



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

15 October 2014

Drama Australia Detailed Response to Review of the Australian Curriculum

Drama Australia has always actively supported the development of the Australian Curriculum: the Arts and its central principle of the *entitlement of every young Australian to an arts education*, one that includes a foundation in all five art forms – Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art. This central principle is now under threat. Drama Australia contributed to the Review of the Australian Curriculum by making a considered submission about the role of the Arts in Australian schools with particular emphasis on the place of Drama in the curriculum. Drama Australia was not invited to meet with the reviewers.

After five years of consultation and development, in July 2013 the Australian Curriculum: the Arts was published, affirming the value and significance of arts education for Australian children. We acknowledge that developing Australia's first Arts curriculum has been a complex process and that the current publication is the curriculum's first inception.

The review of the Australian Curriculum released on 12th October outlines recommendations relating to the Arts. We have detailed responses on the following pages regarding each of the seven arts recommendations (P219). The most alarming recommendation is that;

Two of the arts strands should be mandatory and we recommend music and visual arts. The other three strands should be elective subjects and schools would choose which to offer according to their resources and wishes of the parents and nature of the school context. (P.219)

Drama Australia is very concerned by this recommendation as the recommended focus is *less* than what is currently offered in most states and territories in Australia. Victoria, Queensland and South Australia have successfully implemented five arts subjects through the primary years for the past 20 to 30 years.

Drama Australia urges the Government and state education ministers to reject this recommendation. We believe that all five Arts areas should be mandatory in the curriculum from Foundation to Year 8 and that schools are best placed to make localised decisions regarding delivery. Although the reviewers believe teachers can only deliver two arts subjects at a time, many schools already delivery more.

We were encouraged early in the report that some research was acknowledged which illustrates the value of the arts on academic and non-academic achievement; however, the report then goes on to contradict itself by recommending that the dance, drama and media arts should be 'absorbed' into other curriculum areas and the content in music and visual art should be reduced.



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

Response to each of the Reviews recommendations about the Arts

Review Arts Recommendation 1

The arts curriculum should be available to all students throughout all the years of schooling. The learning area should be formally introduced at Year 3 but provide a rich source of resource material for Foundation to Year 2, the Foundation years. (P.219)

The Arts play an essential role in the early and primary years of schooling. Dramatic and projected play is an essential part of early learning, and the evidence is indisputable linking dramatic play to pre-literacy and the development of spoken language, and kinaesthetic motor skills, as well as emotional learning. Drama in Foundation to Year 2 allows students to learn through drama processes to develop language and communication skills. It directly links to and deeply enhances children's literacy. To remove any of the arts from the Early Childhood years curriculum would severely and irrationally damage the Review's stated primary intention of improving literacy and numeracy.

Drama Australia argues that Drama is integral in the early years of schooling and should be mandated as a core part of the curriculum. Research shows that frequent planned art-making activities in the early years stimulate brain development that supports accelerated learning in a range of non-arts learning areas. Some of this development occurs only in the early years. The proposal that the arts are only rich 'resource materials' for teaching literacy and numeracy in F-2 is counter-productive. The Arts Curriculum should be taught in F-2. Drama plays a fundamental role in F-2 and this is reflected in the Early Years Learning Framework.

Review Arts Recommendation 2

The core content of all five strands should be reduced and a considerable portion of the current core be included in school-based curriculum and activities, thus augmenting the rich arts programs which most schools are already conducting. (P.219)

The assumption that 'most' schools offer rich extra-curricular arts based experiences lacks any real evidence and is not borne out by statistics. This might be true for some schools, particularly elite private schools, but as the National Music and Visual Arts Education Reviews demonstrated, the provision varies widely across the country, with some schools being virtually arts-free, and this provision is also related to socio-economic advantage. The five strands are currently offered in many Australian states and territories across Australia within their curricular. Extra-curricular arts based opportunities for a privileged few, which would be the inevitable result of this recommendation being implemented, would not allow equitable access to learning through the arts.

The Arts must be delivered in the curriculum.

Review Arts Recommendation 3

Two of the arts strands should be mandatory and we recommend music and visual arts. The other three strands would be elective subjects and schools would choose which to offer according to their resources and wishes of the parents and nature of the school context. Media arts should become a separate standalone subject and substantially reduced in content. (P.219)



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

This is a retrograde step harking back to the late 19th century and the 1950s in most states. This recommendation disregards the fact that the arts are distinctive ways of communicating that ALL children need to have, as is explicitly stated in the review's opening quotation by the Subject Specialist, Dr Vallance: "build social confidence and self-respect ... self-confidence, self-esteem ... exploration of different forms of human communication ... and a broader and more generous view of their obligations as citizens ..." (p. 215). Copious contemporary research world-wide shows that these particular attributes are particularly strongly developed and supported through drama.

To remove drama makes no sense. The inclusion of five arts subjects was also democratically agreed by the original reference group of Australia's foremost arts educators, at the outset of the process, and ratified by a majority of State and Territory Governments.

Australia is receiving international recognition for its leadership in the field. Many other countries including United States of America, Norway, China and Japan keenly watched the development of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts.

The leadership in the field was recognised in 2013 by educators from the United States of America who said:

The Australian arts curriculum could be considered as exemplary in the international context in terms of the breadth of its scope, the considerable attention to defining its own language, and the lengths it goes to in recognising the differences in abilities and learning opportunities at the different age/grade levels. It considers the importance of the arts in the roles they may play in other parts of the general curriculum: literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, cross-cultural and environmental awareness, social and ethical development.

Extract from *International Arts Education Standards: Survey of the Arts Education Standards and Practices of Fifteen Countries and Regions*, prepared by the New York-based College Board for the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards

Review Arts Recommendation 4

Elements of the current arts curriculum should also be integrated into other learning areas such as English, health and physical education, history and technologies. (P.219)

This disregards the specific history and content of each of the arts as discipline areas. It also completely contradicts independent research published earlier this year by the Australia Council of the Arts titled "Arts in Daily Life". This research reported that "9 in 10 Australians think the Arts are an important part of education."

Robin Pascoe, President of IDEA International Drama/Theatre Education Associations states that "It is interesting that the international benchmarking for arts education was the United Kingdom and South Korea rather than, say, Ontario or New Zealand. The inclusion of the UK indicates the prejudicial skewing of the intended outcome of the review given the recent history there. Both Ontario and New Zealand don't include Media Arts but they do bring drama and dance into the arts education fold. The recommendations that Drama move to English, Dance to Physical Education and Media to Technology, take little account of the focus on aesthetic and practical curriculum developments in those subjects. The ideological underpinnings of the recommendation fail to take account of the shift in drama, for example, from literary study focused on responding to a canon of



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

set texts to more practical, embodied learning of drama as an art form. Similarly for Dance and Media Arts.”

It should also be noted that contra the suggestion that Drama can be and should be taught in English, in theory, and in past ages, this might once have been true, but the current Australian Curriculum: English in its 12 page Scope and Sequence of Content, effectively makes no mention whatever of drama. The idea that Drama could be subsumed into English does not acknowledge the distinctly different content, skills, knowledge and pedagogy of Drama and English. The two subjects can complement each other, but they cannot and are not one and the same.

Review Arts Recommendation 5

The content of each of the arts forms needs to be restructured and re-sequenced along the lines suggested by the subject matter specialists. The documents need to be expressed in clearer language. The balance between ‘making’ and ‘responding’ in each of the strands needs to be revisited involving consultation with arts teachers. (P.219)

The Australian Curriculum: the Arts was written in consultation with thousands of teachers and subject matter specialists with extensive teaching experience. The writers and their expert advisory groups, are acknowledged curriculum specialists and throughout the development process worked with arts teachers, arts organisations, arts professional teaching associations, primary generalist teachers, primary specialist teachers – all of these individuals and groups were consulted. ACARA received 1606 responses to the online survey and 166 formal submissions through the consultation phase of the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: the Arts (ACARA, 2011, p6). When ACARA formally consulted on the draft Australian Curriculum: the Arts, they received 743 responses from parents, teachers, academics and organisations (ACARA, 2012, p6). We would question the credibility of the ‘subject matter specialists’ referred to in the review document. Neither of the teachers who were selected as the review specialists of the arts are known to any of the arts professional teaching associations or community. Nor are they acknowledged anywhere as arts curriculum experts. Two teachers are not representative of the education community, particularly when reviewing a curriculum document that had input from thousands of stakeholders.

We do agree the balance between ‘making’ and ‘responding’ in each of the strands needs to be revisited. Drama Australia has always advocated for three organising strands of Creating, Presenting and Responding be used in the curriculum which enables broader and deeper engagement with content and insures more rigour and deeper understandings. This is current practice in most drama curriculum documents across Australia.

Review Arts Recommendation 6

The considerable resourcing costs associated with delivering the arts curriculum need greater consideration, and professional development for teachers is needed as the years progress. It needs to be acknowledged that arts specialists will be needed at the advanced levels. (P.219)

This is an interesting recommendation that contradicts recommendation 3 (making Music and Visual Art mandatory). Music and Visual Art can be very expensive subjects to implement, particularly resource heavy for primary schools. Drama can be taught and experienced by students with few resources and in any classroom in the primary years of schooling. Arts organisations, theatre companies and state and territory teacher professional associations, along with educational



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

institutions provide extensive professional learning opportunities for primary teachers to learn more about the Arts and support quality arts education programs.

Drama Australia encourages the Australian Government to better resource Arts Education and professional learning for primary teachers and teachers in regional and remote locations.

The Arts have always been taught by subject specialists in senior secondary.

Review Arts Recommendation 7

An analysis needs to be undertaken to identify the extent to which the cross-curriculum priorities have produced repetition of content in these strands, and the extent to which they have skewed the content of all the strands, particularly away from Western and other cultures. The cross-curriculum priorities should be integrated, but only where appropriate, and their presence more clearly indicated. (P.219)

Drama Australia would agree that this is an appropriate recommendation but support the validity of the cross-curriculum priorities. It must be acknowledged that the Arts provide a meaningful way of exploring the three cross-curriculum priorities. Through the five Arts, particularly Drama, students can learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and Sustainability.

Other Issues

There are several other issues relating to the review of the Australian Curriculum that Drama Australia wishes to address.

A crowded curriculum

Curriculum in Australia, particularly in the primary years of schooling is crowded putting enormous pressures on teachers, students, parents and school leaders. We thank the reviewers raising this issue. The answer to the current crowded curriculum, however, is not to cut the Arts in primary schools particularly in Foundation to Year 2. The principle of connectivity, explicit in the Australian Curriculum: the Arts, works towards the Melbourne Declaration's aims of a more integrated (and less crowded) curriculum, without demeaning any of the subject disciplines' integrity. We would argue that the Social Sciences, which have usually been contained in a single curriculum document, and are now spread across four separate curriculums and separate time allocations (History, Geography, Economics and Business and Civics and Citizenship) have significantly contributed to an unnecessary crowding of the curriculum.

Combining the five arts into one curriculum

'... there appear to be no other countries that have combined these five art forms into one curriculum' (para 4, p.213).

The Australian Curriculum: The Arts does **not** combine five art forms into one curriculum: There are five stand-alone subjects, each with its own comprehensive, sequential and developmental curriculum for years F-10 in Dance, Drama, Music, Media Arts and the Visual Arts. This is current practice in some states and territories in Australia as well as other countries such as in Ontario Canada, New Zealand and Taiwan.



Music and Visual Art as separate learning areas

The Review panel states that ‘... in most of the PISA top performing countries music and the arts have separate learning areas’ (para 3, p.214). References to arts strands and ‘separate learning areas’ are incorrect or at best ambiguous, as each of the arts is identified clearly by ACARA as a ‘subject’ within the learning area and other countries use the phrases ‘subjects’ and ‘learning areas’ differently. Moreover, it is noticed how much stress is given approvingly to England’s National Curriculum – which is by no means a PISA top performing country (and significantly lower than Australia.). The recommendation in the Review of the Australian Curriculum does not explain or justify why Music and Visual Art have been prioritized and privileged by the reviewers.

Watering down the arts

We strongly reject the assertion that the five arts subjects curriculum be watered down and that only two be mandated, with the other three subsumed by other subject areas. The Australian Curriculum: The Arts already has minimal time allocations over each two-year band (160 minutes for each subject), a target which can easily be met if teacher learning in the arts is properly resourced and schools are allowed to adopt their own timetabling for meeting this target (e.g. teaching of two arts subjects each semester, sequential teaching for each arts subject over a whole term, etc).

Concluding comments

A ‘back to basics’ curriculum will not adequately prepare young Australians for life after school, nor will it give them a competitive edge in the international workforce. Nor is it even going to make them more literate and numerate, as research shows quite clearly that literacy and numeracy are strongly related to contextualised learning and rich learning environments, not just intensive drills in literacy and numeracy. Surely in 2014 our Federal Government would want more than a ‘basic’ education for our students. As the Review itself states in several of its chosen quotations on the Arts, to prepare for the diverse and unknown futures facing our children and young people we need to have a comprehensive curriculum that provides children with foundational skills and experiences that cater to their multiple intelligences, accessing all the modes of communication our culture offers. Students need to learn creative and critical thinking skills, the ability to work collaboratively to solve problems, the ability to effectively communicate, and empathise with others.

Students in the twenty-first century will need to find multiple solutions to a problem and access creative and engaging technologies if they are to address the challenges of our world. Rigorous and longitudinal Australian and international research unequivocally states that arts education offers this, and so much more. If we fail to offer experiences of all the arts within the school curriculum we are denying opportunities for personal and social growth, limiting academic success, as well as the pathways for innovation and future prosperity.

Students, parents, educators are seeking a forward thinking 21st century curriculum to foster learning. A basic, narrow, reductive curriculum focusing on literacy and numeracy is simply not going to prepare Australian students for life. Learning in and through the arts provides students with creative and critical thinking skills, the ability to work collaboratively to solve problems and



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

construct work, the ability to effectively communicate with others, and ability to empathise with others.

Drama Australia strongly advocates for the Arts to be mandatory in the curriculum from Foundation to Year 10, letting schools choose how they can implement them. All five arts play an important role in the education of Australia's children and young people.

John Saunders
Director of Strategic Partnerships
Drama Australia
PO Box 1510, Stafford, QLD, 4053
e. jsaunders@sydneytheatre.com.au
p. 02 9250 1795
w. www.dramaaustralia.org.au

Colleen Roche
President
Drama Australia
PO Box 1510, Stafford, QLD, 4053
e. rochec@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au
w. www.dramaaustralia.org.au

Member Associations of Drama Australia:

ACTDA – Australian Capital Territory Drama Association
Drama NSW – Drama Education Association of New South Wales
Drama Queensland – Queensland Drama in Education Association
Drama TAS, Tasmanian Association for Drama in Education
Drama VIC, Drama in Education Association of Victoria
Drama West – Association of Drama Educators Western Australia
SAADIE – South Australian Association for Drama in Education



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

Appendix 1: The Australian and International Research on Arts Education

Below is a very brief snapshot of four recent studies in the field of Arts Education.

Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning (Fiske, 1999) begins with an analysis (Catterall, Capleau & Iwanaga, 1999) from data about student achievement gathered by the United States Department of Education. “It showed that low income students who were high arts participators did better in school and in life than peers who were low arts participators” (Rabkin and Redmond, 2004, p.7). There should be no question that if we want to maximize the power of arts education – cognitively, socially, and emotionally – if we want to meet the challenges of students in low-income and low-performing districts, arts education must be integrated” (Rabkin as cited in Rabkin & Redmond, 2004, p.5). Fiske’s findings prove 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.

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.

Professor Robyn Ewing from the University of Sydney’s extensive research published in *The Arts and Australian Education: Realising Potential* by ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) 2010 reported that those students whose learning is embedded in quality arts:

- Achieve better grades and overall test scores
- Are less likely to leave school early
- Rarely report boredom
- Have more positive self concepts

than those students who are deprived of arts experiences.

Most recently, a comprehensive study, titled *The Role of Arts Participation in Students’ Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study of School, Home and Community Factors* (Martin et al., 2014), examined 643 primary and high school students from 15 Australian schools, tracking their academic and personal wellbeing outcomes over two years. This research was conducted by the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Education and Social Work and the Australia Council for the Arts. It found that the arts are not only critical in the social development of young people, but young people who engage in a high quality arts education achieve more consistently in their other non-arts subjects.



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

Reference List

Australia Council for the Arts (2014). Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts. Report May 2014.

http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/200927/Arts-in-Daily-Life-Australian-Participation-in-the-Arts.pdf

Deasy, R. (2002). Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development.

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/ERIC-ED466413/pdf/ERIC-ED466413.pdf>

Ewing, R. (2010). The Arts and Australian Education: Realising Potential. Australian Education Review; no.58. Australian Council for Educational Research.

<http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=aer>

Fiske, E. (1999). Champions of Change, the Impact of the Arts on Learning.

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/champions/pdfs/ChampsReport.pdf>

Martin, A., Mansour, M., Anderson, M., Gibson, R., Liem, A., Sudmalis, D. (2013). The role of arts participation in students' academic and nonacademic outcomes: A longitudinal study of school, home, and community factors. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), 709-727

<http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=2013-14506-001>

Review of the Australian Curriculum, Australian Government (2014).

<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/36269>