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Knowing me knowing you: Enhancing emotional literacy through visual arts

ABSTRACT

This article presents Enhancing Emotional Literacy through Visual Arts (ELVA) an innovative approach, developed by The Dax Centre, incorporating visual arts and mental health for primary school students. ELVA, beginning as a five-year project, and funded through a philanthropic grant, is the result of the collaborative efforts of a multidisciplinary advisory group of teachers, child psychotherapists, psychiatrists and art therapists, is lead by a project manager and overseen by the Director of the Dax Centre. Through an examination of ELVA's theoretical frame and its unique experientially based teacher professional learning component, this article will highlight the contribution ELVA offers to existing well-being and visual arts approaches in schools. It will also present the findings of an independent evaluation of the initial pilot phase of ELVA.

KEYWORDS

emotional literacy
well-being
visual arts
neuroscience
psychodynamic
art therapy

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing Emotional Literacy through Visual Arts (ELVA) aims to develop the emotional literacy capacity of primary school children. Emotional literacy, within the scope of this work, is defined as the capacity of a person to understand their emotional experiences. ELVA recognizes that children who possess emotional literacy are emotionally aware, alive and connected with

themselves, with others and with experiences and surrounding situations. As a result, they are better equipped to develop capacities to engage with and manage difficult emotional experiences, and, as a consequence, can be more resilient in the face of emotional challenges.

ELVA uses visual arts to create the time, space and place for children to engage with, and reflect on, their emotional experiences, and their interactions with their social settings, and to express this within a safe and supportive environment. It is a new schools-based mental health initiative that is preventative in nature and has undergone an independent evaluation by the University of Melbourne.

ELVA has been developed within the work of the Dax Centre. The Dax Centre promotes mental health through innovative programmes based on its heritage-listed Cunningham Dax Collection at its core. The Dax Centre seeks to change community's views towards mental illness and psychological trauma by increasing empathy and understanding through art.

ELVA is unique on three counts: unlike most emotional well-being programmes it aims to increase the emotional capacity of children through their experience rather than skills training and behaviour modification; it emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the child, and the impact of the whole school system on this dyad, and it is located within the creative space of existing visual art curriculum.

Within education in the recent years there has been an emphasis in approaches to well-being, social and emotional learning and behaviour management that favours the behaviourist and cognitive approach. Salzberger-Wittenberg and Osbourne argue that teachers gravitate towards these packaged curriculums as they provide 'skills and answers' (1999: 26) with measurable skills and behaviours that are seen to reach a desired outcome (Youell 2006: 82). Katherine Weare (2004) in her book *Developing the Emotionally Literate School* identifies the influences of the psychological framework of behavioural theory characterized by a focus on behavioural outcomes, and cognitive theory that seeks to understand causes or reasons for behaviours within current approaches to well-being (2004: 66). Weare acknowledges a psychotherapeutic approach as a third psychological framework that has influenced thinking and practice. This framework takes into account beliefs, experiences, memories and relationships when considering behaviours (2004: 33).

ELVA is informed by current psychodynamic understanding of the emotional growth of children and the neuroscience of the developing brain. Intertwined within these theories is an art therapy perspective on the process of art making and the exploration of the inner world of emotions and imagination. This approach seeks to enhance art education through challenging its traditional context and role within the primary school setting. Art education has increasingly been pushed to the periphery of school activities. In adding a new dimension to art education, this approach offers an opportunity to reposition it as a central element in the life of a school at a time when there is a growing appreciation of the importance of emotional well-being in children within social development and learning.

ELVA aims to provide a preventative approach that uses visual arts as the mechanism to first build a child's capacity to make sense of their own life experiences and emotions, and second to develop empathy for other students' experiences and the emotions associated with them. Allen et al. (2003) claim that these two key capacities are the cornerstones for children to build strong,

healthy and sustainable relationships, which is vital to our sense of well-being. An understanding of self and an empathetic connection with others provide protective factors in situations of loss, grief and trauma. Fonagy et al. associate the development of these capacities with a child's ability to 'show increased resilience to stressful social situations' (2011: 100). Pianta and Walsh (1998) identify the contribution of healthy relationships in the development of resilience. They argue resilience is not taught through a set of skills, but is a process involving interactions among systems over a period of time. Relationships with adults are part of the system of interactions and are seen as resources in the process of resilience. They write, '... a supportive relationship with an adult is one of the single most commonly identified protective factors in the literature on resilience' (1998: 414).

ELVA is not only an approach that develops mental health and well-being but also addresses key factors for maintaining mental health, such as reducing stigma and early detection and intervention. Stigma, a crippling factor in maintaining mental health, can be countered through the development of empathy. Through enhancing a child's capacity to first recognize and express their own inner world, they are able to appreciate more that others have a different yet equally valuable inner world. This understanding is the basis for building empathy. ELVA aims to provide the opportunity for students to express their inner world, their emotional responses and their experiences through creating visual arts. The resulting artwork provides a tangible and concrete representation of each individual's varying views. It creates a starting point or reference point for discussing individual responses. Although ELVA recognizes the role of art in assisting students to make sense of their inner worlds, it does not operate within a therapeutic art therapy framework.

This classroom-based approach, which includes teacher professional learning, implementation and ongoing support, has gone through an initial trial of four schools and implementation in a pilot programme consisting of nine schools in the first cohort and a further nine schools in the second intake involving more than 3000 students. An additional two schools are currently engaged in training their entire staff in ELVA.

THEORETICAL FRAME

In recent years there has been a growing awareness in the general community about promoting and guarding the emotional life of children. It is now widely understood that some childhood trauma can lead to life-long difficulties and, in many cases, the development of mental illness in adult life (Choi-Kain and Gunderson 2008; Fonagy et al. 2011; Fonagy and Luyton 2009). Some children are, however, able to overcome severe adverse experiences and develop good mental health in both the short and long term. Allen et al. (2003) suggest that an understanding of self and an empathetic connection with others provide protective factors in situations of loss and grief and trauma. It allows us to '... generate the two most protective experiences human beings can produce: hope and meaning' (2003: 16).

Current neuroscientific research and psychodynamic theory provide the foundational thinking that contributed to the ELVA theoretical frame. These theories identify the factors of nurturing relationships, contained experiences, and emotionally safe and supportive environments as essential for children's healthy development, well-being and learning. Interwoven within these

theories are aspects of art therapy perspectives on the process of art making and viewing, and the exploration the inner world.

NEUROSCIENCE

The current understanding of neuro-plasticity supports the importance of emotional literacy as a basis for mental health in later years. This is particularly relevant when referring to the developing brain of children and the changes during early adolescence. As the growth and reshaping of neural circuits are dependent on their use, the child who is emotionally engaged in their everyday experiences is more likely to develop a more robust circuitry for the successful processing of emotions.

Humans are social beings dependent on caring healthy relationships for optimal brain development. 'Each brain is dependent on the scaffolding of caretakers and loved ones for its survival, growth, and wellbeing' (Cozolino 2006: 6). Healthy and sustainable interpersonal experiences contribute to the long-term development of the right brain regulatory capacities and impact on the processing of social-emotional information, and responding and regulating stress (Cozolino 2006; Giedd 2003; Schore 2001). Cozolino argues that meaningful relationships can '... reactivate neuroplastic processes and actually change the structure of the brain' (2006: 8). These social interactions are a powerful force providing the necessary energy for growth and survival, influencing brain regulation, development and health. ELVA recognizes that experiencing meaningful and nurturing relationships such as healthy teacher–student relationships can strengthen neural transmitters within the critical phase of a child's development.

Emotional literacy involves well-developed neural circuits connecting parts of the brain that are involved in perception, thinking, memory and feeling. Creative activities that involve perception, thinking, memory and feeling also utilize these circuits. If a person is provided with contained or manageable emotional experiences that utilize these circuits, they will increase their development. In this way the increase in size and dominance of neural circuitry is use-dependent. During adolescence there is a pruning of underused circuitry making the strengthening of the circuitry involved in emotional literacy essential within the primary school years.

The presence of an emotionally safe and supporting environment also impacts brain development and function. Experiencing an unsafe environment, characterized by uncertainty, anxiety and fear, impacts neurological functioning, causing the self-protective fight-or-flight neurological circuitry to be activated. This may result in a reduction in cognitive processes, impacting on a person's capacity to thrive, think clearly, develop relationships and learn (Allen et al. 2008; Cozolino 2006; Twemlow et al. 2005).

Malchiodi (2003) reviews the work of Damasio, Schore, Siegel, Gardner and Ramachandran on understanding art making and neuroscience. Drawing on this work, she argues that art making is a non word-based modality involving the right hemisphere of the brain to describe feelings and events. This recognizes that right brain optimal growth is dependent on emotional stimulation and is expressed through experiences such as art making. Research involving people who have neurological damage indicates that the left hemisphere, generally thought of as the language centre of the brain, is also engaged in art making.

Malchiodi discusses the role of the limbic system in storing sensory memory of stressful events. Art making, she writes, is a '... natural sensory

mode of expression because it involves touch smell and other senses within the experience' (2003: 20). With this understanding, Malchiodi argues that art making can act as the bridge between implicit and explicit memories, and can assist children in making meaning of challenging experiences.

PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY

Psychodynamic theory recognizes the contribution on a developing child's mind of nurturing and contained relationships, characterized by another taking an interest in a child's emotional world. 'A mind comes into existence by means of receiving appropriate input from a caregiver' (Jurist 2010: 291). It is through a close emotional bond, a secure attachment base, that children are able to explore both their inner and outer world. The work of Bion (1993) suggests that it is through interactions within a healthy and secure relationships that children develop an understanding of another's mind, which is a necessary prerequisite for them in understanding their own mind (Bragin and Bragin 2010; Jurist 2010). Bion (1993) writes of the importance of a caregiver's capacity to manage the baby's powerful feelings through the notion of container-contained theory. He writes that through a process of projective identification it possible for the child '... to investigate his own feelings in a personality powerful enough to contain them' (1993: 106). This experience facilitates the gradual development of an understanding of their own mind, and an understanding of the mind of others (Allen et al. 2003; Jurist 2010). Youell (2006) and Salzberger-Wittenburg and Osbourne (1999) describe the role of the teacher as creating in the child a sense of being cared for, and referring to the child as 'being held in the mind' of the teacher. For these authors, the developing of a safe and supportive environment is intertwined with the relationship of the teacher with the child.

Psychodynamic theory identifies the facilitating factor of an emotionally safe and supportive environment for both teacher and student. Willshire (1999) highlights the contribution of an emotionally safe environment to the sense of containment for teachers. This environment is one where teachers experience the feeling of being supported rather than overwhelmed by the demands of their role. This sense of containment allows teachers to respond in positive and creative ways, assisting them to provide a containing environment for the students.

The 'inner working model', a concept within psychoanalytic theory, contributes to the ELVA theoretical frame. The inner working model '... contains generalized information about the self, others, and self-other relationships that shape development of new relationships' and is developed through a person's primary relationship experiences (Spilt et al. 2011: 463). Riley (2011) suggests that understanding the presence and function of the inner working model can assist teachers in their interactions with different students.

Psychodynamic theory recognizes that emotional literacy is a capacity that develops through experience of relationships within a safe and supportive environment rather than a skill that is learned. It supports the opportunity to engage in a process that encourages reflection and exploration of transitional phenomena and emotional experiences within the activities such as play and art making. The term transitional phenomena, coined by Donald Winnicott, recognizes '... the immediate area of the experience' (1971: 2) that is between the child and the 'not-me'. For example, the thumb or the teddy is seen as

'... objects that are not part of the infants body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to the external' (1971: 3). Malchiodi (2003) argues that for children, art making is a natural component of play, providing an accessible form of expression where thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs and goals can be expressed. She writes, '... art making allows an individual to actively try out, experiment with, or rehearse a desired change through drawing, painting or collage; that is, it involves a tangible object that can be physically altered' (Malchiodi 2003: 19).

Although the emphasis is on the process of making art, the product is important and contributes to the classroom environment. The artwork becomes a tangible record of each student's inner narrative and a concrete representation of each individual's different, yet equally valued and respected, inner world. In this way it becomes a testimony that the emotional world is present and valued within that learning environment. Rubin (2005) writes that the artworks become a means to acknowledge the presence of multiple experiences at the same time. In the classroom context this means the artwork of each student in the class is telling their own story, and can be displayed simultaneously.

THE SIX DOMAINS OF ELVA

Drawing from the two theories of neuroscience and psychodynamic theory, the advisory group developed six domains to form the theoretical frame of ELVA. The six domains are as follows: the activity; the student; the teacher; the teacher–student relationship; the learning environment; and the broader school environment. This frame provides the thinking and understandings that inform the operationalizing of ELVA.

The activity

The ELVA art-making activity is designed to encourage the exploration and expression of experiences – that is, the engagement with experiences that encompass the past, present, future and hopes, dreams, desires and goals of an individual. It includes activities that encourage the reflection and sense making of the internal world and focuses on the process rather than the outcome. The art activity reflects the theory that it is the process of making art that contributes to a child's understanding and processing of experiences. The art activity can include art making and art viewing. ELVA views the art making as a form of communication about the child's inner world. Rubin writes,

To put it simply, there are many things people can say in art that they can't put into words, no matter how articulate they are. These include images from dreams, which do not translate well, as well as feelings or thoughts that are ineffable- beyond words-one of the reasons for the very existence of the arts.

(2005: 24)

The student

Central to the ELVA frame is the importance of the students experiencing an emotionally safe and supported learning environment. It acknowledges that students need to feel encouraged to explore and express emotionally at a pace where they are comfortable, secure in the knowledge that their expression

and contribution will be valued. ELVA recognizes that each student brings with them their own experiences and their beliefs, and understanding that have resulted from them. The creation of this environment is dependent on the teacher's capacity to demonstrate an interest in the individual student's emotional world.

The teacher

The teacher is pivotal in creating the environment in which the activity is conducted and their emotional capacity impacts the quality of the implementation of social and emotional learning approaches (Biggs et al. 2008; Nind and Weare 2009; Payton et al. 2008). It is essential for the teacher to have a stance that allows the student to know that the other is interested in and can contain their emotional world. This relies on the teacher's capacity to process their own emotional world, including recognizing and containing their own anxieties. Enhancing this capacity enables the teachers to model self-awareness and empathetic relationships that value differences. Experiencing this model of relationship enhances a child's capacity for self-awareness and responding empathically towards another (Allen et al. 2003).

The teacher-student relationship

Positive teacher-student relationships are essential for developing trust and impacts on academic outcomes and adjustment to schools (Myer and Turner 2007). The relationship between the teacher and the student is seen as a contained relationship where the teacher is able to provide a secure base for students. This strengthens the student's confidence and supports their capacity to explore their inner world. This model of relationship, which takes time to develop, allows students to explore and play in the security of knowing that they will be valued and affirmed within an environment of clear and consistent boundaries

The classroom environment

The ELVA domain of classroom environment recognizes the importance of both the teacher and the student feeling emotionally safe and supported. This is characterized by each feeling that their emotional experience and responses are valued and that their emotional expression is permitted. It is essential that this expression is within the safety of a contained environment characterized by mutually agreed upon expectations, limits and boundaries. The environment therefore is co-created by students and teachers, and recognizes that the classroom exists within a broader school environment.

The broader environment

Jennings and Greenburg (2008) identify '... various contextual factors inside and outside the school building' (2008: 494), which contribute to the milieu of the education setting and impact on the experiencing of an emotionally safe and supportive culture. This environment includes the local community, parents and school structure, and policies and procedures. This broader environment has the capacity to both support and undermine the facilitating classroom environment and is impacted on by its own history.

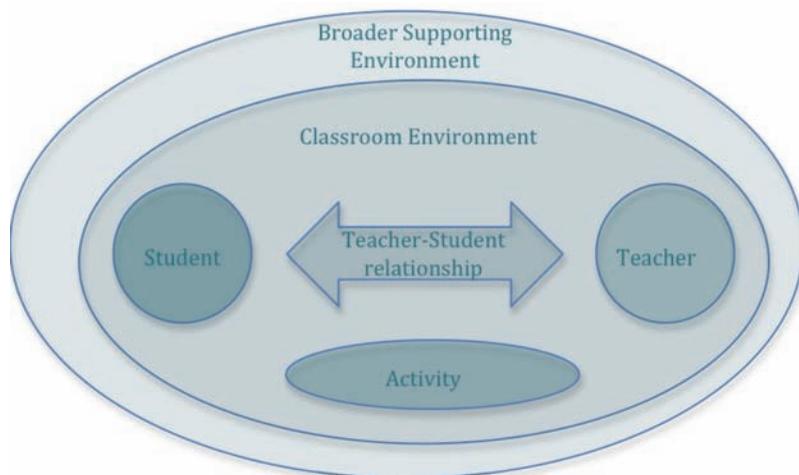


Figure 1: The Six Domains of ELVA.

These six domains, which form the operational frame that informs ELVA, are connected and interact with each other within a complex dynamic network (refer Figure 1). The frame guided the development of the teacher professional learning and the implementation of ELVA within schools.

ELVA TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The ELVA theoretical frame informs the Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) content and delivery. The TPL incorporates an understanding of individual capacity, integrates experiential learning, places emphasis on the facilitator-teacher relationship, focuses on establishing a safe and supportive learning environment, and recognizes the presence of the wider environment that will influence the training. It is designed to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and understandings of the theoretical frame and the experiences to successfully negotiate and implement ELVA within their school settings.

The TPL is delivered by the Dax Centre staff and is an essential requirement for teachers wishing to implement ELVA. The pace and delivery of the content is informed by participant feedback and facilitator reflection. This flexibility within acceptable boundaries reflects the complex relationship between the six domains. The TPL is delivered through three components: theory, implementation and experiential.

The theory component contains the core principle and domains that inform ELVA. This includes sessions of neuroscience and psychodynamic theory, and includes a focus on containment and boundaries and safe and supportive environments. The theory is linked with practice through discussing the role of the teacher in creating emotionally safe and supportive environments within student learning.

The implementation component includes the history of ELVA, and an examination of implementation models within the art room, classroom and the whole school. It looks at the place of ELVA within the visual arts curriculum and as a complementary element within the student well-being approach of the school. This component also covers the ELVA units of works and other supporting documents.

The third component is the experiential art making. This provides the TPL facilitators an opportunity to model for the teachers the theory and discussion from the previous two components. Through the art-making experience it is hoped that the theory and the practice would come together. During this time of participation in activities developed using the ELVA principles, teachers are provided an opportunity to experience reflection on their inner world through art making. The art-making experience also enables teachers to gain insight into how the children in their classes may respond to the activity.

TPL is currently delivered through two training models: whole school staff training or selected staff training.

Whole school staff training is conducted after careful consultation and discussion with the school leadership regarding alignment and readiness of the staff and school culture to the ELVA approach. In this model, two Dax Centre facilitators deliver the training on-site over a period of eighteen months, at times negotiated between the school and facilitators.

Selected staff training entails staff from approximately ten schools coming together to participate in the TPL. After consultation with each school they are encouraged to choose a minimum of two and a maximum of three teachers (e.g., visual arts teacher, well-being coordinator and curriculum leader) to participate. This creates a group of around 25 teachers from up to ten different school settings. For this model the TPL is delivered over eighteen months through six day-long trainings at The Dax Centre and an onsite consultation at the school. The first four of the training days are held in the six months, with the remaining two trainings held at a rate of one per semester.

The Dax Centre continues to support the school after the conclusion of the TPL phase through access to web-based resources, supporting documentation, e-mail support and through hosting the annual Dax ELVA Symposium.

ELVA IN SCHOOLS

Primary schools provide a most important venue of development where nearly 100 per cent of children aged 5–11 attend school six hours a day, five days a week, 40 weeks a year for seven years. Schools provide a central hub during this period of the children's lives and it is here that they are influenced by their relationships with teachers and peers. As has been discussed, this stage in children's neurological development is recognized as an optimal time to strengthen neural pathways that contribute to relationship building, connectedness, empathy, self-awareness and resilience. These characteristics provide the foundation for mentally healthy children and adults.

Schools are communal places. It is here that children learn and develop within a communal setting of adults and peers. As has been discussed, a school's culture has the capacity to provide the safe and supportive environment recognized as essential for academic learning and mental well-being. Concurrently, teachers can be provided with the understanding and experiences to maximize their capacity to specifically and intentionally approach their teaching in a manner that promotes the development of emotionally literate and healthy children. These factors cannot be guaranteed in all homes or in schools generally.

ELVA acknowledges the link between experiencing healthy and positive relationships within a school environment and increased connectedness to school and positive academic, social and emotional learning. It provides a preventative universal model to strengthen and develop a child's emotional

capacity while creating the opportunity for early intervention through heightening awareness of his or her emotional world.

ELVA has the potential to complement and value-add to school's visual arts and well-being programme. The theoretical framework recognizes that while participation in ELVA may have therapeutic benefits for students, it is not designed as a therapy programme to address behaviours of a 'troublesome group' of students, but rather as part of the visual arts class or within a classroom context. There is, however, room for variation while remaining within the boundaries of the theoretical frame. Government, Catholic, Independent schools and special settings for students with intellectual, emotional and behavioural challenges have all participated in ELVA training and implementation.

Depending on the individual school, ELVA may be implemented in all classes in the school or in a selection of classes. It is recommended that students receive ten ELVA sessions over the year to ensure adequate time to process and integrate the learning. These may be delivered in a block over a term or spread out through the year. The Dax Centre has designed seventeen units of work, and participating teachers are also encouraged to design their own units of work on the basis of the ELVA model. All units of work relate to current curriculum, assessment and reporting protocols.

UNITS OF WORK

The units of work are designed to engage each individual child in expressing their own experiences and the feelings associated with them through visual arts. Through the art making the teacher focuses on creating a safe and supportive environment through encouraging valuing of individual experiences and expression, and focusing on the *process* of the art making rather than the final outcome. Children are encouraged to share their work with others, at a level they feel comfortable, and through activities such as Circle Time.

An example of a unit of work is *Dreaming Over Time*. In this unit the children are encouraged to keep an individual Dream Diary, where they record waking dreams (daydreams, hopes, wishes and desires) and sleeping dreams. Within the art classes the children choose from the 'dreams' collected in their Dream Diary to create a collective dreaming collage with their classmates. The children also create individual collages of the dreams they choose from their Dream Diaries. This unit provides children to express fantasies, 'I had a dream I was X ...'; hopes, 'When I grow up I want to be a X'; and fears, 'I was X and I nearly X ...'.

Another unit, *Inside-Outside Boxes*, encourages children to consider their inside and outside feelings. Children create a container or box with an inside and outside as a representation of their external and internal world. This is then covered with images to signify the feelings they share with others on the outside and the feelings that they keep to themselves on the inside. As one boy said when doing this unit, 'Oh you mean like when I was on the giant swing at camp and on the outside I had a big smile, but on the inside I was really scared!'

The ELVA units of works have four distinct planning areas that reflect the six domains of the ELVA theoretical frame: Pre-Activity Teacher Reflection; The Activity; The Environment; and The Post Activity Reflection.

The Pre-Activity Teacher Reflection is designed to encourage the teacher to reflect on his or her own emotional world. This is done prior to conducting the unit of work through the teacher undertaking an activity similar to that of the

students. This activity seeks to enhance the teacher's capacity for self-awareness and to promote empathy with students. The Pre-Activity Teacher Reflection does not focus on the functional considerations of the activity but rather encourages teachers to reflect on their own emotional world prior to asking the students to think of theirs, a practice that becomes easier with time and experience. This element of planning recognizes the concept of the inner working model and its impact on subsequent relationships. Day (2004) acknowledges the need for teachers to first know themselves before they are able to care for another. This knowing comes through self-reflection that he interprets as being deliberate, relational and critical in nature. Day acknowledges that it is important that the 'person' of the teacher connects emotionally with the students for the student to feel connected to the 'person' of the teacher.

The second planning area is The Activity. This area outlines the art-making activity for the students, which promotes expression of their past, present and future, and their dreams, desires, beliefs and goals. The activity values and encourages students to respond individually with the focus being on the process of art making rather than final product. They engage in the aspects of art viewing, and reflecting on their own work and responding to other students' work. The activities are designed to meet the curriculum and assessment and reporting requirements using a range of media and techniques.

The Learning Environment is the third planning area. This area details the language and actions that will assist the teacher in establishing a classroom environment where the children's emotional world is valued, expressed and contained. Teachers model an interest in and an expression of their own and the students' emotional world. The environment seeks to be one where participation is encouraged and where students feel empathetic support when facing challenges.

The final planning area is the Post-Activity Reflection. This provides the opportunity for the teacher to record observations and reflections of the lesson – the student's and personal reflection.

EVALUATION

The University of Melbourne Centre for Program Evaluation conducted an evaluation of the initial pilot phase of ELVA involving eight schools, 22 teachers and over 2000 students (Astbury and Aston 2013). The report identified that through TPL and the implementation phase many of the teachers indicated they had developed greater emotional self-awareness and had a greater understanding of how their thoughts and emotions could impact on students. They reported being more reflective, empathetic and mindful, and that '... the training had "changed the way they teach, and think about teaching"' (2013: 33). They also reported that ELVA gave them a greater awareness of the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment when encouraging students to express emotions. The report recognized that while the findings were still provisional they suggest '...positive impacts on students, parents and the broader school community are beginning to occur across school sites. This is significant for just one year of involvement' (2013: 6).

CONCLUSION

ELVA presents a unique opportunity to engage the primary school visual arts curriculum as a powerful tool to strengthen the mental health and emotional well-being of children as they grow through adolescence and into adulthood.

It is hoped that further funding will be sourced to enable the extension and generalization of ELVA as it presents an opportunity for maximum potential to reach students at a population level through primary schools. It is an approach that can be delivered on a greater scale in terms of its geographic reach and numbers of participating schools.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

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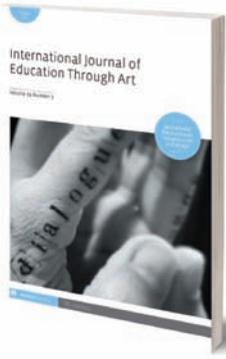
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International Journal of Education Through Art: Speculative Realism(s) Objects/Matter/Entanglements of Art and Design Education

Special Issue
Call for Articles
and
Visual Essays



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In the face of impending ecological and environmental crises worldwide caused by human alterations to the biosphere, the rise of neoliberalism and the knowledge economy on a global scale, the permeation of new technologies into everyday life, the rapid developments of bioengineered living and non-living matter, it has become exceedingly clear that new modes of inquiry and praxis are needed to alter our ideas of how we understand and relate to each other and our broader environment.

Through this special issue, we wish to invite contributions on the topic of Speculative Realism(s) Objects/ Matter/ Entanglements of Art and Design Education to address pressing pedagogical, political, visual, aesthetic, ecological, methodological and ethical challenges in art and design education, museum, community and classroom practices, as well as contemporary art.

As a non-unified, diverse, and speculative philosophical approach, Speculative Realism or (SR) draw from perspectives aligned with Object Oriented Philosophy (OOP), Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), and New Materialism. In this special issue, we combine OOP, OOO, and New Materialism, under the constellation of Speculative Realism(s) with the understanding that while these philosophical propositions share significant tenants, they are also distinctive critical projects. Accordingly, we seek submissions that are informed by one or more of these emergent, interdisciplinary, and fluid philosophical approaches.

Speculative Realism(s) brings into focus new and speculative thinking about and commitments to materiality – for instance, the idea that objects have agency on their own terms and occur through intra-action between subject and object. SR inquiries use post-human and post-anthropocentric standpoints to displace the human subject as preeminent in all aspects of life while disavowing correlationism – the philosophical proposition that the reality of objects and matter are a correlate of human thought and being, and as such, must be accessed through human perceptual, cognitive, or practical experiences. When considering the non-human world, speculative realists argue that all objects, matter, and levels of existence are equally real and significant for ontology.

In this special issue, we propose that art and design education have something to say to emergent studies in speculative realism(s). If we tentatively accept the claim made by speculative realists that aesthetics is first philosophy, one could subsequently argue that art education plays a crucial role in extending the ideas and arguments of speculative realism(s) in ways that challenge us to rethink what is possible to see and say about the entanglements of objects, things, and matter in art, aesthetics, and education. Possible lines of inquiry include:

- How might exploratory inquiries of material objects – based on the idea that matter is alive and has agency emphasizing object/object interactions or object/subject relations – address pressing pedagogical, socio-political, visual, aesthetic, ecological, or ethical challenges in art education?
- How do speculative realist approaches help us to rethink pedagogical objects and processes in art, design, and museum education?
- How are digital technological advances (e.g., artificial life, robotics, virtual reality, and STEAM) in art and design education contributing to speculative realist(s) scholarship?
- What if art education considered intra-actions between human and non-human agents, objects, and matter?
- How does the hidden life of ordinary objects, for example, drawing pencils, oil paint, software, or sensors respond to each other and help us understand non-systemic concepts of objects and their relations in/ to/ across art and design education?
- How can new speculative realist approaches propel us toward a consideration and reconsideration of feminist/queer materialism(s)?
- How can art and design education extend the ideas and arguments of speculative realism(s), to create alternative research and dissemination formats that emphasize the materiality of its objects – e.g., research papers, art, curriculum, conference presentations, and the things of design?

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: 30 SEPT. 2016.

All enquiries should be addressed to the editor at ijetaed3@gmail.com. **Please state submission is for this special issue.** Only online submissions will be accepted, please follow author guidelines at <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/ijeta/index>

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