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## Arts Education Imperatives: Connecting the Globe

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**Abstract**

At a time of uncertainty Arts Education continues to offer powerful learning possibilities for being in, and with, the world. While it is crucial to research these possibilities in our own communities, clearly, engaging and collaborating with colleagues from various global contexts and cultures offers great potential. These interactions can develop our understandings of common and disparate issues related to arts education from a range of perspectives and allow us greater impact in the work we do. The Arts Education Research for Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development network is an international think tank and part of the UNESCO UNITWIN program supporting arts education academics to collaborate and engage in interdisciplinary discussions and research initiatives. In this article we outline the distillation of previous and current research from this group and affiliates to identify four key areas of arts education research that have global relevance and significance. We argue that these four “imperatives”—decolonisation; cultural resilience; inclusion, agency, and wellbeing; and the post-digital age—not only represent a snapshot of current research in arts education but provide a focus for future research and collaborations critical in a pandemic and post-pandemic world. We invite arts education scholars to join us in the discussion.

**Introduction**

Discussions about the role and purpose of arts education have been taking place across cultures for decades. From Eisner’s (1972) perspective, many of these debates were too fixated on art of the past and promoting cultural reproduction of the western canon. Arguments about privileging various art forms and ways of knowing over others have continued (Robinson, 2015). While there has been a shift from categorizing the arts into discreet disciplines (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005), the field has also seen the emergence of diverse ‘new’ art forms and theoretical perspectives that continue to challenge established views and understandings. Biesta (2019) notes prevailing concerns about the disappearance of art from education where it is viewed through the narrow perspective of the instrumental benefits of the arts (McCarthy et al., 2005), or through the expressivist perspective focused on individuals or the self. He argues that the arts in fact offer education the opportunity to consider and engage far more broadly, drawing the learner into dialogue with the world.

The sentiment of engaging with the world and developing world-centred approaches to education resonates in recent fora. For example, UNESCO (2021) argues that the world is at a turning point and the numerous disparities across the globe indicate that education is not yet working effectively to shape just, peaceful, and sustainable futures. In providing a rationale and overview of the need for more integration, Hunter et al. (2018) claim that arts and

sustainability education are “predicated on like-minded principles and they provide spaces in schooling for big picture thinking alongside the close and personal” (p. 9). Likewise, Cameron (2021) promotes a partnership and alignment of arts education with sustainability education to mitigate some of the most pressing 21<sup>st</sup>-century issues. From another perspective, Cabedo-Mas et al. (2017) highlight the unfulfilled opportunities encouraged by significant international UNESCO-based fora to include peace and values education through arts education. While Wagner (2021) identifies the environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of the UN Sustainable Development goals as being most relevant for arts education in the context of Education for Sustainable Development. Likewise, Westerlund et al. (2021) call for arts educators and professionals to become active in tackling “systemic inequality and exclusion *in* and *through* their specialized expertise” (p. 12). While acting locally remains important, it seems that arts educators and arts education researchers may have a greater impact if they work across communities, cultures, contexts, and national borders, from a world-centred standpoint. Engaging internationally through professional networks is one way this can happen.

Many of the above concerns are directly and indirectly acknowledged in the *Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education* (2010) which was a major outcome of UNESCO’s Second World Conference on Arts Education held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea. At the time it embodied the conviction of the International Advisory Committee (IAC) at UNESCO and the experts participating in the Conference that arts education could make “a direct contribution to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing the world today” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2). It could play an important role in “constructive transformation of educational systems that are struggling to meet the needs of learners in a rapidly changing world characterized by remarkable advances in technology on the one hand, and intractable social and cultural injustices on the other” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 1). The Agenda took three main issues that emerged from the discussions as its organising principles, recognising (1) accessibility; (2) sustainability achieved by quality of conception and delivery in arts education; and (3) a commitment to addressing social and cultural challenges.

The Seoul Agenda provided the guiding principles in the establishment and ratification in 2018 of an international arts education network, the Arts Education Research for Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development (AERCDS), as part of the UNESCO UNITWIN program. UNITWIN networks are ‘think tanks’ and bridge builders between the academy, society, communities, and policy makers (UNESCO, 2007). The AERCDS group has hosted four international symposia, produced three Yearbooks, established an annual international graduate researcher fora and founded a journal, the *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic and Arts Education*, in late 2021. While these initiatives fulfill several of the aims, attempts at international research collaborations have been patchy—an issue raised

at the Winnipeg Symposium in late 2019. The group considered how they might capitalise on their existing research projects and combine these in future initiatives rather than developing new ones. Instead of beginning with universal themes such as those identified by UNESCO, we reversed the process and considered the commonalities emerging from the research connected to members of the AERCDS group, and then identified possible connections with global proposals such as *A new contract for education* (UNESCO, 2021). By collaborating to synthesise global arts education issues, we hoped to develop a more systematic approach to international collaborations. We also decided our work could be more far reaching and impactful through the UNITWIN AERCDS website (<https://www.unitwin-arts.phil.fau.de/>) as opposed to our individual efforts, thus making a much more visible research repository and hub for arts education research.

In this article we outline the process of progressive focussing and reflective practice bricolage we engaged with to identify significant issues shaping the current international arts education landscape. From this interrogation we provide a conceptual framework (the four arts imperatives) we propose could act as a basis to engage in international research collaborations related to arts education. We also present a preliminary synthesis of ideas related to these imperatives to act as discussion starters and a potential framework for future research initiatives.

### **Methodology**

To articulate the logic, systems and approaches we adopted to arrive at the four imperatives for arts education, we adopted a stance of reflective practice bricolage. Bricolage can be understood as “employing multiple methodological processes as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation” (Kincheloe et. al., 2011, p. 168). Drawing on the work of Levi-Strauss (1966), Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also describe a bricoleur and the process of engaging in bricolage through the metaphor of a quilt maker who combines a range of potentially disparate images, ideas, or representations and fits these to the specifics of a complex situation. This notion of a complex situation resonated with us given the various research foci of members of the AERCDS group who also work across various art forms. As part of the reflexive and reflective practices adopted for this project, we found progressive focussing where “the collection of data must be guided by the developing clarification of topics for inquiry” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p 163) a helpful concept in our exploration of ideas leading to research.

The project evolved over four phases of inquiry and dialogue through a recursive and iterative process using observation and discussion notes, literature reviews, analysis of submitted writings and an ongoing synthesis (Figure 1). Each phase identified particular themes which eventually fed into the final phase. This final analysis aimed to identify global issues in arts

education that could drive a more systematic approach to world-wide research collaborations. This eventually led to a funded investigation to interrogate and analyse previous and recent work and synthesise relevant bodies of literature related to the “imperatives”. The remainder of this section discusses the four phases (Figure 1) where researchers congregated and shared ideas that led to the identification of the four imperatives for arts education.

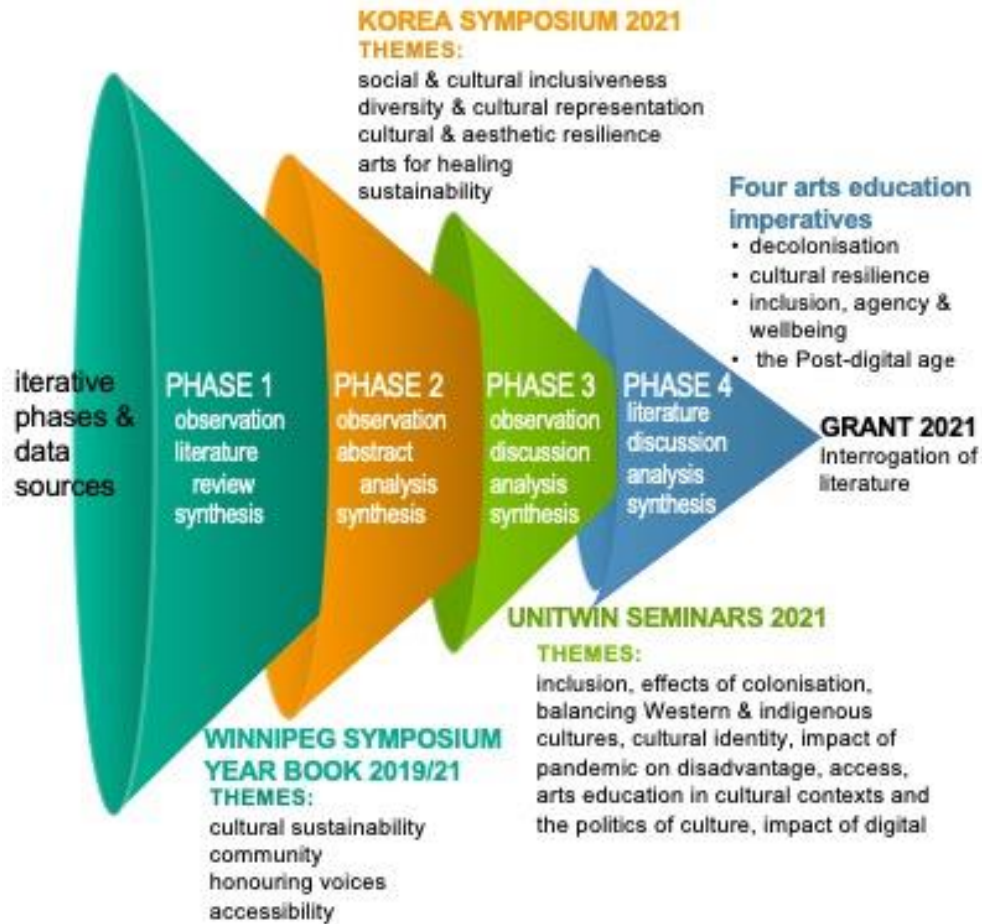


Figure 1. Phases of Analysis that Involved Progressive Focussing, Iterative Thinking, and the Synthesis of Four Global Imperatives.

**Phase 1** focussed on the 2019 UNITWIN symposium in Winnipeg, and subsequent Yearbook, *Visions of Sustainability for Arts Education: Value, Challenge and Potential* (Bolden & Jeanneret, 2021). Chapters were contributed by UNITWIN members and their colleagues from nine countries in Oceania, North America, Asia, and Africa. Researchers from Australia, Singapore, China, and Germany referred to aspects of cultural sustainability via artistic cultural learning and this theme overlapped with many references to community arts and engagement. Authors also addressed the significant role of digitalisation, both in sustaining culture by allowing and supporting its expression and in shaping culture and cultural products. The theme of honouring voices also featured, often manifested in the research methods that authors employed, while accessibility was highlighted in work from Korea, Canada, Kenya, and China. The editors identified four prominent themes across the contributions – cultural sustainability, community, honouring voices, and accessibility (Bolden, Jeanneret, & Kukkonen, 2021).

**Phase 2** followed a COVID-induced break and focussed on the 2021 UNITWIN Symposium hosted online by the Korea Arts and Culture Education Services in May with presenters from 13 countries and 575 delegates from 38 countries. Jörissen's keynote seemed to capture the essence of what was to come and began with the word “resilience”, “a much sought-after capability in times of crises” that “can be related to individuals, collectives (e.g. communities) and even entire systems (e.g. societies)” and a concept that “is especially important at a time when societies - on an economic, ecological and cultural level - are exposed to a multitude of transformations” (Jörissen, 2021a). The closing ceremony called upon UNITWIN members to comment on presentations and from this synthesis came many insightful observations and recommendations. For example, the impetus for, and value of, sharing globally was noted by Akuno, while Leung remarked on research that demonstrated the arts capacity to reflect real stories, countering official languages and focussing on different ethnicities. Themes emerging from this phase included social and cultural inclusiveness, diversity and cultural representation, cultural and aesthetic resilience, the arts for healing, and sustainability.

**Phase 3** occurred in July 2021 with UNITWIN members presenting research with discussions over two Zoom sessions. Spurred on by an increasingly focussed consideration of arts education issues that are global in scope, the group endeavoured to find parallels between their individual research agendas and the emerging themes outlined in previous phases. While contexts differed, similar themes to previous phases emerged, along with a distinct and sharper focus. For example, from contexts as diverse as Colombia and Hong Kong came the notion of balancing access to learning about Indigenous arts with that of imposed Western knowledge systems and ways of preserving and invigorating local musics. Research from both Kenya and Columbia highlighted how limited access to the internet for many has only been exacerbated by increased reliance on it during the pandemic. The nature of engaging with and

teaching Indigenous knowledges was also identified as a common area of interest, along with the limitations of engaging with such teaching via digital technology. While the power of the arts to contribute to wellbeing was acknowledged, the notion of the “arts for art’s sake” was seen as diminishing. Several themes emerged from the synthesis of these presentations and discussions: inclusion; the effects of colonisation and balancing Western and Indigenous cultures; cultural identity and resilience; the impact of the pandemic on disadvantage and access to arts education; and the omnipresent digital world.

**Phase 4** involved a process of further iterative and reflexive thinking. The challenge was to distill and synthesise these emergent themes into a manageable conceptual form. We developed a conceptually clustered matrix (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) to group and sort the emergent themes, which enabled us to identify four categories that we have described as “imperatives”. These imperatives characterise a global compendium of research in arts education occurring over the last two years. The representation in Figure 2 shows the imperatives, and attempts to capture how they overlap, connect and are interdependent and interrelated.



Figure 2. Intersecting Imperatives.

Having identified these four imperatives, we used them as a framework for a successful University of Melbourne Research Development Grant in August 2021 with the Melbourne Graduate School of Education arts education team and partner investigators from UNITWIN members in Canada, Kenya, Singapore, Germany, and Hong Kong: *An Arts Education Imperative: New Directions for Sustainability*. The Project aimed to develop a foundation for generating international and national research collaborations with one of the main outcomes being to develop an open access digital repository of research to consider the four imperatives, while also interrogating further the ideas and concepts proposed in the framework and what they may mean within and across different arts disciplinary boundaries.

Given our aim was to ensure the digital platform was sustainable and accessible for ongoing collaborations across locations, we identified the open-access reference-management tool, Zotero, as the most appropriate digital repository for this purpose. The approach we adopted to establish and contribute foundational literature about the proposed imperatives to the platform also involved aspects of bricolage such as ‘feedback looping’ while also having an anchor or ‘point of entry text’ (POET), that prompted the initial inquiry that can be continually revisited to identify new lines of inquiry (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) were employed. We also used the elements of progressive focussing (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) we referred to earlier.

Based on the four imperatives, nine sub-terms (decol\*<sup>1</sup>, culture, resilience, inclusion, agency, wellbeing, post-digital, digital, arts education) were used to undertake a literature scan of databases such as ERIC, EBSCO Education Research Complete, and ProQuest Arts Premium Collection. In tandem, abstracts and reference lists from project partners’ research were used to identify further germane literature. A protocol was developed for identification, screening, and eligibility to establish inclusion and exclusion criteria. When sources were deemed appropriate to be included, they were entered into the Zotero reference-management platform and coded according to its relevance with each of the four imperatives by considering key terms and automatic tags imported through Zotero. To assist in effective searches within the Zotero platform, we also extended the tagging system, and codified various authors’ affiliated institutions, and the geographical sites of research studies into the database to provide data for manipulation in various digital applications to generate geographical maps. Having identified these initial bodies of literature, which we hope will grow in time, as initial POETs, we are also aware that this literature and research over-represents voices and perspectives from the global north, which we also hope can be addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> \* truncation added to the root of a word used as part of a database search which searches for all forms such as decolonising and decolonisation.



The Zotero library is free and publicly available to others who may want to search for literature or provide additional sources to contribute to the site (MGSAE, 2021). We also see the site as another avenue to connect with colleagues who are working in the field of arts education, thereby providing an opportunity for various types of collaborations and for others to engage with, and contribute to, the project.

Having discussed both the methodological aspects of the project and the digital literature repository, in the following section, we outline some initial understandings of these imperatives. We distill key ideas from some literature we have listed in the Zotero repository, and we discuss how these ideas are reflected in the work of researchers associated with the AERCDS network.

### **Considering the Four Imperatives**

#### ***Inclusion, Agency, and Wellbeing***

Inclusion, agency, and wellbeing in arts education are three distinct but interconnected dimensions of human experience. Reporting on inclusion as part of the global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2017), Antoninis et al. (2020, p.105) claim that “progress on education access is stagnating,” and that access is a pre-requisite before inclusion can be affected. Meaningful engagement in the arts promotes access and inclusion for all individuals regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability (UNESCO, 2010) and agency ensures that individuals have the power to act in a sociological sense (Willis, 1978). The connections between arts education and wellbeing are well established (Cameron, 2021; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Sills, 2021) and have been highlighted as particularly important in the current COVID19 climate (Selkrig, Coleman & MacDonald, 2020). Seligman (2011) identifies five core elements of psychological wellbeing which have been influential in research connecting the arts and wellbeing (e.g., Clift, 2012). These elements are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). As highlighted in the phases described above, arts learning in communities is a common thread throughout the research. The pedagogies that underpin this learning have potential to support cultural diversity, inclusion, agency, and wellbeing in out-of-school informal and non-formal contexts, and in school contexts (Lum, 2021, Kukkonen, 2021; Luo & Lau, 2021; Wilson, 2021; Yu & Buck, 2021, Selkrig, 2011).

Engendering a sense of collaboration and community is particularly pertinent to inclusion in, and through, the arts. Arts educators have a unique opportunity to promote empathy, understanding and exposure to diverse cultures through the arts which can assist in breaking down ethno-, generational-, and socially-based barriers. These types of arts learning can facilitate both deep personal understandings and communal responses to notions of

inclusiveness, equity and cross-cultural appreciation. The following examples are indicative of the creative responses across varied arts fields. According to Joseph and Trinick (2018) “music participation ‘in community’ and ‘as community’” provides an opportunity for people to cultivate a sense of belonging and connection” (p. 2513), while Lum (2021) maintains that engaging musical improvisation within a multi-cultural performing arts company could “make sense of the intercultural amongst the musicians’ personal and geographical contexts” (p. 101). Wilson (2021) has also explored how adopting community-based music approaches which are “student-driven and collaborative, emphasising immersive, creative music experiences that are thought to promote inclusion and engagement” (p. 212) can support increased classroom engagement in school contexts that are culturally and socially diverse.

### ***Decolonisation***

Decolonisation in arts education is commonly understood as the ongoing process to address the balance of, and Indigenising of, arts cultures that exist within national, geographical, or social contexts (Cameron, 2021; Cheng & Lee, 2021; Luo & Lau, 2021). For example, where Western aesthetics-based arts cultures have been dominant due to colonisation, these arts cultures have held pre-eminence over the promotion and inclusion of Indigenous, local, or immigrant cultural traditions; or where the arts cultures associated with an elite or colonisers dominate a particular group, context, or society (Martin et al., 2021). The notion of decolonisation is a central concern for many arts educators wrestling with Euro-centric arts traditions in their own backgrounds and dominance over arts traditions of local Indigenous cultures in colonised countries and regions. Martin et al. (2021) highlight that, “Many of the approaches, processes and thoughts in arts education are entrenched in colonial histories and structures that perpetuate exclusive, privileging, and Eurocentric agendas” (p. 1). The fields of arts and culture provide fertile ground for addressing ingrained Eurocentric perspectives and all the artforms can be reframed to generate a narrative with more inclusive and respectful approaches to Indigenous arts cultures.

We aimed to include global perspectives that represent diverse perspectives, viewpoints, and experiences beyond a Eurocentric view of arts education. Honouring the voices (which first emerged in Phase 1) of researchers and participants was a key idea which emphasises that arts educators and learners come from varied and multiple cultural backgrounds, and these are often different from dominating Eurocentric traditions. Researchers such as Leung (2021) focus on the Indigenisation of society and music education curriculum policy and practice in Hong Kong through the promotion of traditional Cantonese opera following the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. While Luo and Lau (2021) reported that despite the intentions of The Action Plan for Arts Immersion (APAI, China) “to promote indigenous cultural inheritance and transmission through community-based arts teaching and learning” (p.118), challenges identified, such as the reality of the power and cultural differences between

urban/rural, and between the Han majority and Yao minority, provided significant barriers to cultural equity and preservation (p. 128).

The methodologies and practices that researchers adopt in their work are also significant in the ongoing work of decolonisation in arts education. For example, artographic approaches (Sajadi, 2021), narrative participatory inquiry (Sills, 2021) and the arts pedagogies that foreground student and artist voices from diverse cultural and social backgrounds (Lum, 2021; Wilson, 2021) are found in the work of researchers connected with the AERCDS network.

### ***Cultural Resilience***

Resilience and sustainability are often cited as panaceas for the 21st century to combat the significant impacts of a range of critical world events such as climate change, increased populations, and cultural loss or destruction due to political agendas or poorly managed societal changes. Not the least of these is the impact of a global pandemic over the last two few years. Resilience is commonly understood as adapting well and bouncing back from difficult experiences and has been applied extensively in a variety of fields at an individual, societal and systems level (Anderson, 2015; Brown, 2014). Recognizing that cultural sustainability is connected to, but not interchangeable with, cultural resilience, culture and the arts have been recognised as important dimensions of sustainability along with the social, economic, and environmental (Hawkes, 2001). The role of culture and the arts to build resilience for individuals and societal groups to address global issues is a growing field (Newsinger & Serafini, 2021).

As noted earlier, Jörissen at the 2021 UNITWIN Symposium discussed cultural resilience and sustainability and how these concepts can be adapted and linked with arts education. Jörissen suggests that cultural resilience is helpful to think of as a translation of cultural sustainability for use in educational settings and as a powerful and complex concept for arts educators to engage with as,

Resilience aims to retain identity through change by activating resources in culturally meaningful ways so that meaningful responses to disruptive events are created on multiple interwoven social levels (Jorissen, 2021b, 04:58).

This quote emphasises that artistic responses are social as well as individual and that there is a connection between identity, social learning, and collective achievement. This perspective aligns with Kim (2015), writing from a Korean context, who found that community-based visual art education in cultural facilities supported resilience in young people through interactive teaching and collaboration. The young people in this study improved their self-esteem, self-identity, and could make plans for the future.

A strength of arts education is its capacity to help learners build and experience these connections. An arts pedagogy of cultural resilience works towards connecting identity, social learning, and collective achievement by activating cultural resources within a transformative framework (Jorissen, 2021). For example, Selkrig (2011) argues that both artists and participants are transformed through community-based arts projects and Hillman (2018) illustrates how musicians adapt and develop through multiple and shifting identities throughout their careers. x's conception of cultural resilience also resonates with Sajadi's (2021) story of finding identity and voice through art making and the role of agency in supporting cultural resilience.

### ***The Post Digital***

In 1998 Negroponte proposed that "Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only in its absence, not by its presence" (para. 2) suggesting that digital technology would become a vast, quiet element forming a seamless backbone of life. More recently, Jörissen (2018) also refers to this seamlessness and how post-digital culture is a condition where digitality is deeply embedded in not only the medial aspects of everyday life, but also in the infrastructural and material layers of culture. Digital technology is a part of social reality but also capable of changing it. This suggests that the prefix "post" is not about discarding the obsolete but moving past what Cascone (2000) calls the "the revolutionary phase of the information age" (p. 12) and recognizing a period of ongoing social and cultural transformations where digitalisation is no longer seen as disruptive, but as normal and hegemonic (Cramer, 2015; Safonov & Mayakovskaya, 2020; Sinclair & Hayes, 2019).

The post-digital serves multi-purposively in arts education: as a facilitator for artistic practice, as an artefact in and of itself, and as a driver for generation of data which becomes enabling. This ever-expanding digitalisation of everything and the consequence of instant and worldwide distribution via the internet has disrupted arts education and created an urgent and continuous need for revision, for the professional development of the creative arts education workforce, and for keeping up with contemporary arts and creative industry practices (Hillman, 2018; Kerby et al., 2021, Kidenda, 2021). The high degree of intersection of real-world arts with digital, internet-based, and virtual experiences has implications for artists, arts organisations, and arts education. Unlike previous centuries, "there is an increasing desire to insert oneself into the narrative" (Australia Council for the Arts, 2021, p. 28). Reporting the ubiquitous 'selfie' as "an act of co-creation" expanding on more traditional museum/gallery viewing and responding, The Australian Council for the Arts (2021) claims it is "a type of interpretative response to the art, contributing to a wider conversation by saying 'this is what it means to me'" (p. 28). While educators need to respond to and incorporate this type of engagement, it will be important to promote critical appraisal and to broaden students' exposure to the arts in different ways.

Dezuanni (2021) proposes that the pace of change and the changes in emphases and contexts have far-reaching consequences for arts education curricula. He argues that “when young people are producing, curating, circulating or consuming content on digital media platforms, including video, images, audio recordings, or text, they are deeply involved in arts practice” (p. 874). The permeating practices surrounding media in all its forms are a challenge including “the rise of disinformation, the media industries' shift of power from Hollywood to Silicon Valley and the impact of algorithmic culture on creative participation” (p. 873). A further challenge is how we appraise broader issues such as “regulation, and the media's social and political impacts” (p. 884).

Tavin et al. (2021) tackle a myriad of implications for arts education in their exploration of educational futures in arts education that stem from the proliferation and adoption of technological change and digitalisation. Klein (2021), for example, wrestles with the notion of digital cultures and aesthetic production in terms of the properties of distribution, hybridity, fluidity and digital imaginaries. While art education can facilitate aesthetic appreciation through digitalization, Klein also argues that art education “can also explore what eludes digitalization and what cannot be transferred into binary codes” (p. 40). Bolden, O’Farrell and Kukkonen (2020) also articulate a cautionary perspective of “Balancing the potential and risks of technologically-mediated arts practice and learning” in “The Winnipeg Vision” (Bolden et al., 2020).

### Conclusion

The project we have outlined brings together a range of arts education scholars from various parts of the globe and across a range of arts forms. We have canvassed some common issues across arts education that are global in scope, and highlighted that arts education is well placed to make a difference and contribute to addressing these concerns. Through analysing issues currently being researched in our respective contexts, we have identified some key imperatives for attention within the field of arts learning. While these proposed imperatives remain at an emergent stage, they are currently crafted to articulate preliminary ideas and understandings. We are also aware that there is scope for elaboration and refinement as they can encompass a range of meanings and complexities. Similarly, they are entangled, messy and mediated by context. They have emerged from a global compendium but require further scrutiny to ascertain if they are internationally representative. In returning to some of the arguments about the purpose of arts education, we propose transcending the intrinsic, expressivist, arts for art’s sake, and instrumental rationales for arts education and further align with Biesta’s (2019) argument of an arts education that affords possibilities to be in dialogue with the world.

Our intent is to initiate and provoke discussions about the imperatives from a global

perspective to promote future international collaborations. We are also keen to keep our discussions and dialogue open, inviting our arts education colleagues to stay informed about this work, contribute and even collaborate with us as this project evolves. As Arts educators in various parts of the world, we argue the need to consider these ideas and concepts in the work we do.

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