

ARTS AND SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROSPERITY



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

Manatū
Taonga

Ministry
for Culture
& Heritage

How might learning in the arts support young New Zealanders to contribute to New Zealand's future social, economic and cultural prosperity?

INTRODUCTION

This was the question Manatū Taonga/the Ministry for Culture and Heritage asked the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to explore. NZCER did a literature review of national and international research in arts education, and synthesised key ideas from the literature review with relevant high-level policy statements.

The review and synthesis looked at New Zealand's goals for the educational, social, economic and cultural futures of our young people and our nation.

<http://www.mch.govt.nz/research-publications/policy-perspectives-papers/contributions-learning-arts-educational-social>

KEY FINDINGS

- Arts learning can contribute to high-level goals: preparing New Zealanders to help create a prosperous and sustainable knowledge economy; fostering creativity and innovation; and preparing New Zealanders to be national and global citizens.
- Most research focuses on the short-term, individual benefits of arts learning and participation. Increasingly, researchers are interested in how these benefits accumulate and spill over into the public sphere.
- Studies indicate positive effects from arts learning and participation. Some studies suggest particular outcomes for specific kinds of arts learning and participation (e.g., music learning and spatial thinking), while a few large studies suggest that students in “arts-rich” learning environments do better overall than students whose schooling environments are “arts-poor”.
- Each arts discipline has its own history, culture and practices. For school students, arts learning occurs in several ways: in the curriculum as a stand-alone subject or integrated across curriculum areas; as a co-curricular or leisure activity; and as an individual or collaborative pursuit.

Research on the impacts of the arts for communities is growing, but given the long-term processes involved in building a sense of community or effecting community change, the scarcity of long-term studies is a problem.

WHY IS IT A HOT TOPIC?

Several large international research syntheses have investigated the impacts and outcomes of arts learning and participation for both young people and adults.

Many authors suggest political imperatives are driving demand for arts education research to contribute to debates about how student academic achievement can be lifted.

Arts educators often express concerns that the arts may be marginalised when certain educational goals, such as raising achievement in literacy or numeracy, or reforming standards, are prioritised ahead of other goals.

As a result, there is a trend towards looking at how arts learning affects non-arts outcomes. However some authors argue this “instrumentalist” approach treats arts learning as a means to an end and downplays the intrinsic benefits of arts learning.

Human societies have long valued and recognised arts learning as contributing a range of cognitive and affective benefits. Some authors argue for a broad view that looks at both intrinsic and instrumental benefits.

Many of the intrinsic benefits of learning in the arts (such as expanded capacity for empathy, cognitive growth, creation of social bonds and expression of communal

meaning) have spill-over effects, because the development of these individual capacities has wider benefits for society, or what the author of the diagram on the left calls public benefits (see Figure 1).

WHAT DO WE WANT FOR YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS?

The research drew on the vision for young people expressed in *The New Zealand Curriculum*, and on high-level policy statements from some government departments (economic, health, social development, culture and heritage, etc.). These documents highlight the qualities and attributes we need to achieve our aspirations for New Zealand's social, cultural, economic and environmental future.

Recurring themes include:

- preparing New Zealanders to create a prosperous and sustainable knowledge economy
- fostering creativity and innovation
- developing strong identities and cultural value
- supporting wellbeing of individuals and communities
- ensuring equity of positive outcomes for all New Zealanders
- preparing New Zealanders to be national and global citizens who can play a role on the world stage.

Instrumental benefits

Improved test scores

Improved self-efficacy, learning skills, health

Development of social capital
Economic growth

Private benefits

Private benefits with public spillover

Public benefits

Captivation

Expanded capacity for empathy

Creation of social bonds

Pleasure

Cognitive growth

Expression of communal meaning

Intrinsic benefits

FIGURE 1: Framework for understanding the benefits of the arts (reproduced from McCarthy et al., 2004, p. xiii)



New Zealand studies in Ngā Toi suggest research approaches should align with Māori knowledge-building frameworks and current thinking about Māori education and health promotion.

These themes are consistent with international thinking about the purpose of education in the 21st century. There is a growing consensus that 21st century education needs to prepare young people to confidently navigate their way through a world that is increasingly complex, interconnected and dynamic, with a range of new challenges.

It has been widely argued that school systems of the past were not designed to educate for such a world, and that we need to rethink not only what people need to *know*, but also what kind of people they need to *be* in order to have meaningful, productive, healthy and fulfilling lives.

WHAT CONTRIBUTION CAN LEARNING IN THE ARTS MAKE TO THIS VISION?


The four pink boxes to the right and overleaf, drawn from the literature review, suggest conditions and mechanisms by which arts learning and participation are likely to contribute to six aspirational themes for NZ and New Zealanders.

THEME 1: CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

- Arts learning can be linked with the development of creative capabilities. Particular approaches to arts teaching support students to engage in creatively producing, appraising and responding to the arts.
- The arts can be partnered with other curriculum areas, and with intentional teaching approaches, creativity and creative thinking can be developed in other curriculum contexts.

THEME 2: STRONG IDENTITIES AND CULTURAL VALUES

- “Identity” and “culture” are frequently linked with the arts, but (like creativity and innovation) can be defined in different ways.
- Students’ engagement, enjoyment and accomplishments in the arts can support the development of positive views of themselves.
- Whose culture(s) are or are not explored or valued through the arts? Some New Zealand researchers suggest arts education should go further in adopting a multicultural approach, which may help to address general concerns about educational experience and outcomes for Māori and Pasifika students.
- The arts provide clear opportunities for exploration of identities, but research suggests this is more likely to occur when this is an explicit intention for arts teaching.



One US study of arts-based youth organisations noted that, in these environments, students had more opportunities to ask (and respond to) ‘what if?’ questions, and to express ideas and engage with other people’s ideas, than in other settings.



THEMES 3 AND 4: WELLBEING OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES, AND EQUITY OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL NEW ZEALANDERS

- New Zealanders’ wellbeing is a priority for central and local government. Wellbeing is defined in terms of physical, social/emotional, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions.
- There is evidence for positive social, emotional, cultural and health outcomes for individuals engaged with the arts.
- There is also an emerging body of research that looks at the impacts of the arts at the community/collective level. This research suggests the arts (particularly community arts) can contribute to building and strengthening social bonds, building cultural and social capital, and various flow-on benefits to community members.

THEMES 5 AND 6: A PROSPEROUS AND SUSTAINABLE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, AND NEW ZEALANDERS AS INTERNATIONAL CITIZENS AND CONTRIBUTORS ON A WORLD STAGE

- Economic, social, cultural and environmental prosperity is of paramount importance for governments all over the world.
- Contemporary thinking about life in the 21st century emphasises the need for citizens to engage collaboratively with complex challenges, make wise decisions and be proactive in shaping local, national and international situations.
- Research linking “creative capital” with social and economic outcomes suggests that the choices people make about work, leisure and where to live may be linked with actual and perceived opportunities to engage creatively with the people and ideas in different jobs, communities and cities.

CONCLUSION

Existing research can only tell us so much about the long-term impacts and outcomes of arts learning and participation. Further research is necessary to provide meaningful answers to the questions this project aimed to address.

Further research could focus on:

- the development of a coherent strategy within the arts education community. This would mean individual studies do not stand alone, but contribute to a wider platform of understanding in key areas.
- which kinds of arts learning experiences lead to positive outcomes (including cognitive, social, emotional and health) for a wide range of New Zealand learners.
- the impact of arts learning on a wider scale, focusing on larger groups rather than small studies of students, classes or schools.
- the impact of the many arts-related initiatives supported by outside agencies, which have a wide uptake across schools, such as Stage Challenge and Play It Strange.