

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

### The Case for Aesthetic Literacy

Australia is at an arts education crossroad. Schools face pressure to prioritise literacy and numeracy benchmarks, subsequently, deprioritise arts programs.

40 Creative Arts degrees discontinued between 2018 and 2025.

This policy must make a compelling, evidence-based, defence for what the arts uniquely deliver, and fund infrastructure to deliver it.

That case rest on aesthetic literacy: a developed capacity to engage meaningfully with art, and through that engagement, to build the critical thinking, empathy, and social imagination which educators know matter deeply for how young people develop, participate in community, and comprehend the world around them. Standardised testing is inadequate.

Aesthetic literacy is a rigorously developed educational philosophy, shaped most prominently by Professor Maxine Greene, philosopher-in-residence at Lincoln Center Institute, New York for 30 years and Professor Emerita at Teachers College, Columbia University. Greene demonstrated that structured, intentional engagement with the arts- distinct from, but complementary to, teaching arts disciplines in the classrooms- develops students cognitively, emotionally and imaginatively in ways nothing else replicates. Her work was not purely theoretical; it was translated into practice at Lincoln Center Institute, creating one of the world's most respected models for arts education partnership, inspiring programs across multiple countries. This is not arts for education. It is arts and education. Two fields in genuine, equal partnership.

### Australia Has Already Proved This Works

Critically this is not a foreign model proposed for import. It has already been tested here, at scale, with success. In the 80s and 90s, Arts Centre Melbourne's Art-Ed Program, developed with Victorian College of the Arts support, was built on exactly this philosophy and became the first international affiliate of Lincoln Center Institute, New York, engaging tens of thousands of participants across Victoria. It demonstrated that a world-class model could be meaningfully adapted to Australian context and genuine community scale.

A show focused Threefold Program: Performances in arts venues;

Country Access facilitated; Artist-Teacher Partnership.

That program no longer operates, and arts engagement has suffered for it. This policy is the opportunity to revive its spirit and build something national and enduring from it.

### Three Specific Policy Asks

1. Explicitly name aesthetic literacy as a policy outcome, thus recognising meaningful arts engagement as a goal, distinct from participation alone.

2. Fund structured artist-in-education partnerships nationally, connecting working artists with school communities in ways that go beyond curriculum delivery.

3. Resource artists of calibre as essential practitioners to inspiring work which builds the aesthetic literacy for decoding our place in the world.

Audience capability cannot be enhanced without investing in the people who create the context work.

These goals align directly with the policy's existing pillars: centrality of the artist, a place for every story, and strong cultural institutions. What seems currently missing is the connective tissue between them - a framework that links artist support to community capacity - building through education.

Australia has the institutions, the intellectual heritage, and the demonstrated experience to lead in this space.

This policy provides opportunity to bring them together.