

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH THE ARTS



**BRIAN CALDWELL
AND TANYA VAUGHAN**

ROUTLEDGE


Transforming Education through the Arts

Brian Caldwell and Tanya Vaughan



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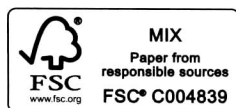
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Transforming Education through the Arts

This timely book takes up the challenge of maintaining programs in the arts in the face of unrelenting pressure from two directions: the increasing focus on literacy and numeracy in schools, teamed with the cut-backs in public funding that often affect the arts most severely.

Drawing on the wealth of evidence already available on the impact of the arts, including the findings of a landmark experimental study in Australia, this text considers:

- the social and educational impact of neglecting the arts
- research evidence on engagement in the arts
- why there is a need for educational reform
- how to transform schools through engagement in the arts.

This challenge to arts education exists at a time where an increasing number of students are becoming disengaged from the traditional schooling model that appears ill-suited to the needs of the twenty-first century and to the ways young people learn in a globalised, high-tech knowledge world. *Transforming Education through the Arts* provides illustrations from around the world that clearly show how the arts have transformed learning for disengaged students and established their worth beyond doubt in settings where the disengagement of students has hitherto been presented as an intractable problem.

Transforming Education through the Arts is an indispensable tool for policymakers and practitioners in school education and for academic and postgraduate students with an interest in the arts. It is also highly relevant to the work of individuals and organisations in the philanthropic sector and those in the wider community who place a priority on closing the gap between high- and low-performing students.

Brian Caldwell is Managing Director and Principal Consultant at Educational Transformations, Australia, and Professorial Fellow and former Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne.

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Foreword

I am not an artist by any definition. I am not even a good art critic. In fact, I know nothing about the arts — either as a creator or learned admirer. But I am a staunch defender of arts education. So I am grateful to Brian Caldwell and Tanya Vaughan, who send a loud, evidence-based, and much-needed message to parents, teachers, school leaders, and most important, education policy makers around the world: the arts are essential ‘to national creativity and to the wellbeing of the individual citizen.’

I might have become a Picasso or Mozart or perhaps even a male version of Lady Gaga, but I never had the opportunity to try painting or singing to know my talents or lack thereof. Born in a poor village in China in the 1960s, I did not see a violin until college, did not play with crayons until I came to the United States in my late twenties, and did not know of the existence of art galleries before graduating from college. All through my primary and secondary education, I had a highly focused curriculum—mathematics, Chinese language, and later English. But that was not by choice, rather than by necessity: we did not have the resources, no art teachers, no supplies, no galleries, and no access to the arts.

The arts, as Caldwell and Vaughan masterfully document in *Transforming Education through the Arts*, are fundamental to us as human beings. Besides their utilitarian value in cultivating economically valuable creative talents and innovative spirits, the arts add undeniable value to the human society. Moreover, they are simply enjoyable. Any one of these is reason enough to make the arts an essential element of any educational experience, whenever possible.

Thus I don’t understand why anyone in their right mind wants to take the arts out of their children’s educational experiences. Unfortunately that is precisely what the leading education reformers are doing, especially in some Western developed nations. From the United States of America to Australia, some Western countries have recently embarked on a journey to improve education by almost exclusively focusing on numeracy and literacy. The arts have, naturally, been disappearing from many children’s school experiences.

What is worse and more disheartening is that while the arts have been increasingly squeezed out of all children’s curriculum, those who are fortunate to be born into families and communities with the means, can find them outside school; those who cannot afford it are deprived of the opportunities entirely, just like me. This is becoming increasingly dangerous in the twenty-first century, when artistic capabilities and

creativity are becoming even more cherished assets and when arts are the only experiences that engage some children. The disadvantaged children, without access to the arts at home or in their neighborhood, are now deprived of the experience in school. It is not only morally cruel but also practically discriminating: the wealthy have a rich, well-balanced education while the poor have an impoverished experience focusing on literacy and numeracy.

It is my hope that, after reading this book, you will be compelled by the evidence and logic presented to actively defend the arts as an essential element of education for all children.

Yong Zhao
Presidential Chair and Associate Dean for Global Education
University of Oregon
November 2011

Preface

We began the research reported in these pages, as we should, as dispassionate scholars who had been commissioned to study the impact of an innovative program in the performing arts in the upper primary years in schools in relatively disadvantaged settings.

On the basis of the evidence we gathered, which was consistent with findings in similar or related projects elsewhere around the world, we have grave concerns that there are fundamental ‘design flaws’ in efforts to improve or transform schools that are sidelining the arts.

Current governments may have drifted off-course in their policies but the fault lies just as much with previous governments in (mostly) Western nations, accentuating the widening bifurcation of the sciences and the arts over more than a century to the particular detriment of the arts. We write this with heavy hearts because we are both scientists by training.

While this bifurcation must change and the efforts of governments must increase, the contributions from the public purse should be supported, if not exceeded, by the wider community including the philanthropic and non-profit sectors. The good news we learnt as our work progressed is that private effort is increasing steadily.

As far as our Australian research is concerned, we wish to thank The Song Room (TSR), a non-profit organisation committed to providing programs in the arts where none exist, for the commission to Educational Transformations to enable us to undertake the study reported in Chapters 5 to 8. We acknowledge, in particular, the leadership and guidance of Chief Executive Officer Caroline Aebersold, and the contribution of the Macquarie Group Foundation that funded the research. The Song Room also provided an additional grant to support the preparation of the manuscript.

We are exceedingly grateful to our colleague Dr Jessica Harris, Senior Consulting Researcher at Educational Transformations based in Brisbane, for her skilful leadership in undertaking the case studies reported in Chapter 8 and to Project Manager Anna Kitney who assisted with organisational arrangements and the collection of data. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) made available its Social-Emotional and Wellbeing (SEWB) survey and provided an independent analysis of the findings. The Department of Education and Training in New South Wales gave its approval to conduct the research.

We are delighted that Yong Zhao, Presidential Chair and Associate Dean for Global Education at the University of Oregon, kindly agreed to write the Foreword. He is a pre-eminent educator on the world stage at this time, being much in demand for his extraordinary capacity to understand the need for a broad and rich curriculum. He is a passionate advocate for the arts, as is evident in his blog which is read by thousands (<http://zhaolearning.com>) from which we draw in Chapter 3.

Above all, we acknowledge the assistance of principals, parents, teachers and students in 10 schools in the western suburbs of Sydney who gathered information and shared their views so freely. We are not able to name them in the book but we have extended our thanks in more personal ways.

The outcome is a major contribution to worldwide understanding of the critically important role of the arts in education and of the pitfalls, indeed the dangers of neglecting them in well-intentioned but ultimately misguided efforts in school reform.

Abbreviations

AARE	Australian Association for Research in Education
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ACMF	Australian Children’s Music Foundation
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CCE	Creativity, Culture and Education
CoCA	Centre of Contemporary Arts
DHS	Dandenong High School
FHL	Festival for Healthy Living
GU	Griffith University
ICA	Inner City Arts
ICEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
LTTA	Learning Through the Arts
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NBYO	New Brunswick Youth Orchestra
NCEE	National Centre on Education and Economy
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NSW	New South Wales
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
PASW	Predictive Analytics Software
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
QACI	Queensland Academy for Creative Industries
QAHS	Queensland Academy for Health Sciences
QASMT	Queensland Academy for Science, Mathematics and Technology
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SEWB	Social-Emotional Wellbeing
TA	Teaching Artist

TFA	Teach for America
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TSR	The Song Room
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
SOTA	School of the Arts, Singapore
VCASS	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School

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1 The social and educational costs of neglecting the arts

In a powerful critique of Australia's preoccupation with national testing in literacy and numeracy, Richard Gill, then director of the Victorian Opera, declared that 'this abhorrent method of assessing children, teachers and their students needs to stop now'. He argued that the tests and associated transparency in results for all schools in the country on the My School website have 'nothing to do with the education of a child' (Gill 2011: 15). He went on:

Evidence is now available that schools all over the country are cutting back on arts education to devote more time to subjects that make children literate. It can demonstrably be proven that activities used in teaching for the national tests destroy individuality, stifle creativity, stultify thought and make all children respond in the same way – a sort of educational circus in which the children are the trained animals and the teachers the poorly paid ringmasters.

(Gill 2011: 15)

Critics in comparable countries, notably England and the United States, argue along the same lines. What will it mean to a nation if Richard Gill is correct and, moreover, the curtailment of arts education not only robs students of the intrinsic benefit of an artistic experience but further reduces the performance of students in literacy and numeracy? Moreover, what will it mean to a nation if such a cut-back increases the gap between high- and low-performing students on these same tests and decreases the life chances of students, even to the extent of increasing the probability they may subsequently be involved in crime or other anti-social behaviour?

Our purpose in *Transforming Education through the Arts* is to critically examine these issues and provide evidence that Australia and similar nations will benefit from greater rather than lesser engagement in the arts in school education.

Indeed, we go further and contend that a major design flaw has opened up in these nations and that school education, especially in the public sector, is at risk unless corrective action is taken as a matter of urgency.

Major themes

Schools and school systems around the world face the challenge of maintaining programs in the arts in the face of unrelenting pressure from two directions. One

2 *The social and educational costs of neglecting the arts*

is the justifiable focus on literacy and numeracy, often accompanied by high-stakes testing that is exerting pressure on other areas of learning and teaching. The other is cut-backs in public funding, with international evidence suggesting that programs in the arts are often the first to suffer. The paradox is that study after study reveals the benefits of student participation in the arts.

The challenge described here is occurring at the same time that an increasing number of students are becoming disengaged from schooling. Part of the blame in the view of many observers is that school systems are trapped in a traditional model of schooling that is ill-suited to the needs of the twenty-first century and to the ways young people learn in a globalised, high-tech knowledge world. Disengagement occurs across all strata of society but is acute in highly disadvantaged settings where there is often a risk of involvement in juvenile crime. It seems that improvement in current approaches to schooling is not enough and change on the scale of transformation is required.

Among the many concerns of educators as far as recent attempts at reform are concerned is the narrowing of the curriculum, especially when the focus has been on literacy and numeracy, and schools have had to operate in a regime of high-stakes testing. This focus is often at the expense of the arts and pedagogies that endeavour to nurture innovation, creativity and problem-solving. These trade-offs have been especially noteworthy in schools in disadvantaged settings.

Governments in many nations in the Western world seem to be at their wits' end in devising policies that will close the gap in achievement between high- and low-performing students. Among strategies that have been adopted are new curricula, often at the national level; high-stakes testing programs with unprecedented levels of transparency; performance pay for teachers; structural change through different approaches to governance and choice; and reform in initial teacher education. Yet countries like Australia, England and the United States still lag behind countries in Scandinavia and East Asia. While there are exceptions, it is proving very difficult to achieve improvement on the scale of transformation, especially in schools in highly disadvantaged settings.

Foundation in research

Transforming Education through the Arts builds the case for the arts to be at the centre of efforts to achieve such a transformation. It draws on the wealth of evidence already available on the impact of the arts but includes the findings of a landmark experimental study in Australia that puts the case beyond doubt in settings where disengagement of students has hitherto presented as an intractable problem. There are powerful implications for all stakeholders, including policymakers and the wider community. The case for expanding the involvement of the non-profit philanthropic sector in new kinds of partnerships is presented. Illustrations are provided from around the world of how the arts have transformed learning for disengaged students. Strategies for policy and practice are provided that leave no doubt about the 'why' and the 'how'.

The findings from research around the world provide the touchstone for an evidence-based approach in this book. Particular attention is given to ground-breaking research in several of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia

(Western Sydney in New South Wales) in state schools which did not previously offer programs in the arts. An intervention by the national non-profit arts organisation The Song Room (TSR), with the support of a high-profile foundation (Macquarie Group Foundation) to provide such programs in primary schools has led to gains on almost every measure of student achievement and wellbeing. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that these gains have been on indicators that are predictive of engagement in juvenile crime. Teaching was conducted by successful artists.

The Australian research is a rare example of experimental design in education wherein the performance of students in schools that offered programs in the arts was compared with the performance of students in matching schools that did not offer such programs. The effects were much larger than expected and the findings suggest strategies that should be adopted if levels of achievement and wellbeing are to be raised.

The book sets the findings in national and international research in the context of efforts around the world to achieve improvement on the scale of transformation, defined as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings. International research on the impact of the arts is summarised along with studies of conditions that predict the incidence of juvenile crime. Case studies of successful practice in different countries are provided and these include descriptions of approaches to learning and teaching which proved to be instrumental in achieving the desired outcomes. Implications for policymakers and professionals are offered. These implications will challenge several current strategies to improve schools.

In Chapter 1 we document the social and educational costs of neglecting the arts in schools and school systems. In England, the Cambridge Primary Review drew attention to this and proposed a new curriculum with a central place for the arts. In the United States, the arts are often the first programs to be cut as states and school districts introduce savage cuts in funding. It took a major effort to get the arts on the agenda in the national curriculum in Australia. These developments are puzzling given that high-performing nations on international tests of literacy and numeracy such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) protect the arts; for example, China, Finland, Japan, Korea and Singapore. It is even more puzzling given the wide gap between high- and low-performing students in countries such as Australia, England and the United States when evidence to date and to be developed further in the book shows how the arts can help close the gap.

What do we mean by ‘the arts’?

The draft of the Australian Curriculum for the arts provides a useful starting point for explaining what we mean by ‘the arts’:

We experience and engage in the Arts through sensory, cognitive and affective dimensions of perception. We make sense of the Arts within our three realms of experience: