

The Arts: In Schools: Beyond 2000

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Everyday we are involved, either directly or indirectly in arts-based experiences. We make decisions about what to wear, magazines and books to read, television programs to watch, movies to see, music to listen to, concerts, plays and performances to go to. We design, construct and decorate our homes, work and other built environments. We select from a multitude of products and objects which have been designed and produced to support our existence, make life easier, more convenient or aesthetically pleasing, or we make our own. We organise and attend a diversity of activities - festivals, birthdays, weddings, parties - to celebrate important personal, cultural, seasonal and social occasions.

These lived experiences present a picture of the arts as an integral, important and significant component of our daily lives. There are a number of reasons why this is so. One is that the arts are cognitively significant. Through arts practice and experience we are helped to 'know' about our world - we construct meaning, convey ideas and feelings and represent experience. Involvement in the arts demands that we use our perception, cognition and imagination.

A second reason is that the arts contribute significantly to our aesthetic, cultural and emotional life. They help us think about, feel, respond to and critically analyse life and life experiences in personal and individual ways.

Thirdly, the arts are culturally significant - they play a critical and pivotal role in shaping our sense of social and cultural identity. They help us to define, construct and articulate who we are both personally and socially. In effect, they operate as a special kind of communication system through which we can share meaning across different situations, cultures and societies.

Fourthly, the arts are socially significant. They operate as an interactive and dynamic social and cultural force which is available to everybody. Thus they play a vital role in the way in which we manage and enrich the society in which we find ourselves.

The arts also have an important and significant part to play in life beyond school: careers and working life. They provide us with the basic key competencies and general skills which are so valued in the workplace including those of problem solving, collaboration, planning and organisation, technological, communication, information and enterprise.¹

The arts in schools

Translating our understanding of the arts into the context of education and schools is a complex and difficult task. In addition to possessing an understanding of the arts as lived experiences and of their particular personal, social and cultural significance, it requires a knowledge of: contemporary curriculum issues and those relating to the framing of arts curriculum; a continuum of arts learning taking into account the nature of the student as learner; the role of the teacher; assessment practices; technology and the arts and literacy and the arts - all within a context of the ways, schools invariably operate.

1. Further information about the Key Competencies can be found by searching Education Network Australia (EDNA) which is on-line at <http://www.edna.edu.au/EDNA/>

In schools the diversity and complexity of arts experience and practice is generally channelled through five major arts subject areas: dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts. In reality, the divisions and distinctions between each of these arts forms are becoming increasingly blurred. However, in school-based arts programs it remains important to continue to acknowledge that each of the five arts form has its own unique set of characteristics and body of knowledge and even more importantly, to acknowledge that each makes its own distinctive contribution to learning. In a schooling context what this means is that one arts form cannot be substituted for another. In other words, learning about, in and through one arts form cannot be generalised into a thorough and informed appreciation and practice of another.

Contemporary Issues in Arts Education

The dynamic and ever-changing nature of the emphases, focuses and structures of contemporary Australian society needs to be reflected in arts curriculum. This means that in addition to taking direction from systemic educational priorities and guiding principles when structuring curriculum for a particular school context, arts teachers need to be responsive to recent and significant directions including

- the changing nature, purpose and aesthetic qualities of contemporary arts works brought about by the increasing use of new technologies
- the increasing focus on issues relating to multiculturalism and cultural inclusivity
- the increasing use of multimedia or multiple arts forms and emphasis on collaborative activity in contemporary arts practice
- the emergence of theoretical frameworks, including postmodernism, associated with the study of gender, race and culture which provide new, perspectives through which to understand and explain arts experiences
- the impact of communication and information technologies and globalisation of cultures

At a more general educational level, other areas requiring attention include

- the increasing emphasis on the identification of benchmarks and the achievement of standards
- the need to address issues relating to the arts and the world of work, career options and pathways
- the delineation of key competencies, particularly in the arts
- the requirement to include particular curriculum emphases such as literacy.

Framing arts curriculum in a contemporary context

In a contemporary context arts educators are encouraged to conceptualise arts curriculum around broad aims and objectives which include having students

- explore, generate and develop ideas; to bring into existence new arts products and to rework and transform existing works or ideas
- demonstrate acquired skills and the application of techniques and processes associated with each of the arts forms

- use, investigate and understand the use of new technologies and new media
- work collaboratively across arts forms
- engage in programs which are inclusive of all social and cultural perspectives
- demonstrate a sound grasp of the elements and features associated with each of the arts forms and the ability to apply these in both practical and appreciation activities
- demonstrate a capacity to perform and present arts works to a variety, of audiences
- understand the interconnectedness of arts works and the cultural context or their development and production
- adopt an investigative, challenging, questioning approach to arts learning
- investigate and consider the multiple meanings inherent in arts works
- discuss, analyse and research arts works critically and with appreciation
- demonstrate knowledge of the ways in which arts works vary according to cultural, social and personal contexts and the capacity to develop and present reasoned arguments about their interpretation and meaning.

Planning a Continuum of Arts Learning

The complex nature of arts learning and teaching means that the arts do not readily lend themselves to any one common description of a continuum of arts learning. With the necessity for schools to identify and report on student learning at all phases of schooling however, it becomes important for arts teachers to conceptualise curriculum as a continuum along which students' progress can be reflected.

By structuring curriculum around those elements which are intrinsic and common to arts learning and by making explicit learning objectives and expected outcomes, teachers can ensure that students have access to quality experiences at all points along the way. Importantly, the continuum of arts learning can be used as a reference point when determining pathways for students to pursue study in the arts areas of learning. Decisions relating to the equal access of all students, particularly in terms of gender, subject choice, career options and different needs and abilities can all be assisted by continuing reference to the key elements of the continuum.

Pre-compulsory years

It is important to acknowledge and build upon the arts learning that occurs in the pre-compulsory years. Here, teachers invariably provide learning opportunities which help children to explore a range of creative experiences including art, dance, drama, music and culture in which the focus is generally upon self expression, imaginative play and the development of aesthetic awareness. These creative experiences often form the focus for discrete arts activities or are integrated into teaching and learning programs.

Compulsory years

In the compulsory years, teachers generally find themselves planning around one or more of the five arts forms of dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts (art, craft and design) in association with the particular organisers or emphases which have been determined as important and central to arts learning.

The nationally developed statement in the arts ² identifies these organisers as *creating, making and presenting; arts criticism and aesthetics* and *past and present contexts*. These three organisers can be developed further to present a breadth and depth interpretation of quality arts teaching and learning which includes:

- exploring and developing ideas
- using skills and techniques
- presenting/ performing
- arts response
- arts context

The continuum of arts learning in the compulsory years needs to be framed so that the intended outcomes of arts teaching and learning are made explicit. Guidance in identifying the intended outcomes is provided by, the nationally developed curriculum profile for Australian schools ³ which offers snapshots of expected student outcomes along a continuum of eight levels of achievement.

An important element in the delivery of curriculum in these years is the provision of a balance of experience across the five arts forms. This can be achieved by offering students the opportunity to study, one or more of the arts forms over short or long term periods. Alternatively they can adopt an integrated ⁴ or cross arts approach whereby arts learning and teaching is incorporated into programs which focus on common topics, themes, concepts or processes.

Middle years of schooling'

There are some generalisations which can be made about students in the middle years of schooling ;which are useful to acknowledge when planning the delivery of arts curriculum at this level. One is to recognise that students in this group may be experiencing significant change including physical change; an awareness of sexuality and fluctuating emotions and behaviour patterns. Another is to acknowledge the strong influence of the media, peers and/or youth sub-cultures on individuals. With its focus on individual student learning, negotiability and flexibility, arts programs are well placed to accommodate the emerging needs of these young adolescents. The increased availability of information technology is of significance here in that it can extend student learning beyond the classroom thus meeting needs of the young adolescent who may be wanting to set life goals or is in search of individual identity. The collaborative nature of many arts projects serve as ideal motivators for students at this level who want and need to work in, and belong to, a learning community. In this context students can learn how to

² *A Statement on the Arts for Australia Schools 1994*. Curriculum Corporation. Australian Education Council, Carlton.

³ *The Arts: A Curriculum for Australian Schools 1994*. Curriculum Corporation. Australian Education Council, Carlton.

⁴ School-based examples of an integrated approach to arts teaching can be found in *Integrating the Arts: Twelve school-based examples*. 1996. DECS Adelaide, South Australia

become a member of a team as representative of society and to contribute effectively to the work of that team. The incorporation of the Key Competencies⁵ in arts curriculum can also be an effective focus for teaching and learning in these middle years.

Post compulsory years

It is important in the post compulsory years of schooling to ensure that arts curriculum provides pathways which are important to all students as learners and which at the same time take them beyond schooling. The focus for curriculum should continue to provide arts learning experiences which are authentic and relevant and which incorporate those general skills or key competencies which are valued both in the workplace and at higher education levels.

The role of the teacher in delivering quality arts programs

The skills, knowledge and experience of the teacher is a key feature in the delivery of quality arts education programs. Developing a personal view of, or philosophy of the arts can help in the development of arts teaching and learning experiences for students of all ages. Such a focus or emphases will reflect those experiences which are valued, and which it is believed are important for students.

Broadly speaking, teachers of the arts need to possess knowledge, skills and methodologies which include

- a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of relevant and contemporary arts education
- expertise and confidence to work in one or more of the arts forms of dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts
- the ability to identify the educational potential of technology-based multimedia in both arts and non-arts learning applications
- awareness and acknowledgement of the impact of new technologies on contemporary society and its reflection in the teaching and learning environment
- a repertoire of teaching and assessment strategies to cater for the needs of all students
- flexibility and the capacity to operate as mentor, guide, motivator supporting student learning
- sensitivity to the learning needs of different groups of students particularly those who come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds
- awareness of the different ways and rates at which students demonstrate achievement in the arts
- awareness of career pathways and competencies in the arts
- awareness of standards in the arts achievements of students gained through networking with others.

⁵ The Key Competencies include: Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information; Working with others and in Teams. Communicating Ideas and Information. Using Mathematical Ideas and Techniques; Using Technology. Planning and Organising Activities; Solving Problems

Assessment in the arts: Authentic Learning

The major purpose of assessment is to improve student learning by providing information which those involved need to know. Assessment should be an integral part of the planning process for arts teaching and learning. Assessment criteria should be made explicit at all times - students have the right to know what it is they are being asked to do and the criteria by which their achievement is being judged or evaluated. It is important to remember that what is being assessed is invariably reflective of what is valued either by the teacher, the school or the system.

Once the overall objectives: concepts, skills and processes-objectives of a unit of work or arts program have been determined, teachers can make decisions about and negotiate with students

- learning activities and tasks
- assessment activities or tasks and the criteria used to record or measure achievement
- assessment strategies to gather information including: observation, product analysis; peer or self assessment
- recording techniques
- links to declared achievement criteria and learning outcomes.

Ensuring appropriateness of assessment strategies and tasks

The assessment strategies and tasks can be examined to ensure the appropriateness of the tasks by asking

What is being assessed? What do I value?

- arts skills/techniques
- arts processes
- arts knowledge - language, terminology
- arts understandings
- ability to demonstrate personal response/appreciation
- attitudes / opinions.

How authentic are the assessment tasks? Are they

- helping to build a sound knowledge of arts concepts, skills and understandings?
- contributing to a continuum of arts learning?
- designed to result in quality learning experiences? More than just busy work?

What is the nature of assessment activities? Are they

- folios of works and preparatory materials, experiments, ideas generation
- oral presentations
- work diaries or journals kept by the students which include personal observations and comments on their own effort and achievement in the arts
- notated scores-both graphic and traditional for music and dance
- video and audio tape recordings
- anecdotal reporting records
- students' commentaries on their own work ie explanatory labels for art works in an exhibition

- literacy tasks: recount, response/review, report, exposition, discussion, explanation, narrative, procedure
- photographic records
- projects, researched essays, special studies, computer-generated presentations, web-page designs
- tests: teacher designed/standardised.

Ensuring assessment is inclusive of all students

Teachers can ensure the assessment strategies and tasks are inclusive of all students by asking

- are the assessment tasks appropriate in terms of gender, culture, class, background for all students?
- has sufficient consideration been given to their timing, length, status?
- does opportunity exist for monitoring both individuals and groups by a variety of indicators eg gender, ability, purpose?
- is there clear indication as to how this monitoring information is to be used? For student feedback? Reporting to parents? Curriculum review? Improving personal practice?
- do the assessment tasks cover the range of responses possible in arts learning ie practical, oral, physical, aural, written, technological?
- can all students succeed at all of the tasks? Are they being set up for failure?
- have the assessment criteria been made explicit? Will they provide information about what each student knows, can do, understand?
- has opportunity for both formative and summative tasks been provided?
- is there opportunity for peer or other forms of class and student assessment?

Making judgements about student achievement

The major focus for making judgements about achievement in the arts is generally centred around the five arts forms of dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts. Combining such judgements with decisions about achievement in pre-determined criteria will create a fuller picture of student achievement. The development of school-based assessment criteria which reflect the quality or degree of achievement such as in the development of rubrics further enriches the information gathered. These rubrics not only suggest the level achieved in relation to pre-determined learning criteria such as *Basic*, *Proficient* and *Advanced*, they also make explicit what each level means in relation to the predetermined criteria. For example, *Basic* could be explained as: student is progressing, but hasn't met all criteria expected. *Proficient* could mean that the student has met all expected criteria, whilst *Advanced* could mean that the student's achievement has gone substantially beyond what was expected.

Portfolio assessment is a particularly useful method for recording achievement in the arts as it has the potential to encompass the full range of assessment strategies including observation, product analysis, self and peer assessment.

The importance of new technologies in arts education

There is no doubt that new technologies, which collectively constitute a new genre of contemporary forms, are significantly and dramatically altering our social and cultural landscape. By international comparison, Australia has one of the highest take up rates of new technologies, particularly video recorders, mobile phones and personal computers. In 1996 it was estimated that two million households - 31% of all households frequently used a computer in their homes.⁶ This figure is expected to increase to more than 40 percent by the end of 1998.

In the educational sector, the take up of new technologies is no less enthusiastic. Here, the major focus has been to concentrate on providing schools and students with access to hardware and software. More recently this focus has shifted to finding answers to questions including 'Is technology really adding to the quality of teaching and learning for all students? If so, how? What sort of things do educators need to know in order to translate such knowledge in classroom practice?'

In the arts, there is little research or writing to provide guidance for teachers in their quest for answers to these questions. Although many arts teachers are already using new technologies in their teaching and learning programs, there are as yet, few widely available examples which have been documented to offer direction to school-based arts communities.

There are however, a number of advocacy arguments available which support teachers in the integration of new technologies in arts teaching and learning programs? These include suggestions that students need to

- engage with the unique and exciting forms of artistic expression made possible by the electronic media of today - computers, digital cameras, scanners, synthesisers, interactive multimedia, video and electronic stage and set equipment - since these deserve and require special attention to appreciate their special uses and relevance
- be given access to the new technologies in interpretive and expressive tasks in order to develop the skills of literacy which accompany a newly emerging technological culture including: learning to communicate and think effectively with electronic media tools; reading, using and manipulating the 'language' of these new technologies including sound, movement, voice, drama and text and being supported to critically analyse and make meaning from the messages inherent in the new media, just as they were with older media
- be provided with access to new technologies, particularly on-line information and communication technologies to explore cross cultural issues and engage with critical, social and environmental issues
- use information technologies ie Internet and email to work in a wide variety of collaborative partnerships

⁶ From: ABS: *Household use of Information Technology*. 8146 0.1996, pages 5 and 9

⁷ Two advocacy posters are also available. 1. *Technology and the Arts - Essential education for the 21st century*, available from the Australian Centre for Arts Education at: <http://education.canberra.edu.au/centres/acaec/policy/polgraphics/arts.html> 2. *Information Technology in the Arts* available from the Victorian Board of Studies at: <http://www.box.vic.edu.au>. This poster outlines how to use information technology to help students achieve the learning outcomes described in The Arts key learning area of the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework.

- consider and debate ethical and moral issues surrounding the use of, and exchange and communication of ideas, information, opinion; consider ways in which new technologies are rapidly altering existing concepts and practices relating to ownership, copyright, intellectual property, censorship, freedom of expression, gender and cultural bias, computer control vs human autonomy, individual privacy and control of personal information.
- participate in innovative arts curricula ie computer animation, desk-top publishing, electronic music, video, and multimedia production in order to train for the high-tech occupational demands of the twenty-first century
- learn to challenge and question the ever present argument that new electronic media, gadgetry and services will transform all of our lives for the better. Through critical analysis of cultural and technological issues students can engage in debate which allows them to argue for the human condition in an ever increasing technological world.

Literacy in the arts

There are a number of interpretations of literacy, which have been framed for particular use in an educational context. One that has particular relevance to the arts is that which adopts a functional or social view of language. This view emphasises the way, in which language is used to make meaning. It argues that literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It also involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing.

The focus of the functional view of literacy is upon the ways language enables people to do things: share information, enquire, express attitudes, entertain, argue, have needs met, reflect, construct ideas, order experience and make sense of the world. It is very much concerned with how people use language for real purposes in a variety of different situations. In this context, all of the exchanges, whether spoken or written, formal or informal are called texts.

In the arts, literacy means different things to different people. Certainly a functional view of literacy is directly relevant in that the arts are incredibly language rich. Students use language or texts all the time for all kinds of reasons including to: collaborate and exchange ideas; express and communicate concepts; articulate intentions; develop their skills and techniques; form questions and clarify concepts; make suggestions and contributions; refine ideas; give and take direction; integrate experience; develop their language in purposeful ways. They also use language to talk and exchange ideas with teachers, mentors, artists and others; to explain, give direction, express ideas, opinion to peers and for the integration of experiences.

There are however, many other literacies in the arts which go beyond using talking and writing, speaking and listening. These include those which are to do with the unique language of practice and experience of each of the five arts forms.

By and large the majority of these arts literacies currently go unacknowledged in practice. This is understandable since they have not as yet been identified and made explicit enough for arts teachers to incorporate into their practice. This needs to occur to ensure they form a focus for teaching and learning. As one writer argues:

We need to expand the boundaries of literacy to ensure that it includes multiple literacies, cultural literacies (our own and others), technological literacies

(*cyberspace and computer literacies*), *critical literacies and visual literacies, aural literacies and oracies*.⁸

The literacies which are missing are those which are unique to arts practice, expression and response. These include the literacies, 'language' or 'multi-literacies' of dance, drama, music, media and the visual arts which involve 'reading', interpreting or 'viewing' the texts which are unique to the arts including:

- human movement: facial expression, gesture and posture, whole body movements; relationship to and placement of the body in space
- sounds: subtleties, particular rhythms, beat, cultural significance
- energy: movement, sounds, timing, rhythm, beat, flow
- dramatic tension: posture and gesture, lighting effects, arrangement of human forms
- visual images and forms: the way they are organised or arranged, symbolism used, cultural and historical connections.

There are of course, many other arts literacies which can be added. The above list is just a start to identifying those literacies which are unique, intrinsic and particular to the arts.⁹

The arts: other curriculum areas and school activities

Using the arts as a starting point or springboard for learning and teaching is a valid means of constructing contemporary arts curriculum. For example, focusing on arts works and arts practice provides an ideal starting point in assisting students to understand traditional and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Asian cultures. Artists-in-schools programs, visits by community artists, arts administrators, workers in the arts industry or parents with arts expertise also provide starting points for quality cross curriculum activities to occur. Community arts programs in schools also provide ways for parents and communities to share learning experiences and school/community interaction through participation in the arts. In addition to sharing their own work within the school, visits outside the school brings students face-to-face with live performances, professional artists, original works of art, the work spaces of practising artists or 'behind the scenes' in television or theatre and in design studios etc.

In the secondary school, cross-arts experiences enrich arts programs and provide alternative or broader ways of understanding and participating in the arts. In many secondary and some primary schools and centres, significant opportunities exist for students to work with new technologies and multi-media on relevant and contemporary arts

⁸ From Alloway, N. Davies, B. Gilbert, P. Gilbert, R. King, D. (1996) *Boys and Literacy: Meeting the challenge*. Book 1 Introduction and Professional Development Units Canberra Commonwealth Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

⁹ Papers expanding on Literacy and the Arts in Dance, Drama, Design, Media, Music and the Visual Arts can be found on the Australian Centre for Arts Education website at: <http://education.canberra.edu.au/centres/acae/literacy/arts.html>

experiences. Work experience placements help students to gain significantly from direct contact with innovations and new initiatives in contemporary arts practice and the arts industry. Other arts experiences include student participation in local dance/music performances, choirs, concerts; designing for invitations, banners, posters and other community-based activities and functions.

Support Resources for Arts Teaching and Learning

- *A Survival Guide to the Internet for Teachers* 1997 DECS An interactive multi-media resource which assists teachers to understand the Internet and the potential for its use in the classroom.
- *Aboriginal Art and the Dreaming: Teaching about art, craft and design in secondary schools* 1994 DECS A text designed to assist art, craft and design teachers of Aboriginal studies in secondary schools to teach students about the exciting diversity of both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal visual arts.
- *Integrating the Arts: Twelve school based experiences* 1997 DECS A print resource which presents twelve case studies of school based experiences of using an integrated approach to arts teaching.
- *Profiling the Arts* 1997 Curriculum Corporation, Carlton. CD ROM Windows and Macintosh compatible. This multi-media resource serves as a guide to assessing students' achievements in the Arts. This interactive program provides numerous examples of student work. The work samples are examined in the context strands, levels and outcomes described in The Arts-a curriculum profile for Australian schools and its State and Territory equivalents.
- *The Arts on CDRom: Work samples from South Australian Schools* 1997 DETE An interactive multi-media resource (Windows and Macintosh compatible) consisting of work samples in each of the five arts forms which are presented in such a way as to assist teachers in making judgements about student outcomes and levels of achievement in the arts.
- *The Arts, the heart of cultures: Teaching for Cultural Inclusivity* 1997 DECS A video-print resource which models ways in which schools and teachers have used the arts in culturally inclusive teaching and learning programs.
- *The Arts: A curriculum profile for Australian Schools* 1994 Australian Education Council, Curriculum Corporation, Carlton.
- *The Arts: A Curriculum Statement for Australian Schools* 1994 Curriculum Corporation, Australian Education Council, Carlton.