

*Perceptions of an Artist and Art Education: A Study of Pre-Service Year One Teachers at a Fijian University*

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**Abstract**

Gaining an insight into primary pre-service teachers' perceptions is vital for teacher educators especially in the field of primary art education. This paper reports on a study that investigated the perceptions of pre-service year one teachers on art education and an artist. Located in a Fijian urban university, this quantitative study, using a questionnaire designed by the investigator, provided an insight into primary pre service teachers' perception of art education and an artist. A cohort of 45 participants was selected through convenient sampling for the purpose of this study. Analysis of data collected through the questionnaire revealed that participants are able to fully articulate characteristics that define an artist, however, unable to draw their perception or mental image of an artist. Findings reflect the narrow perception of art education held by participants, which was solely based on defining art education as merely drawing ability. This study will have implications for tertiary and primary art education and other related study.

Keywords: Art education, pre-service teachers, aesthetic development, perception, teacher education, teacher educators

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## Introduction

Art education is the area of learning which is based upon the visual, tangible arts—drawing, painting, sculpture, and design in pottery, weaving, fabrics. In Fiji, the local school curriculum covers three aspects of art education which is painting and drawing, modeling and construction, and pattern/print making. This study is an exploratory study, a working paper, which proposes wider theoretical implications for the re- conceptualization of pre-service teacher training in the area of art education, especially in Fiji. The Fijian primary art education curriculum has adopted art education as an essential subject for children to study in primary levels. The primary teacher is the person responsible for the whole range of instruction, which includes art education, too. This situation often results in dilemma for the primary teacher if the teacher has not been adequately prepared during teacher training.

Few schools are able to employ specialist art educationists; however, majority primary schools have the classroom teacher as the overall general practitioner.(Richardson: 1992).The Fijian Ministry of Education clearly outlines its art curriculum and therefore expects teachers to teach art from kindergarten to form 7 or higher education where applicable. Subramani (2000) discusses art education in Fiji, as :

the primary curriculum should suggest ways in which students may explore their own lives and experiences, and find ways of expressing what they feel, see and imagine. With the help of their instructors, they should assess the creative potential in their own environment (colors, shapes, sounds, movements, images, space, personalities, history, humor and artistic traditions) as the local environment offers great opportunities for investigating moods, atmosphere, feelings, and memories; working with a wide range of symbols, images, mythologies and cultivating skills of selecting, ordering, manipulating, simplifying, balancing and unifying.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of pre service teachers on art education and an artist and how their perception influences their views towards art education. Perception is a way of regarding, understanding or interpreting something: **a mental impression**. Perception is inseparable from an individual. Everyone has their own unique perceptions, shaped from their personal experiences and values. It is obvious that the pre service teachers would differ from each other in emotional make up, economic background, intellectual capacity, creative potential, and life experiences. These play a vital role in the creation of individual perception of artists and art education. These pre-existing viewpoints shape how an individual reacts to an event, interacts with other people, and perceives the world around them. Perception of an individual determines how they see and appreciate art which in turn impacts on the teaching and learning of art education.

By understanding personal perceptions of teachers, in this case, pre service teachers, it becomes possible to engage more deeply with the ideas represented in the creation and development of artwork and artistic abilities. Therefore, investigating pre service teachers' perception of art education and artist would enlighten teacher educators to develop appropriate activities and implement the artistic techniques accordingly for optimum benefit.

## **Significance of the Study**

It is of great importance to investigate this area of art education, since such knowledge can influence teacher pedagogy in primary art. This study also would bring a new point for primary school art education. In addition to that, it will help art teacher educators to better promote and teach appropriate techniques and skills to pre-service teachers, making explicit their importance in art education overall. The results of this study will greatly influence teacher educators' decisions in planning teacher education in art education. This research will throw light on how art education has been perceived and how this perception hinders the learning and development of artistic abilities in pre service teachers. This will help the teacher educators to tailor the teaching of the art education courses to develop interest and creativity in the pre-service teachers. Finally, the findings will have the potential to influence changes at tertiary levels in the area of art education, especially in the case of Fiji.

## **Sample**

The cohort of participants included 45 primary pre-service year one teachers at a Fijian university in Fiji. Of the 45 respondents, 16 respondents had primary art education background and 29 had secondary art education background. A convenient sampling was done to aid the researcher in administration and distribution of questionnaire.

## **Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, quantitative and qualitative research was combined with aesthetic concerns, reflecting aspects of practice based research and a/r/tography. Practice based research depicts the researcher / practitioner as central to the inquiry as is the context in which the research is taking place. A/r/tography encourages the combined creative freedom and risk-taking of the artist with the theory, rigor and responsibility of the academic researcher, along with the ethics and compassion of the educator. (Bickel; 2008). The main focus of the study was divided between two components, and the research instrument utilized was a designed questionnaire to investigate perceptions of art education and an artist. The first was a description of an artist through drawing and checklist. The emphasis was on giving a reliable description of an artist from the perspective of the pre-service teachers. The questions focused on the respondent's mental image of an artist, where they were required to visualize and draw an artist. Through a checklist, characteristics of artists as perceived by pre-service teachers was investigated. The second component of the research was investigating pre-service teachers' perception of art education. The questions elicited the respondents view on his or her perception of art education.

## **Art Education and Teacher Perception**

Frost (2010) agrees that by offering art education in the school system, all children get a chance to stimulate their imaginations, as well as their cognitive and problem-solving skills. Therefore there is a need for people to realize the importance of art education in schools as it is not only beneficial to the person itself, but contributes to the wellbeing of the community as Duncan (2010) in his speech at the Arts Education Partnership National Forum remarks,

Through the arts, students can learn teamwork and practice collaborative learning with their peers. They develop skills and judgment they didn't know they had. It gives the child an opportunity to demonstrate creativity. It helps students to become well-rounded and expression of one-self becomes easier also. In addition to that art helps build student's self-esteem. Therefore the emphasis on the arts in schools is not about learning a specific skill, but about attaining an education that nurtures the whole child. It is not about leading to a better career but about leading to a better life.

Eisner (2004) also agrees that art education teaches us to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective. Developing discerning aesthetic awareness can lead to the understanding of relationships. Art education is not only limited to itself. Art enables students to learn and understand other subjects as Cohen (2010) highlights;

Art is related to many different subjects and it can help to reinforce the knowledge of all those disciplines. Art is experimental like science and it requires exact mixtures of compounds like oil, wax, pigment, and silica. Art reinforces mathematics when it requires the accurate representation of objects in two and three dimensional space. Mathematical concepts like linear perspective, symmetry, and spatial relationship are used in art. Art has connections to foreign languages as many of its terms come from German, Italian, French, and Latin. Many historical periods have been greatly influenced by the art created during that time. Art also connects to language arts, physical education, and technology.

Educators just need to realize the importance of art education. Richard (n.d) emphasizes that art makes children see the beauty that exists in the world. Today, children are so bombarded with technology and plugged in almost constantly. Many of them don't even know what a real painting looks like. Pictures have been replaced with flat screen televisions or home theater systems. Their parents fail to teach them the importance of creativity, doing something with your hands.

As Grumet (1988) suggests, curriculum is our attempt to claim and realize self-determination by constructing worlds for our children that repudiate the constraints that we understand to have limited us. Teacher perceptions are vital in any teaching situation. Our personal perceptions lead us to believe and do things in ways which are a direct effect of the perceptions we hold. Teacher's perceptions in art will have a direct impact on the way they disseminate the given art curriculum to the students. Bhattacharyya et al., (2009) further emphasizes on this issue stating, that teachers don't teach what they don't know.

Society and schools focus heavily on numeracy and literacy levels, which presents teachers with challenging curriculum demands and leaving little time for the arts (Russell-Bowie; 2009). Teachers may lack confidence if they have had limited or no formal education on teaching art (Duncum; 1999). Other teachers may be unsure of how to use their artistic abilities and skills to assist student learning (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara; 2009). Art education is a language on its own and as with any language-it has a diversity of communication discourse, thus teachers must learn them before they can teach the language (Richardson; 1992). Therefore, the same reflects for art education.

Teachers need to learn the appropriate skills and techniques to be able to teach accordingly. Educators just need to realize the importance of art education. As Grumet (1988) suggests, curriculum is our attempt to claim and realize self-determination by constructing worlds for our children that repudiate the constraints that we understand to have limited us. The ideas that pre service teachers bring to class have an impact on learning outcomes. Therefore it is important as art educators to investigate the perceptions pre service teachers bring with them in regards to art education.

These perceptions would help teacher educators to gauge the interest level of pre service students towards art educators. What teachers believe about their teaching capabilities can have a strong influence on their teaching, and teachers with low self-efficacy may not feel motivated for delivering arts education (Hamilton; 2008). Art teaching opportunities can lead to increased confidence and competence for pre-service teachers, along with enhancing student outcomes (Garvis; 2008). Therefore, this study investigates the perceptions pre- service teachers have about art education and an artist. The findings of the study will guide the art teacher educators to design the art education workshop activities to suit the interest of the pre service teachers. For, interest in art will capture and retain attention which in turn will give pre-service teachers more exposure to the field of art education. Teachers that value creativity lead the way in cultivating the well informed and active citizens our future demands: where individuals are able to generate fresh ideas, communicate effectively, take calculated risks and imaginative leaps, adapt easily to change and work cooperatively. Ausubel (1968) stated, the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. It is true that teachers tend to teach as they were taught, modeling themselves after their own teachers. Since the basic training of children is in the hands of their teachers, it is highly important to know their level of competence (Jambrina,Vacas,Sanchez-bardubo; 2010).

It's vital for art teacher educators to research on pre service teachers' perception so they are able to gauge the exact mindset of pre-service teachers bring to learn art education. To many people art is a confusing and mysterious thing and artist enigmatic and even ridiculous figures. (Richardson; 1992). Thus studying the perception of pre service teachers would enable teacher educators to design appropriate content and technical skills which would help communicate ideas, feelings and imagination through creative expression.

## **Results and Discussion**

The sample comprised of 39% of students who had done art education up till primary level only, while 61% stated that they had done art education up till secondary level. The results were analysed according to art education background, characteristics of an artist and perception of art education. Comparison was made between respondents who had done art education up to primary levels and secondary levels.

## Perception of an Artist

The image of an artist that was acceptable was the image of a human being showing any artistic quality. Respondents with primary art education background, none of the respondents were able to draw an artist, while those with secondary art education background, 36% of respondents were able to draw an artist. The other respondents have just managed to draw an image which is irrelevant to the notion of an artist. The image that was drawn was either of the nature or animals. This could reflect either the respondents were unaware of what an artist looks like or could not comprehend the statement appropriately to answer it correctly.

## Perception on Characteristics of an Artist

Artists have often been considered different from other people because they see things in different ways. (Darby;1991:33). Defining the characteristics of an artist is a difficult endeavor. By definition artists are difficult to categorize as all artists are unique individuals. Artists usually try to inject their work with some of their own personality, intelligence, skills and imagination (Darby; 1991:33).

For the purpose of this particular study, a list of characteristics was provided to the respondents where they were required to select the characteristics accordingly. The respondent's perception on characteristics of artists has been compared and presented as graphs.

Table 1 lists the characteristics of artists, as deigned by the researcher, which was used for the purpose of this study.

Intelligent	Always withdrawn
Nerd	Not sensitive to emotions
Hardworking	Untidy
Unpredictable	Creative
Extrovert	Imaginative
Uncooperative	Visionary
Lives in fantasy world	Moody
Introvert	Open to new ideas
Highly curious	Peaceful
Not intelligent	Adventurous
Doesn't fit in society	Loner

Figure 1 shows the comparison of the perception on the characteristics of an artist of respondents with primary art education background (PAEB) and respondents with secondary art education background (SAEB)

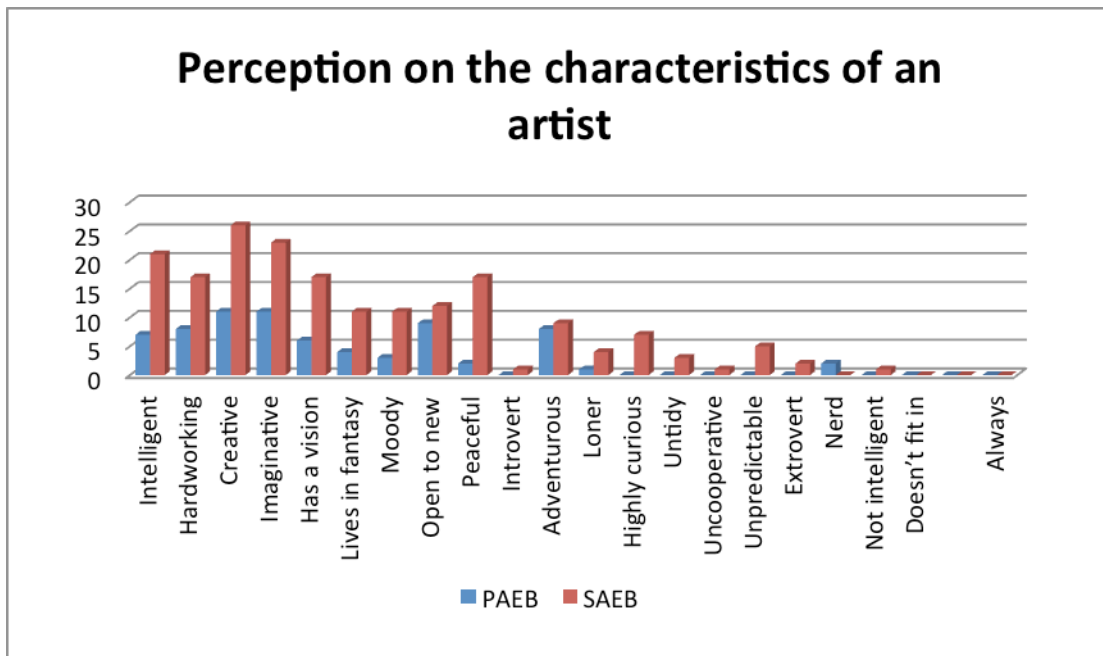


Figure 1: perception on characteristics of an artist.

### Perception of Art Education

The prominent factor in describing art education by pre-service teachers, with primary art education background, was the notion of **drawing**. 56% of respondents perceive art education as **drawing** only. For these respondents, “art education means expressing your views and feelings through **drawing**”, “It’s a creative nature of **drawing** and expressing yourself”, “art education refers to how you learn to **draw** for creative and expressive art with different drawing methods or “ it is a way you express your feelings by **drawings**”

The perception of respondents with secondary art education background reflects the true nature of art education. For these respondents, art education is “something that comes from within yourself, your own thoughts, imagination and approaches to every thinking”, “It’s creativity we use in class, use of colors, recycle materials, “Art education is a department which guide and mold people who are interested in art”, “Art education is about creativity that enable students to explore about their art work” and “Art education is basically where we as students come and learn the different concepts and skills of arts and how it can be best taught”

In comparison, 24% of respondents with SAEB, still perceive art education as “Art education is about **drawing**, designing and very creative in everything we do”, “art education is educating students to use their skills of **drawing** to express their emotions”, “Art education means study of arts or deals with **drawing** and making sketches” “Means anything regarding to **drawing**, “Art education is to learn how to **draw** neatly and color or paint”, “Art education means expressing your views and

feelings through **drawing**”, or “Presenting your emotions, thoughts and ideas in **drawing**, creations and creativity.”

Pre-service teachers with both primary and secondary level of art education have perceived art education with the description of drawing; however, some responses from respondents with secondary art education background have highlighted art education as a creative entity where “we as students come and learn the different concepts and skills of arts and how it can be best taught” ( SAEB)

As Grumet (1988) suggests, curriculum is our attempt to claim and realize self-determination by constructing worlds for our children that repudiate the constraints that we understand to have limited us. Teacher perceptions are vital in any teaching situation. Our personal perceptions lead us to believe and do things in ways which are a direct effect of the perceptions we hold. Teacher perceptions in art will have a direct impact on the way they disseminate the given art curriculum to the students. Bhattacharyya et al., (2009) further emphasizes on this stating, that teachers don't teach what they don't know. The results of this study reflects on the perception pre-service teachers have on art education and an artist. This perception could reflect on the learning and teaching of art education at tertiary levels which would impact on primary levels through these pre-service teachers in later years.

According to the findings of the study, the pre-service teachers with PAEB are unable to draw an artist, reflects that these pre-service teachers are lacking the basic foundation of art education. The perception of art education also reflects the narrow framework of **drawing** only, whereas art education is a wide field of creative and artistic techniques and skills which is not only limited to drawing only. Teachers may lack confidence if they have had limited or no formal education on teaching art (Duncum; 1999). Other teachers may be unsure of how to use their artistic abilities and skills to assist student learning (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara; 2009). Perception often limits pre-service teachers in actually fully exploring art education courses and their own personal creative and artistic talents as their perception hinders their creative growth in art and art education as a whole. Art education is a language on its own and as with any language-it has a diversity of communication discourse, thus teachers must learn them before they can teach the language (Richardson; 1992). Therefore, the same reflects for art education. Teachers need to learn the appropriate skills and techniques to be able to teach accordingly. Educators just need to realize the importance of art education.



## **Conclusion**

Teacher education in art education needs is an area with requires active research especially in the context of Fiji. This study revealed the perception of pre-service year one teachers of an artist and art education. In order for the art curriculum to be effectively disseminated to primary students, the teachers need to be appropriately educated in this area. The findings reflected that despite being able to articulate the characteristics of an artist appropriately, respondents with primary art education background couldn't draw an artist. The respondents with secondary art education background had greater awareness of artist, characteristics of artist and art education. Both the respondents with primary or secondary art education background, did define art education with the notion of drawing, however, the respondents with secondary art education background had a more in-depth perception of art education.

Therefore, it becomes important for teacher educators of art education to understand the perceptions of pre-service teachers to fully grasp the status of art education which the pre-service teachers hold within. Then only, it would be possible to design art activities to develop appropriate techniques and skills in the pre-service teachers which would have a direct impact on art education at primary school levels. Thus, teacher education in art education needs careful consideration and active research.

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