

Connecting the silos:

Developing arts rich education

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This paper is set in the context of the Australia Council's interest in exploring the linkages between the arts and education arising from a surge in international advocacy. It explores several issues that surround linking the arts. It reviews some of the current discussions around integration and suggests some approaches that are supported by the evidence for teaching in an arts enriched manner. The paper argues for the retention of the integrity of each art form but reviews models that can assist in the deepening of the learning experiences for students through the use of a diversity of artistic forms including drama, dance, music, media and visual arts.

We began thinking about this paper while conducting some research on how drama teachers understand and respond to their own professional development (Anderson, 2004b). The paper which documents that research, outlines a series of attributes that we might associate with an effective 'drama' educator. One of the important attributes (for drama educators) is the ability to embrace all of the arts as tools for pedagogy, advocacy and research through praxis. Evidence from this research into drama teachers' professional development suggests there is a distinct difference between the way primary teachers see themselves and the way secondary drama teachers think of themselves. The primary educators see themselves as teachers of the arts with strengths in specific art forms such as drama or visual arts, whereas the secondary teachers think of themselves as teachers of drama exclusively. They have, at best, a vague supportive attitude towards the other art forms and, at worst, they are hostile to other arts teachers in their schools (Anderson, 2002).

It is difficult to say why these tensions have arisen between arts educators. It seems far less common amongst primary school educators than secondary drama teachers. In secondary schooling the faculty system may section off subject areas arbitrarily while in most primary schools, teachers 'teach' the whole curriculum rather than aspects of it. Perhaps many teachers have also seen other arts areas as the enemy in the fight for time, resources and numbers in schools where student numbers are valued. This is certainly

true in NSW where music and visual arts have been given curriculum ascendancy as mandatory areas in the *Education Reform Act NSW* (1990). This has made dance and drama fight strenuously to establish their own place in school curriculum planning rather than remain on the fringes. Sadly, one would still need to concede the continued marginalisation of all the arts within most NSW primary schools. We have, however, reached a moment where the division of the arts is worse than fruitless and may endanger our ongoing survival. This frustration is not only expressed amongst teachers. There have been longstanding divisions between those who call themselves art makers and those who call themselves arts teachers (Blakeslee, 2004). As Michael Blakeslee argues this only serves to undermine the progress and promotion of arts education generally:

The result of this debate (or rather, avoidance of rational and clear debate) is that we are hard pressed to identify what we truly mean by arts education, even among ourselves. And those who control the resources may be forgiven if they experience confusion about which programs are deserving of support—and even sometimes if there are any programs that can provide long-term educational benefits to students (Blakeslee, 2004, p. 33).

While Blakeslee is speaking from an American context, there are resonances for Australian arts educators. We often feel frustrated at not being taken seriously, and perhaps that stems from the lack of cohesion that has been seen in the arts community for many years. We are unlikely to be taken seriously by curriculum and resource gatekeepers until we can provide evidence that demonstrates the changes that arts enriched education can deliver. This evidence is beginning to mount internationally (Fiske, 1999) and nationally (Australia Council, 2004).

Significantly many in the community recognise the importance of arts education more than policy makers and funding bodies. A recent report for the Australia Council for the Arts found that: “the vast majority of Australians agree that ‘the arts’ should be an important part of the education of every Australian kid’ (85%)”. The report also suggested that: “...the arts sector needs to work with teachers and students to generate more effective education and opportunities for children in the arts” (Saatchi & Saatchi, 2000, p. 97). The messages here are clear. The community values the arts and wants access to them for their children (although probably not at the expense of literacy and numeracy) (Gibson, 2004). Moreover the stakeholders expect the arts and education sectors to work together enthusiastically for the benefit of Australian young people. So, why is it that arts educators find it so difficult to break through and create change, moving arts education from the fringes to the centre of the curriculum discussion where many would contend it belongs? Perhaps our past divisions have led to our current poverty.

The solution is for arts educators to agree on the value and place of arts education and advocate change that encompasses and uses the strengths of the distinctive art forms in our schools. We need to present a united front. There are significant initiatives taking place in arts education that are imperilled by the traditional 'siloing' that we can easily (and at times justifiably) make our default position. It is time for a creative unity to promote and advocate for a place for all the arts at the centre of each child's education. How can we politically, pedagogically and through research change our approach to make education arts enriched?

BEYOND INTEGRATION: ARTS ENRICHED APPROACHES TO PRAXIS

There has been a subtle yet crucial shift in the discussions surrounding arts education and the way that it might be taught in our schools. The discussion of how we might integrate the arts has shifted, to how we might enrich education through the arts and the approaches that might be used for the various art forms to complement rather than replace each other. The recent return to favour of integration within the primary context may have been driven by an effort to create an amorphous subject called the Creative Arts. Clearly the curriculum designers thought that the mixing of four disparate disciplines – dance, drama, music and visual arts - would be a practical way of reducing the amount of time needed to teach essential content in the primary classroom. In NSW at least, the attempt to integrate the arts has been resisted. The long awaited *Creative Arts K-6 syllabus* retains the concept of four distinct arts and values complementarity rather than integration. The Board of Studies' 'linkages' (integration) document has this to say about connections in the arts:

As each syllabus is developed, the distinctive qualities of the key learning areas are as crucial to the overall construction as the connections that assist in determining the total curriculum. As teachers plan their programs from Board of Studies syllabuses, they come to recognise the links and areas of commonality as well as the specific aspects that are unique to each key learning area.

Source:http://www.bosnswk6.nsw.edu.au/linkages/Guiding/guiding_intro.html#guiding2

This document suggests that the Board of Studies still values the arts as separate entities within which teachers will "come to recognise" commonalities. However vague and unsatisfying this description is, it does avoid claiming that the arts are really all the same and they can be thrown together like a formless *blancmange*. Given that there is now some support in curriculum documentation for the arts informing each other, how might we go about this through our own pedagogy, research and ongoing advocacy?

In the first instance, let's discuss some principles of arts education practice that could begin to make the shift at a grass roots level. These principles are by no means exhaustive and they are, in large part, based on practice that already exists. As such, they are not revelatory but underscore some of the things we might do to create sustainable connections within and between arts forms.

I. Use artists/teachers¹ outside your field to complement and enrich your practice

The nature of drama is to be inclusive and draw on other art forms, while music, dance and visual arts are often considered individualistic pursuits. While we accept other art forms are important to drama, we could go further and embrace all art forms in a more committed way so that each of us but especially our beginning and experienced teachers might be enriched by the relationship. This is not to say that we integrate the arts in a tokenistic manner (Gibson 2003), far from it, but rather that we value the skills and capabilities of teachers and artists from other art forms to enrich our own practice.

Arts educators are by their nature, flexible and usually have a wide variety of skills to build on. There are times, however when the arts educator needs to look beyond his/her own abilities and to others within the school or the community to support his/her work. The school production, for example, provides a classic cross arts model with various teachers and community members working together to produce a celebratory event complete with performance, music, costumes, props and set.

There seems less evidence of this approach in the day-to-day running of drama and music classes at the secondary level. When is the last time you heard of a drama and music teacher “team teaching” to do work on Brecht, for instance? This is not to suggest that it doesn’t happen but does it happen enough? The structures of schools and, to some extent, secondary faculties, conspire against this arts team approach. Furthermore the school musical has traditionally (in Australia at least) been seen as a co-curricula activity, and it is relegated to after school or lunchtime rehearsals. Similarly the annual school art exhibition (often tied to a fund-raising event) is simply added to the art teacher’s list of ‘other’ duties. What this means is that arts teachers are not supported through the structures of the school to jointly create artworks. The move to Key Learning Area² and faculties throughout NSW is making this approach at least possible but there is not widespread adoption of cross arts teams at the present time.

An important exception is the celebratory theatre events that have been occurring throughout NSW over the past few years. The impetus for these has been twofold. Initially teachers began working in this cross arts form so they could provide their students with an experiential understanding of celebratory theatre³. In anticipation of the skills deficit in this area, the NSW Department of Education and Training offered a training event in celebratory theatre. John Fox and Sue Gill’s Welfare State International (WSI) provided the right fit for cross arts experiences through their extensive work in celebratory theatre. The manifesto of WSI states:

We make images, invent rituals, devise ceremonies, objectify the unpredictable and enhance atmospheres for particular places, times, situations and people. We are artists concerned with the survival and character of the imagination and the individual within a technologically advanced society (Fox, 2002, p. 3).

In this manifesto there is no specific reference to visual art, music, dance or drama. All are important in the creation of the celebratory event.

With Charles Sturt University, Bathurst under the leadership of John Carroll and Bill Blaikie, Fox and Gill ran the *Devising Celebration* in-service event for teachers in September and October 1999. One of the aims of this event was to “cross the boundaries usually encountered between the visual arts, music, performance, dance and theatre to connect to a community event ...” (Carroll, n.d) . The event saw over 100 teachers from all over NSW work with artists from all fields to develop a community celebration event that transcended institutional and art form boundaries. The teachers who attended were allowing the partnerships with artists, students and other teachers to enrich and extend their devising process.

These partnerships established an important model for an aesthetic integration of process and product drawing from all the arts. Sharon McCutcheon , a participant in the *Devising Celebration* course made a comment on how this course has influenced her ongoing practice:

The [devising celebration] course gave me the ‘tools’ to stage a large-scale site-specific celebratory theatre production in my school. The performance involved over four hundred students and forty staff. The students owned every step in the “Journey”. The maths department made the lanterns as part of their geometry unit, the industrial arts department made the armour and weapons, the fashion and design students designed and constructed the costumes...in fact EVERY student that expressed an interest in being involved was given a role in some aspect of the production (Anderson, 1999).

McCutcheon’s response testifies to the power of an integrated arts enriched approach to the education of her students. The permeable subject barriers meant that she was able to manage “rich tasks.”⁴ . This approach to learning and creativity goes against the grain of many school organizations. More than just a cross-arts opportunity, this approach provides testament to the whole community how powerful the arts can be when taught in a connected and meaningful way. The emphasis here is not so much on faculties but on collaboration, not on subjects but on cooperation. This approach provides an effective model of partnerships that might be used to support successive generations of arts educators. This model allows arts educators to be liberally influenced by each other’s practice while they maintain, celebrate and share the distinctiveness and the integrity of their own discipline areas.

The multi-sensory, multi arts approach is not new, of course. Indigenous Australians have traditionally approached the arts in this manner. Anne Marshall describes the way indigenous artists create their art through the notion of songlines:

It encapsulates the close connectedness of people, events, social and religious belief, environment and movement through the land: a mapping of identity and country using the visual and performing arts. Almost all existence is framed as performances at one time or another in oral cultures (Marshall, 2004, p. 56).

This model of connectedness is one that arts educators would do well to utilise. By eschewing the western educational faculty silos, we can perhaps find in arts connections

new possibilities that relate more to the art form and less to the political baggage and affiliations we carry. We are also wise to take note of this model because almost all syllabi in Australia prioritise experiences from indigenous perspectives. Again this is not a call to integrate but rather to cooperate to create new performance, new artworks, and new pedagogical and political possibilities. In the same way leaders in qualitative research methodologies are now suggesting the opportunity for real and lasting change. An arts enriched approach offers powerful ways to understand and engage with arts praxis.

2. Use arts enriched approaches to research

There has been a long and useful call for teachers to reflect on their own praxis as Friere (1970) argued. According to Taylor (2000) such research empowers students and teachers alike to understand and transform their surroundings. While the opportunity for teachers to transform their classrooms is often controlled by contextual factors (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) it is also true that teachers who are able to reflect on their own practice can work to shape their development and the learning of their students. In recent research on the professional development journeys of teachers (Anderson, 2002) there is evidence that experienced teachers who can reflect on their situations are more able to change their environment to suit their professional needs.

As practitioners of the arts we have an innate understanding of how arts forms can create and clarify meaning. While we have always understood arts potential in performance, making and appreciating, we may not have fully realised the arts research potential. An example of arts informed inquiry comes in the work of Monica Prendegast (2004, p. 78), who uses poetic form to celebrate the work of audience educator, Howard Blau:

audience education
 the education
 of the audience a dubious
 desperate task
 a bewildered liberalism
 (dreaming cultural unity)

‘What a misunderstanding’

The use of poetry here gives Prendegast an opportunity to create a connection with her audience. This is especially apt as she is concerned primarily with audience education. The research uses poetic form to communicate beyond raw numbers or bland description. In this research approach there is the potential for inspiration.

Similarly arts educators, Robyn Gibson and Marianne Hulsbosch use arts-informed inquiry to position themselves precariously as “the researched and the researcher” (Cole, 1994, n.p). Through their sculptural artwork titled *In Your Own Backyard*, they utilise Australian icons such as the Hills Hoist and boardshorts to juxtapose notions of identity with multiculturalism and encourage their audience to question what multiculturalism

really means to Australians (Gibson and Hulsbosch, in press). Such is the power of arts-informed inquiry to unite the arts and research.

While the arts have the power to communicate, performance ethnography has been suggested lately as an arts-informed research methodology that can bring about real social change. In his latest book Norman Denzin (2003) advances a passionate argument for using performance ethnography not only as research but also as a way to influence and change society:

...I advance a critical performative pedagogy that turns the ethnographic into the performative and the performative into the political. It is my hope that this pedagogy will allow us to dream our way into a militant democratic utopian space...
(2003, p. xiii).

Denzin is calling upon researchers to use performance ethnography as a praxis for social change, just as Augusto Boal or Dario Fo have done. This use of arts-informed inquiry rises above research for the social good and works as research for social change. This is radical methodology powered by applied theatrical approaches that Denzin believes can change lives and societies. Denzin identifies and utilises the power of an arts-informed approach. Such approaches move beyond the information abattoir (Carroll, 1996) and introduce the possibility of communicating research in radical ways to effect lasting change. We as arts educators have an amazing opportunity to engage with this process as we already understand the possibilities of the art forms and their conventions.

3. Develop joint advocacy approaches

For the first time in the history of arts education there are international and national calls for a renewed examination of the role and benefits of arts education in the lives of young people (Fiske, 1999). There seems currently to be a stream of policy, research and advocacy documents that relate to arts and education such as *Champions of Change* (1999) and *Critical Links* (2003) from the *Arts Education Partnership, Evaluation of School-Based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools* (2004) from the Australian Council for Educational Research. In addition there are several innovative studies from the Australia Council and a series of high level documents and events planned by UNESCO often with the support of Australian arts educators. Discussions are occurring with policy makers about the place and envisaged role of education. There are now several documents outlining the areas where significant research might be undertaken and there is a new generation of arts education scholars. The time is right for arts researchers to examine our past research heritage and plan for the future in partnership with other arts educators and also educators in schools, hospitals or youth outreach centres throughout the country and the world. These research and advocacy attempts are not being overtly driven by one art form or another.

Not surprisingly these efforts are beginning to bear fruit. The Education Secretary in the Bush administration, Rod Paige wrote a letter in support of a broad and thorough arts education to school superintendents throughout the United States:

The arts, perhaps more than any other subject, help students to understand themselves and others, whether they lived in the past or are living in the present. President Bush recognizes this important contribution of the arts to every child's education. He has said, "From music and dance to painting and sculpting, the arts allow us to explore new worlds and to view life from another perspective." In addition, they "encourage individuals to sharpen their skills and abilities and to nurture their imagination and intellect." Source: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/040701.html>

This is a strong statement by any politician but it speaks volumes for the new arts education advocacy that it comes from the current conservative government in Washington. In Australia as well there is activity in the same direction. There are moves to have a similar joint statement from Australian Ministers for the Arts and Education especially in light of the recent *Evaluation of School-Based Arts Education Programmes in Australian School* report. A document akin to that from the US with attendant resource and political support could be a big win for arts educators. There are similar advocacy bodies established in Australia.

The National Education and The Arts Network (NEAN) set up recently has local carriage of these agendas. The function of the NEAN include:

- fostering and supporting the development of state, territory and commonwealth education and the arts activities, programs and research projects
- reaching agreement about the priority areas for inclusion in a national strategy for education and the arts in Australia
- identifying opportunities for collaborative use of resources towards implementation of a national strategy for education and the arts in Australia

Source: http://www.ozco.gov.au/council_priorities/education/nean_terms_of_reference

Such an organisation provides considerable encouragement for those who have been seeking a coordinated, national approach to advocacy efforts in the arts and education. The measure of the success of this body will be whether it creates real change and opportunity for teachers and students in arts classrooms throughout Australia. The early signs are promising as they coordinate with the international efforts in this direction as well. We may yet make some ground in our journey from the periphery to the rightful place of the arts at or near the centre of the curriculum. Importantly there are other groups organising events to facilitate cross-arts dialogues.

4. Organise cross-arts pedagogy/research

In May 2004 the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney organised a cross arts symposium 'Dialogues and Differences in Arts Education'. Beyond the rhetoric of integration, this symposium was seeking to explore the areas where discussion can begin, to facilitate dialogues and learn from our differences. The symposium managed to do that and began the discussion around how we can work together. These were small steps. The individual presentations were often heavily influenced by each presenter's most familiar artforms. Very few of the presentations explored truly cross-arts territory. This is not a criticism, merely a reflection upon the way we come to the cross arts discussion. In a sense it is natural to play to our strengths. Who of us can claim to be equally skilled in all art forms? Our most familiar artform usually serves as a base for us to discover what cross-arts approaches have to offer. This symposium facilitated discussion to begin and the generation of ideas. These collaborations can help break down our natural barriers and inform ongoing collaboration in pedagogy, research and advocacy.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

On a weekly basis now there is published material that emphasises the importance of the arts in the lives of every student. There is little doubt that in Australia and other places there is strong support amongst the community for the arts to become a crucial part of each student's education. In addition there are excellent models at a school level such as the school production, the school art exhibition and on larger levels like the *Devising Celebration* model, of how the arts can break from their traditional 'silos'. How they can be an exciting force for imagination and creation in school settings. There are strong and concerted political and lobbying efforts taking place at the highest levels internationally and nationally. We have reached the moment where we need to create connections with each other, valuing our unique abilities and learning to support and complement one another. We have a chance to make lasting change for students in our care if we can work collaboratively and create connections that are genuine and authentic in research, pedagogy and advocacy. It is the authors' view that these meetings and organizations will begin to communicate to all in the arts and education community more widely that there is untapped potential in arts education that can be used for the real benefit of students and their teachers.

NOTES

1. The term artists/teachers is inclusive of those who see themselves as teachers, artists and teacher-artists.
2. Key Learning Areas organise all subjects into generic areas such as Science & Technology, Human Society and its Environment (geography, history & social studies) and Creative Arts (Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts). The latter KLA includes media in all other Australian states. Staff are now organised in these areas in the place of traditional faculties in some institutions.
3. Celebratory Theatre (called Environmental and Event Theatre) is a topic area that students can study at Higher School Certificate (senior matriculation) level in NSW.
4. Rich tasks are a central part of the Productive Pedagogies movement in NSW. A rich task works across subject areas to produce a project. For instance students might develop a bio-ethics conference where they are coordinating knowledge and skills in English, Biology, Legal Studies and Drama.

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