



Research Report

Community engagement enhances confidence in teaching visual art

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Executive Summary



The purpose of this project was to investigate whether existing visual art education expertise found within cultural centres can effectively develop newly trained primary school teachers' confidence in the teaching of visual art. A recent challenge faced by primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand is access to specialist curriculum support. Traditionally, New Zealand primary schools have relied on a teacher advisory service to provide specialist curriculum support; this service ceased in 2010. Price (2010) argues that for New Zealand primary school teachers finding suitable support to increase their understanding of art educational practice is a challenge.

Given the need to respond to the challenge as outlined above, this project considered the possibility of supporting provisionally registered teachers using existing expertise within the local community. Provisional registration is recognised as a time when newly qualified teachers put into practice theories of teaching and learning before becoming fully registered. It is a time when they follow a structured programme of reflection and professional development often provided by both their school and outside institutions. As recognition of this important time in a newly qualified teacher's development, 0.2 of their teaching workload is allocated to this process.

Cultural centres are ideally placed to support primary school teachers' confidence in a range of curriculum areas

Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of communities of practice, Lave (1998) and Brown, Collins and Duguid's (1989) theories of situated learning, this project focused on the dynamic relationship that can develop between museums and galleries (cultural centres) and primary schools within their community. Over a two-year period, 12 provisionally registered teachers were supported by four cultural centres, where eight workshops were held (one workshop per term). The impact of this workshop programme on a teacher's confidence in teaching visual art was measured using survey data, interviews and focus groups. In addition, confidence levels of the trial group were compared to those of a control group ($N = 10$) at the beginning of the project, at 12 months and at two years.

Results showed that although the control group reported slightly elevated levels of confidence at the outset of the project, at 12 and 24 months those who participated in the workshops demonstrated higher levels of confidence compared to those who did not. This project also found that:

- Developing confidence in teaching visual art requires hands-on experience in visual art activities
- Effective communities of practice encourage reflection about visual art teaching practice and enhance expertise
- Visual art supports the teaching of other curriculum areas
- Visual art in the classroom helps to develop children's creativity.

This project illustrates the critical role cultural centres can play in the ongoing professional development of teachers across a range of disciplines, including the teaching of visual art.

Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand is not alone in the challenges it faces with an expanded curriculum, the pressure to raise numeracy and literacy standards and the effects of a world economic crisis. In Australia, Garvis and Pendergast (2010) came to the conclusion that the arts were becoming marginalised, following the introduction of a national assessment programme. Barnes and Shirley (2007) recognised that the arts in primary schools in the United Kingdom suffered after the government pushed for a rise in literacy and numeracy standards in 1997. In the United States, a study of the impact of the 'No Child Left Behind' policy on arts education concluded that the policy had a negative effect on school arts education programmes (Sabol, 2010). The policy focused schools on numeracy and literacy skills and linked these to a testing regime. Schools focused their resources on the testing regime and neglected the teaching of the arts.

Can provisionally registered primary school teachers develop their confidence in the teaching of visual art by using expertise found within the community?

The teaching of visual art in primary schools is under threat from a lack of professional teacher support. Historically, the importance placed on visual art in primary schools has been reflected in the time allocated to the training of primary school teachers in the teaching of visual art, and in the support available to primary school teachers from the Schools Advisory Service. Today, visual art time allocations for pre-service courses have been reduced and the visual art advisory service for primary schools no longer exists.

The main objective of this project was to enable provisionally registered primary school teachers to develop their confidence in the teaching of visual art by using visual art expertise found within the community. One way of developing the confidence of primary school teachers to teach visual art is to focus on their initial training as teachers, which include their two years as a provisionally registered teacher.

Beginning in January 2010, this two-year project was initiated in the Greater Wellington region and drew upon the experiences described by Andrews (2006), Davies (2010) and Hudson (2005), who all found that creating a partnership between arts expertise within the community and schools enabled both student teachers and teachers to develop their expertise in the teaching of the arts. This project used a network of existing visual art expertise within the community to support provisionally registered teachers. Given that the first two years of a teacher's career is recognised as a time when they develop their teaching confidence and expertise, this was viewed as an opportune time for teachers to develop their confidence in the teaching of visual art.

Method

Project overview

Two groups of volunteer provisionally registered teachers were established for this study, consisting of a trial group of 12 and a control group of 10. The control group was established to enable comparisons over the two-year period with the trial group on their self-reported confidence in teaching visual art. The project established a collaborative community support network for the trial group. The community network, set up to support the trial group, consisted of four groups, each responsible for developing and delivering workshops related to the use of visual art within the classroom. The four groups were:

- Pataka Museum of Arts and Culture, Porirua
- Raroa Normal Intermediate School, Wellington
- Victoria University of Wellington, in collaboration with Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators (ANZAAE)
- City Gallery, Wellington and Toi Poneke (Wellington City Council, City Arts Centre).



Each group had at least one visual art education expert, either a gallery or museum educator, a visual art specialist teacher, or a practising artist who designed and delivered workshops during the two-year project. During the two-year period, the trial group took part in one workshop per school term, experiencing a total of eight workshops during the project. As well as designing and delivering the workshops, the experts also worked as a team to evaluate the workshops, based on the feedback given by the trial group. Each workshop focused on developing practical understanding and confidence in visual art and its teaching in the classroom.

Three of the visual art experts adopted a mentoring role with the trial group, using both face-to-face and online conversations. The online setting enabled the trial group to share and develop visual art teaching resources based on the content of the workshops.

The initial intention of the project was for the participants to share resources and ideas in an online setting. As the project developed, workshop discussions and email took over some of this function and the website was used to share resources. The trial group brought examples of work they had completed in the classroom and shared these at the workshops. This process developed into an informal sharing of resources both at the workshops and via email. Resources and exemplars completed by the trial group were posted on the website.



Project participants

The trial group consisted of 12 volunteer provisionally registered teachers, all from the same one-year postgraduate primary teaching diploma course. All members of the trial group were teaching in primary schools within the Greater Wellington region. A control group of 10 volunteer primary teachers was also established. The control group members were also volunteers, the majority of whom were teaching in the Greater Wellington region although not all were from the same one-year postgraduate primary teaching diploma course.

Research design

The central research question in this project was: To what extent does a community-support network develop the confidence and expertise of a group of provisionally registered teachers in the teaching of visual art?

A multi-method approach was used (Anderson, 1998; Best & Kahn, 2006; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Yin, 2006), which advocates the use of a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, enabling the triangulation of data to address the research question. In this project, this mixture consisted of semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions, data from which was collected from the trial group to build a clear picture of how the trial group developed over the two-year period of the project. Data in the form of questionnaires was collected from the control group and analysed for comparison with the analysed data from the trial group.

The two-year project was divided into eight distinct phases, with each phase matching the four terms of the New Zealand school year. Each phase began with a whole-day practical visual art workshop focusing on one aspect of the use of visual art in a teaching environment. Following the workshop, the trial group was encouraged to explore the workshop ideas in their own teaching. Data collection followed each of the eight phases.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and a questionnaire completed at the start of the study with the trial group. The initial data from these focused on the teachers' self-reported confidence in the teaching of visual art as well as their previous experience in visual art. The same questionnaire was also completed after the first year and again at the end of the two-year project. At the end of each workshop, the trial group completed a questionnaire that focused on the effectiveness of the workshop in developing their confidence in teaching visual art. At six-monthly intervals (6, 12, 18 months) all members of the trial group took part in focus group discussions and questionnaires that were used to monitor any change in their perceptions of their confidence in teaching visual art. At the conclusion of the project, each member of the trial group took part in a final semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews focused on the teachers' confidence in teaching visual art.

Data in the form of questionnaires was also collected from the control group at the start, after 12 months and at the conclusion of the project. The questionnaires were the same as those used with the trial group, focusing on their self-reported confidence in the teaching of visual art. The control group did not take part in any focus group discussions or interviews as its members were spread across lower North Island, making it difficult to bring them together as one group. The majority of the questionnaires completed by the control group were emailed to them and either emailed or posted back for analysis.

The first semi-structured interviews initially focused on the trial group's background in visual art and the members' self-reported confidence in teaching visual art, including any aspirations they had for the use of visual art in the classroom. Further semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions focused on the content of the workshops, the teachers' confidence in teaching visual art, and any links between the workshops and their confidence in teaching. The data collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was used to validate the data from the questionnaires, and to identify any common themes and issues that emerged. Emerging themes were included as topics in the focus group discussions as the project progressed.



Workshops

Initially the themes and content of the workshops were decided by the specialists at the centres. This process changed during the project as post-workshop questionnaires and focus group discussions were analysed; the workshops were in part a response to needs expressed by the trial group.

During the two-year project, the eight workshops took place at the following centres:

- Workshop One was designed and delivered by a visual art specialist at Raroa Intermediate School (Painting and drawing)
- Workshop Two was designed and delivered by two gallery educators at Pataka Museum of Arts and Culture (Masks and pop-up books)
- Workshop Three was designed and delivered by Ian Bowell and the gallery educator at City Gallery (Pasifika Design)
- Workshop Four was designed and delivered by two gallery educators at Pataka Museum of Arts and Culture (Sculpture using found objects)
- Workshop Five was designed and delivered by the visual art specialist at Raroa Intermediate School and visual art specialists at Victoria University and Pataka Museum of Arts and Culture (Use of clay in the classroom)
- Workshop Six was designed and delivered by educators at Wellington Zoo (Zoo EOTC visit and visual art teaching)
- Workshop Seven was designed and implemented by educators at City Gallery (Response to Pasifika exhibition; printmaking, construction)
- Workshop Eight was designed and implemented by educators at Pataka (Landscape conventions; drawing, construction mixed media).

Ethics

Prior to the start of the project, ethics approval was applied for and gained from the Human Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington. Informed consent was obtained from both the trial and control groups, and any identities have been protected.



Results

Profile of provisionally registered teachers involved in project

Both the trial group and the control group completed the same questionnaire on three occasions: at the start of the project, after 12 months, and at the end of the two-year project. Analysis of the questionnaires conducted at the start of the project provided an initial view of the trial and control groups' self-reported confidence in the teaching of visual art.

The questionnaire contained seven items that were designed to measure their confidence in teaching visual art:

- Confidence in teaching visual art
- Confidence in incorporating visual art in other curriculum areas
- Confidence in developing visual art units of work
- Confidence in enabling students to develop their ability in drawing
- Confidence in enabling students to develop their ability in printmaking
- Confidence in enabling students to develop their ability in construction
- Confidence in enabling students to develop their ability in painting.

Confidence was rated on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = limited confidence, 2 = some confidence, 3 = mostly confident, 4 = fully confident.

Confidence in teaching visual art - baseline

Mean results are presented in Figure 1. When the data from the trial group's first questionnaire was compared to the control group's first questionnaire, the control group reported being marginally more confident than the trial group in the teaching of visual art. At the start of the project, the control group's self-reported confidence to teach visual art was slightly greater than that of the trial group, although both groups' responses fell mostly within the 'limited' to 'some confidence' categories when responding to the questions.

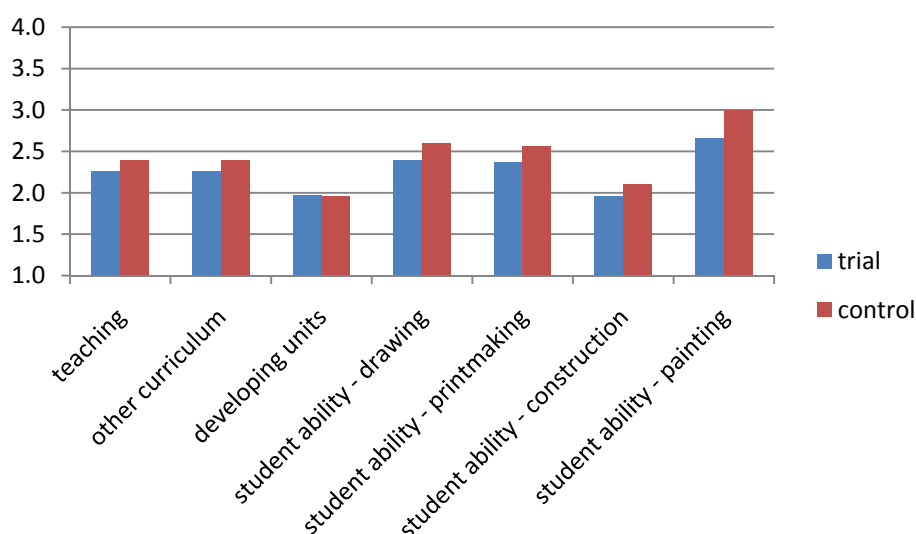


Figure 1: Confidence at teaching visual art at baseline for trial and control groups

All members of the trial group also took part in semi-structured interviews, and data from these interviews provided an initial picture of their own confidence in teaching visual art, as well as their previous visual art experience. During the semi-structured interviews, all members of the trial group related their confidence in the teaching of visual art to their past visual art experience and to their pre-service teacher education course.

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed that eight trial group members (66 per cent) felt they had little or no experience in visual art before their pre-service teacher education course, and four (33 per cent) felt they had a great deal of visual art experience. Three of those four, equating to 25 per cent of the trial group, had fine arts degrees. The trial group consisted of volunteers from the same one-year graduate teaching diploma course. Of this cohort of 80, five (6 per cent) had fine arts degrees; therefore, the majority of those teachers with fine arts degrees volunteered for the project. Perhaps the connection those graduates felt towards visual art encouraged them to volunteer. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews also revealed that the fine arts graduates viewed both their confidence to teach visual art and their satisfaction with the pre-service teacher education course differently from those without a fine arts background.

When asked how well their pre-service course prepared them to teach visual art, nine (80 per cent) commented on the lack of time spent on visual art in the Arts course, which had an allocation of 12 hours for the Arts (Dance, Drama, Visual Art and Music) and a teaching practicum of seven weeks. After initially talking about the lack of time spent on visual art, they went on to talk about how this lack of time affected their ability to teach visual art. Below is a comment that typifies the views of members of the trial group in this regard:



Rushed, not enough time to explore more deeply ways to teach visual art in the classroom. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewees agreed that the lack of time and consequent lack of depth prevented them expanding upon or developing any of the visual art content:

Wasn't deep enough; unless you were strong going in, you're not going to feel particularly strong coming out. (Interviewee 7)

The link between previous visual art experience and teacher confidence seems clear. The comment above was made by one trial group member who felt they had little or no experience in visual art before their pre-service teacher education course. In contrast are the comments made by the members of the trial group who identified themselves as having extensive experience in visual art before taking the pre-service teacher education course, for example:

Gave me a starting point to further explore. (Interviewee 3)

It seems those members of the trial group with extensive visual art experience needed less support as they developed their understanding of teaching visual art. They started the pre-service teaching education course with a level of confidence in the discipline of visual art, allowing them to “further explore” the content presented to them. Within the trial group, three (25 per cent) had extensive experience in visual art. As already mentioned, five (6 per cent) of a cohort of 80 had a fine arts

degree, suggesting that 75 (93 per cent) of the cohort could have felt unprepared to teach visual art following their pre-service teacher education course.

When asked what specific areas they felt they needed to develop to become confident in the teaching of visual art, eight (66 per cent) related their confidence in teaching visual art to being confident in the use of visual art materials, processes and media. They also talked about wanting to develop their confidence in their ability to teach visual art:

...but it's knowing how to teach it, and how to get the children to understand it, and where to start. (Interviewee 3)

All trial group members expressed concern about their lack of confidence in their ability to teach visual art, either as a result of being unfamiliar with the curriculum area or because they lacked the ability to apply knowledge of the curriculum area to ways that it can be taught. The trial group had completed a one-year pre-service teacher education course that included two seven-week blocks of teaching practical. The responses from these semi-structured interviews would suggest the pre-service teacher education course completed by this group of provisionally registered teachers had not prepared them to teach visual art.

The next series of questions focused on how important they felt visual art would be in their classrooms when they started their teaching careers. The focus of the responses centred on three different areas:

- The role visual art plays in developing children's creativity
- The relationship between visual art and the teaching of other curriculum areas
- The link between the teaching of visual art and the physical environment of the classroom.

The comments below are typical of the responses to these questions:

Really important. Through visual art students learn about themselves. (Interviewee 11)

Just the ability to encourage children's creativity; not getting stuck in a rut – I hate walking into a school and seeing 40 of the same reproductions – I like to see creativity rather than reproduction. (Interviewee 2)

Not only do members of the trial group have a clear understanding of the place of visual art in developing children's creativity, they also regard visual art as having a role in supporting the teaching of other curriculum areas. All trial group members talked about increasing their confidence in the teaching of visual art, thus enabling them to develop children's creativity.

Themes from the semi-structured interview

Three recurring themes emerged from the initial semi-structured interview:

- Developing confidence in teaching visual art requires hands-on experience in visual art activities
- Visual art in the classroom helps to develop children's creativity
- Visual art supports the teaching of other curriculum areas.

Developing confidence in teaching visual art requires hands-on experience in visual art activities

The trial group linked their confidence in teaching visual art to their own experience of visual art. This echoes the findings of Andrews (2006) that engaging beginning teachers in arts learning activities promotes their confidence to teach the arts. According to Loewenberg Ball and Cohen (1999), teachers need to understand the subject matter they teach to enable them to develop meanings and make connections within this curriculum area. Perhaps teachers need to participate in practical visual art experiences in order to teach visual art with confidence? Experience will engender a degree of familiarity and confidence that will then translate to a confidence in teaching visual art. The trial group members felt the pre-service teacher education course lacked time and depth, which meant their confidence in teaching visual art was low. Without support, this confidence will not grow.

Visual art in the classroom helps to develop children's creativity

Although reporting a lack of confidence in teaching visual art, the trial group expressed a desire to use visual art to develop children's creativity. Over the decades, many art educationalists and researchers have advocated enhancing and enabling children's creativity through visual art (Atkinson & Dash, 2005; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1972, 2002; Gardner, 1983; Hickman, 2000; Lowenfeld, 1947; Piaget, 1970; Taylor, 1992; Thistlewood, 1990). This large body of literature supports the notion that teaching visual art to primary school children enables them to make meaning or sense of the world around them, and is a vital tool in the development of creativity. It is clear that educationalists, researchers and newly trained teachers are continuing to highlight the link between teaching visual art and developing creativity in children. If teachers have no confidence in teaching visual art, then the cognitive and creative development of those children may be adversely affected.

Visual art supports the teaching of other curriculum areas

The final theme emerging from the first semi-structured interviews conducted with the trial group was their desire to use visual art in the teaching of other curriculum areas. Visual art plays a vital role



in developing children’s literacy skills in their early years at school. It is common practice to use children’s artwork when developing their literacy skills. According to Shifrin (2007), the University of New Hampshire in the United States has developed programmes that use visual art to train teachers to use images to improve reading and writing skills. From an early age, children make sense of the world through visual art, and use visual art as a vital means of communication (Roberts & Hilditch, 2003). The trial group in this study realise the importance of visual art in teaching other curriculum areas. It would seem, therefore, that any lack of confidence in the teaching of visual art will also affect their ability to effectively teach other curriculum areas.

Post-workshop questionnaires

At the completion of each workshop, the trial group completed a questionnaire to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop in developing their confidence in teaching visual art. The questionnaire contained two key questions:

1. How useful was this workshop in developing your confidence in teaching visual art? (This was measured using a four-point Likert scale: 1 = not at all, 2 = some use, 3 = useful, 4 = very useful.)
2. This workshop has encouraged me to teach visual art in the classroom. (This was measured using a four-point Likert scale: 1 = limited, 2 = some, 3 = mostly, 4 = fully.)

The questionnaire also provided an opportunity for participants to identify what specific part(s) of the workshop had helped them and what improvements could be made to the workshop. The respondents were given four responses to the first two questions (See below).

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the responses to each question from the post-workshop questionnaire for each of the eight workshops. Results reveal that the trial group increasingly viewed the workshops as very useful in developing their confidence in teaching visual art. As the project progressed, the trial group responded more positively to the workshops.

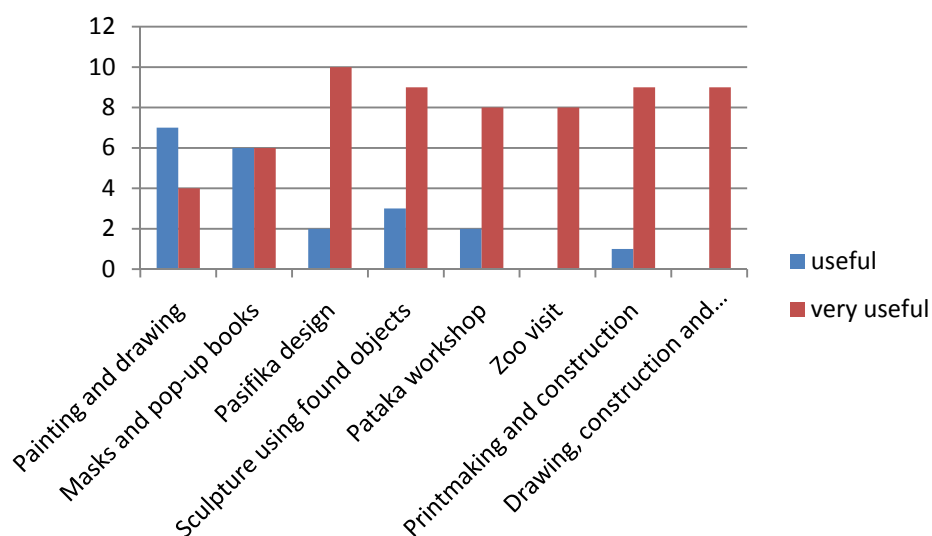


Figure 2. How useful was the workshop in developing your confidence in teaching visual art?

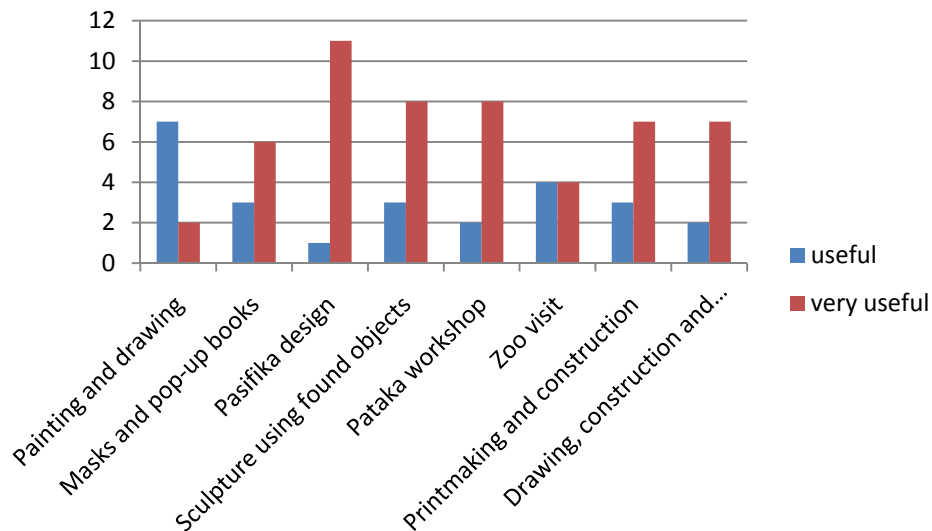


Figure 3. The extent to which the workshops were useful in encouraging the of teaching of visual art in the classroom

Analysis of the second part of the post-workshop questionnaire reveals some of the factors that could be responsible for the teachers' developing positive view of the workshops. The trial group was asked the following in the second part of the questionnaire:

- Name 2 or 3 aspects of the workshop that have encouraged you to teach visual art.
- Name 2 or 3 aspects of the workshop that could be improved.

Analysis of the questionnaires revealed a series of themes, some of which replicate those identified in the semi-structured interviews. These themes were used to analyse the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The three themes mentioned most frequently by the participants in the post-workshop questionnaires as encouraging them to teach visual art were:

- Developing confidence in teaching visual art requires hands-on experience in visual art activities
- Engaging with museums/galleries enhances confidence
- Effective communities of practice encourage reflection about visual art teaching practice.

The data suggested the confidence of the participants to teach visual art increased when there was a combination of these three themes.

Further analysis of the trial group's focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews shed light on how the workshops enabled them to develop their confidence in the teaching of visual art. Practical visual art experience was identified as one of the main factors that enabled them to develop confidence in the teaching of visual art. The following are extracts from the trial groups' focus-group discussions.

It [practical activities] has definitely helped with what I can do with regards to visual art. I have been able to take what I have learnt on the course and use it with whatever topic I am doing at the time.

We are doing practical things, then it gives you more confidence to go on and do that at school.

The trial group's comments supported the analysis of data collected from the post-workshop questionnaires, where practical activities were identified as the most important element in enabling them to develop confidence and expertise to teach visual art. Practical visual art experiences formed the core of the workshops, and confirmed the findings of literature that point to the importance of such experiences in enabling teachers to develop their understanding of visual art education and their confidence in teaching it (Alter, Hays & O'Hara, 2009; Andrews, 2006; Davies, 2010; Hudson, 2005; Loewenberg Ball & Cohen, 1999).

From Workshop Three onwards, the expertise found within the museums/galleries used for the workshops and the trial group's opportunities to reflect upon their own practice and share this reflection with others became increasingly important:

If I needed any support or had questions I could email her [Gallery educator].
(Quote from second focus group discussion)

I found it really valuable meeting with other [provisionally registered teachers] and talking about your experiences. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

It would seem that the developing relationship between the trial group and the cultural centres involved in the project increased the trial group's confidence to teach visual art and enabled the cultural centres to strengthen links with primary schools within their community. Over the two-year period of the study, those members of the trial group whose schools were close to the cultural centres started to use the cultural centres outside the cycle of workshops. They would not only go to seek advice, but also take their classes as part of a teaching programme. The experts within the cultural centres were developing a closer relationship with the trial group by supporting their roles as developing teachers.

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews and trial group discussions revealed practical visual art experiences were enriched by the ability of the trial group to discuss and share ideas, and the availability of resources and expertise provided by the cultural centres. The data from the focus group discussions was confirmed by the analysis of the post-workshop questionnaires. It became evident that the trial group's confidence to teach visual art developed as a result of the resources and expertise provided by the cultural centres participating in the project.

According to Talbert and McLaughlin (2002), collaborative teacher communities improve teaching practice as a result of teachers sharing knowledge, evaluating new practices, and sharing a repertoire of practice. The opportunity and environment created by the cultural centres participating in this study enabled the provisionally registered teachers to develop expertise in the teaching of visual art. The workshops enabled a collaborative teacher community to develop, which further enhanced confidence in the teaching of visual art by sharing knowledge and evaluating new practices.

Role of situated learning

Lave (1988) argued that learning, as it normally occurs, is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs (*ie*, it is situated). A critical component of situated learning is social

interaction, where learners become involved within the site and activities associated within that site. Other researchers (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) have further developed the theory of situated learning, emphasising the idea of cognitive apprenticeship. This is described as learners acquiring, developing and using skills in an authentic setting. Brown *et al.* make the point that learning advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge.

Analysis of the data revealed the importance the trial group attached to the practical activities associated with the cultural centres. The trial group emphasised the importance of working as a group in developing their understanding of teaching visual art. This would confirm the importance Brown *et al.* place on collaborative social interaction in the development of expertise. The trial group talked about the importance of practical activities allowing them to develop their expertise in teaching visual art. Lave and Wenger's (1991) analysis of situated learning described a process where novices gradually acquire knowledge and skills from experts in the context of everyday activities. Analysis of data points to the trial group gradually developing their confidence to teach visual art as they became more familiar with the cultural centres and the educators within those centres. As mentioned earlier, the cultural centres became increasingly important as a place to gain and develop expertise and to inquire and discuss professional practice.

I have been in touch with (museum educator) and I know that if I need any support or had questions I could email her. She is just in Porirua and I know if I needed help I could just go down there. (Quote from first focus group discussion)

She was very helpful to me because she lent me resources and I took them to school and adapted them. (Quote from first focus group discussion)

Supporting teachers (learning communities)

The trial group developed into a community of practice as they worked towards improving joint practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Riel & Polin, 2004). They belonged to two distinct learning communities: a group of participant provisionally registered teachers involved in developing expertise in teaching visual art and the school in which they taught. During the focus group discussions, the trial group talked about sharing their developing expertise in visual art with school colleagues:

...tell other teachers and give other teachers ideas...show them my work book and show them what we did. (Quote from first focus group discussion)

When asked if this had been done in any formal way, by organising school professional development, the following comment was made:

Yes. I will be doing it on the masks. We did it with the drawing. Taking ideas especially with the portraits we were doing. (Quote from first focus group discussion)

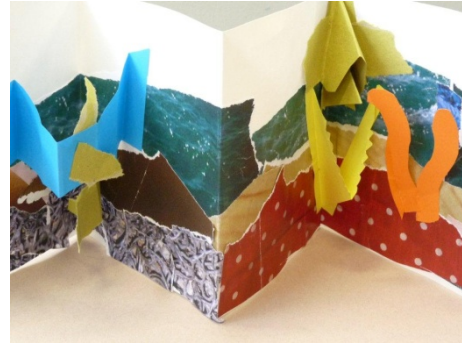
The trial group's developing confidence enabled them to develop the confidence of their school colleagues in the teaching of visual



art. The two communities, to which the trial group members belonged, intersected. Schwen and Hara (2004) made the point that fully functioning communities of practice are not designed but instead evolve naturally. The trial group involved in the research project evolved into a functioning community of practice, supporting its members in their developing expertise and supporting the schools in which they taught.

Developing themes from the focus group discussions

All members of the trial group took part in three focus group discussions held at six-monthly intervals (6, 12, 18 months). The themes that emerged from the analysis of this data help to shed light on why the teachers reported an increase in their confidence to teach and use visual art in the classroom.



During these focus group discussions, six areas were explored:

- How the workshops informed their own classroom practice
- If and how their confidence to teach visual art was informed by the workshops
- Any perceived difference between themselves and other provisionally registered teachers in their schools
- Supporting other teachers in teaching visual art
- Increase confidence and teaching in other curriculum areas
- Increase use of local cultural centres and local community.

Two themes were identified during the focus group discussions:

- Visual art supports the teaching of other curriculum areas
- Effective communities of practice encourage reflection about visual art teaching practice and enhance expertise.

Visual art supports the teaching of other curriculum areas

The trial group linked their increased confidence in classroom practice to the process of discussing and sharing ideas. After the first workshop, the participants would bring work they had completed with their class in the previous term. This work was not necessarily related to visual art. At times it was related to another curriculum area, with visual art being used as a tool to teach in that curriculum area. An example was a trial group participant who used the idea of creating pop-up books to teach their class about volcanoes; the class created pop-up books to illustrate the formation of volcanoes. Another participant used the work she had done in the Pasifika design workshop to teach her class the concept of fractions. The following comment made during a trial group focus group discussion illustrates this:

I think the more ideas we have, the more ideas we get; more flexibility. More ideas and more confidence in actually teaching it. (Quote from focus group discussion)

Analysis of the initial semi-structured interviews at the start of the project highlighted the participants' view that visual art would become an important component in all their teaching. Once they had started teaching, it became increasingly evident from the data that they were using their knowledge and developing confidence in visual art to support other curriculum areas.

The same with literacy I do illustrations to support literacy work. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

It adds to it. It is not as dry. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

It adds a different element to reading and writing. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

It is hands-on for the kids that are hands-on. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

I think for some kids they don't realise they are learning through it. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

Effective communities of practice encourage reflection about visual art teaching practice and enhance expertise

Not only were the trial group members developing their confidence from the concepts and ideas they were being presented with during the workshops, but they were also able to develop their confidence by sharing with each other ideas from their own teaching.

When discussing how the workshops had increased their confidence to teach visual art, the trial group returned to the theme of practical experiences being in part responsible for them developing their confidence to teach visual art.

...because we have had a practical experience of it before; we haven't just read it in a book and thought 'I'll give that a go', we have actually done it ourselves. (Quote from focus group discussion)

The theme of linking practical experiences to developing confidence was evident in all data collected during this project. As mentioned earlier, this links to the theory of situated learning set out by Lave (1988) and Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989), who argued that learning is a function of the activity the learners take part in.

Development over time: Developing disciplinary leadership

In the second and third focus group discussions, when talking about how their developing confidence manifested itself within their own schools, members of the trial group, who were in schools where other provisionally registered teachers were employed, mentioned the difference between their own confidence to teach visual art and their provisionally registered teacher colleagues.

I go ahead and do it, and then she comes in and asks me what I have done and then I'll be teaching her how to do it. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

...you become an extra person that looks like they know what they are doing. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

They come into your room and you explain step by step. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

The trial group talked about being seen by other provisionally registered teachers at their school as 'expert' in teaching visual art, and as such, being sought after for help and guidance.

The theme of supporting their provisionally registered teacher colleagues was also extended to other teachers at their schools. It seems that the trial group members were seen by all their colleagues as the visual art 'experts' at the school.

I take back examples from these workshops, and the teachers say, 'Where is that thing you had that you brought back the other week? Can we have it?' and they will take it and show it to their class and might do something like it. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

The staff are definitely interested in where I go every term and what I do. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

I share what we do at syndicate meetings. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

I am now the art teacher from our syndicate because the others... don't like doing visual art, so, because I am on this course, they say, 'You can do it'. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

The trial group's developing relationship with the cultural centres taking part in the project led to them using the centres outside the parameters of the project. They became places to take their classes, seek advice and find resources.

I think one of the things with this course is that we have made a nice connection with our local gallery. We have utilised that. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

I would never have thought to involve the community as much as we do now since doing this course. Just seeing how it can help and the opportunities it can provide. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

It has made you want to go outside the school gates. (Provisionally registered teacher)

In our school we had Cook Island Day and Samoan Day and all the cultural days, and we invited Cook Island elders to come to the classroom and they were showing us the Tavaevae patterns ... it was beautiful so they came into the classrooms. It was really cool to have these elderly women sitting in the classroom teaching the students, and amazing to have the experience and expertise in the room. So that made me more confident to say to the students, 'We saw what she did so now we can do ...' instead of me trying to make it up completely out of context of the culture. (Quote from third focus group discussion)

The centres became an important link between the schools and the local community. The trial group began to realise the importance of using their community within the classroom just in the same way the cultural centres use their local community. The cultural centres had modelled an inclusive pedagogy that was now being adopted by the participants.

Control group comparison

When data from the control group’s first questionnaire (completed at the start of the project) was compared to the questionnaire completed by the trial group, it was revealed that the control group reported being marginally more confident in teaching visual art. Both the control group and the trial group completed the same questionnaire on three occasions during the two-year project: at the start of the project, after 12 months (Figure 4) and at the end of the two-year project (Figure 5). Below is a comparison of the data from the questionnaires completed by the control group and the trial group after 12 months.

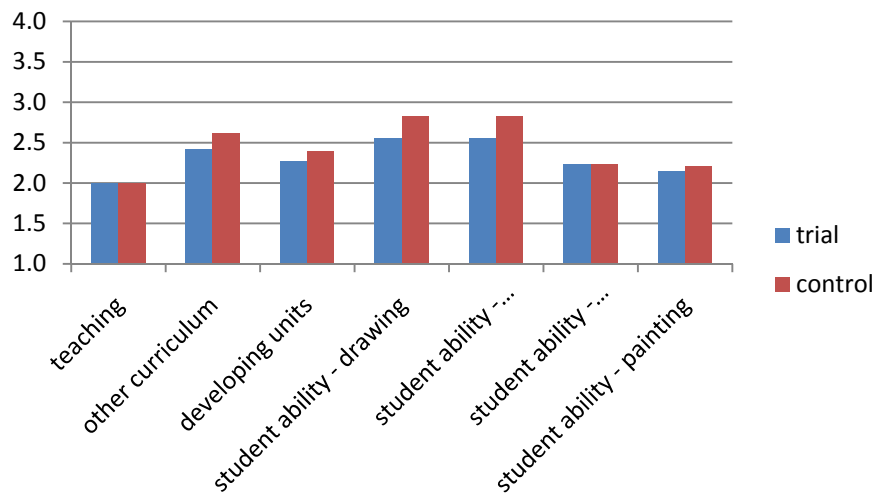


Figure 4: Confidence at teaching visual art at 12 months for trial and control groups

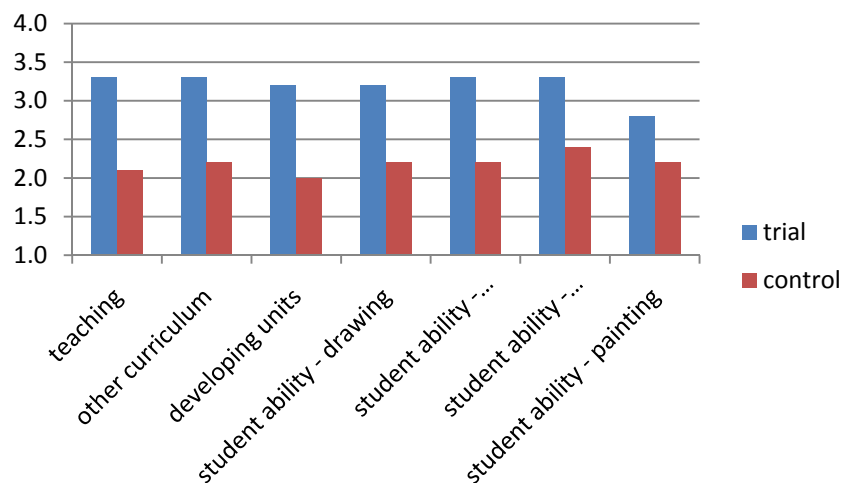


Figure 5: Confidence at teaching visual art at 24 months for trial and control groups

Figures 4 to 6 show that, after 12 months, the trial group started to report that their confidence in teaching visual art is increasing. Comparing the data from the three questionnaires from both the control group and the trial group reveals the control group’s self-reported confidence to teach and incorporate visual art in their teaching remains stable after the first year, whereas the trial group’s confidence increases over the two-year period of the project (Figure 6).

If we recall that, when the data from the first questionnaires was compared, the control group reported being marginally more confident than the trial group in some areas of teaching visual art. At the completion of the project the trial group’s data clearly indicated that they were considerably more confident than the control group in the teaching and use of visual art within their classrooms.

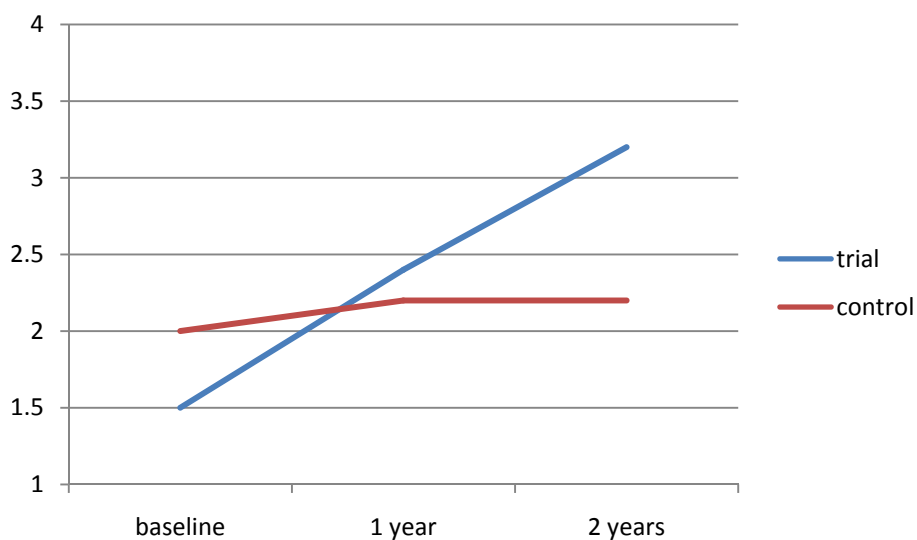


Figure 6: Confidence at teaching visual art across time for trial and control groups

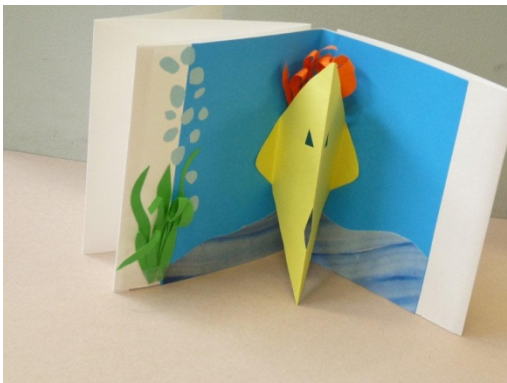
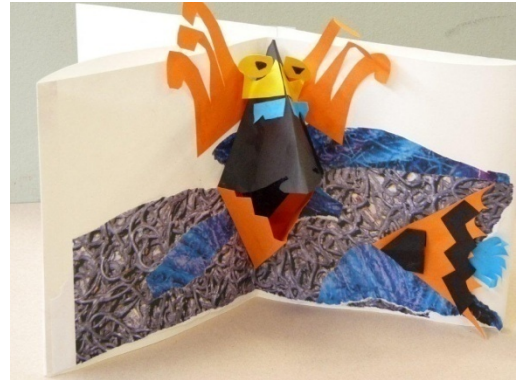
When this data is compared to the data collected from the trial group’s focus group discussions and the post-workshop questionnaires, a number of themes emerge that could indicate the factors responsible for both the development of the trial group’s confidence in using visual art in their teaching and the control group’s lack of progress.

Over the course of the project, the trial group members’ confidence to teach visual art progressed and their relationship with the cultural centres became more important. Not only were the trial group members starting to use the cultural centres involved in the project, they were also making contacts with others in their community to support teaching and learning.

I would never have thought to involve the community as much as we do now since doing this course. Just seeing how it can help and the opportunities it can provide.
(Quote from second focus group discussion)

The control group did not have the structure provided by the project, they were not part of a community of practice whose focus was to support their developing confidence in the teaching of visual art, and as stated above, they had not been given the opportunity to experience the “the opportunities” provided by their local community in the context of supporting teaching and learning.

All these factors combined could have limited the development of the control group's confidence in the teaching of visual art.



Discussion

This project set out to investigate whether provisionally registered teachers' confidence to teach visual art could be enhanced by working with existing expertise in the community. The project was in response to concern about the lack of support available for primary school teachers in the teaching of visual art.

The data clearly demonstrates that local support does exist and can provide the support primary teachers need to develop their confidence in the teaching of visual art. Although the curriculum focus for this project was visual art, support for all curriculum areas can be found within the community. There are many examples where local cultural centres provide primary schools with support in a full range of curriculum areas. The support does not have to come from cultural centres, as there are many community groups outside cultural centres who have expertise in curriculum-specific areas.



One aspect that emerged from this study was the ability of the cultural centres participating in the study to coordinate the various community groups both within and outside their region. They performed the role of a 'cultural broker' by making available a wide range of expertise to both schools and others within their local community. Perhaps cultural centres could be renamed cultural brokerages. The cultural centres responded to the needs of the trial group, and in doing so, the trial group began using the cultural centres to enhance teaching and learning outside the framework of the project. It was not only the cultural centres involved in the study that were used by the trial group.

I think one of the things with this course is that we have made a nice connection with our local gallery. They have an educator there, and she has come to our school twice and we have gone to her, which I wouldn't have done if it wasn't for this project. So now we take the kids there, which is a new dimension. (Quote from second focus group discussion)

The quote above is from one of the trial group members whose school was close to a gallery that was not part of the project. This teacher had seen the benefits of using cultural centres to support teaching and learning, and started to use a local cultural centre.

According to the data collected from the trial group, it was the combination of practical experiences, using the cultural centres, and the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss their own practice that allowed them to develop their confidence to teach visual art. The trial group developed into a community of practice such as that described by Lave and Wenger (1991). It was within the structure of this community that the participants started to discuss and reflect upon the practical activities and their application in the context of teaching and learning. The trial group made the point that one aspect of developing their confidence was hearing what others had done and using each other's ideas within their own classroom environments. This implies that the impact of practical experiences on developing expertise is enhanced and strengthened within the context of a community of practice.

The control group members would each have been part of a community of practice at their own schools, although the schools would have different dynamics and support structures. The trial group made the point that they were perceived by members of their schools as experts in the teaching of visual art, and as such they offered ideas and advice at their schools. The control group members would have looked for advice and support from within their schools, but this may not have been available. This in part may explain why their self-reported confidence in the teaching of visual art did not develop and, in some cases, even decreased. If one has low levels of confidence and does not get the opportunity to develop greater confidence, then the lack of confidence could further deteriorate, as it did in the case of the control group.

If schools are to respond to social change, then teachers need the tools, support networks and confidence to do so. The trial group was able to develop a working relationship with their local cultural centres, and therefore, to develop tools to respond to the needs of their students. It was not just the teaching of visual art that was affected. The trial group talked about how they were able to use their developing expertise in other curriculum areas. They also talked about using their local community to engage their students, which reflected the inclusive pedagogy modelled by the cultural centres.

The role of a primary school teacher is challenging, as they are expected to be able to engage their students in a wide-ranging curriculum. This study has shown that, with the support of community expertise and a functioning community of practice, teachers can develop their confidence in teaching.

This small project focusing on a group of primary school provisionally registered teachers raises a number of questions that need further investigation. One issue that emerges is the depth of support for curriculum knowledge that student teachers have access to both in the one-year postgraduate teaching diploma course and during the two years of provisional registration. Perhaps if this three-year period was seen as an opportunity to deliver a programme that would equip teachers to cope with the ever-changing demands of teaching, the result would be teachers who were more confident in the classroom. Rather than viewing the one-year postgraduate diploma as an end point, it could be seen as a starting point. A more comprehensive programme could be developed by the institutions offering the one-year programme in partnership with cultural centres and schools. This three-year programme could become a route to a higher qualification.

Another aspect of this study is the role played by the cultural centres in supporting teaching and learning in local schools. The cultural centres responded to the needs of the trial group both within and outside the project. After the first year of the project, both City Gallery and Pataka saw the need to provide practical workshops for teachers in their local community and started doing so. Some trial group members started to attend these workshops along with other teachers. This has enabled these cultural centres to provide closer links to schools in their community. It was clear from the data collected during this study that the cultural centres involved were able to provide the support needed to develop the provisionally registered teacher's confidence in teaching. The schools at which the trial group members taught were geographically close to the cultural centres, which made it easier for them to identify with the cultural centre and visit them outside the research timetable. This enhanced the development of their relationships. It would be more difficult for schools to develop this relationship if the provisionally registered teachers could not easily access the cultural

centres. One solution to this problem could be the development of online platforms in the cultural centres and schools that enable them to support teaching and learning in schools outside of their immediate area.

Before starting this project, I visited the trial group's volunteer provisionally registered teachers' school principals. The principals of the schools where the trial group members were teaching were fully supportive of their provisionally registered teachers and the study. There were, however, some potential volunteers whose principals felt there was little need for the provisionally registered teachers to develop their expertise in the teaching of visual art, when the school's focus was the development of numeracy and literacy skills to meet the requirements of the national numeracy and literacy standards. This narrow view is worrying, when the evidence from this study illustrates that it was not only the trial group's confidence to teach visual art that was developed but also their confidence in teaching all areas of the curriculum.

This project has now ended, and as a result, there is a group of primary school teachers in the Greater Wellington region who are confident in using visual art in their teaching. During the project, they became an active community of practice as they supported one another to develop this confidence. According to Talbert and McLaughlin (2002), collaborative teacher communities improve teaching practice as a result of teachers sharing knowledge, evaluating new practices, and sharing a repertoire of practice. If it was, in part, the process of sharing knowledge within the community that allowed their confidence to develop, then in order to sustain this community, this group of provisionally registered teachers will need to continue to work together. They will need the opportunity and encouragement to continue, and perhaps this opportunity will allow others to join the group and develop their own confidence. Lave and Wenger (1991) made the point that one of the characteristics of a community of practice is that it is socially situated, with new community members learning through a process of acculturation. The trial group became a collaborative teacher community, developing confidence in the teaching of visual art by sharing knowledge and evaluating new practices. If they were to continue as a group, others could also join the community thus continuing the professional development of teachers.

As the evidence of this study shows, the trial group's confidence in teaching visual art developed and in turn, this confidence supported their ability to teach other curriculum areas. The implications of this project are that cultural centres are ideally placed to support the professional development of teachers and, therefore, teaching and learning within their local schools. I would recommend that a greater emphasis is placed on the role cultural centres can play in the professional development of teachers. In order for this recommendation to become fully realised, further research is needed to gain a greater understanding of the role played by cultural centres in supporting teacher development and teaching and learning. If schools are to respond to the ever-changing needs of their local communities, it seems that cultural centres are ideally placed to support schools in the way they respond to those needs.

I would also recommend that the two years provisionally registered teachers spend developing their expertise as teachers is restructured and linked more closely to the expertise available outside schools. This period could be seen as an extension to their teaching qualification and perhaps a structured pathway to a higher qualification.

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Appendix: Journal articles/conferences completed to date

During the two-year research project, the following journal articles have been published and conference presentations made:

Bowell, I. (2010). *Community support for teacher learning in visual art*. Fifth International Conference on the Arts in Society, Sydney.

Bowell, I. (2010). Community support for teacher learning in visual art. *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*.5(3), 235-246.

Bowell, I. (2011). *Community Support for Visual Art Education*. ANZAAE Conference, Hamilton, July 2011.

Bowell, I. (2011) *Cultural Centres Supporting Teaching and Learning*. World Education Research Association (WERA).) Focal Meeting as part of the Taiwan Education Research Association International Conference on Education (TICE) Taiwan.

Bowell, I. (2011). Supporting visual art teaching in primary schools. *Journal of Art Education Australia*. 34(2), 98-118.