

# The challenges of facilitating arts learning in home education

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Home education, or home schooling, is a rapidly growing global educational phenomenon. Given the emphasis that educators, policy makers and researchers have placed upon the arts as an important element in a holistic education, the ways in which the growing home education community are facilitating arts learning warrants consideration. Facilitating quality arts learning has been found to be extremely challenging, especially for generalist classroom teachers who may not possess background learning across the range of arts subjects represented in most arts curricula. Revelations from this study on Australian home educating parents identifies a similar dilemma with the facilitation of arts learning in home contexts, and a significant proportion of the home educating participants acknowledged little to no educational or artistic training. In this project, an online survey was conducted to develop insights into the ways Australian home educators ( $n = 193$ ) approach arts education, the challenges associated with facilitating arts learning and the strategies they employ in light of these challenges. The research highlights that, while home education is pedagogically unique and distinct from traditional classroom education, the challenges participants expressed regarding teaching in the arts aligned closely with those expressed by classroom teachers in wider research; however, the uniqueness of home education contexts means that support structures for classroom teachers are less helpful for home educators. Implications arising from the research are thus beneficial in understanding the nature of support that might be tailored for arts learning in home education.

**Keywords:** home education; home schooling; arts education; self-efficacy

## Introduction

Home education, also often referred to as home schooling, is understood in the context of this project as the process of a parent or caregiver taking primary responsibility for the education of their child or children from a home base, independent of an institutional schooling context (Barratt-Peacock, 2003; Harding & Farrell, 2003). It was once considered an unusual, eccentric educational choice, often considered the domain of ‘hippies’ and ‘religious fanatics’ (Morton, 2010). However, home education is now gaining mainstream global momentum and is increasingly being considered by parents as a legitimate educational option (Strange, 2013; Beck, 2015; Neuman & Aviram, 2015; Roy, 2016). As such, this growing educational phenomenon has far-reaching outcomes, impacting not only the children and families engaged in the practice, but also the communities in which it is occurring (Murphy,

2014). An understanding of the growing impacts of this alternative educational option is coupled in this research project with a conviction regarding the value of arts learning, which has been shown to contribute positively to the cultivation of critical and creative thinking, personal and cultural understanding, and cognitive, social and emotional development (Fiske, 1999; Bamford, 2006; UNESCO, 2006; Seidel *et al.*, 2009; Ewing, 2010). The majority of existing research regarding arts education focuses on institutional school contexts, and current research has not satisfactorily encompassed insights into the growing home education phenomenon.

Arts learning has been demonstrated as an important dimension of a holistic education (Seidel *et al.*, 2009; UNESCO, 2010). Typically, arts curricula cover a range of distinct art forms, which may include dance, drama, media arts, music and visual art, each possessing its own set of discipline-specific concepts and skills (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). For the generalist teacher who possesses no formal training in one or more art subjects covered by various curricula, lack of training can form a significant hindrance to their sense of confidence and self-efficacy when facilitating what they perceive to be a quality arts education (Alter *et al.*, 2009; Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). Importantly, while research has explored the self-efficacy of pre-service and in-service classroom teachers with regard to teaching the arts (Welch, 1995; Alter *et al.*, 2009; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010), a dearth of understanding of the experience of home educators is apparent in the research literature.

The experience of home educating parents with respect to their children's arts learning is considered particularly pertinent given the significant growth of this educational sector. Accurate statistics of home educating families are impossible to obtain owing to the number of families who choose not to register with an educational body. In Australia, registrations have experienced a national growth rate of 12% between 2011 and 2017 (Chapman, 2017), and estimations regarding the number of unregistered families have recently ranged from 50% to 85%, indicating that the true numbers including all home educating families are much greater than the recorded figures (Sinnerton, 2014). Regardless of definitive statistics, home education is clearly 'growing in legitimacy and popularity in line with other forms of private education in Australia' (English, 2015, p. 4), which mirrors significant growth in other countries (Redford *et al.*, 2017; Foster, 2018). Given the visible increase in this sector, understanding the arts teaching and learning experiences of home educators is warranted.

This article reports on qualitative research with 193 Australian home educating parents, in which the researcher sought to understand through an Australia-wide online survey how parents were facilitating their children's arts learning. The research was guided by the following questions:

- How do home educators approach the arts in their own educational practices?
- What specific difficulties do home educating parents experience regarding the incorporation of an arts education into their children's education?
- What do home educating parents identify as specific needs that, if fulfilled, would assist in facilitating their children's arts education?

Importantly, by gaining an insight into the processes, challenges and needs that home educating parents identified regarding arts learning, this research provided a foundation for a larger future research project that would work collaboratively with

home educating parents to develop a resource, specifically tailored to the needs of a home educating community, which might provide them with the support they require to engage with quality arts learning processes.

### Understanding arts education in the home education context

In order to gain insight into how Australian home educators facilitate arts learning and the challenges they face, it is necessary to understand some of the broader issues surrounding arts education, and consider the ways these may impact home educators in the same manner that they impact classroom educators. It is, however, important to recognise the ways in which home education differs from classroom learning, and that it is not merely ‘school at home’. Described as a form of sociocultural activity (Jackson, 2015), home education is recognised as fundamentally different from classroom learning and as such, while similarities between the challenges to teachers and home educators may be identified, the very different nature of these contexts means that the provision of support for home educating parents must be based on the unique approach to learning employed in individual educational contexts.

#### *The challenge of facilitating quality arts learning in home education contexts*

Given this project’s focus on supporting *quality* arts engagement in Australian home education, it was first necessary to clarify the concept. The notion of quality has long been contested and is highly value-laden (Bodilly *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, developing shared understandings between the researcher and participants in an ‘evocative, rather than didactic spirit’ (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999, p. 2) was considered foundational for this research to provide a sense of direction regarding what ‘quality’ arts learning may look like. Dinham’s (2017) concept of *authentic* arts practices provided a useful direction. She defines authentic arts as a genuine programme of arts learning that develops children’s creativity and aesthetic sensibilities, their ability to express themselves through various art forms and their engagement with multiple cultures through artistic media. Dinham (2017) further asserts that authentic arts practices are grounded in arts knowledge and proficiency. In the context of this research, these authentic processes—in which arts engagement provided learners with opportunities to engage in arts-based ‘ways of knowing and meaning-making’ (Wright, 2012)—provided an understanding of, and approach towards, a sense of *quality* arts education practices. Importantly, these descriptions align with the stated goals for arts learning from a number of arts educators and researchers (Ewing, 2010; Wright, 2012), and provide a clear counterpoint to oft-held notions of the arts as ‘useless frills’ (Nussbaum, 2012).

Although a significant body of empirical support exists demonstrating the significance of the arts in education (Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010; UNESCO, 2010), they nevertheless continue to be under-appreciated and relegated to tokenistic ‘fun forays’ on a Friday afternoon as a treat for good behaviour (Dinham, 2017). The lack of value placed on the arts has been affirmed in a series of national and international reviews (Adams, 2011), which highlight a ‘cycle of neglect’ with respect to arts learning (Alter *et al.*, 2009, p. 23). Even though the contributing factors to this are varied,

a commonly identified hindrance is that of poor teacher self-efficacy and confidence in facilitating arts learning. Specifically, a number of researchers have identified links between a teacher's background knowledge in the arts and their self-efficacy when teaching the arts (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). In short: the arts are often considered 'challenging' unless the teacher possesses a background in the arts and a positive self-efficacy (Alter *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, for the generalist classroom teacher, the arts are less likely to be meaningfully enacted in the curriculum when they lack confidence and a sense of competence (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). These findings surrounding a teacher's self-efficacy and background understanding in the arts and its impact on the quality and prominence of arts learning raise questions regarding the potential impact on a child's arts learning when a parent lacks a background in the arts, or confidence in facilitating arts learning in home education contexts. Given that parents are not required to possess formal teaching qualifications in most countries where home education is legal, and thus—by extension—any background to teach the arts, it is reasonable to question whether parents without a background in arts learning similarly find the arts a challenging learning domain.

A range of perspectives exist regarding whether arts learning is best facilitated by specialists, or by generalist teachers who may not have background learning or expertise in one or more art forms (Seidel *et al.*, 2009; Vasquez Heilig *et al.*, 2010; Barton *et al.*, 2013), and these questions are extended in this study to home educators who may similarly possess little background arts knowledge. In the generalist versus specialist debate, advocates for skilled specialist arts teachers maintain that generalist teachers often lack the required arts skills and knowledge, which then impacts the quality of arts learning. Conversely, those who advocate for the facilitation of arts learning through generalist teachers believe that the intimate understanding of learners and their day-to-day interests and routines can more readily facilitate a child-centred and integrated arts education (Seidel *et al.*, 2009). Similar questions arise when considering arts learning within home education: while many parents may not have a background in the arts or possess educational qualifications, does the deep relational understanding they have of their children's interests and needs enable the facilitation of quality learning, and quality *arts* learning? A thorough search of the literature into the arts teaching and learning practices of home educators revealed a dearth of research, and thus a gap in understanding. This article therefore addresses this gap by providing initial understandings of arts teaching practices, challenges and needs of home educators in an Australian context.

In order to develop an understanding of how home educators facilitate their children's arts learning, it is first important to understand the broad diversity of pedagogical approaches adopted by individual families. Researchers have long attempted to classify the pedagogical approaches of home educators, however these attempts often misrepresent and oversimplify a disparate group of people with vastly varying characteristics (Rothermel, 2003; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). Typically, home educating families have been found to adopt an eclectic approach to their children's learning, in which a flexible and responsive mix of instructional modalities and approaches is employed, based on their intimate understanding of their child/ren (Taylor-Hough, 2010; Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). The pedagogical practices of home educators are thus not simply defined. However,

one shared defining feature of home education is its pedagogical distinctiveness from institutional learning (Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). The ways that education is approached in most home education contexts differs from traditional classroom learning, and has been identified as presenting strong correlations with sociocultural and socioconstructivist theory (Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016a). In contrast to traditional classroom learning, sociocultural and socioconstructivist learning theories emphasise the nature of learning as occurring through social interactions, wherein learning occurs as a feature of membership in a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Home educated children have been found to experience situated understanding in authentic contexts, as compared to the 'abstract representations, with decontextualisation' that are characteristic of schooling (Barratt-Peacock, 2003, p. 104). Parents act as guides to authentic learning experiences through family conversations, role modelling, domestic occupation and engagement with the wider world. Therefore, while the pedagogical approaches of home educating parents is exceedingly diverse, and tend to represent a continuum along which pedagogical approaches range from something resembling 'school at home' to approaches representing 'child-led learning' (English, 2012), a number of researchers nevertheless assert that sociocultural/socioconstructivist theory presents a suitable lens to gain an insight into some of the shared philosophical and practical elements of home education across a range of contexts (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003; Neuman & Guterman, 2016a).

Carpenter and Gann's (2016) research into the educational activities of home educating parents of high-school children highlights these processes in action, demonstrating how participating parents employed a range of strategies, based on intimate understanding of their children's needs and interests, and the parents' own capabilities. Working with their children, parents employed a flexible mix of educational strategies, which included the use of online courses, outsourcing to private tutors, self-led learning or courses, engagement in co-ops or home education groups, and occasionally direct instruction from the parent. The research explored the educational activities of high-school students, and thus did not represent families with younger children, however their findings align with those of other researchers who similarly identify an eclectic range of educational activities in use by parents with younger children (Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

These broader findings align closely with Burke and Cleaver's (2018) research into the strategies and educational activities parents employ when facilitating intentional arts learning. The arts learning strategies included child-led learning (wherein children are given the freedom, time and materials to engage with the arts according to their own interests); resource-led learning (which often includes the use of online arts courses, existing arts curricula or textbooks); outsourcing to private tutors; collaboration with other home educators; and integrating arts experiences with wider curriculum learning. Burke and Cleaver (2019) further highlight the nature of home education as embedded in sociocultural practice, with individual approaches being a very close reflection of individual family cultures. The needs of the child were the primary factor influencing the approach to arts learning, mediated by parental engagement and engagement with the 'wider world'. Importantly, it was found that the home educating parent's choice of strategies for the facilitation of arts learning was



largely tied to the parent's background knowledge in the arts. Participating families acknowledged that they purposefully sought structured or didactic arts learning resources, online courses or purchased curricula when they felt a sense of personal inadequacy to facilitate what they perceived as effective arts learning for their child/ren. Such findings indicate that self-efficacy may represent a similar issue for home educators as it does for generalist classroom teachers with respect to the facilitation of arts learning. However, Burke and Cleaver's (2018, 2019) findings did not sufficiently investigate the wider range of challenges that may also impact arts learning in home education—a gap this study aims to fill.

A brief exploration of the relevant literature shows that only limited understandings exist regarding home educators' facilitation of arts learning, and that the confidence of parents with respect to their own background knowledge may be a determining factor of the educational activities they use in facilitating this learning. The research literature also highlights that questions regarding whether arts learning is effectively delivered by generalist teachers are equally valid in the home education context. This research thus fills a gap in understanding at the intersection of these issues by developing more explicit insights into the challenges of home educating parents when facilitating their children's arts education, their areas of perceived strength and their insights into needs that—if fulfilled—would help foster self-efficacy in facilitating an arts education. Importantly, these findings also provide scope for comparison with the experience of generalist classroom teachers, who—like home educators—often may not have an extensive arts education background.

### **Research background and design**

The findings reported in this article arise from the first phase of a larger research project, during which the researcher worked with home educating parents and their children to gain an understanding of their perspectives, challenges, successes and needs with respect to facilitating arts learning. The approach to research was guided by a constructivist epistemological and ontological position, which acknowledges that 'reality' and how we come to 'know' it is formed through mental constructions, founded in the experiences of individuals in their specific contexts. As such, the researcher sought insights that revealed the uniqueness of different contexts and multiple perspectives. The findings for this portion of the study arose from formal consultations with 193 home educators via an online survey (175 completed responses). The perspectives of parents were sought for this first stage of the research to better understand their role as facilitators of their children's learning. Children's voices were sought in later portions of the research and are not reported here.

Participants were recruited via a range of online and personally known home education communities. An initial invitation to participate in the research project, which explained the research and asked for volunteers, was distributed via home education forums, social media sites, email lists and the personal contacts already known to the researcher. The survey used a combination of multiple choice and short response questions to ascertain insight into a range of issues regarding how home educators approached the arts when facilitating their children's learning, including the specific

difficulties they experienced, and the aspects they identified that may assist in facilitating a meaningful arts education practice.

Thematic analysis was chosen as an appropriate way to make meaning from the data: an analytic ‘sense making’ that is helpful in developing rich and reliable analyses that reflect the complexities of the lived world (Creswell, 2007). This was approached inductively, allowing significant themes to *emerge* through empirical observation, as compared to a deductive approach through which preconceived hypotheses are tested through research (Johnson, 2008). The process began by reading through the data to gain a sense of the ‘whole’, and identify recurrent themes. Filters were applied to survey responses to look for patterns among responses to different questions, searching for possible correlations and relationships between themes, and research memos were generated to document emerging points of interest. All data, including research memos, were then re-read and first-round coding was conducted, inductively generating codes emerging from participant responses. After reflection on qualitative and quantitative data and associated researcher memos, second-round coding was conducted through the lens of the research questions. This process yielded insight into salient issues home educators identified with respect to the facilitation of arts learning, including a number of commonly experienced challenges and a range of support strategies that participants identified as potentially beneficial to the facilitation of their children’s arts learning.

### **The challenges of arts learning in home education contexts**

Findings regarding the challenges expressed by participating home educators when facilitating their children’s arts learning are now explored. It is again important to acknowledge the philosophical and pedagogical difference between home education and institutional learning, with home education affording opportunities for arts learning to be embedded in everyday interactions, opportunities and spontaneous explorations, in addition to planned and cultivated learning experiences (Burke & Cleaver, 2018). However, for the purpose of this study, focus was primarily given to formal arts learning—defined as organised intentional learning with clear learning objectives (OECD, 2018). The intent was not to deny the value of informal and spontaneous arts experiences in favour of organised learning, or to perpetuate an arbitrary distinction that valued formal over informal learning (Barton, 2018), but rather to gain an insight into the specific challenges home educators identified when engaging with intentional arts learning in order to better understand how to support this dimension of their educational approach.

The data highlights the uniqueness of individual educational approaches adopted by participating families. The findings are thus not presented as broad generalisations, but as insights into shared experiences that provide helpful understandings of the common challenges experienced by participants with respect to facilitating their children’s learning in the arts. The commonly identified challenges for home educating parents related to a lack of parental background knowledge and confidence in the arts, arts resourcing, time constraints, the breadth of arts learning and meeting individual student needs. Each of these challenges are now explored, with accompanying

discussion regarding the similarities shared with the experiences of generalist classroom teachers.

*A lack of background knowledge or confidence*

Insufficient confidence, learning or perceived skill in the arts was raised frequently by participants, and was also frequently related to a parent's sense of ineptitude in engaging with the arts. A number of participants expressed confidence in areas where they possessed background arts learning, such as music or visual art, but then referred to their lack of confidence in other subject areas where they did not possess background learning. The following comment was characteristic of many:

*I feel confident in some areas and severely lacking in others. (Melissa)*

Importantly, lack of confidence or skill was never related to a belief that the arts did not have value. Rather, participants communicated their understanding that arts learning was valuable and they wished to provide their children with adequate learning, but felt personally lacking in facilitating this.

A parent's own background was found to be influential in determining their approach to, and sense of confidence in, facilitating arts learning. While some possessed considerable arts experience, which helped to inform their teaching, others admitted that their lack of personal involvement in the arts had a perceptible impact on their sense of efficacy in facilitating arts learning for their children. A commonly noted relationship was identified between a perceived lack of background learning in the arts directly and subsequent lack of confidence, which was then observed to impact on arts learning, sometimes resulting in avoidance:

*Because I lack skill in the arts myself and knowledge about different types of art, I find it hard to teach this subject to my children. (Thea)*

*I lack confidence in drawing, painting, etc. and find it too easy to put those activities off. (Georgina)*

The impact of a background in the arts, and the sense of confidence and competence it affords educators when facilitating arts learning, is similarly experienced by generalist classroom teachers. Direct correlations have been identified between a teacher's previous experience and the quality of their teaching. For example, Chapman *et al.* (2018) note that teachers who lack knowledge in arts content and pedagogy admit to regularly seeking out 'easy solutions' such as Pinterest activities, which are easily implemented but not necessarily reflective of quality arts teaching and learning. Of all subjects, arts education is particularly dependent on previous experience and a sense of competence in the various domains of arts learning (Bamford, 2006; Seidel *et al.*, 2009; Chapman *et al.*, 2018). These findings have led to a consistent request for a more significant focus on developing arts knowledge and skills during pre-service teacher education (Bamford, 2006; Dinham, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2011), which again highlights the significance of possessing knowledge in the arts as a foundation for a quality arts education. Formal educational training is not a requirement for home educating parents, and this leads to a sense of feeling ill-equipped in their role,



particularly with respect to arts teaching (Burke & Cleaver, 2018). These findings highlight that adequate support for the facilitation of arts learning is a need and priority for home educating parents and generalist classroom teachers alike. Importantly, parents who experienced a lack of confidence owing to little or no background in the arts frequently acknowledged that prescriptive arts learning curricula or learning resources were a useful strategy to guide their facilitation of their children's arts learning, which aligns with the findings of Burke and Cleaver (2018). However, as identified in the next section, finding appropriate resources was particularly challenging for some home educators.

### *Arts resourcing*

A frequent theme emerging from participant responses was an ongoing search for support resources that might inspire, provide pedagogical direction in the area of arts learning or assist in the facilitation of meaningful, engaging learning. Many participants acknowledged that they sought, but had difficulty in finding or accessing, quality resources for learning. The references to resources covered a wide range of helpful supports, including curricula and learning guides, arts-specific materials and tools (such as paints or musical instruments), private lessons with specialist trained teachers, and even opportunities to engage in arts-based community events, such as attending performances or cultural events. Most notable was the search for curricula or learning resources, which a majority of families (79%) indicated as an important support for facilitating arts learning, especially for the ways in which these provided direction, inspiration and guidance, particularly if their own sense of confidence and competence in arts learning was lacking:

*For areas of the arts I am not skilled in, I use resources that I find both instructional and inspiring. In areas I feel confident in I go with what I know my son will enjoy, using my own knowledge and experience to guide the learning process. (Jean)*

However, many who sought guided support or arts curricula identified a dearth of arts resources specifically geared to home educators, noting that most resources were targeted at classroom educators:

*Sourcing resources designed for delivery in the home, by the homeschool methods rather than designed for school room delivery by specialist teachers [is most challenging]. (Wendy)*

In particular, financial constraint was a significant factor for many. The high cost of accessing quality arts resources and opportunities was referred to frequently, with cost seemingly a prohibitive factor for many families in being able to hire private tutors for some of the art forms, such as music or dance lessons. Many families thus sought free opportunities that existed in their local community, but again, limitations such as travel and isolation, or a lack of access to community resources, proved challenging for some:

*It can be expensive and not that easily or locally accessible. Sometimes you have to travel too far, especially for things like drama. (Ange)*

... it's one of the most expensive subjects – when you consider materials, events, or teachers.  
(Eseta)

The resourcing of arts learning and its potentially negative impact on the quality of learning is an issue experienced not only by home educators, but also by classroom teachers as well, and the links between the poor resourcing of arts learning and learning quality are well documented (Seidel *et al.*, 2009; Ewing, 2010; UNESCO, 2010). Repeated calls for the reasonable resourcing of arts education have been issued, however, the arts continue to receive little funding, particularly in an increasingly standards-based educational system (NAAE, 2009). While quality arts programmes exist across Australia and internationally, these tend to be the exception rather than the rule, and inequitable access and inadequate resourcing still exist (Ewing, 2010). The findings regarding the challenge of accessing resources in home education highlights that limitations in accessing adequate resourcing, and the relationship with financial constraint, exists across both home education and institutional contexts, and similarly that this lack impacts on the quality of arts learning. Nonetheless, enterprising and creative educators are regularly found to seek alternative ways to ensure their learners have access to quality arts opportunities (Seidel *et al.*, 2009), and the determination and resourcefulness of home educators was likewise noted in this project. This will be explored further later in the article.

#### *Time constraints*

Participants frequently acknowledged that time constraints posed a significant challenge for facilitating quality arts learning. The arts were often referred to as time intensive, and parents felt that it was difficult to squeeze meaningful time for arts learning into busy schedules. Participants acknowledged that, in the midst of the competing demands on their time as both parent and teacher, the arts were often afforded a lower priority than other aspects of learning, and that learning in other areas, particularly literacy and numeracy, took precedence when time was tight:

*I struggle to place emphasis on art time because there are many competing subjects and other things to do. I have seen [how] participating in art with my kids is enjoyable and relaxing for me and good for mental health. So there are benefits all round. . . I know it's good to do, but when push comes to shove, it goes out the door. (Wanda)*

*It can be hard 'justifying' the time spent on the arts as it is so often viewed as something 'recreational' or that you do 'in addition' to school: like an extra-curricular activity, rather than an important part of the homeschool 'curriculum'. I have to remind myself constantly to make it an equal priority rather than just fitting it in around the more academic subjects. (Fatima)*

A similar dynamic is revealed in classroom contexts, in which the arts continue to remain low on the subject hierarchy (Bodilly *et al.*, 2008; Gibson & Anderson, 2008; Adams, 2011; Nussbaum, 2012). Not only do arts programmes traditionally receive lower funding priority, they also receive the least attention of all learning areas in terms of time allocations in the weekly curriculum (Alter *et al.*, 2009; Vasquez Heilig *et al.*, 2010). All of this can contribute to a classroom educator's sense of being overwhelmed in light of so many competing demands (Alter *et al.*, 2009; Chapman *et al.*,

2018), and a similar sentiment was noted in the home educating participant responses. The sense across both contexts is that allocating priority to the arts is very challenging in the midst of competing pressures.

### *The breadth of arts learning*

The scope of the knowledge and skills required to sufficiently and intentionally teach across the five art forms outlined in the Australian curriculum led to a sense of being overwhelmed for many home educating parents, especially in light of a tight time schedule. Some parents approached this challenge by compromising, and chose to focus their time and attention on the art forms with which they either felt more comfortable or in which their children demonstrated more interest. Other art forms that were too challenging were then either outsourced to private tutors or community arts organisations (if finances permitted), left for children to explore informally or overlooked. Some families were determined to engage with all five art forms, but found this stressful:

*The large scale of it; I feel confident in some areas and severely lacking in others. My husband fortunately has skills in some of my lacking areas but I still feel we need to put a lot of effort into making sure our children get to experience and learn about all aspects of the arts. (Tamara)*

*The 'arts' is a broad subject, so I find it hard to cover it all. I end up not covering it all. (Nancy)*

*I do not have a background in the arts myself and so I need to outsource most of the time to adequately cover the subject matter. (Winter)*

Similarly, Australian classroom educators often express a sense of being overwhelmed in relation to the expectation that they ensure students engage meaningfully with numerous arts domains (Alter *et al.*, 2009). Concerns regarding this very issue were raised in the 2014 *Review of the Australian Curriculum*, particularly 'whether generalist teachers would be able to handle all or any of these art forms, since they were written as specialist learning areas by specialists' (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p. 212). Nonetheless, the reality remains that children should be afforded this opportunity, and the classroom teacher is responsible for ensuring provision of this learning. Arts educators in Australia and around the world, the author included, hold deep convictions and advocate strongly for specialist arts teachers to be employed in schools. This would provide much needed guidance and support to generalist classroom teachers and ensure that all learners were exposed to quality arts education (Seidel *et al.*, 2009; Russell-Bowie, 2011; Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). Unfortunately, the present reality continues to see teachers (and home educators) overwhelmed and in need of support to facilitate meaningful learning across all art forms.

### *Meeting individual student needs*

The drive to tailor learning to individual student needs was a strong theme in participant responses, but one which proved particularly challenging when facilitating arts learning. Parents acknowledged a range of issues, including catering for the needs related to age differences, gender, variations in personal interests and special needs.

In particular, the vast majority of participant families encompassed multi-age contexts, and parents acknowledged that they struggled to find and facilitate arts learning that was engaging to a range of ages, or experienced a sense of being overwhelmed if they attempted to cater separately for each child. Catering for the interests and capacities of adolescent learners was identified as more challenging than meeting the needs of younger children, who demonstrated a greater interest and spontaneity with a range of art forms. Similarly, catering for the interests of boys was raised, especially with regard to dance:

*Most of our arts programme is highly tailored to the individual kid by me – it's a lot of work!*  
(Olga)

*... dance is hard to teach to older boys who aren't keen.* (Elisia)

*... my child has ASD... It wouldn't matter what I want to teach him; he only engages if something interests him. I suppose I would like help on how to extend on what he is learning.* (Eden)

Importantly, many families choose to home educate their children precisely because it enables the needs of individual children to be placed at the centre of learning, and parents thus have a heightened awareness of their children's needs and interests, and a vested interest in tailoring learning to individual children (Neuman & Guterman, 2017). This clearly raises challenges when parents lack self-efficacy with arts learning, and lack a clear direction on how to cater for such needs in the arts.

Catering for the diverse needs of a cohort of unique learners is certainly a challenge classroom teachers regularly experience. In the large modern classroom, teachers must consider the needs and rights of different aptitudes, backgrounds and abilities, including children with disabilities and those from diverse cultural backgrounds (Dinham, 2017). Gender issues also have some influence on arts engagement, and have been shown to influence teachers regarding the types of activities they believe they can successfully facilitate. Importantly, the arts provide a platform for celebrating and embodying difference. They allow the transmission of deeper understandings of the traditions and customs of global cultures, which often celebrate belonging and share their histories through arts-based creative explorations such as music, dance, stories and artwork (Goldberg, 2017). They further embrace alternative ways of knowing and meaning-making, so that children with specific learning difficulties or physical limitations can often engage more readily than in other learning domains (Wright, 2012). As such, the arts encourage and celebrate individuality and diversity (Raphael & Hunter, 2017), however, the specialist arts knowledge and skills that underpin teacher/home educator confidence in facilitating such learning nonetheless means that meeting the individual and diverse needs of children is challenging, especially when a background in arts learning is lacking.

### **Beyond the challenges**

Importantly, in addition to the identified challenges and needs that home educators expressed regarding the facilitation of arts learning, many participants indicated

satisfaction with certain aspects of their children's arts education, and a generally positive degree of confidence with their approach. In response to the survey question regarding their level of confidence, the responses received showed that a greater proportion of parents felt confident, or somewhat confident, about their ability to facilitate quality arts learning than those who did not (Table 1).

It is further important to recognise the wide-ranging possibility of arts learning experiences in home education contexts, which may include intentional and formalised approaches to arts learning with explicit learning outcomes and an appreciation of the meaningful learning that can occur through less formal, but by no means less meaningful, arts experiences embedded in everyday practice. The range of responses to the survey question regarding approaches used to teach and engage children in the arts indicates that many families took advantage of a range of formal and informal, child-led learning opportunities: 40% of participants embraced spontaneous arts learning without the need for adult intervention, and 63% used their children's interests as the starting point for arts learning as part of their overall approach (see Table 2).

As such, the above findings are useful in understanding the challenges experienced by home educators when facilitating *formal* arts learning, while also highlighting a further opportunity to support and promote awareness of wider, meaningfully embedded arts experiences that may already be occurring in participant homes, which may help to mitigate some of these expressed challenges.

These findings thus provided important insights into possible future strategies that could be employed to support home educators in their role as facilitators of arts learning. Sharing of positive strengths and experiences, and consciously promoting the value of rich, informal arts experiences as part of a holistic education, could empower the home educating community. However, provision for this sharing and consciousness-raising on a nationwide and accessible platform was not yet occurring. As already demonstrated, qualitative participant comments indicated a correlation between parents with an arts background and their confidence. However, importantly, other participants who did not have an arts background expressed that—with adequate support such as outsourcing to private tutors or through the use of helpful teaching resources—they experienced greater self-efficacy, indicating again the importance of resources to support home educators in facilitating arts learning. Although the study revealed a range of important insights into the challenges experienced, it also highlighted a resourceful community determined to support its children and committed to ongoing efforts to facilitate holistic development.

Table 1. Level of parental confidence for the delivery of arts learning

Which of the following best describes your perception of yourself?	Responses	
I feel confident about my ability to deliver quality arts learning	34.08%	61
I feel somewhat confident about my ability to deliver quality arts learning	48.60%	87
I lack confidence about my ability to deliver quality arts learning	17.32%	31
Total	100%	179

Table 2. Home educators' approaches to teaching and engaging in the arts

Which of the following best describes your approach to teaching and engaging children in the arts? You may select more than one	Responses	
I/We provide resources and opportunities and let our children spontaneously explore the arts without the need for adult intervention	39.33%	70
We follow our children's interests and provide opportunities (which may include focused learning or lessons) in these areas	62.92%	112
We lead our children through planned arts experiences, using their interests as the foundation of the experiences	36.52%	65
We lead our children through planned arts experiences	25.28%	45
We predominantly integrate the arts with other subject areas	21.35%	38
We don't intentionally include the arts in our learning	3.37%	6
Total		178

## Discussion and conclusion

The findings from the online survey generate useful insights into arts learning in participants' home education practices that provide an understanding of the challenges they experience, the needs that community members themselves have identified, and the strengths and resourcefulness of respondents. The findings support previous research into broader pedagogical approaches to home education (Jackson, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2016a), demonstrating how individual practice is influenced significantly by individual context. Arts learning is found to be largely dependent on the nature of the family's context, including the skills and confidence of the home educating parent/s in the arts; the interests of the children and/or parents/carers; the services and opportunities available to the family in their community; and family finances. Equally, the arts can present a challenging learning domain within the home education context, including small class sizes and sometimes single student contexts, making collaborative arts learning challenging; the pedagogical uniqueness of home education, which values individual student interests and therefore poses challenges if students are disinterested in certain aspects of the arts; and a dearth of resources specifically geared towards home educators and that address multiple art forms represented in the curriculum, including dance, drama, media arts, music and visual art.

Interestingly, although the research highlights the pedagogical uniqueness of home education as distinct from classroom learning, the challenges that participant home educators expressed regarding their children's formal arts education is clearly similar to the experiences of generalist classroom teachers, particularly with respect to the impact of poor self-efficacy. Although the issue of poor self-efficacy was only one of a range of challenges noted by participants, it was noted as a foundational issue, similar to findings with classroom educators (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Chapman *et al.*, 2018). If home educators possessed a strong sense of self-efficacy, they felt more confident in countering the other challenges and creatively providing for their children's arts learning. Those lacking self-efficacy looked for support and direction from external sources, which became time-consuming and frustrating when little exists that is home education specific, cost effective and comprehensive enough to cover the range of arts curriculum areas. Many participants thus indicated that a home education-



specific support resource would be helpful and beneficial. Although additional professional development for educators, and training in the arts for pre-service teachers, are absolutely affirmed as important strategies to increase the experience and confidence of generalist classroom teachers (Alter *et al.*, 2009), there are no parallel opportunities available to home educators, and many feel unsupported, or unable to find appropriate support. As such, the research has identified a genuine need for a targeted arts education resource that is specifically geared to supporting home educators.

Importantly, data analysis also revealed that a good proportion of participants felt satisfied with their current arts engagement and confident with their methods of facilitation. This highlights the importance of generating opportunities to value and give voice to these competencies from which other home educators might benefit. However, provision for this sharing on a nationwide or international platform was not yet occurring, revealing the positive potential of generating such a resource. As such, this study reveals the need for a targeted support resource for arts learning in home education that provides supporting resources which can overcome some of the commonly experienced challenges such as small class size, multi-age groups, interest-centred learning and lack of parental background in the arts. It also highlights an important opportunity to consider how home educators might recognise and share their various strengths and expertise with both formal and informal arts learning experiences. Such an opportunity might be cultivated through the development of a CoP, a group brought together through their shared interests, wherein the co-contribution of information and experience enables members to learn from each other (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Through such an arts-focused online CoP, home educators might benefit from working together, be provided with the opportunity to ask questions, share learning and develop new insights with other home educators in a manner that recognises home education as pedagogically distinct.

The understandings generated through this research give grounded insights into the nature of arts learning in home education, the challenges that sometimes impede the quality of arts learning and the potential strategies that might facilitate the empowerment of the community through the sharing of existing strengths. It raises important points for consideration regarding access to arts learning, and the rationale for generating adequate support for home educators. Support structures for teachers of the arts must be contextually relevant, and the findings from this project have identified that the nature of home education is distinct from traditional institutional learning, meaning that classroom-specific resources are insufficient and inflexible for the home education context. The research thus forms an important foundation for the future design of a home education-specific arts support resource.

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