

**National Cultural Policy Submission**

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As an educator with over 20 years' experience in primary classrooms and beyond, specialising in music and visual arts, and now running a micro-business delivering visual art immersion programs for children, I strongly support the principle of the **Centrality of the Artist**.

If we're serious about valuing artists as workers and creators, this must begin in childhood. The arts must be a robust, prioritised part of education, not an optional add-on.

High-quality art education is not about polished outcomes; it is about child-centred exploration, meaning-making, thinking and problem-solving. When children are given time, agency and rich materials, they develop what researchers call Studio Thinking Skills: observing, envisioning, experimenting, reflecting, persisting and expressing. These are not "extra" skills – they are foundational, transferable capabilities that underpin literacy, numeracy and complex thinking.

Art is not separate from learning – it unlocks it.

Yet in many primary schools, access to meaningful arts education is inconsistent, shallow and constrained. In specialist settings, 25–30 students are often taught in 30-minute sessions. Once students arrive, settle and transition, there is often only 20 minutes of actual teaching time. Add behaviour management and administrative demands and opportunities for depth disappear.

We must ask honestly: what kind of artistic thinking, experimentation or reflection is possible in 20 minutes once a week?

This is not a criticism of teachers, many are doing extraordinary work, but a reflection of systemic conditions. If we want to position artists and future artists as central, we must address the environments where artistic capacity is first formed.

Teacher support is critical. Many educators lack confidence in delivering rich, process-based and open-ended arts programs – not due to lack of interest, but limited training and sustained support. Upskilling must move beyond one-off workshops to ongoing, practice-based professional learning that models how to facilitate creative thinking, not just manage activities.

At the same time, many excellent small businesses across Australia, mine included, deliver high-quality, child-centred arts programs focused on social-emotional development, creative confidence, resilience and critical thinking. This work often sits outside formal systems – for good reason. These programs prioritise process over product, relationships over compliance and depth over coverage.

However, because they sit outside the system, access is inconsistent and often dependent on families' resources. There is significant opportunity to better recognise and support this sector – without compromising its integrity and build stronger connections between schools, policy and community providers so these experiences are not a privilege, but a consistent part of every child's education. For example, some states provide sports vouchers to support

participation. A similar model for the arts would be a practical, equitable way to increase access and signal that creative development is equally valued.

We must also reconsider assessment. Over-assessment can strip the life from creative processes. The arts thrive when we value process, curiosity and reflection over standardisation.

If we truly believe in the centrality of the artist, we must invest in the earliest stages of artistic development by:

- Providing adequate time for deep, sustained arts learning
- Ensuring equitable access across all schools
- Supporting teachers with meaningful professional learning
- Investing in resourcing, materials and partnerships with community arts providers
- Protecting creative processes from excessive assessment

Children are not just future artists – they are artists now.

To centre the artist, we must first centre the child.