

Importance of arts education

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February 2011 marked the implementation of english, mathematics and science into the national curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013) and it was up to the view of the principle to integrate the arts, as they felt appropriate (Russell-Bowie, 2012). After a large amount of scrutiny the arts strand was included during the second phase of the curriculum (Russell-Bowie, 2012; ACARA, 2013).

Aland (1999) highlights the fact that what is assessed in the classroom is what the teacher, the school and the community, value. Within present and future classrooms it is a teacher's responsibility to integrate the five arts subjects into the already busy curriculum, and ensure our students are all able to experience the diverse culture we once were. Article 31 of the United Nation Convention for the rights of a child state children have the right to “join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities” (Unicef, 2013).

In line with this statement, the Australian National curriculum aims for the development of five art subjects: Dance, Drama, Music, Media and Visual Arts and implementation from February 2014 (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013). Initially aimed as a choice by principals, a nation wide approach was not included till second phase of the curriculum was developed (Russell-Bowie, 2012).

With support from the Victorian essential learning's giving the arts relationships between other subject domains (Victorian curriculum and assessment authority, 2009); New South Wales Syllabus giving equal opportunities between seven subject domains (Board of studies NSW, 2006); Tasmania's essential learning separating all subjects based on students
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outcomes (Hanlon, 2004), “ being arts literate” (Shilto, Beswick and Baguley, 2006); and Queensland essential learnings’ separating a multitude of key learning areas equally (Queensland Study Authority, 2010), there is clear support from the governments regarding arts education (Australian Council for the Arts, 2001) for the future generations, but without the economical support from the government it is unlikely arts education will continue (Russell-Bowie, 2012).

The public view regarding arts education has been under disrepute, through being seen as a “soft subject” with little connection to the ‘ real world’ (Rabkin and Hedberg, 2011). Although Paige and Huckbee (2005) undertook a poll where 90% of respondents thought “ arts is vital for well rounding”, Rabkin and Hedberg state arts is “ not seen academically” and does not prepare for the workplace (2011). President Clinton is one influential person within history who has said in the past that he owes music for the success in his life, and without music running for president and consequentially winning would not of been possible (Australian Council for the Arts, 2001).

In regards to what is taught in our schools, schools value what is of economic value (Russell-Bowie, 2012) and with recent budget cuts the success of arts education is unlikely. Aland (1999) reminds teachers that what we teach and assess is what students assume is valued by the teacher, the school and within the community. So does teaching and assessing in regards to the NAPLAN test (Russell-Bowie, 2012), mean as a nation we only value the english and math results? Taras (2005) defines assessment by “ judgement of students work” and it is important, as teachers, these judgements are made appropriate to the learning experiences and the children’s background

(Russell-Bowie, 2012). Recognising that students go through times in their lives where change occurs (Aland, 1999).

Aland (1999) highlights the importance within the assessment of the arts, of clear and very explicit criteria and outcomes. Queensland Study Authority (2007) highlights the seven key criteria aspects students are marked upon in the Queensland essential learnings framework as knowledge and understanding, creating, presenting, responding, and reflecting. Aland (1999) emphasizes the importance of not only criteria but also knowledge in the strategies off assessment. Russell-Bowie (2012) gives six strategies of observation, consultation, outcomes and indicators, self-assessment, peer assessment and checklists. It is also important to look towards the future and understand the effects the arts have on students and the achievement of students in other academia domains.

Paige and Huckabee (2005) suggest through involvement within the arts students gave achieved significantly higher in maths and verbal language aspects of SAT/college entry results, giving students the ability to aim higher, and succeed with future goals. . In a primary setting this was scene at Joseph Lazetta School, where 80% of students were unable to read at grade level (Australian Council for the Arts, 2001). Within one year, with music integrated within the curriculum, there was an increase of over 300% in a year three classroom. A teacher's goal in giving students the highest chance of success is achieved through developing skills, knowledge and confidence for inclusion of all five art forms. As teachers entering the profession confidence, awareness, knowledge and skills in preparation are key in the delivery of arts education (Russell-Bowie, 2012; Aland, 1999).

The incorporation of the arts within everyday and non-arts related subjects is the key in the integration of the arts within classrooms. Preparation of knowledge, skills and the preparation of lessons are crucial (Aland, 1999). Russell-Bowie (2012) highlights the importance in preparing teachers before they enter the classroom and giving them a ‘tool box’ of strategies for implementing the arts into classrooms. This gives teachers the confidence, another important element as highlighted by Russell-Bowie (2012), in teaching their students an array of arts subjects as well as incorporating these into common topics, themes, concepts and processes (Aland, 1999).

Awareness of career pathways, the ways students learn and achieve, and the criteria regarding student achievement (Aland, 1999) is crucial for a teacher to develop within a classroom and keeping up with advances within arts education is key. With the median age of teachers within 21st century classrooms approximately 44% of teachers are over the age of 45 and only 28% aged 15-24 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), the issue of teacher knowledge and development needs to be addressed. Assuming teachers over the age of 45 finished their training at 20, how can parents expect a teacher who graduated over 25 years ago to integrate arts within their classroom?

Personal Development is key in keeping up with the advances within theory, technique and skills, and for those teachers who did not have the access to study these techniques, personal development is crucial in their own knowledge development and successfully developing their students abilities. This has been proven to work well in the US where grants are available to further a staff member of the schools knowledge and was thus passed on to

other supporting teachers around the figure (Department of Education, 2011). The Australian Council for the Arts (2001) also introduces the idea of forming partnerships between schools and arts organisations. Giving teachers and schools this support will allow teachers and students to learn together within the classroom. Students spend 32.5 hours a week in classrooms (Swanbrow, n. d. therefore the resources, time, subject priority's and a teachers flexibility is important for integrating the arts within a classroom. The Board of Studies NSW (2006), states teachers should spend 10% of their teaching per week on arts. Using Swanbrow's statistic of 32.5 hours a week (n. d.), students should spend approximately 3 hours a week on the arts alone. Understanding flexibility within time and lessons is crucial for achieving this 3 hours, for without integration in non-arts subjects it is unrealistic teachers will achieve this benchmark. Without the resources integrated within lessons students will exhibit off-task behaviors and not engage in the lesson.

Ensuring teachers are using new technology, especially with older primary students who have access to the technology radially available (Aland, 1999), have a large amount of educational potential. Education is crucial in a child's development, so why limit their future? The arts appear in our everyday lives, and through integrating this colourful aspect, students are able to develop ideas and work collaboratively successfully. Integrating the arts is a teacher's responsibility, but as a nation, can Australia implement a prep-7 approach and give all students a magnificent experience of the arts.

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