Art Education Rationale

ART EDUCATION RATIONALE
Developed by Max Darby over the past 20 years

Rationale
The rationale for the visual arts in schools is directly related to the nature of the arts in general. While each arts form has its own specific value and rationale, the arts together provide a rich source of experiences and understandings that cannot be gained in any other way.

The Arts
The Arts are practiced and valued in our complex and diverse society as important outlets for the communication of ideas, feelings and beliefs and as major sources of intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional development, understanding and enjoyment. Comprehensive and sequential learning experiences in the arts during schooling provide individuals with necessary skills, understandings and confidence to participate fully in the arts throughout their lives.
Learning in the arts takes several forms. Through arts practice students learn to develop ideas by drawing upon experience, exploring feelings, observing and researching. These processes may require the development of imaginative and creative solutions or a sensitive understanding of particular conventions and constraints, depending upon the nature of the arts activity. In order to communicate ideas, students learn the elements, principles, processes and techniques as well as the cultural and aesthetic values associated with specific arts forms. They also learn how different arts forms can be presented in collaborative ways.

In responding to the arts, students learn to analyze and interpret art works. They learn how the arts are practiced and valued in different societies and cultures, past and present. They form personal judgments of their own works and those of others. They understand the skill and intentions of artists and the social or cultural contexts in which their works were produced. They learn about aesthetic qualities in arts works and aesthetic values relating to the nature and role of the arts in particular cultures or societies. In later years of schooling they learn about the broad range of vocations and careers associated with the arts and opportunities for further study.

**Goals**

Through an arts program students:

- develop their intellectual, imaginative and expressive potential
- develop skills, techniques and a knowledge of processes as a basis for personal expression
- create, perform or present arts works
- develop critical skills and an understanding of aesthetics
develop understanding of how the arts evolve within particular social, cultural and historical contexts

enjoy participating in the processes of creating, presenting and responding to the arts.

An Art Education Philosophy
(a) Art can be enjoyed and successfully undertaken by all students. All programs and activities are open ended so that students can be challenged to move beyond their own level of expertise and need. The major focus of the program is on individual and personal artistic development.

(b) Art should be available to all interested students regardless of previous art experience. Despite this, wherever possible, students should be encouraged to study art in an on-going manner rather than interrupt their experience and then opt to take it up at a later time.

(c) The major purpose of art in the curriculum is to foster creative and imaginative practices and attitudes through studio-based classroom activities. Although these qualities may be developed or enhanced in other curriculum areas, the visual arts provide the best opportunities for that to occur for most students.

(d) The activities selected for inclusion in the program should, wherever possible, be drawn from the fine arts, popular arts, and design. They should also include a range of two and three-dimensional experiences.

(e) The development of skills, techniques and processes used in the designing and making of art works is essential if students are to successfully express their ideas. This will also provide students with the confidence and encouragement to engage in art-making activities and projects.

(f) The development of increased knowledge and
understanding of great art, past and present, is essential if students are to gain an appreciation for the achievements of artists working in a variety of contexts.

(g) The development of the capacity to analyze art works, to make personal responses to art works and to form and express personal opinions about art works is essential if interactions with the work of artists is to be relevant to each student.

(h) The development of knowledge and understanding of the major role art serves in the formation and transmission of a cultural heritage is important. Students should be acquainted with the arts of the world’s cultures as well as with art that is unique to the different cultures of the country they are living in.

(i) The development of research, writing and aural communication skills is essential if students are to express their ideas and knowledge about art effectively.

(j) The development of an appreciation for the need to protect the natural environment, to conserve energy and resources and to enhance the quality of the built environment is important both for the quality of life of present and future peoples.

**Art Product and Process**

Both the finished product and the process involved in making an art work should be considered inseparable. To make an artwork requires involvement in an art-making process. To engage in an art making process without using it to make an art work is a waste of time and effort. Despite this relationship, both product and process have important roles to play in the art education of each student. The importance of artistic product and process should be further emphasised by the nature of assessment practices employed. These should reflect both of these key components of art education.
The importance of the Product
Students undertake art at school to make art works. Enjoyment, satisfaction and pride in their achievements emanates from the success of the various things they make. Unfortunately, some students undervalue what they have done because they have unrealistically high expectations. While trying to ensure that all students work to the maximum of their potential, art teachers should also work to maintain interest, enthusiasm and confidence regardless of how developed or undeveloped a student’s art skill appears to be.
Realistically, students seem to gain most satisfaction by completing products of quality. Not only do they see quality in terms of their own expectations but also in the responses of their teacher, other students and their parents. Students who do not receive positive feedback about the value of their work seldom continue with art beyond the compulsory years. There are times when teachers need to point out to students some of the artistic qualities their art works contain. The completed art product is a record of a student’s experiences in the subject and teachers should always encourage students to keep the things they make. One of the ways teachers are able to reinforce the value of the products produced is by displaying and exhibiting the work of all students.

The importance of the process
The development of self-confidence, self esteem and a positive self-image is not only reinforced by the quality of the product but also by the successful employment of artistic processes. Many art processes, skills and techniques require practice, great care and concentration. Students who are able to learn new processes and are able to use these effectively develop enormous confidence in their own capabilities. An important process which is developed in art activities is creative problem solving. Whenever students are engaged in art
making activities, they are confronted by enormous challenges and problems. These need to be considered and decisions made after first thinking about the various solutions available. The development of imagination and creative expression is dependent on students being able to think for themselves.

**Sequencing of visual arts experiences and activities.**
Sequencing of experiences and activities in the visual arts is important but in quite a different way to what occurs in other subjects. Obviously there is a need for some experiences to be sequential so that levels of understanding and skills can be developed in a logical and flowing manner.

In many cases, however, the actual sequences that develop are not evident until after an activity or program has been completed. It is not only difficult to always predict in advance the best sequence for each student to follow but can actually be contrary to the nature of art and art education. For example, in the visual Arts it is important for students to interpret ideas in their own way and to work through ideas, art processes and techniques in ways that emphasize the importance of trialing and exploring various directions that might be taken. Individual students will, by necessity, take quite different pathways, sometimes to a common end and sometimes to quite different ends. The Visual Arts set out to deliberately encourage students to be inventive, imaginative and unique.

Art teachers also need to able to vary the program during any planned activity if a need arises. This might happen for example, if students are struggling with complex ideas or concepts and the teacher needs to include additional stages to ensure they achieve what was originally planned.
Reinforcement activities are, therefore, sometimes necessary either for a whole class or for individual students.

Sometimes, one idea suggests new and exciting ideas that might be explored even though they had not originally been planned. Frequently, students become interested in a topic or activity and the teacher needs to take advantage of this and to encourage that interest by providing opportunities for extension.

In other cases, such as when issues of safety are paramount or when a new and complex process is introduced, it can be essential that all students work through the same set of steps or stages.

There are also times when something newsworthy happens in society and the art teacher needs to change the program or sequence of activities to allow for current and contemporary issues to be addressed. Sometimes, too, art exhibitions cannot be predicted in advance and the art teacher needs to make use of an exciting display of artworks when it occurs.

For these reasons an art program needs to be flexible so that it can be adapted to the individual needs and interests of the students.

An exciting and vibrant art program might begin with one activity, follow a set sequence for a while and then revisit earlier activities or skip ahead to other activities. It might also start again with another short sequence and then flow on to other numerous valid activities.
The art teacher who can positively cope with all of these possible program variations is involved in program planning and implementation at an enormously more sophisticated level than the art teacher who tries to fully predict a program a year in advance.

**Brainstorming or Concept Mapping of ideas**

In Art there is also no single correct way to proceed with an idea and most ideas lend themselves to enormous possibilities which students might explore. While Art teachers might sometimes determine which direction students take, they also need to provide opportunities for students to plan their own directions within a set topic. This approach can take the form of a brainstorming of ideas, which can then recorded as a kind of Concept Map.

**Art Teaching Methods**

It is important to use a variety of teaching methods in the visual arts where individual expression, levels of achievement and pace of learning are essential if students are to be motivated to continue. The teaching approaches used include:

**Instruction:** New skills, techniques and processes need to be carefully introduced to students so that they understand and accept the rules and stages which need to be used.

**Demonstration:** Students learn many skills, techniques and processes best when they shown as well as told how to employ various methods of working.
Experimentation: Art needs to be experienced by students in order for learning to occur. In order to gain that experience and to encourage learning to be more meaningful, students are provided with opportunities to experiment in appropriate ways with skills and techniques as well as with materials and equipment.

Discussion: Opportunities are provided for students to talk about a range of art issues and ideas. Some of these are related to folio or practical work and some are related to art appreciation activities.

Commentary: Students should analyze of their own portfolio work to an audience, usually the class. Commentary encourages students to be critical about the qualities displayed in their own works and to evaluate their performance. The commentary is also used to help students develop the confidence and competence to talk meaningfully about their own works.

Lecture: Much of the art appreciation course can be introduced formally so that students are provided with essential information in a manner which ensures that it is received and understood by all students.

Video, slide and film presentations: used because they provide variety in presentation and also cover areas of study which are not available in any other medium.
Research: Students should research areas of study. Some of the research topics may address topics not covered in class. Others are designed to extend knowledge which has previously been introduced. Research is encouraged through museum, exhibition and gallery visits, text books, magazines, CD Rom, Videos, DVDs and via the Internet.

Art Criticism: Students should be provided with opportunities to analyse and respond to art on a personal level. As well as develop a sound knowledge of the History of Art through lectures and research, art students need to develop the ability to make their own judgments about art in a confident and competent manner.

Mentoring: Students who have expertise in some processes can be used to instruct or assist other students who may otherwise have to wait for the teacher’s attention. This method can be particularly successful with computer-based activities such as scanning or using Adobe Photoshop.

Excursions: Excursions should be a major part of the art experience of all students. They allow students to see and learn about the work of professional artists. Seeing artworks first hand is much more meaningful than studying art only from reproductions or prints. Apart from the advantages for the art appreciation program excursions are also used as motivation for practical art making activities.
In all approaches to teaching the students should be increasingly empowered to take control of their own learning. Students are more creative, imaginative and skilful when they work primarily from their own inspiration and motivation. As soon as students demonstrate the capacity to become self-controlled, the art staff may provide opportunities for them to negotiate their own directions and to pursue their own interests.

Please feel free to add your own ideas, thoughts and practices in the spaces provided below. Discussion is welcomed.