

Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Arts Education

**Report by the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts
References Committee**

October 1995

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Cover: The Tamworth Coreperena Line Dancers perform at the Tamworth Country Music Festival, January 1995.

Photo: Andrew Meares, Sydney Morning Herald

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**Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications
and the Arts References Committee**
October 1995

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AD - Australian Democrats; ALP - Australian Labor Party; Ind. - Independent; LP - Liberal Party of Australia; NPA - National Party of Australia; GWA - The Greens (WA)

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Artistic expression is found throughout human history and in all people. The earliest records of human cultures show highly developed art forms. All extant indigenous people spend a great deal of time and effort expressing and celebrating cultural identity through art.

This suggests that artistic expression must have had considerable survival value. As a former research scientist with a strong background in biological sciences, I believe that six million years of human evolution has built the need for, and the satisfaction to be derived from artistic expression into our genes. It follows that to deny or frustrate this aspect of our humanity diminishes us. Part of us remains unsatisfied if we cannot express ourselves in creative and artistic ways.

Against this background I view with alarm the growing dominance of the view - the dominant paradigm - that has come to be called economic rationalism. Artistic expression and arts education, like almost every other element of our lives, have become subservient to some degree to this paradigm. The arts have become merely another market commodity. Arts education is valued chiefly as a training for employment. The benefits of widespread amateur participation in an artistic and creative life outside the market economy are relatively ignored. Art, like science, is being corrupted to serve the needs of the industrial system.

We see a growing emphasis by Government on the arts as professional performance, while the rest of us are seen as consumers of artistic 'products'. *Creative Nation*, the Commonwealth's 1994 cultural policy, is well within this dominant paradigm, with its emphasis on production and consumption for the market economy, its foremost focus on professional performance and 'audience development', and its limited treatment of arts education other than vocational training. *Creative Nation* gives little space to amateur creative life either at the individual or community level.

Indeed, the term 'audience participation' is itself a creature of the consumerist paradigm. A healthy, individually creative community that participates in artistic activity at the amateur level will spontaneously form the most appreciative and critical audiences. *Creative Nation* is good for the professional producers of 'artistic products'; how good is it for those whose creative activities have nothing to do with the market economy?

J.K. Galbraith writing in 1967 in *The New Industrial Society* saw very clearly where we were heading. He wrote -

'If we continue to believe that the goals of the industrial system - the expansion of output, the companion increase in consumption, technological advance, the public images that sustain it - are co-ordinate with life, then all our lives will be in the service of these goals. What is consistent with these ends we shall have, or be allowed, all else will be off limits.'

‘If, on the other hand, the industrial system is only a part, and relatively a diminishing part, of life, there is much less occasion for concern. Aesthetic goals will have pride of place ... Men will not be entrapped by the belief that apart from the goals of the industrial system - apart from the production of goods and income by progressively more advanced technical methods - there is nothing important in life.’

But since 1967 we have not learnt from Galbraith’s warning. We have gone further down the road to industrial dominance.

In both the National Curriculum for schools and the Mayer Key Competencies (recent educational initiatives considered in this report) one finds the same Procrustean tendency - the attempt to squeeze artistic activity into a restrictive mould, a mould determined by the needs of vocational training. While the arts is one of the important key learning areas identified in the National Curriculum, many submissions to this inquiry saw insurmountable problems with the assessment of creative and self-expressive work within the behavioural outcomes of the National Curriculum framework. Many submissions bemoaned the failure of the Mayer Key Competencies to include a competency relating to aesthetic awareness. An attempt to document ‘cultural understandings’ as the eighth ‘key competency’ speaks of ‘the need for individuals and groups to value and understand the interrelated cultures that make up Australian society ... acquiring economic, political and historical skills and knowledge to ensure that they can *make a productive contribution to the nation ...*’ [emphasis added] (see page 128).

As well, an indirect effect of the amalgamation of universities with formerly independent art schools and conservatoria since 1989 has been to redefine artistic accomplishment within an academic framework, raising the complaint that the research-orientated culture of universities does not appreciate the different nature of arts activities. While neither artistic nor academic accomplishment needs to be motivated by economic rationalism, the motivation for amalgamation had a lot to do with the perception by the Federal Government of the role of education in a technological economy.

This is not to say that economic factors are unimportant; but we must attempt to redress the balance and to stress the pre-eminence of the human and the creative for its own sake. It is not to say that excellence and professional performance are unimportant; but we must also support the amateur creative and artistic life of all people, which must be the foundation of a healthy professional arts scene.

I hope that readers of our report will find here a consistent and human perspective on these broader matters as well as specific recommendations for the implementation of desirable change.

I thank all those who made written and oral submissions to the inquiry, my Parliamentary colleagues on the Committee and especially Geoff Dawson and the other members of the secretariat who worked very hard and creatively through all the submissions.

The report is now in the hands of both the public and the Commonwealth government. The Government must make a response to our recommendations. This is usually accompanied by reasons for accepting or rejecting specific proposals. Members of the public may now use the report and its recommendations to assist the further evolution of arts education.

John Coulter, Chair
Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications
and the Arts References Committee
October 1995

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Committee acknowledges the help of the secretariat (Robert King, Committee Secretary and Geoff Dawson, Senior Research Officer; assisted for parts of the inquiry period by Frances Michaelis, Senior Research Officer, and Sonja Weinberg, Principal Research Officer; Diane Strong, Executive Assistant); the ever helpful staff of the Parliamentary Library and the Parliamentary Research Service; staff of key agencies who freely gave background information and publications (particularly the Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Department of Communications and the Arts, the Australia Council, and State education authorities); and Brenda Foran, a student of the Australian National University who, as an intern in the Committee Office, wrote a valuable background paper for the Committee summarising the submissions (see APPENDIX 7).

We particularly pay tribute to the work of the 131 groups and individuals who made submissions and the 185 people who appeared at hearings. They are listed in APPENDIX 2 and APPENDIX 3. Without their input this report would not have been possible. Some submissions were long, some short; some were useful for their information, some for their argument, and some for corroborating and enhancing points made by others. All were obviously written with care and commitment; all were valuable in providing the context for the inquiry. The Committee was not able to invite all their authors to give evidence at hearings, or to mention all of them in the report, but all were carefully considered. Most of the direct quotations made in this report are simply examples of points that were made by many.

ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Australian Education Council
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ARC	Australian Research Council
CAE	College of Advanced Education
DEET	Department of Employment Education and Training
EFTSU	Equivalent Full Time Student Units
HEC	Higher Education Council
KLA	Key Learning Area
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NPDP	National Professional Development Program
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

