

# ***A Pedagogy of trust: Improving educational outcomes through partnerships***

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## **Executive Summary**

An Education and the Arts Partnership Initiative in the Northern Territory of Australia. A project of the Northern Territory Music School, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training. A partnership between the Northern Territory Music School, Wagaman Primary School, Moulden Park School and Neighbourhood Centre, Charles Darwin University Learning Research Group, and ArtsNT.

### **Introduction**

Effective partnerships are grown by building trust in the relationships between people. This research project sought to determine whether improved educational outcomes were achieved for students by transforming the quality of relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and their colleagues, and with school leadership and families. Arts education was the medium for engaging the school communities. Relationships of trust developed through arts learning experiences were shown to have the capacity to be inclusive and to engender a sense of belonging. Levels of attendance, engagement and participation can only increase when students feel included, and learning can only result when students attend school and are engaged with classroom pedagogy. Engaged teaching and learning leads to improved outcomes, as summarised below:

The arts + the student = engagement  
Engagement + inclusion = belonging  
Belonging + inclusion = attendance  
Attendance + engagement = learning  
Learning + engagement = outcomes

Arts education is one way for students to experience academic achievement and access employment options by the pathway most valued by mainstream Australian society; that is through Standard Australian English literacy and numeracy outcomes.

This research was a pilot project utilised performing arts processes and music skills development as a conduit for engagement, teaching, learning, and measuring improvement in English literacy and numeracy. This project purposefully integrated intensive music education in urban upper primary classroom programs.

### **Background and purpose**

In 1998 the Australia Council for the Arts commissioned research that identified engagement with arts and education, for both children and adults, as a priority area of activity in the Australia Council's *Promoting the Value of the Arts* program (Saatchi and Saatchi, p286, 2001).

In 2002 the Australia Council for the Arts called for tenders to propose an *Education and the Arts Partnership Initiative* (EAPI), as a first step to building an Australian body of research into the impact of the arts in education, that could enable "real progress to be made in negotiating change at the highest levels of government and affecting change at grass roots level"<sup>1</sup>. Four projects were selected, including *Music for Learning for Life*, submitted by Ms Anja Tait, Northern Territory Music School (NTMS), Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT DEET).

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<sup>1</sup> Promoting the Value of the Arts Initiative, EAPI Guidelines dated 14 May 2002.

The EAPI (NT) project proposal was submitted in response to a brief which stated that “each EAPI project will be specifically devised to target the impact of the arts for young people “at risk” in the middle years of schooling”<sup>2</sup>.

## Aims

The EAPI-NT project was originally titled *Music and Literacy for Life*. It became clear that music and related arts learnings could contribute to outcomes across the curriculum. The identified research questions were:

1. Does music skills development, embedded in daily learning across the curriculum in urban upper primary classrooms, provide educational outcomes for Indigenous ESL learners with low literacy and low numeracy levels?
2. What are the implications for policy, practice and research?

For upper primary Indigenous students in two urban primary schools, the project evaluated the impact of the intervention upon:

- attendance
- participation in classroom-based learning opportunities
- oracy and literacy levels for Standard Australian English
- numeracy levels
- arts knowledge and skills development

For two school communities, the project evaluated the impact of the intervention upon:

- The educational outcomes of Indigenous learners for recognised numeracy and English literacy benchmarks and community expectations, as found in the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS).

For three participating teachers the project evaluated the impact of in-school mentoring and team-teaching in the arts as a transformative model of on-the-job professional learning.

## Methodology

Two Northern Territory schools participated: urban schools in Darwin and Palmerston, with fluctuating Indigenous student enrolments up to 54% of the total school enrolment. Sixty-one year 5, 6 and 7 students participated in the project. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for all participating students. The research methodology was multi-site, multi-method. Numerical data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Audio and audio-visual materials were subject to thematic analysis as part of a case study approach.

## Report Structure

Following the Executive summary this report begins with an overview of the background to the research project and the structure of the document. In chapter two previous studies and current research and policy documents are put forward to provide a context for the study. Methodology is outlined in chapter three, and results and discussion in chapter four. Chapter five presents conclusions under seven key areas, and then raises the implications of these conclusions with respect to policy, practice and research. Recommendations are made in chapter six.

## Overview of findings

This report outlines the results of an evaluation of the impact of arts-infused teaching-learning for upper primary students in two urban schools in the Northern Territory. The report presents

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

evidence for the impact of this approach upon educational outcomes for students and upon professional learning outcomes for teachers.

The main findings of the study are drawn together under seven areas similar to the way in which the results are reported and discussed in Chapter Four, as follows:

#### 1. Attendance

The key conclusion that is drawn in relation to attendance is that the numerical findings of students' attendance do not necessarily correlate with outsiders' perceptions of those records:

- (a) Some students perceived to have improved in attendance in fact did not. However, what did happen was that these students became highly visible and engaged in the school community. That is, attendance records are not necessarily a good relative measure of student engagement and participation in learning; and
- (b) A student who was described as an "irregular attender" was found to have actually improved his attendance rate throughout 2003. This compared starkly with the attendance rates for the whole school enrolment and Indigenous students specifically, both of which had dropped in 2003.

#### 2. Literacy

- (a) Risk taking was evident in the increased number of test items target students attempted in state-wide benchmark testing for literacy (MAP tests), compared with the number of test items they had attempted two years prior.
- (b) Although not statistically significant, target students' mean improvement in reading age<sup>3</sup> was 1 year, 8 months over a nine month period.

#### 3. Numeracy

- (a) Students generally achieved statistically significant higher maths ages in Term 4 compared with Term 1, 2003. A highlight was that an Indigenous student demonstrated the greatest improvement in maths age of 4 years 8 months, adjusted for the passing of time (nine months).
- (b) An analysis of the MAP test items for numeracy highlighted the learning tasks that students responded to incorrectly or did not attempt. Qualitative data provides evidence of students' participation in these learning tasks and engagement with the related mathematical concepts, not visible in the written responses required for MAP testing.

#### 4. Arts

- (a) Very few students who participated in this arts-infused teaching-learning approach had prior formal classroom based experiences in music.
- (b) Participating teachers reported that an arts-infused approach to teaching and learning acknowledged and valued the music and related arts skills, knowledge, understandings and interests that students and adults contribute to the school learning community.
- (c) Students acquired an understanding of the elements of music by engaging in rich learning tasks that had relevance to their lives beyond the school gate. Particularly potent was the use of contemporary song materials.

#### 5. Teachers

- (a) Teaching practice showed a marked transformation in a number of ways: quality of student-teacher relationships, confidence and competencies in music pedagogy, and a sense of efficacy.
- (b) The model of professional learning used in the intervention enabled transformations in teaching practice, which appear to have contributed to improved outcomes for students.

#### 6. Whole-school planning

- (a) Both schools have included music for learning in their Literacy and Numeracy Plan

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<sup>3</sup> ACER Press (2001). Progressive Achievement Tests in reading (PAT-R) Revised. vii

as an approach that works. An arts-infused teaching-learning approach was developed, trialled and rigorously evaluated in each school, with a focus on explicit literacy and numeracy teaching using arts-based texts, materials and pedagogy.

- (b) In School A, the Principal was directed by the School Council to include the ongoing employment of the Artist-in-Residence in the school action plan for 2004.
- (c) In School B, the Literacy and Numeracy Coordinator successfully secured ArtsNT/DEET funding to engage the Artist-in-Residence to work with upper primary students, with a literacy and music focus in 2004. Subsequently this short term project was awarded further funding from the ASSPA committee in the school, and a small federal grant.

## 7. Partnerships

- (a) Effective partnerships were built between stakeholders in the school community, including Indigenous staff, teachers, school leaders, and students. The process had begun and potential was demonstrated for a similar approach to engage families in their children's learning.
- (b) Sustainable outcomes were achieved in the area of teacher transformation: teacher practice remains flexible with teachers reporting improved quality of relationships with students. However, without ongoing joint planning, team teaching and in-school mentoring teachers' sense of efficacy is compromised.

## Recommendations

The key recommendation that arises from the EAPI-NT research project is the growth of partnerships, in research, industry and practice. Each recommendation has a different emphasis and target group. Together they have the potential to grow the EAPI-NT findings in ways that embrace key political issues and contribute to the socio-economic growth of communities in regional Australia.

### Research partnerships

#### Recommendation 1

It is recommended that there be a trialling and evaluation of targeted programs for isolated children and families, with a focus on early years care and education, and an emphasis on building partnerships across agencies and sectors. These ideas build on the current research and grow this approach beyond the boundaries of school communities. Case studies may focus on one or more of the following groups:

1. teenage parents
2. immigrants
3. children in refuges
4. children in long-term care
5. Indigenous children
6. children with disabilities and additional needs in educational settings
7. children in hospital, or requiring long-term medical intervention

Targeted outcomes would be in the areas of:

1. education: school and family literacies - English literacy, numeracy, the arts
2. well-being for families: resilience, risk and prevention, parenting skills
3. strengthened whole of government approaches
4. further research into the socio-economic impacts of music and other art-forms
5. practical train-the-trainer guides

Key personnel would be in the areas of research, early childhood education and care, arts education and arts therapy, family and children's services, and the music industry. Community and industry partners would be determined by the case study focus.

This research would be conducted with reference to the work of the Goodling Institute of Family Literacies, Pennsylvania State University and the Risk and Prevention Program, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

### Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the Learning Research Group, Charles Darwin University, in partnership with DEET, engage school communities through arts education, as one intervention in Territory-wide trialling and evaluation of a learning communities model of professional development. This would support the key tenets of the NT DEET Workforce Development Strategy (2003-2005).

## **Practice partnerships**

### Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the NT Music School, DEET develop a model of professional learning in arts education that is aligned with key policy directions across government, including the DEET Workforce Development Strategy (2003-2005), NT Arts Policy Review (2003), NTPS Remote Workforce Development Strategy (2003-2006). An ensemble of registered teachers and music educators could develop repertoire and performance, professional learning workshops, in-school mentoring programs, and a resource package for teachers in urban, rural and remote schools.

### Recommendation 4

The effective partnerships that were built between school-based teachers, a community musician and an arts educator provide evidence for a sustainable model of implementation in Artist-in-Residence programs. It is recommended that ArtsNT and DEET consider the results of this research with respect to essential criteria for future Artists-in-Schools (AiS) project funding.

## **Industry partnerships**

### Recommendation 5

It is recommended that Vocational Education and Training (VET) Music Industry competencies be linked to arts-infused literacy and numeracy tasks with early childhood and primary aged students, and explicit literacy and numeracy outcomes within the NT Curriculum Framework. By promoting community and school partnerships in urban and remote settings this approach would support the growth of employment pathways for Indigenous artists in remote communities. These partnerships could be managed and actioned by the NT Music School, DEET, in collaboration with Charles Darwin University's Remote Music Delivery.

In summary, a pedagogy of trust developed through arts learning experiences has the capacity to enable improved educational outcomes for students. By building relationships of trust between students and teachers, teachers and their colleagues, families and the school leadership, the pedagogy of classroom teaching and learning has the potential to become inclusive and to engender a sense of belonging. For teachers the opportunity to build productive and trusting relationships with colleagues can culminate in a shared sense of purpose and agreed values about teaching and learning, for their own learning and that of their students.

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28<sup>th</sup> October 2004