



VADEA Response to the Inquiry into Arts & Music Education NSW

Question on Notice

(August 2024)

Introduction

While the newly released K-6 Creative Arts syllabus is an improvement on their drafts, VADEA reiterates its concerns that there are significant issues with the constrained organisational structure within a Creative Arts paradigm that is artificial and a response only to reducing content rather than ensuring quality educational outcomes for all the creative and performing arts subjects. Every KLA constrained within it has had outcomes halved, focus areas increased and each of these focus areas conflated into single outcomes that only succeeds in meeting the curriculum reform objective of 'reduced content' in the guise of reduced outcomes and in no way provides the quality of the previous syllabus.

In many of our discussions with NESA about the reduced outcomes for Visual Arts they replied that the K-6 Creative Arts syllabus has 16 outcomes, more than any other subject. This is an inaccurate comparison when it is clear that there are four subjects conflated into the one syllabus when other subjects are afforded their own syllabus.

Outcomes

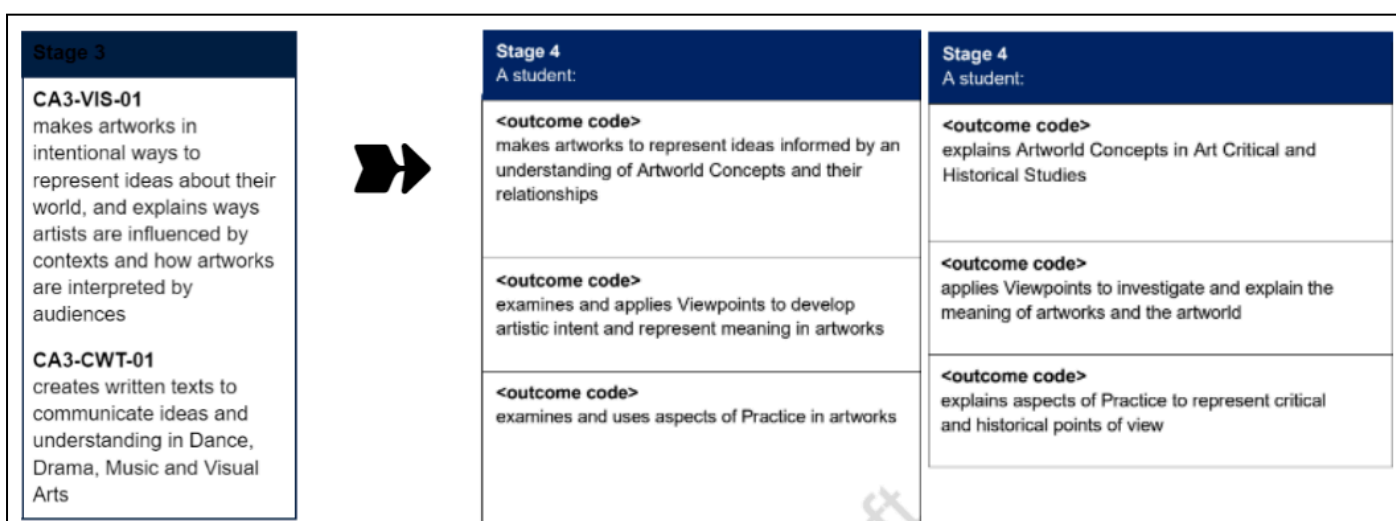
Focus area	Early Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Visual Arts	CAE-VIS-01 experiments with and identifies ways materials and techniques are used to represent subject matter and ideas in artworks	CA1-VIS-01 makes artworks using materials and techniques to represent subject matter and ideas, and describes ways artists convey ideas in artworks	CA2-VIS-01 makes artworks using art forms to represent subject matter and ideas, and describes ways artists convey ideas about their world to audiences through artworks	CA3-VIS-01 makes artworks in intentional ways to represent ideas about their world, and explains ways artists are influenced by contexts and how artworks are interpreted by audiences CA3-CWT-01 creates written texts to communicate ideas and understanding in Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts

The K-6 Visual Arts outcomes from the syllabus (above) show that each outcome has two parts (Making & Appreciating) until Stage 3 where the third focus area has been loosely linked to Audience (as part of Exhibiting). VADEA advocated for Exhibiting to be removed as a focus area because it is easily integrated into Making and Appreciating (as NESA have done with S1-S2 and in the 7-10 draft Visual Arts syllabus).

VADEA believes it was integrated purely for uniformity of the Creative Arts diagram within the overview and is evidence of the artificial conflation of Creative Arts subjects. The inclusion of "Exhibiting" as a key content area is problematic, as it does not fit well within the discipline and may confuse teachers about its role in K-6 education. NESAs has chosen to ignore broad subject-based advice on this matter, despite its inclusion cluttering the subject unnecessarily and confusing educators in the process.

As advised by NESAs in consultation, the newly released K-6 Creative Arts syllabus has always aimed to simplify things for teachers who don't specialise in the creative arts, but this good intention has led to oversimplification. The explanation of 'Making' in the new syllabus has shifted from a valued, descriptive approach that provides untrained teachers a better understanding of the value of the Visual Arts to prescriptive and limited bullet point content points that do not allow teachers to get a real sense and taste of the subject. Shallow descriptions within the online structure could result in program design turning into a tick a box set of 'activities' rather than visual art experiences.

Learning Progression from Stage 3 - 4



The image above shows the Stage 3 outcomes moving to Stage 4. The CA3-VIS-01 outcome is the only subject specific outcome in Stage 3 with three conflated focus areas. When moving to Stage 4, there are discipline specific outcomes supported by solid research that align to a concepts-based approach more in keeping with the curriculum reform objectives. Much of VADEA's advice to NESAs within the Have Your Say processes was about the lost opportunities to align with the historical conceptual structures of the 7-10 Syllabus. NESAs were also aware of early childhood research into Visual Arts education through their TAG group and published evidence base but chose to also ignore this advice.

The K-6 Visual Arts draft content points were overly prescriptive, limiting the scope of Visual Arts education. Additionally, there was a misalignment between stages, particularly from Stage 3 to Stage 4, which could hinder students' progression in Visual Arts skills and understanding. In the now released K-6 Visual Arts Syllabus the prescriptive nature of the content points has been reduced, there are still areas where this is evident and this forecloses on other content a teacher might choose.

Curriculum Reform Process

VADEA raised their concerns on a number of occasions, including a letter to the Minister for Education, regarding procedural inconsistencies. The concerns in this letter were denied, despite our knowledge to the contrary, with many participants in the reform process constrained by confidentiality clauses designed to

ensure NESAs decisions, objectives and practices were largely unchallenged. The consultation process has been adversarial in nature, opaque, contradictory and confusing. As a teaching association, we were made to feel that our views were not that of experts in the discipline and that they were one of many points of view. Hours of unpaid work was undertaken, on top of exceptionally busy leadership roles in schools, to provide constructive solutions-orientated responses to NESAs that have been largely under-valued, ignored and then sought by NESAs throughout consultation processes.

Up until this new syllabus, Visual Arts and Music have always been compulsory with Drama and Dance taught in English and PDHPE, as suggested in the old syllabus. The new curriculum seems to mandate that all four subjects must now be taught, effectively diminishing the time allocated to Visual Arts and Music. Such significant changes will impact teacher supply in myriad ways.

Conclusion

VADEA considers the K-6 Creative Arts syllabus a diminishment on what students and teachers currently enjoy and we will always advocate for Visual Arts education where we see educational outcomes for our students eroded or diminished. We advocate for a syllabus that supports teachers in classrooms and connects students to the value of an art education.

As was highlighted in our original submission, VADEA continues to advocate for an increased focus in training visual arts teachers and having specialist K-6 VA Visual Arts teachers in all schools in every sector in order to ensure the quality of visual arts education does not remain a privilege for some. VADEA also advocates for a renewed focus and incentives for the reinstatement of creative arts university courses.