based on their own encounters in school. Influenced by these ‘lay theories’, the identities of the student teachers in the present study were shown to be shaped by an evolving student vision of teaching the arts that on one side of the continuum was viewed in a functional or didactic way to a vision that was rooted in a reflective practitioner approach.

4.3. Previous experience/current experience

Many students entered the creative arts module with stereotyped views of the arts. These perceptions invariably were linked with performing, acting, singing and/or drawing. Furthermore, the word ‘arts’ itself was sometimes viewed as applicable to visual arts only - a difficulty often related in literature on the arts (Greene, 2001; Hickman, 2005). On

encountering visual art, music, and drama within the module in all their many and various forms, students related the experience as “eye-opening”, and further commented that the module “opened my mind” and “broadened awareness”. However, students also related apprehension in discovering that they would have to engage in the three arts areas, and the newness of such experiences as seen in the two extracts below:

When I thought of arts education I immediately thought of just drawing and painting ... I got scared when I found out I'd have to take part in them all (F27, SC1).

I had very little experience of any of the arts subjects before these workshops. I always thought you had to have a talent for either art, music or drama to ever be good at them (F21, SC1).

The second extract highlights a further issue found in the data which linked ‘talent’ to the arts (see also Section 4.1). Some students remarked on their pre-existing assumptions on beginning the module that some people were ‘talented’ in the arts. However, through participation in the module, students remarked on a shedding of this assumption and a building of confidence through experience. This finding links directly back to the literature explored earlier where it is argued that the arts in particular require student teacher practical engagement in order to inspire confidence to teach the arts in schools (Collanus et al., 2012; Greene, 2001; Kenny, 2014; Mills, 1991; Pitfield, 2012). This is especially important within a generalist teacher education model where students are required to teach three arts areas. One student commented, “I don't think you needed much experience in music before you came in to actually get on well ... or any of them [the arts] really. You kind of just start from scratch” (F4, T1, 23/4/13). Another student remarked at interview specifically on building confidence through their visual art experience:

I'm not good at art. At all. I don't like art, I can't do art. So art was a big problem for me when I came in. Then I went into it and they [lecturers] weren't looking at 'well that's a good thing' or 'that's not a good thing' ... it was more about your process that ended up in your product, not just looking at your product. So I feel way better about art now, like I actually enjoy going into art. I'm not scared to go into art (F3, T1, 23/4/13).

The fact that the group size rarely exceeded 30 in the arts education module appeared to aid this feeling of 'safety' within their arts participation as well as a consistent focus on small group activities. This finding resonated with previous research in highlighting the need for 'safe' spaces for small group learning to occur through hands-on participation (Kenny, 2014; Ní Chróinín, Mitchell, Kenny, Murtagh, & Vaughan, 2013).

Just as students retained a focus on their emergent professional roles as primary teachers, they also reflected back on their own childhood arts experiences often. These included reflections on the arts both inside and outside of formal school contexts. Many students had very arts-rich experiences outside the classroom which typically occurred through privately funded means, raising the perpetual controversial issue of access to the arts in Ireland (Arts Council Ireland, 2008; Hibernian Consulting with Insight Statistical Consulting & Martin Drury, 2006; Kenny, 2011; McCarthy, 1999; National Economic and Social Forum, 2007). These private arts experiences ranged from music lessons to stage school to art classes to attending live performances. Within formal education there were dominant recurring patterns of experience where music was associated with tin whistle playing, 2 visual art with copying famous paintings, and drama with special occasion events such as Christmas plays. The two extracts below exemplify this:

My only experience of drama e when I was in senior infants3 I remember bringing a tea towel to school one day because I was in a Christmas nativity play. So that was my only experience. 'Till I came here (M1, T5, 24/4/13)'

Our teacher had done art lessons where they [children] were all trying to copy the same Vincent van Gogh painting. Now I realise you're just meant to let kids do what they want. It's not a matter of getting them to try and copy one another to make twenty copies of the same thing. It's about twenty individual pieces of art created by children as they want (M2, T8, 25/4/13).

Where students had a positive school experience of the arts, teacher influence was related as highly significant, for example:

Our secondary school art teacher had a real passion for art, and she encouraged us to share this passion with her. I found art to be a really good means of expressing myself in secondary school, as we rarely got the opportunity to do this (F37, SC1).

Such reflections on past experiences served to impact on the students thinking about their current and future practices as teachers, as well as informing and shaping their emergent teacher identities. As Eisner explains (2002, p.45), “the outcomes of education can thus be said to diversify and deepen the kinds of meanings people know how to construct and provide them with the appetite and ability to shift frames”.

4.4. Marginalised arts/valuing the arts

Students' own experiences of the arts in school contexts tended to be marginalised both in terms of time and priority. One student noted, “From my own experiences in primary school I came to the belief that these subjects didn't have much importance and the reason we didn't

do them was because you didn't learn anything from them" (F12, SC1). We also saw from the previous section (4.3) that students often accessed the arts outside of the classroom as children, thereby reinforcing the view that the arts were 'extracurricular'. This marginalising of the arts from the school building and timetable had a significant impact on students' values of the arts within education and schooling. The module appeared to challenge the students' internalisation of this arts marginalisation and the data findings overwhelmingly presented evidence of students interrogating these established biases. For instance, one student commented:

I think I see it as more of an actual subject now. Like in primary school if we got the rest of our work done we'd then do drama, or we'd then do music. But now it's something that has to be done - it's not something that's done if everything else is done (F3, T1, 23/ 4/13).

Students' appeared to be ascribing 'value' to the place of the arts in schools which was continually being reconciled with their own marginalised experiences. One student related at interview:

We were always given the treat of doing art on a Friday when I was in Primary School. Or when there was an event - like a Confirmation⁴ or a play or something. And from the module I'd definitely be more encouraged to give the arts a proper place in lesson planning for the week and classroom plans for the month. I think it definitely deserves a place. As opposed to just for a treat once a week or something (F1, T7, 25/4/13).

Despite having an explicit place within the Irish Primary Curriculum, viewing the arts as an integral part of this primary curriculum was one of the key learning points for students on this module.

Even where students accepted the place of the arts in the primary curriculum, they still appeared to carry with them inherited opinions about the arts formed during childhood school experiences as well as broader societal influences. The influence of these ‘lay theories’ (Sugrue, 1997, 2004) on their approach to teaching the arts and overall emerging teacher identity was significant. One such opinion was that the arts were ‘non-academic’ and a means of relaxation and/or fun. An example of this was seen from one student's reflective assignment where they claimed, “Drama, visual art and music are a break away from the heavy academic subjects such as maths. They can help in relaxation and allow students a chance for self-expression” (F3, SC1). Further to this, students sometimes related a strong belief in the therapeutic value of the arts as opposed to the educational benefits, as seen below:

I value them because ... like ... especially music therapy and just say play therapy and art therapy for those with special needs. It's so therapeutic for them ... and I believe that it's self-expressive. And in school I suppose it's a break from the dull academic stuff (F2, T3, 23/4/13).

Here, students appeared to be relying on pre-existing belief systems prior to the module experience to inform their emerging values of arts education.

In the main however, students revealed a determined resolve to promote and advocate for arts education in their future schools and classrooms. One student claimed:

It's a very sport-dominated country with the G.A.A.s and things like but ... the arts are massively important. This country has produced some of the best writers in the world ... great musicians as well. So it's important for kids, definitely in primary school, to learn about the arts and I suppose to expose them to it, to the different genres. Whether or not you have

enough interest yourself is immaterial, you know. But you'd have to have a knowledge of what you're doing, of course. (M1, T5, 24/4/13)

There was a perceived need amongst students to take on this advocacy role due to their own limited arts experiences in school, but also due to their current experiences of school placement on their degree course. On one observation in school, one student commented on the removal of children from arts education subject lessons for resource hours⁶:

Something that I noticed was this was the time [arts] that students who were struggling on a certain topic academically would attend a resource teacher. I did not think this was a fair way to deal with the subject ... A well-rounded education would result in giving children a better chance to develop more interests and skills than children who were only exposed to a limited number of subjects (SC1 F25).

Here the student is observing first-hand the marginalisation of the arts in schools and is making value judgements on removing ‘weaker’ students from arts experiences. Students were beginning to demonstrate instances of “cognitive dissonance” (Alsup, 2006) here in questioning teaching observed in practice. Students also demonstrated an awareness of broader educational issues influencing the marginalisation of the arts such as the literacy and numeracy agenda (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) within the Irish educational system. A student commented:

It's probably gotten more difficult because they've got so much emphasis on literacy and numeracy. So I think that's probably a reason why it's [the arts] like faded in importance. And why there's not been as much time spent on it. But from doing it you kind of realise that it really should (M1, T1, 23/4/13).

The last comment by this student again emphasises the importance of the students' having participatory experiences in the arts in order to inform their values about the arts as well as their beliefs about the place of the arts in education. Through module engagement, the students' attitudes to the arts were very favourable which reflects findings from previous studies where meaningful arts experiences are required to build confidence and positive values to teaching the arts in schools (Davies, 2010; Downing, Lamont, & Newby, 2007).

5. Conclusion

Negotiating, interpreting and locating emerging teacher identities during a teacher education programme present significant challenges for both students and teacher educators. This study contributes to continuing discourses on student teacher identity building, but also furthers the conversation to include the role of the arts in shaping and re-shaping this identity development. The research findings have shown that students gained new understandings of the arts through module engagement that often challenged their preconceived ideas of the arts and arts education formed from their previous experiences or lack thereof. These new experiences became part of an overall emerging teacher identity for these students, offering them a means to inform this dynamic process. Students' arts educator identity development then sat alongside a range of multiple sub-identities all contributing to their emerging teacher identity.

In presenting the data in the form of dualisms, the themes identified highlight the complex nature of both arts and teacher identities, further complicated by the emerging nature of identity building for students within their first year at a third level institution. It emerged that the themed dualisms operated not in conflict with each but rather along a continuum where students had to grapple and make sense of new concepts and experiences, namely,

personal/professional, practical/theoretical, previous experience/ current experience and, marginalised arts/valuing the arts. The complexity of this identity building process extends Alsup's (2006) use of “cognitive dissonance” to arts educator identities within overarching teacher identity development. Using this conceptual tool, providing new experiences for preservice teachers to challenge their “lay theories” (Sugrue, 1997) about teaching as well as their value systems in relation to the arts, allows for potential transformation in teacher identity. This in turn influences preservice teachers' growing sense of agency in “beginning to feel like teachers” (Alsup, 2006, p. 38).

The student voices presented in this research study offer unique learner perspectives on the fluid process of ‘becoming’ a teacher in and through the arts. There is a consistent call to seek student perspectives within teacher education research (Conway, 2001; Deegan, 2008; Korthagen, 2010; Loughran, 2006). This study contributes to the important work of capturing the student experience within teacher education to inform teacher educator knowledge and understanding about the students they teach. Findings from reflections and interviews provided particular insight into the emerging identities of arts educators who are studying within a generalist initial teacher education model.

Practical, immersive arts experiences in small group teaching environments emerged as crucial for students to build confidence and positive attitudes towards arts education. It also served to inform their emerging teacher and artist identities in a grounded way. This was very much in keeping with findings from other studies referred to previously where student teachers privilege activity-based learning for ‘practical’ subjects (Davies, 2010; Kenny, 2014; Ní Chróinín, Mitchell, Kenny, Murtagh, & Vaughan, 2013). However, in echoing the dual nature of the issues explored, it also emerged that reflection was a key aspect of these active experiences and therefore to the students' emergent identities. It is claimed “As arts educators, teachers must learn to think critically and locate themselves in their own histories and in

various discourses on arts education. Teachers are not only practitioners, but social and political agents” (Collanus et al., 2012, p. 18). Drawing on the findings of this study, it appears that both practical participatory arts experiences and reflective approaches to teaching and learning the arts are fundamental to informing emergent teacher identities as well as values and approaches to teaching the arts in schools.

Brown suggests that pre-service teacher identity development can potentially lead to “developmental transformation” (2006, p. 686) where theoretical and practical knowledge gained results in a greater sense of self-efficacy and increased agency to make professional decisions in classrooms. The study highlights the need to provide student teachers with opportunities for such participatory arts experiences to occur, but also space to reflect on these experiences. Through reflective practice whereby meaning-making arose from these arts experiences, students were able to make connections to the types of teaching approaches they might espouse to in their own classrooms based on these module experiences. Drawing on Greene and Eisner's work, through reflective arts experiences, the students were also enabled to imagine what might be possible in the arts classroom and “see things other than the way they are” (Eisner, 2002, p.198). Therefore, opening up students to participatory arts experiences from the beginning of their initial teacher education programme presents a model of arts education that is inclusive, active and potentially transformative. That seems like a good place to start.

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