

# Australian Education Review

## The Arts and Australian Education: Realising potential

Robyn Ewing

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# Foreword



*To be capable, it is to have a mind of many wonders.*

This statement is hard to surpass as a definition of capability, in a world in which change is the only constant. There is a new emphasis in twenty-first century education on the need for creativity and imagination – for learning to wonder about as well as to wonder at. The statement, made by an unknown Tasmanian primary student in the early 1980s, is reminiscent of an inspiring and popular publication on the power of drama as a pedagogy to engage and motivate students in their education (Morgan & Saxton, 1987). Nevertheless, the student’s statement is as imaginative as it was prescient, shrewd and eloquent. Identified as a child with learning difficulties and poor literacy, she wrote it as part of her response to encountering drama for the first time in her education (see Parsons et al., 1984).

Robyn Ewing’s *Australian Education Review* goes some considerable way towards mapping the actual and potential contribution of all the Arts to education. It identifies the opportunities and constraints in today’s landscape of education and schooling, in terms of philosophy, pedagogy, practice and the systems which implement all of these.

As a prelude to engaging with the review paper’s themes, and in order to refresh our own assumptions about, and attitudes to, curriculum and pedagogy, we might take a lead from the Tasmanian girl and briefly ponder, in a form she would understand, just what part in education the Arts are capable of playing and what part they do play in furnishing students with minds of many wonders, and thus in making them more capable people.

## *A fairytale*

*Once upon a time, all over the world, no children went to school, because schools hadn’t been invented. But children and young people still learned all they needed to become useful grown-ups in their community. They did this by listening to their elders, who told them wise stories and sang songs with them; together with the adults they danced and made music and performed the deep ceremonies and necessary lore and laws of the people; with the adults and each other they drew patterns and painted pictures and fashioned sculptures to create and communicate images and meanings; they invented stories that, although make-believe, were models of both the real world and other possible worlds – and they brought the models to life by acting them out. They learned by making artful and art-full*

*play, and from all these experiences, where the body and senses, the brain and the emotions were all working together in constructive harmony, they made order and meaning for themselves in their personal, relational and objective worlds.*

*Then as life for humans got more complicated, some very odd people invented a special place to learn, and called it 'school'. And the idea caught on, at least among grown-ups, who decided that in school, knowledge and compliance were the same thing. So they invented the Protestant Work Ethic, which divided work and play, and led to places for work called 'classrooms', where you learned sitting down – a good class was a quiet class, and play was left firmly outside in a special place called the playground where nothing important happened. The body and senses were ignored, and the emotions banished, and the brain was the only thing that counted. And they turned learning from a verb into a noun and called it 'The Curriculum' – a document in which what young people needed to know was all written down and could be carefully controlled, and what they did not need to know could be excluded.*

*The excluded bit included the Arts. This was because the odd grown-ups thought that music was noisy, the visual arts were messy, and that dance and drama were both noisy AND messy. If they happened at all, they were allowed to happen outside school time or on wet Friday afternoons. Their exclusion was also partly because another strange thing had happened in the world beyond schools. Proper Art had become something only for grown-ups, and could only be created by special people who had a gift from the muses and had to have special training, which of course was available outside the schools.*

Within the pages of this *Australian Education Review* are signposts which help us to decide how much truth we think there is in this fairytale. The review casts light on what can be done about the ambivalent and often muddled perceptions and understandings about the Arts and young people that are alive and well in schools and their curricula, and it tells us what some folk are already doing about the problems the tale describes.

Professor Ewing's arguments are focused on what the Arts can offer all children, not just the talented, and she also addresses the claims of arts educators about both the intrinsic benefits and/or the necessity of the arts, and particularly their instrumental purposes within pedagogy and curriculum. The thorough survey of the research and scholarship in the field is woven within a tapestry of descriptions of exemplary projects and programs, which not only illustrate her themes, but provide rich insights into the nature of the Arts, individually and collectively, their distinctions and commonalities, and their place in education and in the community more broadly.

The publication is timely, appearing at a unique point in the uneasy history in our society of the relationship between the Arts and education. It is a golden moment of opportunity for both, though a few might still see it as a threat. For the first time since European settlement, there is about to be a national curriculum for all Australia, and one which, for the first time, mandates the Arts of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts as a basic entitlement for all Australians.

This new arts curriculum is being shaped to re-assert some of those key principles which were embedded in the beginning of the fairytale: that experiencing the Arts is natural and necessary for all children and young people as part of their learning; that through the Arts they gain access to the real world and to other possible imaginative worlds, and make coherent meaning and order for themselves out of the welter of impressions and sensations bombarding them, from inside and out, before and from birth. The 2010 Shape Paper for this new arts curriculum further asserts that by firstly apprehending artistic experience through their bodily senses, their brains and their emotions, and bringing critical, cultural, social, technical, historical and other lenses in order to thoroughly comprehend the experience, students come to a special understanding – aesthetic knowledge – of the three worlds of

perception: the world of themselves ('me'), their world of relationships and their society ('us' and 'you'), and the world beyond ('it' and 'them'). The curriculum stipulates that all the five arts are to be provided: dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts have equal but distinct offerings to make to students' education, separately and collectively, and therefore all children will be equally entitled at the very least, to an introduction to all of them.

But these assertions raise broader questions about the whole national curriculum and about the Arts within it. Is a common arts curriculum for all children feasible? If it is, is this a good thing? Why those five forms, exactly? What do those five forms have in common? Why isn't literature included, to say nothing of more culturally specialised arts, or other activities with aesthetic components such as gymnastics? What arts are happening currently in schools and other learning contexts? Most important, what do any or all of these arts achieve for the education of young people, how do we know, and how can we improve on it?

Comparing this latest government curriculum with Australia's first, in Victoria in 1872, is revealing. Then as now, a debate raged in the United Kingdom and Australia about 'the basics', and whether breadth and depth in education were opposite or complementary – the latter claim led by a man who was both an Inspector of Schools and an artist, poet Matthew Arnold:

*Intelligent reading ... when children ... possess it they owe it not to the assiduity with which they have been taught reading and nothing but reading, but ... far more to the civilising and refining influences ...*

(Arnold, 1862, p. 220)

The Victorian Education Act's founding fathers may have been aware of Arnold's words, but they weren't overly concerned with the exact curriculum – they were so cock-a-hoop with their victory in getting legislation for a secular education system passed in 1872 that they hardly bothered about what actually got taught, just so long as it didn't include religion. The Act relegated the curriculum itself to less than half a page, in an appendix, with a curriculum based on seven-and-a-bit subjects. These were Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, Drill and where practicable Gymnastics; and additionally, for girls, sewing and needlework. (*Victorian Education Act: Schedule 1*, 1872). There was nothing creative in this list of subjects, and the Arts were not at all part of the package – for even the needlework wasn't there for its aesthetic qualities.

Interestingly, the new Australian Curriculum is still based on subjects – a decision which has been strongly questioned – and at its current stage there are still seven-and-a-few-bits subjects. They are English, Maths, Geography and also History (now we've discovered we've got one), Health and Physical Education (not technically one of the named subjects, but one of the extra bits), and two 'new' named ones: Science and the Arts.

Of course, this isn't 1872; a time when change meant social instability, and compliance was the duty of all classes, so that the last thing the 19th century power-brokers wanted from their budding workforce was creativity or independent thought! How different it is nowadays, when creativity has become one of the most desperately sought-after qualities for young people, both for the present and in the future. Professor Ewing's review paper comprehensively demonstrates that creativity is core business for the Arts.

Professor Ewing also maps the changes in arts curricula delivery from a past when a few committed schools and teachers always did teach the Arts, to how the Arts in Australia have made themselves increasingly significant down the years, especially in the last two or three decades, and now more than ever. But the position of the Arts nationwide is patchy – even in the two longest established art forms – Music and Visual Education – where the National Reviews of both showed clearly that there are arts-rich and arts-poor schools (Davies, 2008; Pascoe et al., 2005). A very few students have lots of opportunities in many arts; more have some opportunities in one or two arts; many Australian children get few arts or none.

Aesthetic knowledge is central to learning, understanding and enabling in our society. However providing aesthetic knowledge is difficult for schools and teachers, because it is an experience that engages the brain, body and emotions, all together in a range of symbolic

languages and forms, whereas orthodox schooling and particularly assessment systems concentrate on those cognitive aspects of knowledge that can be made explicit and learned propositionally, just in words or numbers.

Dealing with these issues responsibly demands that there be a priority on research and that research needs to be shared with practitioners and policy-makers. Research is a natural activity for scientists, but it is less of a natural activity for arts educators, who on the whole have been more preoccupied with arts practice and practical pedagogy, with sustaining and developing their right to be in schools. Although not well-known, there is research a-plenty already, both investigating the distinctive contributions made by each individual art form, and charting their common effects. This AER thoroughly reviews the research literature and the major movements in this research.

There has long been a manifest gap in mutual understanding between researchers and practitioners, which is only now being bridged. Twenty years ago there were few refereed arts journals (in some art forms only); arts and education training were both based in profession-focussed colleges not universities; the dominant education research paradigms were positivistic, and as such ill-suited to the complex, unpredictable and evanescent impacts of arts experiences; the Australia Council for the Arts had no brief for either education or research. Correspondingly, a grant for arts education from the Australian Research Council was almost unheard-of (and there was no ARC committee for Arts). As Professor Ewing's vividly described examples illustrate, there are today many arts-friendly research paradigms, and the arts education community is entering the research field with a new will.

When investigators are passionate about their research, there is a very fine line between research and advocacy, and this is particularly true in the Arts, with such a long history of pleading our case and producing a rationale for survival. Professor Ewing surveys the contemporary field in Australia and beyond with a sympathetic, engaged but critical scrutiny, in the process demonstrating, in exemplary fashion, how to tread that fine line. It is a valuable, timely, well-written, comprehensive and thoroughly researched document by one of Australia's foremost arts educators, herself a benchmark practitioner and experienced researcher. While she shares engagement in this arts field with the unnamed Tasmanian girl, in this review she writes with authority about education practice and research across the full range of the Arts. I commend it as both an absorbing and necessary read.

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# Setting the scene

The Arts have been in existence for as long as human civilisation. As a way of human knowing and action, they play a central role in the identities and cultural practices of all indigenous peoples. They are perhaps one of the defining elements of humanity for, as George Bernard Shaw (in Gire, 1996) wrote, 'the Arts are the window to the soul'. Nathan (2008) suggests that the Arts were created to communicate and understand emotions, passions, jealousies and enduring conflicts. She provides a number of examples: early cave drawings recorded historical events; pageants marked the passing of seasons and time; trumpets, piccolos and drums heralded battle. Birth and death were welcomed or accepted with song and dance. Theatre proposed solutions to life's dilemmas. Portraits of legendary kings, queens, villains and heroes were painted. She asserts that language on its own could never have communicated the significance of such critical moments.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted over 60 years ago, asserted that everyone has the right 'freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the Arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits'(General Assembly of the United Nations, 1948). Yet, in the latter part of the 20th century, particularly in western cultures and education systems, the Arts have increasingly been regarded as peripheral, relegated to the margins, the extra-curricular. Formal curriculum documents have focused heavily on literacy, numeracy and the sciences, and serious government funding for arts programs has been drastically reduced. In the last decade, however, some acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of the Arts has resurfaced, at least in terms of policy rhetoric. Arts experiences are frequently embedded in community initiatives, particularly for those regarded as being at risk. In the words of Maxine Greene:

*The arts, in particular, can release our imaginations to open up new perspectives, identify alternatives. The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomena; our encounters with the world become newly informed.*

(Greene, 1995, p. 18)

Others would add that immersion in the Arts can improve an individual's sense of enjoyment, purpose and identity, positively changing the direction of people's lives. The Arts, it is argued, by transforming learning in formal educational contexts, can ensure that the curriculum engages and has relevance for all children.

As momentum for the 2007 Australian federal election was gathering, Wesley Enoch, Indigenous director and writer, encouraged the then Shadow Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett, to allow the Arts (and in particular, Indigenous Arts) to show society a way forward. He argued the Arts were central in the health and vitality of any community (in Glow and Johanson, 2009), claiming that the Arts are often the generators of change, providing intercultural dialogue and provoking conversations that challenge the status quo and the 'saturated consciousness' (Apple, 1990) that becomes a malaise in any society. In that same year, *Australia's National Education and the Arts Statement* (2007) was jointly released by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and the Cultural Ministers Council. It asserted the following:

*An education rich in creative arts maximises opportunities for learners to engage with innovative thinkers and leaders, and to experience the arts both as audience members and as artists. Such an education is vital to students' success as individuals and as members of society, emphasising not only creativity and imagination, but also the values of cultural understanding and social harmony that the arts can engender.*

(MCEETYA and Cultural Ministers Council, 2007, p. 5)

The need for creativity and flexibility, coupled with the ability to solve problems, are 'must-haves' for those who wish to make sense of 21st century living as Wyn (2009) has strongly argued in a recent *Australian Education Review*. Nevertheless, recent figures demonstrate how little of this kind of rhetoric translates to action, at least in terms of state expenditure on the Arts. In 2008–9 an average of \$17 per person was spent annually on the Arts in New South Wales compared with \$32 in Victoria, \$38 in Queensland and \$55 in South Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

There is a general community need, as well as at all levels of schooling, to understand that cultural and social contexts shape and sustain and, conversely, inhibit the Arts. This review will demonstrate that the Arts offer both a lens into historical and contemporary social issues, as well as simultaneously challenging them (Gadsden, 2008). It will argue that arts processes can provide the potential to reshape the way learning is conceived and organised in schools and other educational contexts. The Arts can also act as a catalyst for personal and social transformation in schools and the community more generally.

In introducing this review of the Arts and education in Australia, the following vignettes, drawn from education programs that embed arts processes, demonstrate how powerful the Arts can be in changing the lives and life chances of children and young people.

## Arts-based programs – Vignettes

### *Kids of Survival*

More than 30 years ago artist and educator Tim Rollins started working with students from the South Bronx, New York, aged between 16 and 19 on an Arts and Literacy Project. Most of his students were classified as learning-disabled, truants or 'at risk'. He began by reading classic European and American literary texts to these students as they drew. Later they discussed their views on the book and subsequently they began to create their own art on pages of books which had been copied onto canvas. As Rollins has said, while the book is in one sense 'destroyed', it is also simultaneously 'honoured'. The students respond extremely positively to art and literary text when taught this way. Rollins is critical of the way he sees both art and literature being taught in many American public schools. A number of Rollins' students later became part of a regular group who participated in an after-school and weekend program called the Art of Knowledge Workshop. The students named themselves 'K.O.S' (that is, '*Kids of Survival*'). Rollins and the K.O.S. have exhibited all over the world and continue to work with disenfranchised and disadvantaged youth in many American cities.

*What we're doing changes people's conception about who can make art, how art is made, who can learn and what's possible, because a lot of these kids had been written off by the school system.*

(Rollins, 2008)

### *Reggio Emilia*

*Reggio Emilia* was developed in a region of the same name in Northern Italy at the end of the Second World War by Loris Malaguizzi and a group of concerned parents. This integrated approach to early childhood education places emphasis on the child as a capable, inquisitive, autonomous and active learner (after Dewey, 1934), and on the critical importance of the visual languages in imagination and learning. An expert art specialist whose role is to inspire the children to represent their learning imaginatively is always a collaborative team member. Children are encouraged at all times to make connections between the affective and the cognitive, and to express their ideas through drawing, movement and designing using different media. Although initially designed for young children, a number of primary and middle schools in Australia are now using the *Reggio Emilia* approach to the curriculum when undertaking multidisciplinary investigations around scientific and mathematical problems.

*The artists [in the Gifts of the Protagonists program] have brought their keen sense of colour, line, texture and aesthetics and knowledge of art media. A fundamental reason for putting artists and children together is that when they work together, the children learn skills and forms of awareness that occur only in the arts. They learn about the life of the imagination, how to be keen observers and appreciators of experience.*

(Artists at the Centre, 2007)

### *The Song Room*

*The Song Room* ([www.songroom.org.au/home/introduction](http://www.songroom.org.au/home/introduction)) currently provides 200 of the most disadvantaged school and high-need Australian communities with long-term music and creative arts-based programs. At the same time, its teaching artists also mentor classroom teachers, usually over a six-month period, and offer online teaching resources for member schools. Funding is provided by a range of government, corporate and philanthropic organisations and individuals. Four commissioned research projects are currently underway to provide both a comprehensive overall evaluation of the outcomes of *Song Room* programs, as well as separate evaluations of the programs in areas of high juvenile crime, in refugee and resettlement contexts and for disengaged Indigenous students.

*The Song Room vision is that every Australian child should have the opportunity to participate in music and the arts, and to help them learn, grow and become positive forces in their communities ... We help schools re-engage with their communities ... there are 700,000 children across Australia without teachers who specialise in music and the arts.*

(The Song Room, 2010)

### *Dance – The Next Generation*

*Dance – The Next Generation* (<http://www.sarasotaballet.org/>) uses the discipline of dance, the satisfaction of hard work and confidence building in an after-school dance-based program run by the Sarasota Ballet School in Florida, in conjunction with the University of South Florida. Up to 100 economically disadvantaged and/or at-risk children have been accepted into the program annually, since 1991. The aim of the program is to prevent at-risk children aged between 8 and 18 from dropping out of school. Each year third grade children from

targeted schools with an interest in dance are auditioned for entry into the program and attend sessions in classical ballet, jazz, elements of dance and composition. Some children who are judged able to increase the intensity of their dance training are promoted and granted full scholarships with the Sarasota Ballet School. Many who enter the program with poor grades and discipline problems develop into model students. Rather than dropping out of school, they achieve strong academic results. The current education director, Sayward Grindley, claims that the students develop self-esteem and interpersonal skills that help them overcome confrontational situations with their peers and adults, including teachers. Students who complete the seven years successfully are guaranteed scholarships to the University of South Florida to pursue their choice of any degree. Many of the students have achieved success in dance and other fields.

*When you see the students graduate after seven years of dance, discipline and mentoring, and loving support, they have been transformed. Most will not become professional dancers and that is not the goal of the program, but they will certainly be knowledgeable arts supporters and, most important, contributors to society.*

(Roucher, 2002)

### *UCPlay Project*

The *UCPlay Project* (<http://www.ucpla.org>) is the United Cerebral Palsy Los Angeles and Ventura County's theatre and drama program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or related developmental disabilities or difficulties. Established in 2008, the program is now offered to schools in the Los Angeles and Santa Monica Unified Schools District. The designer and director of the project, Australian actor and educator Olivia Karaolis, has designed a series of weekly thematic-based workshops which use a range of process drama forms and theatre strategies to foster students' joint attention (the ability to share an experience or object with another person), communication, engagement and ability to relate socially. The program also aims to expand the participants' interests, encourage their self-expression and celebrate their achievements. Karaolis wrote in personal communication to Ewing:

*The outcomes vary from class to class and I have different learning goals for each student. In my High School class for example, one of my aims for a particular student for the semester was to increase his involvement in a group activity from 2 minutes to 15 minutes. At no other time has he ever joined his peers in any collaborative learning experiences. After 6 weeks he was participating for the entire 40 minute class.*

(Ewing, data file, 2010)

In addition, teachers at the schools involved in the *UCPlay Project* are provided with professional learning and online support to enable them to provide creative activities for their students with special needs, problem-solving strategies and methods of authentic assessment. A *UCPlay Project* e-newsletter states that the vision is ultimately to build a community of educators who can provide students with special needs possibilities in education so they can lead a 'life without limits' (*UCPlay Project*, 2010). After a recent puppetry workshop and performance, one classroom teacher noted that these classroom experiences enabled the children to make connections about friendship in their daily activities, as well as talk about their drama lessons with their families. This behaviour is so important given many of these children have difficulty expressing themselves and connecting with others.

## Realising potential

The above examples are only a few of the thousands of programs and initiatives all over the world that strive to improve educational outcomes or change problematic social situations

through embedding arts experiences in formal or informal learning contexts. While they have varying specific goals and objectives, many of these initiatives are primarily concerned with children or adults considered to be vulnerable or ‘at risk’. It seems that the need for the Arts takes on an additional urgency where children and adults are experiencing difficulty.

Despite the importance of such programs to their participants and their potential generalised social impact, many of them have been initiated and are implemented by not-for-profit, philanthropic or charitable organisations, rather than governments. Perhaps it is because of these funding histories that systematic and long-term evaluation of such initiatives has not always been a major focus of these programs. Investing in independent evaluation of learning and social outcomes is expensive and can be challenging for program managers, so it has not always been routinely undertaken. The absence or inaccessibility of outcome-based evaluative reporting has represented a challenge during the development of this review paper.

This writer, after a professional lifetime in Arts educational work, has strong beliefs in the imperative of an arts-led curriculum, and this review paper will assert from the outset that there are at least two elements to the argument of the importance of the Arts in education.

The first element of the argument is to acknowledge the central, intrinsic role the Arts can and should play in the lives of all children and adults. This is the argument of the Arts for the sake of the Arts. The Arts enables an immensely rewarding way of human knowing and being – of imagination, aesthetic knowledge and translation and expression of ideas. The Arts, in this argument, must never be viewed largely as ‘instrumental’ servants in the achievement of other outcomes (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004). Nevertheless, the second main element, which is undergoing a renaissance worldwide, is the realisation of the potential for the Arts to foster the development of creativity and imagination and to facilitate social change. This potential, however, has not yet been realised in formal education contexts in Australia despite recent research undertaken by the Australia Council for the Arts (2010) that indicates Australians are becoming increasingly positive about the Arts and believe they should play an important role in education. Perhaps this is because up until the last five years, systematic, large-scale longitudinal research studies about the impact of learning about and through the Arts have been lacking in Australia.

## Uneasy relationship between the Arts and education

Despite their criticality in lives and learning, Professor John O’Toole, lead writer of the draft Arts Shape paper in the second phase of the Australian national curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010) commented at a symposium (O’Toole, 2010) that the Arts and education have often regarded each other with suspicion.

Several reasons why this may be so are listed below.

- a perception that the Arts represent a form of elitism only accessible to the highly educated
- the misconceptions or baggage from their own prior arts experiences that many teachers have
- a lack of confidence or expertise with particular or all art forms
- the dearth of quality and sustained pre-service and in-service arts professional learning for educators
- intense political arguments within and between the arts disciplines themselves, leading to fragmentation and loss of voice
- limited systematic large-scale research on the impact of the Arts on student learning in Australia as referred to above, leading to the impossibility of quantifying their impact (Mills, 2010) in ways preferred by governments
- the continued dominance of traditional academic curricula as the main passport for entering tertiary education.

The increasing emphasis on high stakes literacy and numeracy testing, the introduction of the *My School* website (<http://www.myschool.edu.au/>) and the inevitability of simplistic school league

tables as a result could also be contributing factors in the continuation of this ambivalence towards the role of the Arts in education. An exploration of the research into these factors and their possible impact on the provision of the Arts in Australian education will be a critical focus of this review paper.

While the centrality, autonomy and discrete disciplines of art-making processes must be upheld, this review of the research argues that consideration of artistic and educational collaborations should be based on purpose rather than constrained by separate discipline practice. This movement toward expansive, multi-layered, even organic, ways of thinking about the Arts and the ever-increasing number and diversity of art forms is seen by Gadsden (2008) as a shift in epistemological grounding away from the more traditional codifying of the Arts into discrete categories (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005) and past tendencies to oversimplify arts processes and products. The Council of the European Union, for example, endorsed a European Agenda for Culture in 2007, acknowledging the value of arts education in developing creativity and emphasising the importance of transversal key competences, including cultural awareness and creativity. This represents another important lens through which to view the Arts.

## Towards a definition of the Arts

There are many definitions of what constitutes ‘the Arts’. Bamford’s (2006) study for UNESCO makes a clear statement that, more than any other area, the Arts reflect the unique cultural circumstances of a nation. Her subsequent review of the Arts in Icelandic education (Bamford, 2009), noted that the Arts must always be characterised as fluid and dynamic. She asserts that it is impossible to give static definitions because as soon as these definitions are written, they are outdated. Thus, conscious of the ever-changing nature of contemporary arts practices, the term ‘the Arts’ has been used throughout this review paper to identify, discuss and represent some of the major creative disciplines. While well over a hundred creative forms have at various times been classified as ‘Arts’ (Bamford, 2006), this review focuses on dance, drama, literature, visual arts, music, film and other media arts, because it will be argued they should all have an important role in both formal educational contexts and in the community more broadly.

Although this review paper discusses the Arts collectively, the following disciplines have provided the focus and exemplars and are listed in alphabetical order to prevent perceived privileging of any one art form:

- Dance: dance performance, choreography and dance appreciation
- Drama: dramatic processes and performance, including storying, play-writing and dramatic appreciation
- Literature: imaginative writing including novels, short stories, plays, poetry and picture books that use evocative, expressive language
- Media arts: artistic and expressive elements of traditional and new technologies such as photography, film, video and digital animation
- Music: musical performance, composition and critical appreciation
- Visual arts: two- and three-dimensional art-making, including painting, drawing and sculpture and art appreciation.

The second phase of the Australian national curriculum includes Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts as strands in the Arts Key Learning Area. Literature is not included in the Arts Key Learning Area of the forthcoming national curriculum and is often missing from discussions about the Arts, even though it is the art form most Australians engage with (Australia Council, 2010). It is, however, a prominent strand in the English curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010). Such separation highlights the inadequacies of a fragmented approach to the formal curriculum and the importance of investigating ways to integrate across traditional boundaries. Literature has thus been included as an arts discipline in this review paper.

Each art form is a different language, communicating in its own mode with particular knowledge, skills and symbols. All art forms must therefore be studied for their intrinsic worth (Bryce, Mendelovits, Beavis, McQueen, & Adams, 2004), and each provides different ways of knowing (Habermas, 1972) and communicating. Goodman (1976) describes each artistic symbol system as being of special importance, for example, 'poetic' versus 'visual' versus 'gestural'. Different art forms need to be seen and understood as different kinds of literacies, thus expanding the more limited notion of multi-literacies that privileges words over other symbols (Livermore, 2003). Yet all involve some kind of play, design, experimentation, exploration, provocation, metaphor, expression or representation, communication and the artistic or aesthetic shaping of the body or other media. The paper, *Draft shape of the Australian curriculum: The Arts*, states that:

*The Arts have a special relationship with learning, in that the Arts can be learned and can be used as a tool by which to learn about something else. Fully understanding the Arts involves critical and practical study. Through critical and practical study students have the opportunity to explore, experiment, create, analyse and critique, and ultimately discover multiple meanings in artwork.*

(Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010, p. 3)

The Arts have the potential to promote self-understanding and illuminate the advantages of viewing the world from multiple perspectives. There is, therefore, a need for educators, arts practitioners and students to consciously explore the blurring of boundaries between the arts disciplines and to explore multidisciplinary initiatives, while maintaining respect for the integrity of each.

## Definitions associated with the Arts and education

A number of other phrases commonly used in the literature and throughout this review paper also need clarification (Bamford, 2006; Gadsden, 2008).

- 'Arts *and* education' is an overarching term that emphasises the equal status of both elements and the importance of acknowledging the reciprocity and interactivity of the relationship.
- 'Arts *in* education' and 'education *through* the Arts' both denote the centrality of engagement in the Arts and imply that arts strategies can be used as pedagogical tools to facilitate learning, to foster the capacity for creative and flexible thinking, as well as to provide a way of coming to understand and make connections across different kinds of knowledge.
- 'Education in the Arts' and 'arts education' underline teaching and learning *about* the arts disciplines and processes. Children can learn the different languages, concepts and symbols through which artistic ideas are expressed in the separate arts disciplines. They can also develop their own interpretive skills, expertise and understandings, as well as the capacity to appreciate others' different performances and expressive representations.

This review is most concerned with the first two definitions: the Arts *and* education, thus embracing the importance of aligning the Arts with education, as well as education *in* and *through* the Arts. To enable the interactivity of the relationships between arts and education to be balanced, and to ensure that the Arts are not seen as servants to other curriculum areas, it is, however, imperative that all schools have quality arts education programs.

## Creativity, imagination and the Arts

To define the Arts is also to define creativity and imagination. The most commonly accepted definition of creativity is the production of something that is simultaneously original or innovative and is also acknowledged as useful or of value by the relevant field or area. Hull and Nelson advocate the need to extend notions of creativity:

*... to seek a non-atomistic, combinatorial theory of knowledge that can account for the fluidity and flexibility of human thought and learning.*

(Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 225)

This extended notion is encapsulated in Messer's definition:

*Creative expression, in whatever form it takes, is a dance. This dance between conscious and unconscious, creator and critic, left and right brain results in something original and often surprising. This is not theory. It's a process I have observed in my own practice of writing and art ... [It is a] dance between innovation and logic – flowing, exuberant, expressive, joyful.*

(Messer, 2001, pp. 1-2)

Based on his study of 91 creative individuals, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) asserts that the role of joy and total absorption that consumes individuals engaged in the creative process or, 'in the flow', has been underestimated. He affirms that creative individuals are constantly curious, highly motivated, willing to take risks, possess the ability to think outside the square, to combine unusual ideas with more conventional ways of thinking, and to see them to fruition (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998).

Much of the research into the creative process has focused on the creativity of an individual. As Simons and Bateman (2000) point out, however, more and more 'collaborative creativity' is enabling significant new contributions to fields as diverse as medicine and theatre. In Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, interpersonal intelligence in its most developed form, is the

*... ability to understand, act on and shape others' feelings and attitudes.*

(Gardner, Kornhaber, & Wake, 1996, p. 211)

In the performing arts, well-developed interpersonal skills are needed to collaborate in creative activity, and this collaborative process is just as important as the final product. For example, consider the range of elements which together constitute the development of a script or dance: its interpretation in direction, the set design and discussion by the actors or dancers during rehearsal, the actual performance and the audience's response. Similarly, classroom process drama (O'Neill, 1995) enables a group of students working together in role to explore an issue or dilemma. They are undertaking a collective process of discovery (Burton, 1991). Thinking in the moment encourages many of the characteristics of creativity including lateral thinking, risking, a toleration of ambiguity and the putting together of ideas in unusual ways (Simons & Bateman, 2000).

The characteristics of creativity resonate strongly with how imagination is usually conceptualised by educators. One of the world's leading advocates for the importance of the imagination in education, Kieran Egan (2007), suggests that imagining enables us to think beyond actuality to possibilities. He regards it as the originator of invention, the novel and the flexible and he also underlines its role in rational thought. Over the last three decades Egan (e.g., 1988, 2007) has argued consistently that 20th century western education systems and curricula have neglected children's imaginations and consequently dulled their intellectual excitement.

When considering the links between creativity and imagination in the Arts, however, there is a general preference in the field for conceiving of it as an extended, multi-step process, rather than a singular epiphany, although flashes of random insight certainly do occur, sometimes as part of the creative process. According to Perkins (1981), people with creative dispositions or habits of mind are able to probe ideas more deeply, ask open-ended questions, seek multiple responses and listen to their inner voice; critiquing, reflecting and persisting.

### *Arts Corps'* key creative indicators

*Arts Corps* (<http://www.artscorps.org>), a Seattle-based organisation focusing on increasing students' access to quality arts programming, cites tolerance for ambiguity and the ability to think metaphorically as important capabilities in solving problems and fostering creative habits of mind. It lists the key creative indicators as:

- *Imagining possibilities*
- *Critical thinking*
- *Persistence*
- *Discipline*
- *Courage*
- *Risk-taking*
- *Reflection.*

(Seattle Arts Education Consortium, 2007, p.12)

This review paper argues that the ability to think in these ways should be an outcome of any successful education.

Creative thinking and the development of the creative sector in industry is now widely valued by the corporate world as well as the community more generally (Wyszomirski, 2004). She argues that this has resulted in a heightened political and economic interest in the Arts and culture. In her view this newfound attention to the Arts provides a striking departure from viewpoints common at the end of the 20th century when the Arts were often characterised as small, needy and only for entertainment. She explains that one of the reasons for the new emphasis on the Arts and culture lies in the development of the 'creative industries' and the new importance of intellectual property in the knowledge age.

Although it may seem to be counter-intuitive to measure creativity, Torrance's creativity index developed in 1958 (in Torrance, 1981) has been shown to be very reliable in the predictions it made about the children in the United States of America who had been identified in the late 1950s as creative, as their lives unfolded (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). Subsequent administration of the index to American children indicated that over the last four decades there has been a decline in creativity scores. Hours spent watching television and playing videogames are, rather predictably, cited as part of the cause of this decline. Lack of programs offering creativity development and reduced opportunities for exploratory play in schools and early childhood centres, are also regarded as contributors to this trend. Accompanying this is the longstanding evidence that young children who display surprising artistic competency can also lose it by middle childhood, if participation in artistic activities decreases (Gardner, 1989).

It does appear that too often western educational systems value a hierarchy of discrete subjects as part of the school curriculum. Mathematics and science are prioritised over humanities and the Arts. In the report *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, commissioned by the Blair Government in the United Kingdom, Ken Robinson (1999) emphasised that creativity and literacy are of equal importance, and proposed that fostering creativity in students would enable them to interpret and appreciate the real meaning of being literate and numerate. He also asserted that by adulthood many people had lost the capacity to think creatively so evident in young children. Robinson's findings about the importance of imaginative experiences in learning have been strongly supported in the recent comprehensive review of primary education undertaken by Cambridge University and overseen by Robin Alexander (2009).

At the *Australia 2020 Summit*, participants in the 'Towards a Creative Australia' stream emphasised the need for creativity to be at the heart of Australian education and society, as well as highlighting in the report the potential of the Arts and creative industries for future economic innovation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship were all seen to be related. While such an interrelationship may be generally supported, the conflation of the Arts with innovation in industrial and economic manifestations is conceptually problematic and this can be dangerous. Art does not and should not always be expected to make the leap into industry for the purpose of financial gain. Given that imagination and creativity are valued in societies characterised by accelerating change and new knowledges, it is not surprising that the importance of education about, in and through the Arts has re-emerged.

## Structure of this review

One of the reasons for the lack of prominence of both the intrinsic and transformative dimensions of the Arts in schooling may be related to how they are defined. Certainly disciplines that are grouped under the umbrella term ‘the Arts’ (signaled in this review by capitalisation), is ever-expanding and those disciplines that are taught in schools vary across the globe. This variance creates an uncertainty regarding what may or may not be included in a policy discussion on the Arts and contributes to a lack of clarity that has, arguably, undermined the field itself. While there is no question that the teaching of knowledge, understandings, skills and practices of separate arts disciplines is essential in the Australian curriculum, and will benefit every student individually, this review will focus on the centrality of the Arts collectively. It defines ‘the Arts’ as a way of knowing and learning, one that embodies play, inquiry, experimentation, creation, provocation and aesthetics. As such, arts processes should be at the heart of the formal or intended curriculum, embedded in pedagogy.

Section 2 considers both the international and Australian research on the impact of the Arts on learning, and considers the meaning of quality in arts education. Section 3 uses a number of exemplars to build, in part, on an earlier Australian Education Review (Wyn, 2009) which explored the demonstrated inadequacy of current approaches to schooling and education to fully equip many of its students for the flexibility and creativity they need in the 21st century. It argues that the Arts can be seen as critical, quality pedagogy. Using such insights in schools, however, creates a tension with the current fragmentation of the syllabus and the increasing focus on high stakes testing as a measure of educational success. Section 4 will examine, through several current case studies, how education through the Arts can be the catalyst for social transformation and inclusivity, building social capital and providing both the trigger for social reform and the means through which it can happen. Finally, in Section 5, the review will consider the implications for the Australian education context and make some observations about a way forward. There is a need to reframe both research and pedagogy in the Arts to focus on understanding the possibilities for learning and teaching in, through and about the Arts, in schools, but also a need to use the Arts as a catalyst for social justice in the community more broadly.

# The international context and Australia



While this review focuses on the Arts and education in Australia, much of the recent research in Australia derives from, and reflects prior research undertaken in other countries. This section thus examines some of the more pertinent international research in the Arts and education before exploring research undertaken in Australia over the last two decades. One of the key themes of both the international and national research, the notion of 'quality' in the Arts, is also examined.

## International research over the last decade

Internationally, the acknowledgement of the contribution that both arts in education and arts education can make to learning has been growing for a decade or more. This increased status is reflected in key policy documents in many western countries, although such policy recognition has not necessarily been translated into practice. For example, surveys of arts education in Europe (Taggart, Whitby, & Sharp, 2004; Sharp & Le Metais, 2000; Robinson, 1999) found that all national policy statements on education routinely emphasised the importance of the cultural dimension and the need to promote the artistic and creative abilities of young people. Yet in actuality the main disciplines taught were often limited to visual arts and music and were usually afforded less time and status than the sciences. In addition, arts subjects were usually optional after the first few years of secondary school in most countries and the lack of professional learning for generalist primary teachers was also a common lament. These provision characteristics indicate the shortfall between the rhetoric and reality.

UNESCO has led the development of policy initiatives in arts education over the last decade. In 1999 its director appealed to all stakeholders in the field of arts and cultural education to do what was necessary to ensure that the teaching of the Arts gained its rightful place in the education of every child (UNESCO, 1999). A world conference in Lisbon re-affirmed this need to establish the importance of arts education in all societies and led to two important publications: *The Wow Factor: Global Research Compendium on the Impact of the Arts in Education* (Bamford, 2006) and the proceedings of the Lisbon conference (UNESCO, 2006).

Participants at the 2006 World Conference on Arts Education *Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century*, in Lisbon asserted that arts education helps to:

- *uphold the human right to education and cultural participation*
- *develop individual capabilities*
- *improve the quality of education*
- *promote the expression of cultural diversity.*

(UNESCO, 2006, pp. 1–4)

Anne Bamford's 2006 study reported on the provision of arts curricula in 37 countries and organisations. Her report included 45 case studies. It aimed to provide an important overview of the research findings documenting the impact of high quality or, in her words, 'arts-rich' education programs on the education of children and young people.

#### Summary of Bamford's findings

- The Arts appear in the educational policy in almost every country in the world.
- There is a gulf between the 'lip service' given to arts education and the opportunities for it to be provided within schools.
- The term 'arts education' is culture and context specific. The meaning of the term varies from country to country, with specific differences existing between economically developed and economically developing countries.
- In all countries – irrespective of their level of economic development – certain core subjects (e.g. drawing and music – but also painting and craft) were part of the curriculum.
- Economically developed countries tend to embrace new media (including film, photography and digital art) in the arts curriculum.
- In economically developing countries far greater emphasis is placed on culture specific arts (e.g. stilt walking in Barbados, hair-styling in Senegal).
- There is a difference between what can be termed, education *in* the Arts (e.g. teaching in fine arts, music, drama, crafts, etc.) and education *through* the Arts (e.g. the use of arts as a pedagogical tool in other subjects, such as numeracy, literacy and technology).
- Arts education has impact on the child, the teaching and learning environment, and on the community.
- There is a need for more training for key providers at the coalface of the delivery chain (e.g. teachers, artists and other pedagogical staff).
- Quality arts education has distinct benefits for children's health and socio-cultural well-being.
- Benefits of arts-rich programs are only tangible within high quality programs.
- Quality arts education programming tends to be characterised by a strong partnership between the schools and outside arts and community organisations (teachers,

(Adapted from Bamford, 2006, p. 11)

Bamford's (2006) report for UNESCO clearly demonstrated the potential links between education and the Arts for individuals, societies and nations.

At the same time as these reports were published, three international bodies representing arts educators in drama/theatre, visual arts and music formed a world alliance (the International Society for Education through Art, 2006). The alliance called upon UNESCO to make arts education central to a world agenda for sustainable human development and social transformation. Most recently, UNESCO's Second World Congress on Arts Education in Seoul, Korea in June 2010 reaffirmed UNESCO's ongoing conviction that arts education has a critical role to play in the constructive transformation of educational systems struggling to meet the needs of learners in the 21st century. Such conviction is critical, given that on one hand we have increasingly sophisticated technological changes, while on the other hand, social and cultural injustices and inequities are escalating.

# Research on the impact of the Arts on learning

It is now widely documented in the United States of America, Canada and Europe, including the United Kingdom, that those students whose learning is embedded in the Arts (often called 'high arts students' in the American literature) achieve better grades and overall test scores, are less likely to leave school early, rarely report boredom and have a more positive self concept than those students who are deprived of arts experiences. In addition, interestingly, they are more likely to become involved in community service. Two important reports have been published by the Washington-based Arts Education Partnership: *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske, 1999) and *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Achievement* (Deasy, 2002). They provide convincing evidence of, and remarkable consensus on, the existence of a strong positive relationship between participation in the Arts and benefits for individual learners of an academic, social and behavioural nature, and thus broader social benefits.

Fiske's study for the US Senate brought together seven major independent research studies in a meta-analysis that highlighted the benefits of the Arts for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In one of these studies (Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999), the students with high levels of arts learning experiences in a sample of 25,000 students across the United States of America earned higher grades and scored better on standardised test measures than those with little or no arts involvement, *regardless of their socioeconomic background*. Learning through the Arts was also shown to improve learning outcomes in other disciplines. Students who were involved in music and drama achieved higher levels of success in mathematics and reading than those who were not. Fiske's findings published in *Champions of Change* indicated that the Arts:

- provide ways of engaging those students who were otherwise difficult to engage
- connect students to themselves, to each other as well as to the world
- transform the learning environment itself, and importantly
- challenge those students who were already successful.

Evidence on the benefits for children was found to be particularly overwhelming in the early years of schooling (Catterall, 2002). In addition, the Arts were also able to provide learning experiences for the adults/caregivers of these young people.

In *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002) provided a compendium of 62 research studies that explored the relationship between the cognitive capacities developed through learning and communicating in dance, drama, music and the visual arts, and students' academic and social skills. His major findings on the positive effects derived by those involved in arts-rich education programs included:

- positive achievements in reading, language and mathematics development
- evidence of increased higher order thinking skills and capacities
- evidence of increased motivation to learn
- improvements in effective social behaviours.

A third US report, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, reviewed a range of previous research reports, including published research about the benefits of the Arts, works of aesthetics, philosophy and art criticism and literature about arts participation, and multidiscipline conceptual theories that the researchers hoped would provide insight into how such benefits are generated. The report's purpose was to improve

... the current understanding of the arts' full range of effects in order to inform public debate and policy.

(McCarthy et al., 2004, p. xi)

McCarthy et al. delineated four kinds of provision of arts experiences in schools. They are:

- arts-rich environments
- the Arts as learning tools across the curriculum
- the use of arts experiences in non-arts classes
- direct instruction in particular art forms.

While it is useful to delineate these different emphases, it is also important to note that different kinds of arts experiences are frequently and obviously interrelated.

## Intrinsic benefits

The McCarthy et al. (2004) report also identified a gap in the research – the lack of a systematic appraisal of what they termed the ‘intrinsic benefits’ of arts experiences. The intrinsic benefits cited in McCarthy et al. include the following:

- the pleasure and emotional stimulation of a personal, ‘felt’ response
- captivation by an imaginative experience
- an expanded capacity for empathy leading to the potential for creating social bonds and shared experiences of art
- cognitive growth in being able to make sense of art
- the ability to find a voice to express communal meaning through art.

## Instrumental benefits

While describing the importance of these intrinsic benefits, McCarthy et al. (2004) devoted a great deal of time to mapping the ‘instrumental benefits’ of the Arts in learning that had been reported in empirical studies. These instrumental benefits were identified as cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural, health, social and economic. Although different benefits have been categorised separately, once again many are interrelated.

### Cognitive benefits

Cognitive benefits include the development of learning skills and learning how to learn. Improved academic performance and test scores, improved ‘basic skills’ specifically in reading and mathematics, and improved capacity for creative thinking are all grouped under this category.

Three important studies reviewed by McCarthy et al. reported findings of improved academic performance, especially for students with low socioeconomic status (SES). The evaluation of the Chicago Arts Partnerships Education (CAPE) (<http://www.capeweb.org/>) is summarised by Catterall and Waldorf (1999) in Fiske’s *Champions of Change* collection. The partnership developed arts-integrated curricula in 14 schools, in high-poverty neighbourhoods. The results found dramatic improvements in academic performance in these schools. Catterall (2009) also demonstrated that the effects of experiencing an arts education hold true within as well as between socioeconomic groups and that these effects are cumulative, increasing as students with lower socioeconomic status gain more exposure to the Arts. Heath’s (1999) study, with Roach, of the impact of community-based arts programs, in which performances were planned, created and presented, also showed that arts education effects are evident in students from low income communities.

Burton, Horowitz and Abeles (1999) found that students with more exposure to arts instruction had scores averaging 20 points higher than their less exposed peers on creative thinking measures, as well as fluency, originality, elaboration and resistance to closure.

### Attitudinal and behavioural benefits

Attitudinal and behavioural benefits that are grouped together include the effects of improved self-discipline and self-efficacy; and are associated with improved school attendance and reduced drop-out rates. Also included in this cluster of benefits are the development of life skills (e.g. better understanding the consequences of one’s behaviour as a result of improved empathy); the increased ability to work in teams; a greater ability to accept constructive peer critique; and adoption of pro-social behaviours.

## Health benefits

Health benefits list the so-called therapeutic effects of the Arts as including improved mental and physical health. This category is attracting increasing interest in Australia and overseas with a range of current projects reporting successful outcomes. For example, clinical studies have demonstrated that the onset of Alzheimer's disease can be delayed or the risk reduced through arts therapy (Vergheze, Lipton, Katz, Hall, Derby, Kuslanksy, Ambrose, Sliwinski, & Buschke, 2003). Soothing music, as developed by the *Hush Collection* (Children's Hospital, 2009) and clowning, as established by *Clown Doctors* (<http://www.humourfoundation.com.au/>) in 1997, are being used to calm children with cancer or undergoing painful procedures; and art therapy is being used with mental health patients. An evaluation guide for assessing the impact of community arts on community well-being was developed by Arts Victoria with Vic Health, Darebin City and the City of Whittlesea (2002).

## Social benefits

Many case studies explore the outcomes of community participants engaging in arts activities together to pursue shared goals. Ensuing social benefits include the creation of a sense of community identity, and the building of social capital and organisational capacity.

## Economic benefits

Studies about the economic benefits of the Arts are the most numerous and relate to employment in the Arts as well as the general attraction to places where the Arts are available due to an appreciation of the contribution the Arts make to the quality of life. McCarthy et al. (2004) argued that the contributions of both intrinsic and instrumental benefits of involvement in the Arts need to be better understood and recognised by practitioner researchers and policy-makers. They believed that intrinsic benefits play a central role in generating all the benefits that can be realised through the Arts.

# Caveats on research findings

A range of caveats can be found in the research literature to mediate findings about the benefits cited in the major reports quoted earlier. Perhaps one of the most often cited and serious caveat is that no common, systematic or longitudinal approaches exist for the evaluation of the impact of arts initiatives and programs.

In response to these concerns one must first recognise that the unique features of many arts programs, and how differently they affect participants in specific contexts, by their very nature, make comparisons of findings or replication across different contexts extremely difficult. It is this significant participant-based variability and attention to specific contexts that represent their strength as programs. It is precisely for this reason that case study methodology is often the most appropriate research approach, as it enables individual responses to be best reported. Where case study is the most appropriate methodology for a given study it should not be regarded as being of an inferior nature to other forms of research. Some of the caveat critique reflects a particular epistemology and hence, a preference for traditional positivist research orientation. As Fleming, Merrell and Timms comment:

*... extreme advocates of one or other research paradigm make mistakes about the nature of truth and knowledge.*

(Fleming, Merrell, & Timms, 2004, p. 178)

As in most social and classroom research, it is not always possible, desirable or ethical to establish a research control group to compare one group experiencing an arts program with a similar group who are not. Therefore, direct comparisons may not be possible or appropriate. Winner and Hetland (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of cognitive benefit studies during the 1990s and found that of 1135 studies reviewed, only 32 used a quasi-experimental design

criteria regarded as necessary for testing effects. Experimental or even quasi-experimental research designs are not well suited to assessing the impact of an intervention in classrooms.

Attributing a direct causal relationship between study in, through or of the Arts, and improved outcomes in other areas is problematic because there are so many other variables in classroom learning that cannot be controlled. While a correlation between arts involvement and certain effects in study participants has been established in a number of large studies, documented by Fiske (1999) and Deasy (2002), there is no demonstration that the arts experiences *caused* the effects. It is not possible to prove whether improvement in a test score is aided by the learning in an art form itself. The diversity of the Arts makes capturing the outcomes through conventional correlational studies problematic (Eisner, 1999).

There are no easy ways to measure the affective outcomes in most fields, and this is especially the case with arts-based programs where comparisons across time and between programs are chronically problematic. And as any researcher will attest, longitudinal studies in any field are very costly, and such funding is rarely available for research into arts-led programming, or indeed in most other educational research.

To date, the research on arts experiences has predominantly focused on the early years of schooling, particularly kindergarten (Catterall, 2002). This imbalance of work may be as a result of the relative ease of access to the younger cohort or that more arts programming occurs at that level of schooling. If possible, future research should be undertaken at the levels of middle and secondary schooling, in order to broaden evidence-based findings in the field.

It is understandable that the Arts find more affinity with qualitative research methodologies due to their ability to explore process and deal with the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the Arts. However the 'weakness' of qualitative methodologies is that they do not readily allow for generalising of research findings across projects. So a balance, and, where appropriate, mixed method research should be employed. Section 4 of this review paper provides details of several arts-based projects where a range of evaluation methodologies have been successfully utilised.

## Recent developments in arts research methodologies

Recognising these methodological concerns are not unique to research into the Arts, O'Toole, Stinson and Moore (2009) also refer to an increasing range of innovative qualitative research methodologies being employed in educational research. These are often more responsive and appropriate epistemologically to investigating paradoxes and conditional insights (e.g., Knowles & Cole, 2008, Ewing & Hughes, 2008). O'Toole, Stinson and Moore add:

*There is a lively debate in the academies about what extent art-making itself can be regarded as research, research-rich or research-equivalent, which has led to new forms of arts-based and arts-informed inquiry.*

(O'Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2009, p. 201)

Additionally they suggest, well defended metrics and statistics are much needed and possible in this field of research.

An increasing number of recent research studies have been constructed in such a way as to meet at least some of these caveats and concerns. Catterall's (2009) book, *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*, is one such example. His 12-year longitudinal national study of more than 12,000 students built on earlier research (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999) that had followed 25,000 children and adolescents involved in the Arts for four years. He used the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), a database of the US Department of Education that tracks student responses to survey questions over time, to follow the participants into adulthood. Additionally, statistical significance of inter-variable relationships was tested. These findings demonstrate that:

*... intensive involvement in the arts during middle and high school associates with higher levels of achievement and college attainment, and also with indications of pro-social behaviour such as volunteerism and political participation. In addition, arts-rich high schools benefit their students in unique ways. Then, in a specific probe, art-rich schools are seen to bear characteristics including a climate for achievement as well as instructional practices that may account for their advantages.*

(Catterall, 2009, p. i)

In reviewing the Catterall study, Brouillette (2009) notes that the insights provided about the way learning in the Arts transfers to other disciplines are particularly important. Catterall had discussed the mechanisms through which learning in the Arts transfers to other disciplines. For example, he looked at the relationship between music and mathematics. Later, Catterall also compared the impact of engagement in the Arts with engagement in school sports, and tightly controlled for socioeconomic status, by focusing only on schools with low SES. His analysis of the statistical data demonstrated that, while engagement in athletics also has positive long-term effects, there were far fewer differences between those students who were sports-engaged and non-sports-engaged, than between arts-engaged and non-arts-engaged students, on a range of academic and social indicators. Catterall also developed a scale of 'arts richness' based on individual school scores. Indicators of educational attainment and achievement were significantly higher for the arts-rich school participants. Second language learners particularly benefitted. This longitudinal study, with a large number of participants and a longitudinal database, adds substance to the claim that there is a strong connection between engagement in the Arts in schools and enhanced academic performance and social values later in life.

Despite some caveats then, a number of major reports have significantly raised the profile of arts and education across the world. A veritable explosion of arts partnerships across North America has resulted. Declarations about the importance of the Arts in education, about the rights of all children to experience both a rich arts education, as well as the value of integration of the Arts across the curriculum, have proliferated, exemplified by the *Arts for All* principles developed by Los Angeles County Board of Education.

### *Arts for All* principles

- *The arts are a vital and indispensable part of a comprehensive education of every student, fostering each student's development into a responsible citizen.*
- *A comprehensive education must include a balanced, sequential (K–12), high-quality program of instruction in the arts.*
- *Exposure to and participation in the arts has been demonstrated to enhance students' creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, as well as improving student performance in other core subject areas, goals often not met through other means.*
- *The arts enable students to build self-esteem and self-discipline, to work cooperatively within groups, and to effectively express themselves.*
- *Integrating the arts into other subject areas improves academic achievement, motivates attendance, increases test scores, promotes involvement, and encourages disciplined behavior.*
- *The arts contribute to building a productive and forward-thinking workforce by teaching skills and competencies required by an information-based economy.*
- *The arts serve as an essential bridge across language and cultural differences and build linkage, both within and between communities.*

- *Preparing general classroom teachers, credentialed arts teachers, professional artists, and administrators to effectively teach in the arts and through the arts is essential for successful implementation of the vision.*
- *In our media-driven society, knowledge of the arts is a necessary part of cultural literacy. Each of us is exposed daily to a myriad of images, which we must be able to read and discern if we are to make informed choices as consumers and as citizens. Fulfillment of the vision will have a positive impact not only on students, parents, and schools, but also on institutes of higher learning, the private sector, and the community at large.*

(Los Angeles County Board of Education, 2002, p. 6)

A similar emphasis on the Arts in education and arts education is also evident in Europe. In March 2009, the European Parliament passed a resolution on *Artistic Studies in the European Union* (European Parliament, 2009). Key recommendations on provision of arts programming included a number of imperatives. In summary they are:

- Artistic education should be compulsory at *all* school levels.
- Arts teaching should use the latest information and communications technologies.
- Teaching of art history must involve encounters with artists and visits to places of culture.

Several key international reports over the last decade have signaled that the Arts should be an integral part of students' education. In particular, they highlight the importance of arts-enriched learning experiences for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to mere provision however, the quality of such programs is critical (Bamford, 2006). An examination of what constitutes a quality arts program follows.

## Understanding quality arts education

Quality is a feature or attribute of something or someone; it also connotes excellence and subjectivity. Program quality is defined as being of high value and worth in terms of skills, attitudes and performativity. What constitute 'the qualities of quality' in arts education have been much debated because of their complexity and subjectivity. Arts education is also highly contextualised and inextricably linked to issues of identity, purpose and values.

### *The Qualities of Quality Project*

Prompted by a perception that arts learning in schools in the United States of America had been seriously devalued, a major study by a Harvard research team has recently been undertaken and its report published, *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education* (Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009). It addressed the multiple challenges of achieving and sustaining quality in K–12 arts education, in and out of school settings. The study's three critical questions can be summarised as:

- How do arts educators (leading practitioners, theorists and administrators) conceive of and define high-quality arts learning and teaching?
- What are the markers of excellence that are featured in the actual activities of art learning and teaching as they unfold in the classroom?
- How do foundational decisions, as well as ongoing day-to-day decisions, affect the achievement of quality?

In the early phases of the study, research with audiences helped distinguish between a work of art of high quality and a quality experience of that work. Researchers interviewed 16 leading arts theorists and practitioners, visited 12 exemplary arts programs that were nominated by practitioners (including some in schools) across a range media and settings. The research work also incorporated over 250 interviews and a review of the relevant literature.

Six central features (Deasy described them in his foreword to Seidel et al.'s report as 'touchstones of quality') emerged as common to the visions, values and purposes of artists and teachers in quality programs. A summary of these key features appears below.

## Key features of quality arts programs

- A personal, persistent and passionate drive or commitment to shape quality arts learning experiences. This shaping includes learning experiences *with* quality resources, works of art and accomplished artists and teachers, and experiences *of* quality interactions, performances and expressions.
- While differing in context, goals and art forms, quality arts programs can serve a range of purposes at the same time, because the learning experiences are rich and complex for all learners, engaging them on many levels and helping them learn and grow in a variety of ways.
- There are multiple dimensions of such quality learning experiences. Four lenses can be used through which to focus attention: learning (what students are actually doing), pedagogy (how teachers perceive of, design and implement their artistry), community dynamics (the nature of the classroom interaction) and environment (physical elements including time, resources and setting itself).
- Foundational decisions in setting up and deciding on an arts program do matter. These include who teaches the Arts, where they are taught, what is taught and how they are taught and assessed.
- While all levels of decision-making both outside and inside the classroom affect the quality of arts programs, decisions made by those 'in the room' (the students themselves as well as the artists/teachers) have tremendous power to support or undermine the quality of the learning experience. A non-alignment of ideas hampers the pursuit of quality arts experiences.
- Continuous reflection and dialogue about what constitutes quality and how to achieve it provides both a catalyst *for* as well as a sign *of* quality.

Study participants in the Harvard study (Seidel et al., 2009) frequently cited the following substantive characteristics of quality in arts learning experiences as being, including or generating the following:

- all-encompassing engagement
- involvement with authentic, artistic processes and materials
- an exploration of 'big ideas' about both art and human experience
- direct experiences with completed or in process works of art.

All of the themes and characteristics reported by Seidel et al. are also elements of the frameworks for quality or authentic teaching and learning, identified originally in the longitudinal research by Ron Newmann and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin in the 1990s. These elements have been more recently adapted in Australia, in *Productive Pedagogies* (Education Queensland, 2001) and the New South Wales quality teaching framework outlined in *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools: A Discussion Paper* (2003). The overarching themes and the broad characteristics of quality arts education identified in Seidel's report therefore suggest ways in which arts education can provide an excellent starting point to explore the meaning of quality in teaching and learning more broadly. Having considered some of the international arts education research conducted over the last decade, it is useful to briefly explore the role that the Arts have played in Australian education to date.

## A brief overview of arts education in Australia

Any historical overview of arts education in Australia must first acknowledge their centrality to the understanding of meaning in Australian Indigenous knowledges, cultures and learning.

## Arts in Australian Indigenous cultures and learning

Art is central to Indigenous culture and traditions. Indigenous Australians hand down their stories orally, through song, music and dance. These arts are important in religious and social ceremonies, men and women's law and funerals. Aboriginal artists signify rather than represent their world. This is why it is recognised that the Arts in Australian Aboriginal cultures are literate (as well as including other kinds of) practices, because they are symbolic and conceptual, and embed religious, social and ceremonial meanings (Freebody, 2007; Sutton, 1988). Sutton (1988) has also suggested that in Indigenous art it is the design rather than the object that is decorated or created. Given what the art itself signifies, the transition from body art to art on school doors and canvases is not particularly radical, though it is commonly described as such. In addition, Australian Aboriginal art traditions are commonly collaborative, conveying both the religious and cultural knowledges of a whole community.

Chatwin's (1986) description of Aboriginal 'songlines' reminds his readers of their centrality in telling the story of a place or a particular landform and its cultural significance. It was through song, music and dance that laws were taught and maintained. Songs evoked the imagined world and were an essential part of both moral upbringing and the passing down of heritage. Aboriginal social histories are still captured in songs and art that provide a link to the Dreaming and are connected to ancestral spirits. Wesley Enoch (see Archer, 2009) summed this up at the *Australia 2020 Summit* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) when he reminded the participants that nothing separates Aboriginal people from their art.

In a keynote address in 2009, Robyn Archer suggested that white Australia is not good at valuing the ephemeral or the spiritual in this way. She explained that by the time Europeans arrived in Australia they brought:

*... a sense that art was something produced by individual genius, to be consumed by those with good taste enough to understand it. For the rest, folk art and popular entertainment would be good enough.*

(Archer, 2009, p. 11)

The understanding that art needed to be at the centre of any society had thus been greatly diminished over two centuries ago. This devaluing continues to be reflected in the lack of a strong presence of government support for the Arts and of support for the role of the Arts in the formal and compulsory Australian curricula.

## Influences on Australian arts education

For the most part, arts education in Australian education has been heavily influenced by the British, and more recently the North American, traditions of arts education. It has never enjoyed large funding and has also often been piecemeal in government funded educational institutions. It is difficult to survey and talk generally about arts education in Australian schools, as teaching and learning in the Arts has mostly been restricted to provision in discrete discipline areas. Each state has responsibility for the provision of education so no national picture is immediately evident.

Despite an integrated and related arts movement in the 1970s and various individually funded 'artists-in-residence' programs and partnerships across the country, arts education in Australia has predominantly centred on the teaching of the music and visual arts disciplines. Vocal music education in New South Wales and Victoria, for example, dates back to the colonial and early years of federation with the appointment of singing masters. Stevens (1997) describes the origin of music education in Australia as essentially transplanted from the British. Specialist music teachers were appointed in secondary schools from the 1930s and the introduction of gramophones to schools at about the same time heralded the introduction of music appreciation as part of the music curriculum. Percussion bands followed. Kodaly (1974) and the Orff-Schulwerk methods (Orff & Keetman, 1950) had a profound influence on more

creative music making in primary classrooms across the country from the 1970s. Drawing, sketching and painting have also been longstanding components of the state curricula with syllabus documents in the Visual Arts available since the 1960s in some states.

In contrast, literature and drama were largely seen as part of the English or language curriculum. Dance, where it became part of the curriculum at all, has often been confined to learning 'social' or 'folk' dances, not creative dancing, and thus it has frequently been regarded as part of the physical education curriculum area. While drama and dance became part of the Victorian, Queensland and Tasmanian curricula in the 1980s, a Creative Arts syllabus which included drama and dance was not published by the New South Wales Board of Studies until 2000. Such was the discussion required for acceptance that it was nearly 15 years in the making.

## Approaches to arts education in Australian curricula

O'Toole (2009) has described three different approaches to arts education in western education systems, elements of which he has noted in Australian state curricula. The first is appreciation of arts heritage, where the Arts are conceptualised as the domain of those with particular talent and skills, and it is believed these chosen few will provide the society with its distinctive cultural artefacts. The second arts education approach O'Toole identified is one which aims to identify those students with artistic talent or potential with an ensuing focus on preparing those selected for future arts careers. Thirdly, and most commonly in Australia, is the desire to provide every student with the opportunity to make art as well as to present and appreciate it. Current state Australian curriculum documents anticipate that students will learn *about* art forms and conventions through actively engaging *in* arts processes and activities, as well as *through* appreciating the work or performance of others (after Abbs, 1994). Contemporary state syllabi have incorporated the full range of processes as components: making/creating, communicating/expressing, appreciating and evaluating. Often, however, these programs still display a tendency to focus on those students who demonstrate particular potential in an art form, showcasing their talents in end-of-year national, state and regional performances.

## Including the Arts in a national curriculum

The political wrangling during the 1990s in New South Wales over the priority to be given to several of the arts disciplines certainly contributed to the extended time frame that was required before a creative arts syllabus could eventuate in that state. To some extent, the arts specialist professional associations that have represented the different arts disciplines have weakened their own potential for arts advocacy by working separately. When a national curriculum was first discussed in Australia in the late 1980s, however, a National Affiliation of Arts Educators was established (1989). This group did work together to ensure that the Arts were recognised as one of the eight Key Learning Areas when National Statements and Profiles for the curriculum were developed in 1992. Even so the national curriculum was aborted largely as a result of state concerns about the potential for a 'dumbed down' curriculum at the time. The Senate Inquiry into Arts Education in 1995 further documented the concerns of many arts educators that the Arts were in danger of being restricted by the new emphasis on vocational training.

An investigation of how the Key Competencies (Mayer Committee, 1992) were realised in five arts areas (dance, drama, media, music and visual art) conducted a survey of 360 arts teachers in 103 schools, together with interviews at 14 educational and training sites. It concluded that teachers saw congruence between the key competencies and creative arts processes, at both school and tertiary levels (Livermore in Bryce, Harvey-Beavis, Livermore, & O'Toole, 1996). The report exhorted arts educators to:

... recognise and promote those outcomes of arts learning which have relevance in general education and which provide useful skills that will enhance employment opportunities for their students. Such an approach further strengthens the position of the arts in the curriculum. This project has shown that the arts could be central to students' development of the full range of generic competencies because they encompass practical, personal and interpersonal skills in a wide range of activities that are characterised by complex decision making and problem solving.

(Livermore in Bryce et al., 1996, p. iii)

Despite this early acknowledgement of the importance of arts education and the relative consensus about arts processes, Gattenhof noted in her keynote address at the *Drama NSW* annual conference in 2009 that:

*It seems like every ten years or so the arts have had to fight for inclusion in the development of curricula in Australia and within Australian states and territories.*

(Gattenhof, 2009, p. 14)

The initial projected plans for the first and second phases of the re-birthing of the Australian national curriculum did not include the Arts. But this time the re-named *National Advocates for Arts Education* lobbied hard, together with prominent actors and artists, until the announcement that the second phase of the new Australian national curriculum would include the Arts and the promise of an 'arts rich curriculum' (Garrett in Dow, 2009, p. 13). One of the most significant things about the advocacy for inclusion of the arts education in this iteration of an Australian national curriculum was a united stand by the various arts disciplines, which contrasted to the previous fragmented arguments for individual allocations for separate arts disciplines. At the time of writing this review paper, however, there is some re-emergence of the old fragmentation, with the assertion that some arts disciplines are more important than others (e.g. Thomas, 2010).

## Funding for the Arts in schools

To date Commonwealth and state governments have provided relatively little funding or resources to support the adequate resourcing of arts education. In addition, professional learning in the Arts for teachers to accompany the stated intentions of such documents – especially for those generalist teachers in the early childhood and primary areas – has been almost non-existent. National reviews of music education (Pascoe, 2007) and visual arts education (Davis, 2008) independently concluded that, although there were many individual examples of high-quality programs in schools, both areas were in crisis, with large numbers of Australian students missing out on effective music and art education because of inequity of access, inadequate resourcing and the lack of teacher expertise. Walker (2009) has also drawn attention to the differences in the provision of specialist music teachers K–12 in the more affluent end of the independent school sector, as compared with schools in state systems. The same argument could be made, across all the systems, for art, drama and dance.

In 2000 the Australia Council commissioned a study to investigate how much Australians valued the Arts. The report, *Australians and the Arts*, was part of a broader exploration of the Australian cultural environment. Those surveyed with higher educational qualifications had more positive attitudes to the Arts and 51 per cent of the respondents believed there was an element of elitism involved for those attracted to the Arts. Familiarity and knowledge of the Arts from childhood was also found to relate to positive attitudes towards the Arts as well as participation in artistic activities in adulthood. The report suggested that the Arts needed to be more accessible and relevant to everyday living. In particular 'average' Australians were identified as missing out on this education, including men and boys; those in rural and regional areas; those on low incomes; and those with less formal education. In 2010 market research undertaken for the Australia Council for the Arts, *More Than Bums on Seats: Australian Participation in the Arts* reported much stronger support for the Arts existed in the community, with nine-tenths

of more than 3000 participants over 15 reporting some engagement with the Arts (most often literature or music). Those less engaged were likely to be those born outside Australia and of a non-English speaking background, those who were seriously ill or disabled, or those living in regional or rural Australia.

By 2007 the respective federal and state ministers for Education and the Arts through the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) had agreed on the following priority:

*All children and young people should have a high quality arts education in every phase of learning.*

(MCEETYA & CMC, 2007, p. 5)

While such a policy statement is pleasing, much resourcing and prioritising of the Arts would be needed to make it a reality. Many contemporary school settings remain devoid of arts resources and the challenge of access for some children continues. Boyd (1998) suggests that many school arts activities are ‘soul destroying and meaningless’, lacking in depth and dimension. Misconceptions about teaching arts disciplines also continue. One such misconception is the deeply held perception that being able to do or teach music requires special gifts that are only attainable by, or given to, a chosen few, which Hennessey (2000, pp. 183–4) labels ‘the red feeling’.

The National Advocacy for Arts and Education (NAAE) continues to advocate for adequate resourcing of individual art forms within the curriculum, but is also concerned about the lack of mandated representation of the Arts across the K–12 curriculum, inadequate pre- and in-service teacher education and professional learning in the Arts, and the ongoing lack of adequate resourcing, teaching standards and research (2009). The same critical questions about arts education continually recur in any conversations about arts and education. They echo the questions raised by the previously mentioned review of quality in arts programming (Seidel et al., 2009).

There is also increasing pressure for schools to include the study of new media (including film, photography and digital arts) in their curricula, and to enable students to use ICT as part of the creative process. Resourcing these areas is expensive. Children of the economically affluent have more opportunities to study the Arts throughout their years at school. They are more likely to visit museums and art galleries and attend theatre and concert performances. If they show an inclination to participate in arts activities, their parents can often provide the finance for lessons with art teachers and artists. But for children living in or near poverty, approximately one in seven in Australia (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2005; Vinson, 2007), opportunities for formal arts learning experiences are minimal. Nevertheless, a range of not-for-profit and private organisations outside of schools have developed programs offering arts learning experiences for young people. This is a great concern given that it is education systems and schools that should be providing quality arts education.

## Research into the impact of the Arts in Australian schools

In the last decade a number of Australian research studies have been commissioned to investigate the assertions about the impact of the Arts on student learning outcomes. Several of these important Australian studies and their findings are discussed in the next sub-section.

### ACER evaluation of school-based arts education programs

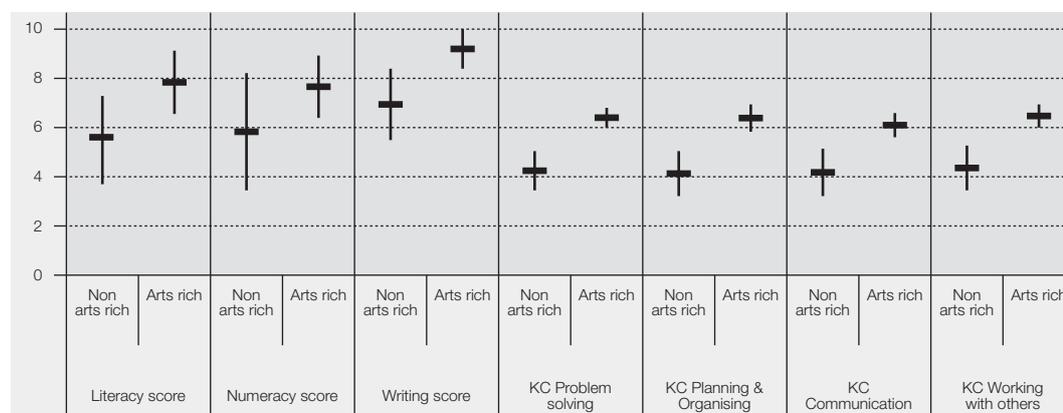
In 2004, for example, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was commissioned by the Australia Council, Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

(DCITA) to evaluate the impact that middle school-based arts education initiatives have on student learning outcomes, including students of Indigenous, disadvantaged and at-risk backgrounds. The *Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools* (Bryce et al., 2004) centred on four arts education programs – two music and two drama – that were considered examples of good practice. They were:

- the Northern Territory School *Boys Business* Music Program
- the Northern Territory *Indigenous Music Education* Program
- *Youth Arts with an Edge*, Victoria
- Learning to learn through the Arts@Direk Primary School, South Australia.

Given the diversity of the programs, multiple data gathering and evaluation strategies were employed, including field visits to undertake observation and interviews, pre and post narrative writing tasks, questionnaires that measured attitudes to school and reading engagement. Where appropriate, system-level assessment results were also analysed. In a number of schools an analysis of teachers' opinions on the Key Competencies was also undertaken. The researchers experienced difficulty in deriving statistically significant data to provide evidence for improvement in academic outcomes. In the examination of the arts-rich Direk Primary School in South Australia, the program evaluated drama mentoring. Funded by the Spencer Foundation, drama mentors focused on teacher professional learning about the use of the expressive arts to enhance literacy. The evaluation included comparisons of the achievement on system-level tests of two groups of students. The scores for all students in the Year 4 arts-rich group were significantly higher than those of a matched 'non-arts-rich' group on literacy, numeracy and writing and were significantly higher on the three generic competencies of problem-solving, planning and organising, communication and working with others.

Figure 1: Comparisons of student learning in arts-rich and non-arts-rich programs



Note: Means (denoted by the horizontal line) and 95% confidence intervals (denoted by the vertical line) for literacy, numeracy, writing scores, and Key Competencies, comparing Year 4 'arts-rich' (N=19) versus 'non-arts-rich' (N=20) programs.

(Bryce et al., 2004, p. 14)

The reasons for the small amount of 'hard' evidence included the short time span for some of the students' participation in the arts programs, the relatively short time frame for the evaluation itself, the broad diversity of the arts programs and the diverse student groups involved. All resonate with the caveats discussed earlier in this section. Nevertheless, the researchers reached the following conclusion:

*Involvement in arts programmes has a positive impact on students' engagement with learning and, for students from Indigenous communities, leads to improved attendance at School.*

(Bryce et al., 2004, p. 14)

Engagement in learning was seen by Bryce et al. to be facilitated by an increase in students' self-esteem, in their ability to plan effectively and set goals, as well as an improved ability to

work collaboratively and persistently. The arts programs researched in this evaluative study provided inclusive contexts in which the students felt confident about taking risks as well as positive and often inspirational role models. The researchers also argued that the arts programs evaluated provided enjoyable learning opportunities for students who did not fit the conventional mould, because they foregrounded strengths and intelligences not always valued in other curriculum areas. In addition, working towards performances or presentations provided concrete team-building experiences, as well as strategies for exploring and expressing emotions. Each of the arts programs evaluated in this study placed emphasis on time for reflection and constructive feedback. These findings support research quoted earlier, and provide further evidence for the key characteristics or touchstones of quality arts education. In addition, this work also suggests that disadvantages facing students from low socioeconomic backgrounds can be overcome by quality arts programs.

## Australian Research Council grants in the Arts

In the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant undertaken jointly by the University of Tasmania and the Australia Council, researchers Barrett and Smiegel sought the perspectives of children aged between 5 and 15 years, in 28 schools and 28 non-school settings, on their experiences of the Arts in general and the role they perceived the Arts played in their lives (see Hunter, 2005). One of the critical and somewhat surprising findings of the small group interviews, photo generation and artefact and photo elicitation with over 330 children, was the children's highly developed capacity to identify the Arts in their everyday living. They perceived the Arts as having an important meaning in their lives, particularly as a way of expressing and communicating thoughts and feelings. Many were able to clearly identify features of arts participation, describe their engagement in the Arts and articulate the importance of the Arts as a 'way of seeing' in their lives. They identified reflective thinking, problem-solving, skill development, as well as practice and hard work as features of arts participation. Youth arts settings were depicted as safe contexts for flexible learning with like-minded peers that enabled the development of autonomy and personal growth.

*Risky Business* was another important ARC linkage grant (2002–5) funded in partnership with the Departments of Justice, Human Services, VicHealth and Arts Victoria. Undertaken by University of Melbourne researchers, the project investigated the effectiveness of involvement in the creative arts as a diversionary intervention for at-risk youth in urban and rural Victoria. In their report Donelan and O'Brien (2008) concluded that young people who engaged in these arts programs experienced a broad range of personal and social benefits. These included increased self-esteem, development of artistic skills, improved communication skills and a sense of achievement and well-being. In addition, they reported that participant youth felt more connection to their communities.

A third significant ARC linkage grant, which had two rounds of funding, was undertaken by O'Toole and Burton at Griffith University over ten years (Burton, 2010, 2008; O'Toole, Burton, & Plunkett, 2005). It used a combination of improvisation, process drama, forum theatre and peer teaching strategies to develop a whole school program to combat bullying in both primary and secondary school contexts. Burton (2010) concludes:

*In the final phase of the research in Australia, extensive data were collected by the researchers from Griffith University in Brisbane across a range of high schools and primary schools. The data clearly and consistently indicated that the combination of forum theatre and peer teaching enabled students of all ages to deal more effectively with bullying.*

(Burton, 2010, p. 256)

In addition to their substantive findings, these studies modelled methodologies which explicitly address the caveats listed earlier.

## Australia Council and state government research initiatives

Hunter was commissioned by the Australia Council to examine the impact of six Australia Council research initiatives that embedded the Arts in children's learning (Hunter, 2005). Her evaluation certainly supports the international and national findings previously discussed in this review paper. Several of the state-based projects are briefly explored below.

A Queensland study (Piscitelli, Renshaw, Dunn, & Hawke, 2004) found that children believed that arts participation strengthened their learning in other areas and were important in building creativity, identity and self-esteem. Participating parents, teachers and community leaders shared these views.

In ten Western Australian schools, working with 61 children aged 10–14, who had been categorised by their teachers as being 'at risk', Haynes and Chalk (2004) sought to investigate student and teacher perceptions of artists-in-residence programs. The data, collected through focus groups and interviews, was tested against the *Western Australian Curriculum Framework Principles of Learning, Core Shared Values and Overarching Learning Outcomes*. The students who volunteered to be involved in the study were aware of their previous alienation from school learning experiences, but found these experiences different because they felt trusted to take responsibility for their learning. Key findings once again included perceptions from both the students and their teachers of improved self-confidence. Interestingly, the participating students also reported feeling relaxed and joyful during art-making processes. They perceived that the arts processes were helping them develop empathy, patience, goal setting and perseverance. Such outcomes would have a positive effect on their approach to learning.

One Northern Territory research project, *A Pedagogy of Trust* (Tait, 2004) specifically examined over one year whether the development of music skills, embedded in learning in upper primary classrooms, improved educational outcomes for Indigenous English as a Second Language students. Most of the 61 students were experiencing difficulty with literacy and numeracy. At the end of the year, the students had generally achieved statistically significant improvements in their mathematical age and also in reading. An unexpected outcome was the marked improvement in the quality of the teacher–student interaction. Teachers also reported that the students' improved self-confidence had resulted in their willingness to try unfamiliar tasks. This is a most important study, given its findings about both specific and broader social effects of an arts-led intervention over a relatively short time frame.

After cross-case analysis, Hunter noted that, while the data collected and analysed are rich and multi-layered, the small scale of many of these projects dictates the need for larger scale research in the future. Nevertheless, Hunter wrote:

*In summary there is evidence in the research reports to indicate that arts participation, to some varying degrees positively impacts on students'*

- *Social and personal development*
- *Attitude to learning*
- *Literacy*
- *Numeracy*
- *Generic competencies (writing, communicating, problem solving, planning, organising, perseverance)*
- *Arts knowledge and skills*
- *Enjoyment and valuing of the Arts*

(Hunter, 2005, p. 2)

In addition, Hunter suggests that arts programs can contribute to improvement in teaching quality, providing students with positive role models. Family involvement in students' learning can also be encouraged. In Indigenous communities, specific cultural issues can be discussed more effectively.

## Arts sector partnerships

The first stage of a recent study by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the University of Melbourne (2009) specifically examined the role of arts sector partnerships on student learning outcomes as well as their engagement in learning and social and personal development. The partnerships' summary particularly focused on artists-in-residence programs but also includes 'exposure to the Arts' and venue-based programs in galleries, performing arts centres and museums. This examination of the influences of such a mix of programming is an unusual opportunity for research in the field, and the research findings provide insights into the positive role schools and arts partnerships can play in whole school change. Many of the conclusions are not so dissimilar to those from international research on the outcomes of such programming.

*The review of literature reveals student engagement in the arts and creativity can have a positive impact on all the dimensions of physical, personal and social learning. Furthermore, beyond the obvious relationship with discipline-based learning in the arts and other disciplines, many school/arts partnerships have the potential to introduce new and creative ways of thinking and learning which can have a positive impact across all disciplines as well as the interdisciplinary learning standard.*

(Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009, p. 5)

Recent Australian arts-led interventions are thus highlighting the strong positive relationships between arts processes and improved academic and affective outcomes for students involved. These findings are consistent with the international research picture.

## Impact of attending live performance

According to other Australian research, early attendance and positive experiences at dramatic, choral and musical performances correlate positively with later interest and engagement in the Arts (Australia Council, 2000; Australian Council for the Arts and NSW Ministry for the Arts, 2003). Although most state Creative Arts syllabus documents suggest that young students should have opportunities to respond to performances early in their studies of Drama, Dance and Music and to installations and exhibitions in Visual Arts, performance tends to be underused and undervalued as a pedagogical tool by Australian teachers (Gibson & Ewing, 2008). For example, the Drama section of the *New South Wales K–6 Creative Arts Syllabus* (2000) incorporates an 'appreciating strand' from Stage 1 and suggests that students need to learn to:

*... respond to drama as devisers and audience members and learn about drama through the experience of viewing character relationships in live performances and screen drama.*

(New South Wales Board of Studies, 2000, p. 70)

A large research project in South Australia, *Children's Voices* (2003–5) explored 140 young children's (Reception to Year 5) engagement with theatre performances, over a three-year period. Led by Professor Wendy Schiller (2005) from the University of South Australia, the study involved the Department of Education and Children's Services and Windmill Performing Arts (<http://www.windmill.org.au>). The children in the study were drawn from four state primary schools and attended two or three Windmill performances during each year of the three-year study. The students were interviewed both individually and in groups before and after viewing performances. Teachers and parents also monitored the children's drawing, writing and play activities to gain further understandings about how the children responded to each performance.

*Children's Voices* demonstrated just how powerful 'performance as a text' can be for children. The participating children clearly saw the links between a live arts performance and their own lives, developing a distinct understanding of audience, actors and directors that surprised their teachers and parents. Importantly, the children demonstrated marked improvement in literacy outcomes through their increased motivation to write stories, diaries and plays. The students were also very articulate about what they liked and didn't like about each performance and

how the performances could be improved. In addition, they became more critically aware, developing a deeper understanding of their world and their role within it. Their teachers, in turn, were inspired to extend their own knowledge, experience and appreciation of performance. The project thus also impacted on their professional development.

A current longitudinal Australian Research Council Linkage Grant, *Accessing the Cultural Conversation: Theatrespace* (<http://theatrespace.org.au/>) is in the third of a four-year project investigating what attracts, engages and sustains young people aged between 14 and 28 to theatre, in major performance venues across the eastern seaboard states. A joint project between three universities (Melbourne, Sydney and Griffith) and 13 major theatre partners is particularly focusing on why some young people choose not to engage in theatre, and what factors might exclude them from being able to do so. Such Australian research about the importance of live performance is encouraging and provides an imperative for the inclusion of the performing Arts in the school curriculum.

## Towards a national Australian arts curriculum

It is clear, however, as Robinson (1999) identified about intended curricula in the United Kingdom and Europe more than a decade ago, the current manifestation of a national curriculum for Australian children continues to privilege a traditional subject hierarchy with traditional textual understandings of literacy (reading and writing) along with numeracy taking priority. Academic achievement is measured by proficiency in literacy and, to a lesser extent, numeracy (often based on test scores on specific skills) in reading, writing and number. Thinking processes seem secondary to more technical skills that are more easily measurable with multiple choice tests.

The seemingly contradictory gap between rhetoric and reality about the importance of the Arts continues. For example, the then Commonwealth Minister for the Arts, when announcing that the Arts would be part of the second phase of the Australian curriculum declared that:

*Creativity, interpretation, innovation and cultural understanding are all sought-after skills for new and emerging industries of the 21st century. Arts education provides students with the tools to develop these skills.*

(Garrett, 2009)

In the Arts national curriculum, the five disciplines of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts will be mandated for every student from Kindergarten or Reception to Year 8 for a minimum of two hours a week. While the disciplines can be taught discretely, integrated Arts experiences will also be encouraged. The draft Shape paper for the Arts was released in October 2010 (ACARA, 2010). Three different strands have been nominated as organisers across the five disciplines:

- Generating
- Realising
- Responding.

While not original terms, these organisers have been chosen deliberately because the terms have a certain neutrality, not being consistently used in current state arts documents.

In a recent opinion article, Matt Clausen, President of the NSW Teachers of Media (2010) outlined the current thinking about the new Arts national curriculum and defended the need for all five art forms to be offered:

*Each art form requires 150 hours of teaching distributed over the years of schooling from kindergarten to year 8. Schools and teachers will need to work hard and creatively to meet these targets, but it is achievable.*

*Solutions in curriculum planning to address these issues include loading the study of particular art forms in certain years, working in semester blocks or working cross-arts or cross-curricula – the possibilities are endless.*

*The experiential approach to all of the art forms means that working in these kinds of blocks when, for instance, creating a play, is preferable to an hour here or there. Through cross-curriculum programming it is possible to teach a deep and rich curriculum.*

(Clausen, 2010)

The experiential and cross-curricular approach to arts programming foreshadowed for the national arts curriculum document certainly has the potential be more meaningful than dividing the time up into proportions for different arts disciplines. Deep learning and understanding is more likely when integration is carefully planned to reflect real world learning experiences.

## Concluding comments

With a national arts curriculum imminent in Australia, this is an important moment to build on the paucity of the provision of quality arts education in the past and develop a future coherent body of research to deepen our understanding of learning and the Arts. Gibson and Anderson (2008) underlined the continued void in Australian arts research. They assert that arts educators, students, policy-makers and practitioners need and deserve:

*... longitudinal, thorough and rigorous research projects that are comparable to those undertaken in Europe and the United States.*

(Gibson & Anderson, 2008, p. 110)

Gadsden (2008) exhorts us to merge old and new practices, local and global understandings of the role of the Arts and education. Evidence for the impact that the Arts can have on broader student learning outcomes is being supported by a growing corpus of empirical work. While it has been difficult to demonstrate clear direct causality, the research reviewed in this paper indicates that there are strong demonstrated relationships between arts in education and students' broad academic (including literacy and numeracy) and social achievements. As Hunter concluded:

*As is the case with international benchmark studies on arts education, the Australian projects summarised here offer an abundance of 'rich data' that befits the multi-layered experience of arts learning. Yet, the reports' authors also raise significant concerns about the validity and reliability of their data. These relate to matters such as sample size, the validity of quantitative and qualitative measures, and the duration of studies, among other things. As many of the researchers point out – including those who used quantitative methods – the effectiveness of arts participation on students' other learning areas cannot be measured solely by standardised tests and statistics.*

(Hunter, 2005, p. 5)

Livermore (2003) wrote in *More Than Words Can Say* that it is the inalienable right for all young Australians to acquire literacy in and across the Arts. This review paper of the research into Arts education has already affirmed the value and possibility of such a proposition, and has also indicated that there is a range of ways in which it can be achieved. Given the current conservatism of Australian education however, it is necessary to demonstrate how the Arts, both the language-rich arts forms and other arts forms, can enrich the lives and learning of all students, through transforming the pedagogy they experience. The research indicates that such an approach to teaching and learning should ensure that an increased proportion of students may find school more relevant and engaging. A further consideration of the range of ways such experiences can be created in schools will be examined in Section 3 of this review.

## 3

The Arts as  
critical quality  
pedagogy

Whether and how the Arts are valued in curriculum statements is tied to issues of power, cultural practices and professional, personal and political dispositions. The 1990s were marked by a dearth of critically engaged literature on the Arts in education (Grierson, 2007). In contrast, as has already been demonstrated in this review paper, the early 2000s have been marked, globally and more recently nationally, by renewed interest in creative practice and alignments of creativity to industry. Consequently, there has been more attention given to the role of the Arts in learning, in both formal school and broader community contexts.

This section builds on Wyn's proposition (2009) that current approaches to schooling and education (including entrenched inequalities and the privileging of the competitive academic curriculum) cannot equip our students for the flexibility and creativity needed for 21st century living. The mission statement of the South Australian Education arts initiative ARTS*smart* proclaims that the Arts:

*... play a major role in defining and interpreting our culture, heritage and society and in celebrating our diversity as a nation. They inspire, entertain, transform, instruct and challenge the way we see, listen and comprehend. The arts expand our understanding, knowledge and creativity. When young people are engaged in the arts something changes in their lives.*

(Department of Education and Children's Services, 2002, p. 1)

Exemplars and case studies, drawn from generic arts programs as well as from specific arts disciplines, will be examined in this section to explore the role that the Arts in different forms can play in learning. It will demonstrate how learning can be transformed through the Arts and that it can be done in such a way as to ensure an inclusive learning environment, one that better meets the needs of all learners as it builds social capital. This review asserts that the intrinsic nature of each art form, as well as commonalities across the disciplines, enable a more transformative learning. The Arts, in and of themselves are thus conceptualised as critical, quality pedagogy. Such a pedagogy, it will be argued, can more effectively meet the needs of disengaged learners than the more traditional, transmissive approaches to education and learning that are still employed in many classrooms.

# The current academic curriculum and disengaged learners

In Australia, both the intended and enacted school curricula continue to be largely based in the mainstream culture of the more affluent, resulting in students from other classes and cultures feeling alienated or confronted (Ewing, 2010 a). Children and teachers from minority backgrounds, for example, do not find that their own historical and cultural stories are told or valued in the school system. This kind of alienation can and does lead to disengagement and self-exclusion from the opportunities that a formal education can provide (e.g. Connell, 1994; Heath, 1983). The privileging of certain subjects, the kinds of assessment strategies most valued, the reporting of student outcomes and school results, the way we credential students, the physical and administrative structures of many schools, including the way they are designed, staffed and resourced, all contribute to inequitable schooling outcomes (Wyn, 2009). There is a radical disconnection in many schools between learning and experience, and many children opt out. Discussions in the media about declining standards, deficient teachers and teacher education persist. Surely deficiencies in test results should lead to a questioning, at a school and systems level, of current schooling structures and even of the philosophy of high stakes testing itself.

Engendering a more just education system will require educators to examine both what we expect students to learn and how we position them as learners (Connell, 1994) Structuring schools, fragmenting curriculum and learning, and providing a mainly teacher-centered pedagogy in no way reflects students' experiences in the lived world. We must reconceptualise what the curriculum should look like.

As Wyn (2009) writes, education systems need to 'touch the future' and equip young people for the unpredictability of life and work, by aiming for more integrated approaches across schooling and post-compulsory contexts that not only emphasise academic and vocational outcomes, but also ensure young people's mental and physical well-being. Only then, she argues, can we hope to:

*... shift the patterns of school failure, under-performance and low rates of completion among Indigenous Australians, young people from low socioeconomic areas and young people in rural communities, which have for the last three decades characterised Australia's educational provision.*

(Wyn, 2009, p. 2)

One response to a growing recognition of the inappropriateness to the future of much schooling currently on offer is in the field of critical pedagogy, which has emerged from research and writing that has been concerned with social justice and power issues, with inequities in education along class, gender and race lines. Influential theorists in this field include Gramsci (1971), Habermas (1972), Freire (1986), Apple (1990), Aronowitz and Giroux (1985); Giroux (2003) and hooks (2003). An associated notion and its research literature; that of quality pedagogy, has been previously discussed in this review paper.

Teachers who engage and challenge their students offer them opportunities to deal with the kinds of issues and problems that relate to everyday living often using multidisciplinary or trans-disciplinary elements. Peter O'Connor (2008) implores the community and the education sector to see young people as possibilities instead of problems. He envisions a pedagogy of hope, one in which students can be active rather than passive learners, agents in control of their own lives and stories. It is important to link these issues with the ever-increasing research that points to the importance of the imagination and creativity in our learning. To experience a pedagogy which connects with both emotional and feeling brain functions increases levels of attention, retention and enjoyment in the act of learning, and facilitates deeper learning and understanding. A growing body of research suggests that immersing students in strong arts-based educational programs may well result in increased interest, motivation and engagement in learning. Certainly

arts-based programs are being recommended for those concerned about the disengagement and lack of achievement of boys in the middle years (e.g. Scholes & Nagel, 2010).

Firstly, however, it is important to briefly examine our understanding of motivation, engagement, learning and critical, quality pedagogy. Often the meaning of ‘engagement’ and ‘motivation’ are conflated but, in fact, they are different. Motivation can be thought of as the reason for our behaviours, while Russell, Ainley and Frydenberg (2005, p. 1) describe engagement as ‘energy in action’.

## Motivation and engagement and learning and the Arts

Motivation and engagement in the learning process are also regarded as crucial to effectiveness. Rogers (1969) regarded freedom of choice as essential in his person-centred approach to learning. Bruner (1986), Lave and Wenger (1996) and Vygotsky (1971) have all theorised that engagement, especially as manifested in the Arts, creates opportunities for learners to have:

*... a conscious inner and social conversation and unconscious brain restructuring.*

(Catterall, 2009, p. 131)

Leading motivation expert, Andrew Martin (2001) names self-efficacy, accompanied by mastery and appreciation of the value of schooling, as important cognitive motivators for students’ optimal learning, and in building resilience to cope with and overcome difficulties. In school contexts the need to bring individualistic psychological approaches to learning, together with the sociological, has highlighted the importance of classroom pedagogy and discourse that engages students (NSW DET, 2006; Munns & Martin, 2004). One example of their research, involved the NSW Department of Education and Training working in partnership with educators from the University of Western Sydney to examine strategies to ensure students from low socioeconomic backgrounds find school relevant and motivating.

Evidence discussed below suggests that there is a relationship between students’ engagement in the Arts, as both learner and performer, and their engagement in learning and school (Rauscher, 2003). A number of qualitative research studies have also detected changes in the kind of engagement evident in students as they are involved in the Arts through the creation of visual and written texts, digital renderings, performances (e.g., Warhurst, Crawford, Ireland, Neale, Pickering, Rathmell, & Watson, 2009; Heath, 2001). Student engagement has been identified as a critical element in most frameworks that have been developed to describe quality teaching (e.g. Newmann and Associates’ authentic pedagogy, 1996; *Productive Pedagogies* developed by Education Queensland, 2001; the NSW DET, quality teaching model, 2003).

Throughout the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEECTYA, 2008), the Australian Ministers of Education most recent proclamation about the aims of education, there are a number of statements on notions of young people engaging in curriculum and educational experiences that promote creativity, innovation, cultural appreciation and personal values. Goal 2, for example, states that:

*All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.*

(MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 8)

Frequent references to attributes such as ‘creativity’, ‘innovation’ and ‘resourcefulness’ in the supporting text for goal 2 further signal the need to examine the notion of ‘transformative learning’, that is, learning that moves beyond traditional notions to provide the stimulus for individuals to make significant shifts in their understandings of themselves and the worlds in which they live. The problem, however, is that despite these visionary aims, such policy statements are not often realised in action by educational systems.

## A socio-cultural approach to learning

To consider the role of the Arts in engagement and learning it is important to think about our understanding of the term 'learning' and the processes that can optimise it. From the outset it is important to acknowledge that learning is evidenced by a change in understanding or behaviour, rather than merely reflecting an action such as rote memorisation of a particular set of 'facts' or rules. For most people, changes in understanding or behaviour are usually facilitated by social, collaborative processes embedded in particular socio-historical-cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978).

A socio-cultural approach to learning asserts that the ownership of learning is always with the learner, but recognises that since most learning is socially constructed, learning is embedded in social and cultural practices (Toohey, 2000; Rogoff, 1990). The relevant cultural tools and artefacts of a particular culture therefore mediate any learning. Social constructivist views of learning also acknowledge that integration of knowledge across the school curriculum is essential if it is to be relevant and meaningful. So the development of cross-curricula skills is emphasised, along with multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary curriculum integration, time for collaborative thinking, meaningful discussion to encourage the negotiation of meanings and critical reflection (Gibson & Ewing, in press). Teachers are conceptualised as initiators, models, facilitators, mentors and coaches, rather than transmitters of information. Learning happens more readily when it is enjoyable and when learners are engaged actively in authentic activities that challenge existing knowledge and understandings. The work of Garth Boomer and his colleagues on the importance of negotiation of the curriculum (1982) is very relevant here. Learners will usually only take risks in a supportive and conducive but challenging environment, one in which they have some control over their decision-making in learning. Given these principles, the teacher's role is to know their learners well enough to effectively balance the tension between the challenge and the risk-taking.

## Transformative learning in and through the Arts

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep structural shift in core thoughts, feelings and activities (Mezirow, 2003). This shift of consciousness alters our way of being in the world and changes our large-scale beliefs. Transformative learning often also includes change in our understanding of ourselves, our relationships with others and with the natural world. It can also alter our understanding of power relationships and how they work in relation to class, race and gender. It can impact on our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to being and our sense of possibilities for social justice, peace and personal joy. Mezirow defines transformative learning as:

*... learning that transforms problematic frames of reference, sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meanings, perspectives, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change.*

(Mezirow, 2003, pp. 58–9)

Valuing learning in a multiplicity of ways, as defined by Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (1983), and by the notion of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) are important considerations for teachers. Engagement in arts-based learning can strengthen the potential for such learning to occur.

Over the last two decades neuro-scientific research has provided a great deal of evidence that confirms the interrelationship of good emotional function and effective learning (Ewing, 2010b). For example, the work of Damasio (1994) and Williams and Gordon (2007) demonstrate that the human brain must feel comfortable or safe before it can engage in explorative, creative or problem-solving processes. Damasio (1994) explicitly talks about the interrelationship between emotion, cognition and performance, and how embodiment through the performing Arts can enable engagement in learning and enhance the development of the imagination and

metaphor. Collaborative strategies common in creative dance, music, visual arts and drama activities have been shown to achieve an increase in brain synchrony and associated bonding. Such cooperation encourages the breaking up of old patterns of behaviour (Freeman, 1995). The ability to empathise or ‘walk in someone else’s shoes’ is also important in understanding diversity and the need to be inclusive (Donelan, 2009; Ewing & Simons, 2004).

If the need for transformative approaches to learning is seen to be important for today’s learners as expressed in current policy and mission statements, it is difficult to understand why western education systems continue to marginalise the centrality of cultural and communicative factors in learning (Mercer, 1995).

Gadsden, (2008, p. 33) asserts that it is not too dramatic to suggest that not offering students the opportunity to experience a broad array of thinking, social and emotional dispositions through the Arts – to reorder their ‘habits of mind’ – is to deny them the full experience of learning. ‘Habits of mind’ are also described variously as learning and or thinking dispositions. Costa and Kallick (2000) list 16 habits of mind that they claim are characteristics of the best academic performers, but also represent life skills. These include persistence, listening with understanding and empathy, metacognition, striving for accuracy, questioning and problem posing, finding humour, taking responsible risks and creating, imagining and innovating. In thinking about learning dispositions in relation to the Arts and education, Gadsden (2008) emphasises five aspects of learning that should be examined when developing programs for different groups of learners, including those with special needs. They can be summarised as:

- persistence, how it develops and is revised over time, as well as the conditions and contexts that foster it
- creativity in terms of how it unfolds and is applied
- language, literacy and mathematics
- self-regulatory approaches to learning and learning behaviour development.

To provide opportunities in schools for students to experience conditions that foster these dispositions is going to require substantial change, as discussed earlier in this section. McKechnie (1996, p. 4) argues that for too long western cultures and educational institutions have been ‘... intimidated by the power of established modes of knowing’. She argues that the kind of engagement with ideas and processes inherent in the Arts prepares children to observe their environment carefully, make sound decisions and engage in both abstract and concrete thinking, playing to the imagination in ways that are often lost in more traditional academic practices. Similarly, Catterall (2009) comments that the reflective thinking embedded in arts processes enables the inner and social conversations so often referred to as ‘substantive communication’ in quality teaching and learning frameworks. As Archer (2009) has emphasised, the arts *processes* (e.g. the final painting, the DVD, the performance itself) are not as significant as the making or creating itself, or how that making process will inform the next one.

This sub-section has provided evidence that demonstrates ways in which there is potential for the Arts to foster connections between children’s culture, language and experience and lead to transformative changes in their understandings, so that they can interact with their social and physical environments, making new connections and seeing new possibilities. As such, arts processes and experiences can enable the development of a critical and inclusive pedagogy that incorporates key elements of quality teaching frameworks (Ewing, 2006). One of the central blockers that challenge such a change in approach, however, are teacher beliefs and perceptions about their own creativity and how they can encourage creativity in their students (Hall, Thompson, & Hood, 2006).

## Teaching as artistry

Much of the research previously cited in this review paper has indicated that if teachers are to provide transformative learning opportunities for their students they will have to become aesthetic educators who can help children make meaningful links with their minds, bodies and emotions (Eisner, 2002a, Greene, 2001). In Eisner’s words:

*Artistry requires sensibility, imagination, technique and the ability to make good judgements about the feel and significance of the particular ... Good teaching depends on artistry and aesthetic considerations ... Artistry is most likely when we acknowledge its relevance to teaching and create the conditions in schools in which teachers can learn to think like artists.*

(Eisner, 2002a, pp. 382–4)

Studies that have explored K–12 teachers' attitudes to embedding arts experiences in learning activities found that teachers' self-efficacy and self-image relating to creativity and artistry influenced their use of the Arts more than any other personal characteristic (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009; Oreck, 2004).

Prendergast (2008) depicts the teacher as someone who demonstrates they are concerned with 'artistic process' in the way they interpret curriculum, and as someone who consistently acts as a critically interactive spectator of their students' learning. Prendergast's image of the teacher builds on Sawyer's (2004) conception of teaching as improvisational, rather than over-scripted, performance. Such conceptions of teaching can become more difficult to enact when creativity in the professional lives of teachers is stifled by the overbearing constrictions of government systems. When teachers are expected to perform in 'sanctioned' ways, to fit into a limited and reductive version of what constitutes a good teacher, they are less likely to take risks to explore their or their students' creativity (White & Smerdon, 2008).

The concept of the artist/teacher and teacher as artist (Finley & Knowles, 1995) is a powerful one. But a general lack of arts education and learning in many contemporary pre-service teacher education programs, particularly for early childhood and primary teachers and those not preparing to teach specific secondary arts subjects, is limiting the capacity of all teacher graduates (Gibson & Anderson, 2008). Ewing and Gibson (2007) have developed pre-service units of study which aim to help pre-service primary teachers reconnect with their own creative potential. The goal here is to foreshadow in their own learning the need to initiate creative teaching and learning experiences for their students that employ similar arts processes in primary classrooms. But this paucity in pre-service training is compounded by the widespread lack of sufficient or appropriate in-service teacher professional learning in the Arts.

## Professional learning and arts partnerships

To address the lack of confidence, in teaching the Arts or for embedding arts processes in other curriculum areas, a series of professional learning programs have been developed worldwide. These programs are commonly developed in partnership with practitioners in the arts sector – artists, arts practitioners, theatre companies, museums and galleries. In a national response to achieving such a goal, *Artssmarts* (<http://www.artssmarts.ca/en/home.aspx>) was launched by the Canadian McConnell Foundation in 1998. It is the largest Canadian education school partnership initiative developed to improve learning for Canadian children by funding artists working with classroom teachers to infuse arts into academic programs. Arts-related activities are thus seen as a vehicle for teaching across all subjects. In 2009 *Artssmarts* worked with 22,000 children in classrooms across Canada. A similar initiative, Creative Partnerships, established in 2002 in the United Kingdom, also focuses on creative practitioners working in classrooms alongside teachers and students with priority afforded disadvantaged schools. Ongoing professional learning is provided for teachers.

The final report of the 'Towards a Creative Australia' stream of the *Australia 2020 Summit* also identified the critical role that the Arts should play in schools (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The report highlighted the need for a more integrated role for the Arts in schools and alongside the more common artists in residence programs that have been operating for some time. The *School Drama* initiative is one response.

## The *School Drama* program

Over the last two years, in partnership with The University of Sydney, the *Sydney Theatre Company* (STC) has implemented a program that builds on Ewing's academic mentoring work with teachers over 15 years at Curl Curl North Primary School. The focus of this work has been on the use of process drama strategies with authentic literary texts to enhance children's English and literacy outcomes (Ewing, 2002, 2006, 2009). The program *School Drama* focuses on the professional learning of primary teachers. Actors work alongside participant teachers in their classrooms, modelling the use of educational drama as a powerful medium for improving students' English and literacy learning (Campbell, Ewing, & Gibson, 2010). STC hoped that the teachers' excitement with and enthusiasm for being associated with a working theatre and their new-found expertise in their use of drama would in turn enhance the creative and literacy processes of their students.

At the core of the program is ongoing teacher professional learning and a co-mentoring relationship between primary teachers and experienced actors with the aim of using drama strategies to improve student engagement in English and literacy, in turn improving the overall learning outcomes of students (Ewing, 2002, 2006). The pilot program was undertaken in nine classes across five inner city Sydney state primary schools in 2009. Its success in those schools led to the extension of the program to 16 schools across all education sectors in 2010. Four of the pilot study schools remained in the project in 2010. All participant teachers and actors are initially involved in a whole-day professional learning workshop. At the beginning of the classroom program the actor and teacher meet to discuss the focus for the seven-week time frame. The teacher identifies the relevant literacy focus using outcomes derived from current state syllabus documents and an analysis of the children's needs. For example, the teacher might identify that the children need to improve their expressive oral language skills or their understanding of poetic language, their confidence in writing poetry or their capacity to develop plot, character or use of imagery in their narrative writing. The actor then plans a program incorporating relevant drama strategies and authentic literary texts and team teaches one 60–90-minute session a week with the teacher. Both teachers and actors engage in debriefing sessions at the end of the program. Benchmarking of the students' capacities in the identified literacy area occurs before and after the program to assess student starting points and progress over the program. Interviews are conducted with teachers and actors before and after each program and there are debriefing focus group discussions with students where possible.

Although the evaluation of the second year of the project is still underway (Gibson, in press), to date in all the interviews with principals, teachers and actors as well as in focus group discussions with student groups, participants have been very positive about the professional learning for teachers and the improved student literacy outcomes for students. Teachers report a growth in confidence, understanding and expertise in using drama strategies in their programming. For example, in a letter of thanks to the actor with whom she had been had been working in her class during 2010, one teacher commented:

*Well, who'd have thought that drama could actually be so engaging to teach? It has been an inspirational journey for me. Although my learning curve has been a steep one, I can see a whole range of ways that drama can be incorporated into the curriculum.*

(Gibson, in press)

One child in the same class also wrote to the actor:

*You have brightened our school days, lifted burdens in our personalities and let us totally express our emotions.*

(Gibson, in press)

Whether the teachers continue to use the drama strategies modelled for them during the seven-week *School Drama* program in their subsequent English and literacy programs will be a

key criteria in evaluating the success and sustainability of the project. Certainly *STC* envisages the development of online resources to enable teachers to both refresh their understanding of drama strategies and to readily access new ideas and units of work. It will therefore be critical to monitor the sustainability of such professional learning over an extended time frame. It would also be desirable to collect more data from students and parents to ensure that their voices and perspectives are heard. It does appear that this program is an innovative way of extending the professional learning of those who wish to transform their teaching and their students' learning.

Having looked at the importance and benefits of creative teaching and teacher professional learning, the next sub-section focuses on why and how the Arts provide such a rich and powerful base for deep transformative learning, using specific arts disciplines.

## The Arts and learning – some discipline-based exemplars

Half a century ago, Langer (1957) believed art captures the human subjective experience in a way that ordinary discourse cannot, promoting unique insights that help us look at everyday happenings with fresh eyes. Even earlier, Dewey (1934) highlighted the artistic nature of young children's play, seeing it as the foundation for all learning, and contended that art is a quality of experience rather than a product. These understandings about learning have been extended and elaborated in relation to the Arts through scholarly research and writing since the mid-20th century (e.g., Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1971).

The more specifically arts-based research work of some of the earliest scholars focused on a particular art form rather than the Arts collectively. Lowenfeld (1947), for example, wrote about the use of art as a form of therapy for children at the end of the Second World War, while Slade (1954) and Heathcote and Bolton (1995) have championed the virtues of drama. Egan (1988) concentrated on storytelling and narrative, while Read (1964) was both a writer and an art critic. Others (e.g., Eisner, 2002b; Greene, 1995; Abbs, 1994; Heath, 2000) have discussed the role of the Arts in learning more generally, as enhancing students' learning across the curriculum.

Exemplars from a range of art forms demonstrate how the Arts, with other subjects and across the curriculum, can function as critical, quality pedagogy in school contexts.

### Music

A recent documentary (*The Music Instinct: Science and Song* Australian Broadcasting Commission, 26 August, 2010) confirmed that scientists have established that from about 17 weeks in utero the unborn child can respond to music, and it profiled some researchers who have further suggested that music provides the gateway to better understanding of human cognition, because learning music has been shown to change dendritic connections in the brain. Music has the capacity to

*... exalt the human spirit, transform the human experience and bring joy, beauty, and satisfaction to people's lives.*

(Pascoe, 2007, p. 8)

Defined by Gardner (1983) as a particular kind of intelligence, there is no doubt that learning music enables the experiencing, creating and communicating of ideas and emotions. Experimenting with sounds and rhythm can also help to develop flexibility in thinking (Cornett, 1999). Music can encourage appreciation of different music cultures investigated in History, English, Geography and other social science subjects. It is an extensive symbolic system, encoding and conveying meanings, in ways similar to other symbolic languages, such as mathematics, chemistry, dance and mime. Aural and visual discrimination, fine motor coordination and alertness can also be developed (Thomas, 1984). Catterall (2009), for example, nominates rhythm or the pattern of beats over time, as one example of the manner that music enhances an understanding of mathematical skills:

*Two fundamental mathematical skills are consistent with understanding the time meaning represented in note: the ability to count beats, which allows for an understanding of the absolute value of a note in a measure, and a general fractional or proportional sense, which allows for an understanding of each note type in relation to others.*

(Catterall, 2009, p. 18)

In Canada, Schellenberg and Peretz (2008) have extended early research undertaken by Rauscher, Shaw and Ky (1993) to demonstrate that children who have studied music for at least a year have a greater increase in their scores on intelligence tests as well as school grades, than their counterparts who did not study music. Self-discipline and cooperation within a group were also enhanced. In looking at effect sizes of the Arts and transfer of learning, Winner and Hetland (2000) found that the most reliable and the strongest causal links were found to exist between listening to and learning to play, music and spatial–temporal reasoning, along with classroom drama and the development of verbal skills. It is important to note, however, that baseline data was not collected before the students began to study music, and direct causal links cannot be argued unequivocally. Moreover, North American children taking music lessons improved more over the year, on general memory skills that correlate with non-musical abilities, such as literacy, verbal memory, visual–spatial processing, mathematics and IQ, than did those children not taking lessons. This last finding suggests that musical training is having an effect on how the brain becomes wired for general cognitive functioning related to memory and attention (Trainor, Shahin, & Roberts, 2006).

There are a number of Australian examples of the power of music education and of boys' choirs. (See for example, Harrison's *Male Voices* which documents the power that music-making activities has had for boys.) Bob Smith (2002), who worked with 'at risk' boys making music in a number of schools in Darwin over ten years, created *Boys Business* in 2000. Bryce et al. (2004) found the positive impact on the boys was surprisingly high.

Further to the 2004 ACER evaluation, Jennifer Bryce (2007) examined the extent to which formal music study enhanced secondary students' generic employability skills (GES). The GES assessment package was originally developed by McCurry and Bryce to measure the Mayer Committee's Key Competencies (1992). Although once again there is no baseline data, assessment of 1305 secondary students' GES, including 160 music students, suggested that the music students did have higher ability in academic GES (Written and Oral Communication, Logical Reasoning and Interpretive Reasoning) than their non-music counterparts. In addition, the music students showed significantly higher ability in two less academic GES, Understanding and Working with Others and Approach to learning than their peers who did not study music.

Thus there is considerable evidence that students who engage in music study and/or musical appreciation do perform better academically and on some tests of generic ability, but evidence about direct causality is elusive.

## Dance

Cust (1974) reminds us that creative dance is concerned with

*... movement, imagination or the kinaesthetic feelings or sensations of fastness, slowness, suddenness, sustainment, strength and lightness.*

(Cust, 1974, p. 1)

Although research into the impact of dance on learning across the curriculum is limited, proponents of creative dance begin with the premise that every individual needs to feel comfortable in their bodies both in and outside of school. The proposition is that this comfortable-ness will translate into self-confidence and self-efficacy, both necessary for creative and flexible thinking in the dancer's life and this can transfer to risking and trusting with others and developing empathy. In her evaluation of after school arts programs in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America Heath (2001) asserts:

*Dance repeatedly offers a direct and high-risk means by which members of different racial and ethnic groups illustrate their trust in one another. These young people use dance in competitive displays of knowledge and immersion, at a bodily level and not just in talk, within one another's cultures ... Dance becomes emblematic of the core willingness of the young of different immigrant and racial groups thrust together in housing projects to reach across the cultural and linguistic divides that the broader society reflects. Dancing together illustrates the ultimate in aesthetic and visible rendering of coming together, being in one another's heads and bodies, and joining in mutual support and interdependency.*

(Heath, 2001, p. 14)

Dancers also believe that such knowledge of, and comfort with, the body, together with the capacity for precise creative and dynamic decision-making related to movement and position, is the basis of success in individual and team sports and physical activity.

Those educators who advocate a holistic approach to curriculum planning emphasise the connections between mind, body and spirit (e.g. Miller, 1988). Macdonald (1991) also argues that creative dance involves our whole being and enables us to be in our bodies. Macdonald's (1991) Canadian study documents how eight teachers of varying experience, teaching grades ranging from junior kindergarten through to grade three, quickly recognised the potential of creative dance for other curriculum areas after it was demonstrated in their classrooms over six two-hour workshops. The workshops incorporated some basic dance theory as well as concrete ideas for the classroom. Children were introduced to the concept of 'focus' in dance. They made different shapes with their bodies, experimented with different body levels, worked in groups and danced with props and to different sounds. Creative dance was then introduced in their classrooms in mathematics, science and language content areas. These teachers were actively encouraged to participate alongside their students and then to follow up with the ideas and skills that had been introduced in between the workshops.

It has been claimed that physical self-efficacy is one of the key dimensions of academic self-efficacy (Cameron, 2010; Heath, 2001; Duncan, 1969). This research has prompted the Australian Ballet to pilot dance and kinetic workshops with school students in a program called *Out There: The Australian Ballet in Schools* which has run since 2006. McKechnie (1996) asserts that dance enables both a sensory and aesthetic way of knowing, in bones, nerves and muscles, and in the exercise of imagination, aesthetic discrimination and skill. Such assertions resonate with the research undertaken by Nesbitt and Hane (2007), who engaged primary school students in three different artists-in-residence programs, in schools, over a 12-month period in

*... simultaneous creative processes of writing and choreography, finding inspiration in each that would push the other forward.*

(Nesbitt & Hane, 2007, p. 95)

For example, they examined literary devices such as hyperbole through finding its corollary in dance (exaggerated movement creating comedy). Another session looked at action verbs and students constructed dances embodying these words. In this study the students became authors of new stories and creators of new dances as they oscillated between words and movement, demonstrating improved writing and movement skills.

Emerging evidence thus suggests the learning embedded in dance processes and participation can be powerful tools for learning in other Key Learning Areas in school contexts. Heath (2001) cites evidence of generic learning benefits and skills, such as interdependence, planning and designing, precision in focus and risk-taking. Such learning opportunities address some of the concerns about conventional classrooms expressed earlier in this section. More concrete evidence, however, is needed to support these assertions. Much of the research quoted by Heath, for example, was undertaken in out-of-school contexts.

## Drama

There is a large evidence base for the impact of drama and theatre activities on learning, particularly in the areas of language and expressive skill development, but also in social and pedagogical ‘strands of purpose’ (O’Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2009, p. 4). Due to its capacity to deliver such a range of learning outcomes, drama can and should play a central role in teaching and learning in most Key Learning Areas. Such curricula enable children to explore a range of meanings, concepts, cultural assumptions and social dilemmas relating to their own issues and their personal behaviour and learning. The introduction of process drama strategies across the curriculum can encourage collaboration, problem-solving, the development of empathy and reflection (Neelands, 1992; Bolton, 1984; Miller & Saxton, 2004; Ewing, 2009; Sinclair, Donelan, Bird, O’Toole, & Freebody, 2009). Prominent English drama educator, Jonathon Neelands, has written:

*Drama is not simply a subject, but also a method ... a learning tool. Furthermore, it is one of the key ways in which children gain an understanding of themselves and others.*

(Neelands, 1992, p. 3, with original emphasis)

Process drama is a term that was first coined by Cecily O’Neill (1995) to describe the use of a range of theatre strategies (such as sculpture, role walking, role play, depiction or still image, improvisation, mime, thought tracking, hot-seating or questioning in role, play-building, mantle or enactment of the expert, conscience alley, readers’ theatre) to enable participants to make meaning. Enactment or ‘walking in someone else’s shoes’ (Ewing & Simons, 2004) should be regarded as the essence of educational drama. The opportunity to explore an imagined context enables us to suspend our real world persona to make meanings from a range of other perspectives (Bolton, 1984). Heath (2000) quotes research that documents how moving from physical enactment or embodiment of an idea or event, to visual and then written representation, extends and develops children’s neural circuitry. Storytelling and imaginative writing have been shown to be greatly enhanced through the use of process drama strategies (Ewing, 2010a, 2009, 2006; Warhurst et al., 2009; Crumpler & Schneider, 2002; Booth & Neelands, 1998). Both imaginative oral and written storytelling are important because they encourage the exploration of existing ideas, the extension of the boundaries of our own worlds and the development of new possibilities. As discussed in Section 1, these skills are also important in the development of creative thinking, and additionally because, as Nicolopoulou (in Gleeson, 2010) writes, children use story to make sense of who they are, and to find their place in the world.

Drama can be thought of as a metaphor for bending time and space to create a place for exploratory interactions, dialogues and representations out of which new thoughts, ideas and ways of looking/seeing can emerge. The power of drama to engage students in creative thinking and problem-solving across all other curriculum areas, and to help them make emotional connections, is demonstrated through evidence of changed student responses to learning and improved thinking and literacy outcomes. Some exemplars of these changes will be examined.

Many case studies document the power of drama to change traditional classroom discourse to enable students to think for themselves, rather than trying to guess what’s in the teacher’s head (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O’Toole, 2009; Ewing, 2006; O’Mara, 2004). These findings resonate powerfully with Arnold’s theory (2005) of empathic intelligence pedagogy, which argues for pedagogy that is enthusiastic, expert, has the capacity to engage, displays intelligent caring and is empathetic. Researchers from the University of Waikato, (Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007) have recently emphasised the important relational pedagogy made possible through the process drama experiences that emerged in their two-year research project *Art of the Matter*, which involved ten primary teachers and their K–6 classes in Hamilton, New Zealand. They demonstrated how relational pedagogy develops when teachers open the learning space for the students to come into their own and:

*... work alongside children to explore where learning may go rather than teachers determining where it will go.*

(Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007, p. 16)

Aitken et al. (2007, pp. 8–9) found that co-constructing the drama enabled teachers and children to change the traditional transmissive classroom interaction. This process:

- allowed students more agency, by authentically sharing the power and risk-taking between the teacher and students
- liberated students from the traditional conformity of the classroom
- enabled students to push boundaries, and to try things out in fictional contexts and through the use of the ‘what if’ factor
- assisted in developing a relationship with the art itself, in this case the elements of drama (e.g. role, focus, tension, action, time and space).

The *Acting Against Bullying Applied Theatre Program* uses an adaptation of Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985), enhanced forum theatre, which was developed over a decade of action research into conflict and bullying in Australian schools (Burton, 2010; Burton, 2008; O’Toole, Burton, & Plunkett, 2005). Beginning with international collaboration into conflict within schools, the program combines improvisation, process drama, forum theatre and peer teaching, to address bullying and to help both primary and secondary students deal with it more effectively. The three parties to bullying: the bully, the bullied and the bystander, and the three identifiable stages of escalation in bullying, are taught to the students, both conceptually and through the drama work. Burton has recently worked with Year 11 and Year 9 students at an all girls school where systematic but covert bullying was causing many problems. The Year 11 students used drama strategies to understand the nature of bullying from the perspectives of all participants. They were later able to effectively mentor Year 9 students and help them develop strategies to deal with aggression. Since the project no further cases of bullying or relational aggression have been reported amongst the Year 11 students involved. Their teachers also have noted that the students are more committed to their studies than previously. These transformative pedagogical strategies, so successfully implemented here, manifestly are strategies that could deliver restorative and transformative justice processes and outcomes in a range of learning spaces.

Hands-on participation especially in creation of a drama for some kind of public performance or presentation, is particularly beneficial to all students, according to Heath with Roach (1999). They cite the responsibility needed to create a performance as the opportunity to develop a variety of skills need to plan, engage in discussion, receive feedback, learn how to collaborate and develop a sense of self-efficacy. In his work with marginalised young people, New Zealand educator Peter O’Connor (2008) particularly highlights:

*... [the] endless opportunities for reflection about who and what we are and do that surface in the gap between the fictional and the real world, between the audience self and the performer self.*

(O’Connor, 2008, p. 143)

While drama is most often used in schools to enhance English and literacy outcomes, the studies above suggest that drama processes can deepen learning and help transform traditional classroom pedagogy. In addition, drama can effect change in social behaviours, because it provides opportunities for learners to explore multiple perspectives and work through real issues and dilemmas in fictional contexts.

## Visual Arts

Once again, research that specifically demonstrates the impact of the visual arts on broader learning is limited. Assertions about the value of using art to encourage learners to think through their senses, to develop empathy and to communicate through visual and spatial symbols is often cited as an important benefit of both art-making and appreciation. Research

that demonstrates the effectiveness of the visual arts in achieving those outcomes, especially in relation to cross-curricular learning, is dominated by case study and arts-informed methodologies.

There is a substantial area of scholarly writing and research about the important role that images play in the formation of concepts (e.g., Efland, 2004). Although there needs to be more research undertaken on the impact of visits to art galleries, installations and museums in fostering the interpretation of and emotional reaction to a work of art, this area is growing. Seigesmund (2005), for example, describes a museum education program that used visual works of art to build primary students' imaginative cognition (Efland, 2004) and qualitative reasoning. Both terms are used to describe non-linguistic thinking required when responding to art (Dewey, 1934). Costantino (2007) describes both verbal and visual strategies she used with her primary class on a museum field trip. In both studies students learned to attend to perceptual detail, explore the effect of art works on emotions and make their own interpretations. Further, Riddett-Moore (2009) demonstrates how aesthetic engagement can encourage empathy and caring amongst students because students were encouraged to explore their own and others' responses to art. These programs focus on developing students' tools for discussing art and how it makes them feel, rather than the traditional art-making focus (Siegesmund, 2005).

Alter (2010) argues the visual arts have become even more important given the move away from text-based culture to one that is saturated with visual images. The increasing multimodal nature of our communication means it is often difficult or meaningless to try to separate out words and images. Brain research also suggests that 'drawing is thinking' (Geake, 2009, p. 173). This is illustrated by Haney, Russell and Bebell (2004), who provide an interesting compilation of works in which students' drawings are used to document change and enact change. A growing body of work is being undertaken to encourage refugees to tell their stories through art (McArdle & Spina, 2007). This builds on the use of drawing in many counselling contexts.

Alter (2010) also writes of the need to encourage students to be more adventurous in their thinking when responding to art and other visual media. She suggests that teachers need to provide students with opportunities to deal with ambiguities. This relates directly to the earlier discussion about providing opportunities for students to take risks to foster the development of creative and imaginative thinking. Alter's recommendation is particularly interesting, given the narrow focus in national testing programs world-wide. These testing regimes are explicitly narrow in their focus, and encourage students to look for the right answer, which is a very different outcome from seeking ambiguity! Bower (2004, p. 23) maintains that:

*... teaching students art has been linked to better visual thinking, problem solving, language and creativity ... by learning and practicing art, the human brain actually wires itself to make stronger connections.*

(Bower, 2004, p. 23)

The findings of a recent survey study (Sabol, 2010) sought teacher response on the impact of narrow literacy instruction focusing on phonics and measured by high stakes testing in the United States of America, embodied in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation introduced by the Bush administration. The Sabol survey found that visual arts educators in the United States of America overwhelmingly reported that students' studio work had suffered as a result of increased time spent on assessment and interruptions of class time for test preparation and remediation activities. Additionally, they suggested that because a greater emphasis on language arts and mathematics was required in all subjects, visual arts curriculum content had been reduced. Time typically devoted to students' 'experimentation' with new media, techniques, or processes had been significantly diminished, which had resulted in more unfinished work, increased stress among students, reduced levels of creativity, diminished reliance on or development of personal expression in studio work, and increased dependence on stereotypical responses or reliance on previously created responses. Teaching to test expectations in non-arts curricula could have similar repercussions in Australia, in the arts curricula.

An art studio program, called *Room 13* (<http://www.room13.scotland.com>), has had a powerful impact on students in Scotland, and way beyond since its beginning at Caol primary school near Fort William in Scotland in 1994. The art studio at Caol provided a place for art-making, visual

literacy, thinking and research, reading and discussion to have priority in student learning. Most interestingly, it was totally managed by Year 5 and 6 primary students, who raised money to enable their artist-in-residence to continue his work with them. It is important to note that there was not even the loosest prescribed learning agenda for the young artists; neither was there a prescribed teaching agenda for the artist. There are now *Room 13s* all over the world, including in Mexico and Nepal. They represent a growing international network of young artists. There is no prescribed role for the schools or teachers involved. Members of each *Room 13* argue that the rigour in their educational model comes through philosophical and moral teaching through the Arts, with the aim of promoting intellectual and artistic development across all ages.

The author of one evaluation study known to focus on the *Room 13* program asserts that learning in a *Room 13* develops members' self-awareness and ambition, along with a sophisticated understanding of risk and capacities for both autonomous learning and innovation (Drummond, 2006). Although the art work and music produced by *Room 13* members, and some of the individual learning experiences are easy to merit, as Drummond comments, the connection between the work, the learning, the model and the activity is mysterious, given the artist in residence is usually only present in an advisory capacity. Further exploration of the roles of motivation and expectation and of being part of a working arts community like this may help in seeking to understand the success of these learning spaces.

## Literature

Critical literacy, another term which has triggered much controversy in literacy and English circles as well as in the media, is defined here as the ability to understand and make meanings that penetrate literal or surface interpretations of texts and should include the ability to think about the implications for different contexts. This relates to Freire's early work (1985) about the impact on learning of the limited and inappropriate use of contrived reading materials. He also argued that texts written with controlled vocabulary and syntax remain controlled by writers and teachers, rather than by learners, and that those who are oppressed are then unable to engage actively or creatively in the learning process, remaining only marginally engaged in learning to be literate (Freire, 1986). His work still reverberates in all areas of research and practice in arts and literacy learning.

Concomitantly, if we are to understand the information we receive from computers, mobile phones, blogs, photographs, paintings, billboards and podcasts (to name just a few) we must be able to intelligently sift the myriad of information that bombards us daily. Arts processes can enable us to read, analyse and reflect, with a view to effectively interpreting this information, at the same time remaining conscious of our own social and cultural biases.

Therefore, real or authentic literary texts need to be the cornerstone for teaching English in the primary classroom, to enable children to continue exploring, questioning and creating imaginative possibilities through language (Ewing, 2009). Only under these conditions will they be able to build on the creativity and flexibility that the large majority bring to school. Margaret Meek calls this process taking quality texts 'in hand' (Meek, 1987, p. 11) to interrogate the range of meanings that are embedded in the layers of such literature. An authentic story is intellectually challenging and evocative, the vocabulary and language structures make sense and the language use is therefore rich rather than contrived. An emphasis on storying in talk, reading, writing and viewing multi-layered texts is central to living productively in our uncertain and increasingly changing times. Such texts can be used as the basis for powerful learning experiences integrating drama, music, dance, visual arts and media. These can, in turn, provide the inspiration for creative writing.

There are many impressive case studies documenting how teachers are attempting to foster creativity and imagination in their students. One such project is *Teaching Imaginatively*, begun in 2008 and funded by the Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA). The seven participating primary teachers in one Sydney school engaged in a project immersing children across the K–6 continuum in arts-based learning activities. They used an action learning process to integrate quality children's literature (Revans, 1983; Aubusson, Ewing, & Hoban, 2009) and explore what

teaching literacy creatively looked like at different stages of the K–6 primary curriculum. For one professional learning component of the project, the teachers developed research questions such as the following, for discussion in their regular action learning group meetings:

- *How do teachers know which books are authentic and worthwhile for classroom study?*
- *How do we help students to respond to what they read?*
- *Why is it important that we as teachers of primary children listen to and process the responses of our students to what they are reading?*
- *How do we encourage and foster a love of reading and narrative?*

(Warhurst, Crawford, Ireland, Neale, Pickering, Rathmell, & Watson, 2008, pp. 2–3)

The teachers involved in *Teaching Imaginatively* wanted to show how art and drama can bring texts to life and enhance students' critical literacy. Initially they identified what criteria could be used to determine quality literary texts, they made decisions about which texts were most appropriate for their students and they met regularly to discuss activities using imaginative arts strategies they could incorporate into their units to encourage their students to respond creatively to texts. Examples of the students' talking, listening, reading and writing were benchmarked before the project began. Teachers compared these with students' work at various points along the way, and recorded evidence of oral presentations, brainstorming, group discussions, drama and dance, using digital cameras and electronic whiteboards to demonstrate increased student motivation and engagement, expanded vocabularies, increased use of imagery and improved ability to listen and dialogue with each other. Students' writing demonstrated improved structural features as well as more sophisticated use of description and characterisation.

The project provides evidence that the Arts can achieve deep learning about literature and literacy. An extension of the project in 2009 across three Sydney primary schools used the drama strategy of readers' theatre (Ewing & Simons, 2004) to script a text for a group reading performance to improve students' reading strategies and comprehension. The teachers modelled the use of voice qualities such as tone and pitch, as well as pause and body percussion. Students developed their own scripts and all three schools collaborated in a readers' theatre festival. Teachers perceived the renewed enthusiasm in reading and improved inferential comprehension. After one term some children's reading ages, as measured by the Neale analysis of Reading Ability, had improved by well over a year (Warhurst, Ahrens, & Kilpatrick, 2010). Further detailed analysis of before and after benchmarking is currently underway.

## Film

The children of today are born into a digital world and Angela Thomas (2007) of the University of Tasmania, argues that for many children there is a seamlessness between their online and offline worlds. She writes:

*For children, there is no such dichotomy of online and offline or virtual and real – the digital is so much intertwined into their lives and psyche that the one is entirely enmeshed with the other ... what they do in their virtual worlds significantly affects how they connect to society.*

(Thomas, 2007, p. 3)

In a relatively recent media project, Jefferson (2006) involved senior secondary school students from two schools in making a short film, *The Boy who loved Shostakovich*. Over four months the students participated in all aspects of film making including screen play writing, storyboarding, acting, directing, cinematography, camera operating, composing, designing and editing. The teachers and students were involved in workshops to learn the technical skills and knowledges needed for film making before engaging in the process. In their discussion of the learning that the students articulated in their reflections of the process, Anderson and Jefferson (2009) concluded that the students experienced an aesthetic that touched them and moved them through controlling

the art form of film, 'frame by frame' (p. 79). They experienced 'ownership' of their learning in exactly the form that Freire argued was essential to real learning. In addition the students perceived that they learnt about the need to be and act as if they were a part of an important entity. They experienced difficulty in making choices, and the need to work together to solve problems. One student likened the team effort to being as if they were 'like one big brain' (p. 81). This student recognition of how powerfully the work undertaken was team-based is in itself evidence of learning which can be generalised to other fields of student learning. Even if the evidence is interpreted as simply indicating skill-development, that it was competency-based rather than motivational, it is such as to indicate that the learning had cross-curricular dimensions. There is, however, a need for evidence that this kind of approach is demonstrably better than other approaches.

## Integrated arts programs

Two programs have been selected for description and analysis, as examples of how integrated arts programming can successfully function in schools and provide cross-curricular support.

### *Development of Early Literacies through the Arts (DELTA)*

The *Development of Early Literacies through the Arts (DELTA)* project was a three-year collaboration between Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education. It sought to improve students' academic achievement by integrating the Arts in classroom literacy programs, providing teacher professional development and collaborations between teachers and artists. Although the project involved 26 schools, particular focus centred on three high-poverty schools that had not originally been part of the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education. The project aimed to provide the participating teachers with intensive professional development and demonstrated the improvement in literacy in grades 1–3, through the use of arts teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The report included three detailed school case study reports, which described all the arts processes and experiences undertaken in the action research by the project's researchers, teaching artists and teachers, a digital portfolio, as well as qualitative and statistical data analysis from the interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, surveys and performances. The researchers reported their findings in the following terms:

*Thus we have determined that when literacy teaching practices include creative processes and self expression through multiple arts media, students will increasingly find new ways to expand their vocabulary, communication skills, and self esteem as language literacy learners. During the model building process, DELTA teachers and artists also discovered that their content knowledge and teaching skills had expanded and that the process of co-design, co-teaching and professional development experiences had challenged their flexibility, creativity, and risk-taking skills as pioneering action researchers.*

(Scripp with Burnaford, Bisset, Pereira, Frost, & Yu, 2007, p. 181)

The three case studies are rich in detail and provide exemplary models of integrated arts programs. Improved classroom behaviour and attitude to towards learning were the first changes observed. Specific examples of literacy improvement were cited after a ten-week musical literacy program was taught to a first grade class. Year 3 children demonstrated impressive improvements in story writing, using drama and visual arts. The second grade class focused on a mural-making process and improved literacy skills were subsequently evident.

Analysis of interview and survey data demonstrated impressive degrees of perceived effects in students' language literacy skills as well as reflective awareness and understanding of arts processes. It was also evident that the teachers most valued the high quality and collaborative professional development over time and in addition, expanded their understanding of literacy. Systematic change was also observed in the teachers' classroom practices and this resulted in changed classroom dynamics. In addition, there is some trend evidence to suggest the overall

effects of the project were greater than the individual components. Claims about whole school change were less evident in the data analysis and questions of long-term sustainability remain.

The *DELTA* study should challenge teachers, schools and education systems to think differently about the way classroom learning is organised. Integrating the Arts into English and literacy learning has the potential to deepen students' understanding and mastery of language and literacy.

### *Youth Arts with an Edge (SCRAYP)*

Established in 1996, *Youth Arts with an Edge (SCRAYP)* has worked in Australian schools with student participants on projects which led to innovative performance pieces (<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/directories/listing?id=21103>). More than 10,000 audience members have viewed the performances of emerging artists and the young people that they have mentored, many of whom are 'at risk'. Professional artists experienced in the field of community cultural development mentor emerging artists to make up the SCRAYP creative team. They learn how to work through a dialogic community arts process. The young artists employed to be part of the creative team are from culturally diverse backgrounds. Often they became originally involved with SCRAYP as young participants themselves in schools.

The creative teams conduct workshops with groups of up to 50 young people, either in schools or at a community arts centre, encouraging the participants to use their own personal experiences and language to create a fictional script. All the shows thus portray issues that are important to the young people involved and achieve high-quality outcomes. Professional learning for teachers is also provided as part of the organisation's collaboration with schools. The performances are showcased to peers, friends, family and members of the wider community, as well as representatives from the Arts, Health and Education sectors.

Other evaluated studies have shown that certain attributes of the SCRAYP program effectively benefit young people's individual well-being and their learning and engagement in school (Bryce et al., 2004). Those who participate in SCRAYP tend to have more positive feelings about school, are more likely to enjoy reading and read more frequently, so manifestly some attitudinal changes to learning have been achieved.

## Concluding comments

The examples canvassed in Section 3 have fallen into two broad groups: those that illustrate the facilitation achievable through arts-based programs to good arts learning outcomes and those that achieve more than this. Those in the latter group have demonstrated that the Arts can support transformative learning experiences in school contexts. As illustrated by the programs in both groups, the importance of student engagement in the learning process itself and ownership of the learning cannot be overemphasised. Many children opt out of formal learning activities because they cannot see the relevance for them for their own lives, currently as well as potentially. Too often, learning in schools is very different from the learning that happens in children's everyday worlds.

Ensuring that arts experiences are at the centre of the curriculum can:

- facilitate students' active involvement in learning, helping them make links with their own knowledge and experiences
- enable a range of possible meanings to be explored and represented
- challenge stereotypical assumptions
- encourage creativity, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity
- provide opportunities for students to reflect and dialogue collaboratively
- take risks and try again when something is unsuccessful – understand that getting things wrong is part of effective learning
- apply understandings to their own personal context or other contexts.

Section 4 will explore further how arts processes and appreciation encourage individuals to play with ideas, think in flexible ways, take risks and push stereotypes and boundaries. It will also examine the use of the Arts to transform communities more broadly.

# Arts as catalyst for social transformation

# 4

In Section 3 it was demonstrated that student engagement in the Arts has the potential to change the way that learning is constructed in school contexts to more effectively and equitably meet the needs of learners. This section focuses on broader arts programs that use the transformational role of arts activities and processes to change whole communities, which of course will also involve change for individuals. It also will suggest that schools should examine the effectiveness of such community arts programs when developing critical quality and inclusive pedagogy in their sector.

## The Arts in a broader social context

This sub-section argues that a community's habits of thinking, seeing and behaving can be transformed through active participation in creative processes, debate, identification of divergence and so on, to produce new ways of seeing, knowing and acting in the world. Critical engagement through arts processes can help us to see things from a different perspective and suggest connections between different phenomena that were not previously recognised. In addition, communities and the way in which educational institutions and government agencies operate can be transformed through community engagement in arts experiences. Participants' social skills and ability to work cooperatively can be fostered. Arts processes can engender the development of negotiation skills which can mean that conflict can be managed more effectively and tolerance for difference built. Social cohesion and community can develop because multicultural understanding is promoted. Providing opportunities for further education and employment, through the development of new personal, social and workplace skills and attitudes can also ultimately mean that poverty can be reduced (Ruiz, 2004; Stern & Seifert, 1998). These are serious social benefits.

A range of exemplars in this section demonstrate that when arts activities have been developed specifically for a target clientele, young people 'at risk', or, in some cases, actual offenders, lives change as a result. It is, however, not only the lives of participants in the community arts programs that can change. Such programs can have an impact on the lives of those who have been onlookers or audience members. The following comments in *HighWater Theatre's* recent evaluation (Osmotherly, 2007) reflect the impact such a successful program can have on audiences who view the theatre performances:

*Much reporting and evaluation of arts-based projects focuses on the outcomes for project participants and the artists involved in the development of the work. There is less attention paid to the impact of such creative projects on those who access them as audience members. This seems a shame given that it is these impacts which clearly demonstrate the power of the arts to motivate personal and social change and engage the hearts of individuals across all strata of society.*

(Osmotherly, 2007, p. 29)

Over the last 15 years arts agencies and organisations, often in partnership with community organisations or government bodies, have played an enormous role in the rejuvenation of communities through helping people connect, promoting social cohesion and reconciliation. While many of these programs and projects are small scale, in many cases the social impact has been profound. Unlike the school-based research, these programs are often evaluated, using qualitative methodologies,

## Defining and evaluating social impact

It is even more difficult to evaluate the social impact of an intervention or program because it has more variables than a school-based program, and it must address many different aspects of life, and may have far-reaching and long-term effects that are not easy to measure or quantify. The impact may be personal, where participants are seeking a general competency (e.g. increased confidence or self-esteem); or 'structural' and more specific (e.g. better housing conditions in a regenerated area); employment related (e.g. a new skill or skills enabling a job or a better position) or a combination of these.

As argued in Section 2, longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research methods are needed to develop a rich understanding of the effects of a teaching and learning program on participants. This is even more so with understanding the type and depth of social impact such programs have on individuals and communities. Such research tools need to be carefully tailored to ensure their validity and reliability. In an important UK study, Matarasso (1997) used a multiple method approach to identify 50 social impacts of some 90 participative arts programs. He maintained that arts programs differed from other social programs in their encouragement of imagination and the creation of opportunities for self-expression.

*The greatest impact of participation in the arts – and the ones which other programs cannot achieve – arise from their ability to help people think critically about and question their experiences and those of others ... with all the ... magic, symbolism, feeling, metaphor and creativity that the arts can offer.*

(Matarasso, 1997, p. xx)

Matarasso's study demonstrated that arts programs could deliver resolutions to social issues in ways that other kinds of programs could not. Reeves' review (2002) built on Matarasso's work to assess the quality and appropriateness of research designs used in measuring the impact of the Arts, and to assess how methodologies can be improved and 'streamlined' to demonstrate this impact more effectively in social policy areas. He identified key actions needed to help improve the robustness of research methods and provide substantive evidence that is able to demonstrate the contribution of arts and culture to the social and economic objectives of central and local government. Reeves (2002), Matarasso (1997) and Ruiz (2004) all concluded that participation in the Arts can and does benefit individuals and communities.

Social impact benefits

**Personal development:** An improving sense of self, increasing individuals' or communities' confidence and sense of self-worth, enabling empowerment over one's own life.

**Social cohesion:** An increased friendship or social network, increased contact with other cultures, a sense of 'belonging' to a particular group/club/network/community.

**Community image/regeneration:** A more developed sense of, or involvement in, community (e.g. volunteering, helping organise local events, etc.), working in partnership with other organisations for the community, feeling more positive or safer about where they live, pride in own culture or ethnicity.

**Health and well-being:** An improved physical and/or mental health, reduction in stress or pain, reduction in morbidity, increased physical and mental activity, a more positive outlook on life.

**Education and learning:** The development of transferable skills to the workplace, enhanced employability (e.g. increased creativity), increased enjoyment of arts activities, stimulated life-long interest in culture and the arts.

(Adapted from Ruiz, 2004, pp. 13–14)

## Australian arts programs with social goals

Robust Australian research and evaluation studies cited in this section will demonstrate links between participation in the Arts and social impacts on individuals and/or communities. While there is much participatory community arts activity, as yet there has been no large-scale 'streamlined meta-evaluations' of these. Many of the programs and projects run with limited personnel, funded by charity, philanthropic and not-for-profit organisations. Although underpinned by commonalities of belief in the power of arts-based activities for generating participant engagement, re-locating individual identities and restoring self-esteem, the lack of similar methodological frameworks means comparing programs' relative effectiveness is problematic.

### Community arts projects

Recently Vic Health commissioned an evaluation of the Community Arts Development Scheme. After reviewing many of the intervention programs, the researchers (Kelaher, Dunt, Curry, Berman, Joubert, & Johnson, 2009) selected several community arts interventions to profile their impact on health and well-being. Two characteristics deemed critical to success, and which the three selected organisations had demonstrated, were:

*... an impressive track record of working with communities and individuals and of making powerful and challenging artworks and performances that reflect the realities of these individuals and groups and their experiences of complex issues or significant forms of marginality. Their work is based on the belief that the arts provide a means to bear witness to their own experience, and through that process integrate their experiences into a new sense of self.*

(Kelaher et al., 2009, p. 9)

A number of qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools and methods were used and in some cases developed in this project, to assess impacts at individual, community and organisational level. These kinds of evaluative tools could be used in similar projects in the future.

Key findings included the identification of four interrelated processes that were pivotal to creating/developing the supportive and collaborative environment provided by each of the arts organisations. These were respect, engagement, community and safety. The activities of these organisations generated substantial benefits for participants' mental health and well-being, at both the levels of the individual and the community. The creative arts processes and experiences enabled the participants to 'find a voice' as well as develop new

skills, self-validation and self-confidence. In addition, complex issues, including violence, racism, discrimination, abuse, social justice and poverty were explored through performance or exhibitions, in such a way that the community dialogue could raise awareness and challenge misperceptions. Data from audience surveys also demonstrated the positive effect that the performances and presentations had in challenging perceptions. The organisations themselves also reported benefits from engaging in the evaluation process, and these benefits included extending their outreach, improving their understanding of evaluation and extending their partnerships.

Snapshots of several of these community arts interventions and programs are discussed briefly below.

### *Big hART*

*Big hART*, established in 1992, is a national not-for-profit organisation committed to the use of the Arts to effect social change in challenged or marginalised communities, usually over a period of two to three years. The first step in working with a particular community group involves using multimodal art forms to engage participants. The projects involve multi-tasking with an experienced and creative team. Such processes help participants deepen and validate their life experiences. They then find a way to express or present these experiences to others, in cultural activities of high quality. In doing so, the issues are given high visibility in the public sphere and raise community awareness, which often has results in influencing social policy.

Because experimentation and innovation are also part of the *Big hART* mantra, the style, shape, size and work of the company is always changing. Personnel include community builders, field workers, researchers, artists, arts workers and producers. The website (<http://www.bighart.org>) documents that over the last four years alone, *Big hART* has worked intensely with 330 young people and 1060 adults and won multiple national and international awards for its work. The company has formed 198 community partnerships, reached a live audience of 57,720, and a television audience of over 675,000. Each project consistently shows high levels of participation, improved levels of literacy for participants, improved life skills and self-confidence in participants, and their long-term diversion from crime, into education and work. In addition, the communities around them also manifest positive outcomes. In this way, the programs and participation in them make a positive contribution, build social inclusion becoming part of a cost-effective social solution to the problem. They also demonstrably foreground the broad transformational social benefits of such arts-led programs.

Evaluations of *Big hART*'s projects indicate that the company's programs achieve high levels of social and personal efficacy and its outcomes represent value for money, as participants work towards post-compulsory school retention and helping young people find meaningful employment. Peter Wright and David Palmer at Murdoch University have worked extensively with *Big hART* and they jointly evaluated the Northcott projects, which had been undertaken by *Big hART* in partnership with the NSW Department of Housing, from 2002–7, in Surry Hills, Sydney. The project's aims were to:

- *empower the tenants by assisting them to tell their stories through photographic portraits, music, geo-spatial maps and performance theatre*
- *create an opportunity for the participants' lives to be validated*
- *build a sense of community*
- *encourage conditions that decrease violence and isolation.*

(Wright & Palmer, 2007, p. 6)

Wright and Palmer (2007) reported that the outcomes of the project were extraordinary and manifestly on-target. The use of narrative, for example, to honour and validate the participants' experiences and develop their creative capacities, in relatively short time frames, was a particular feature of the *Northcott Narratives Project*. Project outcomes included the following:

- facilitated opportunities for the community members to tell their stories
- quality cultural and performance activities including *Stickybricks* which was performed locally and also invited to the Sydney Festival
- impacted on a range of government organisations, funding bodies and policy regimes including the Department of Housing and the Police
- a marked decrease in violent crime in the area
- transformation of the community and many personal lives
- accreditation as a World Health Organization safe community (the first Australian public housing estate to be so).

The *Drive* intervention (2008–9), is another *Big hART* initiative that formed part of the LUCKY project in Tasmania. Road crashes are the biggest killers of young men aged between 18 and 25 in Australia, with the highest incidence being in Tasmania. *Drive* was a film project specifically designed for young men to address the rites of passage they confronted over a 12-month period (2008–9). During this time, more than a hundred young men living in isolated areas of the Tasmanian North West Coast who had been identified as being ‘at risk’ of suicide, were invited and agreed to be involved in making a documentary. In the documentary process they worked with professional artists to learn all aspects of film making, including: camera operation and technique; sound recording; engineering; scriptwriting performance; soundtrack composition; and editing. They used these skills to interview families and friends as well as community members affected by the premature deaths of young men involved in motor vehicle tragedy or suicide. They worked in partnership with groups they were often traditionally in conflict with, including the Tasmanian Police, detention centres and the Burnie Drug and Alcohol unit. The film is eligible for the 2010 Film Awards. Palmer comments specifically about *Drive* in his 2008 evaluation:

*Perhaps the most striking feature of this work was the perceptible depth and the expression of maturity that many of the young men possessed after having been involved in the project. The young men were impressive in their ability to reflect upon the impact on themselves and others, articulate how the process of learning skills in filmmaking help them socially and identify the ingredients that lead to a successful program. Indeed, there was a profound and noticeable shift in the maturity and sensibility of these young men from the time when the evaluation began to the present.*

(Palmer, 2008, p. 26)

Both these *Big hART* interventions model arts-based interventions which effectively address and contribute to positive social outcomes for the individuals involved and for the broader society. The use of professional evaluators further ensures the findings are methodologically sound and can be replicated by other projects.

### *Somebody’s Daughter Theatre*

*Somebody’s Daughter Theatre* (SDT) is funded by the Australia Council for the Arts. It began nearly 30 years ago with actors and artists providing workshops, both in prison and post-release, in music, dance, drama and art to women, explicitly to help break the cycles of poverty and abuse. The Annual Report states that it is

*... the creative processes involved in developing the storyline and theme for a performance, or for a piece of artwork that are critical to the transformational nature of the work. The women make the choices as to what they want to communicate, what they want to be understood. They take an idea from conception to completion, from a dream to a reality – providing an excellent model for anyone who wants to make positive changes to their lives.*

(Somebody’s Daughter Theatre, 2009, p. 9)

High-quality dramatic performances and art exhibitions are presented to family, friends and the general public nearly every year. Feedback from both the art and the performance/play is consistently and overwhelmingly positive. The company challenges the community's assumptions, changes stereotypes and motivates people to rethink their attitude to complex issues including homelessness, poverty and abuse. In a 1996 review of the long-term benefits of community arts funding, Williams (1996) reported improved self-esteem outcomes for women ex-offenders involved in one of the *SDT* plays, *Tell Her That I Love Her*, and concluded that the project helped the women develop their self-esteem, come to terms with unacknowledged trauma and gain public acceptance of who they are.

Since 2000 *SDT* has created and produced 14 new Australian works and presented numerous art exhibitions. Participants have toured extensively, and performed in schools, theatres and at conferences. In their research, Kelaher et al. (2009) reported that *SDT*:

- creates high quality, music and art
- provides pathways back into formal education, training or employment for female ex-prisoners and marginalised youth
- promotes public awareness in the wider community of the complexity of issues that lead to mental ill health, addictive behaviour, violence and inter-generational poverty.

It also routinely evaluates its programs, using mixed method research methodologies.

#### *HighWater Theatre*

In 2001 the *SDT* company began a partnership with the Upper Hume Community Health Service and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. They provide an intensive creative arts-based education program (drama, music and art) for and with a small group of rural school-aged youth aged between 12 and 16. The program is called *HighWater Theatre* and focuses on production, performance and presentation. A specialist full-time teacher and an advocate for the young people work alongside the participants on literacy and numeracy, and health and life issues, on a one-to-one basis. Most of the young people involved have been out of the formal education system for some time. Many are or have been in foster care or have experienced homelessness, and a significant proportion had suffered abuse or neglect. The program aims to assist the young people to find pathways back to education and training. The core program includes:

- *Intensive drama, art and music workshops led by artists from SDT, leading to 3 days a week and up to 6 days a week pre-production. Young people will do warm-ups, voice work, articulation and breathing exercises. These activities are non-negotiable*
- *Exercises focused on skill development – including ability to work effectively as a group*
- *Individualised education plans and teaching for each participant with an emphasis on literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and social skills*
- *Planned pathways back into formal education or training*
- *Specialised sessions on health, well-being and nutrition*
- *Individual training and support in going for interviews, writing resumes, filling in forms, making appointments, budgeting and other practical, independent, living skills*
- *Visual arts, singing and song-writing workshops led by SDT artists*
- *Public performances in a range of venues to a range of audiences.*

(Osmotherly, 2007, p. 9)

The critical feature emphasised throughout the evaluation of the *HighWater* program is the centrality of the high-quality arts experiences to the success of the program:

*The pivotal importance of the high quality theatre performances and the disciplined drama workshop processes which lead to these performances are all seen as central to the success of the program. So often, arts can be viewed as a 'tack on.' HighWater is not a health/welfare program where they also do drama. The young people are not there to be 'fixed' or 'cured'. HighWater is not an alternative school setting where they also do drama. HighWater is an arts-based program with essential education and welfare components.*

(Osmotherly, 2007, p. 61)

Figure 2. 'Fragmented' by HighWater art student



(Somebody's Daughter Theatre, 2009, p. 26)

By 2006 the personal, community and general outcomes from *HighWater Theatre* were, by any program evaluation standards, remarkable. *SDT* Artistic Director, Maud Clark attributed a great deal of the success to the creative process itself.

*I've come to understand that in a world where so much is unequal – creativity is the great equaliser.*

(Clark, 2009, p. 186)

Since its inception, *HighWater Theatre* with *SDT* has broken the cycle for many of the young people involved. Both personal outcomes and community outcomes are evident, including:

- The literacy and numeracy skills of all participants have markedly improved with 8 of the 22 students who have exited the program returning to mainstream education. Two have recently completed their final year. A further 8 are completing traineeships or apprenticeships and 2 are in full-time employment.
- The use of drugs and alcohol has stopped or reduced substantially.
- No further suicide attempts have been reported.
- Crime radically reduced.
- Audiences have reported that the 174 performances in mainstream theatres have had a major impact, both as theatre and as an effective educational tool.

Most recently in 2009 SDT began the *Every Child Every Chance* initiative, which envisages the company working with every teacher and every child in school communities across the Hume region in Victoria. The professional learning offered to teachers involves workshops centred on using the Arts as a catalyst for a more inclusive education system. Resources will also be developed alongside the professional learning sessions. Weekly creative workshops will continue with those students identified by the schools as most at risk. This is an initiative which combines the full gamut of the SDT program experience and indicates the company's preparedness to adopt a regional socially transformative approach in partnership with the education department.

## Conclusions on arts-based social transformation programs

This sub-section of the review paper has described successful Australian social change arts-based programs, and the evaluations reported demonstrated that realistic evaluation of the effectiveness of these arts-led initiatives can be undertaken. These are two significant contributions to the field of arts-led social programming.

All of the Australian initiatives described have created positive learning experiences through the Arts, often for those who have not previously had such opportunities. There were other significant commonalities: careful planning, consultation and negotiation with the participants, opportunities to experiment with different art forms, the learning of transferable skills, an expectation of rigour and quality in the work produced, the chance to provide social commentary and critique, and a celebration through performance or presentation, often followed by evaluation by peers, family, the general public and sometimes by experts in the field. Another significant similarity is that all the projects have been socially (not just individually) transformational.

It seems ironic that cross-sectoral community arts projects are leading the way in recognising the educative, social and cultural well-being and restorative dimensions of arts experiences and processes. Such principles and processes should also be at the centre of school learning. The possibility of adopting such processes in delivering and evaluating such programs in school curricula needs to be carefully investigated by education policy-makers and practitioners. The evidence in this review shows there can be no doubt that the Arts can be agents of social reform. But it should not be the sole province of committed individuals and not-for-profit groups to achieve these socially transformational outcomes. This is the province of government, through both educational and broader social policy. Such initiatives not only improve the society they serve, they avoid crippling costs associated with social failure.

## Implications for Australian education policy and practice

Given the growing research evidence about the centrality of the Arts to cognitive and emotional well-being and the impact it can have on deep learning, arts education needs to be seen as a core curriculum component and be accessible to all students from all backgrounds at each level of education.

Currently, however, there are conflicting discourses about what is and is not important in contemporary educational policy and practice. If we do wish to ensure that all learners have access to knowledge and skills that will enable their well-being in such a rapidly changing world, states, governments and policy-makers must:

*... ask what constitutes a well-educated student, a successful learning, and teaching experience, successful schooling or educational success.*

(Gadsden, 2008, p. 34)

Only then might the Arts have its rightful place in formal education contexts. To date equitable provision and resourcing of the Arts and monitoring teaching quality in arts education has

received insufficient attention in Australia. Similarly, provision of quality teacher preparation in the Arts and ongoing professional learning has been almost non-existent.

## Quality pre-service and in-service professional learning

If the Arts are to be a core curriculum component in schools quality arts education and arts pedagogy, there are workforce, funding and resource implications which will need close attention. Learning in, through and about the Arts must become a priority for both pre-service courses and ongoing professional learning for in-service teachers. This review paper has examined the importance of quality in effective education in and through the Arts, and has highlighted the insecurities many teachers articulate about their ability to use arts processes in their teaching. Both governments and tertiary institutions must re-consider the initial preparation of all teachers to give them confidence to embed the Arts in their teaching and learning practices. Funding and other systemic arrangements for ongoing professional development, to enable both generalist and arts teachers to continue to update their knowledge and develop their expertise and skills, must therefore be prioritised.

## The school curriculum

If arts education is to be made accessible to all students from all backgrounds at each level of education, there are direct implications for the imminent national curriculum. If a creative culture is to be developed through arts education among teachers, principals and other leaders, governments and education systems must reshape the competing competitive academic discourse that currently works against achieving such a culture. Cultivating imagination and creativity would need to become the priorities, rather than 'add-ons'. Interdisciplinary experiences, including digital and other emerging art forms, need to be deemed important, not marginal. It is true that a trend to more cross-curricular work involving arts and other (non-arts) subject areas, working together on creative and/or cultural themes, would initially place new demands on teachers and schools. To implement such developments will require leadership and support at a policy level, as well as adequate funding to fulfil the practicalities. It will be important for policy-makers and those developing the new national curriculum to seriously consider the evidence and stances adopted in this review.

Inclusive education requires pedagogical approaches that not only recognise individual differences, but also actively embrace varied learning styles (Ainscow in O'Connor, 2008). This review paper has shown that the Arts are demonstrably well-placed to facilitate change in educational systems and/structures. To enable such inclusivity, artistic and cultural dimensions must be embedded in all academic disciplines and fields. Active partnerships between schools, artists, community organisations and governments will be needed to enable this. Early exposure to the Arts for all children is imperative, and provision for rewarding arts experiences must be part of all early childhood learning contexts. Arts education should be focused on the full range of contemporary society and cultural issues that young people are grappling with, as they consider the future. Their issues include the environment, migration, sustainable development, global citizenship and the need for peace. How are schools currently supporting a consideration of their issues?

This review has argued that findings, from a range of research and practitioner sources, demonstrate that the Arts, while not a panacea for all problems, do have the potential to help us address many of the habitual problems routinely embedded in current educational institutions, and in the community more generally. There are, however, a number of implications and imperatives that follow from accepting this assertion.

## Implications for future research

The limitations of much of the published research on the impact of the arts programming must be addressed. Australian governments should fund programs and evaluations that build on existing research. Investment in high-quality, systematic and longitudinal research and evaluation,

alongside the funding of high-quality arts education initiatives, is essential. Communicating the individual and social impact of arts education, to raise community awareness about the intrinsic benefits of the Arts, would also be valuable.

## Concluding comments

While it must be remembered that the most important role that the Arts play in enhancing learning is in enabling enjoyment and fostering imagination and creative activities through participating in arts programs and processes, it is also true that by engaging in the Arts we become more cognisant of the broad spectrum of human experience. Learning horizons and life trajectories are enhanced. The role that the Arts collectively can play in transforming students' learning more broadly, should also be realised and celebrated.

A considerable and growing body of research supports the assertion that the Arts should be playing an important role in all areas of school education and community development. This review has particularly focused on how the Arts can help transform learning processes and practices in schools to ensure that education is inclusive and meaningful for all children. It has demonstrated, through reviewing the range of the research literature, that the Arts are already embedded in a range of school and community initiatives. They have enabled new beginnings for some of those experiencing great difficulties in their lives. At the same time, it is important to remember that inherent in the Arts is their ability to touch us as individuals in unique ways, and that this in itself can be an important catalyst for change. If we are to realise the transformative potential of the Arts in education, we must move beyond rhetoric in policy about its importance, to action.

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