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Extended Abstract

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### **Title:**

**Teachers as ‘practitioners’: Researching some myths about ‘staying active’ during early-career teaching.**

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This paper explores the difficult terrain of what we teachers do outside the ‘normal’ curriculum. In particular, it investigates how maintaining an ongoing practice within the discipline in which we teach during our early career – ‘staying active’ - effects the quality of our teaching and our expectation of long term success and enjoyment of teaching.

This is becoming a phenomenon of interest to educators as the worrying rate of resignations by early-career teachers (Buchanan, et al., 2013) is placing a spotlight on the professional well-being support our schools provide, (Deffenbaugh, Hatfield & Montana, 2006), and the emphasis in pre-service teacher training programs on metrics-driven learning outcomes over depth-of-learning by students (Hattie, 2008). There exists a growing need to maintain a link between ‘the passion’ that brings us to our teaching – that is, our love of our subject of choice, and our professional practice during our teaching career (Imms & Ruanglertbutr, 2012).

The unit of analysis within this paper will be early career visual art teachers. Within this subset of teaching, three myths exist: that to be a ‘successful’ art teacher you need to also have a private practice; that maintaining a private practice decreases the quality of your teaching; and that teachers who make art eventually leave the teaching profession due to conflicts between their teacher and artist identities.

Since 2010 the Australian Teacher as Art-maker Project (TAP) has tracked early career art educators’ teaching and art-making experiences. This paper will present recent analysis of this ongoing project.

### **Objectives**

This art-specific study actually informs a far more complex phenomenon. In a time of internationally dropping employment retention rates of early-career teachers, TAPs hypothesis, explored through analysis of substantial longitudinal data, argues that allowing opportunity for teachers to be 'practitioners' as well as teachers (that is, actively participate in activities relevant to their specialist subject discipline), actually increases the quality of their teaching and their expectations of retention in teaching.

The TAP project seeks to determine: (1) if early-career teachers' rate of participation in art-making alters significantly during the early years of their teaching career; (2) if perceptions of their quality of teaching is correlated to their rates of art making; (3) if active participation in art-making correlates to employment retention expectations.

### **Method**

A quasi-experimental, longitudinal, mixed-method design is being used to explore these questions. Participants are graduates from a Master of Teaching program in the researcher's university (2015 n=143). An annual 62-item survey undertaken by all participants tracks response changes across 14 independent variables. A volunteer 'experimental' group annually participates in a yearly exhibition and undertakes additional interviews and workshops. This provides longitudinal data within a 'control/experiment' and self-identified 'teacher/artist' and matrix. Data analysis includes descriptive statistical (distributions, frequencies), quantitative (Mann Whitney *U* tests; single-tail *t* tests), and standard qualitative analysis (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993)

### **Outcomes**

Data to date, reported in this presentation, indicates:

- Practitioner activity declines dramatically in the early years of teaching;
- Teachers in the experimental group have a higher expectation of retention in teaching;
- Teachers in the experimental group have a more positive perception of the quality of their teaching;
- The nature of these trends differs substantially between the self-identified teacher/artist sub-groups, and this is temporal in nature.
- Policy investment in teacher-practitioner activities may have beneficial outcomes for student learning outcomes, and improved teacher retention.

### **References**

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