

**Backing Our Creativity – National Symposium on Education and the Arts  
Victorian College of Arts, Melbourne  
14 September 2005**

**Brad Haseman Reflective Keynote**

***Card Sharps – Playing our Creativity***

*As delegates entered the theatre they were offered different playing cards with quotes heard over the two days written on them. Examples of the quotes include ‘my school wants instant results’, ‘exciting times ahead – Rod Kemp’, ‘teachers are apprehensive of the arts’. There was also a precarious looking house of cards on a table on the stage.*

**Brad Haseman:** When I began the task of preparing this reflection yesterday morning, I felt quite optimistic for this is the first national gathering of arts educators for many years and there would be much to say. However, by about four o'clock I was feeling overwhelmed because I'd heard so much, there were so many ideas and many important links were being made – there was almost too much to say! For some reason I felt as if I was being showered with playing cards and each one of them was an important trump. Showered with cards of different values, but they weren't all from the same pack - they weren't all from the same game. In one sense there is an over-richness of possibilities at this conference. Too many cards, too many games. So that's where the idea of the cards came from. On the cards you've received as you entered, you'll find are key phrases which you have exchanged with each other over the two days. You'll recognise them, you uttered them. So, there's a great richness in the range of ideas, concepts and practices that have been the pivots around which much of this conference has worked.

And while we're talking cards, one of the things that we're doing is building a house of cards – we've been making the arts education house and here it is! [*Points to the precarious house of cards on the table.*] And I've got to be careful I don't jump around too much because it would be a terrible thing if at the end of the conference our 'house of cards' fell over!

As a way of organising my thoughts on this conference, I'd like to continue this cards metaphor. I would say right from the outset, I find this task both exhilarating but also more than a bit daunting. I mean at one level, how can a single brain make sense of the richness of the presentations and the work over the last two days? There's a conceit in thinking that anyone can do that. Because I've been able to move in and out of sessions and I've been allowed to be rude, I've been able to snapshot the presentations which have been thrilling, without exception. This has been an extraordinary conference. And so here is my response to what you have all brought to the conference – the key issues which have arisen.

I'm going to use this 'cards metaphor' to organise these key issues. The first thing that we have to acknowledge is that we're in Australia and it's Australian arts education that we're talking about. And if we're going to play our cards, to promote this field, what suit would we want to select? Clubs? . . . probably not! What acknowledges the core of the arts education experience and will give us the greatest strength? Of course it has to be hearts, hasn't it? Of course for the domain of the emotions and feeling lie at the centre of the arts. But the arts are also about cognition and Roslyn Arnold and John Hughes talked about the relationship, the dynamic relationship, between thinking and feeling. Some of you will remember

Garth Boomer, that wonderful arts educator from South Australia who, many years ago pointed out that 'we think our feels' and 'feel our thinks'. So by claiming hearts, I'm not being exclusive and rejecting the rational or cognitive. Earlier today in a wonderful moment from that extraordinary keynote presentation, Allan Marrett said when he heard that music, he actually was moved to tears. We must never forget we do deal in 'hearts': that's part of what makes the arts so distinctive and earns them a unique place in the curriculum.

What are the 13 cards which make up the suit of hearts to be played by our arts educators? Let's start with the two of hearts. I think the two of hearts actually stands for the strength of arts education in Australia. The arts have been a key learning area for years now. We're at home in the new basics and in the language of productive pedagogies. We're across the generic capabilities and there is a sense in which the arts play a key role in employability skills. All of this has been said at this conference. It is clear too that there is a respect for all of the existing art forms and for emerging creative practices. The good thing here is we haven't fallen for that three card trick of fighting among ourselves. I haven't heard, in any presentation, squabbles between the art forms. No sense of one form advancing its agenda at the expense of another. What I've heard is the recognition and the importance of all the arts, the importance of all these symbolic languages - the symbolic orders which make up the arts.

This takes us to the next card in our suit – the three of hearts. This card's power lies in the fact that for us the purposes and potentials of arts education are now clear. There's been a lot of work done on this for a long time and the benefits of the arts

have been mapped in detailed and convincing ways. We're across this. We know the worth of the arts and we know their value to education and learning. It is also clear though that we need to toughen our research around these matters.

Empirically we need to become more muscular and there's a great need for us to become methodologically stronger in the way we make our knowledge claims. As part of that we are clearly going to need new research strategies which actually capture the textures, rhythms and efficacy of what arts educators do. This is a particular priority at this moment of evidence-based, policy formulation. We need to ensure our research provides us with the evidence we need to prosper.

The four of hearts is about the robust intellectual architecture which is now in place around arts education. Much has been done and over a long period. That's not to say new breakthroughs are not going to happen, but we can be confident we're not on shaky ground. We've grown up on a heritage of Emmanuel Kant, Ernest Cassirer, Louis Arnauld Reid, Suzanne Langer, Robert Witkin, Elliot Eisner, Peter Abbs, David Best, Ken Robinson, Howard Gardner, Robert J Sternberg, John O'Toole, Maxine Greene, Warren Lett and Lee Emery. We stand in a great, rigorous, intellectual tradition which provides the completed conceptual architecture for what we do. We can be confident about it and be empowered by it.

The five of hearts is our partnerships card, and this conference has shown how powerful we are at this. In the two days of this conference, we've identified and secured benefit from the following partnerships:

Arts education in formal and informal settings with artists, with learners, students, teachers, researchers, co-artists, teacher-artists, artists and teachers from many different artistic disciplines and practices and forms. We've looked at arts in camps, in museums, children's arts spaces, in festivals, in operas, in non-traditional sites, in early childhood, primary, secondary, higher education, in school, out of school, with students at risk, with different ethnic groups, with different class and cultural backgrounds, with a focus on entrepreneurialism. We've discussed arts ed in different systems and different organisational systemic structures to deliver, small events, large events, elite artists, international collaborations, domestic intimacies.

The range leaves us agog.

The six of hearts from this conference acknowledges the notion that the dimensions of our field have expanded enormously. Remember all those debates back in the '80s about the arts and the four or five art forms which contributed to arts education? Well, the field of the arts has expanded markedly as Anne Bamford reminded us with her research where she gathered well over 100 different descriptions of creative practices which fall within the artistic domain. Perhaps not all of us would want to claim them all as art forms, but they're certainly creative and symbolic practices which are used to make meaning and build identity. One key phrase used at this conference to capture this diversity is 'the creative ecosystem'. I think this idea of us living in an ecology of symbolic forms is an extremely potent one. If we accept that we live in an ecology, and in that ecology there's opera and there's hair-braiding, then that erodes the high-low art debate. All practices make up the aesthetic field.

With this move, our understanding of what the arts are and what they may be has expanded.

The seven of hearts is a huge card. It's our pass card into the knowledge economy. It's the revolution that Ken Robinson talked about. There's no question about the importance of these developments in my mind, Castells talks about this, he maps it very well. It's the 'new economy', the 'network society', for Angela McRobbie, the 'culture society' and the Swedes call it 'the experience economy'. The information and communication technologies, the digital platforms are extraordinarily important today. And there is the power of creativity being the source of competitive advantage. And we bring understandings about artistic creation and production and can link them with this need for the country to pay its bills at the macro level. So I think there's an increasing recognition of the importance of creativity and culture and I think the sort of technological platforms that we're going to see developed, that Ken alluded to, will stun us.

And I think that creates a challenge for us which I've heard in two or three papers. How to build an innovative, creative workforce – how do we do that? It takes us back to graduate capabilities, but there's an edge to this. How do we build an innovative creative workforce and a co-creative market for the experience industry? It's not just audiences anymore. We are finding ourselves in a market which isn't about passive consumption any longer. Look at massive online game play – this isn't passive consumption. This is active participation and engagement in a complex set of aesthetic experiences. That's seven.

Eight for me is actually about the creative environments arts educators build. In schools, in partnerships. We've all heard them – they're among the most dynamic and exciting work places. We should meet that challenge by building the most creative environments where we work. If you're in a position of managing an environment, how do you make it a creative environment? And for all of us who aren't directly responsible, do we manage upward well? Do we work, to pick up Ken's challenge, to subvert those top down hierarchies? Do we seek active ways to break down turfism and siloism? How do we encourage risk taking? If we can't build really good creative working environments then a lot of what we're saying is rhetoric.

Our nine of hearts reminds us of the importance of professional development for our arts educators. The conference has detailed wonderful projects with clear insights into how professional development needs to work. The first is the notion that professional development needs to be both enlivening and enriching our passion for the arts and for education. Because finally, we're here because we're teachers, but there's something important too about how we always remain connected with the artform that brought us through that classroom door or studio. And we see these priorities reflected in student comments. Heather Smigiel and Margaret Barrett's paper today reminded us of students talking about the passion of teachers in the arts. We must get better at playing this card too for as Anne Bamford's figures show, most arts educators have less than three months training. We need to address this critical lack of pre-service education in the arts.

The ten of hearts relates to what I've called manners. Earlier today, Neryl Jeanneret made an interesting comment in her presentation. She was clearly frustrated,

resources had been cut. “You’re expected to do more with less” – that patronising directive from unimaginative bureaucrats (like we in arts education are bloated from too much fat in the system!) After telling of some quite shabby treatment, she said “I’m a little bit cross about it”. I can understand both the frustration and the irritation. Sometimes I wonder if we’ve been playing patience maybe too long. This work of ours has been pursued rigorously since the 1950s. For example it was in the early eighties when the Botsman review of Arts Education at the tertiary level took place – 1985 the report was published. We’ve had subsequent reports, we’ve had Gilbenkian reports, we’ve had . . . reports, services, inquiries, commissions . . . when will it translate into action? We’re polite, nice people who need to get a little bit cross when we’re getting endlessly put on hold!

I think it is Derrida who says there are times to ‘talk mad’. While I’m not suggesting we all rush out and start ‘talking mad’, talking ‘insane talk’, remember Martin Drury ‘talking mad’ about the abuse of the child citizen? These are things that need to be said. I don’t mean talking angry, but I do mean talking with a bold imagination in ways which arrest the attention. For instance, why isn’t someone saying to governments “Yes I think 80 per cent of the curriculum for arts education will be fine. Eighty per cent will allow us to teach the arts and meet an exciting range of cross-curricula objectives”. Yes let’s have the irrational, ‘mad’ talk to unsettle the culture of complacent impoverishment. We can be too patient. Of course, we must acknowledge that this is slow work (*gestures to house of cards*), the house is being built and yes it is slow work. But does it have to take so long?

In some card games the jack of hearts is a bower and so the jack can change suit; it can do all sorts of clever things. One thing that's come out of this conference for me is the way I hear arts educators talking about the need to change. Especially to do less, to manage expectations realistically and reasonably. While there's an expectation that we will give 'inspired tuition', as Robert Nelson called it, there are still expectations that we should do every damn thing, from painting a mural on the toilet block to the rock eisteddfod. Managing expectations. It was Martin Drury and Simon Spain yesterday who talked about this, about the need for us to not over claim or inflate expectations. Each of us need to learn how to play this card.

We come to the queen. This card pivots around our contemporary culture, where the students are, where the ten or fifteen year old brains are, and their hearts are. We have to deal with our discomfort as they unsettle our artforms – the ones we have trained in, feel secure with and love. I've heard all about this at this conference. About the openness and malleability of form and how that is capturing young people's attention. Interactivity is no longer mildly interesting for our students, they demand interactivity and participation. They seek new sites and new forms of cultural production and multi-platform delivery. These dynamics have been unpacked extensively including sessions this afternoon about image making via the information communication technologies. And of course hybridity and interdisciplinarity. This is the world of contemporary art-making. It is the world that our hip hop, manga, reality TV watching students live in. And it is all quite a way from Brecht, Bach or Balanchine. Or is it? How to manage these contemporary impulses and turn them to our advantage?

This takes us to the king of hearts. Our king is about openness. It is about how we can use our understanding of the openness of many forms of contemporary art and creative practices and bring that openness into closed classrooms. That actually is the radical prescription for education and we are able to play a pivotal role. That's why we need 80% of the curriculum, because our forms and processes actually contain the DNA of the radical formulation which education is desperately seeking. Now this is overplaying it I know, (so I wouldn't say that to anyone other than us here!) but the physics of contemporary art making is taking us towards what's needed to make a potent educational environment for today. One that leaves the industrial age behind and takes us into all of the promise and the threats and the challenges of the century we have just started. It calls on us to advance the things we take for granted within the education system. Enabled learners, presentness, makers and doers, for as Peter Wright and Robin Pascoe have made clear, ours is a genuinely aesthetically driven pedagogy. There is much we can do to teach our education systems about how this is done, for well managed 'openness' has to be present in an education system for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Now the ace of hearts. The ace card I think has got to mark the need for national coordination and leadership. This conference shows it's been long overdue. Long overdue. This has been a cacophony, an outpouring of work that we've been doing, of ideas we've needed to hear, of support we've needed to have. We need national leadership here and more. If the next arts education conference we have is in five years' time, we're in trouble. Maybe the Australia Council can take this leadership, maybe the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences will take this leadership, perhaps peak associations. But we have to bring pressure to bear to

make sure that we're not left out there doing all this work, all these projects, which are just contained and dissipated, and their impact diluted. In calling for coordination of national leadership, we have to acknowledge that we have a key role to play in this leadership function. We can be leaders in our own workplaces, with our own parents, with our own communities of interest, but we need national leadership to advance our cause on the policy front, to disseminate our activities, to set an agenda for the future. We must play this most important ace.

So as I see it, they are the cards which have emerged from this conference. I've no doubt missed things, for I didn't get to every session, but I think what the cards show is we are part of a rich and dynamic field, one with tremendous potential. But remembering how long it has been since we last gathered perhaps, in reality, this 'arts education house' is kind of shaky. By playing these cards right, we'll strengthen our house for the future. We mustn't have it blow over with the first puff of wind.

*[Blows house of cards, it doesn't fall]*

Maybe it's more robust than we all think! Play your cards well. Thank you.

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