

Submission  
No 104

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 24 July 2024

---

Partially  
Confidential

## **Submission to the NSW Parliament; Inquiry into Art and Music education and training- due July 25th 2024**

(The NSW Parliament has established a joint select committee to examine arts and music education and training across the state and is now calling for public submissions.

The Chair of the committee, Ms Julia Finn said

'The joint select committee will inquire into the quality and effectiveness of arts and music education and training. In particular, we will look into how the arts, culture and creative industries can coordinate with the education system to support the development of creative skills.' Ms Finn continued: 'The committee will consider how arts and music are taught in schools including at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It will also explore opportunities for students to learn entrepreneurial skills and gain experience in the arts and music industry. Additionally, the inquiry will examine approaches to creative education used in other jurisdictions.' The Chair said 'It is vital that arts and music education opportunities are available to every child, regardless of their age, geographic location or social and economic status. We will explore what we need to do to ensure that quality arts and music education is available to everyone, as well as investigate how we can better support our arts and music sectors.'

**July 2024**

### **Improving the teaching and appreciation of Visual Art in NSW schools and communities**

#### **1. Justification of the value to children of engaging in quality Visual Arts education programs in schools.**

Children benefit immeasurably from engaging in a quality Visual Arts education program in school. Visual Arts encourages children's natural creativity, it gives them a vehicle for expressing themselves, it helps them develop abstract thought, it teaches children about the aesthetic world, about appreciating creativity, and about how to interpret material which is purely visual. Additionally, teaching children about the history of visual art teaches children the bigger picture of human civilization which has been painting, drawing and creating since the beginning of time.

Ken Robinson in his TED talk "Schools kill creativity" says everyone is born creative but that our modern day education system grinds our creativity out of us by focusing and honing our skills in mathematics, english and science. He says students are taught to correct themselves when they are wrong and that being wrong is a bad thing. Therefore students are unlikely to take risks in their thinking for fear of being wrong. He goes on to explain that if students are taught from a young age to avoid taking risks then what then happens to innovative thought when they are

adults? Robinson's main point is that teaching students any of the creative arts, which includes the Visual Arts, enhances the possibility of that student fulfilling the creative side of their brain which leads to an increase in their ability to have innovative and abstract thoughts.

Boldt et al (2013) argues that restricting focus to subjects which have measurable success, such as mathematics and english, causes students to have a narrowed perception and ability to engage with the world around them. This paper argues that the Visual Arts must not only be included in the curriculum but must be taught in an open-ended way rather than a disciplined way, so there should not be a firm pre-organised rubric for the Visual Arts.

Hertzog (2001) reflects upon the principles of Reggio Emilia and describes how fundamental 'art' is in schools who follow the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The reasoning behind the emphasis on art is because it is a visual medium, and that we see first before we speak and therefore art is critical to developing children's thinking, their way of seeing the world, their way of engaging with and understanding the world around them.

Visual Arts crosses boundaries with other key areas of learning such as; understanding visual language in picture books, in multi-modal imagery, as well as in traditional subjects like maths, science and english.

## **2. Observations from teaching as a classroom teacher in a private and public primary school myself**

- I completed a 3 year Fine Arts degree at the National Art School and then a 1 year honours year majoring in Painting. My paintings were seen by a gallery at the end of year show and they began to represent me as my agent straight after Art School. About 10 years later, I completed a Masters of Teaching part time online so that I could support my children with a more consistent wage as I was teaching in the public programs at the National Art School and at Art Est Art School but sometimes the courses wouldn't get enough numbers and it wasn't enough paid work alongside being an exhibiting artist which was also precarious. I was working as an SLSO while completing my Masters of Teaching as well as teaching at the Art Schools and also having my art exhibitions. Then when I had completed the Masters of Teaching I worked for 1 term as a specialist art teacher full time in a private primary school and then 5 years full time as a classroom teacher in a public primary school (not specialising in art but teaching every subject to a class).
- When doing my Masters of Teaching, we were taught 'Visual Art' as part of **one subject** called '**Creative Arts**'. This 'Creative Arts' subject included a ridiculously condensed version of Visual Art, Drama, Music and Dance into one subject. I don't think any teacher who has only done that "Creative Arts' subject is equipped to teach any of those subjects.
- When I taught Music, Drama or Dance as a classroom teacher I was drawing on knowledge from my own childhood not from the Masters of Teaching.

- When I taught Visual Arts as a classroom teacher I was drawing on my training from the National Art School and the private art teaching and evening college teaching I had been doing for 10 years as well as my own art practice.
- I taught as an art specialist for 1 term at a primary private school (covering a long service leave) and found that this job meant consistently working outside of my paid hours to keep up with the paperwork. I was required to document the bottom, middle and top students for every year group (in Visual Art) and I was required to write 4 sentence individual report comments for every student in the junior school (2 classes of 20-25 students in K-5 and 3 classes in year 6).
- I taught for 5 years at a public primary school as a classroom teacher. When the writing of programs was being shared out at the beginning of the year I asked to write the program for Visual Arts for the year group I was teaching and I was given this job for 2 of the 5 years I was there, the other 3 years I wrote another subjects program. The Visual Arts program was only taught for 1 or sometimes 2 terms of the year (one 40 min-60 min session a week during that term) and the program was only followed by some of the teachers. It was a very big school and teachers came and went each year and the teaching profession is very demanding and fast paced - the focus from above was on Maths and English so that filtered down as the programs for Maths and English were detailed and needed to be registered that all lessons were taught, whereas Visual Arts wasn't seen as important. During meetings there was so much content for the executive team to share in a short meeting that there was very little back and forth communication between and among the teachers. In subsequent years I noticed that teachers would be unaware of the detailed Visual Art program I had written the previous year and I was no longer on that grade so had no input - so I presume it was just never used again and the following year someone else wrote a Visual Art Program for that year. It was very much down to the individual teacher as to whether they taught Visual Art in their classroom and how they taught it and how often. We all had our back up to the wall, so to speak, with such an immense workload that no one had time to chat about the Visual Art knowledge I had or the Music knowledge that my colleague had or the Drama knowledge my other colleague had- we were just so busy running the classrooms with very little time to even eat our lunch or go to the bathroom. If we could organise it I would teach my colleagues Visual Art classes and he would teach my Drama classes etc but not in any kind of systematic way and this might have happened once or twice a year.

### **3. Anecdotes from talking to teachers working in Sydney primary schools.**

- Nat from a public school is the only teacher of the 7 teachers on her grade who taught a sequence of 5 visual art lessons beginning with teaching about the artist Van Gogh through to teaching actual skills in mark making, composition and applying paint. All other teachers found that too hard and instead made some craft they found on Youtube where all children followed the online instructions. These other teachers are not confident teaching Visual Art and it is acceptable within the school to make craft in place of teaching Visual Art. Visual Art is thought of as a 'fun extra' and not respected in the

same way as the other subjects. Teachers who 'like' art tend to teach themselves 'how to teach it' or follow the given programs, whereas the others either swap with the teacher who likes it or they take their class into his/her room to combine the classes or they do a lesson that results with students each having an artwork that looks similar but has had no teaching involved and just follows online prompts. Visual Art is only programmed for one term (sometimes 2) within the year as Dance, Drama and Music take its place in the other terms.

- Chris from a private primary school has left his job of 10 years as the paperwork has become too much being the art teacher in the junior school. He is a practicing artist himself and only wants to teach art part time while also creating work for his next exhibition. He is being asked to jump through too many hoops of paperwork and has quit in favour of working at an art school/evening college which doesn't require all the paperwork. The teacher that will replace him 'likes art' but is not as highly trained in fine art as Chris, however (Chris says) the school will be happy as the new teacher is someone who will be good at doing all the paperwork.
- Sarah happens to be the only National Art School and Primary School trained teacher at the public school she is teaching at but no one is interested in mining her vast knowledge and expertise in Visual Art as the school focuses primarily on Maths and English performance and the other teachers around her don't have a deep understanding of Visual Art and they don't actually know about Sarah's background. Sarah is a reserved and self-effacing character and doesn't tell everyone about her knowledge, she just enjoys teaching her class Visual Art every week but she is not meant to be doing that, it is only programmed to be taught in one of the terms.

#### **4. Questions about Visual Arts in our education system and the bigger picture in NSW**

- Do children grow up having respect for Visual Art and what Visual Artists do?
- Do we have an engaged public who value their artists and the art that is being made in their community?
- Is there the right education in visual art occurring in New South Wales?
- Should all schools have a dedicated 'art room' with art materials and a specialist art teacher or a variety of specialist art teachers who take turns coming in on various days to teach Visual Art?
- Do we recognise the impact of viewing and learning about visual art at the Art Gallery of NSW, MCA and Regional Galleries on students and the general public?
- Do we recognise the impact to the Visual Artists when they have their work hanging in the Art Gallery of NSW, MCA and Regional Galleries?
- Do we have enough curators employed in our art galleries to be able to engage and facilitate the growth and development of our established professional Visual Artists and to foster the education of our communities through this curator/artist relationship within our institutions?

- Do we have enough Artist in Residence programs with our Regional Galleries in NSW so that city artists are encouraged to apply to reside and work in the country for short periods thereby invigorating those communities with their ideas and work practices, cross pollinating with the arts community and the school students of that regional community?

## 5. Bigger picture of the flow-on effect of poor Visual Art education and the low respect for Visual Arts in our schools and community

- Currently Visual Artists (defined as professional artists, represented by a gallery and exhibiting nationally) are finding it very tough to live in Sydney and most that I know have moved to areas such as Hill End, Port Kembla, Portland/Lithgow to name a few.
- A professional visual artist who exhibits at one of the top Sydney galleries lives in Portland/Lithgow but commutes to paint in the Inner West in the studio she rents and she sleeps on a friend's couch. This is because she feels she needs to be engaging with other artists and the Sydney art scene to be staying relevant but it is too expensive to live in Sydney.
- The only professional visual artists who I know who live in Sydney are supported by family or spouses to do so.
- Visual Artists are often expected to do jobs in the community for free. I imagine they are very happy to do these jobs but it is worth noting this unpaid work that Professional Visual Artists do as it would be good to discuss the idea of a Professional Artists living wage. These are examples of the unpaid work Visual Artists do;
  - **Charity auctions in the community** - Professional Visual Artists are regularly asked to donate paintings to charity auctions and fundraisers which means the painting is sold at the event and all the proceeds go to the charity or fundraiser, meaning that it can't be sold by the artist. Instead it really should be bought from the artist by someone who has a high income and then donated by the high income earner to the charity auction.
  - **School and special event guest artist** - Visual Artists are asked to; appear at events, to paint live for audiences, to paint paintings of a school building to give to the outgoing principal, to sell pictures at cost price to school community groups for them to give as a gift to someone important, to give talks to groups of people about art in the community, to teach art lessons at local schools.
  - **Community engagement** - Visual artists who work outdoors in the field are approached consistently and are asked questions and engage with people passing by in positive ways. The satisfaction and enjoyment to the passer by is immeasurable.

- **Artist talks** - Professional Visual Artists are asked to give talks in public and private galleries and other institutions about their work, or be in panel discussions with other artists discussing a range of work in front of an audience.
  - **Judging prizes** - Visual Artists are asked to judge prizes and this will typically be most of one day selecting the finalists and then a second day to select the winners and write the judges report and then present the awards - typically 2 days of work.
  - **Live art making to an audience** - Visual Artists are asked to live paint in front of groups of people eg at a school function or a gallery event.
- We have a situation where the biggest art (painting) prize in the country is judged by a majority of economists, lawyers and business people (the Archibald Prize). The flow on of this is that the public is being educated in a skewed way as these paintings are chosen on merits judged through the eyes of people with arguably no expertise to judge them. (Imagine the public outcry if visual artists were the judges in a court of law or if artists were sitting in making decisions in parliament about our economy!) (Currently 2 of the 11 judges are Visual Artists but they are not primarily painters nor portrait painters and the competition is a portrait painting competition. Is an installation artist an expert in portrait painting? Is a portrait painter an expert in installation art or video art? Put it this way - Should a film competition be judged by a painter? What sort of response could a painter give when judging a film competition other than an emotional one? So therefore why is it acceptable to have economists, lawyers, business people x 9 and one video/installation artist and one multi-disciplinary artist judging a portrait painting prize? - both of our country's top 2 art critics don't think this is acceptable and they have been expressing this opinion publicly for years.
  - Mel has recently finished a Bachelor of Fine Art at the National Art School and she would like to now set up an art practice and make art in a studio but it is so difficult to begin on this road, with studio rent high and unavailable, galleries full to the brim with artists they represent and so many people who are trying to sell their art online - many of these online 'artists' are not trained as Mel is. The public is largely ill equipped to discern the difference between good artworks and bad artworks as the education of Visual Art at school is so poor. Buyers judge artworks on how close the likeness is to a photograph as looking at photos may be the only visual experience they have had with such limited teaching of Visual Art in their own school education.
  - A neighbour of mine Vicky and her son Mark like visiting the Archibald prize each year and sometimes visit the Art Gallery of NSW one other time in the year. Both of them say the portraits which are as close to a photographic likeness as possible are the best ones. They don't have the education in Visual Art to have

any other markers for viewing the portraits other than the closeness to a photograph. Vicky and her son went to a public primary school and a catholic high school and neither chose Visual Art as an elective subject so the only education they have had in Visual Art would have been in the public primary school and possibly in year 7/8.

- Recently I ran into Paul who I went to art school with 20 years ago and remember as an extremely talented drawer. Paul is now painting houses as he can't sell enough paintings to support himself even though he is represented by one of the trendiest commercial galleries in Sydney. Paul has good communication skills and would be a great asset to a school one or two days a week - or to a skills based tertiary course such as at the National Art School. He can't work in a school as he doesn't have a Masters of Teaching or a Bachelor of Teaching or a Masters of Fine Art (for teaching in Tertiary) but he does have a Bachelor of Fine Arts majoring in Painting from the National Art School and he has been exhibiting Nationally for the past 20 years. He might sell 1- 4 paintings a year and he might make approx \$10,000 - \$40,000 a year from selling those paintings. The students at any primary, secondary or tertiary school (territory such as at the National Art School) would learn a lot about painting and drawing from Paul.

**6. Note in response to the word “entrepreneurial” as part of this inquiry** - ie “It will also explore opportunities for students to learn entrepreneurial skills and gain experience in the arts and music industry.”

No - Entrepreneurial skills are not what artists and musicians need. What is needed is for **our students and the public to be educated in Visual Art and Music so that they grow up appreciating these parts of human life.** We should have a community where the public chooses to go to the gallery on the weekend as they have an interest in seeing the art there since they have so much background knowledge due to such a good education in Visual Art. We should have a community where all the highly paid workers buy Visual Art for their homes and offices and take pride in following what the artists in their communities are doing because they themselves have had such a good education in Visual Art at school that it is interesting to them to be involved in this industry as a supporter - much like they might support a Sydney Swans AFL game on the weekend.

If students grow up with a strong understanding of what artists and musicians do and why they do it and they have knowledge of the history of these areas and why they are important to our existence then they will engage with them and support them.

It is fundamental that the public and the government supports our artists and musicians and that we do not encourage our artists and musicians to tailor their music and art and give them entrepreneurial skills to try to guess what the public would like - that is not what art and music are about. The leaders in this relationship are the artists and the musicians NOT the audience.

Artists and Musicians are choosing this pathway as they are creative people and their ideas filter back into all areas of our life and culture. The top artists and musicians of this country are a small number of people and should be treated as the elite athletes are treated who are training for the Olympics.

## **7. What solutions or suggestions do I have?**

### **7.1 Employ Visual Artists who have completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts in public and private schools**

- Students who have finished a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the National Art School or the UNSW college of Fine Art or similar have enough knowledge in Art History, Art Theory, drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics and printmaking to teach part time as a specialist in a school. I say 'part time' as people who are wanting to create art will prefer to work part time so that they have the rest of the week to create their artwork. Classroom teachers do not have the expertise to teach Visual Art unless they are also trained at the National Art School or equivalent.
- Professional Visual Artists (who have been trained at the National Art School or equivalent) are often not motivated by money, they are creative people whose dreams are to make artworks. They need money to be able to do this and their skills and expertise are highly valuable to the education system.
- When students complete a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the National Art School they should be allowed to teach Visual Art part time in schools under the facilitation of the classroom teacher (without having to do a Masters of Teaching which is a further 4 years part time while they are working elsewhere and is further debt to them - they are never going to earn much so having these 2 debts is prohibitive.)

### **7. 2. Fund schools to employ specialist Visual Art teachers and encourage these teachers to be Professional Visual Artists themselves by letting them work part time**

- Every primary school should have funding to pay a specialist Visual Art teacher and have an 'Art room' dedicated to teaching Visual Art.
- Visual Art teachers in primary school should not have to write 4 sentence comments for every student nor document work samples for every year group every term - documentation can be a photo of the student group working away and that is enough and the artworks should be presented/showcased regularly to the school community.
- Encourage the employment of 'Professional Visual Artists' as the 'art teachers' in primary and in secondary by allowing Visual Art teachers across all schools to be employed 'part time' so that they can also have their own professional art practice.

### **7. 3 Employ Professional Established Visual Artists part time in skills based tertiary institutions such as at the National Art School**

- Professional Established Visual Artists who have extensive professional experience at a National Level and have gallery representation should also be able to be considered for part time teaching jobs at tertiary level such as at the National Art School with an undergraduate qualification but without having to complete a Masters in Fine Art or PHD if they are teaching in their area of expertise. This was the case in the past (before about 2004).

#### **7.4 Require experts in the Judging of all Art Prizes to ensure excellence across the visual art exhibited in our galleries and institutions as this is educating our children and the public**

- Put Professional Established Painters on the judging panel of the Archibald Prize and include at least one Professional Established Portrait Painter. This is a Portrait Painting Prize and is the pinnacle for all students of visual art to view and aspire to. This is also an opportunity for our professional visual artists (painters in this case) to showcase their work to the community.
- Put a professional established landscape painter on the panel of the Wynne Prize which is a prize for the best landscape in Australia.
- Make a requirement that all Professional Art Prizes have expert judges who are expert in the particular field that the prize is being awarded to.
- Students and the public learn from what they see in these National Art Prizes and educational programs extend from these exhibitions.

#### **7.5 Give more funding to Public Galleries for them to support the Established Professional Artists in their community- this will flow back through to the education of our children and the public**

- Provide additional funding to the AGNSW, MCA and Regional Galleries for them to specifically take an interest and provide opportunities to their local established professional artists (Local Established Professional Artist could be defined as a visual artist who has consistently exhibited at a National level and has had 10 years plus of consistent exhibition history and has exhibited in regional galleries, maybe also they have exhibited internationally). This means that these talented and committed visual artists can be assisted to survive as artists, their skills and talents showcased and this will contribute to the education of the communities around them. They may have their work showcased in exhibitions through these institutions or be employed to give Artist Floor Talks, give lectures, presentations or teach workshops through these institutions. There may also be Artist in Residency opportunities that they can be encouraged to apply for. Make sure there are specific curators whose job it is to have contact with all the Local Established Professional Artists in their community. Not all of these artists will be able and willing to teach but other ways of engaging them can be thought of - even just the curator visiting the artists studio or having coffee with them to find out what they

are up to which might lead to a conversation which might lead to an exhibition idea or a connection with another artist etc.

### **7.6 Give Professional Established Visual Artists a modest living wage such as in many countries in Europe.**

Established Professional Visual Artist could be defined as a Visual Artist who has trained at the National Art School or equivalent and who has consistently exhibited at a National level and been represented by a commercial gallery for 10 years plus or exhibited consistently for 10 years plus, or has had 10 years plus of consistent public and private commissions as their main income, and has exhibited in regional galleries, maybe also they have exhibited internationally. Pay them a modest/basic living wage so that they can focus on furthering the Visual Arts in this country rather than working paid work in an unrelated field.

### **7.7 Support relationships between city and country artists and communities in NSW by funding Artist Residencies**

Funded Artist residency programs, which artists apply to, give those artists a period of time such as 2 weeks, 4 weeks or longer, living and working at the studio away from their normal routine. It is a time where they can immerse themselves in their art practice 100% of the time to really develop it further and this is invaluable to a Visual Artist.

The residencies need to be funded so that the artist can spend the entire time working on their art and not having to do paid work to fund themselves being there.

For longer residencies (more than 2 weeks) there may be incorporated teaching of workshops and giving presentations and other ways of engaging with the local community (schools or local artists or local teachers)

Examples of well regarded Artist residencies which are already set up in NSW, some of which need funding.

- Hill End residency (no longer operating due to no funding) supported by the Bathurst Regional Gallery
- Nancy Fairfax residency at the Tweed Regional Gallery (a funded residency is operating as invitation only to a few artists)
- Bundanon Artist Residency - this is an outstanding model of an Artist residency program

### **Conclusion**

At the base of this whole submission is the underlying problem of a lack of respect and understanding of Visual Art in our society. It needs to be made clear that learning about Visual Art, about Art History and learning to paint, draw and make art enriches children's lives. We are not teaching them to paint, draw and sculpt so that they can become artists, - a very, very small percentage of the population will end up being artists. Not everyone is an artist and teaching Visual Art is not about trying to make people into artists. The skills you learn in Visual Art extend through to all areas of your life. One example of a skill I teach when teaching painting is 'risk

taking' and I see in many students how difficult it is for them to take small risks with the paint brush. We are teaching students so many invaluable skills through teaching visual art. Skills they can draw on for their whole life. Creative experience and appreciation of art enriches everyone's life and our perception of the world around us.

## **Bibliography**

Allen C., *A Circus to Amuse, Shock, Enrage*, The Australian Newspaper, 31st May, 2024.

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC series, 1972

Boldt, Gail & McArdle, Felicity A. (2013) *Young Children, Pedagogy and the Arts : Ways of Seeing*. In McArdle, Felicity A. & Boldt, Gail (Eds.) *Young Children, Pedagogy and the Arts : Ways of Seeing*. Routledge, New York.

Carroll-Harris, L, *Australia Could Unleash a Cultural Renaissance by paying Artists a Living Wage*, Sydney Morning Herald, 20th July 2020

Hertzog, N. B. (2001). *Reflections and Impressions from Reggio Emilia:"It's Not about Art!"*. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* Vol 3, No. 1. Downloaded from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n1/hertzog.html>

Macdonald. J, *Archibald Prize 2024*, Sydney Morning Herald, 18th June, 2024

Reid, Leya, *It's time to pay artists a living wage*, Independent Australia, 2022 retrieved from <https://independentaustralia.net/life/life-display/its-time-to-pay-artists-a-living-wage.17011>

Robinson.K, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*, TED talk, Feb 2006, retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/sir\\_ken\\_robinson\\_do\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity?subtitle=en&trigger=15s](https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?subtitle=en&trigger=15s)

Russell-Bowie, D. (2015). *MMADD about the Arts: An Introduction to Primary Arts Education* (4th ed.). Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Pearson Australia.

Russell-Bowie, D. (2005) 'Introduction to Visual Arts Education'. In: *MMADD About the Arts: An Introduction to Primary Arts Education*. Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Prentice Hall, pp. 147-188.