



BACKGROUND

In 2004, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre's (QPAC) Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood formed a partnership with the Australia Council and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Education Early Childhood and Creative Industries Drama Faculties, to investigate how parents and carers of young children might be further supported to find 'entry points' in their encouragement of young children's participation, engagement and learning in the arts. The first phase of the action research project² investigated:

- How parents introduced their children to the arts
- How parents and children experienced the arts at the festival, and
- How effective the festival was in supporting parents at this important early stage of arts education and appreciation.

Informed by the analysis and findings from the action research project (2004), the guidelines are a distillation of the key factors identified as impacting on parents and caregivers who accompany their young children to arts-based experiences.

STIMULUS

The research and guidelines emerge from the arts and cultural practice emanating out of QPAC's Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood, the only arts festival in Australia and one of the few in the world catering specifically for children aged 3-8 years. The festival places children at the centre of all research and decision-making processes. These processes relate to the lives of contemporary children, in the abstract, from what they see, hear, and imagine, to the practical: how theatre spaces, artists and QPAC staff can manifest as child-centred in practice. At its heart the Out of the Box Festival is concerned with young children having authentic, creative experiences that give them opportunities to practice gaining control over their worlds and demonstrate agency, a critical life skill in the 21st century. By consciously supporting parents, children are enabled to deepen their engagement in and learning through the arts.

² McArdle, F., Tayler, C., Brennan, C., Richer, S., Mclean, J. & Weier, K. (2004). *Learning partnerships with parents of young children*. Research report 2004 Out of the Box Festival. Conducted in partnership with QPAC, QUT & the Australia Council.