

Professional Development for Multicultural Arts Workers

Critical Issues for Action



(Photo: Federation Day, Sydney, 2001)

- Executive Summary
- Contextual Overview
- Research findings
- Selected themes for professional development
- Outcomes



Andrew Jakubowicz
University of Technology Sydney

Email: A.Jakubowicz@uts.edu.au

ISBN : 0 642 47236 X

March 2001

Executive summary

Context: The arts environment is increasingly affected by globalisation. Government has become more aware of the implications of these cultural flows and has committed itself to Australian multiculturalism as a philosophy of practice - linking cultural inclusiveness to the particular qualities of Australian diversity. The Australia Council policy on arts in multicultural Australia expresses this commitment.

Research: The reality experienced by multicultural arts workers and organisations points to training needs that will sustain their active participation in creating a diverse arts practice. Apprehension still exists as to the effectiveness of the policies that government has espoused, particularly in a context of changing funding structures and a recent history of perceived public and government hostility to multicultural policies.

Professional development themes/ SWOT¹ analysis: Arts practitioners have identified professional development needs that include skill development in business, communication, marketing, and organisation and audience building in a multicultural Australian community. A SWOT analysis confirms the priorities emerging from field research and suggests both content and delivery strategies for professional development. Confidence building strategies, through supportive and informative networks, emerge as a priority across the country.

Outcomes: The range of needs requires the development of a national learning network that can sustain local hubs, draw on formal program materials as well as new material emerging from the field, and ensure a role for reflective work-based learning. New online learning environments will aid this process. Professional development will become part of the support available throughout the working life of arts workers and administrators.

¹ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. One method to analyse a current situation.

Contextual Overview

The Australian arts environment has been increasingly transformed by the realities of globalisation, through the acceleration of trans-border flows of cultural workers and cultural ideas and production. Globalisation holds challenges, and opens up new possibilities. It can threaten local cultures, or facilitate their creative interaction with the world. Multicultural Australia has been a product of globalisation with all its contradictions.

While the last quarter of the twentieth century marked a maturation and recognition of the multicultural nature of Australian society, in which the arts played an increasingly prominent role, the new century offers exciting opportunities and challenges in realising the complex multi-layered fabric of Australian cultural practice, and its place as part of Australia's presentation to itself and to the world. Indeed, there are clear signs that the re-invigoration of the arts has been driven by the acknowledgment of the value of cultural diversity. The critical role to be played by culturally diverse arts practices in this revitalisation has now been recognised - the task is to ensure that this recognition is transformed effectively into arts outcomes.

The rapidly changing environment has been influenced by a major Australian government statement on multiculturalism, and a series of significant commitments by the Australia Council. Overall, the effect of these initiatives has been to construct a firmer framework for support for the arts for multicultural Australia, and thereby to underpin developments within the arts communities. In particular, the strategic planning process undertaken by the Council during 1999 and into 2000 has established the broad directions and dimensions for change, that the Council is now moving to support.

Following a period of national debate over multiculturalism and its place in contemporary Australia, the National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMA Council 1999) proposed that the government should assert its support for the concept of Australian Multiculturalism. As part of this process, the NMA Council also recognised the role of cultural production as a crucial element in the communication within and between communities, a position formally accepted by the government (Australian Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 1999). The government's recommitment to multiculturalism has been crucial as a guarantee for the implementation of policy in the arts.

Information from wide-ranging social and industry research has reinforced the directions undertaken by the Australia Council in its Arts in a Multicultural Australia (AMA, November 2000). Australia Council has asserted its commitment in the context of research into arts and the Australian people (Costantoura and Saatchi and Saatchi Australia 2000). That study proposed that "The Australian arts' should represent a point of pride for all to recognise our collective national talents". Furthermore, it argued that the image of the arts should be

promoted "as tolerant of differences between all Australians", reporting that the second most important factor which people identified as making them feel more positive about the arts (67%) would be 'more multicultural events and activities'. The report made specific mention of the need to 'promote the expression through the arts of Australia's national origins', noting that people from non-English speaking backgrounds expressed more positive views overall towards the arts. Arts activities "should be delivered with relevant content and context to appeal to people with varied backgrounds".

These are all findings and recommendations that bolster the claims of the multicultural arts community for a more central place in the arts environment. Critically, the Australia Council has recognised its important role in enabling the multicultural arts community to realise the potential it has, and play its part in the expansion and flourishing of the arts. This recognition is given practical expression through the publishing of the Arts in a Multicultural Australia policy² (Australia Council, November 2000), the title reflecting the subtle shift from the former Arts for a Multicultural Australia. Implicit in this shift lies the belief that the role of the arts as part of the creative 'production' of a multicultural society has moved now to a recognition of Australia as a multicultural society in which the arts play a role in communicating the society to itself and the world. The Council expresses this perspective in its AMA goal - "The Australia Council values the traditions and capacity for innovation that exist in Australian multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and encourages the creativity and artistic expression resulting from this diversity".

While this range of government and Council statements indicate that the institutional atmosphere has changed substantially since the late 1990s, when multiculturalism was seen to be under attack and policies lapsing, there is still substantial confusion and unease about the meaning of current policies. Many multicultural arts groups have expressed a sense of anxiety and frustration about the hostility they identify around them. They also recognise that the conditions of support are changing, and that their survival and success will depend increasingly on their capacity to operate in a much less defined environment. Central government support for the arts has declined, and there is now a multiplicity of local and state government funding sources. Many of these have voiced an expectation of commercial viability and popular success of projects they fund - and public sentiment seems to support them.

In this climate of change and reassessment, the Council issued a discussion paper in February 2001, looking at the future (Planning for the Future, Australia Council 2001). It reported a primary concern across all art sectors of

² Council has adopted a long term framework of strategies for the Arts in a Multicultural Australia. These are described in the policy document launched in November 2000. To join the AMA mailing list please email c.cmielewski@ozco.gov.au and view AMA on-line resources at www.ozco.gov.au/ama/resources and whats new.

the need for a greater level of engagement with the community, one that was characterised by diversity and difference. It proposed an artistic environment which not only encourages originality, diversity and innovation, but engages widely with the Australian community, capitalises on Australia's cultural diversity to create unique artistic outcomes and exploit globalisation, and assists the presentation of work in the artists' own communities as well as internationally. Despite more positive attitudes to the arts, people from non-English speaking backgrounds participate less in mainstream arts activities. This, coupled with findings that Australians generally have a desire for more 'multicultural arts' (Saatchi and Saatchi, 2000) - indicates unmet demand, and a desire for responsive arts activities relevant in a multicultural Australia.

In such a complex environment, with many challenges and opportunities, the Australia Council saw that ongoing professional development would be an increasing element in arts best practice. The capacity of arts workers to respond to changing circumstances, and operate confidently and competently, would require the building of new skills, and the revision and extension of well-established ones. Professional development would play an important role in ensuring that arts workers could take advantage of and contribute fully to the arts environment of Australian multiculturalism. Conceptually, arts in a multicultural Australia suggest that multicultural arts practices may chart the road for future directions for the arts - yet many multicultural arts practitioners still feel marginalised and devalued. As a consequence, their own self-esteem may be lower than the important work that they do.

Summary of findings

In this context, the research referred to in this paper, *Leadership program for multicultural arts workers*, (Positive Solutions, 2001) was designed to canvas arts practitioners and administrators working broadly in the arts for a multicultural Australia environment, and identify what their professional development needs might be. The report used three related methods - a mail survey (78 returns from 466 forms sent out - one in six), 26 qualitative interviews, and a series of group discussions in Darwin and Adelaide.

The picture that emerged indicated that training needs of respondents were set within concerns that reflected the broader contextual issues-

- a) Tension between so-called mainstream and so-called multicultural organisations, over what the point of critical action should be. Should it be on pushing mainstream organisations to build competencies and skills to include multicultural arts within their 'normal' work, or should it be on building the capacity of multicultural arts groups to sustain and flourish irrespective of the actions of the mainstream?
- b) The experience of applicants for funds from the Australia Council, when those assisted by multicultural arts workers as cultural amateurs, were more successful in garnering sustained resources, while those forced to

operate on their own, were more likely to express alienation from the Council and its procedures;

- c) The impact of an increasingly stressful funding environment, where the increased emphasis on commercial viability and private sector support, has highlighted the need for skills in fund raising, sponsorship and business development.

Professional development has been a recurrent issue for the arts community in Australia. It has its most poignant expression among more newly arrived ethnic communities, whose professional artists are often perceived by the Australian arts institutions as craft, folk or emerging artists, rather than arts professionals. Various strategies have been tried over the years to break through this barrier of exclusion, ranging from building development opportunities into community cultural funding, to the appointment of audience development advisors, through to the implementation of mentoring structures. However the recurrent challenge remains the resistance of some 'mainstream' arts organisations to the widening of their perception of audience and content to include new communities and non-traditional content. On the other hand, many arts organisations that have sought to become more inclusive have been limited by lack of resources or skills.

The issue for the Australia Council is thus to envision a development response to this multi-layered situation that is sensitive to the realities of the arts environment, addresses the problematic context of multiculturalism, and delivers tangible benefits to the arts administrators who, as more than have indicated, are fed up to the teeth with surveys of their situation which do not result in outcomes.

If we identify the outcomes they want to see, we can start to clarify the processes necessary to generate them.

In summary, the arts administrators want to be:

- more effective as strategic planners and organisational managers
- more effective at securing resources, through grants, ties to business and the community, and through sponsorships
- more comfortable in community liaison and cross-cultural communication
- more confident in providing advice to newly emerging groups about survival strategies and associated business practices
- more effective in negotiating with and entering partnerships with other organisations, especially if the administrators are from smaller multicultural groups, and they are approaching larger 'mainstream' institutions
- more innovative in building and maintaining audiences
- more successful in nurturing new talent and acknowledging professional minority artists within 'folk' practices

- more secure in access to up-to-date information about best practice, innovative ideas, sources of funding, and dependable mentors
- more confident in relating to the media and securing ongoing media coverage of their organisations' activities.

Selected themes for professional development

Respondents to the mail survey were asked to grade the importance they attached to various leadership skills, and also reflect on their current level of competence/ capability in these skill areas. The differences between 'importance' and 'current level' gave an index of the 'training need' on some 50 items. The results from this process provide strong indicators of professional development priorities.

It is worth noting that the return rate of 165 raises questions about who chose not to respond, and why. A number of possible factors can be identified:

- the survey form was too complex for many potential respondents, especially those for whom the issue of multicultural arts were not seen as important
- the issues associated with arts for a multicultural Australia were not a priority
- the survey was seen as geared towards telling the respondents what to think and do, and to assert policy goals of the Council, rather than serve the needs of the respondents
- there was still an environment of cynicism on the part of respondents as to the commitment of the Australia Council in terms of multicultural arts (the research was done prior to the November 2000 launch of the new policy)
- issues of professional development were not of immediate concern, and the time required to respond to the survey could be better spent on more pressing matters.

Each of these possible factors was identified in the qualitative discussions, and could be deduced as affecting the return rate. This was also born out by the identification of the highest current capability as 'cross cultural skills'. However, this being said, the survey does reflect the situation of particular respondents for whom multicultural arts issues were important; for whom Australia Council policy and its effect on access to resources was a major issue; and where professional development questions (especially associated with organisational survival) were at the forefront of concern.

While professional development was an issue for concern for administrators and animateurrs, it ranked well below desire for greater effectiveness in key responsibility areas, as a focus for their attention. The 'top ten' items where importance and capability were mismatched (ie. importance higher than capability), were (in order):

- a) sponsorship,

- b) information technology knowledge,
- c) business planning,
- d) knowledge of local region or market,
- e) marketing planning and strategy,
- f) contractual and legal matters,
- g) philanthropy and fundraising,
- h) government funding and grant applications,
- i) strategic planning, and
- j) finance planning and control.

The three items judged the 'most important' were:

- communication skills,
- project management, and
- self organisation and time management.

The three items in which the current level of capability was highest were:

- cross cultural skills,
- training and development, and
- communication skills.

SWOT Analysis

Communication skills in relation to organisational development and survival appear as the focal point for professional development, while the capacities people would bring to that situation would be cross-cultural communication skills. This communication nexus - a perceived hostile and difficult external environment being approached with skills more relevant to local communities - provides a setting for an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the field (SWOT analysis).

While SWOT analyses are rather crude tools, they do allow the development of the parameters for strategic planning in professional development for arts in a multicultural Australia. The data from the research enable a charting of these elements. The first 'couplet' (strength/weakness) applies to perceptions within the organisation, the second (opportunities/threats) to the environment in which they operate.

Strengths

Multicultural arts practices and organisations have undergone a number of decades of change and reformulation, since the first central government involvement in the late 1960s in a community arts context. This then developed into the priority listing of Arts for a Multicultural Australia across all art forms

in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and then the 'mainstreaming' of policy from about 1994.

The practitioners had built their skills through voluntary and community work, some formal education, and ongoing interaction with colleagues. Their self-perceived primary strengths related to their professional activities - the majority were 'animateurs', people responsible for creative initiation of activities and the production of events and programs. They saw their own strengths as lying in cross-cultural and communication skills, in their capacity to help in the training and development of other workers (and community members), in working with other artists and team building, in self organisation, in client and community liaison. Indeed the strongest area of capability relative to the importance of the role, was in training and development. While they spent a deal of time and energy on, and had expertise in their 'animateur' role, they did not think this role was as crucial to the survival of the organisation as fund raising.

The picture emerging then is of committed practitioners, many of whom not only work in the field for their organisations, but also as participants in the boards and management structures of other organisations. They represent a wealth of talent and commitment at the 'coal face'.

Weaknesses

Even though people working in multicultural arts have commitment and energy, they express concerns about the sometimes overwhelmingly difficult financial environment, and identify the changing operations of government funding bodies as a critical problem. In short they express attitudes and beliefs that suggest they lack confidence in themselves, and they feel isolated and unsupported. With the extension of free market approaches in government policies in support of the arts, and the pressure on funded bodies to build links with other sources of support, 'sponsorship' confronts most of the practitioners (especially those in managerial roles) as the priority they find themselves least capable of addressing. While in a sense this is a 'weakness' for the individual, it also reflects a rapidly changing external environment. There were few networks of support, and little energy or resource is available to build those networks.

The challenge of organisational survival is reflected in other areas of significant difficulty. Many organisations are small, and practitioners have to undertake many tasks - tasks which do not go away when the individuals are undertaking further training.

The participants recognise the potential of new media technologies to offer pathways to address their challenges, yet realise they are not always 'up to speed' on how best to use the new technology. There are apprehensions about

the 'learning curve' associated with new technologies. In addition, the techniques of planning and control of financial matters - intensified under new taxation regimes - intrude increasingly, yet few feel they have an adequate grasp of strategies to implement these techniques efficiently and effectively.

Opportunities

Given the energy in the field, and the expressed desire for support to enable arts practices in multicultural Australia to become more effective, an innovative and flexible development program would reap considerable dividends. Such a program would need to be flexible, use community learning strategies, offer the potential for longer term peer mentoring to continue beyond the period of any specific course, and utilise information technologies. The curriculum would need to bring together strategic planning skills, community development and cultural knowledges, and flexible learning strategies. The program would need to include work-based learning, appropriate release time for participants, and appropriate cover so that other work responsibilities do not simply pile up. Critically, the program would need to build networks of peer support, and facilitate the continuation of mentoring, and of group learning relationships after the formal training period had been concluded.

Where umbrella development groups have survived, they have tended to do so by a much more 'corporate' approach, building commercial ties with sponsors, and maintaining partnerships with 'mainstream' bodies in order to enhance the practices of those organisations and the sustainability of the ethnic groups. For instance, some multicultural arts organisations have adopted this approach successfully - and have also incorporated the building of peer networks.

Over the past few years, collaborative and flexible learning, the use of new media technologies, and mentoring strategies, have all been delivered in ways which allow activist practitioners, even those in rural and remote communities, to take advantage of the new opportunities. Such programs would also facilitate the dissemination by the Australia Council of its policy objectives and information about how to gain access to its support.

Threats

The environment for arts in a multicultural Australia has become even more challenging. The claim that Australia is now a multicultural society - not just in demographic but also in philosophical terms - changes expectations of arts practice. Long term cuts in government expenditure mean that competition has increased for limited funds, and those groups skilled in tailoring applications to the current priorities are rather more successful than new groups and those not skilled at working the system. The role of dedicated multicultural arts workers as 'animateurs', building confidence and skills in emerging communities, and for

developing minority group artists has been well documented. The decline in the numbers and spread of these practitioners, and their unequal spread, reduces the skill base in the wider community, and thus the competitive edge that might otherwise have existed.

Policy confusion also tends to demobilise commitment. While government has stressed its continuing commitment to multiculturalism, the investment frequently does not match the rhetoric. This raises a question as to the alignment between government statements and actual dollar investment. This generates significant consequences for the capacity and capability of smaller organisations to achieve their artistic goals, though it has increased the pressure on larger professional bodies and art form funding bodies to treat the reality of multicultural Australia seriously. In the longer term it may generate stronger and more resilient environments in the short term though the situation remains tense, with very little strategic networking available to practitioners who feel increasingly isolated.

Outcomes

Continuing professional education, training and development will become an important part of the overall environment for arts practitioners. The focus would be on the dividend from arts in a multicultural Australia, rather than the deficits of minorities to be compensated. In some cases, for individual artists, this may relate to refinement of skills and the extension of practice through the acquisition of understandings of changing technologies. More generally though, and even for individual artists, professional development will require attention being paid to a core leadership and business skills program.

Such a program would involve leadership and interpersonal skills, planning marketing and resourcing skills, and a series of technical skills programs, covering marketing and local knowledge, technical administrative skills, and project planning skills. Delivery systems will need to ensure the status and recognition of the program, the flexibility and acceptable cost of the program, and the continuing benefit of peer networking. The status issue is important, as multicultural arts practice is relevant across the field of all arts development, and will be most effective when the policy is incorporated as part of the core values of the whole arts community.

Ongoing training programs can occur within the context of industry training frameworks (such as Arts Training Australia), within the TAFE system, through commercial industry training providers, and through university continuing professional education environments. Each has its benefits and drawbacks, though it is clear that certification of outcomes, quality assurance, and the development of pertinent and appropriate learning materials and environments, are required. Given the barriers to learning identified by

participants in the research, work based programs that utilise information technology, place a high value on peer mentoring, and build a data base of information generated by questions raised by the field, should be given high priority.

Formal programs could be offered by one institution, or through a consortium of institutions. An inter-institutional program might offer on-line support for a series of locally delivered units, with on-going online support and local networks of peers. Some universities currently offer this service as part of many courses, both within the institutions, and for external study students. Participants could take elements of subjects, whole subjects or the whole program, over an agreed time period. The on-line support would offer archives of questions and answers developed by the field, on-line materials, topic forums, virtual chat, downloadable materials, and the potential for real time streaming of lectures etc. Organisations could decide to maintain a subscription to the information resources, or this function could be supported by the Australia Council. The program materials could also be offered in electronic format on cd-rom, where on-line services are limited, and where email might be the only function readily accessible.

The curriculum could involve the following elements:

'Planning and Development of cultural practice in a multicultural environment'

- incorporating strategic planning, resources (sponsorship, fund raising, grant applications etc.), goals clarification and program evaluation;

'Australian multiculturalism and arts practice'

- including audience development, cross-cultural collaboration, marketing across cultures, use of information technologies for arts practice, case studies in good practice;

'Cultural projects' -

- team based workplace projects, linking student/practitioners within and across organisations, in 'mainstream;' and 'multicultural' organisations if appropriate, including planning, development and evaluation.

One way forward, at the more formal end of the range, would be the development of a national certificate in multicultural practice in the cultural industries, in collaboration with appropriate state government bodies, educational institutions, and flexible education development and delivery organisations. The Council has already begun to canvas educational and training bodies in relation to their capacities to meet these outcomes. Such an approach encourages the formation of learning hubs. These would be the points within the networks for resources to be concentrated, where interaction would be most intense and most valuable.

This approach would overcome concerns of the limitations on current offerings,

which may be insufficiently responsive to cultural diversity and multicultural arts policies, and unable to offer longer term informal networking support. Successful participants would receive an appropriate certificate, which would be credited as a professional development achievement for the purposes of employment progression, by participating organisations. Moreover, the process of learning would be continued in informal and work-based settings, so that continuing professional education would be available throughout the course of their working lives.

Australia Council (2000). *Arts in a Multicultural Australia*. Sydney, Australia Council

Australia Council (2001). *Planning for the Future: issues, trends and opportunities for the arts in Australia*. Sydney, Australia Council.

Australia Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (1999). *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*. Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service.

Costantoura, P. and Saatchi and Saatchi Australia (2000). *Australians and the arts: what do the arts mean to Australians?* Sydney, Australia Council.

National Multicultural Advisory Council (1999a). *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards inclusiveness*. Canberra, National Multicultural Advisory Council.