CHAPTER 1

# Setting the context

> Let the child go and come freely, let him touch real things and combine his impressions for himself, instead of sitting indoors at a little round table, while a sweet-voiced teacher suggests that he build a stone wall with his wooden blocks, or make a rainbow out of strips of coloured paper, or plant straw trees in bead flower pots. Such teaching fills the mind with artificial associations that must be got rid of, before the child can develop independent ideas out of actual experience.
>
> Anne Sullivan, teacher of Helen Keller

## Chapter Objectives

This chapter aims to set the context by providing an overview of:

- the policy and curriculum frameworks for early childhood education
- the Arts and their place within the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)
- the Arts Learning Area in the Australian Curriculum.

## Introduction

The early childhood sector of education spans from birth to age eight. Developmentally, these are the supercharged years of an individual's growth—to the extent that the quality of children's living and learning experiences in these years has a profound effect on their future prospects (Elliott, 2006; Heckman, Pinto & Savelyev, 2013; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

For parents, caregivers and educators, a young child's educational development is a big responsibility. It is also a big responsibility for governments and policy makers who must consider each individual's education in the context of the future prosperity, health and social cohesion of society.

In Australia over the past decade, a considerable amount of attention has been given to the early years of children's education and development. This is framed in part by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirming that each child has the right to an education (Article 28) that develops their 'personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (Article 29, www.unicef.org/crc/). The Australian context has also been guided by compelling evidence from extensive international research about the

high correlation between the quality of children's early years and their ability to fulfil their potential in later life (Elliott, 2006; Heckman, Pinto & Savelyev, 2013; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

The special and particular nature of early childhood education is that it centres on the development of the whole child—the individual in their social and cultural milieu. It employs an approach known as 'play-based' or 'inquiry-led' learning. Integral to this form of learning are the ways that Dance, Drama, **Media Arts**, Music and Visual Arts provide important avenues for children's learning or meaning-making—the ways by which they come to know their world.

Anxieties about literacy and numeracy standards and children's 'school readiness' have seen an increasing prevalence of formal schooling practices being adopted with younger and younger children (Jay, 2016). Yet, as early childhood specialists and researchers would argue, the way children learn in these early years of life has a distinct character that distinguishes it from learning practices employed in later formal schooling (Gordon & Williams Browne, 2014; Jay, 2016; Wood & Attfield, 2005). The incursion of formal school-style learning into the early childhood centre misunderstands the complex and subtle foundational capabilities and dispositions for learning that are developed in a play-based educational program specifically designed for the early years of development.

Rather than being a 'lite' version of schooling, early childhood pedagogy provides a purposeful type of holistic educational experience based on children's innate learning practices. It focuses on developing the neural pathways, cognitive processing and physical aptitude for functioning in the world. Good early childhood pedagogy aims to develop capable, confident, caring and creative individuals who have the capability to adapt and thrive as they progressively adopt more of the practices of formal schooling while moving through the years of primary school.

# The policy and curriculum framework for early childhood education

The focus by the Australian Government and allied professional bodies on the distinctive nature of early childhood and its significance in relation to children's future success—coupled more generally with a broader review of educational practices—has generated in recent years a suite of interconnected policy and curriculum documents that provides the framework for improved education in the early childhood sector.

The aim of this chapter is to familiarise you with key documents that shape the expectations placed upon you as a professional early childhood educator—and the role that

young children's participation in Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts have in meeting these expectations. Since early childhood is defined as the age span from birth to eight years, university-qualified early childhood educators will work within two educational frameworks—the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (birth to aged five) and the Australian Curriculum (Foundation to Year Three).

Five significant key documents are the:

- Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008)
- National Quality Standards (NQS)
- Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)
- Australian Curriculum
- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

## The Melbourne Declaration

Each decade, a document is generated by the Australian Ministers of Education outlining the country's educational goals for the coming 10 years. The current document is the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008). It sets out and describes two goals:

> Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.
>
> Goal 2: All young Australians become:
> - Successful learners
> - Confident and creative individuals
> - Active and informed citizens.

It is important to appreciate that when MCEETYA set the educational agenda for 2008–18, it prefaced the substantial educational reform that was about to get underway in this country. Hence, the goals of MCEETYA have been a major guiding influence on the development of the two curriculum frameworks that apply in the early childhood years: EYLF and the Australian Curriculum.

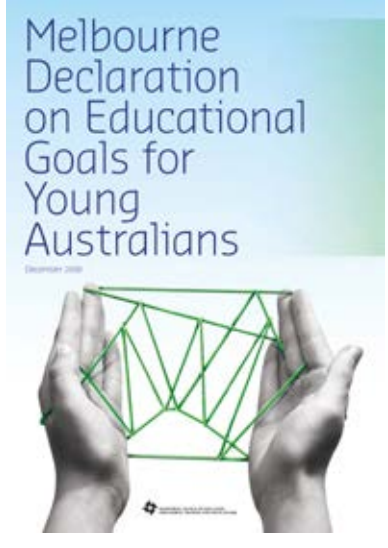


**Figure 1.1** The Melbourne Declaration sets out the goals for education in Australia.

## National Quality Standards (NQS)

The National Quality Standards (NQS) are a product of the National Quality Framework (NQF), which was established in 2012 to support continuous improvement and consistency in the provision of early childhood education and care services. Each service provider is assessed against the NQS standards. These standards relate to seven Quality Areas, including Education Program and Practice, Children's Health and Safety, and Physical Environment. Service Providers (such as child care centres) are required to develop a Quality Improvement Plan and

provide evidence of how they have addressed the standards in each of the Quality Areas. While NQS are not the direct concern of this text, they are part of the matrix that shapes the early childhood learning experience and should be considered in tandem with EYLF.

## The Australian Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is the early childhood curriculum framework that was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2009. It is the first national framework for the sector and is described in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (2009). It can be downloaded from (https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf).


**Figure 1.2** The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) outlines the vision for young children's learning from birth to five years of age.

This document outlines the vision for young children's learning from birth to five years of age, and their transition to school. Five principles of children's learning and early childhood pedagogy are described. These are:

- secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- partnerships
- high expectations and equity
- respect for diversity and
- ongoing learning and reflective practice.

These principles reflect contemporary research and thinking about early childhood education and they underpin educational practices designed to achieve the five nominated learning outcomes. We examine these five principles in depth later in this chapter, as they determine the types of daily learning experiences you will facilitate in your role as an early childhood educator.

## The Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum is the result of a national approach to curriculum design initiated in 2009. The curriculum extends from Foundation to Year 12. It sets out curriculum expectations in terms of what will be covered in the years of schooling and the achievement standards for each year.

Since early childhood extends to age eight, early childhood educators must be able to teach the Foundation to Year 3 stages of the Australian Curriculum.

The development of the Australian Curriculum has been a major national project involving the design of curriculum content, support materials and assessment standards.

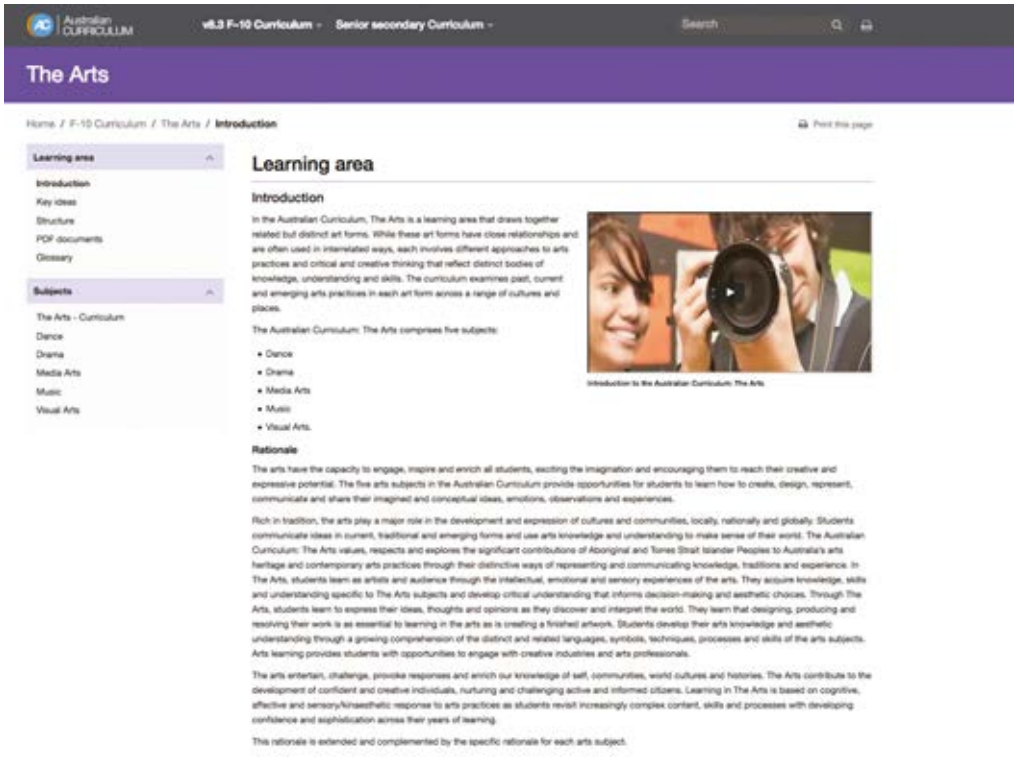


**Figure 1.3** The details of the Arts Learning Area are outlined on the Australian Curriculum website.

In 2015, the Education Council endorsed eight of the Learning Areas, including the Arts Learning Area. As an early childhood educator, you will be expected to incorporate the curriculum for the Arts Learning Area in your classroom. We will examine this Learning Area in depth later in this chapter.

## Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Part of the wide-sweeping educational reform taking place in the past decade has been the 2010 establishment of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Its role is to promote educational excellence through the quality of teachers and school leadership. To this end, an important measure has been the formalisation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (2013). These are calibrated with the expectation that graduate teachers demonstrate essential capabilities—and continue to demonstrate improving professional skills in the course of their career. Visit the AITSL site for an overview (www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers).

Graduate teachers' essential capabilities are understood in terms of being 'classroom ready'. To ensure that graduate teachers across the country meet these essential capabilities, AITSL has begun an Initial Teacher Education Reform (ITE Reform) process. The Ministerial Advisory Group's report, *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*

(December, 2014), proposes new stringent standards for initial teacher education and graduating teachers. These include the requirement that each graduate demonstrates, through the compilation of a Portfolio of Evidence, that they have reached classroom readiness and are eligible for provisional registration as a teacher. It will be important for you to be familiar with these requirements as they will play a critical role in your university studies and teaching career.

# The Arts in young children's education

The Arts is a term that encompasses a range of arts disciplines. In the Australian educational context, these comprise of five Arts subjects: Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. In New Zealand, the Arts comprise of four arts disciplines: Dance, Drama, Music-sound Arts and Visual Arts.

While this text focuses on the Australian context, it is worth noting that in both Australia and New Zealand, the Arts are embedded in the school curriculum as a Learning Area and should be regarded in the same way as other nominated Learning Areas like English, Science and Maths. In the Maths Learning Area, you would expect to be engaged in developing children's comprehension of maths concepts like addition and multiplication; their facility with maths processes such as creating graphs; along with their critical thinking and problem-solving skills through well-designed learning activities. The same applies to the Arts Learning Area where you will be similarly engaged in developing children's understanding of Arts concepts like shape or rhythm; their facility with processes like painting and singing; along with their creative, critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities.

While emphasising that the Arts need to be recognised as an area of learning, it is important to understand that the Arts subjects of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts offer diverse and unique ways for young children to experience their world—the manifest world, the social world, the cultural world and the world of the imagination. Through the Arts, children come to know their world—they create *meaning*. For example, by dancing over, under and between children come to *know* what these concepts mean in a visceral or direct experience of them.

The Arts represent forms of communication that extend beyond, and are not directly reliant on, linguistic language and writing. Children can *show* you what 'over' is. They can *show* you the tempo and mood of the music. By responding and sharing their ideas, thoughts and feelings through their arts-making (e.g. dance and music-making), children are communicating their sense or experience of the world. For educators, children's arts-making is a special window into their world.

## **Pause and reflect:** Dancing in response to music

The teacher, Mrs Nguyen, has selected two contrasting pieces of music for children to explore by moving freely to the music. As the slow, undulating rhythms of the *Humming Chorus* in Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* (1898) fill the air, the children begin to move around the room in gentle patterns, slowly turning their bodies and letting their arms float in the air. Their movements match the tempo and dynamics of the music. Then, when Rossini's *La Danza, Tarantella Napolitana* (1835) is played, the children respond to the fast and frenzied rhythms by twirling their bodies and moving erratically. When asked to contemplate how the two pieces of music are different from each other, the children say that one would suit dancing like a cloth drifting on a gentle breeze and the other like dancing a mosquito dance. Having arrived at these ideas, they are asked to show how a drifting cloth would move to the music. Mrs Nguyen watches quietly as the music begins. She observes how the children centre their energy and become the cloth.

As the children are involved in this seemingly diverting activity, they are in fact engaged in making meaning. They are coming to know their world and make sense of it. They are expressing abstract ideas, interpreting thoughts and evoking feelings. They are experiencing the tempo and dynamics and learning what 'slow', 'undulating', 'fast' or 'frenzied' *feels like*. They are deciding whether they prefer fast or slow music and/or movement. They are interpreting the music and translating abstract sounds into movements that represent drifting cloth or buzzing mosquitoes. They embody the cloth or mosquito and empathetically become it. They experience a different way of being and they communicate this through their dance.

**Figure 1.4** Children interpret the quality of the music through movement.

# The Arts in EYLF

Learning is complex and multidimensional. It involves the whole child—their physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social and cultural dimensions. Notions of formal school learning can sometimes blind us to the rich learning that is occurring when young children are occupied in the play-based approach to learning favoured in the early years. We don't always recognise how children are exploring, creating, interpreting, practising, imitating, inventing, problem-solving, imagining, observing and contemplating.

In EYLF, the breadth and richness of a young child's learning journey is expressed in terms of *belonging*, *being* and *becoming*. In this section, we identify what is meant by these terms and offer snapshots of how the Arts play a role. In the following chapters, we will examine each of these in turn at greater depth.

## Belonging

Our sense of who we are and our place in the world—our identity—is significantly determined by our sense of belonging. Central to our sense of belonging are the relationships we have with family, community, place, culture and heritage. Research shows that children who feel connected to others do better in life than children who don't (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005; Over, 2016).

Carefully designed arts experiences can nurture children's sense of belonging. For example, children can explore topics such as my family, my friends, looking after my pets, our team, our classroom. They can do this by working with clay, drawing, taking photographs or engaging in **dramatic play**. They can place their own arts experiences in the context of artworks by artists and see how others share these interests. They can practice the behaviours of belonging such as sharing equipment and space, taking turns with the tambourines, singing and dancing together, offering assistance and thoughtfully responding to each other's artwork.

## Being

While early childhood education is preparation for the future it is also about the present and the day-to-day experience of living life—its joys, challenges and complexities.

When we focus on the experiential nature of being in the world, the role of our senses is highlighted. We live in a sensate world, meaning that we receive and process information about the physical world through our senses. These include our sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch—along with about 20 other senses. In children's early years, it is particularly important that these sensory capacities are developed so that children have a full and multidimensional apprehension of their world (Vygotsky, 2004).

Since the Arts are experiential in nature and engage the senses, learning in the Arts facilitates children's participation in a sensory world. When they listen to music, they distinguish sound and silence, high and low notes, loud and soft notes. They discover the expressive and metaphorical power of sounds, so that the tinkle of the triangle represents the fairy; the drum beats signal the giant's steady approach; and the increasing tempo conveys a sense of urgency. Furthermore, guided music appreciation leads to heightened

**aural discernment**, which is a critical capability for language development (so children can hear the difference between 'pat', 'mat', 'bat').

Being in the world is also about being in the socio-cultural world that is shaped by beliefs, values, customs and behaviours. Through drama activities, children can explore the dynamics of relationships and social experiences. In the safety of 'let's pretend' they explore different societal roles (such as mothers, doctors or fire officers) and scenarios that present challenges to be addressed (such as three friends have found a lost puppy who has a collar but no name tag).

Viewing paintings and listening to music transports children to other worlds of experience. They can explore different representations of motherhood from Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Child with Toys—Gabrielle and the Artist's Son Jean* (1895–96) to Australian artist, Patricia Piccinini's *The Young Family* (2002–09). They can be stirred by the heroic sounds of Beethoven's *5th Symphony* (1808) or soothed by the mellow notes of Schubert's *Trout Quintet* (1819).

In well-designed arts experiences, qualities such as wonderment, curiosity, imagination and creativity are nurtured. Children explore their world by experimenting: *What happens if I do this?* They create: *I want to put this with that.* They reflect: *I like that one more than the other one.* The sensory dimension of the Arts means that children are invited to explore and learn in a haptic

**Figure 1.5** *Child with Toys—Gabrielle and the Artist's Son Jean*, 1895–96, Auguste Renoir, 1841–1919.

**Figure 1.6** *The Young Family*, 2002–09, Patricia Piccinini, 1965–.

way (that is, learning as we are moving, touching, doing) or in a visual way (viewing, observing) and by using their auditory faculties (listening, hearing). Through Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts, children apprehend, construct and express their experiences—their reality—and the fact of their *being* in the world.

## Becoming

Newborn babies are extensions of their mothers but they quickly develop agency. This means they make things happen—a baby slaps its hand on the table and makes a sound happen. When toddlers exercise the power of 'no', it can be exasperating for parents, but it signals the child's growing sense of being able to control or influence their world—they are developing agency.

Throughout their childhood, children are engaged in developing agency. They are becoming autonomous individuals and learning how to participate responsibly as individuals in society. This is the process of identity formation—of becoming—and is regarded as one of the major projects of childhood (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

To be sustained in this journey of identity formation, children require opportunities and interactions that foster and affirm their sense of self: they need to experience that their thoughts, ideas and needs are considered, their creations are valued, their findings and opinions are respected and their cultural backgrounds are reflected back to them.

The Arts, by their nature, provide a learning context for children's expression of their own perceptions, ideas, thoughts and feelings. Children can paint their response to a piece of

music or create a dance for the night. Drama experiences enable them to 'try on life' by being involved in activities where they experience different roles and situations. They can be both a mighty king and a lowly peasant; they can escape from the invaders; they can climb the beanstalk to the giant's place or they can transact shopping at the supermarket. The world of art provides a rich avenue for exploring cultural diversity, similarities and difference. In the process, children can learn how to live together, how to respectfully engage with others, how to overcome obstacles and how to enjoy life.

## EYLF elements

To address children's education in relation to their belonging, being and becoming, EYLF is designed around three elements: Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes. The *Principles* are shared understandings about the nature of learning and early childhood pedagogy that underpin *Practice*, which are the approaches taken by educators to shape children's learning experiences with a view to achieving the intended ***Learning Outcomes***. Even if you work outside the Australian context, the ideas expressed in EYLF are widely accepted as relevant to early childhood learning in the contemporary world. In this section, we illuminate these elements with reference to examples within the Arts.

### *How the Principles are enacted within meaningful arts experiences*

1 **Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships:** In a network of 'relationships of trust', a strong sense of wellbeing and self-confidence is engendered in children and this provides a solid foundation for learning.

When engaged in art-making, children have many opportunities to experience the dynamics of teamwork, behave co-operatively and learn collaboratively. In groups, they can create dances. They can take roles in dramatic play to act out their stories. They can share equipment, take turns being the photographer and support each other's efforts through encouragement.

When children observe that time has been allocated for art-making—their paintings are displayed, resources for exploring music are provided and opportunities to show others what they have been dancing are incorporated into the program—they instinctively know that their artistic undertakings and expressions of feeling and ideas are valued. They see that they themselves are valued.

2 **Partnerships:** The family is the first and most influential teacher of young children. When an early childhood educator approaches a child's parental figures as partners in the child's education, the shared insights and perspectives about the child's needs, motivations and learning provide a platform for dynamic and coherent education that extends from the home to the educational setting.

Many parents will not have a teacher's understanding of how arts experiences are important ways in which children create meaning and develop their sense of self and their place in the world. When teachers share this knowledge and parents learn the educational

value of these experiences, they are able to reframe children's arts-making activities in the home to achieve the full benefits they can provide. Similarly, the early childhood educator can weave knowledge of the home context into arts experiences to heighten the relevance of the activities. For example, a child's love of chickens can be the basis for a movement activity that requires close observation of chickens' actions. Parents can bring their arts skills and traditions into the early childhood educational setting too. Having a parent teach a traditional dance or play the accordion to accompany children's singing reinforces the idea that education and art are integral dimensions of life.

3 **High expectations and equity:** In education that is focused on children's learning achievement, the idea of equitable learning opportunities is fundamental. 'Equitable' means fairly distributed so that everyone has an equivalent opportunity to shine and make the most of their potential.

In arts experiences (with their focus on discovery, invention and meaning-making), each child is on their own learning journey. Each child's response to a **stimulus** will be uniquely their own. With no prescriptive or predetermined outcome, each child's learning can be individualised. The degree of challenge or the focus can be tailored to suit their individual needs, interests and abilities.

The Arts represent a cluster of different languages for expression. Children can respond to a stimulus (such as walking through a flower garden) using different processes like drawing, painting, modelling in clay, creating digital storybooks, dancing, **composing** music and so on. This flexibility contributes to equity since it enables each child to find the language or artform that suits their particular desires, needs and skills.

Contemporary Arts education conceptualises children's artistic learning experiences as multidimensional. Children's art-making is complemented by reflective practices that encourage contemplation about purpose, achievements and learning strategies. It is underpinned by attention to craftsmanship and developing understandings of the Arts languages and the work of artists. This comprehensive view of arts learning embeds equitable learning opportunities and high expectations about children's engagement and learning.

4 **Respect for diversity:** Each child you meet in a formal educational setting already *belongs* in a family and cultural milieu that have inculcated ways of being in the world: behaviours, relationships, values, beliefs and ways of knowing. Respect for diversity involves honouring different ways of being in the world—and reflecting this back through curriculum content and educational practices. For Australians, this notably includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of being and knowing.

A significant way in which diversity is expressed is through the artistic practices and traditions of different individuals, groups and cultures. Exploring the artworks, artistic practices and artistic traditions of artists, groups and cultures across time and place is an engaging and valuable way in which children learn the ways we are different and yet the same.

**Figure 1.7** Water puppetry shows in Vietnam originated in rice paddies where they were performed to celebrate the harvest.

## **Pause and reflect:** Puppetry traditions reflect cultural diversity

Puppets are part of the arsenal of childhood: finger puppets, sock puppets, glove puppets and many more besides. A collection of puppets is a popular feature in the early learning centre because children are instinctively drawn to them. The puppets facilitate secure and safe interactions, activate children's imaginations and add a **kinaesthetic** dimension to storytelling.

Children's experiences with puppets are the basis for making connections to the wider world of puppetry—a widespread theatrical tradition that dates back thousands of years.

continued

Across time and space, distinctive cultural variations have emerged. Exploring the different puppetry traditions not only opens up a world of wondrous delights, it also offers children insights into the diverse nature of peoples' lived experiences. The water puppet theatre tradition of the Mekong in Vietnam is different from the Wayang Kulit shadow puppet theatre of Indonesia, the Bunraku puppet theatre of Japan, the Hun Krabok of Thailand and the Black Light puppet theatre of the Czech Republic. Their differences reflect the contexts of their creation. For example, Vietnam water puppetry was initially performed in the water of the rice paddies to celebrate the harvest. A pagoda was constructed to hide the puppeteers and the water acted as the stage, while also concealing the mechanisms of the performance and symbolically linking to the life-giving waters.

Can you think of other artistic traditions that have different cultural expressions around the globe? Masks? Theatre? Beadwork?

5 **Ongoing learning and reflective practice:** The EYLF reflects the principles of constructivism—a theory of learning developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) based on the idea that children learn from experience and participation in their own learning rather than from being passive recipients of information (Lake, 2012). In this learning model, the educator's role is to facilitate children to be active and reflective learners by empowering them to find their own answers through their own investigations. This is a qualitatively different approach to one based on instructing or drilling students. When facilitating children's inquiry-based learning, educators are required to observe the dynamics of the learning unfolding in the learning space and adapt or scaffold learning in ways that are responsive to children's needs. This means that programs and pedagogy are constantly being refined in a dynamic process of reflection and review.

Contemporary arts education is orientated towards children exploring and finding creative solutions to arts-based challenges—and being initiators and active participants in learning. The focus on individuals and their learning journeys requires educators to be engaged and reflective professionals both in the moment and in an ongoing cycle of review.

## *How the aspects of Practice are integral to meaningful arts pedagogy*

The EYLF *Principles* underpin an educator's *Practice*. In this section, we examine how the eight aspects of pedagogical practice identified in EYLF as necessary for good-quality learning are congruent with understandings about contemporary teaching and learning through the Arts.

1 **Educators adopt holistic approaches:** The core concept underpinning a holistic approach to education is that the whole person is educated: their cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual being. A holistic approach recognises that children are developing as people and that different aspects of their being are integrated and developing simultaneously. A holistic approach also recognises that this development is

occurring within children's physical environment and the socio-cultural context of their family, community, and culture. Therefore, early years learning and educational practices are multidimensional, integrated, interconnected and interdependent.

We see that good-quality learning through the Arts sits within a holistic approach to pedagogy. The Arts typically engage the whole child through the very nature of arts experiences as well as the 'topics' for exploration. When children listen to music and then interpret the rhythms, beat and feeling of the music through dance movement they are engaged holistically.

2 **Educators are responsive to children:** In EYLF, each child is viewed as a competent learner and is positioned at the centre of their own learning journey. As active agents in their own learning, children participate directly in learning experiences and discovering things for themselves; they initiate and contribute to the direction of their learning. In this model, the educator's role is to facilitate each child on their own learning journey by building on the child's interests and motivations (such as music or dinosaurs) and competencies (such as being bilingual, self-sufficient or athletic). The mantra 'follow the learner' is a useful guide for this approach.

### **Pause and reflect:** Learning promoted 'in the moment'

A young child picks up and studies a fallen leaf. The teacher, Mr Zagari, picks up another leaf and says, 'Here's another one that looks different. I think the wind blew these to the ground. I wonder how many others can be found.' The child gathers more leaves and after a while Mr Zagari observes, 'These two leaves are round and look different to the others.' The child considers this and begins to separate the leaves into piles depending on their shape. The teacher asks 'What shape are the leaves in this pile?' and listens to the child's responses before asking if they can find that shape somewhere else in the playground. The child is not particularly interested in this proposition and instead begins arranging the leaves on the pavement to create patterns. Mr Zagari comments using the word 'pattern'. After a while, observing that the child's interest has begun to wane, he says, 'I know a way you can print leaf patterns on paper, would you like me to show you?'

The responsive educator has engaged with the child *in the moment* to extend their interest and guide their learning. Observing the child's interest in the leaf the teacher introduced observing and selecting a variety of leaves, identifying the characteristics of different shapes, categorising based on shape, identifying the same shapes in other categories of objects, creating patterns using shapes, using words related to shape and pattern, and introducing a printing process that encourages the child to extend their interest and application of new knowledge. What conceptual understandings has the child exercised in the process?

3 **Educators promote learning through play:** The EYLF builds on children's natural learning behaviours and has adopted a play-based pedagogy (Bruce, 2012). Play-based learning is serious business. When play is promoted within an educational context it should not be dismissed as frivolous amusement, time out or relaxation. While there are different interpretations of play-based learning (Sutton-Smith, 1997; Wood & Attfield, 2005), the overarching principle is that it is a path to *learning* determined by children's interests: a pleasurable experience that occurs in an organic, spontaneous and voluntary way as children are invited to explore, test, hypothesise, narrate and imagine possibilities (Bergen, 2002; Ginsburg, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek & Michnick Golinkoff, 2004; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). In play-based learning, early childhood educators do not have a prescribed set of lessons to work through. They *follow the learner* and shape learning opportunities around a child's interests and activities. In order to be educationally effective, they have to be perceptive observers, agile thinkers and responsive to the possibilities for extension and development of each child's playful learning.

   Contemporary thinking about arts education promotes the idea of children developing their own responses to open-ended challenges or propositions: *How can we use these materials to make puppets for your story?* When children engage in arts experiences they are involved in the processes of investigation and imaginative creation, and 'learning by doing'. They are at the centre of their learning and their knowledge, insights or understandings emerge from their experience of the process. Once again, the educator has to be a perceptive, agile and responsive to the learning possibilities inherent in each child's art-making endeavours.

4 **Educators are engaged in intentional teaching:** In a flexible and dynamic learning environment, the educator uses a range of teaching procedures to facilitate learning. This means that they must be alert to the unfolding context and intentionally use procedures like open-ended questions or demonstrations to facilitate learning. Conversations with children happen naturally in the day, but a skilled educator ensures that conversations develop in ways that promote learning. In good-quality arts education, worthwhile interactions can be built around children's engagement in arts-making. This would be to facilitate their investigations, decision-making and reflections on their creations and the processes they employed. Similarly, paintings such as Bruegel's *Children's Games* (1560) provide engaging foci for conversations that exercise children's thinking and observation skills. Using a *guided viewing framework* that incorporates identifying, evaluating, analysing and speculating is one way of intentionally teaching in the Arts.

5 **Educators create learning environments that are conducive to learning:** The design of indoor and outdoor spaces invites different types of usage. For example, an outdoor space filled with a variety of plants, paths, sandpit, seating, lawn and shady trees invites a range of ways to be outside that are not offered in an open yard surfaced with bitumen and devoid of trees. Good learning environments are ones that are welcoming and invite children's play-based learning, risk-taking, inquiry and investigation, creativity and imaginative invention.

Within spaces, the various provisions also telegraph different types of messages about what children are encouraged to do in the space. Investigations and explorations are encouraged by the provisions that are made: a 'discovery table' of interesting items such as shells and seed pods; 'play boxes' containing items that can be used in dramatic play; boxes of machinery parts and tools for making constructions; a music centre with musical recordings, improvised and conventional instruments; and an art studio space with facilities for painting and working with clay.

The learning environment is a social space as well as a physical one. Organising spaces that facilitate group activity, independent investigations and opportunities to practise social behaviours (such as applauding at the end of a performance, listening quietly when someone is talking, taking turns with equipment and discussing ideas with others) are ways that the social dimension of the environment is constructed to support learning. Similarly, flexible schedules and availability of materials contribute to shaping a learning environment conducive to young children's learning practices.

Displaying children's creations—their drawings, paintings and sculptures—acknowledges their significance. The role of these creations in the learning process is highlighted when these are contextualised. For example, children's drawings and clay sculptures of a visit to the zoo are displayed with photographs taken at the zoo, a map of the path taken past the enclosures, pamphlets and key words.

6 **Educators demonstrate cultural competence:** Children's cultural context is integral to their sense of self—their being and belonging. Honouring this helps children flourish as individuals. We live in a multicultural society and generally each classroom and early childhood centre is a microcosm of our broader society.

Being culturally competent means being comfortable with cultural difference and the different ways of being in the world. It involves understanding and respecting the ways people are different in terms of beliefs, values and practices. It also means being able to effectively communicate and interact with people from a diversity of backgrounds. Contemporary educators can model this in their own behaviours and practices as well as in the nature of the learning environment they create for children and the efforts they make to develop children's own cultural competence.

Every culture has artistic traditions and practices that embed cultural beliefs and values. Exploring the artistic traditions of different cultures provides a valuable way of embracing children's cultural backgrounds and developing children's understanding of the diversity of the world in which they live. Like all art forms, songs are social and cultural practices that relate to places, times, cultures and events (Middleton, 2003). When singing songs from around the world, the efforts made to contextualise the song in its cultural milieu will contribute to children's developing understanding of these things. *Hamabe no Uta,* for example, is a Japanese folksong about memories that can prompt identifying Japan as a country, discovering the Japanese language and holding a discussion about special memories. The Afro-American spiritual *Walk Together Children*

is a song of solidarity encouraging a community of people to stay strong together for a better day ahead. Children can learn how the song originated during the American Civil War with its promise of freedom from slavery. They may also consider how the song's overarching theme of solidarity or mutual dependence applies in their own lives (Bigsten, 2012).

7 **Educators provide continuity of learning and transitions:** Young children face several milestone transitions from the family environment to an early childhood centre to a pre-primary or kindergarten and to Year One in a school environment. Each setting has its own traditions, routines, practices, social structures and personnel. For the child, each transition represents a change in their sense of self: their relationships, role and position (Cowan et al., 2005). These are vulnerable times for children and helping them feel secure, confident and included through each transition is important for their continuing development (Sayers et al., 2012). Part of this involves communication and arrangements between parents, teachers and educational sectors; but much can be done with children to ease them through these transitions. Research shows that the more children are independent, culturally and socially competent, the more positive the transitions will be (Davies, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Margetts, 2002, 2007).

Children experience transitions every day as they transition, for example, from one activity to another. Rituals and procedures for managing transitions establish patterns that can be translated into managing other transitions. For example, marking daily transitions with transition songs and **chants** helps to denote a change as an occurrence in the day. A transition song about the time of day introduces the notion that time on the clock is relevant to what is happening. Engaging children in the Arts creates many contexts for children to experience and examine the nature of transitions and to develop the skills to negotiate transitions happily.

Children's books like *Owen* and *Wemberly Worried* (both by Kevin Henkes) feature mice characters who have worries about starting school. Books like these can provide the basis for discussion, creating drama, or painting pictures about the characters and how they go on to thrive—or about children's equivalent concerns.

When children participate in visits to their future location (such as a nearby primary school), sessions where children draw their experiences, take photographs or create videos about the experience can provide the basis for conversations about matters of concern such as where the toilets are located (Dockett & Perry, 2014).

The material and process base of many visual arts activities provide a context for children to learn about procedures and sequences, and about responsibilities such as collecting equipment and cleaning up. Developing social skills (such as working together, taking turns and sharing) are practised in drama activities, singing and playing music together, creating visual artworks and media productions, as well as reflecting on and reviewing the artworks created by others. These all contribute to developing children's social competency, which in turn strengthens their ability to manage transitions effectively.

8 **Educators assess and monitor learning to achieve learning outcomes:** Through assessments and related strategies for monitoring learning, educators and other stakeholders gather information about how children are progressing. This provides the basis for future plans and directions.

When children are engaged in the Arts, their thought processes, conceptual development and manual skills *are on display*. A child mixing different amounts of yellow and blue to create different shades of green is discovering and displaying knowledge about colour and the role that proportion plays in modifying it.

Children advance through a predictable sequence of drawing stages as a natural part of their development (Lowenfeld, 1947; Malchiodi, 1998). While children's drawing and paintings are often unintelligible to adults, they are the manifestations of thinking or stories that young children can recount in some detail. Similarly, Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts provide important vehicles for young children to express and communicate their view of the world, their understandings, thoughts and ideas.

A skilled observer can identify the conceptual understandings, social engagement and emotional intelligence on display in a child's art-making. They know that a child's artwork is a **catalyst** for conversation and an effective way of gaining insights into their learning. Simply asking a child to tell you about their drawing will reveal the child's rich thinking. Similarly, observing how children arrive at decisions on shared projects, take turns with equipment and support each other's artistic enterprises by making helpful suggestions will provide tangible evidence of their developing social competencies.

## *Addressing the Learning Outcomes within Arts experiences*

Learning and the development of the whole child is complex and multidimensional. The EYLF aims to capture this in its five learning outcomes. The Arts investment in imaginative play, dramatic play, storytelling, creative invention and construction, self-expression, critical reflection and artistic appreciation means that all five learning outcomes can be productively addressed through good quality arts engagement.

1 **Children have a strong sense of identity:** With a strong sense of identity or self-concept, children develop an inner confidence. Identity is shaped by children's experiences, the relationships they have with the people around them and the context within which they live. Through positive experiences children develop resilience, autonomy, solidarity and an awareness of their own agency. They feel valued by others, and are safe and secure. They are able to show care, respect and empathy for others.

Self-concept engages children's physical, social, cultural, spiritual and psychological selves. Arts experiences (such as role-playing community service roles, creating emotion masks, singing together, engaging in a guided viewing of portrait paintings, and creating dramatic enactments of animal family stories) are representative of the diverse ways in which children can engage in arts activities that contribute to their developing self-concept.

2 **Children are connected with and contribute to their world:** When children have a secure sense of their own identity and are confident in themselves and their place in the world, they are able to connect and participate in an increasingly variety of contexts and relationships. As children grow, they become more aware of how their actions affect others and their environment. They develop understandings and practices associated with fairness and respect for diversity. They learn about traditions, heritage and shared histories. When children play together and participate in collaborative learning situations, they see how their lives are connected to others, how people live interdependently and how social behaviours and protocols sustain this. They see how they contribute to a shared existence through their actions and decisions.

Since the Arts are forms of praxis, they are physical endeavours involving children directly in the world of cause and effect through the process and interactions that are involved. Children see the consequences of their actions. As forms of communication, a child's relationship with others is exercised through art-making and responding. The Arts also represent different ways of knowing and being in the world. When children participate in arts-making experiences and contemplate the artworks they and others make, they are drawn into a rich and diverse world of human experience, which supports their developing sense of connection and awareness of others and their environment.

3 **Children have a strong sense of wellbeing:** Children's wellbeing encapsulates their physical and psychological equilibrium—their happiness, satisfaction, self-regulation, social functioning and physical health. Further, wellbeing is highly correlated with children's ability to concentrate, their resilience and perseverance, social adjustment and overall success at school (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005; Pollard & Lee, 2003; The Californian Endowment, 2008).

There is extensive evidence that wellbeing is enhanced through participation in the Arts (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013; Cameron et al., 2013; Oreck, 2004; Ruppert, 2006). In the early childhood centre or classroom, there are many ways this can occur. For example, when children are taught to sing, the attention given to posture, breathing and focus all help their physical wellbeing. Singing enables emotions to be released or expressed—and as air is pumped into the lungs, the flow of endorphins improves mood. The joy of singing and moving to music lifts the spirits. Singing in a group is a cooperative (rather than competitive) enterprise that creates camaraderie and recognition that each individual depends on the others in the group. Shy children are embraced in the joint endeavour and this provides a space for their confidence to develop. The songs themselves can promote life skills with messages about good nutrition or being good friends (Klopper & Dachs, 2008).

A positive effect on children's equilibrium is also achieved by the experience of 'captivation' or immersed absorption associated with creative pursuits (McCarthy et al., 2004).

4 **Children are confident and involved learners:** When children are actively involved in their own learning, they develop strategies for undertaking explorations, confidence to experiment and enthusiasm for problem-solving activities. Their learning dispositions such as curiosity, wonderment, imaginative thinking, creativity, persistence and tolerance of risk are nurtured. As they practise envisioning and predicting, pondering, reasoning

and testing propositions they become increasingly able learners. They see how learning in one context can be applied in another. They assemble resources and test hypotheses. They see 'failure' in an inquiry-learning framework as a step in the process of arriving at the desired outcome. As confident and involved learners, they are motivated by the intrinsic rewards of learning.

The nature of arts learning is distinctive. A major study by Hetland et al. (2007), based on reviewing highly successful visual arts classrooms, led to the distillation of eight 'studio habits of mind' that represented the thinking strategies exercised when children were engaged in the visual arts studio. The habits are:

1. develop craft
2. engage and persist
3. envision
4. express
5. observe
6. reflect
7. stretch and explore and
8. understanding the artist's worlds (Hetland et.al., 2007).

The researchers proposed that these could be productively employed across the curriculum to promote the learning dispositions associated with inquiry-based learning. In a separate three-year study, researchers observed that broadly relevant learning behaviours (such as perseverance, problem-solving, self-initiation, risk-taking, cooperation, goal-setting and responding to feedback) were best developed through children's participation in the Arts (Baum, Owen & Oreck, 1997; Oreck, 2004; Oreck, Baum & McCartney, 2000).

5 **Children are effective communicators:** Children can communicate verbally and non-verbally. They can make meaning using a range of media as well as understand meaning being communicated by others in a range of media. In the digital world, the increasing prevalence of multimedia formats strengthens the need for children to be literate in a range of non-verbal and verbal forms of communication. Recognising that Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts are forms of expression and communication means that promoting children's engagement in this range of arts practices develops their capacity to communicate in today's world.

# The Arts Learning Area in the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum and EYLF are based on different educational paradigms. The EYLF presents early childhood education in terms of children's holistic development and as a matrix of principles, practices and overarching learning outcomes. The Australian

Curriculum presents learning primarily in terms of content—the capabilities and understandings within each Learning Area to be developed in each year of schooling through the program provided in the classroom.

The Australian Curriculum is being implemented differently in the different states and territories, but the overarching concerns and directions remain the same.

## Overarching goals

The curriculum of the Arts Learning Area is designed to provide intellectual, emotional and sensory experiences that develop children's capabilities and understandings as both artist and audience. These capabilities and understandings revolve around expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings through the Arts and involve thinking creatively, developing skills with arts processes and materials, and engaging in critical and reflective thinking.

## Making and responding

To achieve its goals, the curriculum is organised under two strands—arts-making and arts-responding. We can think of arts-making as learning by *being an artist* and **arts-responding** as learning by *being an audience.*

The arts-making strand encapsulates children's involvement in the processes of developing ideas, exploring possibilities and creating artworks that express their ideas, thoughts or feelings. The arts-responding strand encompasses children's involvement in exploring and reflecting on their own artwork, the artwork of their peers and the artworks, practices and traditions of art-making in the wider world. The two strands of making and responding highlight the breadth of arts learning. While presented separately, they are typically interconnected and interwoven in practice.

## Arts-making

While young children can be kept busy with colouring-in activities and the like, the Arts curriculum has much higher expectations in terms of children's arts education. At the core of arts-making is the creative process whereby artistic challenges are explored, developed and resolved as artworks that communicate the creator's ideas, thoughts or feelings (Wallas, 1926). This is a critical concept as it moves art-making beyond busy work or cookie-cutter art activities where everyone makes the same thing—and emphasises children's meaningful engagement in investigations and problem-solving challenges where their individual artistic interpretations are encouraged and celebrated.

Involving children in art-making is about involving them in practical arts experiences where the 'doing' generates its own insights or understandings. Like football or swimming or cooking or surgery, *learning* (insights, understandings and capabilities) is achieved through the 'doing'.

The Arts are recognised as forms of praxis—they are enacted—and learning or knowing is gained from tasting and trusting the experience. Meaning is garnered and conceptualised

from the experience. This makes art-making an emergent process because the individual 'comes to know' or discovers or learns through their engagement in the experience. For example, when children mix lemon-yellow and cerulean-blue paint, they are participating in a learning process where they will come to know the possible shades of green that can be mixed with *that* particular yellow and *that* particular blue.

When involved in art-making, children will use arts knowledge, along with a variety of arts skills, techniques, processes, materials and technologies to design, produce, present and perform artworks that communicate their intentions (ACARA, 2013, p. 7). If arts-making experiences are well-designed in accordance with the curriculum expectations, they will provide rich learning contexts that engage children in:

- experimenting
- conceptualising
- problem solving
- decision-making
- interpretation
- reflecting
- refining
- presenting
- performing
- communicating
- evaluating (ACARA, 2013, p. 8).

## Arts-responding

The second strand of the Arts curriculum highlights the role of reflection and review as part of the Arts learning process. In fact, it is noted that the ongoing process of children reflecting, refining and resolving their own art-making is as essential to learning in the Arts as is creating artwork (ACARA, 2013, p. 4).

Reflection and review processes are undertaken in several different contexts: children review their own art-making; they review the art-making of their peers; and they review art traditions and artworks of notable artists from a range of different cultures.

When children are reviewing their own art-making the process, it can be organically in the process of developing work when decisions need to be made or more formally. A **formal review** session at the end of the project can encourage children to reflect on the steps involved in creating their artwork; how these influenced the final outcome; how well their ideas were realised; and how they might take the learning from this experience forward.

Children not only reflect on their own art-making processes and creations, they also review and critically respond to the work of their classmates.

Additionally, children are introduced to the work of acclaimed artists and the artworks and art traditions of different cultures as part of their arts education. In this way, they build their knowledge about the wide world of Art and the way different contexts and motivations

**Figure 1.8** *Bailed Up*, 1895/1927, Tom Roberts 1856–1931.

influence how, why and what artworks are made. Children develop their arts understanding through analysing, interpreting, appreciating and critically responding to these artworks.

While responding may involve discussion and written responses, it is important to remember that children can respond to an artwork by making artworks themselves. For example, children can respond to music by dancing or painting. Similarly, a painting such as *Bailed Up* (1895) by Tom Roberts depicting bushrangers holding up a stagecoach can be the prompt for developing a dramatic performance.

Exposure to a diversity of artworks and practices broadens children's understandings of the world of art, the historical, social, political and cultural circumstances that are the context for artwork—and the possibilities for their own art-making adventures.

When responding, children are exercising a range of thinking strategies including:

- exploring
- pondering
- speculating
- reacting
- analysing
- interpreting
- judging
- critically evaluating (ACARA, 2013, p. 8).

# The five subjects in the Arts Learning Area

The Arts Learning Area in the curriculum encompasses five Arts subjects or disciplines. These are:

- Dance
- Drama
- Media Arts
- Music
- Visual Arts.

Each of these disciplines (or 'subjects' as they are known in the Australian Curriculum) has its own history, traditions, **conventions** and language. Within each discipline, there are different forms that can be explored. Drama, for example, includes role-playing, mime, **improvisation** and puppetry. Arts-making experiences may involve combinations of arts disciplines so that video projections, music and dance can be combined in a performance. Equally, art-making can be integrated with other areas of the school curriculum (such as storytelling in English); or incorporated into explorations of maths or science concepts like shape, proportion, growth, magnetism.

# Types of experiences available in each subject

Each Arts subject offers a wonderful array of art forms and production processes for artistic exploration and expression. Imaginative ways for reflecting upon, considering and responding to artistic creations can be part of the learning experience too.

## Dance

At the core of dance-making is movement. Young children undertake creative movement explorations and experiments that develop body and **spatial awareness**. They stretch to touch the sky and scrunch themselves into a small shape that can be wrapped in a parcel or move around the room in an imaginary bubble aiming not to touch another bubble and go 'pop'! In creative dance explorations, children express ideas, concepts and feelings through movement. They can be cats, elastic bands or puppets on strings. They use different motivations for dancing, such as creating a ritual to start the day, or a dance that tells a story about being lost or one that explains the workings of a washing machine. Their dance explorations involve creative thinking, invention and design as they improvise, interpret ideas and choreograph (design) dances. The quality of the execution of dances is developed through practising and refining, rehearsing and performing.

When responding to their own and others' dance works, children contemplate stories in dances, observe the role of costumes and examine how movements have been used to convey certain feelings. They learn about dance in different contexts—different styles, different motivations, different histories. For example, they may explore the storytelling feature of Aboriginal dances or how the principles of Confucianism that deeply penetrate

Korean life are embodied in the serene and fluid movements of traditional Korean court dances and the colours of the costumes (which reflect the five cardinal elements of yin and yang: red/fire, blue/wood, yellow/earth, white/metal and black/earth).

## Drama

Dramatic play, short improvisations, **role-play**, puppetry, play-building and mime are examples of drama forms. Engaging in drama activities, children learn how they can use their voice, facial expressions, gestures and movements to play different roles and tell their stories. They also learn how to create dramatic tension and propel the story forward through the use of drama elements like space and timing. Improvisations can be vehicles for exploring situations that help children develop empathy and understanding from different perspectives. Rehearsing and presenting performances enable children to experience the magic of the theatrical realm.

When responding to drama, children consider the nature of the characters and situations and make judgements about these—such as what makes the character grumpy or which character most influences the way events unfold; or how the situation relates to their own experiences. They also learn about different dramatic traditions and reasons for creating drama such as maintaining cultural stories, entertainment and sharing experiences.

## Media Arts

In Media Arts, children create their own media artworks such as comics, photographic stories, posters, digital stories, radio plays, videos and multimedia presentations. In the process, they develop skills using software and digital cameras. They learn how to edit, make sound recording and combining images, sounds and text to tell stories. They learn to apply conventions such as titles and credits; and how elements such as lighting, language, pace and different camera angles contribute to the storytelling. Importantly, they are engaged in scripting and using planning devices such as storyboards to develop stories with a narrative arc.

Children learn about different movie genres such as action, adventure, Westerns and epics as well as examining how different cultures represent their stories in different ways. They learn that the relationship between producer–media–message–audience underpins the Media Arts.

## Music

Music and movement (Dance) are commonly linked in early childhood education and together create a natural way for children to explore the elements of rhythm, tempo and beat that are integral to both art forms. When involved in music-making, children learn how they can use their voice, body, simple instruments, found sound sources, and digital technology to create music. Their music education includes developing aural discernment so they can discriminate between sounds/silence, loud/soft, high/low, fast/slow. They learn how to compose musical patterns and notate these so others can play them. Singing is a major form

of musical engagement and children learn songs from around the world, including those from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Asian traditions.

Children respond to music by exploring different reasons for making music and musical traditions. They listen to music and learn how **musical compositions** convey different moods, images and feelings. This involves children in talking and writing about music so musical terminology is learnt along the way.

### Visual Arts

Materials and fabrication processes feature prominently in Visual Arts as children paint, draw, build with clay, print, dye fabrics, collage, stitch textiles and assemble three-dimensional constructions. In the process, children are engaged in developing practical skills and craftsmanship. They also learn about the elements of the Visual Arts such as shapes, lines, colours—and the role they play in conveying meaning. For example, the way the angular black lines outlining the ogre's facial features make him look fierce.

Children learn about the differences between realistic, expressive, narrative and abstract forms of representation. They review artworks from a variety of cultural traditions, including those from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Asian cultures, artworks associated with their local community and those that provide prompts for exploring ideas like belonging or sustainability. They contemplate the stories in artworks or the way an artwork makes them feel or they examine how the elements of line, shape and colour play their role.

## Summary

The quality of children's education during the early years (birth to aged eight) is recognised as having a significant effect on their later success in life. The nature of early childhood education is distinguished from formal schooling by its explicit focus on the development of the whole child, and its adoption of a play-based learning pedagogy. In the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), which is the first national framework for the early childhood sector, this concept of holistic education is expressed as *belonging, being* and *becoming*. The Australian Curriculum builds on EYLF, and covers the schooling years from Foundation to Year Three. The Arts is a Learning Area in the Australian Curriculum and all children are involved in arts learning.

Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts feature significantly in early years education. They are integral to the natural, active and play-based way that children learn in their early years. In the Australian Curriculum, they are also the subjects within the Arts Learning Area mandated for a child's schooling.

The Arts subjects represent ways of knowing that are embodied and experiential. Children's learning and conceptual development comes from the experience of making artworks and responding to artworks through review, reflection and analysis.

The EYLF and the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, the National Quality Standards (NQS) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers create the policy and curriculum matrix underpinning the professional role of an early childhood educator.

# Learning Activities

1. Anne Sullivan was the legendary teacher of Helen Keller (who was born both blind and deaf). Review the quote at the beginning of the chapter and explain what you understand about the distinctions Sullivan is making regarding the two different types of learning experiences described.
2. Draw a picture or diagram that captures your ideas about the features you'd want in an ideal learning space.
3. In a small group, role-play an information session for parents who are visiting your centre or school. The intention of the information session is to explain to the parents (a) the nature of the Arts learning their children will be experiencing and (b) what this achieves in relation to the aims of EYLF or Australian Curriculum: The Arts.

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## Online resources

**Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA):** This is website of the authority that oversees the implementation of the *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*. The website includes useful information, videos and updates. http://acecqa.gov.au

**Australian Curriculum:** This is the official website for the Australian Curriculum which establishes what students should be taught in all schools across the country from the Foundation year. The website includes videos showing work samples for arts education. http://australiancurriculum.edu.au

**Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL):** This body is responsible for the development and oversight of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.* The section for teachers provides information, resources and tools. www.aitsl.edu.au

**Early Childhood Australia.** This is a national peak body for early childhood advocacy. The site has a learning hub, resources, publications and an online shop. www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

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