


Children's theatre play production as an integrated arts pedagogy in the foundation phase: A case study

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Background: Arts education is an underutilised subject in South African teacher education institutions and schools. It is mostly characterised by fewer hours of training and is primarily theory-based.

Setting: The study was conducted at an urban university of South Africa.

Aim: The aim of the study was to find out how student teachers engaged with an integrated arts experience through children's play production, in which there was a deliberate balance of the practice and theory in their Arts Education Methodology module.

Method: A qualitative reflective case study was conducted with the B.Ed. students who had completed this module to solicit their experiences as well as its efficacy for teaching Arts Education effectively in their respective schools. Telephonic one-on-one interviews were conducted with 11 students who were purposefully sampled. Deductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Results: The study revealed that several 21st-century skills were indirectly imparted to the students through the integrated arts pedagogy and were used in the students' play production.

Conclusion and contribution: Play production is an effective pedagogical approach for teaching 21st-century skills to pre-service teachers. It could be adapted by any other Foundation Phase teacher-training institution that might be interested in implementing this integrated arts children's play pedagogy to promote practice-based Arts Education methodology.

Keywords: arts education; 21st-century skills; foundation phase teacher-training; integrated arts pedagogy; children's theatre production.

Introduction

Teacher-training needs to evolve if it is to stay relevant to the modern soft and hard industrial skills demanded by different workplaces and industries. The 21st-century skills, also known as the 4 Cs – communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovation and problem-solving, and collaboration – are soft skills that are required or considered for employability in all sectors over and above different specialised technical skills, including in the teaching profession. Van Laar et al. (2020:2) observes that 'The skills needed for education and the workplace in the current economy have been labeled 21st-century skills'. Teacher-training institutions must therefore ensure that pre-service teachers are empowered with both the academic and the social skills that enable them to impart these skills effectively to their learners and to apply them in their professional practice. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS 2011:5) mentions that the National Curriculum Statement of South Africa aims to produce learners who can 'solve problems ... using critical and creative thinking; ... work effectively as individuals and ... members of a team; ... [and] communicate effectively'. Ball, Joyce and Anderson-Butcher (2016:3) concludes that '... in summary, 21st century skills represent characteristics students should possess to overcome adversity and achieve success in postsecondary education and the workforce'. Children's theatre play production is an interactive and enactment-based pedagogical approach that concomitantly develops learners (including pre-service teachers in this case) both socially and emotionally and, at the same time, stimulates innovation, creativity, teamwork and critical thinking. Dai (2020:71) observes that '... Drama incorporates elements of theatre to facilitate the student's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and learning'.

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This study stems from research that has been carried out in South Africa regarding the poor implementation of Arts Education¹ (known as Creative Arts, under the subject of Life Skills) in government schools (Beukes 2016; De Villiers & Sauls 2017; Magagula, Mugovhani & Yende 2022). Although this study focussed on the Foundation Phase,² this deficiency also exists in the Intermediate Phase,³ the Senior Phase⁴ and the Further Education and Training Phases⁵ (Beukes 2016). Some of the precursors of this situation are: the lack of professionally or adequately trained specialist teachers to teach Arts Education in schools, poor infrastructure, the lack of equipment for teaching the arts, and inadequate training of generalist teachers in Arts Education by their teacher-training institution (Pooley 2016).

I write this article as a former Arts educator with 8 years of experience in public and private government schools as both a full-time music teacher and a part-time instrumental ensemble instructor, and as a lecturer in Arts Education in the Department of Childhood Education at the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Education between the years 2015 and 2021. In these capacities, I have personally experienced some of the above-mentioned struggles that cause the ineffective teaching of Arts Education in schools.

My responsibility as a lecturer in Arts Education was to empower the pre-service generalist teachers in the Foundation Phase with the technical skills and theoretical knowledge they need in order to facilitate Arts Education (known as Creative Arts, under the umbrella subject called Life Skills). I adopted a pedagogical approach using a children's theatre practical play production to empower the fourth year students with practical skills and experience in play production, and also to perform in the production of a play. I adopted this pedagogy because I believe it promotes co-creation and student creativity. Dinham et al. (2024:10) label such pedagogy as a '... pedagogy that builds relationships of trust and supports creative expression [*that*] positions the educator as a facilitator or co-constructer of learning ...'. One objective of this pedagogical approach was to enable the students to gain deeper knowledge and the requisite practical skills to enable them to teach integrated arts (Creative Arts) effectively in their school. A second objective was to improve the level of Arts Education teaching because it has been a challenge since its implementation (Beukes 2016; Chirwa 2014; De Kock, Marias & Botha 2023; Magagula et al. 2022; Nompula 2012).

This study is therefore a reflective review of whether the integrated arts methodology has effectively assisted the students as in-service teachers for effective facilitation of Arts Education curriculum. Georgii-Hemming et al. (2020:246)

1.Arts Education refers to the study of all the art forms: music, dance, drama and visual arts in the school education system.

2.Foundation Phase refers to Grades 1–3 in the South African schooling system.

3.Intermediate Phase refers to Grades 4–7.

4.Senior Phase refers to Grades 8–9.

5.Further Education and Training Phase refers to Grades 10–12.

describes reflection as a '... continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation, focusing how to develop a particular practice ...'. As a teacher trainer in Arts Education at a tertiary level, reflecting on the relevance and effectiveness of my module content and presentation approach is important because I need to remain updated and informed about recent developments and the realities of the classroom teachers. Therefore, the objective of this study was to solicit the experiences of the education students' of the children's theatre play production pedagogy as an integrated arts approach to facilitate Arts Education effectively in the Foundation Phase. The research question of the study was 'what were the experiences of the Foundation Phase teachers of the children's theatre play production'. The two subsequent sub-questions were 'have the integrated arts pedagogy prepared them to facilitate the Foundation Phase Arts Education curriculum effectively in school' and 'what are the non-teaching skills they learned from working with a group in preparation for the children's theatre play production'.

Critical reflection framework informed this study. Georgii-Hemming et al. (2020) explains that critical reflection as:

[...] Involving thinking about how beliefs and values have developed, and to take larger existential questions about education into account ... in other words, includes social, political, moral and ethical aspects ... (p. 246)

Context to the study

A Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree with specialisation in the Foundation Phase in the Department of Childhood Education is offered by the University of Johannesburg. In the fourth year of this degree course, a mixed-methodology module titled Culture and the Natural Environment is offered. I lectured in the Arts Education component of this methodology module. This module entailed equipping the Foundation Phase pre-service teachers with the practical skills they require to teach Arts Education in an integrated manner using the children's theatre play production approach as a platform.

This is performed in about 10 sessions, during which they will be rehearsing their play and characters, a few of these sessions with the assistance of semi-professional actors or professional theatre writers. An Arts Education excursion to a local theatre was conducted with the whole group (about 80 to 100) of pre-service teachers before their final performance to give them an opportunity to watch a theatrical production for inspiration and motivation.

Arts Education in the Foundation Phase forms part of a subject called Life Skills, which is an umbrella subject of which Creative and Performing Arts/Arts Education forms a part. The CAPS (2011:8) states that '... the subject Life Skills in Foundation Phase (Grades R–3) has been organised into four study areas: Beginning Knowledge, Personal and Social Well-being, Creative Arts and Physical Education'.

The in-service teachers who enrolled in this module came predominantly from government township schools in the different provinces of South Africa. In their interview background check, they confirmed that they lacked specialised Arts Education during their primary and secondary school education. This is phenomena is however, not a new observation and also not only observed in South Africa but also in Australia and the United States (De Kock et al. 2023; Dinham et al. 2024; Magagula et al. 2022). The teachers enrolment in this Arts Education methodology was therefore their first formal exposure to formal education and training in the Arts. Although as their lecturer, my undergraduate and postgraduate training was in Music Education, I had to teach all the basic skills and elements of all the art forms (music, dance, drama and visual arts). I also had to attend developmental workshops for all the art forms I did not specialise in to gain the necessary technical skills for teaching in Foundation Phase classes such as painting, dance and acting. This was necessary for me to be able to present the module practically and to understand deeply the demands of the task and in particular to demonstrate some technical performance skills. Problem-solving and creativity are some of the traits of a 21st century competent teacher of which I model to my students; it was then ideal for me to undertake extra training in order to be able to facilitate the integrated arts pedagogy to them. I share the same belief with Batra (2005) that an ideal teacher is the one who:

... develops the needed counseling skills and competencies to be a 'facilitator' and 'helper' for children [*in this case education students*] needing specific kind of help in finding solutions to day-to-day problems related to educational, personal-social solution. (p. 43)

The assessment of the children's theatre play production was performed in local professional theatres (Soweto Theatre⁶ and Con Cowan Theatre⁷) with professional technical support and a live audience that comprised of local primary school learners from and around Soweto. Therefore, the module's assessment approach exposed the learners and the pre-service teachers to the theatre as a performance space (to promote context-based learning pedagogy) and also to an experience of a live children's theatre production. Overton (2016) explains that context-based learning is '... learning that places content within a meaningful context'. The performances were followed by a question-and-answer session at the end of each short play where learners were asked what the presentations were about and what they had learned from them. A pedagogy of enactment was applied as the play production required practical rehearsals, a dry run and a dress rehearsal before its final practical performance assessment at a theatre. I agree with Lampert (2013) that:

The idea that the work of teaching can be learned in the classroom, where it is enacted, is challenged by the notion that pedagogies of enactment can make their way into preparatory courses through activities like rehearsals. (p. 31)

6.Soweto Theatre is one of the three Johannesburg theatres; it is based in Jabulani, Soweto.

7.Con Cowan Theatre is one of the University of Johannesburg theatres, which is based on its Bunting Road Campus.

Entry to the play productions was free for the learners and general audiences as these productions were part of the pre-service teachers' service learning and community engagement project. Community engagement and good responsible citizenry are some of the attributes expected from South African tertiary graduates; therefore, the latter was performed to conscientise and engage the student teachers as members of the greater community.

Research methods and design

This study was a qualitative reflective case study. Maree (2020:89) explain that a case study is an 'empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a case), set within its real-world context'. This qualitative research can be classified as a descriptive research design. Maree (2020) explain that this research design,

... aims to describe some group of people or phenomena or other entities. Descriptive research can serve a variety of research objectives, but descriptive studies tend to be primarily concerned with finding answers to 'what' questions ... (p. 60)

The participants selected for this study were graduates of the B.Ed. degree course from the University of Johannesburg's Department of Childhood Education who undertook the children's theatre play production module with me between the years 2015 and 2019. Although participants comprised male and female, a diverse-race and in-service teachers, age, gender, and race did not influence the results or study outcomes in any manner as the focus was primarily on the efficiency of the Arts Education Methodology module. In order to avoid coercion, I explained to the participants that this research is for academic purposes and for the development and review of this module to enable it to serve future students even better. Therefore, they were requested to express themselves freely and truthfully. To comply with the confidential requirements, participants' quotations are not identified by either gender or race in this research article. They were also informed that there would be no financial benefit for them, their perspectives would be kept anonymous and no information would be used against them in any way.

A purposive convenience sampling was used in selecting the participants. Patten and Newhart (2018:100) explain that purposive sampling is when 'researchers ... use their knowledge of the population to select individuals who they believe will be good sources of information'. A total of 11 participants were interviewed, the majority of them being group leaders of the different groups during the practical presentation of the module. The participants chosen were those with whom the researcher could get contacts of – therefore, they constituted a convenient sample. The participants were of mixed gender and had between 3 to 6 years' experience of teaching after completion of this module. Cresswell and Poth (2018) explain that convenient sampling method '... refers to situations where population elements are

selected based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available...'. The challenge I faced with this sampling was that I could not get a fully representative sample of the students from each cohort from 2015 to 2019. However, I mitigated this challenge by making sure that the participants were not from the same groups so that they could share different experiences from their various groups. They represented the different year groups of the offering of this module and also the groups that they were representing as group leaders.

Open-ended non-leading semi-structured interview questions were developed and an audio recorder was used during the interviews to gather the data – all the participants had given their permission for this. A semi-structured interview is explained by Patten and Newhart (2018) as being an:

[I]nterview guide or interview protocol ... formulated in advance (the 'structured' part) but the interview may follow the flow of the conversation in each interview rather than follow the guide. (p. 160)

The interviews were conducted telephonically at a time chosen to be convenient by the participants. Subsequently, the transcriptions of the interviews were carried out and the data were then analysed using a thematic coding technique. Maguire and Dela (2017:3352) describe thematic coding as '... a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data'. The thematic codes are the different meaning units in which you group statements that fall under or within the same theme or category.

The interviews were conducted in a way that flowed as a conversation with each participant. In order to protect personal information and maintain confidentiality, the pseudonyms E1–E11 (E = Educator) are used when referring to the different responses of the participants. The different participants used diverse languages that they were comfortable with and in which they were able to express themselves better. The languages used were English, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, and code-switching between these languages. I am competent in all these languages; therefore, I could understand clearly what the respondents were saying. The interviews lasted between 30 min and 45 min each.

Ethical considerations

Information sheets and consent forms were given to the participants to read and fill in before the research began. The ethical approval was sought and granted by the General/Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State (UFS-HSD2024/0073).

Results

The research focus was on soliciting experiences of the education students on children's play production pedagogy as an integrated arts approach to facilitate Arts Education effectively in the Foundation Phase. Therefore, a critical review approach lenses were used. Interview transcriptions were performed, and the thematic coding strategy was used to analyse the data. A Thematic Coding table presentation

TABLE 1: Thematic coding analysis table.

Themes	Sub-themes
Duration and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School background training Teacher training program module setup and time allocation CAPS subject time allocation
Artistic Skills Transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Praxis versus Theory Personal artform preference and skill adequacy Different artforms efficacy
21 Century skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Collaboration Creativity Critical thinking

based on inductive data analysis was developed to present the main themes (see Table 1). Three main themes that were identified are duration and training, skills transfer, and 21 century skills. The abovementioned themes highlight the importance of restructuring the teachings of arts education in teacher-training institutes. There is a need to increase teaching and learning hours of arts modules throughout the teaching degree programmes and create an equal balance between theory and practical teaching experiences and performances to empower teachers with the prerequisite skills to teach the arts effectively and confidently. Magagula (2023:43) shares the same sentiments stating that '... provision of the prerequisite tool and facilities for an enhanced creative arts education is a factor that would improve the Creative Arts Subject in South Africa ...'. He further notes that '... educators are feeling under pressure and are not enjoying teaching a subject that they have little to no knowledge about'. Dinham et al. (2024:5) also concurs that part of the inefficiency of teaching arts in schools is caused by '... limited time devoted to arts education in the teacher preparation course ...'.

The interview questions consisted of three sections. The first section was about the participant's background in Arts Education in the primary and secondary schools they came from. The second section was about their current Arts Education teaching experience and how they thought the children's play production module influenced what and how they are teaching. The final section was about the other skills they have learned through the experience of practically participating in the production of a children's play.

The findings were as follows:

Section 1: Limited formal Arts Education background

The participants' background in formal Arts Education was limited to basic visual arts such as artefact creation, painting and colouring of pictures. Their assessment was not based on artistic understanding but on the teaching of fine motor skills and as just a free, fun or relaxing period for the learners.

Drama was another Arts subject that was mostly taught in the primary schools where the teachers had come from. It was taught through other subjects such as English under the dramatisation section and not really from a drama education perspective.

Section 2: Insufficient training in Arts Education from their teacher-training institution

In general, the participants felt more comfortable teaching Visual Arts and Drama because they had had more exposure to it from school. As teachers of these subjects, they could simply give instruction in an activity and let the learners perform the tasks themselves without having to demonstrate them.

The group also felt that going through the children's play production module and exercise gave them some basic skills to confidently teach some art forms (Drama and Visual Arts) in their schools. Fahy (2023) also observed in his research that:

[T]he majority of teachers survey felt that their competence (i.e. knowledge, skills and attitudes) in relation to arts education [teaching] had improved as a result of their engagement in the CS [creative school initiative where generalists school teachers were introduced to the arts education teaching through practical participation]. (p. 5)

Overall, the participants find the arts as important as the other school subjects and promote the teaching of these subjects equally with other subjects. This challenge of arts education time allocation and promotion of subjects such as mathematics and science is not peculiar to South African schooling system, it is also experienced in Ireland. Fahey (2023:4) in his research also found that a '... majority of teachers [he interviewed] indicated that the increasing of emphasis on numeracy and literacy had impacted on the time allocated to teaching arts education in classrooms ...'.

The participants also expressed the view that the play production module they experienced in their fourth year should be taught at tertiary teacher-training institutions and that it should be comprehensively studied throughout the whole Foundation Phase teacher-training degree programme, not only in the final year.

Section 3: Children's play production practical module imparted 21st-century skills

Between them, the group identified communication, collaboration and teamwork, creativity, innovation, problem-solving and critical thinking to have been some of the skills that were developed by the children's play production beyond its artistic assessment purpose and assessment criteria.

Discussion of findings

Section 1: Limited formal Arts Education background

Of the 11 participants interviewed, 4 were males and 7 were females. All the interviewees were between the ages of 20 and 30 years when they undertook the play production module with me. They all came from government schools where they experienced either informal or rather casual Arts Education from the Foundation Phase through to the Senior Phase. Therefore,

their attitudes (of seeing the arts as not important and as an extra Music subject) and skills (in being exposed to the technical skills of performance and Creative Arts from a young age) subconsciously influenced their worldview, perspectives and their view of the importance of Arts Education. Beukes (2016:13) quotes Mezirow (2006:92), who explained that 'perspective involves a general frame of reference, a world view, and a personal paradigm, acquired during childhood and early education of an individual'. Therefore, the exposure to arts education module of the practising teachers through children play production module has transformed their attitudes towards arts education, which means transformative learning took place. Transformative learning is learning that transforms or changes an adult's perspectives or paradigms that they adopted as a result of the environment they grew up in. Mezirow (1996) explains transformational learning as a:

Frame of reference encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and is composed of two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view. Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes. These codes may be cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological. (p. 5)

Beukes (2016) explains transformative theory, as a 'change in mindset' that was initially negatively influenced by one's upbringing or non-exposure to a specific concept.

The participants are all currently teaching Foundation Phase learners and subjects in different government schools that include semi-rural, mining, special needs and boys' schools. These are some of their responses to the question: 'Did you have any formal teaching in Arts Education in your pre-tertiary education?'

'We had it [Arts and Culture] as infused with Life Skills. In the Senior Phase, we did paintings and colouring.' (E1)

'We did all the art forms in class and extramural activities.' (E4)

'Only in primary school and it was more drawing and making artefacts with our hands.' (E5)

'We had basic Arts and Culture, which were done only on those particular days such as heritage.' (E6)

It is evident that the participants had only informal exposure to Arts Education through a subject called Arts and Culture and then later changed to Creative Arts. The above-stated situation relayed by the participants thus confirms Dinham's et al. (2024:4) observation that '... arts education is not strongly present in the taught curriculum, even though is a mandated learning area ...'. Participants E4 and E6 stated that there were more Creative Arts activities during celebratory cultural days and more consistently active extra music activities such as choir, dance ensembles, among others. Respondents E1 and E5 emphasised that there was a Creative Arts subject taught in class during the hours of tuition, although they concentrated on the visual and creative arts more than on other art forms.

It was deduced from the interviews that it seems to be common that the teachers interviewed prefer or feel comfortable teaching Drama and Visual Arts as they seem to be easier for learners to engage in without having too much assistance from the teachers. This also aligns with the fact that most of them were mainly taught Drama and Visual Arts in their pre-tertiary schooling. When asked which subject they teach more comfortably in their current classes, they replied:

'I teach the arts as per the year plan of the curriculum, we use design. For one project we asked our learners to make a prototype of the mode of transport. I like teaching visual arts, mainly visual arts such as 3-D pictures. When you teach the learners with a visual expression, they get interested in such an extent that they even think of colours.' (E3)

'Acting is my favourite as I am comfortable with it.' (E9)

'I like teaching drama because I could be, however, I want to be. I like visual arts because I like creating beauty with my hands and using creativity.' (E11)

'I am confident to teach it as I have it practically. The play production should continue, it takes people out of their comfort zone. For example, role-playing someone or something which you have not yet done.' (E2)

Teaching music seems to be difficult, according to the analyses of the following responses. Two participants found it to be more technically demanding and required taking time to learn about its theory and practice (instrumentals, playing or singing):

'I don't like singing as an individual, I can do it in a group only. I have sung around people casually as an individual, but I have had no one telling me that I sing well. I don't think I have a nice voice and I am not confident to sing alone as a soloist.' (E4)

'I don't like singing, because I don't think I can sing.' (E1)

'We should have the arts from the first year right through to the fourth year. A year of training is not sufficient and does not offer deep practical experience in terms of performance/practical. Practical training especially in music could be done more practically and must be a bit longer.' (E1)

All participants unequivocally agreed that learners should be exposed to Arts Education from the primary level. It helps in integrated teaching and relaxation:

'Performing Arts should be taught because it develops the learner's language communication skills, social and emotional states.' (E1)

'Some learners are not academically gifted, and they can make a living through the Arts. It is good to expose them from an early age and encourage them to work on their Arts.' (E11)

However, all the participants have emphasised that the Arts are not taught strictly according to their policy-mentioned hours. This is because teachers feel that the Arts are not important. After all, they do not determine the progress of the learner to the next grade. The other reason is that some teachers do not feel confident in teaching the Arts because they are not adequately taught themselves. Magagula et al. (2022) warned that:

... South Africans should not be naïve to the changes that are taking place in the field of arts education. Teachers need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and desired skills to improve the subject in South African public schools. (p. 43)

During the interviews it also appeared that teachers use the Arts Education time to speed up coverage of the curriculum (often for other subjects):

'We don't teach Creative Arts as per the curriculum specification in terms of time, we work more on the subjects that the department officials come to and moderate for those subjects that determine the passing and failing of students.' (E9)

'It's like a reward subject for me in the Arts.' (E8)

'When it comes to policy Life Skills are not given enough time to be taught in class, always focusing on Maths and languages. Arts is not taken seriously.' (E10)

'We are given about two hours to teach the Arts which are not enough.' (E2)

One of the greatest challenges that causes the Creative Arts not to be taught effectively is the time allocated to it weekly. Magagula et al. (2022) recommended that,

... the Creative Arts subject in South African public schools should have enough time allocated for learners and have strong teachers who will know exactly how to nurture the talent of the learners rather than tarnishing it. (p. 378)

Section 2: Insufficient training in Arts Education from their teacher-training institution

The play production method was meant to empower pre-service teachers to teach Arts Education in schools following an approach in which all the art forms are taught as a unit instead of different components in a production performance. There are various developmental advantages and ways of teaching arts in an integrated manner such as teaching them through children's theatre play production. Heiman (2020:21) observes that 'Arts integration provides students with quantifiable academic, social, and emotional benefits ...'. Beukes (2016) also explained the importance of integrating the arts by stating that:

Arts not only share commonalities, which make it appropriate to group them together and think of them as a set of disciplines in school, they also share a very common approach in that they are all ways for individuals and groups to experience the world in a sensory ... fashion ... (p. 32)

This Arts Education module is taught for only a semester in the second year of the degree, where the students must learn all the theoretical elements of all the art forms and the basics of playing the recorder. In their fourth and final years, the students get to prepare a children's play production by developing the script and performing the play. According to the responses of the participants, they found the module to have empowered them and given them the confidence to teach the Arts in schools:

'It gave me the basics to put up a play production and acting which use those techniques in my school currently.' (E11)

'We learned what the theatre looks like, and we also went to watch the play to learn what the whole package looks like in its final form.' (E5)

'... it gave me the basics that I needed. Even if you are not completely ready or know everything comprehensively, the basics are there. If you are interested, you can develop yourself from there.' (E7)

In contrast, Oliver-Barcelo, Ribot and Monclus (2024:2) state that 'artistic training within pre-service teacher education programs is notably limited, particularly in those programs designed for ECE [*early childhood education*] which focus on children aged 0–6 years'. Against this long-identified background, all the participants suggested that the module needs to be taught for the duration of the entire degree programme, like any other subject, so that they can gain more exposure and experience, knowledge, skills and the confidence to teach the Arts:

'We need to take it from the first year instead of only starting in the fourth year. If we start from the first year, we can learn each art component deeply and maybe divide each component yearly so that when the fourth year play production comes we would be fully understanding of each art form.' (E3)

'It should be [*taught*] for the four years and divided into semesters.' (E4)

'We could do it as a year module for the duration of the course. One semester theory and the second a practical. To be good in the Arts we need to have time to practise so that we become more competent instead of when starting to learn and enjoy them they take them away. There should be more time for practical performance of other art forms, like there was time created for the play production.' (E2)

The practical teaching approach for this module was aimed at giving the teachers both the theoretical and the practical acting or performance skills so that they would be able to share with their learners through demonstration. The professional arts practitioners were invited to share their skills and knowledge a few days before the play production assessment so as to promote co-teaching and collaborative teaching with them. The students found working with the practitioners invaluable, because it helped them with gaining a deeper understanding of the craft and with acquiring the performance skills demanded by the children's play production.

Section 3: Practical module of children's play production imparted 21st-century skills

In the last section of the interview questions, the participants were asked about the different challenges they experienced while preparing for the play production and the lessons and skills they had learned from that enterprise. The 21st-century skills (creativity, communication, critical thinking, and teamwork) were the most identified themes from the participant responses. Assante and Enescu (2020:325) explain that 'the role of art and artists as educators includes various

activities towards social-political ... empowerment and change [*which can be seen as problem-solving and creativity through the arts*]'.

He further states that 'the role of arts in the community can include the communication and transmission of different perspectives and visions [*which can be interpreted as critical engagement and communication*] ...'. Therefore, the play production seems to have imparted the in-service teachers with life skills that are important to the work place and everyday social interactions.

Communication

Teaching and learning require listening and communication skills. The Arts are special forms of communication: music communicates in sound and words, dance communicates through the body and movement, drama communicates in words and acting, and the Creative Arts communicate in colours, forms and shapes. Uduak (2020) explains that:

The arts as a language of expression and communication has always been and will always remain a fundamental aspect of the human condition and the perpetuation of cultures. The arts as language is comprised of visual, aural, tactile, kinesthetic that are a part of the everyday communication available to people within an environment. (p. 28)

Communication therefore needs to be clear, to happen timeously and to be performed in a respectful and organised manner (especially in a manner that is not embarrassing or humiliating). According to some of the responses from the participants, working in groups with different personalities forced the pre-service teachers to learn to be able to communicate their different ideas about the theme of the story, the preparation of props, the setting of rehearsal times and script writing in a respectful and tolerant manner that still enabled them to maintain order in the groups. Some of the lessons they learned are:

'... in a group to avoid being failed by one person that may tarnish the group's efforts the whole group's effort, you must respect others, be truthful, mean what you say, and send clear communication. Communication is very critical.' (E1)

'We learned to work as a team, not sideline anyone [*ideas*], acknowledge different ideas [*listen to communication without any bias*], and work collaboratively.' (E8)

'... Teamwork, we need to respect everyone's ideas, and if a group is focussed [*on what is communicated to be done*], you can succeed as a team ...' (E3)

'Our group members wanted to be all leaders and disrespected other people's ideas ... We did not communicate and share tasks [*nor did we agree*] on who was responsible for what, we ended up all having different ideas of what we prepared for the task, and we all wanted to do what we thought should be done individually.' (E11)

From the preceding responses it can be concluded that communication plays a key role, whether as an instruction, an announcement, delegation or listening and respecting others' suggestions and ideas, and communicating in advance to report if you cannot make an appointment (in this case, a rehearsal).

Collaboration and teamwork

As the play production was a group assessment task, the pre-service teachers had to work in a group that was diverse as well as non-planned in choosing the members. Therefore, the students had to learn to focus on the task at hand and try their utmost to make the project work. When students were asked about what they had learned about working in a group, some of their responses were:

'I learned that you ... cannot be able to do everything on your own, dividing tasks worked well. Utilising different artistic skills of the others, such as dancers and singers, made a production a success. Many brains work better than one.' (E2)

'We come from different cultures and [have different] personalities; I learned that group work challenges from the play production are like working with colleagues in terms of group dynamics.' (E9)

'We learned to work as a team, not sideline anyone, acknowledge different ideas, and to work collaboratively. Those experiences in the group were preparing for the field we are in. Conflicts are there and we need to apply teamwork skills and think about other people.' (E8)

Creativity, innovation and problem-solving

The Creative Arts component of this mixed-methodology module comprised of a creative task and assessment that promoted innovation and the identification of children's social problems and solutions to them, by applying integrated arts pedagogy. Developing the script, creating the props, deciding on costumes and applying acting skills for the performance were the main tasks the groups had to undertake. When the teachers were asked what they had learned from this process, their responses included the following:

'I have learned to be patient and understand different attitudes and personalities when working in a group and I should not take disagreements personally because other people say hurtful things without being aware that they are hurting others.' (E9)

'I have learned to creatively create my teaching aids when coming to teach the children's theatre.' (E6)

'I have learned that not everything has to be bought, we can use recycled material. However, things such as paint still need to be bought and one must compromise their finances if you want your teaching aids to be colourful and attractive.' (E3)

'I learned that we should come up with a solution when there is a problem and improvise where there is a shortage of anything.' (E11)

The above-stated responses demonstrated that the pre-service teacher learned to be goal-focussed, not to take arguments negatively or personally while trying to reach a goal, improve where necessary, and be open-minded, thinking of innovative solutions. The whole play production method required the pre-service teachers to identify a social problem, be creative and innovative in communicating, and respond to the matter using a 10-min-long children's play production as their vehicle for doing so.

Critical thinking

Heard et al. (2020) explain that:

... the term 'critical thinking' is reserved by some, particularly from the philosophical tradition, to refer to a form of reflective thinking directed toward the analysis and evaluation of existing communication, information and arguments, particularly through the use of logic and reason. (p. 2)

All the participants interviewed in this research project came from different years and groups, and they all managed to put the play production together successfully according to the project assessment brief (which was to create a 10 min long play production for foundation and intermediate phase learners teaching any social life skills content or theme, using integrated arts pedagogy) as a group without direct assistance from their lecturer. All the groups had to think about social maladies, life-orientation skills that learners need and the social issues that they needed to teach learners to solve through a 10-min play presentation. This required critical thinking to come up with a focussed storyline, relevant props and scenes as well as thought about the importance of the critical characters that needed to be in the children's play production. The groups were not presented with the topics they had to deal with; they were instead challenged to think and reflect on critical social issues that the learners encountered in their daily lives and how to solve them. Some of the themes included child abuse, rape, hygiene, child-trafficking and bullying. The feeling of achievement and other feelings expressed by the students in being critically engaged with the task and solving the problem successfully using children's theatre are reflected in the following statements:

'I was excited and felt good about myself acting in front of an audience and being in a theatre.' (E1)

'We got external assistance from practitioners from outside for our plays to make sense of them technically and artistically. They taught us skills such as voice projects, staying in the storyline, and on-stage performance skills. I have learned that getting thoughts from someone from outside can itself bring energy to the class and different skills.' (E2)

'Performing on the stage in the theatre meant learning deeper about play production.' (E6)

Beukes (2016:37) maintains that '... learning through Creative Arts develops many skills, abilities, and attitudes that are critical in a workplace'.

The students' experience of the children's play production, as elicited in the participants' responses, concurs with the observation by Beukes (2016) that Arts Education can promote and develop a student's 21st-century skills needed for teaching purposes.

Frequency rating: Representation of data analysis

The following section takes the form of a table (Table 2) representing the conclusions and summary of the responses of the participants. It also provides an analysis of the

TABLE 2: Frequency rating scale – Analysis of data captured from the in-service teacher interviews.

Frequency rating scale			
Interview questions	Total of 11 responses	%	Narrative
Participants who had Arts education during their primary school education	11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They all came from government schools and were taught either Life Skills or Arts and Culture from Grade 3 to Grade 9.
Participants who are currently teaching Arts in their school in the Foundation Phase	10	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ One of the teachers has been moved from Foundation to Senior Phase. He currently holds the position of Head of Department (HOD) and does not teach the Creative Arts but English.
Participants' awareness of the fact that they should teach all the art forms in the Creative Arts component (as a Life Skills subject)	11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They all understand that the Creative Arts curriculum requires that they teach all the arts forms in the Foundation Phase.
Participants' perspectives about the weekly hours allocated to Creative Arts	11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They feel that it is important to teach the arts from the primary school level seriously and with the same hours allocated to the other subjects.
Participants who predominantly teach Music	0	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All the teachers interviewed are not comfortable teaching singing in class because they are not skilled, and they do not teach using any instruments in the classroom because there are no music instruments in their schools. ✓ One participant stated that in her school they had only two djembe drums and these are always used by the Intermediate Phase.
Participants who predominantly teach Dance	1	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Only one teacher predominantly teaches Dance. That teacher happens to consider dance as his favourite art form and has dancing skills because he grew up as a member of a dance group as an extra music activity in school and the community.
Participants who predominantly teach Visual Arts	8	72	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Most of the teachers are comfortable teaching Visual Arts because they are not directly required to demonstrate or teach practical skills to the learners. ✓ They find Visual Arts an easier way to avoid presenting other art forms. For example, they will ask learners to colour in pictures to test their fine motor skills and build artefacts such as music instruments and houses as creative individual activities.
Participants who predominantly teach Drama	5	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The integrated arts pedagogy through the use of children's play production has somehow added value to the teaching experience of the Foundation Phase teachers. ✓ The number of teachers who teach drama is just under 50%, whereas those avoiding other art forms, except Visual Arts, are just 27% more. Drama is the second most predominantly taught Arts subject in schools.
Participants teaching more than two art forms	2	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Only two teachers are teaching more than two art forms. They are both skilled in dancing and were members of community dance groups in the form of an extramural activity as they grew up and they also went through the children's play production methodology module with me. As a result, they both said they predominantly teach Drama and Dance in their schools.
Participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of the module in giving them basic skills and knowledge to teach the Creative Arts curriculum in schools	11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The teachers generally feel that the Arts Education module is important in their training as generalist Foundation Phase teachers since the curriculum requires them to teach these subjects.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They all have a basic theoretical knowledge of the Arts. Most of the time they were taught drawing, artefact-making/plastic arts and role-playing through dramatisation. ✓ The majority of the teachers who went through the children's theatre play production methodology with me between 2015 and 2021 and who were interviewed are currently teaching Creative Arts in the Foundation Phase as a Life Skills subject. ✓ They are aware that they should teach all the arts forms, but they teach what they are comfortable with. ✓ They also are aware that the arts are not assessed or moderated from the Department of Education's regional offices and they consistently use the hours allocated to the Creative Arts to cover curricula of the other subjects such as Mathematics and English. ✓ All the teachers agree that Arts Education is important to expose learners to the Arts, to nurture their talents from a young age and to create an opportunity to excel in the Arts and possibly pursue them as a profession in the future. ✓ They generally feel that not all learners are academically inclined and school should not be focussed only on academics, but also on Art Education to make possible exposure to career possibilities for non-academic learners. ✓ The participants who were interviewed lack the theoretical knowledge and practical skills to teach classroom singing and classroom instrumental tuition such as the ukulele, glockenspiel, xylophone or recorder. ✓ Teachers would predominantly teach an art form in which they are most skilled and comfortable with, especially when demonstration and coaching are required. ✓ A high percentage of the participants opt to teach Visual Arts because they do not feel efficiently trained in teaching the other three art forms. This is largely owing to the brevity of the Arts training in their pre-service teacher-training institution. ✓ Although they all said that the module gave them the basic skills to teach confidently using integrated arts in the Foundation Phase, they mentioned that the module was too short and that it should be as long as the duration of the B.Ed. degree. ✓ Arts Education should have equal hours of training like other subjects in order for them to be able to teach all the art forms as effectively, practically and confidently as they would teach other subjects they have learned during their training. ✓ Teachers predominantly teach those Arts which they are most skilled in and comfortable with when they are required to demonstrate and coach them. ✓ The teachers generally stated that Arts Education should be taught throughout the 4 years of the B.Ed. programme for them to be more empowered with theoretical knowledge and practical skills to teach Arts Education effectively and efficiently in their school. ✓ They advocate the need for more practice-based teaching and to gain practical teaching experience during their work-integrated learning (WIL) as part of their pre-service training.

Table 2 continues on the next page →

TABLE 2 (Continues...): Frequency rating scale – Analysis of data captured from the in-service teacher interviews.

Frequency rating scale		Interview questions		Total of 11 responses	%	Narrative	Inductive conclusion
Frequency rating scale	Participants' perspectives on context-based learning: whether it is of importance when teaching Arts Education			11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All the teachers were generally excited to perform in a real theatre, with lights and sound and an audience. This experience deepened their understanding of the logistics and performance requirements needed to produce and perform in a children's play production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Teachers generally agreed that Arts Education educational excursions to the Arts spaces are important as they add more to the learners' understanding and appreciation of the Arts. ✓ They also agree that learners should be given tasks that will allow them to perform to themselves, their peers, at heritage events and in Arts competitions.
	Participants who agree with the view that core teaching or working with practitioners in school is important			11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They all testified that it helped them to gain practical and technical performance skills, and confidence when working with professional and semi-professional Arts practitioners during their preparation for their final play production performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In principle, the teachers agreed that Arts practitioners should be invited in schools to assist the teachers with practical skills and coaching in the Arts forms that they lack experience in, with a fee attached to their service.
	Participants who agree they learned and applied 21st-century skills through their group work during the play production module			11	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They generally pointed out that somehow they had to learn to be tolerant towards one another. ✓ Group collaboration work demands mutual respect. ✓ Communicate their ideas for the development of a script. ✓ Apply creativity in creating the props as a group, using recycled materials. ✓ Critically reflect on a social malady that the Foundation Phase learner faces, their cause, implications and solution; e.g., bullying as a theme of a play: what causes it – e.g., abuse in the home, then a learner bullies others in schools, the bullied get frustrated and lose self-confidence, the solution is to report to the teacher and not to encourage their peers who are bullying others to protect them from the bully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All the 21st-century skills were learned or sharpened and had to be applied in their preparation for the play production assessment. ✓ They are now aware of the importance of the 21st-century skills and they are using them in their workplaces. ✓ Skills that they highlighted were respectfulness and timeless communication, creativity in teaching and event organisation, collaborating with other teachers in co-teaching, solving problems innovatively and critically reflecting on their ways of teaching and in their decision-making in their teaching environment.

frequency of their responses by interpreting the responses according to the total number of participants and providing an interpretative narrative of the responses by the researcher using inductive reasoning to conclude the study.

A percentage representation or interpretation of the 11 participants has been carried out for summary purposes (see Table 2).

Recommendations

Based on the findings emanating from the interviews conducted with 11 postgraduate B.Ed. students teaching Foundation Phase learners, the following recommendations can be made:

- Curriculum and assessment policy statement time allocation for Creative Arts should be increased for it to be taught effectively and sufficiently not only for its sake but also as a tool for subject integration teaching for languages and mathematics (using integrated arts pedagogies/children's play production approach) for promotion of STEAM teaching strategy.
- Foundation Phase teacher-training institutions should consider using integrated arts pedagogies to train pre-service teachers to teach the basics of Arts and Culture/Creative Arts.
- The methodology modules for Arts and Culture/Creative Arts should be conducted throughout the 4-year duration of the teaching qualification – and presented by skilled and competent lecturers.
- Arts and Culture/Creative Arts modules should include educational excursions to the performance places so that the pre-service teachers can be exposed to the Arts spaces such as concert halls and theatres.
- Pedagogies of enactments such as space-based learning should be paired with practical-based teaching so that pre-service teachers acquire the hands-on know-how and skills instead of learning only theoretical knowledge.
- Pre-service teachers must have several opportunities to teach Arts and Culture/Creative Arts during their work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities.

Further research

The researcher suggests three further research possibilities that could be considered in continuation of this study in the future. Firstly, a study is needed that will evaluate what impacts the integrated arts pedagogy will have if it is taught throughout the 4 years of B.Ed. studies. Secondly, a study is needed to assess whether the teachers will be more comfortable teaching all the art forms equally if the integrated arts pedagogy is taught throughout their undergraduate studies. Thirdly, a research study should be undertaken to evaluate whether there will be any change of attitude towards Arts Education in basic schooling should it form part of the holistic assessment of Life Skills (being assessed for the overall promotion of the subject).

Conclusion

The objective of this research study was to evaluate whether the children's theatre play production has empowered the

Arts and Culture teachers who take the mixed-methodology module with me during their undergraduate studies. This module assessment applied a practical learning approach to context-based learning, which applied integrated pedagogy. The participants in this study have indicated that the module has helped to provide them with the basic technical skills that they need to teach Creative Arts in primary school adequately and with confidence. However, they have all found that the module is too short and that it needs to be undertaken throughout the course of the degree in order for them to learn the different art forms efficiently so that they will be able to teach and demonstrate the Creative Arts more effectively and confidently. As a direct result of the brevity of the module, the teachers have mentioned that they are not teaching all the Arts forms equally but focus only on those they are more confident with and in which they are skilled – these were mainly Drama and Visual or Plastic Arts, and some Dance.

The participants' responses further demonstrated that their experience of the children's theatre play production module has taught them how to use the integrated arts approach and also how to work successfully in a group or a team. The students also mentioned that they have developed other social skills, too, including communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. Therefore, play production has proven to be one of the more effective pedagogical approaches to teaching 21st-century skills to pre-service teachers who are preparing to teach in the Foundation Phase.

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