

## How important are the Arts in early childhood Education?

**In a recent study of early childhood teachers (Garvis, 2010), I found that time given to arts education in classrooms had been reduced. This prompted me to consider the current place of arts education in early childhood education. Does it still have a place for children?**

The identified problem of arts education has long been documented in National Inquiries in Australia. In 1995, there was a Senate Inquiry into Arts Education in schools. In 2005 A National Review of School Music Education was conducted (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005), followed in 2008 by a National Review of Visual Education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2008). Each national inquiry highlights the limited teaching of arts education occurring. So why is arts education important for children?

Arts education is important for all children. Arts education is one of the first mediums children use to express themselves and communicate. It is also considered important for teaching social justice, exploring diverse identities and uniting communities. According to Maxine Greene (2001), the arts are considered a tool to open minds and break down barriers, allowing children to imagine the realities of the world other than their own familiar culture.

Elliot Eisner's book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002) presents evidence for the importance of arts education and the need for the arts to move from the periphery to the centre of the curriculum. He postulates that learning in and through the arts can develop complex and subtle aspects of the mind. The arts are considered a cognitive tool in transforming learning.

What is the future of arts education in Australia? While it has been accepted as a subject in the National Curriculum, it is dependent on delivery in the daily running of the classroom. Is this different to current practice? The Arts were also considered a 'key learning area' in all states and territories, yet numerous reviews suggest Arts education did not receive equal importance in the school timetable as other subjects. Will the proposed National Curriculum make a difference to the teaching of the Arts?

Advocacy for arts education is needed for the future. If we want to provide students with arts opportunities, teachers, parents, community members and arts organisations must work together to promote arts education experiences in schools. Quality arts education tends to be characterised by a strong partnership between schools and outside arts and community organisations. Through strong connections, a shared responsibility can be established for the delivery of arts education. Through joint advocacy and responsibility, quality arts education can be promoted for all children.

### References

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