

Dance Educators Professional Association NSW  
NSW Curriculum Review  
Response

The Dance Educators Professional Association (NSW) was formed in 1999 with the purpose of supporting the teaching of the K-12 Dance Syllabuses developed by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

Our functions are to:

- Promote quality dance education;
- Foster the continuing development of dance as an art form in schools; and
- Advocate for the value and status of dance as a subject within the K-12 Curriculum.

DEPA believes that the current NSW K-12 Dance Syllabuses already comply with many of the reform directions outlined in the NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report. This is particularly evident in the Years 11-12 Dance Syllabus which contains a core study in Performance, Composition and Appreciation with the student then undertaking an in-depth study in the core component of their choice (akin to a special project). This structure provides for the recommended 'deep learning of core disciplinary knowledge' that students develop 'into deeper understandings of that concept or principle as they revisit it in different contexts'. (*Masters, G. 2019. NSW Curriculum Review: Interim Report. NESA: Sydney: pp: xi-xii.*)

DEPA in principle supports the general thrust of the reform directions in particular:

- the decluttering of syllabuses;
- providing opportunities for greater in-depth study; and
- reducing the onerous imposition on teachers of dealing with compliance.

DEPA supports the retention of the current Key Learning Areas and rather than trying to create new combinations of subjects focus attention on individual syllabuses.

DEPA has concerns with regards to 'a common entitlement' as a reform direction. While it may be argued that a common entitlement could underpin fundamental learning, the more that is mandated the less flexibility and choice is available and consequently the fewer the opportunities for students to engage with the areas of their choosing. A 'true' common entitlement would see all students having access to all subjects all of the time.

Much of what the reform document aspires to already exists in the current curriculum pattern, including flexibility for students. Creative And Performing Arts and Technology and Applied Studies have been at the forefront of learning with deep knowledge and understanding, problem solving, process focused and project related learning outcomes.

Any and every strategy of reform, which shapes, limits or precludes student choices in terms of subjects studied directly contradicts the statement (below) regarding student autonomy:

*The degree of autonomy students have in shaping and directing their own learning is an important determinant of attitudes to learning, motivation, engagement and perseverance. When students have a level of control over what and how they learn – that is, a level of 'agency' as learners – they also are supported to develop skills in self-regulation and independent learning and are likely to develop higher levels of self-confidence.*

(Masters, G. 2019. NSW Curriculum Review: Interim Report. NESA: Sydney: p: 73.)

The limitations on teachers imposed by the onerous responsibility of compliance features strongly in the Interim Report. The statement below:

*Teachers described most (but not all) existing syllabuses as specifying what they are to teach, when they are to teach, and how long they are to spend teaching it. This often constrains their ability to make professional judgements ...The inflexibility arising from the expectation that teachers will deliver the same content to all students within mandated (or recommended) hours... (Masters, G. 2019. NSW Curriculum Review: Interim Report. NESA: Sydney: pp: x-xi).*

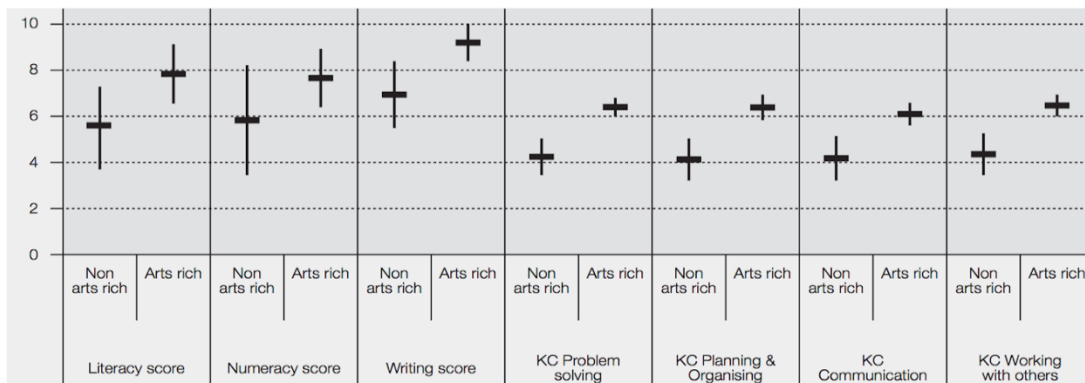
would seem to suggest over-regulation as a contributing factor. DEPA members report anecdotally that in a seeming attempt to maintain rigor the HSC Examination increasingly focuses on minutiae (dot points) that is at times inconsistent with the spirit of the syllabus.

It is proposed here that over-regulation should be considered alongside any decluttering of the curriculum. Regulation is the province of Government and its Statutory Authority and if a review is being undertaken to de-clutter and focus the curriculum, then the current rules and regulations surrounding syllabus development, implementation and examination should also be considered.

DEPA is concerned for the ongoing survival and integrity of the Creative and Performing Arts in general and Dance as a subject in particular. Many of the opportunities provided by a wholesale revisiting of the curriculum are exciting and to be encouraged, but not under threat of the diminishment of the subject. To achieve the best outcome it is essential that all stakeholders are valued and are able to work together on an equal footing.

The following table cited in 'The Arts and Australian Education: Realising Potential' (Ewing, R. 2010. Australian Council for Educational Research: Victoria. P: 24) shows the positive benefits that an arts rich curriculum and pedagogy can have across a range of key learning competencies. Given that the Interim Report expresses concerns about students' progress in literacy and numeracy and their general disengagement with education a strong arts education curriculum offers a solution and should be supported.

Figure 1: Comparisons of student learning in arts-rich and non-arts-rich programs



Note: Means (denoted by the horizontal line) and 95% confidence intervals (denoted by the vertical line) for literacy, numeracy, writing scores, and Key Competencies, comparing Year 4 'arts-rich' (N=19) versus 'non-arts-rich'(N=20) programs.

(Bryce et al., 2004, p. 14)