

Introduction

Promoting the value of the arts to all Australians has been a key priority of the Australia Council since it began establishing strategies in 1999. The council commissioned the *Australians and the Arts* report which found that 85% of those surveyed agreed that 'the arts are an important part of the education of every Australian child' and that 86% would feel better about the arts if there were 'better opportunities and education in the arts'.

Following the release of these findings, the council convened consultation and discussions across the nation, which established education and the arts as a major priority to address in order to promote the value of the arts to all Australians. The council is now working to expand the important links between education and the arts in Australia, in collaboration with its National Education and the Arts Network (NEAN), which comprises representatives from the arts and education departments of each state, territory and the Australian governments.

As a result of discussions at a *National Seminar on Education and the Arts* held in February 2002, six research projects are now well underway, all scheduled for completion during 2004. The purpose of the research is to measure the impact of creative arts education in schools, in order to develop the body of Australian research that will inform future strategic development in education and the arts throughout Australia.

The research partners of all six projects met in Perth on 5 & 6 May to compare methods and common issues encountered. They also discussed preliminary findings, which indicate that we will soon have a body of evidence to demonstrate that meaningful arts experiences both in and out of school have a significant impact on the lives of children and young people, particularly their confidence, self-esteem & mental health and their capacities to work co-operatively, to set goals and plan to achieve them and importantly to actively engage in their own learning.

The projects have considered a variety of practice models for incorporating the kind of rich learning that takes place in the arts into students' learning both in and beyond school. The final reports of all six projects will become available over the next twelve months. This summary includes a short description of each project.

A. COMMONWEALTH EVALUATION OF SCHOOL-BASED ARTS PROGRAMS

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Department of Communications, Information and Technology and the Arts (DCITA) and the Australia Council jointly commissioned an evaluation of the impact of school-based arts programs. This was a major outcome of the aforementioned seminar and a positive step in developing a strong collaborative partnership between arts and education agencies of the Australian Government.

The evaluation was conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). It looked at the impact school-based arts education initiatives have on student learning outcomes, including for students of Indigenous, disadvantaged or at-risk backgrounds.

The project aimed to:

- provide a bibliography of existing national and overseas research on the effectiveness of arts education on student achievement
- determine whether empirical or anecdotal examples of improved learning outcomes in the arts and other areas of the curriculum can be substantiated
- identify the attributes of specific arts programs that are of particular benefit for young Australians, including those in disadvantaged groups.

ACER evaluated the following four arts education programs in schools, which were identified at the national seminar in February 2002:

1. The Northern Territory School Boys Music Program – a music program for boys in Years 4-7 in six Darwin schools and one remote Indigenous school.
2. The Northern Territory Indigenous Music Education Program – an Indigenous instrumental program reaching into more than eight remote community schools.
3. SCRAYP – Youth Arts with an edge: Footscray Community Arts Centre, Victoria – a youth arts mentoring program enabling young people to access the arts and connects them to the world of real work.
4. Learning to learn through the [Arts@Direk](#) Primary School, South Australia - the focus of this teacher mentoring and research program was to enhance practitioners' understanding of the power of the expressive arts (visual arts, music and dance) in children's learning.

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B. AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN & THE ARTS: MEANING, VALUE & PARTICIPATION

The University of Tasmania is undertaking this research with the Australia Council as its industry partner. The project was primarily funded through the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects Scheme.

The project aims to identify the nature of children's participation in the arts in the Australian community and the meanings and values they ascribe to such experiences. The project seeks to redress what the researchers see as a major gap in arts education research so far – the absence of children's voices.

The research specifically seeks children's perspectives on their experiences of the arts in general and the function of the arts in their lives. The method has been designed to access children's perspectives using appropriate, sensitive ways of generating data – for example using small group interviews with children between the ages of five and sixteen years conducted in schools, playgrounds, community art settings and children-initiated arts activities. Multiple strategies have been employed through the interview process and the researchers have sought to ensure that children are empowered as co-researchers to ensure an equitable role for them in the enquiry process.

In the first phase of the study, the research team asked the education departments in each state and territory to identify school research sites. Travelling across all states and territories in Australia, the team has interviewed some 330 students aged between five and fifteen years. Schools included city, regional and isolated rural schools.

In the second phase of the research the team is visiting non-school sites and also re-visiting some children participating in the school-based interviews. It will include a number of sites in each state and territory, and the mix of groups interviewed represents the diversity of socio-economic development, age, gender and ethnic backgrounds in the community.

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that children have rich, insightful views of the meaning and value of the arts in their lives, and their schooling. The research team believes the most significant aspect of the study so far is that these results demonstrate a capacity by students to identify the arts in their every day lives in ways that go beyond the expectations of current educational theory. The project team believe this study provides crucial new knowledge concerning children's perspectives on their participation and valuing of the arts. These outcomes will advance knowledge in the discipline of arts education and inform future policy formation and decision-making in the Australian arts community. For further information on the outcomes of phase one of this study see the article at <http://ijea.asu.edu/v4n4/>.

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C. EDUCATION AND THE ARTS PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE (EAPI)

After the national seminar in 2002, members of the *National Education and the Arts Network* (NEAN) were invited to submit funding proposals for research which would:

- enhance knowledge and practice in the area of education and the arts
- achieve a 'first step' towards developing a set of priority areas for research in arts education relating to contemporary Australia
- develop new strategic and ongoing alliances/networks between the Australia Council, state and territory education and arts agencies; research institutions; artists; arts organisations and the community.

Four states and territories were successful in applying for the partnership funding: Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Northern Territory. The four projects are described below.

Target audiences for this research are: schools, teachers, school administrators, education authorities, tertiary arts education institutions, tertiary arts education teachers and students, artists, arts administrators, community arts organisations and health practitioners.

1. Northern Territory

Music for Learning for Life

This is a pilot project that utilises performing arts processes and music skills development as a conduit for engagement and learning across the curriculum. This project purposefully integrates intensive music education in urban upper primary classroom programs. Research partners are the NT Music School of the NT Department for Employment, Education and

Training, the Learning Research Group of Charles Darwin University, Arts NT, and two urban school communities with very high Indigenous enrolments.

Originally the project focused solely on the literacy and numeracy outcomes of an arts-infused curriculum for Indigenous students in urban upper primary classrooms. The student target group is Indigenous learners with very low levels of English literacy, and numeracy. The study uses qualitative as well as quantitative data to reveal learning outcomes, innovative school interventions and teaching-learning practices. The results are still emerging and data analysis is at an early stage, however, it has now become clear that the learning communities model of professional development employed to support the classroom intervention has the potential to produce unexpected outcomes for teachers and the school community in general. Through practitioner partnerships with an artist and an arts educator this research project provides an opportunity for participating teachers to build understandings, confidence and competencies in arts pedagogy and to effectively demonstrate explicit links between the arts, literacy and numeracy.

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2. Western Australia

Western Australia established a collaborative research partnership between the Department of Culture and the Arts, the Department of Education and Training and the University of Western Australia. The study complements discrete arts and education initiatives and research into creative and critical thinking currently being conducted by the partners. The research aims to establish a body of evidence with a Western Australian focus that begins to measure the effects of participation in arts programs during the middle years of school, especially with students considered to be at educational risk.

The Department of Education and Training estimates that at least 20 percent of its classroom population may not be developing the understandings, skills and confidence to achieve their individual potential, that is, they may be classified as "students at educational risk"(SAER). Ethnic origin, culture, socio-economic status, physical ability, intellectual ability and/or psychological disorder *may* operate as indicators of SAER but the focus of this research is generally on a sense of alienation from the values of the school.

The researchers are seeking to discover to what extent an arts education program, especially where there are links to our creative community and professional artists:

- has a positive effect on motivation for students, especially students at educational risk
- establishes a lifelong valuing of the arts
- fosters a sense of community place and a deeper commitment and engagement with all learning opportunities.

The researchers are gathering students' comments on their own progress and changes in attitude and learning, conducting discussion groups with artists, teachers and students, analysing teachers' reports and documenting evidence of the learning environment. They are estimating student progress against outcomes described in the WA Curriculum framework.

Data is being collected by conversational interviewing of students, classroom observation and document analysis through student diaries and portfolios. Focus groups of teachers, artists and students have been conducted to determine the experiences of the participants. Follow-up will be conducted with one-on-one open-structured interviews with artists, teachers and students where discrepancies occur.

In January 2003 letters inviting schools to submit an expression of interest to participate were sent to 41 schools which met the three criteria of middle school, likelihood of students being at educational risk and having an arts program. Ten schools that demonstrate differences in socio-economic status, art form, status of artist, are both inner and outer metropolitan and regional, are currently participating. Focus groups have taken place with participating teachers.

The results are already demonstrating emerging themes of increased self-confidence, perseverance at task, ability to take risks, ability to work collaboratively, and pride in artistic achievement.

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3. New South Wales

New South Wales initiated a collaboration between the University of Technology - Sydney, the NSW Ministry for the Arts and the NSW Department of Education and Training. The study has identified two primary schools in 'at risk' areas - one in the Sydney metropolitan area and one in regional NSW - and is looking at the impact on an intensive art-based program on the experience of middle school-aged children.

The research aims to:

- determine the extent to which an arts intensive program within 'at risk' middle school aged children impacts on their school experience and learning
- test a range of arts interventions to determine the characteristics of quality interventions within the Australian middle school context
- use the data gained as a pilot study to assess a range of intervention strategies to be trialed Australia-wide into the impact of arts-based education within 'at risk' learners in the middle school years.

These aims will be achieved through research design that investigates the following questions:

- What happens if children are given an arts-rich curriculum?
- Which of the arts interventions and implementation strategies offered are of the most benefit?
- How does this method of collaboration forge the strength of partnerships?

Both of the intensive in-school arts programs have progressed well and had a positive impact so far on the teachers, children, parents and artists. All have embraced the projects with strong support and enthusiasm. Impacts include: professional development for teachers; ongoing teacher support to teach in and through the arts; children showing greater confidence, pride in their work, less aggression and displaying greater body awareness and social cohesion; increased parental involvement in school activities.

The data collected so far provides rich material for assessing both the impact on the school community and the children's responses as a result of the arts program, and on pilot testing the comparative benefits and applicability of various arts interventions. The further aim is to select the most successful arts interventions and implementation strategies, and then make recommendations to trial these Australia-wide in future research.

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4. Queensland

The Queensland project is a partnership between Arts Queensland, Education Queensland and Queensland University of Technology. The Queensland partners have investigated the role of the arts in the lives of young people (9-15 years) particularly those from "disadvantaged" environments in Queensland.

Three key research questions have informed the study:

1. How do the arts fuel an innovation culture?
2. What contribution do the arts make to the public good?
3. How do children (9-15 years) from at-risk and disadvantaged populations become enculturated in the arts ?

The project team adopted an ecological framework for examining the ways that schools and communities deliver arts opportunities to the target population. They collected baseline data through a statewide school survey and case studies undertaken in remote and Indigenous communities, urban corridor communities, a rural community and with a touring arts organisation. This allowed for diverse quantitative and qualitative perspectives with multiple voices and views on arts and education.

The extensive data has now been analysed by statisticians and the research team and the report will be finalised in July 2004. The report will provide an invaluable tool in identifying areas of need/potential development, the scope for pilot projects and data upon which to base longitudinal studies in the future.

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