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To cite this article: Katie Burke & David Cleaver (2019) The art of home education: an investigation into the impact of context on arts teaching and learning in home education, Cambridge Journal of Education, 49:6, 771-788, DOI: [10.1080/0305764X.2019.1609416](https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2019.1609416)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2019.1609416>



Published online: 19 May 2019.



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The art of home education: an investigation into the impact of context on arts teaching and learning in home education

Katie Burke^a and David Cleaver^b

^aFaculty of Business, Education, Law and the Arts, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia; ^bFaculty of Business, Education, Law and the Arts, University of Southern Queensland, Springfield, Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper explores understandings and implications arising from research conducted into how home educating families approach learning in the creative arts. Through a series of online focus groups with 14 Australian home educating families, the authors sought to understand the strategies and learning activities that families employed when teaching their children about the arts, and the factors that influenced this process. An earlier paper based on this investigation uncovered the strategies employed by participating families, and in this successive paper, they now focus on the variety of ways that the arts learning strategies were flexibly incorporated into individual educational family practice according to the fluctuating needs and dynamics of individual contexts. The findings highlight how families engage in arts learning as a form of sociocultural practice, with individuals as joint members in a family 'Community of Practice' and where authentic, collaborative and child-centred arts experiences are valued.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 January 2019
Accepted 16 April 2019

KEYWORDS

Home education; home-schooling; arts education; Communities of Practice; sociocultural learning theory

Introduction

Home education, sometimes also referred to as home-schooling, is one of the fastest growing educational phenomena globally and yet it has often been misrepresented and misunderstood (Neuman & Guterman, 2016a; Ray, 2013, 2016). With an increase in the numbers of children being home educated, research in the field has likewise proliferated, and the majority of this has tended to focus upon understanding motivations, processes and impacts of home education (Neuman & Guterman, 2017). While many researchers have sought to understand and define how home educators approach pedagogy, this is often regarded as ineffective, working against a nuanced understanding of the diversity of practices, and which can perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes (Monk, 2009). Further, the existing research into pedagogy has also predominantly focused upon broad understandings of the overall approach to children's learning, without investigating whether the pedagogical processes and strategies they employ differ across different subject domains. The research reported here thus contributes to a relatively un-researched domain by investigating the ways in which Australian home educating parents facilitate learning specifically in the creative arts.

CONTACT Katie Burke  Katie.Burke@usq.edu.au  Faculty of Business, Education, Law and the Arts, University of Southern Queensland, West Street, Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia

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We set out to understand the variety of ways home educators approach arts learning, the issues that they experience in doing so, and the wider contextual features that impacted the choices made within individual contexts. Such understandings are important on a number of levels. Creativity is considered a cornerstone of the arts, and is increasingly recognised as a fundamental attribute for future effectiveness in a rapidly changing, technologically advancing world (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2006). The value of learning across a range of arts domains is thus increasingly being promoted as essential for the preparation of twenty-first-century learning capacities. However, given the growth of home education, very little is known about how facilitating parents engage with the arts and we sought to contribute to the growing field by providing specific insights into how parents facilitate learning in the arts.

This paper presents part two of a study into the arts teaching and learning practices employed by 14 home educating families. Earlier (Burke & Cleaver, 2018), we presented findings regarding a range of strategies that participants employed when facilitating arts learning. We now build upon earlier findings, demonstrating how the identified strategies are influenced by factors in the sociocultural context of each family and where the greatest influence is exerted by the individual home educating parent followed by factors at the family level, and finally at the community level. We show that home education is, unsurprisingly, significantly influenced by the context in which it occurs, and reflective of sociocultural learning approaches (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In previous research, home educating children have been described as ‘cognitive apprentices’ in the family’s Community of Practice (CoP) (Barratt-Peacock, 1997) and in this project we sought to understand whether this description was relevant to the nature of arts learning in home education contexts. The findings support arts learning as a form of context-specific, sociocultural practice and highlight how this raises both benefits and challenges to the potential quality of the arts learning in the home.

Literature review

Pedagogical approaches in home education

A literature search reveals numerous classifications that group pedagogical approaches along a continuum, with structured learning at one extreme and child-led approaches at the other. Parents/carers who adopt structured and formal ‘school at home’ (English, 2012) approaches have been found to predominantly make use of commercially available pre-prepared curricula to cover basic skills, often mixing and matching these with wider supplemental activities in other curriculum areas (Burke & Cleaver, 2018; Harding, 2011). At the other extreme of the continuum are families who prefer a ‘natural learning’ or ‘unschooling’ approach: learner-centred approaches that follow from the work of author and educator John Holt (1967), who maintained that children are capable, curious and natural learners who can be trusted to learn what is meaningful and valuable if provided with a rich, inspiring and supportive environment. These polarised descriptions miss the nuanced diversity of practices that individual home educating families employ. As such, numerous researchers purport that most families would fit somewhere between these extremes, with many adopting an eclectic approach to their children’s learning, in which

a flexible and responsive mix of instructional modalities and approaches are employed (Burke & Cleaver, 2018; Carpenter & Gann, 2016). Thus, beyond their decision to educate children at home, home educators cannot be grouped together in a single, unified or homogenous group (Morton, 2010; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b, 2016c). Likewise, definitive descriptions of how home education occurs do not accurately define a practice that emanates from choice within individual families. Monk (2004) writes of home educators: '[They are] enormously diverse and it is important not to characterize them as a monolithic group ... it is this very diversity that makes the construction of an identity and the development of a community more striking' (p. 591). The practice, therefore, can be as unique as the families from which it emerges.

Home education as sociocultural practice

When attempting to definitively categorise home education, some have endeavoured to understand and explain it through comparisons with traditional institutional education. This again contributes to limited understandings. Home educating pioneer Thomas (1998) wrote that home educators are 'pioneers of a different pedagogy' (p. 14), based upon the fundamentally different approach that occurs in the home environment as compared to a classroom environment. He noted that informal, social 'chatting' was a characteristic of much of a typical home educating family's day, and asserted that a tremendous amount is learned through social interactions without a focus on formal teaching. This informal approach has been identified as *enculturation*: the acquiring of fundamental cultural understandings naturally through everyday social interaction (Thomas, 1998), and of *situated learning located in social practice* (Barratt-Peacock, 1997). As such, a number of seminal and recent researchers have identified home education as a form of socio-cultural/socio-constructivist practice (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Burke, 2016; Harding, 2011; Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b).

Sociocultural views of learning are based predominantly upon the works of Vygotsky, who asserts that learning is best understood when focus is given not to the product or outcomes of learning, but the *process* by which learning occurs, which is heavily mediated by the learner's social and cultural context (Daniels, 2008). Sociocultural theory does not focus upon knowledge acquisition, but upon a learner's engagement with a Community of Practice in which learning occurs as a feature of membership in that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). An intimate understanding of the whole learner within the context of authentic, everyday interactions generates an atmosphere where 'school work' becomes embedded meaningfully in 'life', and where learning can more readily become focused upon a genuine development of the 'whole person' (Burke, 2016). As such, sociocultural approaches to education foreground authentic learning experiences in social settings, which are naturally part of the educational landscape in home education environments.

Framing arts learning according to sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory offers a cogent lens to understand home education, and based upon this, it was speculated that meaningful arts practices within home education might be best understood when approached as a form of sociocultural engagement. Importantly,

sociocultural approaches to learning are advocated by expert educators when engaging in arts learning experiences (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010). Hence, exploring arts learning from a sociocultural perspective not only aligns with processes within home education but also with recommended pedagogical practice. In the context of this project, sociocultural approaches to learning in the arts are understood to foreground the value of collaborative, authentic and embodied arts experiences where students engage in making and responding to the artworks of others (Burke, 2016). Holland and O'Connor (2004) further espouse the merits of arts learning environments as 'structured chaos' in which teachers and learners work in collaboration, learning from each other, reflecting in and on their learning critically and making meaningful connections to their wider world of experience. When approached as a form of sociocultural practice, the arts thus represent an opportunity to move beyond traditional transmission modes of teaching to facilitate negotiated units of learning that engage learners critically and creatively and encourage them to engage with and share personal interests and ideas.

From this perspective, home educators appear well placed to facilitate such 'authentic' and situated arts learning. However, the identification of families as Communities of Practice equally has potential limitations. Communities of Practice are typically formed by persons who share an interest in a craft or profession, and engage with each other for the purpose of sharing their joint interest and improving upon their practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Importantly, a feature of the CoP is that those who hold less experience in the given area of interest learn from the expertise of more experienced members (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the context of home education, the family's Community of Practice is concerned with learning (Harding, 2011) and holistic development (Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). However, if the family's culture does not naturally value the arts, what implication might this have for arts learning in that home? Based upon an understanding of the nature of Communities of Practice, it could be surmised that arts learning may suffer within contexts where parents feel ill-equipped to teach due to the lack of specialised skills. Such questions are explored by this research.

In a previous paper (Burke & Cleaver, 2018), we explored the arts learning strategies home educators employed when facilitating their children's learning and we revealed that a home educator's background knowledge in the arts was found to significantly influence strategy selection. Notably, those who identified as lacking in knowledge and confidence tended to rely upon prescriptive curriculum and/or resources, which at first could appear to work against the 'structured chaos' recommended by Holland and O'Connor (2004). Nonetheless, when investigating the concept of 'authenticity' regarding the arts learning strategies parents adopted, we revealed the centrality of catering to the individual needs and interests of children, and the ways that parents attempted to flexibly adapt prescriptive materials for their children's interests and needs. This was based upon a shared belief that tapping into life-long learning capacities would develop the 'whole person'. This paper builds upon these findings to better understand how contextual variables in individual situations influence the ways in which participants facilitate their children's arts learning, and the extent to which a family's Community of Practice can effectively facilitate arts learning.

An understanding of home education as a form of sociocultural practice and of how this can drive arts learning approaches is thus central to this investigation. The exploration of the literature through a sociocultural lens aids in understanding the

diversity of approaches to home education and how significantly families are influenced by their social and cultural context. This in turn has implications for understanding the variety of approaches that families contextually utilise when facilitating arts learning. This review of literature equally provides a rudimentary framework for understanding some hallmarks of arts learning from a sociocultural perspective.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to understand how a sample of home educators facilitates arts learning and to gain insight into how their practice was influenced and impacted by their unique contexts. A qualitative research methodology was applied in order to obtain rich, narrative data that would characterise the situation and represent multiple perspectives. While we acknowledge that 'facts' about behaviour can be established, these are always contextually bound in a social world that consists of, and is constructed through, shared understandings. As such, an interpretivist stance was adopted in order to focus less upon objective 'discovery' of 'facts' but upon the development of theories that contribute to understanding the complexities of 'lived experience' (Van Manen, 2004).

Data were generated via a private, purpose-built web-based forum where participants engaged in a focus group setting over a period of three months. A series of forum threads were progressively opened, each with a discussion question posed in order to elicit participant responses on a variety of issues related to facilitating their children's arts education. This promoted lively discussion wherein the participants responded to the question and to each other's posts, sharing opinions, personal experiences and recommendations – essentially documenting their 'lived experience' (Van Manen, 2004). Additionally, a short, 10-question survey was administered to all participants towards the end of the project as a means to validate and enrich understandings generated in the online forums, providing a means to reflect upon data analysis of forum content and check that identified patterns and relationships were supported. The use of online data gathering permitted families from across five Australian states to engage, thus enabling a breadth of perspectives to emerge. In total 14 volunteers (13 females and one male) contributed. Children of participants ranged in age from the pre-school years through to upper-middle school (age 14). Participants were primarily recruited via AussieHomeschool.com.au, a large and well-established online community of Australian home educators who utilise forums for mutual support, and who were thus familiar with the use of forums for interactive discussion. Ethical consent to voluntarily participate in the research was obtained and all agreed to abide by ethical standards for online conduct and who acknowledged their currency as a home educating parent. The voices of participants are incorporated and pseudonyms are used throughout.

Issues of significance relating to the home facilitation of arts learning were sought throughout the online focus group process, with a particular desire to represent faithfully and richly contextual experience. Such a focus warranted an inductive, rather than deductive approach to data analysis; that is, analysis that allowed significant themes to emerge from specific elements of empirical observation (Johnson, 2008). Throughout the project, ongoing data analysis was presented to participants for their critical comment to ensure that emerging themes and

understandings were relevant and representational of their experience, thus ensuring participant agency and transparency of the analysis process (Creswell, 2007).

Results and discussion

In this project, we sought to understand how participating home education families engaged in arts learning, the challenges they experienced, and the ways these were influenced by their context. From an initial search for particulars, patterns, relationships and themes (see Hatch, 2002), two overarching categories emerged through the analysis process. These pertained to the particular **strategies** that parents adopted to facilitate arts learning and associated **contextual influences** including the impact of context upon pedagogical strategies. The specific strategies that participating parents were found to adopt has been previously reported (Burke & Cleaver, 2018), but are briefly outlined here for reader clarity (Table 1).

In addition to these strategies employed when facilitating arts education, a variety of *contextual features* were identified that influenced how, why and to what extent parents employed a combination of arts teaching and learning strategies. Importantly, a range of contextual features was identified, each varying in influence. Most prominent was the individual parent's personal background, skill and confidence with the arts and their beliefs regarding the value of the arts. Next in importance was the family's approach to arts education, including factors such as the priority given to the arts as a learning domain, the ability and enjoyment children exhibited with respect to different art forms, and resources available for the pursuit of specific arts learning opportunities. Finally, the community and wider societal structures influenced individual families' approaches to arts learning, including opportunities at their disposal in the community and educational mandates according to their state's registration requirements. A clear relationship was identified between the arts learning strategies participants adopted and the contextual features of each family. This relationship is explored in Figure 1, which highlights how the strategies adopted were nested within the influence of the individual home educating parent, then personal contextual features of the immediate family context and, finally, the wider community context.

Table 1. Strategies parents adopted to facilitate arts learning.

Learning strategy	Description
Child-led learning	Arts learning episodes are often child initiated through the child's spontaneous creative activity, which parents then purposefully encourage and nurture through the provision of time and resources.
Resource-led learning	Parents obtain guidance for learning activities via a wide range of educational resources, such as purchasing prescriptive arts curricula and texts, lesson-website prescriptions and free websites.
Outsourcing	Parents seek and purposefully utilise opportunities outside of the home through which children can engage in arts learning through organised experiences, including paid lessons with private tutors and free classes in their communities.
Collaboration	Parents often seek out and engage in collaborative relationships with other home educating families, permitting them to maximise on different parent strengths and gain motivation to organise arts 'get-togethers'.
Integration of the arts	Arts approaches and strategies are integrated, or combined, with learning in other subject areas in arts-rich activities or projects. Parents recognise the potential to 'cover more learning in less time', and to bring dynamism and creativity to other subject areas.

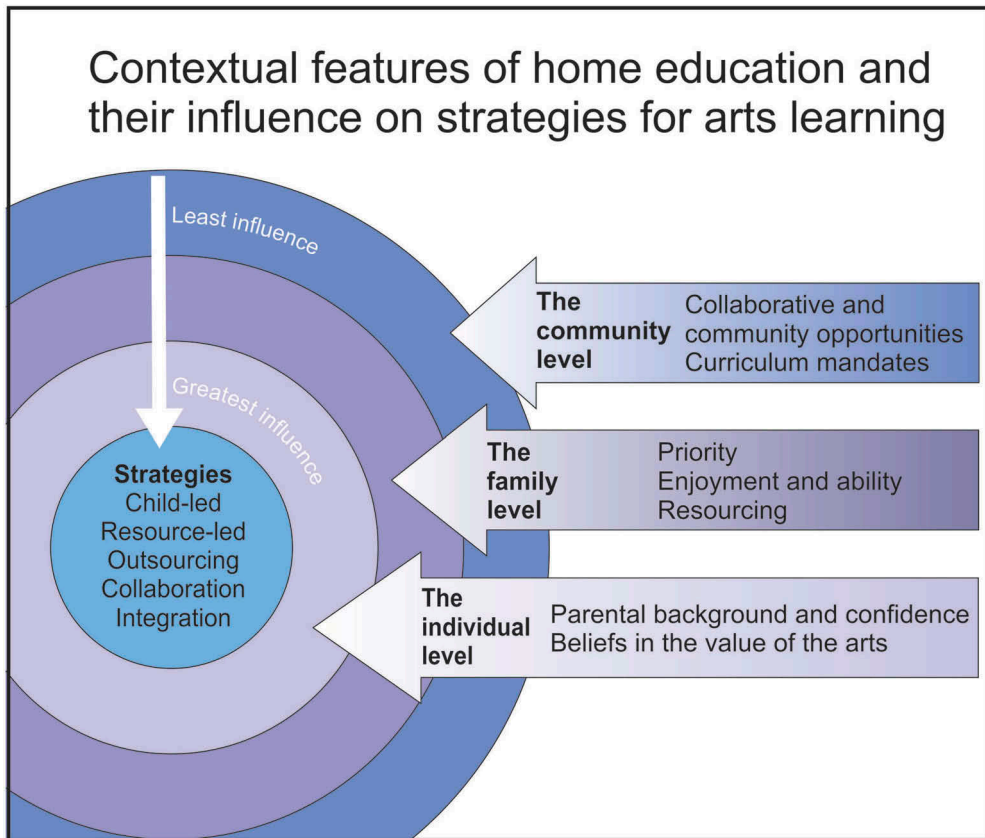


Figure 1. Contextual features of home education and their influence on strategies for arts learning.

The following is an explication of the impact of contextual features upon the ways that participating home educators engaged in arts teaching and learning with their children. We highlight how contingent each family's choice of art education strategies was upon their unique contextual features. These are explored according to context, beginning with the individual, family, and, finally, wider community context.

The individual context

The background and personal attributes of the home educating participants emerged as the most significant influence over the ways that art learning was delivered in individual contexts. Factors within parental background included their skills and confidence with respect to the various domains of the arts; and of equal significance were the beliefs and perspectives they held regarding the value of the arts.

Parental background: skills and confidence

Comments by participants revealed how arts facilitation was influenced by their experience. Some possessed an arts-rich background with specific developed competencies in any number of the arts subjects, whereas others had experienced very little formal or

informal arts learning. Importantly, the possession of limited background in the arts could *not* be correlated with a lesser appreciation of the value of arts learning. However, what became clear was that background learning had implications for participant *perception of their ability* to facilitate an arts education and hence this factor was found to directly influence confidence in facilitating arts learning. Perceptions of a lack of skill and knowledge in the arts then made it a more challenging ‘subject’ to incorporate in the home education practice.

Analysis of this issue highlighted a correlation between parental confidence levels and the use of more prescriptive curricula: the less confident a parent felt in facilitating arts learning, the more likely they were to use prescriptive curricula, where step-by-step instructions provided the confidence and guidance they felt they needed to implement effective arts learning:

We have been using [a prescriptive] curriculum. It was a starting point for me in an unknown world. . . . I think it gives a good overview and is easy for me to do. (Renee)

I have bought some art lesson plans It has made a big difference to my confidence. (Liz)

Strong correlation was found between confidence and parental background; previous arts exposure clearly contributed to greater levels of confidence. The level of parental confidence was similarly correlated with the level of difficulty experienced in facilitating arts learning. It is argued by some researchers that a teacher’s lack of confidence in their own effectiveness in any given area contributes to one of the most substantial hindrances to effective teaching in that domain (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, 2009), with teaching effectiveness being strongly correlated with teacher confidence and interest (Dinham, 2007). Although such research has targeted classroom educators and not home educators, our findings demonstrate a resonance where content knowledge and confidence equally apply to the perceived effectiveness of arts learning in the home.

Beliefs and perspectives: the value of the arts

Participant beliefs and perspectives regarding the value of the arts were found to be a more significant factor than parental confidence in determining the extent to which the arts were included in the family’s approach to arts learning. Largely, participants agreed that the arts are part of a holistic education that engages the whole student and enables them to explore their passions and develop important multimodal literacies. Discussions revealed that most participants felt that the arts enrich learning in other areas and develop important skills, and that wide exposure to a variety of the arts is believed to prompt and inspire children to explore new areas of learning.

I believe it is only through the provision of the arts (music, media, drama, visual art etc.) as a core to the curriculum rather than a subject on the periphery, that students are able to develop as ‘whole/rounded’ future citizens. (Eve)

Only one participant did not see the arts as an integral part of education, and this was reflected in a less-intentional exploration:

I think the arts is something that's nice to do. It can be fun, especially if the kids are young, but because I'm busy stressing about maths and whether or not the kids can read, the arts don't get structured in formally into our lives. We go to museums, go to concerts, sing, draw, etc as the kids see fit. Nothing formal As I said [my husband] & I are maths people. We prefer to laugh over maths jokes, talk about maths ideas, and read in our spare time rather than draw/paint/play music. (Sally)

This example of the arts as 'something nice to do' – as compared to an integral element of learning – translated into a less-intentional approach to arts learning for this family. This contrasts with other participants who reported some lack of confidence in ability to facilitate arts learning but who still emphasised a belief in the value of the arts, thus making strong attempts to include them in their curriculum. Analysis of discussions suggests that parental conviction regarding the value of arts learning was a more influential and significant factor than confidence when incorporating the arts into a home education curriculum.

The family context

Decisions regarding arts learning were made primarily at the individual, parental level, followed closely by influential factors within the broader family context. Parents described a variety of issues unique to their contexts, including health issues, financial constraints and the individual needs of family members. The various concerns were grouped under broader themes: the priority afforded to arts learning in the family's curriculum; the level of children's enjoyment and abilities in the arts; and the resourcing of arts learning.

Priority afforded to arts learning

Historically, research into arts education highlights how the arts have long been considered of lesser importance than other subject areas (Nussbaum, 2012). Our analysis of the participant approaches to arts learning affirmed that it was often omitted. Responses suggested that other subjects required greater time and attention, especially numeracy and literacy. Even parents who highly valued the arts described how they struggled with the arts when time was tight or other subjects presented difficulties, and that arts learning became a lower priority:

I try to get English Maths and spelling done first, and if they don't get done, nothing else does either really (apart from the organised ballet, tap or sport) Don't get me wrong, it's not that I consider art unimportant, in fact I would love for my children to be able to appreciate art much better than I do. It's just that even our English, maths and particularly spelling have suffered over the years with so much time on the road [seeking medical care for a child with health issues]. (Renee)

As I have a teaching background (in music and visual art), I have not purchased programmes/curriculum to follow but decided to rely on my own knowledge and skills to informally teach these areas. In the past weeks I have been reflecting on how I have been neglecting the teaching and assessment across all areas of arts. My guilt comes from the fact that these are my daughter's strengths, particularly visual arts, yet I have been caught in the trap of trying to work on the areas of difficulty (reading, maths, writing) neglecting the arts. (Eve)

Trying to juggle the many responsibilities of education and family life, in addition to matters such as health issues, the needs of younger children, or particular difficulties

students may experience with other subject areas, presented challenges for deciding what priority arts learning should be given. When participants mentioned time constraints, it always led to the arts being eliminated first. The adoption of an intentionally enriching, child-led arts environment was utilised by some families as a means to encourage children to engage with the arts in their 'down time':

... there's a lot of time for free exploration ... they're always painting, drawing, building, designing something. (Kay)

For one participant, intentional 'white space' (scheduled free time in each week) involved the inclusion of stimulating, encouraging arts exploration as an important strategy. Other participant comments similarly revealed that child-led learning was a strategy that helped to ensure arts learning 'happened' when time constraints made its intentional inclusion difficult to achieve.

In Australia, five art subjects are included under the banner of 'the arts': Dance; Drama; Media Arts; Music; and Visual Art. Participants acknowledged that some arts subjects were given greater priority than others, with Drama, Dance and Media Arts given lesser priority, unless children showed natural ability. Forum discussions highlighted that Visual Arts and Music were perceived as the easiest to explore in the home education environment, and that these subjects had a plethora of readily available teaching resources. Drama and Dance were identified as particularly difficult to explore, with parents feeling that these forms required wider social interaction or expert instruction. Dance and Drama were thus generally engaged with via children's spontaneous activity or outsourcing to paid professionals or community organisations. Media Arts, although part of the Australian curriculum, was not recognised as a priority by a number of participants whose state curriculum did not include it as an art form.

Participant background and children's interests had a particularly clear role in determining the arts subjects that gained priority:

I have a background in music, so music happens fairly naturally in my house. It makes up the fabric of our home and no one can avoid it ... That does not mean that it doesn't take considerable effort on my part – it just means that it is my passion and priority, so I don't mind putting in the effort. (May)

Dance – yet another area I'm not passionate about (I was one of those uncoordinated, quiet kids growing up). I tick this off with weekly gymnastics classes and spontaneous dancing around the house. (Eve)

The features of individual participant homes can here be seen to have an impact upon how arts learning is prioritised. All participants admitted to struggling at different times to give priority to arts learning, especially when pressed for time.

Enjoyment and ability

In cases where interest or aptitude was expressed by individual children, this often initiated a more intentional exploration (including use of outsourcing) of the specific area of interest. Equally, a lack of interest or aptitude often became a rationale for non-engagement in a particular area. This stands in contrast to the recommendations of the Australian Curriculum where 'all young Australians are entitled to engage with the five Arts subjects

[Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art] and should be given an opportunity to experience the special knowledge and skills base of each' (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011, p. 6). However, participants maintained a focused set of values that elevated the specific needs and interests of their children:

As for ways of encountering the arts that might more productively develop their benefits in our children, I think this is where engaging the children's interest comes in. It depends on your location, the dynamics of the house, teacher, students etc. and whether you as a family are involved in arty type stuff or if you are only sourcing activities to check the boxes so to speak. (Grace)

... an approach to the arts that is concerned with 'ticking the boxes' really does not represent authentic arts learning. (Imogen)

Notably, participants highlighted that their concern was again on developing their children, not on fulfilling external requirements, and their children's enjoyment and ability were considered to be important factors that assisted in determining the directions that were most cogent to take. This approach again reflects the nature of home education as sociocultural practice. While schools, with larger student populations and diversity of interests, must adhere to curriculum mandates to ensure a well-rounded subject coverage across the larger student population, the home education environment promotes individualised learning. Covering different elements of learning to different depths is not only possible but desirable, as children's needs and interests develop.

Resourcing arts learning

'Resourcing' refers to economic considerations, as well as the provision of the practical requirements to facilitate arts learning. Participant discussion revealed that finding appropriate resources (both with planning and with conducting arts learning) was often difficult and expensive. Parents frequently referred to the cost of appropriate materials (especially quality visual arts materials), the cost of purchasing curricula, associated tools (such as musical instruments) and of outsourcing fees to specialist instruction.

[One of] my difficulties would be ... the cost of quality art supplies. Instruments are quite expensive, but they last. Paints etc. are less expensive but they get used up, and decent paints do cost. (Liz)

I would like my children to have music lessons but being rather musically challenged was not confident to do anything myself; cost was a problem. (Renee)

Drama for us has been non-existent as that is one area which does need a group setting We would have to put the children in an organised drama class, and once again, cost becomes an issue. (Leesky)

Harding (2011) shows that home educating families are generally single income, and most participants in this study relied upon one wage for the household. This financial pressure had visible implications on the arts learning that they could access, often creating unwanted limitations. Nonetheless, as will be explored later in this article, this contextual issue led a number of participant families to consider creative ways to address this limitation.

The community context

Beyond the context of the home educating parent and family, wider contextual features had implications for how participants approached arts learning in their home. Most notable was the availability of collaborative and community opportunities. Of far less importance to participants in the study was the recommendations of external curriculum authorities.

Collaborative and community opportunities

Outsourcing or collaborating with others was identified as a common strategy parents used to enrich arts learning, especially when they felt they lacked the necessary skills to teach specific skills or knowledge. When engaging with arts-related outsourcing opportunities, parents generally felt they were under less pressure to ‘cover’ these art subjects in the home. However, outsourcing to professional arts teachers or community programmes was often cost-prohibitive. Participants were therefore less likely to outsource if their children did not show interest or aptitude. Outsourcing and collaborating were very dependent upon individual contexts and what was available in immediate locales. This was evident when participants discussed the opportunities that existed in their communities:

We are very fortunate that our town has a very active arts community and they are very happy to include home-schoolers in activities. (Lois)

... where we live is a big factor. If you live within an hour's drive of art galleries, music teachers, dance schools, drama clubs, theatre/musical shows, home-school co-ops etc. I would say it is possible that your kids would have a broader taste of the arts than children growing up on an isolated property... Though as someone has already mentioned, in some instances finances are just as prohibitive as distance. I still think though that if you live in the middle of Melbourne, you have got a lot better chance at a varied arts education than if you live on a remote cattle station in the NT, no matter what the financial situation is. (Amber)

Participants demonstrated that adopting a flexible approach to their arts learning and keeping a consistent vigil for opportunities allowed them to ‘make the most’ of community opportunities as they arose:

We make use of as many free community activities as we can. It maybe leads to a quite *ad hoc* curriculum, but we have had some wonderful opportunities such as: free drama workshops with visiting theatre companies, music concerts in the botanic gardens, group art activities at festivals, art workshops leading up to a community celebration, holiday activities in the library/art gallery/shopping centre, free exhibitions and artist talks. (Lois)

I get our local papers, check the library, talk to other local parents (both home-schoolers and school) to stay in touch with what is happening in the area. This is helpful for all subjects not just the arts. I am always on home-school planner duty. If you don't keep checking local news and ads you miss great things that happen in the community; you have to be active in searching or you miss out. Also if I find that something was on and I missed it, I get in touch with the people and see if maybe we could be involved next time. (Grace)

Such comments highlight the variety of community and collaborative opportunities that exist, and that individual contexts vary with the quality and frequency of such opportunities. Safran's (2010) research highlights that many home educators are

engaged as 'legitimate peripheral participants in a social learning process' (p. 107) and are effective members of wider Communities of Practice that support them in their roles as educators and this was evident in the responses of most participants. Importantly, Grace, who identified herself as living in an isolated community, made an intentional effort to harness whatever opportunities arose. While community opportunities had influence over her access to potential arts experiences, her personal context of valuing of the arts stimulated her to make the most of such opportunities.

Curriculum mandates

Requirements for Australian home educators to adhere to educational curricula vary from state to state. Requirements range from demands for parents to conform to that state's syllabus for schools (see New South Wales Education Standards Authority, 2018), to more open and flexible approaches that support parental decision making regarding educational approaches that best suit their family (see Northern Territory Government, 2016). Regardless of their particular location and state requirements, discussions among participants highlighted that curriculum guidelines were generally perceived as useful in providing direction for opportunities through which children might discover their passion. Participants asserted the unique advantage of knowing their children intimately which they saw as more important in informing learning decisions, and which freed them from a perceived need to explicitly follow curriculum documents. Depth of learning in individual areas of passion was considered far more important than breadth of learning that may be more superficial. Enjoyment, passion, motivation and ability were key guiding factors in making educational choices. Developing an approach to arts learning based upon the individual child's and family's context was believed to ensure that children engaged authentically with the arts more than adherence to the wider contextual factor of curriculum adherence:

I personally think that the public/private school curriculum is overcrowded with so many outcomes and strands of learning that make a child's education 'a mile wide and only an inch deep' ... Curriculum developers are trying to give opportunity for each child to find and experience their passion however we have the opportunity to tailor make our kids' experiences to a degree at least ... I think we as home-school parents sometimes worry that we don't give a broad enough experience but we can provide a depth that is unavailable in most schools. The struggle to provide resources is not unique to the home-school experience; school teachers struggle with time and financial constraints. What we do have is the option to exclude things that will not appeal to our students. If one of my kids goes on to advanced study in an arts field, they will have the passion, motivation and ability to fill in any 'gaps', those who have arts as a creative element of their life rather than a career, will have 'tasted' enough to be able to have a basic understanding of the broader arts world but will have had opportunity to build upon their own specialised area of passion and talent. (Tarryn)

I don't think that we have to tick all the boxes ... and cover all aspects of the arts. An authentic arts education could be one with a very small focus but alive with the spark of transfer of passion from one human to another, rather than a broad focus- making sure that your kids get exposure to all strands and their components, might not be that important. (Amber)

These anecdotes are representative of a number of forum comments which highlight participant beliefs on focusing on the individual attributes and interests of their children as the most significant goal for an authentic arts education.

The influence and relevance of parental belief regarding the authenticity of an interest-led approach to learning was not a topic for exploration in this research. However, the project findings highlight that an intentional and in-depth exploration of **all** five of the arts subjects was considered difficult, and to some extent – unnecessary – in light of the range of informal learning opportunities presented in the contexts of the participants. They countered the need to explore deeply all five arts subjects with the higher value of an individualised education that was offered to their children as long as they were engaging with, and developing, their unique creative strengths.

Conclusion

We have discussed the impact of context upon the use of various arts teaching and learning strategies, and findings further confirm that individual values and context have significant influence on each family's approach and how the individual needs of children are central, despite wider contextual factors. Nonetheless, wider factors are still influential within the family's approach to arts learning. Previous research into home education is acknowledged when recognising it as a form of sociocultural practice and we reinforce how home educators provide an approach to their children's learning that is significantly outside the one-size-fits-all models that appear to characterise most institutional learning (Jackson, 2015). Moreover, this research demonstrates that *pedagogical processes* for the facilitation of arts learning in home education are context specific. While it has been demonstrated in the review of literature that attempts to define the pedagogical processes of home educators tend to pigeon hole and limit understandings of the diversity of individual homes, we nevertheless noted when working with the participants that parental decision making when facilitating arts learning was underpinned by the very same element: the necessities and possibilities afforded by their own contextual opportunities and limitations.

New understandings have emerged regarding the variety of ways that arts learning is incorporated into home educational practice and how specific strategies are adopted and adapted flexibly according to the fluctuating needs and dynamics of individual contexts. Participants indicated a broad variety of issues that were encountered when facilitating arts learning and these were identified as emerging from contextual factors that have significant influence over individual approaches to arts learning, demonstrating a clear relationship between a family's context and their choice of arts learning strategies. Contextual issues, however, were not revealed to have equal influence over arts learning. The most influential context was that of the beliefs and arts skills of the primary home educating parent. Family contextual needs followed this in importance, after which came the implications of wider community issues and opportunities. Each family demonstrated their facilitation of arts education was absolutely context-specific, and highly individualised. Children and parents were recognised as joint members in an arts learning Community of Practice, with the community providing the curriculum (Lave & Wenger, 1991), meaning that the needs, interests and capacities of all members (parents and children) and opportunities in the wider community collectively contributed to the unique approach taken.

Through the literature review, it was suggested that arts practices within home education might best be approached as a form of sociocultural practice that values student-centred, collaborative, authentic and embodied arts experiences and open-ended, 'unstructured' creative and experimental learning opportunities. Such an approach represents the hallmarks of what is generally recommended as a meaningful and high quality arts education (Ewing, 2010; UNESCO, 2006). To some extent, findings confirmed many of these hallmarks. Parental discussion demonstrated that their approach to learning was tailored to their individual child where possible, moving beyond traditional modes of teacher-directed learning and instead negotiating learning with their children according to their individual interests, aptitudes and needs. Authenticity of arts experience, the desire to embed arts learning within the child's wider learning, and the intentional seeking of opportunities within the community also reflected a collaborative, culturally grounded and authentic approach. The Australian arts curriculum was generally viewed as an optional and useful guide, and parents did not prioritise curriculum mandates over the engagement of their children's interests. However, participants equally acknowledged that they were motivated by a unique set of values that saw all learning (arts learning included) as part of their child's holistic development. As such, an intentional focus upon some of the hallmarks of 'quality' arts learning were not as significant to these parents as developing their child's unique interests and abilities.

Additional insight was developed regarding a sociocultural view of arts learning, in which children are 'cognitive apprentices' in the family's Community of Practice (Barratt-Peacock, 1997). A particular question in the researchers' minds prior to conducting the project was the extent to which the family's own prior experience with the arts, and their attitudes towards its importance, might influence the nature of arts learning in that home. The findings identify a relationship between parental background in the arts and perceived confidence and competence in delivering arts learning. Participants who possessed a limited background in the arts experienced low levels of confidence and acknowledged a resultant sense of low competence in facilitating their child's learning. Given that broader research demonstrates that a lack of confidence can form a significant impediment to a teacher's effectiveness (Alter et al., 2009), this might indicate a parallel correlation where a parental lack of confidence in arts teaching and learning could negatively impact engagement with the arts, which could be an avenue for future investigation. Of greater significance than this, however, was the influence upon arts learning resulting from a parent's belief regarding the value of the arts. Importantly, participants with lesser arts confidence but who highly valued the arts cultivated a range of strategies to overcome their lack of confidence, particularly the use of curriculum, outsourcing and collaboration with others. Conversely, participants who did not value the arts as highly expressed less concern towards their children's arts learning, and approached it less purposefully. While the outcomes upon the quality of the children's arts learning was not explored in this research, the findings demonstrate that the quality of a home educated child's arts education may be negatively or positively impacted to some extent by the attitudes of their parents towards this domain of learning.

Through this study, we have demonstrated that the concept of a Community of Practice is a most appropriate framework to describe how home arts learning occurs and it highlights the contextually dependent nature of learning that is taking place within it. In

this regard, the study contributes to understanding and it opens for further discussion how home learning communities can provide an authentic and comprehensive arts education. We have shown that, based upon an understanding of the nature of communities of practice, it is likely that arts learning may suffer within contexts in which parents do not value the arts, and, potentially, when they feel ill equipped to teach due to the lack of specialised skills. This is dependent on wider contextual factors, including the parent's ability to gain support from a wider Community of Practice (Safran, 2010).

The findings and outcomes from this project are based on research with a small sample of Australian home educators and therefore should not be taken as broad generalisations about arts learning across home education contexts. However, they provide a useful snapshot of the experiences of 14 families with respect to their engagement in arts learning, and align with previous research regarding the diversity of pedagogical approaches, based upon varying contextual features. Further research on a broader scale to ascertain if these experiences are shared with larger home educating communities is recommended to further develop an insight not only into the ways that families engage in arts learning, but the extent to which their learning approach represents quality arts engagements that genuinely develop children as confident and creative twenty-first-century citizens.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the study participants whose names remain anonymous but whose time, honesty and rich responses are highly valued and respected.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Katie Burke  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1086-8981>

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