

Promoting the Value of the Arts (PVA) 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 achieve PVA goals. The council is now working with state, territory and commonwealth governments to expand the important links between education and the arts in Australia.

As a result of discussions at the *National Seminar on Education and the Arts* in February 2002, six research projects are now underway. 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.

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 new research on the value and impact of arts education in schools. This joint venture was a major outcome of the National Seminar on Education and the Arts and is a positive step in developing a strong collaborative partnership between arts and education agencies of the commonwealth government. The evaluation looks at the impact school-based arts education initiatives have on student learning outcomes, including students of Indigenous, disadvantaged or at-risk backgrounds.

In particular the project will:

- 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.

The research is being conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). ACER are evaluating four key arts education programs in schools around the country, and expect to be completed by December 2003. The four programs being evaluated are:

- 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.
- The Northern Territory Indigenous Music Education Program – an Indigenous instrumental program reaching into more than eight remote community schools.

- SCRAYP – Youth Arts with an edge: Footscray Community Arts Centre, Victoria – a youth arts mentoring program that enables young people to access the arts and connects them to the world of real work.
- Learning to learn through the [Arts@Direk](#) Primary School, South Australia - the focus of this teacher mentoring and research program is to enhance practitioners' understanding of the power of the expressive arts (visual arts, music and dance) in children's learning.

The findings of the evaluation could shed new light on the interrelationship between arts and other areas of curriculum, and on the potential that the arts have to enhance the individual development of school students. The final report will be available soon.

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

The University of Tasmania is undertaking this research with the Australia Council as its industry partner. Funding has been provided both by the Australian Research Council (under its Linkage Projects Scheme) and the Australia Council, under its Promoting the Value of the Arts Strategy.

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 research 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 (current) phase of the research the team is visiting non-school sites nominated by Youth Arts Officers and children participating in the school-based interviews. They are visiting 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, using cutting-edge research techniques, 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.

Stage one of this project is now almost complete with a report due in April 2004. An article describing the first stage of the project is available at <http://ijea.asu.edu/v4n4/>.

C. EDUCATION AND THE ARTS PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE (EAPI)

Under the education and the arts initiative emanating from PVA, 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. Their research projects, which use a number of methodologies, including data surveys and evaluation of in-school arts programs, cover the 2003 school year. Findings will be available in 2004.

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

This project, entitled *Music for Learning for Life*, aims to provide evidence of and recommendations for best practice in urban mainstream classrooms that include Indigenous students who are speakers of English as a second language (ESL learners). Project partners are Northern Territory Music School, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET), Centre for Teaching & Learning in Diverse Educational Contexts (CTLDEC), Northern Territory University, principals, staff & children of participating primary schools; Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA) committees of participating schools and Arts NT.

This project embeds musical experiences and skills development for learning across the curriculum, purposefully integrating intensive music education in the classroom program to actively engage year 6/7 Indigenous students.

Two urban schools (in Darwin and Palmerston) have agreed to participate in the study, both of which have high numbers of Indigenous students enrolled. These schools are in communities that often demonstrate high levels of family dysfunction and distress.

The program involves the children in a wide range of musical experiences and skills development, including song writing, instrumental and vocal improvisation, music analysis, performance and music technology/recording.

Education practitioners are exploring explicit links between literacy, numeracy and music education, as well as the effect the music program has on school attendance, classroom participation and student confidence. The target group for the project is Indigenous ESL learners. The project supports key objectives of other current NT arts education strategies.

Preliminary results so far at both primary schools include: increased school attendance for many students in the target group; increased participation in classrooms; increased confidence and increased involvement of families in students' learning. The project is also producing good results in terms of its impact on teachers, with greater planning and reflection on teaching practices.

This project is due for completion in August 2004.

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 measurable 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 monitoring school results in standard reports through the Curriculum Framework, 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 on video.

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 will be 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. Nine schools indicated their willingness to participate. Focus groups have been scheduled with participating teachers. Artists in residence programs are scheduled to commence in term three in the participating schools.

The research team will collate the findings of the research early in 2004 with a report due in late February.

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 trialled 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.

This project is due to finish by June 2004.

4. Queensland

The Queensland project is a partnership between Arts Queensland, Education Queensland and Queensland University of Technology. The Queensland partners will investigate the role of the arts in the lives of young people (9-15 years) from disadvantaged environments in Queensland. The methodology is to conduct four case studies to identify the qualities and characteristics of exemplary arts programs selected from diverse communities across the State.

The project aims to:

- form a research partnership within Queensland arts and education sectors
- identify the qualities and characteristics of exemplary arts programs in "at risk" schools/communities for children in the middle years (grades 4 – 9; ages 9 – 15)
- identify the characteristics of arts education that build strong relationships between students, schools and communities
- collect baseline data on student achievement as measured against QSA Arts syllabus outcome statements and other performance indicators; and
- identify the outcomes and benefits for 9-15 year olds' participation in the arts.

The study is acquiring and analysing a body of information on both student participation and achievement in the arts, and the influence of the arts on young people at risk in the middle years of schooling. Survey data and case studies provide diverse perspectives on the systems necessary for supporting education in the arts: i.e. the structures, processes, attitudes and benefits of an arts education.

13,300 questionnaires have been posted to state schools for data collection, with returns currently being evaluated. The project team began work on case studies of two schools in August, with two further schools to be selected at a later date. The research team has been provided with specialist training to undertake the qualitative elements of the study.

This project is due to finish in March 2004.