

The National Advocates for Arts Education – advocacy strategies for a 21st Century curriculum

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Partnerships within and beyond school: Collaborative efforts between public and private sectors, school communities, cultural institutions, etc.

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Introduction

This paper considers advocacy strategies that have located the arts in the developing national curriculum for Australian schools. We explain how arts educators worked with professional associations in a strategic partnership to successfully argue for the inclusion of five art forms (dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts) within the development of a new national curriculum. Woven throughout the paper are the perspectives of the two authors whose particular interests are located within the art form of dance. We therefore provide examples from our experience as players in the important process ‘game’ of arts curriculum policy in the particular area of dance.

The paper will explain how lobbying was used to exert pressure upon those with power and influence on curriculum decision-making, and how this work for arts curriculum development included contestation and settlement. Tracing developments in arts curricula for the school years in Australia, we consider government support for the role of the arts in fostering creativity, innovation, cultural understanding and social inclusion, to provide Australian children with the fundamental skills needed in the 21st Century.

Background

Background information is vital for understanding the current context for the arts in Australian schools. ‘Australia is a vast country, the sixth largest country in the world. It’s about the same size as the 48 mainland states of the USA and 50 per cent larger than Europe, but has the lowest population density in the world – only two people per square kilometre. Since 1945 more than six million people from across the world have come to

Australia to live. Today, more than 20 per cent of Australians are foreign born and more than 40 per cent are of mixed cultural origin' (Australia Facts 2009).

The small population is spread mainly around major coastal cities and includes many urban Aboriginal people. Smaller communities live in regional and remote areas, including Aboriginal people using their native languages and maintaining cultural traditions. Aboriginal people in Australia are believed to be the world's oldest civilization, having lived and thrived on the continent for more than 50,000 years. Indigenous cultures vary widely and can be seen as a living, foundational culture in Australia, with non-Indigenous Australians identifying with the signs, symbols, colours, sounds and objects of Indigenous Australia. Other cultural influences upon Australia include a strong awareness of a colonial past led by the British, with other European influences, particularly from Italy and Greece. Early Chinese settlers have been more recently joined by communities from across Asia and the Pacific regions.

Advocacy for the arts: beginnings and alliances

Advocacy for arts education in Australian schools has a long history. Undertaken through political action and in the pursuit of democracy, the arts have engaged in a 'substantive form of collective participation' (Apple 2009, p.244). An early example was the 1977 'Education and the Arts' study by the Commonwealth Schools Commission and the Australia Council (Commonwealth of Australia 1977), which reviewed the status of arts education across all States and Territories. It was a major step forward for arts education, and formed the basis of many future studies and campaigns, especially in the 1980s.

Its publication coincided with the formation of the Australian Association for Dance Education (AADE), also in 1977, which drew together dance educators from schools, studios and tertiary institutions, and dance artists such as choreographers, artistic directors and dancers, in a common cause for the first time. The AADE subsequently became the Australian Dance Council – Ausdance Inc., and now includes a network of funded State and Territory offices in all capital cities except Hobart.

Ausdance National was a strong advocate for dance education throughout the 1980s, developing sequential workshop programs for teachers, making submissions to various inquiries and forming the Tertiary Dance Council of Australia. Ausdance forged other

strategic alliances as a result of learning about the power and value of direct communication with politicians and their advisers, and some campaigns at that time also built on the Ausdance National Director's eighteen years in the Federal Parliament as a member of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff. The convergence of these two interests – dance and politics – has been central to Ausdance's advocacy work with allied organisations.

In the 1980s this work included responses to the Report of the Task Force on Education & the Arts (Department of Education and Youth Affairs 1984) and the Review of Arts Education and Training (Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission 1985), as well as participation in the National Arts in Australian Schools Project (NAAS) (Commonwealth of Australia 1985), a federal, state and territory initiative formed after the 1984 Task Force report to implement an arts education strategy. The NAAS team recognised that arts educators should be able to present a position that would enable individual teachers, schools and indeed state and territory education departments to develop meaningful curricula in each art form. Towards the end of the 1980s, the NAAS project therefore made a specific request of associations – to formulate a 'position' for each art form in education. This presented Ausdance with a particular problem – there was no recognised national position for dance education, and in fact some very vocal opposition to any such notion. However, Ausdance National forged ahead and commissioned prominent dance educator Robert Osmotherly to write a framework for dance education in Australian schools. This has become a foundation from which all future work on Australian dance curricula was based; the resulting Ausdance position (1991) is published on its website, still very much in focus.

It was following the Australian Education Council's (AEC) 1989 'Hobart Declaration' (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2010), which included 'The Arts' as one of the eight key learning areas, that the National Affiliation of Arts Educators (NAAE) was founded, in 1989, an important milestone for Ausdance and for arts education generally. This voluntary alliance strategically established important relationships, vital for successful advocacy. Member associations were the Australian Institute of Art Education (AIAE), Australian Dance Council (Ausdance), Australian Society for Music Education (ASME), Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM), Design Education Council of Australia (DECA) and the National Association for Drama in

Education (NADIE). However, it soon became apparent that 'the Arts' were not going to be 'mapped' as a national curriculum learning area along with the others, which triggered the NAAE's first national campaign. Eventually – with AEC support – NAAE finally achieved a settlement on a major mapping project for 'The Arts', and also reached agreement with the AEC that 'The Arts' learning area would clearly identify five art forms: dance, drama, media, music and visual arts. Writers were appointed and after a process lasting two and a half years, the 'Statements and Profiles' on 'The Arts in Australian Schools' were published (Australian Education Council 1994).

This curriculum writing was partly informed by a national summit on arts education, initiated by the NAAE and partnered by the Australia Council for the Arts in 1993. The summit provided an opportunity to bring together artists, educators, advocates and administrators, including representatives from New Zealand. The ensuing dialogue was notable for uncovering some of the misunderstandings that existed at that time between artists and educators, but it did provide much new information and greater understanding between the sectors.

The NAAE's major focus during this period was on ensuring the integrity of each art form, i.e. recognition of the body of work that learning in five art forms entails. This is reflected in the original published documents, but since then, arts curricula have been published for each State and Territory, and development has not always been clear in their implementation in the different jurisdictions. This has been revealed in audits of provision by the Dance Education in Australian Schools (DEAS) group, via consultation and meetings in 1998, 2001 and 2005, and in the Federal Government's music and visual education reviews (the National Review of School Music Education (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), 2005). and the National Review of Education in Visual Arts, Craft, Design and Visual Communication, DEST, 2008).

Advocacy and lobbying for arts curriculum – 1990s–2000s

Having established itself as a successful advocacy and focus group for arts education, the NAAE was offered Federal funding in 1994 to establish an office, undertake research and produce publications. While much was achieved in the early 1990s, its funding ceased with the election of the Howard Government in 1996, and NAAE again became a voluntary organisation. In the meantime however, its advocacy work continued, including

appearances at the Senate Inquiry into Education and the Arts (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995), and in consultation with the Australia Council for the Arts, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body. As a direct result of lobbying for Australian arts education research for instance, the Federal Minister for the Arts provided funding for a series of small arts education projects, and a dedicated arts education position was created which brought together State and Territory bureaucrats to consider ways of enhancing and enriching arts education in Australian schools.

Initially, the Australia Council's National Education and the Arts Network (NEAN) group saw the Australia Council assume a leadership role in advocating for arts education. There was dialogue through meetings, regular newsletters and, eventually, real consultation with the NAAE. A major conference in 2005 – Backing Our Creativity – provided new focus for teachers, artists and bureaucrats, with Professor Ken Robinson's rallying call for the role of each art form in education. The conference provided an opportunity for planning for the UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education, 'Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century' conference in Lisbon.

Many Australian participants went on to present papers at that conference and contribute to the Road Map – with one major exception – dance was not included. This has, of course, since been rectified through WAAE recognition of the World Dance Alliance, strongly represented in the 2010 second UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education in Seoul, through our international networks. In the meantime, 'Backing Our Creativity' was followed by an affirming document prepared by Federal, State and Territory governments, the 'National education and the arts statement' (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2007), which became a useful advocacy tool in the NAAE's current campaign for the Arts in the national curriculum.

In 2006 Ausdance received an Australia Council Dance Board grant to research the quality of dance education in Australian schools and a commissioned report subsequently identified several strategies for supporting teachers and providing increased resources. Having produced three Safe Dance Reports and national standards for dance teachers In the 1990s, Ausdance was well positioned to build on that achievement, and to look at gaps in delivery.

During 2008 the Australia Council for the Arts and Ausdance worked together in a partnership to develop Dance Plan 2012 (2008). Written in consultation with the dance sector, the plan identifies four ambitions for 2012, each accompanied by a list of achievable objectives. One of the four 'ambitions' is for 'Dance to be an integral part of every young person's education' by 2012, which has now become a key driver for Ausdance in its bid to ensure the inclusion of dance in a national arts curriculum.

Recent developments for an arts curriculum in the Australian 'Education Revolution'

The current Labor government's pursuit of a new national curriculum for Australian schools has provided new challenges for NAAE to advocate for arts education via the newly created Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA). In 2008, there was no plan for the arts in the new Australian national curriculum and 'It has been increasingly clear that the school curriculum has become a battleground' (Apple 2009, p. 242). Questions of the purpose of such a new curriculum, what will be included and excluded, were provoked and alarm bells for arts educators sounded immediately. The first learning areas, English, mathematics, sciences and history, were announced in 2008 and there was no sign of the arts in phase 2 which included only languages and history (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2009).

Ausdance is again working as a member organisation in a 'tactical alliance' (Apple 2009, p_ 246) with the NAAE (renamed as National Advocates for Arts Education) to lobby for the arts in the new national curriculum and to find a settlement on arts curriculum. In an early meeting, the NAAE Chairperson was told by the Arts Minister's office that art form organisations would fail to achieve inclusion in the curriculum if they pursued independent lobbying, and that a combined effort would provide the best chance for winning ministers to the cause. The NAAE was in a prime position to take up this challenge, and organised a series of meetings and intense coordinated lobbying by Ausdance, Drama Australia, the Australian Society for Music Education, the Music Council of Australia, the National Association for the Visual Arts, Art Education Australia and the Australian Teachers of Media. This lobbying included meetings with federal government politicians, media releases, advocacy letters written to ministers and support from the Australian Primary Principals Association. A face-to-face meeting with the arts minister assured NAAE that 'the arts' would not be forgotten. An early meeting was also held with the General Manager of the National Curriculum Board, in order to profile the NAAE's lobbying efforts,

gain advice and establish a positive relationship with an influential leader working with the Board.

Concurrently in December 2008, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians was released and included 'the arts (performing and visual)' as a learning area to be incorporated in the curriculum. The terms 'performing' and 'visual' had not been used before, and the author of this new framing for the arts unknown, providing an example of a 'top down' approach to policy development (Taylor, Fazal, Lingard, & Henry, 1997, p. 35). Whilst not statutory, the NAAE advocacy campaign drew on the Melbourne Declaration and the National Education and the Arts Statement (MCEETYA 2007) for support. NAAE made arguments which drew on claims for the economic benefits of arts education, such as the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) Working Group's 'The role of creativity in the innovation economy' (2006), 'Educating for the creative workforce: rethinking arts and education' (Oakley, 2007) and international influences such as 'Creative Britain: New talents for the New Economy' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2008), supporting a 'human capital perspective on education' (Taylor et al, 1997, p. 95).

NAAE members had become adept at playing the political game for the arts by framing arguments in appealing economic terms, which relate to the government's productivity agenda. Creativity is highlighted as intrinsic to arts practices and essential to innovation. In addition, the arts contribute to social cohesion, inclusion, and support cultural understanding at a time of mass migration and diversity.

These lobbying endeavours led to arts minister Peter Garrett's announcement in April 2009 that 'the arts' would be included in Phase 2 of the federal government's 'Education Revolution'. However, the text of the media release (Garrett 2009) obscures the lobbying efforts of the NAAE and communicates the power of federal, state and territory education ministers to decide that Australian children would be guaranteed an 'arts-rich education'. Similarly, shortly after, the Australia Council for the Arts issued its own media release applauding the government's decision and highlighting its own leading role. This adroitly masked the Australia Council's apparent lack of public leadership and advocacy for the arts in the national curriculum, when in fact the Council had been approached by the NAAE for this purpose and had not responded.

NAAE supports the (UNESCO) World Conference on Arts Education's 'Road Map for Arts Education', another essential advocacy document which 'aims to explore the role of Arts Education in meeting the need for creativity and cultural awareness in the 21st Century' (2006). Ausdance National is working with the Asia-Pacific World Dance Alliance and other global arts education organisations to realise the aims of this policy document.

In considering the key issues for an effective arts education for every child, NAAE has identified the following critical issues:

- There must be development of five art form curricula from K-12, i.e. dance, drama, music, media and the visual arts (not a combined 'creative arts' approach, except perhaps in early childhood learning, but still with identifiable art form 'strands').
- Attention must be given to quality and depth in pre-service teacher arts education.
- The availability of meaningful arts professional development for teachers, particularly in the primary school.
- The role and quality of artists in schools and/or other specialists.

Conclusion

Advocacy for arts education is itself an art form – it requires understanding of political systems, consultation mechanisms, communication skills, art form knowledge, access to international research and, above all, ability to demonstrate leadership through strategic collaboration and negotiation with key stakeholders. The NAAE has not only successfully met each of these benchmarks, but has succeeded in achieving and maintaining a united voice for each art form within an 'arts' paradigm, against all the odds.

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