

Exploring The Artistry In Teaching

Sean Casham (PhD Candidate)
Professor Shirley Agostinho
Dr Lynn Sheridan
University of Wollongong



The most influential account of artistry in teaching is found in the seminal writings of **Elliot Eisner**. Eisner was an American educational philosopher (1933 to 2014). He compared teachers to jazz musicians and described quality teachers as artists "most intimate with life in classrooms" (2002, p.381). His reasoning as to why teaching involves artistry is summarised below:

Background

Teachers do unforgivably **complex work**, and part of this complexity is the artistry in teaching practice. Artistry is an umbrella term for a collection of important, **sophisticated** and **subtle** teaching practices that matter. Artistry in teaching is not just about creativity; it is a broader idea, more focused on the **distinctive signatures** of classrooms shaped by teachers who adopt a personal style. Technological thinking has undermined notions of artistry, normalising teaching to a series of narrow and predictable inputs and outputs (Heimans & Biesta, 2020).

Literature

A **systematic literature review** used Eisner's ideas as a lens to explore the empirical literature on what has been found out about artistry in teaching. **Thirty research studies from 16 countries** were found over a period of 50 years, indicating that more empirical work is required. Six key interlinked themes emerged from the literature:

1. There is no single definition of artistry.
2. Aims to measure learning accurately constrains ideas of artistry.
3. Artistry is essential in quality teaching
4. Artistry can stimulate rich aesthetic experiences that matter.
5. Artistry is both philosophically holistic and disruptive.
6. Artistry helps form strong social bonds in the classroom.

Artistry in teaching practice reflects the dynamic and complex psychological and sociological dimensions that influence daily practice. We may never fully understand artistry, but more careful observational studies are needed to help us understand this perspective of practice better. This research aims to address this gap.

Some results...

Data has been collected from a pilot study and two cases. Preliminary results demonstrate that a teacher's artistry varies, and each classroom is distinctive and shaped by the school context and the teacher's unique approach.

Three short quotes from the teacher participants help us understand each teacher's **highly personalised approach**.

BALANCE **LIKEABILITY**

"I think I'm probably good at dealing with kids who are sometimes a little bit off centre, kids who are a little different in their own way. I like to think I'm kind of good at finding the good in children. So there's not a kid that I don't like. I get something positive out of all of the kids I teach."

MR. HEY **INCLUSION**

*Describes himself as an "all rounder" who doesn't like to be "King of the castle"

TRADITION **PASSION**

MR. BEE

*A fourth generation teacher, guided by his faith and his values

"I said to him, prac is where you get to try everything and see what works and find out what doesn't work... if your lesson falls apart, I am not going to step in and rescue you. I will sit at the back, and you can sit in the uncomfortableness of what it feels like when a classroom slips through your fingers. It was really important for me to give him that to do it. He's developing his teaching style and the boundaries"

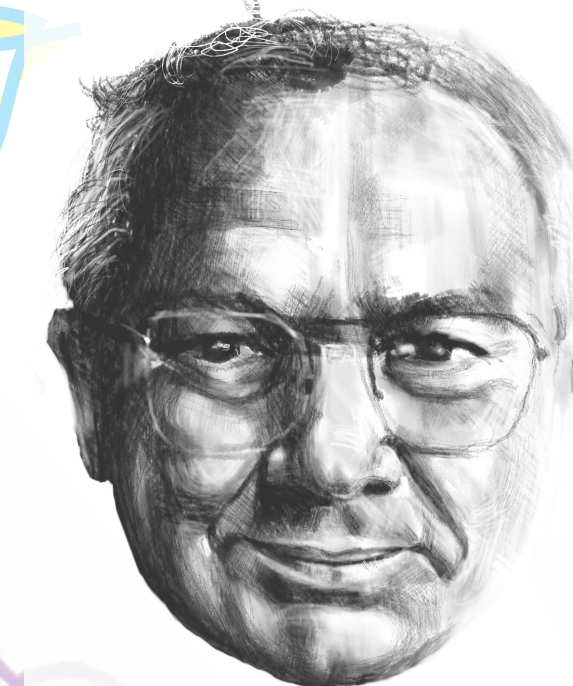
LEADERSHIP

"Teaching can be performed with such skill and grace that, for the student as well as the teacher, the experience can be justifiably characterised as aesthetic... a form of artistic expression."

"Teachers, like painters, composers, actresses, and dancers, make judgements based largely on qualities that unfold during the course of action."

"The teacher's activity is not dominated by prescriptions or routines but is influenced by qualities and contingencies that are unpredicted" (e.g., teachers need space for inventiveness and ingenuity)

New and unplanned learning outcomes emerge as a result of teaching interactions, as noted: "the ends it [teaching] achieves are often created in the process (Eisner 1979, pp.175-176)."



Method

- Qualitative multi-site case study design
- Participants teach in Years 3 to 6
- Diverse schooling contexts in NSW, ACT and the Northern Territory
- Data to be collected from 3 semi structured interviews and 6 hours of lesson observations across two or three days.

COOPERATION **WELLBEING**

"I just could see her. She was getting upset, she was getting distraught. She deleted all her work, and she had about 10 minutes left to go. She had to write the whole story again. And I said just go to the bathroom, take a break, take a walk, refresh. And she came back, and she did okay."

MR. SEE

*He doesn't want his students to struggle at school, like he did.

FREEDOM

A cross-case analysis will be conducted to find artistry's enabling and constraining forces using **Theory of Practice Architectures**, and these are the cultural-discursive, socio-political, and material-economic arrangements that shape practice.



I am a PhD candidate at the University of Wollongong and an Assistant Principal Teacher in a public primary school in NSW, currently on full-time study leave until July 2024. I have taught in the independent systems in Sydney, Northern Territory, and Argentina but began my career in the state system in England. I have a Master's in Management and Leadership from The University of Sydney and a BA (Hons) from Edinburgh College of Art. I am interested in the dimensions of teaching and leading in schools where philosophy, politics and art intersect.
email: sd104@uowmail.edu.au



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FEMALE TEACHER PARTICIPANTS ARE NEEDED! PLEASE SCAN HERE TO REGISTER INTEREST.

