

Evaluation of the Artists in Remote Schools (AiRS) Program

2012

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Evaluation of the Artists in Remote Schools (AiRS) Program 2012

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It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.
-Albert Einstein

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the AiRS artists, school staff, parents and other community members, and the staff of Corrugated Iron Youth Arts who generously gave their time to contribute to this evaluation.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Acronyms	6
A note on attribution in this report.....	6
Executive summary	7
Key observations.....	9
1. Background.....	11
1.1 The arts in education	11
1.2 The “Artists in Remote Schools” (AiRS) program	12
2. AiRS aims and objectives	15
3. Program description: AiRS in 2012	17
3.1 Program organisation	17
3.2 The sites.....	17
3.3 Program highlights.....	19
3.3.1 Shepherdson College highlights.....	20
3.3.2 Maningrida School highlights.....	20
3.3.3 Nyirrpri highlights.....	21
3.3.4 Music education (Warlpiri College)	22
3.3.5 Milpirri	22
4. The AiRS evaluation	23
4.1 Purpose of the evaluation	23
4.2 Program logic.....	23
4.2 Methodology	25
4.2.1 Participatory action research framework	25
4.2.2 Data sources and analysis.....	25
4.3.3 Summary of evaluation activities.....	26
5. Did the program meet the objectives?	28
5.1 Objective 1.....	28
5.2 Objective 2.....	30
5.3 Objective 3.....	35
5.3.1 Integrating arts with literacy and numeracy.....	36
5.3.2 “Brains learning from bodies”	37
5.3.3 Working in language	37
5.3.4 Learning through aesthetic and emotional expression	38
5.3.5 Reflective learning	39
5.4 Objective 4.....	39
5.5 Objective 5.....	42
5.6 Objective 6.....	43
5.6.1 Setting up the program.....	44
5.6.2 Program and support needs	46
5.6.3 Potential performance and outcome measures	47
6. Emerging issues	48
6.1 Engaging students.....	48
6.2 Collaborative spaces	48
6.3 Engaging community	49
6.4 Time	49

6.5	Collective memory	50
7.	Conclusion	51
8.	References	52

Acronyms

AiRS	Artists in Remote Schools
ALPA	Arnhem Land Progress Association
AT	Assistant teacher
CEC	Community Education Centre
CIYA	Corrugated Iron Youth Arts
DECS	Department of Education and Children's Services (formerly DET)
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training (now DECS)
MSHR	Menzies School of Health Research
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory

A note on attribution in this report

In writing this report we wished, as far as possible, to maintain the anonymity of those who had contributed their thoughts to the evaluation of the AiRS program. This was in part to enable us to use the most candid comments and protect the identities of those who said things that were not always positive, but it was also to help build a general sense for the reader of “this is what it was like to see the program through the eyes of an artist”, or “through the eyes of a teacher”, without this perspective necessarily being personified. This in turn helped us to form some generalisations from their experiences. However, with only seven artists operating three main sites, real anonymity was often difficult to achieve. And at times it seemed absurd to do so: in some instances particular activities were clearly the domain of one or another artist, or a specific school, and it seemed appropriate that they be named in this context. As a compromise we kept most comments unattributed, but where the activities were clearly identifiable, the individuals or schools are named.

Executive summary

The 2012 Artists in Remote Schools (AiRS) program was a demonstration trial to employ arts practitioners in remote Northern Territory schools for eight months of the school year and to evaluate this using a participatory action research framework. The artists worked with teachers in Early Childhood (Transition to Year 3) to reinforce students' learning of literacy and numeracy. The program was funded by the Department of Employment, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the Northern Territory Department of Education and Children's Services¹ (DECS), and the Northern Territory Department of Arts and Museums. It was managed by Corrugated Iron Youth Arts (CIYA).

Maningrida College, Maningrida and Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku each accommodated two artists in residence during Terms 2, 3 and 4 of the school year. In Central Australia, Nyirrpri School accommodated one artist for the same period. Additionally, two music educators spent a total of ten weeks in Warlpiri College schools (Nyirrpri, Yuendumu and Willowra). As well as the residential artists, the AiRS program also supported some visiting artists for shorter stays in the participating schools, and collaborated with Tracks Dance Company to run a series of early childhood dance workshops in conjunction with the Milpirri Festival at Lajamanu.

The artists attended an induction in April, and a "recall" session was held in Darwin in July. A "wrap" session for the artists was held in Darwin in December.

The purpose of the AiRS evaluation was to develop understanding of the issues inherent in setting up artists-in-residence initiatives in remote Northern Territory schools, and in continuing such programs over the longer term. The evaluation also aimed to identify measures that could be used in a subsequent longer-term, systematic evaluation of the program. Such measures potentially include school attendance rates, students' participation in extra-curricular activities or class performances, measurements of students' language, literacy and numeracy levels, and their achievement in other subject areas. Measures could also be developed to account for community engagement and parental participation.

At each site, the AiRS artists negotiated a variety of ways of working, according to their specific skill sets, the timetabling possibilities of each site and the needs of the teachers. The program demonstrated many ways that artists in residence can help augment arts instruction, with a positive impact on early childhood instruction in remote schools. Notably, artists used drama, puppetry, music, photos and video to produce retellings of the stories that children studied or created in their literacy classes; they organised visual arts projects in collaboration with community artists, using media such as weaving, sculpture or painting; they conducted open-ended play activities, yoga and circus arts. While much of the work was open-ended with an emphasis on the process of learning, much of the work also culminated in visual displays or performances of drama, dance and music. The artists also generated and highlighted different ways of working across the curriculum and of

¹ Formerly the Department of Education and Training (DET)

facilitating learning: exploring learning through use of the whole body, learning through first language, and using the arts to promote reflections about learning with the children.

Generalist teachers gained confidence in tackling the arts, using new technologies and incorporating these activities into their everyday teaching. Most teachers were naturally open to collaboration with the artists, but a few found the artists to be an intrusion on their program. The ability of artists and teachers to negotiate ways of working together was a function partly of individual skills and personality, but also of organisational structure: collaborative work was more successful where the overall objectives had been explicitly communicated to school staff, and the management and timetabling was flexible enough to allow for the inherent uncertainties of experimental ways of working.

Artists were asked to engage with parents and local artists and arts organisations to involve them in school-based activities. The residential artists considered that their length of stay in the community was an essential part of building relationships with local people and organisations. Where artists stayed for shorter periods, there was a strong feeling among participants that it was important to return, so that they could continue to develop their relationships with local people. The artists also felt that time was needed for local people to develop their own ideas about their engagement, if it was to be a genuine two-way process.

Although the three-term arrangement was successful for most of the artists, some felt that their residential time could have been shorter.

A number of issues emerged in the course of the program with the artists' accommodation and support. Accommodation, comprising basic donga-style facilities was not ideal. The artists' found it difficult to sustain very intense creative work across the full school term, and suggestions were made that working in shorter blocks of time, with periods away for rejuvenation, might be preferable. Pairing artists at the same school who had not been previously acquainted also created some stresses, although these were managed and resolved in the course of the program.

Artists, teachers and parents made many positive observations about students' engagement in the arts activities, and there were modestly improved attendance rates at two of the program sites. Nonetheless, participants felt that factors unrelated to happenings at the school also had a strong bearing on children's patterns of attendance. The question of whether there are direct correlations between AiRS program and children's attendance is one that should be explored in more depth in the future.

By the end of the school year, the program had generated new knowledge and skills for many school staff and a range of products (e.g. films, songs, paintings and sculptures) that will serve as teaching resources in the future. However, it is important to recognise that, with teacher turnover, some of this knowledge may be lost if processes are not put in place to pass it on to future staff.

The program has confirmed the strength of Corrugated Iron Youth Arts as an organisation that can support artists in schools, and link people and organisations to help them work more effectively in remote sites.

Key observations

This report can be used as a foundation document to set the agenda for continuing discussions about arts education in remote schools. Some points to consider are summarised here.

Setting up and supporting an artists-in-residence program

- There needs to be careful consultation with schools at the start of an artists-in-residence program to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings. Overall objectives must be explicit and communicated to staff. Management and timetabling must be flexible enough to allow for the inherent uncertainties of the experimental ways of working.
- Artists need to be well informed about working in remote communities, and when artists are paired to work together in the same site, it is important to prepare them well for this. Artists need to have access to counselling services.
- It is important to continue to build networks of people and organisations that can work with the arts in schools.

Length of stay

- Length of stay in the community needs to be carefully negotiated with artists and it is essential to take into account how much time is optimal for intense creative work in the school, and how much regenerative time the artists will need. This is particularly the case where artists are obliged to use accommodation that has not been designed for long-term stays. Where artists stay for short periods, it is important that they return to communities to maintain and keep building relationships with the schools local people.
- It would be valuable to trial modified models of the residential program, and especially to experiment with the timing of artists' stays in community (e.g., to organise shorter, but repeated, stays).

Engagement with parents, local artists and organisations

- It is important that artists understand how to construct engagement as a two-way process: it is not simply a matter of inviting people into the school to work within the school's agenda, but must always be attendant on and in dialogue with the motivations of local people

The program has also highlighted several areas of enquiry that need further exploration, as noted below.

Student engagement, performance and attendance

- The notion of "engagement" needs some interrogation. In particular, it would be instructive to document in more detail the different ways that arts-based instruction in remote school contexts can focus students' attention on learning. It would be good to have a clearer understanding of how engagement and learning are interrelated.

- The extent to which arts-based learning transfers to other academic areas can be further investigated. This may involve tracking the future school performance of the cohort of students who have benefited from the 2012 AiRS program.
- Within the scope of this study, it was not possible to demonstrate that arts activity in school promoted better school attendance. Better understanding is needed of the links (if and where they exist) between school activities and children's patterns of school attendance in remote communities. This incorporates better overall understanding of what impacts on children's habits of attendance, and what impacts on their attention to the activities of schooling.

Maintaining a memory of artists' work

- A vital question for action research is how schools can maintain the arts knowledge and practices that they have gained, beyond the demonstration phase. Processes need to be developed for recording artists' work (both processes and products) within schools, and for creating appropriate teacher professional development.

1. Background

1.1 The arts in education

“The Arts”² curriculum explicitly entails teaching music, visual arts, dance, drama and media. Through this curriculum area children can express themselves creatively, and also develop an aesthetic and critical appreciation of the many forms of artistic expression. Arts forms can also be used to teach across the curriculum, integrated with and embedded within other curriculum areas. The arts can thus be seen as having a special relationship with learning, in the sense that they “can be learned, and can be used as a tool by which to learn about something else.” (ACARA, 2010, p. 3)

It is generally accepted that there are significant benefits in working with the arts in schools. Research reviewed by the Menzies School of Health Research (Perso, Nutton, Fraser, Silburn, & Tait, 2011) provides a strong basis for arguing that teaching through the arts can create environments and conditions that result in improved academic, social and behavioural outcomes for students, from early childhood through to the later years of schooling. Notably, Galton (2008) explored successful instances of artists who worked to transform attitudes to learning, particularly among disaffected students with an anti-school disposition. The research found that student motivation is influenced by the culture of learning through the arts, which is characterised, for example, by relationships of equality between artists and students; by fewer time constraints than in other subjects; by the acceptance of emotional as well as cerebral responses; and by feedback that extends rather than corrects students’ ideas.

Research cited by Perso et al. (2011) also suggests that arts in schooling may play a crucial role in helping to create respect and intergenerational understanding, and in encouraging the active involvement of families in their children’s education. Such creative partnerships can revitalise teachers, help them engage with the cultural practices of children’s communities, and provide fresh perspectives on helping students achieve. Most notably in the context under discussion in this report, that of remote schools in the Northern Territory, the arts have a great potential to help sustain Indigenous cultures, both through traditional arts practices and through new forms of artistic expression. Further, arts programs may help students to participate in school activities and they may be a strong medium for establishing and sustaining positive teacher-student relationships, even when students’ literacy levels are low.

Despite the general sense that the arts are “good”, there is limited large-scale research on the impact of the arts on student learning in Australia generally, meaning that effects are difficult to quantify. Due to the range of expressive forms that come under the banner of “the arts” and the diversity and complexity of the programs and research that have been implemented, it is difficult to identify causal relationships between the arts and the learning of other disciplines (see, e.g., Hetland & Winner, 2004). In the Northern Territory context there is little current research into arts and learning with Indigenous students (cf. Bryce, 2004; Tait 2005). In a selection of Australian school-

² When capitalised in this way, the term “The Arts” refers specifically to a curriculum area. Throughout this document, “the arts” is also used in its non-capitalised form to refer more generally to the gamut of arts forms.

based arts programs described by Bryce (2004), there was some indication that the programs were associated with improved outcomes, but no evidence that participation in the programs could be related to academic progress. Further, the brief duration of most arts programs in schools has usually meant that any reported benefits have rarely had any lasting effect. More sustained arts in schools programs involving partnerships between schools and local art centres, musicians and other artists have been developed in some NT communities, but again, the evidence of the educational and other benefits of such programs remains largely anecdotal.

Hence, there is limited evidence of the impact of arts in schools programs or arts-based teaching approaches on student engagement, language development, literacy and numeracy and other school learning outcomes (Perso et al., 2011). While arts programs usually incorporate some sort of evaluation as a requirement of funding, these evaluations only rarely include investigation of their immediate impact and longer-term effects on student educational outcomes, and very few such studies have been reported in the published literature.

1.2 The “Artists in Remote Schools” (AiRS) program

The current program is informed by a literature review, noted above, that was undertaken by the Menzies School of Health Research (MSHR) with the support of the then NT Department of Education³ (DET) in mid-2011 (Perso et al., 2011). The literature review documented the current national and state/jurisdiction initiatives in arts education. It also discussed the international, national and local evidence base for specific arts programs; the cultural, linguistic and geographic contexts of the Northern Territory; the demographics of the local workforce, and other factors that might impact on successful implementation of arts programs, particularly in Indigenous contexts.

The literature review identified a number of obvious barriers to the systematic implementation of effective arts programs in Northern Territory schools. The nature of the arts programs generally depends on who is available to deliver them in schools, locally and at territory level. Most remote Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory have limited infrastructure for the teaching of the arts and do not have the capacity to employ teachers with an arts background or training in arts education, relying instead on buying in short-term and intermittent input from visiting artists. The activities of visiting artists are typically conducted as an adjunct to the school curriculum with little direct involvement of teaching staff or links with relevant areas of the school curriculum. Some remote schools have developed small, localised projects, collaborating with local musicians or visual artists, but these are often difficult to sustain for a variety of reasons.

On the basis of the literature review, Perso et al. (2011, p. 11) concluded that there was a need for arts-based programs in Northern Territory schools to be specifically designed with a view to improving the engagement of students, particularly in the early years, and with a focus on literacy and numeracy. They proposed that arts-based programs in the Northern Territory should include:

- pedagogies which create learning environments that enable students to take risks, and are not focused on any one ‘right’ way of doing things, or pre-conceived ideas or products;

³ The department has now become the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS). For the purposes of consistency, the name ‘DET’ has been retained throughout this report.

- pedagogies which are scaffolded so that students can demonstrate existing talents and skills and which allow students to exercise 'choice' and to have a 'voice';
- programs that focus on deliberate learning goals while valuing the unique opportunities created by the arts to motivate, engage and improve attitudes to learning;
- opportunities for ongoing teacher professional learning to build confidence and competencies. This can be on-the-job learning, with structured opportunities for shadowing, co-teaching and peer coaching;
- supporting visiting teaching artists and arts educators who bring different but complementary skills, knowledge and arts practice to educational settings;
- collaboration between local and visiting arts-based practitioners (educators and/or artists) with school-based educators (e.g. classroom teachers) involving intensive blocks of time to jointly plan, deliver and evaluate the impact of the intervention;
- commitment from educational leadership to additional non-contact time for participating teachers, and recognition and remuneration for the time artists need to partner with teachers and assistants so that the skills and knowledge necessary for quality practice are genuinely passed on.

Their recommendations also included the following points:

- that Arts programs should make the most of the language and cultural resources already available in the communities, and capitalise on existing local knowledge and experience;
- that there is an investment in training teachers to be better equipped to teach the arts and to work in partnership with visiting and local practitioners, as a way of counteracting the typical short-term nature of funding for arts in schools programs;
- that outcomes are well monitored, and the knowledge created from the program is effectively disseminated; and
- that small programs should be incrementally scaled up as a way of making sure that the right kinds of support are available for continuing a quality program.

These proposals and recommendations informed an agreement negotiated between NT Arts and DEEWR to jointly fund a 12-month Artists in Remote Schools (AiRS) program in remote Northern Territory government schools. A working group was convened in July 2011 to decide on the specifications of the proposed program and to develop a framework for its evaluation. This group included senior policy officers from NT Arts, the NT Department of Education, the NT Library, Corrugated Iron Youth Arts, the NT Music School, the Centre for School Leadership, Learning and Development at Charles Darwin University, and the Menzies School of Health Research.

The NT Department of Education then called for expressions of interest from remote Indigenous schools and six communities were short-listed for site visits in late 2011 and early 2012. These visits sought to establish the level of community and school support for the program and to discuss the community and schools' views of the type of arts program preferred. They also sought to confirm the availability of accommodation and the logistical arrangements for supporting artists residing in the community for up to eight months of the school year. Corrugated Iron Youth Arts (CIYA), a non-government arts organisation with extensive experience in running arts programs in remote NT schools, was contracted to manage and organise the AiRS Program. The schools included in the demonstration trial for eight-month artist residencies were Maningrida College, Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku, and the Warlpiri College (with the artist to reside in Nyirripi). In addition, as

part of the larger AiRS program, the Warlpiri College engaged two musician-educators to spend ten weeks in total visiting Nyirrpi, Yuendumu and Willowra providing intensive music education in one or two-week blocks. Finally, AiRS sponsored a series of early childhood dance workshops, which were run in conjunction with the Milpirri festival at Lajamanu School (also part of the Warlpiri College) in October 2012.

The AiRS program was funded by the Department of Employment, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the Northern Territory Department of Education and Children's Services⁴ (DECS), and the Northern Territory Department of Arts and Museums.

⁴ Formerly the Department of Education and Training (DET)

2. AiRS aims and objectives

The Artists in Remote Schools Program (AiRS) 2012 employed arts practitioners in a number of remote Northern Territory schools for eight months of the 2012 school year and evaluated this using a participatory action research framework.

AiRS addressed the principles that underpin the National Education and the Arts Statement released jointly by the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), and the Cultural Ministers' Council (2007), namely:

1. All children and young people should have a high quality arts education in every phase of learning;
2. Creating partnerships strengthens community identity and local cultures;
3. Connecting schools with the arts and cultural sector enriches learning outcomes.

The AiRS program had a number of overarching aims, which were stated as

1. Embedding the arts as an integral part of the learning environment – by enriching the curriculum with an arts focus that works across literacy, numeracy and other key learning areas as well as arts for arts sake, and exploration of the arts as a vehicle for students to exercise choice, take risks and improve motivation and engagement;
2. Increasing attendance and academic achievement – by making the school a valued, exciting and engaging learning environment relevant to remote community life;
3. Providing professional development opportunities and skills exchange between artists, teachers, students and community members – by establishing a program designed to facilitate an interactive two-way learning environment;
4. Building on community connections to strengthen families' engagement with the school and community members' contribution to arts and education – by providing pathways for families and community to engage with, contribute to, and celebrate the program;
5. Establishing a model that can be replicated in other schools and in the future – through continual evaluation and assessment of progress and outcomes to inform future delivery.

To conduct the 2012 evaluation of the AiRS program, Menzies School of Health Research (MSHR) formulated these objectives in the following way:

1. promoting the use of arts in schools as a positive means of engaging children in school learning and encouraging regular school attendance;
2. developing a shared school and community discourse building on arts pedagogy and cultural ways of learning to scaffold children's competencies in literacy and numeracy;
3. identifying effective pedagogies used by artists and investigating how these can be developed and utilised by classroom teachers to enhance students' engagement with school learning and improving outcomes in literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking skills;
4. supporting school leadership to engage parents and the broader community in the arts and other aspects of children's school learning;
5. building productive partnerships between schools and local artists/arts organisations;
6. documenting the process issues relevant to the program's effective operation and the practice learnings regarding the following issues:
 - a) the school and community engagement and selection processes;
 - b) the artists' recruitment and selection processes;
 - c) the artists' induction to the program including cultural awareness training and preparation for living in a remote Indigenous community;
 - d) the program and personal support needs of artists delivering the arts programs in schools;
 - e) the program specifications, performance and outcome measures needed to inform the development of an Australian Research Council Partnership Grant for the evaluation of a subsequent roll-out of the program in NT remote schools.

Additionally, through the AiRS evaluation, MSHR set out to explore some further issues, namely:

- A. The extent to which artists were able to achieve the goals they had set for themselves, and what they saw as the key factors facilitating or impeding the realisation of their aspirations for the program;
- B. The advantages and disadvantages for placing pairs of artists in larger communities and what helped and hindered the way these arrangements worked out in practice e.g. living and working together over an extended period of time; having different ideas of what they would like to achieve;
- C. Whether future employment opportunities may have arisen from the program for the artists;
- D. Artists', schools', and community suggestions for ways to improve the program.

3. Program description: AiRS in 2012

3.1 Program organisation

In 2012, AiRS was implemented in a small number of participating schools and managed by Corrugated Iron Youth Arts (CIYA).

Six schools participated in the AiRS 2012 to varying degrees. In the Top End, Maningrida School and Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku each accommodated two artists in residence during Terms 2, 3 and 4 of the school year. In Central Australia, Nyirrpri School accommodated one artist in residence for the same period. As well as the residential artists, the AiRS program also supported some visiting artists for shorter stays in the participating schools. In particular, two music educators were employed to spend a total of ten weeks in three schools of the Warlpiri College (Nyirrpri, Yuendumu and Willowra). Also within the Warlpiri College, and in conjunction with the Milpirri Festival, the AiRS program supported Tracks Dance Company to work with the school to run a series of early childhood dance workshops.

All the artists were requested to work specifically with teachers in Early Childhood (Transition to Year 3), and to use the arts activities to reinforce the students' learning of literacy and numeracy. In April the artists attended an induction incorporating an introduction to play based learning, cultural awareness training, curriculum integration and preparation for living in a remote community. A further 'recall' session was held in Darwin in July after the artists' first term of residence. A final 'wrap' session for the artists was held in Darwin in the final week of the school year.

As well as the residential artists, the AiRS program also supported some visiting artists for shorter stays in the participating schools (see 3.3 below).

3.2 The sites

3.2.1 Galiwin'ku

Shepherdson College is located in the township of Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island, 550km northeast of Darwin. The population of Galiwin'ku and its surrounds is about 2220 people. Shepherdson College caters for students from early years to senior years, and also services seven Homeland Learning Centres. According to current information from the Northern Territory Department of Education and Children's Services (NT DECS)⁵, Shepherdson College has 49 full-time teachers, and 22 full-time assistant teachers. There are 528 students enrolled, of whom 97% are Indigenous, although there are reportedly many more school-aged children in the area who are not enrolled at the school.

At Galiwin'ku, Djambarrpuyngu - a language from the group of languages generally known as Yolngu Matha - is the most widely used language. Up to 12 additional Yolngu languages are spoken in Galiwin'ku, including Galpa, Golpa, Golumala, Gumatj, Gupapuyngu, Liya'gawumirr, Wangurri, and

⁵ All statistical information cited here and in the following sections has been retrieved from <http://www.teaching.nt.gov.au/remote/index.cfm?attributes.fuseaction=the-remote-schools-and-regions>. School enrolments and attendance rates fluctuate greatly, so this information may not be entirely current.

Warramiri. Children hear little English in their daily interactions with family, and on starting school they need explicit instruction in English language. Instruction in Shepherdson College is mainly in English, although the school is committed to a bilingual approach which aims to teach reading and writing through Djambarrpuyngu throughout the first three years of school and encourages Yolngu staff to help children with the comprehension of schoolwork. School attendance, listed by NT DECS as averaging 56% percent, fluctuates according to the time of year and people's ceremonial and family commitments. The school conducts "mobile classes" outside of the school premises for children who are reluctant to attend school, and as the children become habituated to school activity, these classes are moved into the school.

Shepherdson College hosted two AiRS artists, Sarah Hope and Gavin Vance, from Term 2 through Term 4 of the 2012 school year. The school provided accommodation for the artists in the school grounds in a facility known as "The Bunkhouse." The accommodation has a communal kitchen and accommodates other visitors to the school throughout the year.

3.2.2 Maningrida

The township of Maningrida is situated on the coast in northwest Arnhem Land, approximately 550 km east of Darwin. The population of Maningrida and its homelands is about 2700.

Maningrida College caters for students from early years to senior years, and also services a number of Homeland Learning Centres. Current information from the Northern Territory Department of Education and Children's Services (NT DECS) indicates that Maningrida has 44 full-time teachers, and 14 full-time assistant teachers. There are 389 students enrolled, of whom 95% are Indigenous, although as in Galiwin'ku there are reportedly many non-enrolled school-aged children in the community and surrounding region.

The two main languages spoken in the community are Burrara and Ndjebbana, but there are many other languages spoken, including Rembarrnga, Nakara, Kunwin'ku, Gurrgoni and Djinang. Kriol is also increasingly spoken among younger people. As at Galiwin'ku, many children hear little English in their daily interactions and when they first come to school they may have very little knowledge of English. Because of the multilingual nature of the community (the languages spoken at Maningrida are more dissimilar from each other than the languages spoken at Galiwin'ku), children may even have difficulty understanding others in their class. Instruction at Maningrida School is in English, although assistant teachers in early childhood classes will often translate a teacher's instructions for children. As for Galiwin'ku, school attendance at Maningrida (listed by NT DECS as averaging 39 %) fluctuates greatly, and, although it has increased over the past year, it is of considerable concern.

Maningrida School hosted two AiRS artists, Felicity Jane Horsley and Conor Fox, from Term 2 through Term 4 of the 2012 school year. The school provided accommodation for the artists in the school grounds in a donga-style facility. The accommodation has communal kitchen facilities and also served as accommodation of other visitors to the school throughout the year.

3.2.3 Warlpiri College

The Warlpiri College comprises the four schools at Nyirrpri, Yuendumu, Willowra and Lajamanu. The organisational structure of the College to link the four schools across Warlpiri country has been created recently, but it should be noted that these schools have a history, driven largely by Warlpiri

people themselves, of several decades of working together as the “Warlpiri Triangle” to develop their teaching resources and expertise.

Nyirrpi, the smallest of the communities, is situated approximately 460 km northwest of Alice Springs. The population of the community is approximately 320. The community is predominantly Warlpiri, but there is also a large group of Pintubi. The community can be accessed via road, 4WD only, and access during the wet season can be severely restricted. The school caters for children from early years through middle years. There are 4 full time teachers, and 2 full-time assistant teachers. DECS currently lists enrolments as 47 students, with an average attendance of 60%. The main language spoken in the community is Warlpiri.

Yuendumu is about 300 km northwest of Alice Springs. It has a population of about 1000, but has fluctuated greatly over the past two years due to some serious family conflicts. Warlpiri is the main language spoken. The school provides education to students from preschool to middle years. There are 14 full time teachers, and 4 full-time assistant teachers. Enrolments are listed by DECS as 118, with an average school attendance of 56 percent.

Willowra is located 300 km northwest of Alice Springs (although to the east of Yuendumu). The population of the community is approximately 300 and it is also a mainly Warlpiri-speaking community. Willowra School caters for students from early years to middle years. There are 4 full-time teachers, and 4 full-time assistant teachers. Enrolments are listed by DECS as 51, with an average student attendance of 67%.

Lajamanu is about 580 km southwest of Katherine. The community has a population of approximately 1200 and although the community is situated on Gurindji country, the main language is Warlpiri, with many people also using Kriol. Lajamanu School caters for students from preschool through to middle years. There are 15 full-time teachers, and 4 full-time assistant teachers. Enrolments, according to DECS information, are at 161, and average student attendance is at 55 percent.

Nyirrpi School hosted one AiRS residential artist, Aengus Cullinan, from Term 2 through 4 of the 2012 school year. Aengus was accommodated during this time in a ‘silver bullet’ donga, off-site from the school. The three southern Warlpiri schools, Nyirrpi, Yuendumu and Willowra, were also visited by a team of two musician-educators, Rob Hoad and Kristie Schubert, who spent ten weeks in total visiting Nyirrpi, Yuendumu and Willowra providing intensive music education in one or two-week blocks. Finally, AiRS sponsored work on educational outcomes relating to the Milpirri festival at Lajamanu in October 2012.

3.3 Program highlights

At each site, the AiRS artists negotiated a variety of ways of working in their school settings, according to their specific artistic skills, the timetabling possibilities of each site and the needs of the teachers. Activities included using drama, puppetry, music, photos and video to produce retellings of the stories that children studied or created in their literacy classes; visual arts projects in collaboration with community artists using media such as weaving, sculpture or painting; open-ended play activities; yoga and circus arts. While much of the work was open-ended with an

emphasis on the process of learning, much of the work also culminated in visual displays or performances of drama, dance and music. The full details can be read in the CIYA monthly reports.

3.3.1 Shepherdson College highlights

The end of Term 3 at Shepherdson saw the production of “Island Night”, organised by Gavin Vance. “Island Night” was an evening of student performances in both English and Djambarrpuyngu, free healthy food, a student photography exhibition, an art auction, disco and school bands. Despite the date clashing with other community functions (a ceremony at Dhambala and football), the event was extremely well attended by parents and community members. Preparation of “Island Night” involved students working to create the sets, props, scripts, and costumes, as well as rehearsals of the performance itself. In the lead up to the Island Night performance, Sydney vocalist and folk singer Jeannie Lewis visited Galiwin’ku and spent 2 weeks running vocal classes with the children. Gavin enlisted teachers to contribute and build upon his performance evening by picking families up in the school bus, planning the art auction, organising the disco and catering.

Gavin recruited local painter Jeffery Gurruwiwi to work with early childhood teachers and the Families as First Teachers (FAFT) staff in designing and painting playground designs on the pavement in the early childhood area of the school. Jeffery also participated in the preparations for “Island Night” by designing and painting backdrops. Gavin and Jeffery collaborated to create storybooks for the school library, and to design murals of students’ stories for the columns underneath the elevated classrooms. Jeffery subsequently also worked with the Literature Production Centre at Shepherdson College to help create bilingual booklets.

Sarah Hope developed a character, Mili the Clown to help teachers and students explore relationships, the impact of teasing, and ways of thinking about learning in school. Darwin-based community filmmaker Peta Khan visited Galiwin’ku in Term 3 and worked with Sarah to complete four films based on texts that the children had been studying, with some collaboration from local organisation DigiFM.

In other activities at Shepherdson College,

- a Marrara Christian College student on work experience placement worked alongside Gavin during one week in Term 4
- Shepherdson AiRS artists prepared some clowning items for the ALPA (Arnhem Land Progress Association) 40th Anniversary Celebrations in Galiwin’ku
- AiRS artists supported play-based learning sessions and the Perceptual Motor Program throughout the year
- Darwin fibre artist Aly de Groote visited Galiwin’ku to run weaving workshops with Mavis Ganambarr. These workshops were used to draw student attention to the impact of ghost nets with presentation from Marthakal rangers.

3.3.2 Maningrida School highlights

Felicity Jane Horsley organised the creation of two short films, “Going to Goulburn” and “Superheroes”, for which students wrote the script, played all the roles, and took part in filming and editing. Felicity also created a “Circus Club” for students before school. The club was regularly attended by 10-30 students, and sometimes as many as 60 students. Felicity collaborated with the developers of a Campfire Stories program to strengthen self-esteem and confidence in young girls.

Conor Fox organised a fibre art workshop in which Darwin-based weaver Thisbe Purich spent a week with local weavers Agnes Djaypirri and Matilda Pascoe covering a cane armature crafted by Conor. The collaborative work consisted of weaving ghost nets and scraps of fabric printed at the Barbara Women's Centre. The resulting sculpture, a large sawfish, is a local totem and a school emblem, and is currently on display in the school library. Lena Yarinkura and Bob Burruwal from Maningrida Arts and Culture also devoted time during the week to work with students, weaving pandanus and creating sculptures from stringybark.

Conor created animations based on the class text for literacy study, and helped children to perform the texts using masks. Conor also worked with a Transition class to create a shadow theatre, again based on a class text, and performed by projecting the shadows onto the outside of a geodesic dome that Conor had constructed (with the audience sitting inside the dome).

Visiting dance therapist Alex Jordan ran a week of choreography workshops with Maningrida students in Term 4. Visiting artist Fleur Elise Noble shared her multi-media performance "2 Dimensional Life of Her", scheduling 6 performances over 3 days within and outside of school hours.

Felicity and Conor, with the help of Circosis, organised the Christmas concert to great acclaim.

In other activities at Maningrida School,

- Students from Maningrida attended the Darwin Festival to see Felicity Horsley perform and to participate in the Polyglot installation 'Tangled'
- AiRS artists attended the Stone Country Festival at Gunbalanya
- Conor and Alex Desebrock facilitated community mapping activities with students
- Conor Fox completed murals for learning areas around the school
- A number of student teachers from Deakin University completed a practicum placement in Maningrida, and worked with the AiRS artists
- AiRS artists supported weekly play-based learning sessions.

3.3.3 Nyirrpi highlights

Aengus Cullinan created an earthwork "learnscape" in the school grounds, building walls by earth bagging. He subsequently extended the project to include a seating area outside the shop across the road from the school. Aengus then negotiated with Warlukulangu Arts to engage local elders to paint stories on the walls that he had created around the school. Aengus facilitated arts activities during school picnics and bush excursions. As part of an already established garden program in the school, students planted out the landscaped garden beds around the school, and the gardens were linked into the science, literacy and geography lessons of the older students. Documentation from the garden project was shared with the remote Indigenous garden network and an international organic gardening student network.

As well as teaching some visual arts lessons, Aengus worked with the early years teacher to support the teaching of movement, yoga and story telling based on the movement classes. During this time, AiRS supported other artists to visit Nyirrpi. Anula Primary School art specialist Alison Dowell spent one week at Nyirrpi working with the students, mentor Aengus and support teacher development

in teaching visual art. Jon Clarke from Corrugated Iron also visited Nyirripi for a week, running outdoor circus tuition in recess and lunch breaks.

3.3.4 Music education (Warlpiri College)

Rob Hoad and Kristie Schubert spent ten weeks touring between the three communities teaching music and creating and installing permanent musical playgrounds made out of junk materials. The ten weeks spread over three terms in the three schools involved up to 3 return visits.

3.3.5 Milpirri

The Warlpiri festival “Milpirri Pulyaranyi” took place in Lajamanu at the end of October 2012. Milpirri developed out of a relationship between Lajamanu and Tracks Dance, which began in 1989, through an artists-in-residence program run by CIYA (then Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre). A biennial event, Milpirri is also a focal event for Lajamanu community and visitors to learn about Warlpiri philosophy. Milpirri in 2012 involved 100 local performers, was attended by people from all over the world, and was recorded for Vamp TV.

Tracks Dance and Corrugated Iron Youth Arts have a strong working relationship and a shared history. In the lead-up to Milpirri 2012, they developed a Memorandum of Understanding allowing Tracks to work with early years students. The partnership also introduced CIYA to Deakin University lecturer Alan Marshall, who had previously helped to link curriculum documents with the Warlpiri philosophy explored in Milpirri. Steven Jampijinpa Patrick at Lajamanu also worked to define alignments between the Australian Curriculum and Warlpiri cultural teaching. Through Alan Marshall, Deakin University student teachers also participated in Milpirri 2012.

4. The AiRS evaluation

4.1 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the AiRS evaluation was to account for and better understand the issues inherent in setting up artists-in-residence programs in remote schools in the Northern Territory and continuing such programs over the longer term.

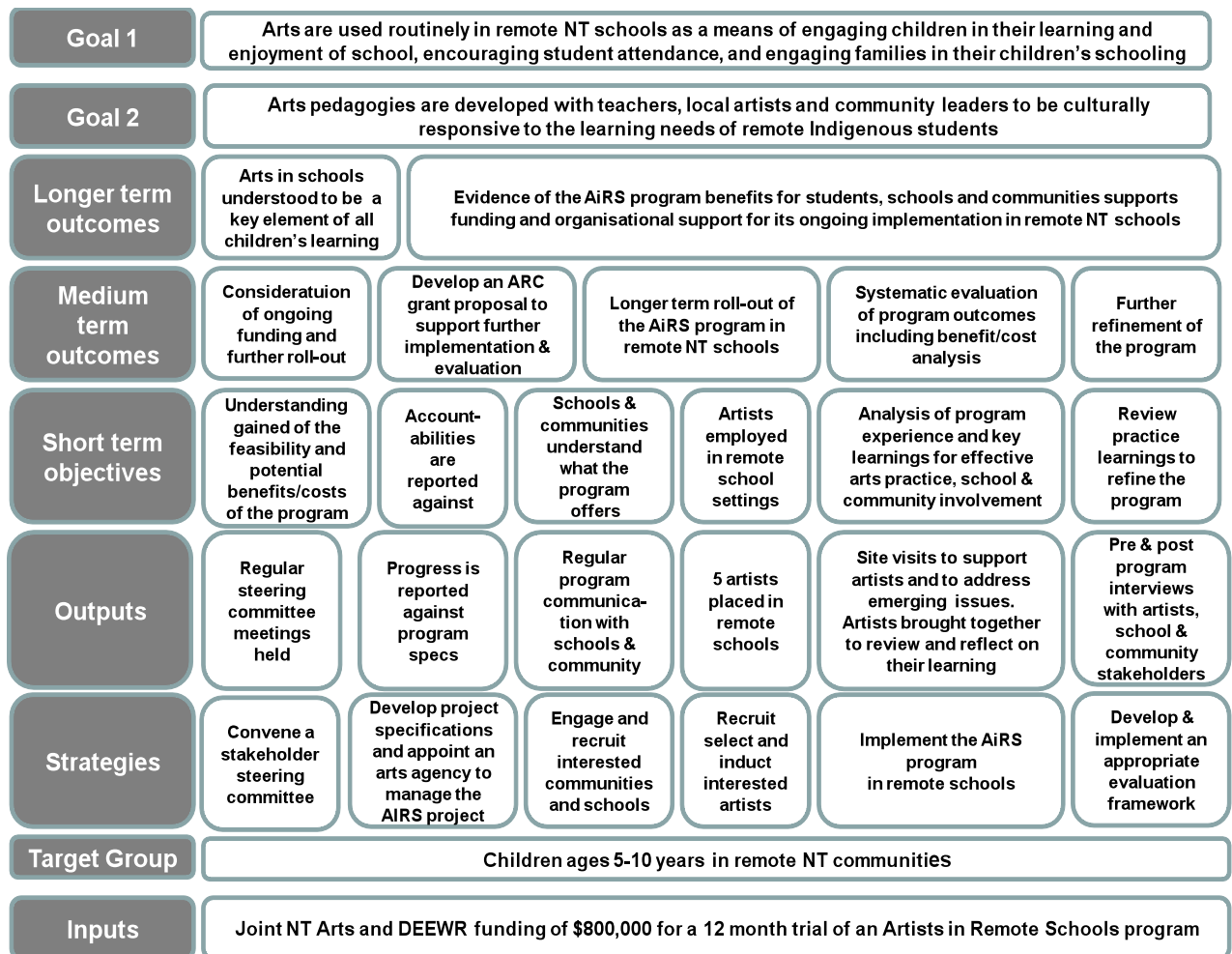
The evaluation of the AiRS program also aimed to identify and trial potential program performance and outcomes measures which could be used in a subsequent longer-term, systematic evaluation of the program. Such measures were envisaged to include attendance rates at the schools, students' participation in extra-curricular activities or class performances, measurements of students' language, literacy and numeracy levels, and their achievement in other subject areas.

4.2 Program logic

Program logic is a planning and evaluation tool that graphically depicts the steps of the program and maps their anticipated cause and effect relationships. This is useful in identifying different levels of effect over time and the measures which may be required to assess the success of each of the program steps, as well as developing suitable outcome measures, determining the effective use of resources in the evaluation process, clarifying which strategies have the most impact and to illustrate why certain activities make a difference. Program logic is useful in articulating a “theory of change”; that is, in helping to explain how certain activities can lead to specific outcomes over time. Developing and refining the program logic in collaboration with participants is a useful means of identifying key enabling factors and potential obstacles to implementation and the strategies that may assist in addressing these. A key benefit of this type of program logic is that it shifts thinking from “what are we doing” to “what is needed to bring about the desired change.” At the same time, it must be recognised that program logic is a simplified representation of the situation and that it will not capture all of the real-life complexities of the program's implementation.

In the context of the program logic, this evaluation sought to determine the extent to which the program was able to be carried out as intended, and how well the program achieved the desired short term objectives.

Figure 1
Program Logic for AiRS



4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Participatory action research framework

Given the formative nature of the aims of AiRS program, the most appropriate methodology for this evaluation was a participatory action research (PAR) framework. This approach invites relevant parties actively and collaboratively to examine current action to address an issue in order to change and improve it. It is a systematic cyclical process of planning, taking action, observing, evaluating (including self-evaluation) and critical reflection prior to planning the next cycle of action (O'Brien, 2001; McNiff, 2002).

Within this approach, each school was treated as a case study, allowing an in-depth and holistic description of the artists' activities and impact in each remote community context.

4.2.2 Data sources and analysis

A semi-structured interview format was used to gather information and perspectives from principals, teachers, assistant teachers, parents and family members, local artists and arts organisations, the AiRS artists and CIYA AiRS managers. The evaluation questions were formulated as follows, and were asked of school staff, artists and project managers where appropriate:

- In what ways has the program assisted in developing a shared school and community discourse in building on arts pedagogy and cultural ways of learning to scaffold children's competencies in literacy and numeracy?
- How have artists engaged with teachers and provided PD extension of their classroom practice to incorporate arts practice into their teaching?
- What pedagogies used by artists have been effective in engaging students in learning and how can these can be developed and used by classroom teachers to enhance engagement with learning and improving outcomes in
 - a) literacy,
 - b) numeracy ,
 - c) higher order thinking skills?
- To what extent and how has the program supported school leadership engaging parents and the broader community in the arts and other aspects of children's school learning?
- To what extent and in what ways have productive partnerships been built between schools and local artists/arts organizations?
- What are the practice learnings regarding the project management issues relevant to its effective operation?
- How appropriate and effective was the program's initial engagement with schools and communities and the overall site selection processes?
- How relevant and useful was the artists' induction to the program including cultural awareness training and preparation for living in a remote Indigenous community?
- What are the most effective ways to scaffold the artists' practice learnings so their work has relevance to children's learning journeys?
- How well were the program and personal support needs (including accommodation) of artists met to during their delivery of the program?

Further data were drawn from classroom observations, with the MSHR researcher observing classes and arts activities at each school site during schools visits in Terms 3 and 4. The purpose of the observations was to gather data about teacher/artist interaction and collaboration, student-artist/teacher interaction and engagement and other aspects of classroom behaviour and students engagement with the arts learning activities. Although a classroom observation schedule was created to help systematise the noting of the observational data, in the event it proved inefficient to try to slot notes into predetermined categories, and the researcher switched to taking less structured notes to allow more easily for the recording unforeseen events and post-observation interpretations.

Transcribed interviews and written notes were collated with a view to determining the ways in which the program had addressed the stated outcomes. Additionally, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify emergent issues that would be relevant to future iterations of the program.

4.3.3 Summary of evaluation activities

In June 2012, Researchers from MSHR met with officers from DET and CIYA to agree on the program logic and the evaluation framework for AiRS.

In July the first interviews were carried out in Darwin by a MSHR researcher with the seven AiRS artists as part of their 5 day debrief and professional development workshop run by Corrugated Iron Youth Arts during the school holidays.

A monitoring meeting with MSHR, NTDET, Arts NT and DEEWR was held on August 23, 2012.

In September and October, a researcher from MSHR visited Galiwin'ku, Maningrida and Nyirrpri to conduct interviews with the artists, and with school leaders and teachers, parents, community artists and arts organisations.

In Maningrida, the researcher observed classes, before-school activities, and performances. She also interviewed the principal, the assistant principal (primary), the AiRS artists, and the coordinator of the arts centre. She attended a meeting with the assistant principal, early childhood teachers and the AiRS artists to discuss the AiRS program for the following term. She also viewed various products of the arts program, such as the woven sculpture, and class films and puppets.

In Galiwin'ku, the researcher observed classes, and formally interviewed the artists, and two assistant principals, and had more informal conversations with assistant teachers, and early childhood coordinators. She viewed video and photographic documentation of the Island Night performance, and took part in a discussion about the AiRS program at a meeting of early childhood teachers.

At Nyirrpri, the researcher interviewed the artist, the school principal and three teachers, and informally spoke with local artists who were engaged in painting the walls. The researcher observed at first hand the musical playground equipment the musicians had constructed. As Rob Hoad and Kristie Schubert were also visiting Nyirrpri during this time, the researcher was also able to interview

them, and to observe some of their class sessions in both early childhood and the upper primary sections of the school.

Throughout the year the CIYA project manager visited each school site a number of times, and produced monthly reports on the artists' activities.

In November, a brief set of evaluation questions was prepared by MSHR and sent to the artists for their written feedback. The MSHR researcher interviewed the AiRS project managers and prepared an interim report for CIYA.

In December, the AiRS artists attended a two-day "Wrap" session in Darwin and presented some of their work to an audience of government representatives, arts educators, CIYA board members, researchers and other interested people. The MSHR researcher presented a draft report to the artists and CIYA project managers, inviting feedback and further input.

5. Did the program meet the objectives?

The following sections address the six key objectives of the AiRS program in light of the data from observations, interviews and written feedback gathered in the course of this evaluation study.

5.1 Objective 1

Promote the use of arts in schools as a positive means of engaging children in school learning and encouraging regular school attendance

Most of the artists, teachers and school leaders were unequivocally enthusiastic about the ways they had seen children engaging with arts activities throughout the year, and the possibilities afforded by artists in residence. The CIYA team documented a wide range of photographic, film and writing evidence of children participating in arts activities facilitated by the AiRS artists. These are outlined above, under the heading, “Program Highlights,” and the activities are also discussed in more detail below (see 5.3). Several themes emerged from the reflections of artists, teachers and school leaders about what had, for them, been key in the children’s engagement.

Firstly, most participants considered that having the artists at the school for an extended time had a settling effect on the children and allowed them to build familiarity and cohesion through repetition. This in turn acted as a counter to some of the chaos that often pervades remote classrooms:

In cultures where cultural and ceremonial business has been integral to maintaining peace and equilibrium but to some degree is lost and, where there is trauma and a break down of community spirit, a chaotic element arises that often negatively impacts classroom environments. Interestingly the classroom can potentially be a place where a sense of culture and community cohesion can be rebuilt. Building familiarity through repetition is something we employed to address this. (Artist)

A number of interviewees contrasted the potential of the AiRS program with the limitations of artists making short or irregular visits to schools, noting particularly the value of helping children build longer-term relationships with both the artists and learning:

This was a more sustained integrated approach into what a school can do with artists, longer-term things. It wasn't about ... the end product; I think with this it's been about the relationship that's built with the kids, and how [the artists] have been able to ... scaffold them into learning whatever the skill is that they're trying to do. (Assistant principal)

A second theme that emerged from discussions with the artists in particular related to the power of learning through the whole body and through the tactile, for example:

Drama or storytelling is best kick-started through making something with their hands like building a prop or painting a backdrop. Once they feel it and see it, they leap into the story of it all much easier. (Artist)

Sometimes, kids would rush up to us after the session and hug us saying, “Thank you! Thank you!” My guess is that the thrill of the physicality and collective unity was a buzzing and happy sort of adrenaline kick that too often is experienced through much less happy circumstances. (Artist)

This theme is further explored below in 5.3.

A third theme related to the nature of the children’s engagement. This was widely understood as being primarily the ability to act positively and purposefully, both as an individual and collectively, for example:

In essence, our work helps build group cohesion and individual participation. I think good group cohesion and individual participation is essential to effective teaching in the classroom regardless of subject matter. (Artist)

A number of teachers in the schools we visited would confide in us and say something along the lines of: “As much as it pains me to say, I’ve had to let my expectations of curriculum come second to the simple aim of getting the kids to be in the classroom together without fighting.” Willowra and Yuendumu in particular experienced trauma in their communities to a level that made it difficult for the students to be in classrooms. They were tired, upset, ready to fight, reactive, unsettled, unfocused ... We decided that if we could get the students in a room together, experiencing something collectively that was satisfying and fun, we would have achieved something. And we did this: through persistence, through rhythm, through the building of instruments, through songs and through movement. (Artist)

Despite the many positive observations about students’ engagement in the arts activities, artists and school staff were hesitant to relate the program to students’ school attendance patterns. The artists were sensitive to the fact that children may choose not to attend school for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of the programs that are offered:

I’m still getting to know which kids belong to which clan groups, but I’ve heard lots of stories about kids who won’t come to school because they’re bullied, or because they don’t fit in to this group or that group, or parents who feel they’ve been isolated from the schooling system as well. (Artist)

There’s so many variables, so it’s hard to isolate and say, “The kids are coming because of this.” Because of recent restructuring, and new ways of operating the school, attendance is already on the up anyway, so it would be hard to say it’s as a result of this program. And depending on how we operate within each classroom, it’s hard to know if the kids understand that we operate in two week blocks, or if we work in this classroom every Tuesday or Wednesday: it would be hard to know if the kids come to school just for our activity. We’ve seen when the sports carnival is on, the attendance massively increased. And that’s a whole school involvement thing, so everyone’s talking that same thing, but our kids wouldn’t know that tomorrow is arts activities. (Artist)

This sentiment was echoed by various school personnel. An assistant principal reflected on the relationship between attendance and school programs:

It's naive to assume that these sorts of things [arts programs] affect attendance. There's not going to be a conversation out in the community, "There are two new people at the school and they do drama and it's really good fun so I should go to school." It just doesn't work that way. I suppose the other side of that is that, we're here, all day every day, and we do some fantastic things with the kids, ... really well planned teaching, lots of activities and excursions, acknowledging their language and culture in the way that we teach and we're very well equipped... We try every day to [improve attendance] and I don't think there's any magic solution to that. I think it doesn't mean we stop trying and it doesn't mean we don't do these wonderful programs for the kids because the ones that come deserve it, but it doesn't work like that, [as if] there's going to be message tree that "Oh there's something different happening at schools, you've got to get down there." (Assistant principal)

Another senior staff member commented:

For attendance, we don't have the answer. One program isn't going to be the answer. We don't understand why kids are here one day but not the next. In terms of getting kids to come to school, I'd say no, [this program is not the answer], but seeing the kids enjoy it, and seeing the performance and their confidence, ... that's a key part. (Assistant principal)

These participants thus believed that the engagement potential of the arts may not of itself be sufficient to impact on children's attendance rates; and other factors, external to classroom practice, may impact more significantly on whether children come to school. It seems that attendance patterns in remote schools are complex, and not easily accounted for. Often in remote schools only a minority of students attend more than 80% of the time. This means that any school-based activity, no matter how 'engaging', reaches and affects only a small percentage of the student body in any sustained way. The issue of attendance merits further interrogation, as currently we lack an adequate understanding of how various factors work together to determine whether or not children attend school in remote settings. We note that actually we understand very little about the extent to which school activities actually influence children's decisions to attend, or not to attend, school. We need a better overall understanding of what impacts on children's habits of attendance, and what impacts on their attention to the activities of schooling.

5.2 Objective 2

Develop a shared school and community discourse building on arts pedagogy and cultural ways of learning to scaffold children's competencies in literacy and numeracy.

The AiRS program provided opportunities for teachers and artists to break down some of the boundaries between their areas of expertise. In the most general sense, as noted above, the arts activities brought people together with a common purpose to do the very tangible activities introduced by the artists:

We realised that the music and movement that we brought to the classroom resembled/is cultural activity and helped bring people together into a unified sense of purpose/celebration. (Artist)

Many of these activities were created through a process of collaboration and negotiation with teachers and others. The fact that the artists' roles were not preconceived or predetermined meant that there was room for innovation and experimentation in how teachers collaborated:

I don't think there is an ideal ... that you're striving for, that's part of the process, the good part, it provided an opportunity to try things that maybe you wouldn't, I don't mean crazy things, but just trying different things to try to embed it, it does break down some of the structures that classroom teachers have built in to ensure a safe environment. ... I think that's what's good about not trying to box it in to what it should and shouldn't look like. And that's the approach we've taken. There's been plenty of flexibility to change it and modify it. (Assistant principal)

The artists' roles and the nature of the artists' status in the classroom also needed to be negotiated: "They're not release teachers, they work with the teachers, where possible they plan with the teachers" (Assistant principal). The artists, too, took time to work out their own roles, as one artist commented: "We're not really teachers, but we're not a kid either - or a parent". Additionally, the artists stressed the importance of taking enough time to establish ways of working and getting to know the children: "It's been amazing to have the luxury to try to build rapport and have a play and see what the kids take to and really get to know them, which is mainly what I've focussed on for the first term." (Artist)

Artists and teachers agreed that there was a need to build a shared language about working with the arts, as the teachers might be quite protective of their area, and the artists somewhat intimidated by the curriculum.

I think the program itself has helped to enrich these conversations and shown teachers other methods of exploring curriculum. I believe it has added another dimension to the conversation. Teachers have indicated to me that some of the activities we have engaged in will be carried over into their classroom teaching, which is a great result. (Artist)

The artists were also keen to be able to pass their skills on to teachers:

For participatory storytelling, we designed them so that they didn't need much to make them work: mainly just direct time with the students. They did involve a live musician and a dancer leading them, but we designed the activities so that they could potentially use recorded music or video to facilitate them. (Artist)

A valuable outcome of the program was that generalist teachers have gained confidence in tackling the arts, using new technologies and incorporating these activities into their everyday teaching.

I think the program overall has been great for the school, it's been really good for the kids to have other people, to bring expertise into school that teachers may or may not have and perhaps that's an area where teachers aren't always confident in performing. (Assistant principal)

An assistant principal, reflecting on a teachers' discussion about learning more about the arts, commented, "It was nice to hear that they've seen activities done, and they think 'I can do that too.'" The artists, for their part, reflected positively on the way many of the teachers had worked collaboratively on the arts activities, or participated themselves in the class with the students:

Often when I'm in there [with one of the teachers] it feels like team teaching because she'll just pick ideas up and run with them and be creative herself, and that's really nice. And another one really engages when I'm in there, so it's not like team teaching in the sense that [while] I'm having input, it's really supportive because she's doing the stuff, and I've found that to be really important that the teachers are engaged with what's happening when I'm in there. (Artist)

Building a shared language also encompassed finding ways to bring local languages into the arts activities, and in this way, the AiRS program also afforded Indigenous school staff ways to be involved in classroom activities that they might not otherwise have had.

The translation of the fun action song "Shake it Out" (Yurnku yurnku jarriya) into Warlpiri was certainly favoured wherever we went, with students, parents, teachers and assistant teachers both Kardiya and Yapa joining in singing and dancing. (Artist)

The demonstration project has highlighted some of the challenges inherent in building a shared discourse about arts pedagogies at the various sites. Timetabling was largely experimental at the start and changed over time. The process was not always easy, and it was largely dependent on the personalities and confidence levels of all the participants. Additionally, the artists in particular drew greatly on their personal skills of negotiation. They were initially very conscious of not wanting to appear overly intrusive:

We stressed that we wanted to be able to fit into school timetables without negative impact, potentially enhancing teachers practice and helping to build skills in our area of expertise. Senior staff drafted timetables that suited most but there was regular adaptation to the unforeseen. (Artist)

Teaching staff in remote communities are often inundated with visitors, which can interfere with core teaching practice and scheduling and we were very aware of this. (Artist)

Because of the openness of the AiRS program aims, and the fact that it did need to remain flexible, at times within this process of negotiation there was clear potential for school leaders, teachers and artists to be at cross-purposes. The problems inherent in the process of negotiation were illustrated at a staff meeting attended by the MSHR researcher towards the end of the second 10-week period of the artists' residence (Term 3), where the teachers discussed the processes and impact of the

program. It emerged through the conversation that the class teachers and their assistant principal had at times had some differences of thinking about the purposes of working with the artist. On the one hand, some teachers disclosed that they were feeling pressured to make the artists' activities link into their structured literacy program as much as possible. The assistant principal, on the other hand, felt that exclusively linking the artists' activities in this way had never in fact been the goal of the program, and that the intrinsic worth of "arts for arts' sake", and creating dramatic play across the curriculum, was essential.

Further, some teachers were naturally more open to collaboration with the artists than others. Documenting some of the difficulties has highlighted the importance of making sure that everybody is well briefed and included from the start of the program. Particularly for the musicians who were making short repeat visits to the Warlpiri schools, the need for careful consultation with the schools emerged as an important issue during their first school visits, and they commented that they would have valued a period of scoping similar to that afforded to the other artists (who were effectively using the first term of their residency to scope the following two terms):

There seemed to be a lack of clarity about the scope and nature of the project with principals and teachers at the outset of the project. There was not enough consultation with teaching staff, students, parents and the community in general prior to the beginning of the project. ... It's tricky because teachers are generally very busy people but we would have liked to have had more time to reflect with teachers about processes outside of the casual encounters we had with them. Perhaps we need to schedule this in the future? (Artist)

The artists also often lacked some confidence and struggled to find a way to negotiate their ideas with teachers within what they perceived to be a rigid curriculum structure.

Trying to work out how we fit without disrupting. How do we access the classes we need to access without disrupting the literacy and numeracy programs as they stand, but how do we bring the arts into the literacy and numeracy curriculum, which, when you have a policy telling to the schools what they have to deliver, so there's not a lot of room for us to work out how this drama or circus exercise fits into the kids learning maths and learning English. I see heaps of ways we can work, but the teachers have this program they need to deliver in a particular way, so that needs to be negotiated. (Artist)

Planning time with teachers was at a premium, and most of the artists felt that they would have liked more time to plan with teachers, particularly in the early weeks of their residence. In their early interviews, the artist express a certain amount of frustration with issues of timetabling, feeling that that without their involvement in the classes being strongly supported by the school leadership, they were easily marginalised:

If you genuinely want arts in the curriculum you need to allow that from the top, otherwise it's token effort, but it's got to be a structure that can allow us to interact with it, so that is one of the walls that have come up in the timetabling. (Artist)

On the whole, however, most problems were negotiated over time:

In the beginning there were teething problems, but I think that was just that initial [teachers thinking], “How valuable are you going to be?” Probably the only thing is I sometimes feel I don't have enough time for prep with the teachers, but I think we've found ways around that, I can pop in and chat whenever I need and find out what's important. (Artist)

I think we struggled at first ... with how everybody would work together, and the first part of it I think [the artists] just got to know the classes and tried to work out what the teachers might like to do, [and] they spent some time programming and timetabling to see what they would feel like. ... They came in and out of classes and then at about 7 weeks, we then worked out what Term 3 would look like, and what teachers would like it to look like. (Assistant principal)

While the stories of negotiations were mostly positive, they were not successful in every case, and there were some teachers who found the artists too much of an intrusion on their program. In one school, teachers and the artist reported that they had, over the course of the three terms, sustained little shared understanding of the nature of the artist's role, the desired outcomes, and ways of working together. There was a lot of frustration all round, and as time passed, the communication did not become any easier. The overall sense from the teachers was one of disruption rather than integration:

We have so many people coming up and doing things like that it disrupts the whole program. If they're coming out like that, they need to be in the activities part of it, not taking over our reading, literacy ... and all that time, which is what happens when people come out now. They need to be part of a rotation. ... It's all very well for people to come out and having all these wonderful things to do, but they need to appreciate that as well as doing that the kids need to do other stuff. (Teacher)

This level of dissatisfaction is instructive in drawing attention to the need to include classroom teachers, as well as the school leadership, in the initial negotiations about the any future project. It also suggests that building a shared discourse about the arts in a particular school may be a matter than runs much deeper than a negotiated timetable. It may require, among other things, commitment to much longer term discussions, and clearly agreed choices of direction for each school. From the position of project management, the shared discourse also needs to extend beyond the confines of individual schools. In this, the Corrugated Iron Youth Arts project managers emphasised the importance of using broader connections and networks of schools with a strong arts focus, such as Millner Primary School, Anula Primary School, the Alice Springs-based InCite Youth Arts. These networks can help promote different models of artist engagement, providing teachers with some examples for helping them choose styles of collaboration suitable for different contexts.

5.3 Objective 3

Identify effective pedagogies used by artists and investigate how these can be developed and used by classroom teachers to help students engage with school learning and improve outcomes in literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking skills.

Throughout the three school terms of the program, the artists brought a range of art forms into classrooms, in many different ways. Activities included using drama, puppetry, music, photos and video to produce retellings of the stories that children study or create in literacy; visual arts projects in collaboration with community artists using media such as weaving, sculpture or painting; open-ended play activities; yoga, clowning and other circus arts. While much of the work was open-ended with an emphasis on the process of learning, a significant body of work also culminated in visual displays or performances of drama, dance and music. Importantly, the AiRS program gave classroom teachers opportunities that they would not otherwise have had to explore multiple arts activities over time, and to develop their own knowledge about how to integrate these activities across the curriculum. Whether integrated into various curriculum areas or taught separately, the artists and most of the teachers felt that the arts work in Early Childhood should be embedded into the core curriculum work of the school, rather than being seen as an 'add-on'.

As noted above, teachers varied greatly in their confidence to work with different art forms, so artists had to adjust the way they managed the collaboration, according to whether the teacher felt able to team teach, or wanted to step back. Even within their regular literacy program, some teachers were happy to accept help. Walking Talking Texts, the literacy program that is used at Galiwin'ku, for example, has a component of role play in its teaching cycle, and some teachers specifically asked for help with this. Other teachers were looking for inspiration in other kinds of activity:

I had one teacher who said, "I'm not confident with this drama stuff, I'm not confident to do spoken English or get the kids to stand up in front of the class, ... and then another who is confident with that said, "Oh, they do Walking Talking Texts to death the rest of the week, can you give them something else," so it's been a class by class basis. (Artist)

One way of approaching the artists' involvement was for the artist to work with children towards a specific outcome, such as the production of a film (based a book studied in class, or on a story generated by the children themselves). However, the artists as well as the school staff also stressed the importance of working with process, as well as product.

This was a more sustained, integrated approach into what a school can do with an artist, longer-term things. It wasn't about creating a big presentation at the end necessarily, but ... I think with this it's been about the relationship that's built with the kids, and how [the artists] been able to scaffold them into the learning of whatever the skill is that they're trying to do. (Assistant principal)

Effective pedagogies were explored in many different ways. Some key ways of relating the arts to the early childhood curriculum are presented in the following sections.

5.3.1 Integrating arts with literacy and numeracy

At Galiwin'ku and Maningrida, the artists worked with teachers through the school literacy programs: Accelerated Literacy at Maningrida, and Walking Talking Texts at Galiwin'ku. Both programs involve in-depth study of a text (In early childhood usually a picture book) over a number of weeks. One advantage of working with a specific literacy program that focuses on a book was that the artists could build up familiarity with the text and the set routines:

It's good because I haven't ended up having the prep time I was hoping for with teachers, but for Walking Talking Texts they can say, "Here's the book," and I generally have a good idea of the sorts of things they're going to do, so I can use the language and focus at that time, and implement the program around that. (Artist)

Artists also used film extensively, to create songs based on the text; to retell stories using role play, puppets, and masks, in the process creating new resources which potentially could be used again with the original class texts. In one case the film work involved working with filmmaker Peta Khan; in other cases it involved filming using iPads, allowing the children themselves to do the filming and teaching the process of the story making to the teachers. The artists also used music to develop language and storytelling, using invented stories:

We invented stories which involved collective actions, group singing, and room for the students to guess answers, anticipate outcomes and contribute ideas. (Artist)

The pavement art created at Galiwin'ku by Jeffery Gurruwiwi and Gavin Vance is example of integrating the arts with both literacy and numeracy. Jeffery's concept was to paint a goanna through which children could experience storytelling and numbers. The goanna can be seen to have walked in a great splash of blue paint on the part from Preschool, and with each footprint there is a number to represent the steps he took to reach the Transition classroom.

Artists and teachers spoke about finding it more difficult to integrate the arts with numeracy concepts, but this may simply reflect a preference on the part of most of the artists for the dramatic arts, which related more obviously to the study of language. Music provided more direct links to maths. For example, the musicians constructed musical playground equipment and this was used in an integrated way with science and maths:

The maths/science teacher at Willowra was impressed with the applied mathematics and the science of tuning to the correct note/frequency. ... It's almost certain that these instruments will encourage an ongoing exploration of music, and possibly science and maths, well after the AiRS program is over. (Artist)

As well as making explicit links to the literacy or numeracy curriculum, some school staff stressed the importance of exploring the arts "for their own sake", with the understanding that, particularly in

Early Childhood, activities such as drama, movement or visual arts invariably link back to every aspect of the curriculum.

5.3.2 “Brains learning from bodies”

Artists stressed the benefits of working “with the whole child”, and “allowing brains to learn from bodies”, in contrast to what might be perceived as the more cerebral focus of much everyday activity in school.

An assistant principal related drama activities with the Perceptual Motor Program that the early childhood children attend most days, and was keen that the artists be involved:

A lot of the stuff you do - balancing body, moving your body in different ways, understanding left and right, and crossing the mid line. Maybe you don't even know you're doing in drama, but you often are. It was really good that we could ... use [the artists] in this way. (Assistant principal)

The musicians emphasised the potential of rhythm to help children focus, use language, connect as a group, and have fun:

Younger students love rhythmic, patterned dance games. It helps, with these, to have a strong beat that the children can fall into sync with. Then they love the delight of remembering the pattern of the sequence (and being given an opportunity to declare out loud what the next sequence involves), the challenge of changes in tempo, the surprise of freeze moments, the connectedness of moving and vocalising in unison and the satisfaction of being able to call chants out loud! These age groups seem to respond incredibly well to “full body” involvement in activities and to the delight of stories, imagination and physically “creating” what is being talked about. (Artist)

The “hands on” nature of the learning was equally valid for teachers as for students:

Teachers and students were able to engage quickly with the ideas and activities we presented even though they weren't familiar to many. The “hands on” use of combinations of language, maths, music and movement brought new dynamics to classrooms that teachers appreciated and were sometimes able to employ when we weren't there. (Artist)

5.3.3 Working in language

The artists often stressed the value of finding ways to work with the children's home languages, finding that in many instances children have a greater level of conviction if they are working with their own language. As noted above in 5.2, the musicians, for example, worked with songs translated into Warlpiri:

The songs we had translated into Warlpiri gave great delight to students, assistant teachers and visiting parents. Assistant teachers and parents seemed to engage with us on a better level after we'd brought these songs into our play with the students. And the students themselves would sing and dance with a greater level of conviction. (Kristie)

Sarah Hope created the clown character, Mili, in part to address the Yolngu teachers' wish that children could learn about school behaviours through drama. Mili, also promoted the use of children's first language in the classroom, to generating conversations and thinking, as Sarah noted:

Conversations about Mili were very useful, because she generates a lot of talk. In class, there is a lot of talk in English about what Mili does; the children also talk with the assistant teacher in Yolngu Matha.

5.3.4 Learning through aesthetic and emotional expression

The activities of the artists in the AiRS program highlighted the place in learning of emotional and aesthetic elements. One artist spoke of the need to find a position of emotional "quiet" as a basis for all other learning, and her consequent focus on activities that focus specifically on wellbeing, such as yoga:

I think there's so much going on for those kids, of course it's going to be difficult for them to be learning how to read and write in another language when they're not even up to the level of learning how to read and write in their own language and they're five and they've got so many other home life problems and personal dynamics with all the other kids in the classroom. That's already so much to be digesting. That's why I try to target wellbeing stuff because for them even to be in a space to start learning, they have to quieten down, or it's just like the teacher is going to have a really difficult job and it'll feel like they're not getting anywhere. (Artist)

Artists also related the care that they took with the aesthetic quality of their productions with the fundamental experience of learning. Conor Fox, for example, worked with a Transition class to create a shadow puppet show in which the audience were seated inside a geometric dome in which the walls functioned as a screen, and the images were then projected on to the outside of the dome. The effect was not only breathtakingly beautiful, but it also created an intensified experience for the children and adults in the dome, arguably helping them to internalise and remember the event. All of the artists spoke about the value of creating some products that look professional, so that children get the sense that their own input is valued and valuable. The films produced by Felicity Horsley and Peta Khan were examples of this.

The musicians spoke about the children's delight and emotional comfort in being asked to repeat familiar activities, as well as the value of "surprise":

Because we were dropping in and out of very chaotic communities, repetition was an incredibly helpful tool: far more helpful than I would have imagined. ... The pattern has to be challenging and surprising enough on the first instance, so that they enjoy learning it. Once it's mastered, there is a delight in revisiting the moments they love in the stories, song or dances. There is a sense of success in remembering what comes next. There is a familiarisation with patterns and discourses and cause-and-effect. There is a sense of comfort in the familiar. And, also, there is a growing freedom of expression.

Clearly, leading the sessions that are described here required technical and pedagogical skill, but the artists' comments also point to the advantages of "lightening up" in teaching; while teachers need to be sensitive to covering curriculum material, there is so much scope for children to begin to attend to many aspects of learning when they are presented with patterned activities that allow them to express themselves and have fun, as Kristie commented:

We were lucky, as a pair of artists running classes, that I could often take on the role of the physically expressive, ridiculous "clown" that the students could watch or copy while Robbie provided rhythm or instructions and so on. The children (particularly in the Transition to Year 3 age range) are fascinated by the physicality, the ridiculousness, the parody of emotions, the comedy, the tragedy and the sheer energetic presence of "clowns". The clowns don't always have to have a costume: they can just take on these elements to help engage the students.

5.3.5 Reflective learning

"Mili the clown" was an example of a drama-related pedagogical device that encouraged children to be reflective, notably about behaviour, rules, and ways of learning. Sarah described Mili as an "experiment taking a character into the classroom, as an engagement tool, as a self-reflective tool in terms of behaviour or any other issues that the teachers bring up, for whoever wants to be involved."

Mili was used as communication tool, between teachers and children and also to encourage self-guided learning and reflections on behaviour. She served, for example, as a role model for the children in maths when she answered questions, sometimes getting the wrong answer. The teacher could then ask the children to explain the maths to Mili and in the process of this, observe how the children went about displaying their own understanding. Mili was also used by teachers to help explore issues that arose in sporadic ways in class. One of the teachers, for example, noticed that children would touch Mili a lot, and so used the clown as a prompt to remind the children about personal space. The teachers considered Mili a very good settling tool. Mili also gave the assistant teachers a very concrete, proactive way of identifying productive behaviours in school, in contrast to the extrinsic, reactive behaviour management style characteristic of some assistant teachers.

All of these ways of using the arts - embedding them in literacy and maths lessons, expressing emotions and using the body, using first language and finding dramatic tools for reflecting about learning generally – may potentially make an enormous difference in the schooling of Indigenous children in remote communities, and merit further research.

5.4 Objective 4

Support school leadership to engage parents and the broader community in the arts and other aspects of children's school learning

A significant element of the artists' job was to try to involve parents and community in their activities, but it was not always clear for them where to begin. Time emerged as the most important organisational factor for allowing them to make inroads into engaging parents and the broader

community. It was clear to all the artists that the possibility of engaging parents would depend on establishing working and trusting relationships:

The community engagement component is a job in itself, and if you want a job well done, you have to spend a lot of time to really work out how you make that really work. (Artist)

Most artists reported having used a twofold approach for beginning to engage parents in their work: firstly, building relationships with assistant teachers (ATs), and secondly, finding ways to invite parents into the classroom or to view the outcomes of their work. For the five artists in residence, the process of building relationships with assistant teachers varied according to the dynamics of the classes and the school. One artist reported that she “tried to naturally build relationships with assistant teachers. [There’s] one in each class, and ...they are really consistent.” For others, the role of the assistant teachers and how to tap into the potential of working with them was not always clear, particularly at the beginning of their stay. It seemed to one artist that the stronger Indigenous people who had some involvement in the school were studying, or doing other things, but were not in positions where they could lead early childhood lessons:

There's ATs [in the early childhood classrooms], but they're not given a lot of power in the classroom, they're sort of there to chop the paper or get the scissors, and quell behavioural issues that come up when they really need to. (Artist)

The same kind of variation existed in the artists’ experiences of trying to connect with parents. One artist reported,

There's an open door policy, parents can come to school and they do, so I try to keep in check with people who are around so they know what I'm doing. (Artist)

In contrast, another artist had a completely different experience, while acknowledging that they were working to change the situation:

Parental involvement is limited. It seems as if something happened a few years ago, and so it seems really strange the relationship between the school and the community at the moment, but there's efforts being made to bring people in through different programs and that's part of our plan as well, so hopefully that'll begin to increase. (Artist)

Another artist’s comments about the need to take time included an acknowledgement that part of this was coming to understand the complexities of the community context:

The reasons that parents aren't engaged are varied and they're also sensitive questions that are slowly unfolding and I don't know the reasons. (Artist)

One (male) artist identified gender as an issue in making links with the assistant teachers, who were mostly women:

For me one of the largest things has been the gender question: there's very few male ATs within the school, there's only one in early childhood and he's quite young; the cultural advisors in the school are all female as well and so I've found it hard to even find the people to ask the questions of how to engage both content and process. (Artist)

The visiting musicians in the Warlpiri schools had less opportunity to build up relationships over time because their visits were so short, but they reported the assistant teachers not only joining in with lessons, but also helping out with translating songs into Warlpiri, and building musical equipment:

We did ... have good involvement from assistant teachers in Yuendumu and Willowra and family members in Willowra, too. Assistant teachers sat down with us in Yuendumu to translate songs into Warlpiri. This assisted the bond with assistant teachers in all the schools, whose faces lit up when we sang in their language. In Willowra, Frankie, an assistant teacher who longs to get involved but often doesn't seem to have a place, came into his own while helping build the musical playground equipment. He even gave us and the boys a spontaneous bush-tucker lesson when we started using part of a local tree in our construction.

In Willowra, junior primary teachers encouraged mothers to sit in on the lessons. ... These women also spontaneously offered gentle instructions in Warlpiri, helping their kids more fully participate in the activities. ... Given a longer stay, it could be an idea to build on those relationships, perhaps even starting a "mums and kids" session (or "carers and kids", given that Nannas and Aunties are equally involved in raising kids!), which would foster learning and literacy and laughter. (Artist)

The imperative of building relationships was evident even for the artists who were visiting communities for very brief periods. If the visits were to be short, then they needed to be repeated. One artist offered the following comment:

Consistency is important. If the program can continue I would recommend artists, whether they were lead or visiting artists, revisit the community and their work wherever possible because so much of this work is about building relationships. (Artist)

In Maningrida, the advantage of having the program over three terms was brought home clearly with the Christmas concert, at the end of the school year. The final 2 weeks of the artists' stay in the community was spent in a very busy schedule to create a show of an impressive scale (the artists managed to work right across the school, with about 15 classes, to produce the acts). The show was well attended by the community. At this point it seemed as if the work of the whole year was able to be drawn together, and a lot of people came up to the artists to say how much they had appreciated the show, and that the show had managed to make a connection with the community in a way that hadn't been achieved in past years. Hence, as one of the artists commented, "The impact of the show went way outside the school boundary." The school council, Yuya Bol, also demonstrated their support of the artists by writing a strong letter of support, listing the ways that they felt the artists had enriched the school life.

In summary, school leaders and artists stressed the usefulness and importance of the artists staying for significant periods of time, as they appreciated that the artists needed the time to build relationships, to learn something about culture and language, and to come to understand the social dynamics of the community.

5.5 Objective 5

Build productive partnerships between schools and local artists/arts organisations

There was considerable shift in participants' attitudes to the engagement of local artists between the start and end of the eight-month period of the 2012 AiRS program. At the end of the first term, the artists were still feeling somewhat daunted by this aspect of their role. Particularly in the early days of the residence, most of the artists felt that, given the intensity of their classroom-based work, it was going to be difficult to find the time to set up the right kinds of relationships with local artists. Indeed, one artist commented that it was like "having two jobs".

The artists commented that even short-term, one-off events, such as getting people in to paint or do a workshop, could take a huge amount of work to organise, and needed to be grounded in a commitment to creating personal relationships. They also commented that it took time to work through such questions as who to talk to, and the best ways to work in each community. At Maningrida, for example, building a relationship with the Maningrida Arts and Culture centre required some delicate navigating, again requiring sensitivity and time, as one of the artists commented:

One thing has been linking up with artists in the community: the arts centre only allows for traditional media and styles, which I'm not familiar with, so we've been having discussions about how to engage community artists because they don't use canvas or acrylic paints or modern sculptural media. So navigating whether it's stepping on anyone's toes to engage artists to come into the school to use contemporary media, or if it's offensive to use traditional media in new ways, they're all questions that are gradually unfolding, but it hasn't been a stressful thing; it seems like it's a slow unfolding anyway.

With time, however, the artists made solid connections. In Galiwin'ku, Gavin sought out a local artist, Jeffery Gurruwiwi, who was prepared to come to the school to work with teachers to design some ground paintings (for example, hopscotch games) with a local theme. The school subsequently agreed to employ Jeffery as a part time teaching artist in the school from 2013. Other connections across the AiRS program were made with Marthakal Rangers in Galiwin'ku, the Elcho Island Art and Craft Centre, the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA), Maningrida Arts and Culture and Warlukulangu Arts at Nyirpi.

For the short-term artists, however, community involvement in their work was not really possible within the timeframe.

We had no time to make contact or get to know community artists to invite or facilitate their participation ...If we had more time to scope and network in the community, I'm sure we would have been better placed to initiate these processes. (Artist)

Community connections take a long time to establish: particularly in Central Australian communities where, like the sparse trees and bushes, relationships take a long time to grow and, like the waiting sandy rivers, may only really come together and collaborate every once in a while. The two communities we worked in for longer periods (Willowra and Yuendumu) were also undergoing very significant community trauma and upheavals, making everything additionally touchy and tricky. Quite simply, it seemed that community involvement was beyond the scope of our endeavour. (Artist)

And even with the time, local participation may not be a fait accompli. One artist made an important observation about the need for local people to be able to drive their own participation:

This is an area I have found most challenging. One of the issues has been that in a lot of the projects I was approaching people with an idea rather than setting up an avenue for people to implement their own ideas within the program – for that to occur effectively I think the program would need to be approached differently. Even after series of consultations with individuals and organisation I found it difficult to retain interest from local artists in what we were doing. (Artist)

This comment points to the critical need to be aware that engagement must be constructed as a two-way process: it is not simply a matter of inviting people into the school to work within the school's agenda, but must always be attendant on and in dialogue with the motivations of local people.

5.6 Objective 6

Document the process issues relevant to the program's effective operation and the practice learnings regarding the following issues:

- a) The school and community engagement and selection processes;
- b) The artists' recruitment and selection processes;
- c) The artists' induction to the program including cultural awareness training and preparation for living in a remote Indigenous community;
- d) The program and personal support needs of artists delivering the arts programs in schools;
- e) The program specifications, performance and outcome measures needed to inform the development of an Australian Research Council Partnership Grant for the evaluation of a subsequent roll-out of the program in NT remote schools.

A final objective of the evaluation documented by this report was to reflect on the operation of the AiRS program, with specific focus on those processes that will be most effective in future successful iterations.

5.6.1 Setting up the program

On the whole, the artists were very happy with their induction to the program, which consisted of a five-day workshop in April, followed up by two days “recall” in July. They particularly appreciated the cultural communication workshop conducted by the Centre for School Leadership, Learning and Development at Charles Darwin University, and a visit to Anula Primary School to gain insights into the nature of play-based learning and to learn about their specialist visual arts program.

Questions about selecting schools, recruiting and setting up the residencies on the ground were largely represented by the participants (artists, teachers, school leaders and the project managers) as being part of the broader issue of good communication and adequate scoping time. There was a general agreement among participants about the importance of taking time early in the year to scope the program with the schools, and of carefully negotiating and defining of the artists’ roles. In retrospect, it is clear that there were many layers of communication to be managed. For example, the following lines of communication were all vital to the success of the program:

- project managers to school leaders (college directors, principals and assistant principals);
- project managers to artists;
- school leaders to teachers;
- school leaders amongst one another (e.g., college directors to principals);
- school leaders to artists
- artists to teachers;
- AiRs artists to local artists;
- local artists to school leaders.

Some participants reported that at times they felt left out of a communication loop, and ultimately this affected those at the front line. It particularly affected the ability of the artists to feel that they had a clear understanding of the schools’ requirements, and that they could adequately communicate this to the teachers they were working with. The project managers also acknowledged that although communication had mostly been smooth in 2012, there had been some occasions when it had been less satisfactory, and they stressed that the first term of the residence was vital for establishing what the schools wanted.

Some artists and teachers would have preferred a tighter organisational structure from the beginning, with agreements about the number of class contact hours, and numbers of classes before the artists took up the positions. Others, on the other hand, stressed the desirability of having the flexibility to negotiate once they were on site. The need for flexibility was particularly emphasised by the musicians who were making short visits to the Warlpiri schools, where they found they had to negotiate and re-negotiate their schedules each time, and where their position within the dynamic of the school would potentially shift from visit to visit, as this comment illustrates:

Teachers have many pressures on them in remote schools, and if they haven't directly asked for a specific kind of interaction or outcome from visiting artists, we are just an extra ball in their already difficult juggling act. Teachers needed the flexibility to adjust their time-slot with us in various ways, and we always adjusted, making a point of reassuring them that we weren't there to shift their teaching priorities.

The idea of a scoping period came through very strongly for the short-term artists too. They would have preferred a longer scoping period, and more focused time “outside of casual encounters” for both setting up and reflection. However, they acknowledged that for the artists to be involved in the consultative process, they would need longer stays in the communities. They stressed that to derive maximum benefit from their short visits, the school needed a clear vision of the purpose of the visit; they needed to be able to facilitate time-tables and provide the artist with a clear idea of available equipment, class sizes and current influences on school life and behaviour; and they needed to have the means to broker relationships with community members.

Having experienced three school terms at the school, the longer-term artists were in a good position to reflect on the optimal time frame for their residency. There were various views on this question, largely depending on the individual experiences of the artists and the affordances of each site. The artists’ views also changed during the course of the program. After the first term, for example, the three-term arrangement seemed like a long time for most of the artists. Towards the end of the year, however, some of the artists started to feel that they were really only just “scratching the surface” and, in at least one case, that this length of time was a minimum necessary for building a rapport with staff and children, and building some sense in the broader community about the nature of their work. Referring to the end of the year concert, one artist commented:

I think it was because they got to see the concert, or maybe it was because it was the end of the year, but anyway, it was those last few weeks where we got all the good feedback, and about the rest of our time as well; it brought together the rest of our time, and people saying they had never seen that impact with a show. (Artist)

Another artist made a similar point, stressing the importance of having enough time to build relationships:

I think that for the longevity of this program is one of the things that makes it really great, and for me I tried to pick up as much language and knowledge of culture as I can and the thing about that is that it's about relationships developing naturally and it's about getting to know people and people feeling safe enough to share their culture which happens over time. (Artist)

On the other hand one of the artists did ultimately find the three-terms to be too long and felt he would have worked better with shorter periods, and time out for regeneration and rejuvenation:

Shorter periods of six or eight weeks, with a couple of weeks break would have kept the inspiration and level of creativity high. Longer periods with few sources of inspiration left me searching for ideas at times, as I became drained and uninspired. I found at times my

enthusiasm was low and there is no real way to bring that back, without a change of scene.
(Artist)

For the musicians, the short time in Warlpiri schools provided a different set of challenges. Spending only ten weeks spread over the three terms, and moving between three different schools, they had little time for forming relationships in the communities. They did, however, find that their return visits were important, and good way to build rapport: they commented that “being 'special' yet familiar visitors probably enhanced our impact much more.”

Other artists echoed this sentiment with respect to their observations of how other visiting artists had operated:

I've realised how important it is, if we're going to have visiting artists, for those visiting artists to return, rather than constantly having new people for the sake of having different art forms or whatever it is. (Artist)

5.6.2 Program and support needs

The CIYA project managers noted the need to be aware of a number of issues in supporting the artists. It was important that CIYA be sensitive to the potential difficulty of living and working in a remote community, the issues related to functioning in a school without being a direct school employee, and the attendant stresses inherent in this status, particularly the stress of needing to negotiate many of their day-to-day working operations. The project managers were also aware that the artists were living in accommodation that was very much below the standard of housing accorded to teachers. The project managers recognised that the artists may at times need to debrief with people other than direct colleagues or the project managers, and therefore needed access to counselling services. Additionally, they noted the need to make sure that the leave arrangements were well negotiated at the beginning of the program, along with a clear agreement on the questions of how much time is optimal for artists to spend in the community and how much break time is needed.

The artists spoke about the benefits of being able to meet and share their experiences regularly. CIYA set up a wiki space for sharing programming ideas, but this was not widely used. It is not yet clear what tools would be best for sharing experiences between artists in different communities.

The artists also raised the issue of pairing artists who were previous unacquainted in the same community: not only were they expected to work together, but they were also expected to live in close quarters in the rudimentary accommodation provided by the schools. One artist described this situation as “like being in an arranged marriage”, with somewhat predictable stresses.

One feature of the AiRS program in 2012 was the involvement of some artists who came to the schools on short visits to complement the skills of the artists in residence. The ability and funding to bring in other artists to support and extend the programs was very much appreciated by the residential artists.

5.6.3 Potential performance and outcome measures

A final objective of the AiRS program was to identify and trial potential program performance and outcomes measures that could be used in subsequent longer-term, systematic evaluations of the program and could also be used generally to inform research questions about arts education in Indigenous contexts.

As noted above, measures of school attendance, while easy to obtain and monitor, are unlikely to be a good indication of how well the arts programs are being either taught or received. This is because a complex range of factors influences children's attendance patterns in remote schools, and many of these are most likely unrelated to happenings at the school.

In the longer term, it may be possible to track the school performance of the current cohort of students who have benefit from the 2012 program. A suite of measures currently available may be used to track students' achievement, such as the Assessment of Student Competencies (for students in Transition and Year 1), and NAPLAN (for students in Year 3).

Future iterations of the program may also be evaluated in more qualitative ways. For example, positive outcomes may be defined by the degree to which parents and other community people are brought into the school through the arts activities. The success of the end of year concert at Maningrida is a good example of this. Similarly, the building or enriching of relationships between the schools and local arts organisations can be considered a measure of success for the program. The willingness of local artists to come into Nyirrpri school to paint the earth walls, and the development of a relationship between the school and arts centre at Maningrida (where previously little communication existed) are also examples of success.

Perhaps the most significant qualitative indicator of the program's success will be in the scope and depth of the practice-based knowledge that the artists and their collaborating teachers are able to pass on to others as a form of "collective memory" of their work. Throughout the 2012 program, Corrugated Iron Youth Arts carefully and methodically documented the AiRS program, producing regular reports and a comprehensive account of the artists' achievements. Ideally, the work that has been produced in this program should be able to be passed on to others. A task for a future artist in residence program may be to produce further exemplars of classroom work, documenting innovative pedagogies in such a way that new teachers can also benefit from the program.

6. Emerging issues

Through the documentation of the 2012 AiRS program, a number of key issues began clearly to emerge. These are questions that are not yet resolved, or working concepts that are not yet clearly defined, but that will need to be considered in any future iterations of the AiRS program. They are briefly discussed in the following sections.

6.1 Engaging students

The notion of “engagement” is one that needs some interrogation, and in particular, as noted above, we need a better understanding of the links (if and where they exist) between school activities and children’s patterns of school attendance in remote communities. As noted above, it is not clear that attractive activities at school can be linked to students’ attendance patterns. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the AiRS artists have been able to add aesthetic and embodied dimensions to the everyday work of schooling and that these have provided children with enjoyable ways of experiencing school and learning.

One of the AiRS artists, Sarah Hope, distinguished between different levels of student engagement, based on her work in the school. At the most basic level, she observed children responding to her and her activity, whether by just watching or by joining in. At another level, she found the children started to engage with her as a person, and with her role as a teacher. And finally, they began to offer their own imaginative ideas and to request favourite activities, so that they were actually contributing to the creation of the activities. Kristie Schubert stressed the power of both “comedy and tragedy”, and her observations that children engaged emotionally both through the surprise of the new, and also through the safety and comfort of repetition. Sarah and Kristie’s comments exemplify themes that came through many of the reflections of both artists and teachers, and that merit further reflection and research. Another theme that has emerged through this program and which requires further examination is that of the power of group cohesion to focus students’ attention of learning. It would be instructive to probe beyond the use of the term “engagement” as a cover term for many levels of participation in school-based activities, and to document further the different kinds of children’s engagement. It would be useful to know whether some kinds of engagement are optimal for learning, and to quantify the extent to which arts-based learning does indeed transfer to other academic areas.

6.2 Collaborative spaces

The collaborative working space between artists and teachers, and even between artists working on the same site, was at times a difficult and uncomfortable one, particularly in the early stages of the program. The conditions of working together needed in every case to be negotiated, and the success of these negotiations depended largely on the personalities and robustness of individuals to be able to extend themselves into new ways of working. It is fair to say that teachers in remote schools generally need to work hard to establish their approaches and routines in remote schools, and it is no small thing to be asked to let go of these and perhaps work differently, particularly with someone who is not a qualified teacher. Some teachers perceived the artists as being in a service provider position, and spoke of their expectations about the artist in a kind of contractual language.

For example, they spoke of “obligations”, and what the artist should “deliver”. The artists who were not trained as teachers, for their part, often found the jargon of the curriculum-speak somewhat overwhelming and intimidating.

While individual personality had much to do with how people approached the discomfort of beginning to work together, the success of the collaborations also had a structural basis, so that the teachers and artists had a much greater chance of succeeding together where the overall objectives were very explicit within the school and communicated to staff, and the management and timetabling was flexible enough to allow for the inherent uncertainties of experimental ways of working.

6.3 Engaging community

Engaging parents and local artists was one of the more difficult aspects of the artists’ role, particularly in the early stages of the residency. Without the advantage of well-developed relationships, it was difficult for the artists to build links with organisations and individuals outside of the school. Schools do not necessarily have a history of working closely with community arts organisations, and the churn of staff means that any collective memory of processes and intentions is often lacking. It is clear that promoting relationships between local artists and people (teachers or artists) working in schools is long-term work and requires a level of commitment, particularly where these ways of working are not well established already in the community. The key consideration here is that building such relationships, and (most importantly) building a commonality of purpose in joint activity, necessarily takes time. This is one reason to support the long residency of the AiRS artists, and it is also an argument for finding ways to maintain the personal connections that the artists have now established.

In considering community engagement, we also need to consider the question of ownership: of who drives the ideas, and on what grounds working with the school will be worth the personal investment of local people. By way of comparison, it is interesting to reflect on the success of the Tracks Dance Company and their long-term involvement with Milpirri (see 3.3.5). Much of the impetus for the work has come from local people, who have provided a consistency of vision despite the comings and goings of many outsiders in the school and other organisations.

6.4 Time

The AiRS program has given rise to a number of different perspectives about the optimal length of time for the artists to stay in the remote schools. The long-term residence did have certain advantages: it allowed the artists the time to form relationships with both children and adults, working in depth, and passing on some of their skills to the teachers. Additionally, many of the artists and teachers agreed that the consistent presence of the artists had a settling effect on the children.

On the other hand, there are good arguments for considering alternative arrangements, particularly given that accommodation at most sites has not been ideal for working professionals. Further, the intense work of the artists was often difficult to sustain. It may be beneficial in future iterations of the program to build more breaks into the artists’ schedules. (Some of the AiRS artists did in fact take some time out to pursue their own practises, attending festivals or workshops.) Such a model

might comprise blocks of four to six weeks in the term, over the course of a year or more. The key to the success of any model, however, will be in the setting up and the early negotiations, so that schools, teachers and artists are agreed on timelines, processes, curriculum integration, student participation and expected outcomes.

6.5 Collective memory

A final important question relates to how a program such as AiRS can encourage and support schools and indeed the wider educational community to maintain and pass on the knowledge that artists and teachers have worked so hard to acquire over the course of the year. In the first instance, the artists have produced some resources (such as the films relating to class texts) that can be used again by teachers. However, the perennial issue of exceptionally high teacher turnover in remote schools means that there is a very real prospect of “memory leakage”: that is, in a year or so, there may be very few teachers still working in the schools with any knowledge of how or why the resources were produced, and what kinds of pedagogical knowledge were acquired through the process of collaboration with the artists.

Hence, in the long term, there is a need to consider how a form of “collective memory” can be developed in schools, to insure against the otherwise inevitable dilution of hard-won knowledge and skills. Creating collective memory will need to involve some powerful processes for capturing not only what the artists did, but also their rationale in their ways of working, and the kinds of learning engendered by the work. Serious consideration needs also to be given to how teachers can learn these processes and incorporate them in their own repertoires. Then, at the school level, processes need to be put in place so that when teachers leave, the knowledge and skills can stay within the school. These processes have yet to be worked out, but they might involve formalising some in-service training for teachers; building an “exemplar” library of arts activities; and/or systematically working with local organisations, teachers, and pre-service teachers to build the knowledge with people who are less likely to leave. Milpirri may be an excellent model for such processes. Liaising and collaborating with other organisations that have long-term investments in supporting arts in remote schools (such as the NT Music School) may also help to keep knowledge fresh and circulating in the system.

Increasingly, considering the strong community response to performance events at Maningrida and Galiwin’ku, and with the easy availability of video and photographic devices such as mobile phones, it may be that parents also record and maintain “memory banks” of their children’s performances and work, and in this way are able to contribute in a greater way to the maintenance of collective memory about their children’s activity at school.

7. Conclusion

The AiRS program has demonstrated many ways that artists in residence can help augment arts instruction, with a positive impact on early childhood education in remote schools. The program has established the value of Corrugated Iron Youth Arts as an organisation that can support artists in schools, and link people and organisations to help them work more effectively in remote sites.

The program has highlighted a number of areas of enquiry that need further exploration. First, the notion of “student engagement” can be examined in more detail in the context of remote classrooms. It would be useful to have a clearer understanding of pedagogical factors that are key in engaging children in remote schools, and how engagement and learning for these children are interrelated. Some themes relating to engagement and raised in this report (5.1) could be further explored, such as the use of repetition as a counter to non-productive classroom chaos, how the arts can be used to promote group cohesion, and the idea of learning “through the body” and as well as in more cerebral ways.

A second and related area of enquiry is the relationship between student engagement, learning and school attendance. Currently this appears to be poorly understood in the Northern Territory context. Additionally, there is need to develop a better understanding of the factors from outside of school that impact on children’s school attendance and how parental and other community involvement in schooling is linked to students’ overall performance at school. Third, research can be designed to find out more about if and how arts-based learning transfers to other academic areas, and whether this transfer can be quantified.

A fourth, and vital, area of research must address the need to find ways of maintaining arts knowledge and practices in schools, beyond this initial phase. It would be ideal to use a participatory action research framework to design processes for recording artists’ work (both processes and products) within schools, as well as models of accompanying teacher professional development.

The immediate next step is to continue building networks of people and organisations that can work with the arts in schools. It would also be valuable to trial modified models of the residential program, and especially to experiment with the timing of artists’ stays in community (e.g., to organise shorter, but repeated, stays).

This report can be used as a foundation document to set the agenda for continuing discussions about arts education in remote schools.

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