

Submission  
No 68

## INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** The CREATE Centre, University of Sydney

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Dear Committee,

We make this submission to the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales.

### **Our organisation**

[The CREATE Centre, University of Sydney](#) engages in three main areas: creativity research; the role of the arts in creative education, health and wellbeing; and how the arts transform all areas of life from early childhood through adulthood.

Our researchers come from education, performance studies, medicine and health, literature, architecture, music, business, and the visual arts. We acknowledge the central, intrinsic role creative pedagogy and the arts can and should play in the lives, learning and formal education of all people.

We are delighted to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales and would be happy to provide further detail and support documentation about any of the recommendations below.

### **1. Summary of Recommendations**

There is unequivocal research evidence that The Arts (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts) should play a central role in the NSW Curriculum for primary and secondary schools. It will enable the realisation of the NSW Curriculum Review (2020,.ix) recommendations to:

- provide an education that engages and challenges every child and young person in learning, rewards them for effort and promotes high standards; and
- prepare each student with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners, and to be flourishing and contributing citizens in a world in which rapid technological advances are contributing to unprecedented economic and social change in unpredictable ways.

We believe there is an urgent need to:

- update the NSW Education Act (1990) to reflect a contemporary understanding of The Arts in schools in Australia and align with the central principle in the Australian Curriculum: The Arts that states that 'all young Australians are entitled to engage with the five Arts subjects and

should be given an opportunity to experience the special knowledge and skills base of each” (ACARA, 2011, p. 4);

- ensure that all five arts subjects are treated **equally** in the NSW curriculum;
- include Media Arts in the NSW Curriculum and it is difficult to understand why it has been omitted given it is part of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts. Currently NSW is the only state that does not recognise Media Arts;
- reinstate adequate time in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to ensure early childhood and primary teachers have quality learning experiences in and develop the knowledge skills and confidence to teach each of the five arts subjects;
- enable secondary ITE students time in their studies to understand the benefits of arts-rich pedagogies in all curriculum areas
- recognise The Arts as an area of primary specialisation in ITE courses;
- endorse arts-rich professional learning for in-service early childhood, primary and secondary teachers;
- develop creative arts strategies, cultural resources and capacities within schools to support children’s, young people’s and families’ connection and wellbeing through access to arts rich experiences in schools preK-12. These strategies and resources will help prepare learners and communities for future uncertainties and disasters;
- provide support funding for youth arts and arts organisations and arts professional teaching associations.

## **2. A Brief Summary of Relevant Research and Policy**

A wide range of policy documents recognise the potential transformative role The Arts and creativity can and should play in the lives and education of young people (e.g., The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, 2019; Revive, Australia’s National Cultural Policy, 2023). Each Arts subject nurtures the imagination alongside the development of different knowledges, skills and dispositions including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, resilience and problem-solving. These ‘21<sup>st</sup> century skills’ and dispositions are important across disciplines are critical in facing the challenging futures we all face globally.

There is strong evidence that arts learning and engagement in both formal and extra curriculum contexts significantly enhances well-being, self-esteem, self-regulation and motivation. For example, Martin et al.’s (2013, p711) longitudinal research in 15 Australian primary and secondary contexts demonstrated that ‘students participating in the arts increasingly saw themselves as part of a larger local community, felt they had contributed to that community, and had a greater sense of meaning and purpose ... ‘(p. 711).

An increasing body of Australian and international research demonstrates unequivocally that quality arts processes and experiences impact positively on student social and emotional wellbeing and academic achievement (e.g, Bowen & Kisda, 2022; Saunders & Ewing, 2022; A New

Approach, 2019; Dunn et al., 2019; World Health Organisation, 2019; Ewing, 2019, 2010; Fleming, Gibson & Anderson, 2016; Martin et al, 2013; Winner et al., 2013; Catterall et al., 2012; Bamford, 2006; Catterall, 2009, 2002; Seidel et al, 2009; Deasy, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Fiske, 1999).

In addition, there is growing evidence that arts processes and experiences can help nurture well-being, self-efficacy and resilience in the face of challenging times. The development of such attributes can be important in reducing children's anxiety and support children and young people facing crisis or trauma. Arts and cultural experiences and activities can thus play an important role at any stage of disaster management and recovery (See, for example, the Regrowth project, De Angelis, in press, 2024).

To date, however, in Australia there has been a gap between education policy and opportunities for quality, well-resourced arts education to be provided within schools (Bamford, 2006, Ewing, 2010). In fact, two reviews undertaken, in music (Pascoe et al., 2005) and visual arts (Davis et al., 2008) concluded that learners from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds were less likely to experience arts-rich education in their primary years of schooling.

The Australia Council for the Arts' research (2014, 2017) also confirms that Australians (and in NSW, 75%) generally agree the arts should play an important role in every child's education.

### **3. Media Arts**

The NSW Arts curriculum needs to align with the Australian Curriculum: The Arts. At present NSW is the only Australian state that does not recognise Media Arts as a discrete subject. Children and young people are actively involved in media culture from an early age. Media Arts provide learners with the tools and critical understandings needed to understand diverse cultures, the role of media in influencing cultures and different audiences. Developing media literacy enables learners to be intelligent and critical consumers of diverse media cultures and products.

### **4. Initial Teacher Education and ongoing Teacher Professional Learning**

Over the last three decades, arts curricula in initial teacher education has been dramatically reduced leaving many early career early childhood and primary teachers without the confidence and skills to teach the five arts subjects or to embed arts-rich processes and strategies across the curriculum. The CREATE Centre team strongly advocates for an increase in the time allocated in initial teacher education for early childhood and primary teachers to gain further expertise in teaching the Arts to ensure all five arts subjects are taught well.

In addition we recommend increased support for professional learning opportunities across the five Arts subjects (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts). There are a range of teacher mentoring and Artist-In-Residence programs available (Hunter et al, 2014). These programs can support teachers develop confidence and expertise in the Arts. For example:

- Music in Me (the National Music Teacher Mentoring Program) delivered by Australian Youth Orchestra,
- the School Drama co-mentoring program, a partnership between Sydney Theatre Company and The University of Sydney which upskills teachers in literature, literacy and drama.

- Poetry in Action
- ATYP On Demand Plus

Arts organisations, Teaching Artists, professional teaching associations youth arts and arts organisations need support and resources if they are to continue to play an integral role in supporting quality arts education in schools.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the CREATE Centre strongly urges the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales to recognise and prioritise the intrinsic value of arts education. Our recommendations are firmly grounded in robust research and policy evidence that underscores the transformative potential of the arts in education. The arts are not merely supplementary; they are essential in fostering well-rounded, resilient, and innovative individuals who are equipped to navigate and contribute to an increasingly complex world. By updating the NSW Education Act, ensuring equitable treatment of all arts subjects, reinstating comprehensive arts education in Initial Teacher Education, and supporting ongoing professional development for teachers, we can build a future where every student benefits from a rich, arts-integrated education. We welcome the opportunity to provide further details and support for the implementation of these recommendations and look forward to contributing to the advancement of arts education in New South Wales.

### **Authors and contact details**

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