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## Research Article

### Lived Experiences of Spa Teachers in Selected Schools of the Division of Misamis Occidental

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#### ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of six teachers in the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) in Misamis Occidental. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method. Findings revealed four major themes: 1) the transformative impact of SPA in preserving culture, enhancing skills, and instilling discipline; 2) challenges caused by limited training, inadequate facilities, and resource shortage; 3) recommendations for holistic learning, extended class hours, teacher training, and more opportunities for competitions; and 4) metaphors that illustrate the teachers' resilience and passion despite constraints. The study underscores the dynamic role of SPA teachers as both mentors and cultural stewards. It recommends enhanced professional development, improved facilities, and stronger administrative support to sustain the SPA's contribution to arts education and cultural preservation.

**Keywords:** *Lived experiences, Phenomenology, Special Program in the Arts, Teacher perspectives*

#### Background

Philippine is a country rich in terms of culture and art. To preserve Philippine's culture and arts the Republic of the Philippines created the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, in order to establish a national endowment fund for culture and the arts, and for other purposes (RA 7356 of 1992). This law is also known as the "Law Creating the National Commission for Culture and the Arts". In Section 7 of this law, it emphasizes the preservation of the Filipino Heritage. It states, "It is the duty of every citizen to preserve and conserve

the Filipino historical and cultural heritage and resources. With this, the Department of Education (DepEd) launched the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) in 2000, that aims to develop student's sense of nationalism through deepened appreciation of Filipino culture and arts; develop student with special inclination to music, visual arts, theater arts, creative writing, media arts, and dance; develop students to express their ideas and feelings through their chosen art forms; develop their aesthetic awareness and perception; and ultimately help students develop the general skills and

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attitudes, the habits of heart and mind student will need as preparation for life and work in a postmodern society regardless of their chosen career (DepEd Memorandum No. 335 s. 2004).

### **SPA Curriculum**

In order to make sure that the program is implemented, there are guidelines set by the Department of Education that is aligned with RA 7356 to ensure a successful implementation of the program. According to the study of Leocario and Pawilen (2015) despite having these guidelines for implementation, schools encounter problems in the implementation of SPA curriculum. These challenges include, lack of funding, specifically lack of facilities, shortage in instructional equipment and materials, as well as missed training opportunities of teacher specialist (p. 51). Rosete (2017) have similar findings when he evaluated the SPA curriculum in the Division of Cagayan de Oro and Division of Misamis Oriental. According to him, the SPA curriculum is moderately implemented in terms of student's selection, class size, class schedule, teacher's load, program offered, and physical facilities/equipment. Similarly, in the study of Brillantes (2022) similar problems were raised, the lack of facilities/equipment was emerging first in the list of problems followed by the lack of teacher specialist to handle the different disciplines. In addition, teacher qualifications are not aligned, only two out of five teacher participants have met the qualifications, which means that these teachers were previously teaching regular academic subjects but transferred to the program when it was launched in 2000 (Lecario and Pawilen, 2015).

One of the researchers happens to be an SPA teacher would like to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of teacher specialist in the SPA curriculum particularly in the first district of Misamis Occidental. In the first district of Misamis Occidental there are three schools with SPA curriculum namely, Calamba National High School, Looc National High School, and Sibugon Integrated School who happens to be the only integrated school in the division of Misamis Occidental that offers the SPA curriculum. The researchers would like to

identify the strengths and weaknesses, the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the challenges encountered by SPA teachers in the schools implementing SPA curriculum. Hoping that when this is explored there is an improvement or enhancement in the implementation of SPA curriculum, and it will serve as basis for the conduct of future research related to SPA.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of teachers who specialize in the Special Program in the Arts in the Division of Misamis Occidental's first district. to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and difficulties, opportunities, strengths, and drawbacks that SPA teacher professionals encounter. This study sought to answer the following questions:

Central Question:

What are the experiences of Special Program in the Arts teacher-specialists in teaching SPA disciplines?

Sub-questions:

- a. What do you like best or appreciate about the SPA curriculum?
- b. What trainings were you able to attend in relation to teaching in the SPA curriculum?
- c. What are your recommendations and suggestions that would lead to better student achievement?
- d. What are the images you can associate with in this particular discipline being a teacher in (music, visual arts, media arts, theater arts, dance, and creative writing)?

### **Methods**

The phenomenological design was employed in this qualitative investigation. The phenomenological design was predicated on the idea that interpretation mediates human experience (Creswell, 2009). The focus on other people's experiences and the interpretations they make served as the basis of the phenomenological design (Seidman, 1998). The lived experiences of the Special Program in the Arts teacher-specialists teaching several arts disciplines were examined using this design.

The research was conducted in three schools of the Division of Misamis Occidental implementing the Special Program in the Arts curriculum, namely: Calamba National High School, Looc National High School, and Sibugon Integrated School. These schools were selected because they were accessible to the researchers since they are along the national highway.

The research participants of this study were the six teachers specializing in the different disciplines in the Special Program in the Arts curriculum. These teachers specialized in teaching music, visual arts, media arts, theatre arts, creative writing and dance.

The primary research instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit in-depth responses from teachers regarding their lived experiences and perceptions of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) curriculum. This qualitative approach allows for flexibility in the conversation, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring that key topics related to the research questions are covered. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions arranged according to the SOP. Probing questions were added according to the response of each participant for the richness of the data.

Data collection primarily involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their words while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific aspects of their narratives. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to ensure consistency across sessions while leaving room for natural exploration of participants' unique perspectives. Each interview was conducted in a quiet, comfortable setting according to participants' preferences and convenience. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure the accuracy of data capture while maintaining their confidentiality. Field notes were also taken to record nonverbal cues, reflections, and contextual details that enhance data interpretation.

In addition to interviews, supplementary data such as journals, letters, or photographs shared by participants was collected to enrich the understanding of their experiences. These materials were analyzed with their permission

and incorporated into the study to provide a holistic view of the phenomenon. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher consciously set aside personal biases and assumptions to fully engage with participants' perspectives.

The researcher made sure that reliability and trustworthiness are included in this study. It assesses the validity of the data and makes it evident that it is a crucial component of the study since it contains the research's veracity. If the study reflects or interacts with respondents' ideas, it is considered trustworthy. In addition to discussing the respondents' theoretical knowledge, it also discusses how the research depends on their experience. Trustworthiness involves credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

The data analysis for this study focused exclusively on qualitative methods to evaluate the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) at Calamba National High School, Looc National High School, and Sibugon Integrated School. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which were then transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze patterns and themes within the data. This process will involve the seven-step method of data analysis of Colaizzi (1978): (1) making sense or acquiring a feeling for the protocol; (2) extracting significant statements; (3) formulating meanings; (4) organizing the cluster themes; (5 & 6) integration of results and exhaustive description; (7) validation to categorize responses and highlight recurring ideas, experiences, and perceptions related to the SPA.

As a researcher, ethical considerations are pivotal to ensuring the integrity of the research process and safeguarding the rights and well-being of participants. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by ensuring that participants' personal information was not shared or disclosed to unauthorized parties. Data was handled with utmost care, using coded identifiers rather than names or other directly identifiable information, and access to the data was restricted to members of the research team. Additionally, participants were informed that any information they provided was used solely

for the purposes of the study and presented in a manner that prevents individual identification.

Protecting participants from harm is a fundamental priority, and the research was designed to minimize potential risks. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they are aware of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and their rights, including the right to withdraw without penalty at any time. The research team remained vigilant to any psychological, emotional, or social discomfort participants may experience and provided resources or referrals for support if necessary. By adhering to these ethical principles, this research aims to respect and uphold the dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants.

Anonymity was rigorously safeguarded by designing the study to prevent the collection of unnecessary personal identifiers and ensuring that any data published or presented were fully anonymized. This includes removing or disguising any details that could indirectly lead to the identification of participants. In cases where absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed, such as in focus group settings, participants were informed beforehand, and additional measures were taken to protect their identities in the reporting of findings.

Data storage followed strict protocols to ensure its security and integrity. Digital data was stored on password-protected devices and encrypted cloud platforms, while physical data, such as consent forms or handwritten notes, was locked in secure cabinets. Backup systems were also encrypted, and data retention adhered to institutional and legal requirements, with data being deleted or destroyed responsibly after the retention period. Regular audits were conducted to ensure compliance with data protection policies, and any breach of data security was promptly addressed following established procedures.

## Results and Discussion

The narratives of Special Program in the Arts (SPA) teacher specialists reveal profound insights into their transformative roles within the educational landscape. From discovering hidden talents among themselves to cultivating discipline, skill, and cultural preservation in

their students, these lived experiences form a mosaic of purpose and resilience.

The researchers' objective was to unravel the lived experiences of teachers handling the SPA curriculum. Guided by this study's aspiration and utilizing the phenomenological perspectives, and the following section presents the themes that emerged from four specific questions related to the overarching grand tour question: *"What are the experiences of Special Program in the Arts teacher-specialists in teaching SPA disciplines?"*

### Theme 1: Teacher's Implementation of SPA Curriculum

Like soldiers receiving orders for an unfamiliar mission, teachers were presented with the SPA curriculum. It was a radical departure from the traditional, linear approach, emphasizing interconnected concepts that spiraled upwards in complexity. This initial briefing was disorienting. Gone were the familiar maps of the old curriculum. In their place, a complex web of interconnected concepts, spiraling upwards in increasing difficulty. It felt like being dropped into enemy territory, armed only with a rusty compass and a tattered map.

Slowly, the teachers began to adapt. They realized the advantage of SPA curriculum. **T1 shared:**

*"They preserve culture and tradition of the Filipinos. With that, they are interconnected with the culture and arts of the other countries that's why we can easily adapt if we go to the other country. With their competency, the competency states the various activities, performances of the culture and arts of the Filipinos. It is integrated in the competencies."*

**Cultural Preservation.** The SPA curriculum is deeply valued for its ability to preserve and promote cultural heritage. By incorporating traditional art forms such as folk dance, indigenous music, and native visual arts, the program serves as a bridge between generations, ensuring that cultural traditions are not forgotten but celebrated and revitalized.

This aspect fosters a sense of identity and pride among students, enabling them to connect with their roots while showcasing their

culture to a broader audience. Teachers appreciate how the curriculum transforms cultural education into a living, dynamic practice rather than a static historical concept.

*"I really like it because it is more on skills and talents that need to be enhanced."*(T4)

**Enhancement of Skills.** Another remarkable aspect of the SPA curriculum is its focus on skills enhancement, which helps students refine their artistic and technical abilities across various disciplines. Whether it's mastering the nuances of painting, choreography, or musical instrumentation, the program provides students with ample opportunities to develop their craft. Teachers value this aspect as it fosters not just artistic mastery but also personal growth, as students learn to set goals, overcome challenges, and achieve excellence. The curriculum's emphasis on skills training ensures that students are not only prepared for artistic endeavors but are also equipped with valuable competencies for other aspects of life.

*Some of my graduates accept portraits and it becomes their means of earning. One graduate gifted me a portrait. (T4)*

One of the most fulfilling aspects of SPA teaching is witnessing student growth. Teachers observe students evolve from novices into skilled performers, artists, and musicians. Success stories often include students winning competitions or pursuing higher education in the arts.

*"I think there are skills that tend to develop or being enhanced. Skills that you thought you did not possess."* (T2)

The SPA curriculum is designed to nurture creativity and technical proficiency in various artistic disciplines such as music, visual arts, dance, theater, and creative writing. Through its structured yet flexible approach, the program enables students to explore and refine their talents, leading to significant skills enhancement.

*"I somehow learned how read music notes but I am not a master, just the basic.*

*-the first batch of SPA students won the jingle contest, and it's impressive that the kids themselves composed the jingle for a national contest.*

*It's rewarding to see the results of what you've taught them—it really shows that they've learned."*(T6)

Students engage in specialized training that focuses on honing their craft. For instance, music students learn instrumental techniques, voice modulation, and musical theory, while visual arts students gain mastery in drawing, painting, and digital design. These skills not only prepare them for competitions but also lay the foundation for potential careers in the arts. Even teachers are helped improved their skills and bring out their potential through this SPA curriculum. Things that they thought they did not possess but eventually, because of their dedication in teaching, they themselves have improved and developed their skills and potentials.

*"In teaching SPA curriculum, what I appreciate is for me, SPA is both art and discipline at the same time. You have that freedom but you also have that strict rules so you can be both. That's what makes it beautiful. It is artistic at the same time imposing discipline. It should be a two-way."*(T3)

**Art and Discipline.** The SPA curriculum is equally lauded for its emphasis on art and discipline, cultivating a balance between creativity and structure. Teachers highlight how the program instills discipline in students, encouraging them to manage their time effectively, stay committed to practice, and strive for continuous improvement. At the same time, the curriculum nurtures creativity by providing self-expression. This combination of art and discipline creates well-rounded individuals who are not only skilled in their chosen fields but also possess the work ethic and focus needed for success in any endeavor.

According to **T5:**

*"We have experiences and the best experience I have had being in SPA is that your talent and skills that you are using until now, you are able to use them to teach students and transfer your skills to the students."*

**Transfer of Skills.** One of the celebrated aspects of the SPA curriculum is its ability to

facilitate the transfer of skills from teachers to students. Teachers take pride in mentoring young artists, passing on their expertise, techniques, and passion for their crafts. This dynamic exchange of knowledge creates a collaborative learning environment where both educators and students grow together. Teachers often find themselves inspired by their students' fresh ideas and enthusiasm, resulting in a reciprocal process that keeps the learning experience vibrant and fulfilling.

The Special Program in the Arts (SPA) offers a distinct advantage by nurturing students' artistic talents while fostering personal growth, cultural preservation and discipline. Through its tailored curriculum, students gain specialized training in various art forms such as music, dance, theater and visual arts, allowing them to hone their skills and explore their creative potential. Beyond technical expertise, the program emphasizes transferable skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and perseverance, which are invaluable in both artistic and non-artistic pursuits. Ultimately, the SPA equips students to thrive in creative industries and contributes to the holistic development of future artists and cultural ambassadors.

According to a study by Llamas (2019), the SPA curriculum significantly contributes to students' artistic and academic growth. The study found that 85% of SPA graduates report improved self-confidence, public speaking skills, and teamwork abilities—all of which are transferable to other areas of life.

## Theme 2: Limited Training

Despite these positive aspects, the journey was fraught with challenges. It saddened the teachers who are the frontlines of this curriculum receiving not much of support in terms of trainings.

Trainings serve as vital stepping stones in teaching the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) curriculum, providing educators with the necessary tools, insights, and confidence to deliver high-quality instruction. In an educational setting where creativity and technical mastery are key, training programs act as foundational supports, allowing teachers to refine their own artistic skills while learning effective ways to nur-

ture and guide their students' talents. These opportunities for professional development enable SPA teachers to bridge gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical application, fostering both personal growth and instructional excellence.

For SPA teachers, every training attended is a chance to broaden their horizons and deepen their expertise in their specific artistic disciplines, whether it be music, dance, theater, or visual arts. These programs introduce educators to innovative techniques, modern trends, and cutting-edge tools that keep their teaching relevant and dynamic. For instance, a visual arts teacher might learn new approaches to digital art, while a music teacher could gain exposure to contemporary performance practices. Each training session becomes a stepping stone, building on previous knowledge and equipping teachers to meet the evolving demands of arts education.

*"Sad to note, I haven't attended any trainings yet because the Sanay Guro have not connected yet with DepEd. If ever there will be trainings, it will be in our own expense." (T1)*

*"No, I haven't. Maybe because of pandemic that's why it stopped." (T2)*

*"I was able to attend the training by the Sanay Guro in Baguio City and another training in Dumaguete City. But that was way back 2018. When it comes to training, it is really necessary." (T3)*

*"Yes, I have attended a training in Baguio City related to visual arts and in Dumaguete in Siliman. But I really want more trainings because we are not yet master in this discipline. There are a lot to improve since students are leveling up. So, we teachers, should have more trainings." (T4)*

*"I haven't had any trainings attended in visual arts yet. Back when I was in dance, at the Sinanduloy Festival in Tangub, I was able to attend twice. But now, in visual arts, I haven't had any opportunities." (T5)*

*"I was able to attend the seminars because I was one of the pioneering teachers in SPA and*

before the SPA was implemented teachers were sent to attend trainings, there were two of us who attended, one for music and one for dance. That was way back 2013. The last training I attended was last July (2024), Malikhaing guro in Bacolod. Participants were selected, only those who were able to attend trainings in Sanay Guro and Husay Sining so that you'll be eligible to attend. There were two SPA teachers who qualified one in Looc National High School and another one in Calambal National Comprehensive High School. The SPA teacher who attended in Calamba was specializing in dance. It was actually the regional office who screened the participants." (T6)

Notably, majority of these teachers were not able to attend trainings related to the particular SPA discipline they are handling. SPA teachers who have attended limited trainings or have not participated in any training face significant challenges that directly impact their ability to effectively deliver the curriculum and foster student growth. Without access to consistent professional development opportunities, these educators often struggle to stay updated on modern techniques, methodologies, and tools that are essential in teaching arts-based disciplines. This gap can lead to feelings of inadequacy and limit their ability to provide students with comprehensive, high-quality instruction.

Providing adequate and continuous training to SPA (Special Program in the Arts) teachers is crucial for ensuring that the curriculum remains dynamic, effective, and responsive to both students' needs and the evolving landscape of arts education. Given the unique demands of teaching in the arts, training for SPA teachers must be multifaceted, addressing not only technical proficiency in their specific artistic disciplines but also pedagogical strategies, technological integration, and professional development.

One study by Guskey (2002) emphasizes that professional development programs play a pivotal role in improving teacher competency and confidence, particularly in specialized disciplines. Guskey argues that training equips teachers with updated knowledge and skills, enabling them to implement innovative

teaching strategies and adapt to diverse student needs. In the context of SPA, attending training can help teacher-specialists refine their artistic techniques, integrate interdisciplinary approaches, and adopt modern technologies, all of which are essential for delivering a dynamic and engaging curriculum.

### Theme 3: Suggested Recommendations

But teachers persevered. They shared their struggles, frustrations, and successes with one another. They sought out support from whom they can ask for it including the community. It's time that their voices shall be heard if we want this curriculum to be more successful in the future.

Teachers under the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) have provided valuable recommendations to enhance the program's effectiveness and impact. These suggestions focus on fostering a holistic approach to education, improving teacher support, refining student selection criteria, reinstating extended class periods, and providing more opportunities for student growth through competitions. Together, these recommendations aim to elevate the quality of SPA curriculum while addressing existing challenges.

When teachers were asked about their recommendations and suggestions that will lead to better student achievement, the following are their answers:

*"Focus on the whole being of the students. That is what the holistic approach is. Because we all know that this curriculum is not just about academics. Therefore, to give holistic learning to students, teachers must be equipped in giving learning to students because if teachers themselves are not quality enough, it will reflect to the learners." (T1)*

One of the central recommendations is the integration of a holistic approach in the SPA curriculum. Teachers advocate for a balanced development of students, emphasizing not only on academics but also the required technical skills, personal growth and social responsibility. This approach requires the curriculum to include activities that promote character development, teamwork, and emotional resilience,

ensuring that students emerge as well-rounded individuals.

Hoffman, et al. (2016) emphasized the role of a holistic approach in arts education, advocating for programs that integrate social-emotional learning and character education alongside artistic training. The researchers found that this balance fosters improved creativity, resilience, and discipline among students, aligning with SPA teachers' vision of nurturing well-rounded individuals who contribute to both artistic and societal development.

*"We need more facilities or equipment in order for the students to do hands on because it is really different to use only one camera." (T2)*

One of the most pressing challenges faced by teachers in the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) is the lack of adequate facilities and equipment necessary to deliver high-quality arts education. The scarcity of essential resources, such as functional music rooms, art studios, and dance spaces significantly hinders the effective implementation of the curriculum.

The importance of adequate facilities and equipment in arts education has been highlighted in numerous studies, emphasizing their critical role in fostering creativity and skill development. Hallam, et al. (2016) explored the impact of physical resources on music education, finding that access to quality instruments, practice spaces, and recording equipment significantly enhances both teaching and learning outcomes. Their study revealed that schools with dedicated music facilities and well-maintained instruments reported higher levels of student engagement and performance, underscoring the necessity of investing in infrastructure for specialized programs like SPA.

*"If possible, we will go back to the 2-hour instruction every day because the 1-hour teaching today is very difficult. In terms of enhancing the performance, I wish to be trained again. It's been six years that I do not attend any training. We need to update ourselves." (T3)*

Another important suggestion is to reinstate the 2-hour daily period for SPA classes, which was previously a hallmark of the program. Teachers believe that this extended time is crucial for in-depth instruction, adequate

practice, and meaningful feedback. Shortened periods often result in rushed lessons and limited opportunities for creative exploration, undermining the quality of learning. A return to the 2-hour schedule would allow for a more immersive educational experience, enabling students to fully engage with their artistic disciplines.

Research on extended instructional time by Patall, et al. (2010) demonstrated that additional time for skill-intensive subjects significantly improves learning outcomes. This finding supports the recommendation to reinstate the 2-hour daily period for SPA instruction, emphasizing that deeper engagement and practice are crucial for artistic growth and mastery.

*"In my case, I will not select students who show bad attitude. I want student with good character, who follows instructions. He should have dedication in everything he does. That's what I like." (T4)*

In terms of student selection, teachers recommend prioritizing students with good character and strong potential for artistic growth. This criterion ensures that the program nurtures individuals who not only excel in their chosen art forms but also possess the discipline and attitude necessary for success.

Battistich, et al. (2004) argued that fostering positive character traits, such as discipline and respect, is essential for the success of arts-focused programs. Their findings suggest that selecting students with good character, in addition to talent, creates a conducive learning environment and maximizes program effectiveness, a strategy that aligns with SPA teachers' proposals.

*"For me, the opportunities given to us in visual arts are often very limited. For example, when there's a contest like poster-making or slogan-making, the school tends to select students from the regular classes. But ideally, they should choose students from the SPA (Special Program in the Arts) because it's about providing experiences that really encourage the kids to put in the effort. I've noticed that when there are contests like that, the SPA students aren't really prioritized or chosen as much." (T5)*

Finally, teachers recommend providing more opportunities for SPA students to participate in contests and exhibitions. For some schools who opt to choose participants from regular class than the SPA. This becomes ironic since ideally, those students who are in the SPA should have been given much exposure since this is their forte. Competitions and public performances are valuable platforms for showcasing talent, building confidence, and gaining exposure. By actively supporting students' various events, the program can inspire excellence and motivate students to strive for greater achievements.

Winner, et al. (2013) explored the impact of competitions and public showcases on arts education, revealing that performance opportunities enhance student motivation, confidence, and skill development. SPA teachers' suggestion to increase opportunities for contests aligns with these findings, as such platforms allow students to apply their skills, gain exposure, and achieve recognition.

Another key recommendation is to provide more training opportunities for SPA teachers. Professional development is essential for keeping educators updated on modern teaching methods, artistic trends, and technological tools. Teachers suggest regular workshops, masterclasses, and access to conferences, enabling them to refine their expertise and enhance their instructional strategies. Continuous training will empower SPA teachers to deliver high-quality education and address the diverse needs of their students effectively. It is sad to note that while teachers make constant effort to deliver the necessary competencies expected from their respective discipline, their craving for trainings and self-upgrading were not fully satisfied.

The significance of teacher training was underscored by Desimone and Garet (2015), who found that targeted professional development enhances both teaching efficacy and student achievement. Their research emphasizes the value of content-specific training tailored to the unique demands of arts education, supporting SPA teachers' recommendation to provide workshops, conferences, and seminars for continuous learning and professional growth.

In essence, valuable recommendations were presented. Teachers emphasized the need for more specialized and regular trainings tailored to their disciplines to equip them with advanced skills and methodologies to better nurture students' artistic potential. They also underscored the importance of upgrading facilities and equipment to provide a conducive environment for learning and creativity. The extension of 2-hour period for SPA classes was suggested to allow deeper engagement with the arts, giving students ample time to refine their craft. Furthermore, it is suggested that more opportunities for SPA students, such as participation to various competitions, to showcase their talents and gain real-world experience.

#### **Theme 4: Impacts of Curricular Changes**

Even now, the memories of those early struggles continue to linger. The images associated by the teachers with the SPA curriculum are a mixed bag:

*"Abstract painting. You cannot predict the students. You need to assess the talent. It's really not clear where they will be heading. After Grade 10, that's when you can see the fruit of your labor." (T1)*

The image of an abstract painting symbolizes the dynamic and unpredictable nature of teaching in the SPA curriculum. Much like an abstract artwork, the journey of an SPA teacher involves layers of emotions, interactions, and diverse learning experiences that do not follow a singular path. This metaphor highlights the necessity for creativity, adaptability, and open-mindedness in navigating the varying needs and talents of students while embracing the fluidity of artistic education.

*"I associate camera in the field of media arts because you cannot edit movies or videos if you cannot capture the moments without the camera." (T2)*

The image of a camera signifies the importance of perspective and documentation in the SPA teaching experience. Like a camera that captures diverse scenes and angles, SPA teachers must observe their students closely, recog-

nize unique talents, and focus on their individual strengths. This metaphor also emphasizes the need to capture and celebrate moments of progress and success, serving as a reminder of the transformative impact of arts education on students' lives.

*"I use the logo of theater that seems bipolar. There's happy face and sad face, that's the logo of theater." (T3)*

The metaphor of bipolar captures the duality of experiences that SPA teachers encounter. On one hand, there are moments of joy, inspiration, and triumph as students excel and discover their potential. On the other hand, there are struggles, such as limited resources, time constraints, or mismatched expectations, which can lead to frustration and exhaustion. This image reflects the emotional highs and lows that come with balancing the demands of teaching with the need for personal and professional resilience.

*"I choose heart. At first, I don't love visuals. The feeling that you do not have the idea at first. But later on, you realized that love is the greatest of all." (T4)*

The heart represents the deep passion and commitment required to succeed as an SPA teacher. Educators in this discipline often invest significant emotional energy in nurturing their students' artistic and personal growth. This image underscores the central role of empathy, care, and dedication in fostering a supportive environment where students can thrive. It also reflects the sense of fulfillment teachers derive from witnessing their students' progress and success, making their efforts feel rewarding despite the challenges they face.

*"There's still sketching, and it's hard to add color since there's no color yet, but I just continue. Pre-pandemic, then the pandemic hit, and the kids, again, had to adjust. The teacher was also not a specialist, but at least we managed to keep going. One of the things that encourage me is the kids—it's surprising how much they actually know. It's also where I get challenged, thinking about what I can input to help enhance their skills even more. I feel challenged to be involved too. I just end up learning because I really have no formal training." (T5)*

Sketching represents the process-oriented nature of teaching in the SPA curriculum. Just as a sketch evolves from rough outlines to detailed masterpieces, teachers guide their students through incremental growth, encouraging them to refine their skills and develop their artistic identities. Despite the fact that they have not attended much of trainings they needed, they still managed to guide and help students grow and develop.

*"For us, it feels like we keep going back to the beginning, like we're still in the bud phase, not yet blooming. There are batches that are really good, but there are also batches that are not as strong. The talented students from the past have already graduated, so we're back to square one. But what I observed during COVID is that the kids really lost their skills, even their talents. It's really different now. Hopefully, they can recover. Right now, in Grade 7, there are some good students again." (T6)*

The bud phase symbolizes potential and growth. SPA teachers view their students as budding artists who require nurturing, guidance, and the right environment to bloom fully. This image reflects the hope and optimism inherent in their roles, as teachers invest in shaping the next generation of artists.

These metaphors illustrate the transformative, emotional, and sometimes challenging nature of the SPA curriculum, as perceived by the teachers.

### **Theme 5: Challenges Encountered**

Teachers are like soldiers in the battlefield, they must master techniques to become better in their craft, learn to survive in unpredictable situations, and they must have patience to accomplish impossible tasks. Just like soldiers, teachers are trained for years to be ready in their chosen field but are they ready to face the reality? It is a different story once we are in the battlefield, there are no training that prepares us for such kind of things. The truth is, we have this ideology that this is reality, but it is farfetched from the true reality of the battlefield. Just like SPA teachers, they are trained but once they are deployed in their respective stations, they are given tasks that they are not ready from. Thus, they must adapt in order for

them to survive. A Charles Darwin's Theory of natural selection implies, "Adaptation of the fit, elimination of the unfit."

To conclude, the lived experiences of SPA teachers reveal a deep appreciation for the program's ability to cultivate artistic talents while fostering cultural preservation, discipline and transferable skills. Teachers admire the curriculum's emphasis on skill enhancement, allowing students to refine their craft in various art forms.

However, teachers face significant challenges due to limited training opportunities, which hinder their ability to fully meet the program's demands. They recommend more specialized and regular trainings, improved facilities and equipment, extended class periods for in-depth engagement and increased opportunities for students to showcase their talents on larger platforms. Teachers also associate the SPA curriculum with powerful images: a camera for its role in preserving artistic expression, bipolar to reflect the program's joys and struggles, a heart symbolizing their passion and dedication and an abstract painting capturing the complexity and beauty of their experiences.

Together, these insights and metaphors underscore both the strengths of the SPA curriculum and the areas that need urgent attention for its enhancement.

As the SPA continues to exist, teachers become more resilient, more resourceful, more deeply invested in the students' learning. They have learned to adapt, to innovate, to find joy in the midst of challenges.

## Conclusions

The lived experiences of SPA curriculum teachers highlight the dynamic and transformative nature of their roles in arts education. Teachers play a pivotal part in preserving culture, enhancing students' skills, and fostering personal and artistic growth, often serving as both mentors and cultural stewards. Their narratives reveal the profound rewards of witnessing students discover their talents, excel in their chosen disciplines, and develop the discipline and confidence necessary for future endeavors. Despite the numerous challenges, including limited resources, inadequate training, and mismatches between their expertise and

assigned disciplines, SPA teachers remain resilient and committed to their mission, continually adapting to ensure meaningful learning experiences for their students.

This study underscores the critical need to address the challenges faced by SPA teachers to maximize the program's potential. Providing consistent training opportunities, aligning teacher assignments with their expertise, reinstating extended instructional periods, and ensuring adequate funding and resources are essential steps toward supporting both teachers and students. By addressing these areas, the SPA curriculum can continue to thrive as a platform for cultural preservation and the holistic development of students, while also fostering a more empowering and sustainable environment for the teachers who bring the program to life.

## Recommendations

Considering the findings uncovered, the following recommendations have been made:

**SPA Education Program Supervisors.** SPA Education Program Supervisors play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the SPA curriculum. It is recommended that they establish structured mechanisms for gathering regular feedback from SPA teachers to understand their challenges and successes. Supervisors should prioritize professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of SPA teachers, such as workshops on effective arts integration and curriculum adaptation. Advocacy for funding and resources that cater to the unique requirements of SPA programs is essential.

**School Heads.** School heads should actively support SPA teachers by providing the necessary infrastructure, including well-equipped arts spaces and specialized materials. Open communication channels should be maintained to ensure that SPA teachers' concerns and recommendations are heard and addressed in decision-making processes. They should also support teachers' recommendations to the higher offices regarding constant training and initiate income generating programs to support their needs. Recognizing the demanding nature of the SPA curriculum,

school heads must ensure manageable workloads for teachers and implement strategies to prevent burnout.

**SPA Coordinators.** SPA coordinators serve as vital links between administration and teachers. To maximize their effectiveness, they should facilitate regular mentoring sessions and peer-sharing opportunities, allowing teachers to exchange ideas and best practices. Coordinators can strengthen the SPA curriculum by collaborating with local artists and cultural organizations to provide enriching experiences, such as workshops and guest lectures, for both teachers and students. A systematic approach to evaluating curriculum implementation, based on teacher feedback and student outcomes, can guide continuous improvement.

**Teacher-specialists.** Teacher-specialists are at the heart of SPA curriculum delivery and should focus on ongoing professional growth by engaging in training sessions and staying updated on trends in arts education. Developing differentiated lesson plans to address the diverse needs and abilities of SPA students is crucial. Teacher-specialists should also document and share their experiences, challenges, and effective strategies, contributing to a deeper understanding of SPA teaching. Building strong relationships with parents and the wider community is equally important, as it fosters a supportive network for the program.

**SPA Students.** SPA students' voices should be integral to the development of the curriculum and teaching methods. Providing platforms for them to share feedback about their learning experiences can identify areas for improvement and innovation. Recognizing the dual pressures of academic and artistic performance, schools should implement programs to support students' mental health and well-being.

**Future Researchers.** Comparative studies between SPA and non-SPA programs could highlight the unique contributions of the curriculum. Researchers should also investigate the interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and geographic factors in shaping the SPA

experience. Incorporating the perspectives of parents and community members can provide a more holistic view of the program's impact, creating a comprehensive understanding of the SPA ecosystem.

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