

# BEHIND ARTPLAY'S BRIGHT ORANGE DOOR



*Oh, it just lets my imagination out... If you look around the whole place then you can see so much art work and it's just really, really amazing to be in here. It's like a massive house.* Puppet Troupe child artist.

Melbourne Graduate School of Education  
Neryl Jeanneret  
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MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Shaping minds, shaping the world



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Note - Parents, carers, guardians all referred to as "parents" throughout the document.

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

Little Gidding, T.S. Eliot

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Mapping and augmenting engagement, learning and cultural citizenship for children through ArtPlay workshops with artists.

## CONTENTS

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- 3** Summary of the research
- 6** What is ArtPlay?
- 11** Engagement
- 13** Learning
- 15** Cultural citizenship
- 17** Engaging practice
- 30** Conclusion
- 31** About the research
- 37** Bibliography
- 40** Appendix

# MAPPING AND AUGMENTING ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING AND CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP FOR CHILDREN THROUGH ARTPLAY WORKSHOPS WITH ARTISTS.

ArtPlay is a unique arts provider for children in Australia and draws its inspiration from The Ark in Dublin. It represents a permanent home for children's art and play, and makes an important non-school contribution to the artistic, creative and cultural development of the City of Melbourne as a child-friendly city. Open to children aged 3-13 years, the facility offers a wide range of artist-led programs across diverse art forms and age groups, and its establishment in 2004 showed a significant commitment by the City of Melbourne to the promotion of arts and cultural experiences for children and families. This report is the result of research conducted between 2007 – 2012 that involved:

691 children  
300 parents  
63 artists  
20 ArtPlay staff  
4 City of Melbourne staff  
8 researchers  
39 workshops  
366 surveys

When we sat down it was so subtle. At first, I wondered what is really happening here? Is my child going to be engaged, because she's never one to sit at storytime. Then after ten or fifteen minutes it seemed like magic. All the kids were involved and the artists just seemed to know exactly what and when to present to the children. It was all so seamless. They managed to get a level of engagement and intense interest with all the children without saying what to do, or giving out things. They just presented stuff for the children to take themselves when they felt that they wanted to.

*ArtPlay parent*



## ARTPLAY HAS:

- a unique combination of time, environment/space, artists and participants
- a welcoming and supportive staff
- a safe, practical and aesthetic environment conducive to creative expression, and
- organisational goals and values that support creative enquiry by children

## AT ARTPLAY

- there is consultation with children, families and artists
- there is built-in, paid time for artist reflection and evaluation
- there is regular professional development for artists
- there are opportunities for artists to extend themselves

### children

- enjoy making and 'doing'
- value using cognitively rich tools and materials
- develop confidence to initiate and direct their own art-making
- are challenged to try 'something different'
- engage in creative and collaborative learning processes
- build cultural citizenship
- build relationships with other children
- learn through personalised art making
- learn something new
- learn arts skills and knowledge
- have shared and individual experiences
- develop individual risk-taking, collaboration and communication skills and self-efficacy
- are engaged by activities that are paced, unhurried, varied and linked
- are engaged by a custom designed environment

### children and parents

- are engaged by the practical arts workshops

### parents

- seek out of school arts experiences for their children
- seek experiences that are open, playful and creative
- value the arts experiences offered
- value the welcoming and supportive environment
- take home ideas for further arts activities
- value the opportunities to play alongside their children
- value the opportunities to co-create with their children
- value observing how their children interact and respond in a public space

### artists

- model their own artistic practice and creative processes
- create workshops that are openly planned and responsive to child interests and emotional needs
- are adept at multimodel communication
- rarely work alone
- adopt a variety of roles – facilitator, model, director, engagement monitor
- engage children through personal and professional connections
- commonly work across disciplines
- support the concept of 'learning to learn' capacities such as self-efficacy, communication, collaboration, problem-solving and risk-taking
- guide parents' participation towards child-led learning

### children and artists

- build relationships through co-playing and cocreating





# WHAT IS ARTPLAY?



During a once-only period of major city development, the central train yards of Melbourne were transformed into what is now a vibrant community and cultural precinct. At this site was a dilapidated railway building awaiting demolition. Through the vision of a group of like-minded town planners, local government councillors and arts and cultural leaders, the idea evolved to develop such a site into a dedicated facility for children and families, a place to congregate and create through the arts. And so ArtPlay was born.

Seemingly as a by-product of Federation Square, a new and significant public space, the opportunity arose to develop a new park in a prime river location in the centre of Melbourne. At this time, the town planners were aware that life in the city was changing, and Rob Adams<sup>1</sup> commented,

*... one of the challenges that Melbourne faced going back to the early '80s was to turn itself from being a central business district into a central activity centre, and effectively, that's what's happened... if you read today's *The Age* [newspaper]*

*all of those figures are talking about a city that has gone from being an 8 to 5 city, to being a place where people live and spend a lot more of their time, and the residential population in the central city has gone from about 800 units to about 16,000 in that short period.*

Part of the drive for this city transformation was the increasing child and family population. Morris Bellamy<sup>2</sup> recalled that, "The city was looking for a new strategy," one that led planners to "consider seriously, for the first time, the notion of a child friendly city". He added that the development of a park and community art space in a "prime" location along the river was "not accidental", and that it formed part of a "vision for children and families to have a deeper engagement with the city... a different experience from just shopping and buying."

At some stage the idea of developing a derelict building into a community arts space germinated. This was partly stimulated by strong advocates, Rob Adams and later Councillor Wilson, who both remembered feeling

1. Rob Adams is an architect and urban designer, and Director of City Design at the City of Melbourne.  
2. Morris Bellamy is the former Manager of the City of Melbourne's Arts and Culture section.

restricted from undertaking arts studies in formal education when they were young, and strongly believed that children should be given more opportunities to "express their ideas" and to be "creative". While the seed of an idea for what was to become ArtPlay had been planted, it wasn't formally considered until Rob Adams saw a unique children's art centre in Dublin, Ireland, that the concept for ArtPlay took shape; "I saw in the ARK an idea that resonated with me... young kids working with professional artists in their own facility". Central to the mission of The Ark is an image of the 'citizen child', a position developed in response to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which promotes the need to, "respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity" (United Nations, 1989: 9). This belief aligned strongly with the City of Melbourne's aspiration to promote further social engagement with children and families.

Planners now had both a vision and working model for ArtPlay. They had also identified and were to eventually recruit a creative producer for ArtPlay, Simon Spain, one of the core artists at The Ark. Rather than employ an arts administrator, key people such as Rob Adams preferred to employ an artist experienced with working with children,

*Artists are undervalued for their creative management skills and the effort they put into their work... Just about every project (as an urban planner) involves an artist. This is threatening for some people but exciting for others who want to 'think outside the box'.*

This complex and timely convergence of events and developments, as noted by Morris Bellamy, was the catalyst for the creation of ArtPlay with the belief that it could be "striking example of how Melbourne could embody the idea of a child friendly city" and "offer something to children at a different level, something deep and memorable."

Supporters of ArtPlay had faith in its capacity to find its own form through the Creative Producer's leadership and provide engaging arts programs for children aged three to thirteen years. After several business plan iterations, the Council agreed to fund ArtPlay for three years with significant support from the Myer Foundation. It was accepted that it needed to be nurtured by an 'arms-length' approach, giving it every opportunity to succeed on its own terms. Entrusted with the license to experiment, the beginnings of programming were opportunistic and developed, where possible, in partnership with existing festivals and established artist-in-residence initiatives. And in 2012 ArtPlay is now core business for the Council.

## THE ORGANISATION

*Shepherded in by an ArtPlay staff member, the children and families move from a small foyer to an expansive, open and un-cluttered hall brightly lit by large windows placed high adjacent to the exposed vaulted ceiling. This first exchange between ArtPlay personnel and the community begins to establish trust and rapport, alleviating the uncertainties of new users. After a short period of time most participants are readily engaged and un-distracted by life outside ArtPlay.*

As an artist himself The Creative Producer had a clear vision for artist-led programs. Families feel welcomed by the front of house and other ArtPlay staff who interact with them before, during and following the workshops, a service that includes making parents themselves feel confident in their own creative abilities. Such support complements the creative role of the artist in a variety of ways. Alex, the ArtPlay Program Coordinator, observed that the staff act as 'conduits', and help participants to 'interpret' the workshop content. They also, according to Bobby<sup>3</sup>, take on the role of 'hosts' and also 'mediate' between the artist and the children, particularly if the artist is inexperienced in working with children. The staff employed to take on these roles do not have specific training, though many have worked with children before. As Bobby says, "To tell you the truth, they haven't (had training), but they all have a special quality which is patience, love for children, and love for art".

3. Bobby is the ArtPlay front-of-house Coordinator

## THE SPACE

The physical space is made up of an open downstairs hall suitable for diverse activities ranging from dance and music performances to large-scale visual arts installations. Adjacent to this space is a smaller area that can be completely enclosed and blacked out. It can transform into a seminar space, a gallery and/or a more intimate space for art-making. Located upstairs is a mezzanine area that provides a smaller workshop space suitable for more contained arts

experiences. The whole building benefits from abundant natural light streaming through high tall windows located on all four walls. Designed as an open modular space the environment is continually custom-designed for the needs of each age group and art program, helping to create an atmosphere of focused attention and home-like comfort. This capacity to transform creates a perpetual 'newness' for how participants experience ArtPlay.



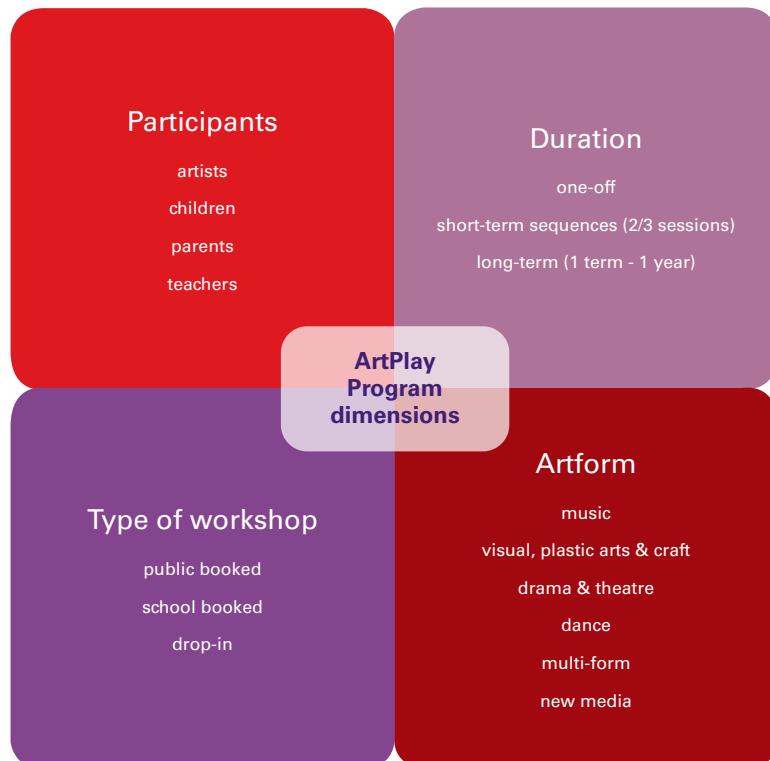
## THE PROGRAM

*In the midst of a groundswell of individual child music making, Nico introduces more instruments, including enough angklungs for every child. At this point the atmosphere becomes even freer with children moving around to collect instruments, adults and children co-playing and Nico moving throughout modelling one-to-one how to play various instruments. As one parent noted the artists were "warm, engaging, gentle and non-confrontational. They ensured that each child had a chance to be involved". Meanwhile a mother plays a triangle to engage her baby who sits on her lap, and all the time Martin maintains a unifying bass beat in the background.*

The workshops are mostly one-off or short term and cater for different age groups. The pre-school programs are for children aged three to five years. These are for 45 minutes to one hour and involve up to 20 children as well as parents and guardians, who are required to attend and participate. The programs for six to thirteen year olds are generally one-off and run for two-three hours with some continuing all day. Group numbers range widely from five to twenty-five young participants and parent/guardians are required to attend if their child is younger than eight years. Generally adults are not required to participate. The school programs involve up to twenty-five students who come with teachers to participate in a series of two or three whole-day workshops. There are also long term programs. These involve one group of young people (ranging from eight-thirteen years of age) who are engaged in multiple all day workshops (four to eight sessions). At this point such programs have only focused on music and visual theatre/puppetry.

The workshops are presented in an informal and relaxed manner with little sense of the pressures of time. Workshops end in different ways, sometimes culminating in a presentation/performance or final reflection, at other times, quietly finishing as individuals each complete their work. What is noticeable is that the boundaries of time and place are somewhat absent at ArtPlay – once there and cocooned, the children, artists and families are focused on the task at hand.

Figure 1: The multiple dimensions of ArtPlay



## THE ARTISTS

From the outset the artists were conceptualised as the key figures in creating the program. After the first year of operation a core group of regular artists had formed. Apart from leading a number of workshops, some of these artists were eventually employed to co-develop program strands the preschool, school and puppetry workshops. Balanced with this stable of continuing artists has been the periodic or one-off employment of a very diverse group of artists.

While families frequently acknowledge the benefit of the arts for their children, the opportunities, resources and skills to engage children in arts experiences can be lacking. In response to this demand facilities such as The Ark and ArtPlay have emerged. As Bobby says,

*I think for a lot of people it's oh, let's give this a try. But then I think what keeps bringing them back is the feeling of the place, the building itself, the staff, how friendly and welcoming we all are. How professional it is. The atmosphere that's created by all those things, the building, the set up, but also the variety and working alongside an actual artist...*

The development of ArtPlay outlined in this report shows that it is able to achieve what key advocates such as Councillor David Wilson had hoped, namely to "help kids engage with culture, with the city, with their families and with each other".

## CHILDREN'S VOICES

Once successfully established the Council extended its commitment to the facility by funding an annual round of ArtPlay grants (\$100,000). A grants panel was formed, one that gave children full voting rights. One such panel we observed in 2007 included children aged seven to ten years, each partnered with a known adult (parent, guardian or family friend), artists, a representative from the Myer Foundation, and the Creative Producer of ArtPlay. Allocated the entire day to do so, the panel's role was to systematically work through artist submissions, discuss the merits of each, and rate these in order of preference. It was a complex process that required communication, justification, prioritization and re-prioritization that took into account the merits of each subsequent application.

Through the grants program ArtPlay was able to attract diverse artists, both experienced with, and new to, working with children. Funded initially for a small number of workshops only, such grants allowed ArtPlay to trial innovative workshops that otherwise may not have been offered because of cost, or the risk of not gaining sufficient public subscription. A significant element of some grant proposals was that they targeted the participation of marginalised groups.

From the outset ArtPlay was offering free and inexpensive fee-based workshops but not necessarily attracting disadvantaged families, ones who were unaccustomed to coming into the city or disinclined due to travel costs. The opportunity to actively engage children from diverse backgrounds was given a boost through the support of a silent philanthropic organisation. Drawing from this funding, ArtPlay was able to support the workshop costs and travel of individuals and school groups identified as disadvantaged. In particular, this grant enabled and compelled the ArtPlay school program to extend beyond connections made in central Melbourne to other urban and regional schools, ones who rarely come to the city.

Overtime ArtPlay has continued to gain financial and other support from a range of sources and partnerships which has extended its capacity and reach. In 2012 it presented over 450 events, programs and workshops, including 50 days of low-cost or free school workshops.

## THE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

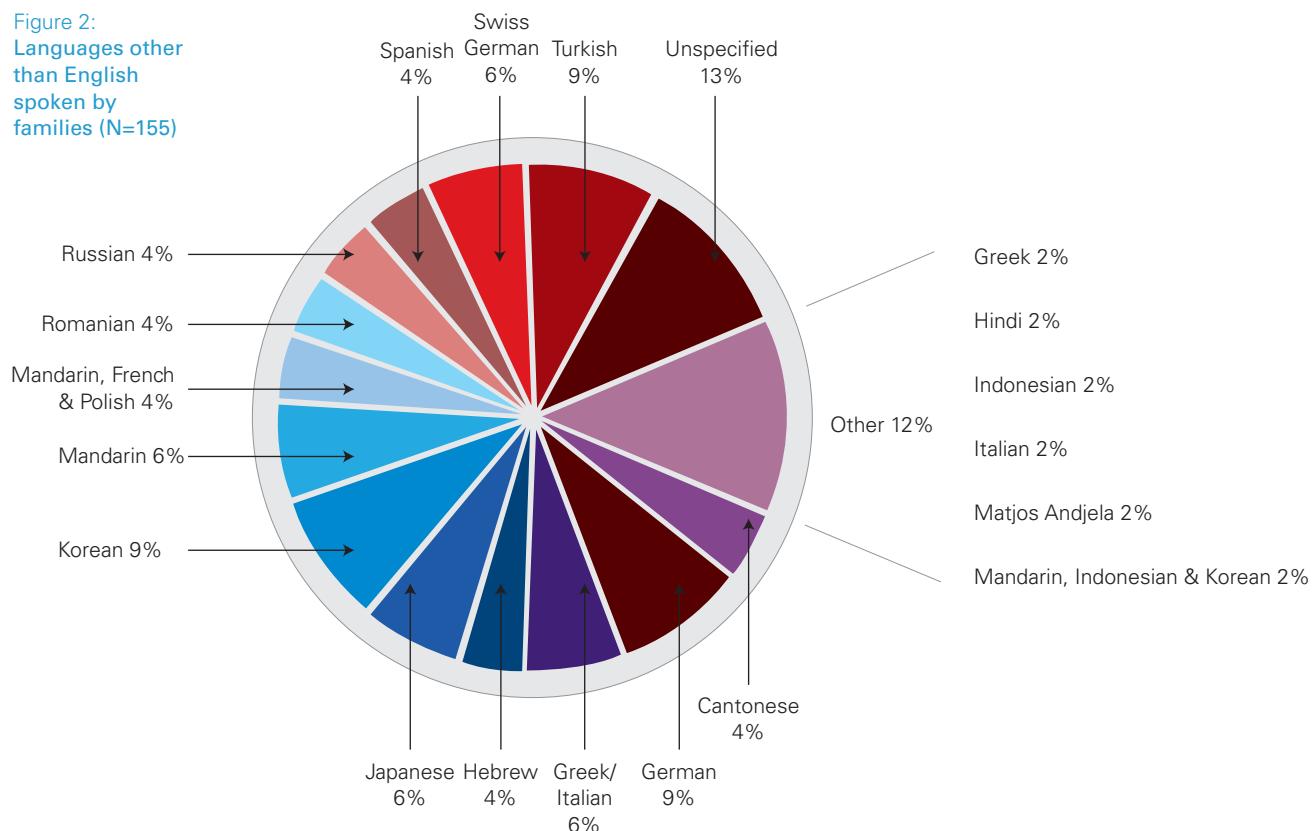
The distinctive combination of artistic, developmental and cultural elements housed at ArtPlay where children, parents and teachers are able to engage directly with artists and art-making in a non-school environment, has provided a unique research opportunity. ArtPlay is open and receptive environment, rightly identified as a 'rich site' for research (Davis, 2008).

Soon after the facility opened, communications between the City of Melbourne and the University of Melbourne were established with the goal of researching the phenomena of ArtPlay. This partnership, with support from the Australian Research Council and the Australia Council for the Arts, led to the four-year research project, *Mapping and augmenting engagement, learning and cultural citizenship for children through ArtPlay workshops with artists*. The research began in July 2007 and has provided an opportunity not previously available in Australia - to conduct sustained and in-depth research within a space specifically designed for art and play experiences for children aged three - thirteen. Throughout this research partnership we have actively sought the views of all those involved at ArtPlay and our formative analyses have stimulated on-going reflection, interrogation and exchange which has strengthened the organisation's capacity to target, broaden and deepen the programs.

# ENGAGEMENT

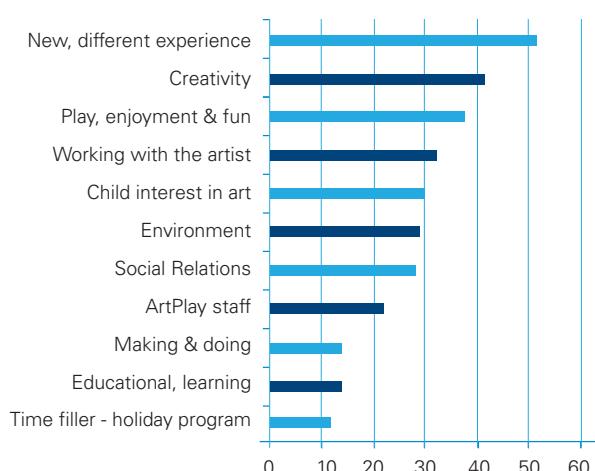
The families who come to ArtPlay are largely well-educated professionals who live in the inner Melbourne suburbs. While the families primarily speak English as their first language, they also represent diverse cultural backgrounds with 23% of families speaking a language other than English (Figure 2). This profile of family backgrounds, however, does not take account of the large number of participants who come to ArtPlay as part of free and large festival events and it should be noted that the school programs give emphasis to children from disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

**Figure 2:**  
Languages other than English spoken by families (N=155)



Families bring their children to ArtPlay for a wide range of reasons such as the desire to expose their children to a 'different' experience, and an experience that promotes creativity and enjoyment (Figure 3). Families also look for workshops that relate to their child's interests in the arts. The opportunity to work with artists was a significant reason for coming to ArtPlay for children aged eight and above in the school and long-term programs, but not for parents who came with young children. Another incentive noted by returning families was the welcoming and supportive staff, and the safe, practical and aesthetic qualities of the environment.

**Figure 3:**  
Responses to Why did you come to ArtPlay today? (N=310)



Of the children surveyed (273), 92% said they enjoyed the workshops and 98% of their parents (93) agreed. The children made strong links between their enjoyment and the active making and doing (36%), and they valued using tools and materials, and creating a finished product. A small number of children (10%), particularly the older children, felt that working with artists and interacting socially with other children were the most memorable part of the workshops. Another group (8%) felt play was most important aspect. These positive reflections by children on their experiences at ArtPlay were strongly supported by other data from the observations and the artist interviews.

Workshop observations, informed by an engagement checklist (Table 1, p 32), indicated high levels of motivated, focused

and sustained participation. As well as the positive data, there were a small number of cases where children were not engaged, often as a result of their particular physical and emotional needs. Short periods of non-disruptive, child-determined, non-participation or 'time out', were not considered non-engagement but rather potentially positive opportunities for child reflection and re-charge.

Although children's engagement was the primary focus of the study, high levels of parent engagement were also identified, particularly in the preschool programs. Parents in the focus groups discussed how positive it was to co-play and observe how their children interacted with others and such shared experiences also stimulated continued art and play experiences at home.



# LEARNING

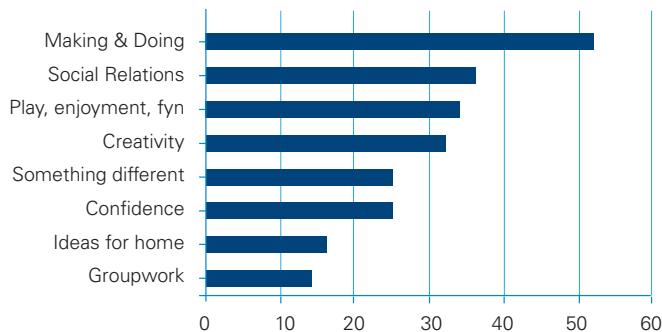


The children and families who attend ArtPlay are predisposed to benefiting or learning from the experience. To elect to come is a decision in itself that shows an interest in and commitment to arts activities. Once there, the parents were invested in their children having a positive experience. A supportive family culture helps to enable a child's openness to learn at ArtPlay but it does not necessarily determine it.

The data certainly support that ArtPlay programs offer children learning encounters in and through the arts. Of the families surveyed 97% believed that their child/

children had learnt something new at ArtPlay, particularly in relation to practical arts making and doing (78%) (Figure 4). Social relations, creativity and the development of confidence were also given some emphasis by the parents. Play and enjoyment were seen by parents (13%) as a clear 'gain', a benefit that matched one of the common reasons noted by families for why they came to ArtPlay. Opportunities to play and engage in creative processes are closely aligned. Valued by both artists and parents, such approaches to learning were commonly observed in the workshops and linked strongly to engagement.

**Figure 4:**  
**Responses to What did your child gain from today's workshop? (N=234)**



In many workshops the demonstrated learning was evident largely in the completion of children's artworks and performances but the involvement did not end there with a number of surveyed families saying they would consider trying the activity at home. This view was also supported by the parent focus groups where many families felt the experience had stimulated them to 'take home' the learning gained (art techniques, tools and processes) and explore them further with their children.

The development of practical arts skills and knowledge was evident. This was seen through small and subtle changes in the child's practice such as the mastery of particular tools, techniques and processes, or through the accommodation of artist-introduced language and terminology. In the longer, multi-session workshops involving older children (8-13 years), developing specific competencies such as presentation and performance skills were more readily observed.

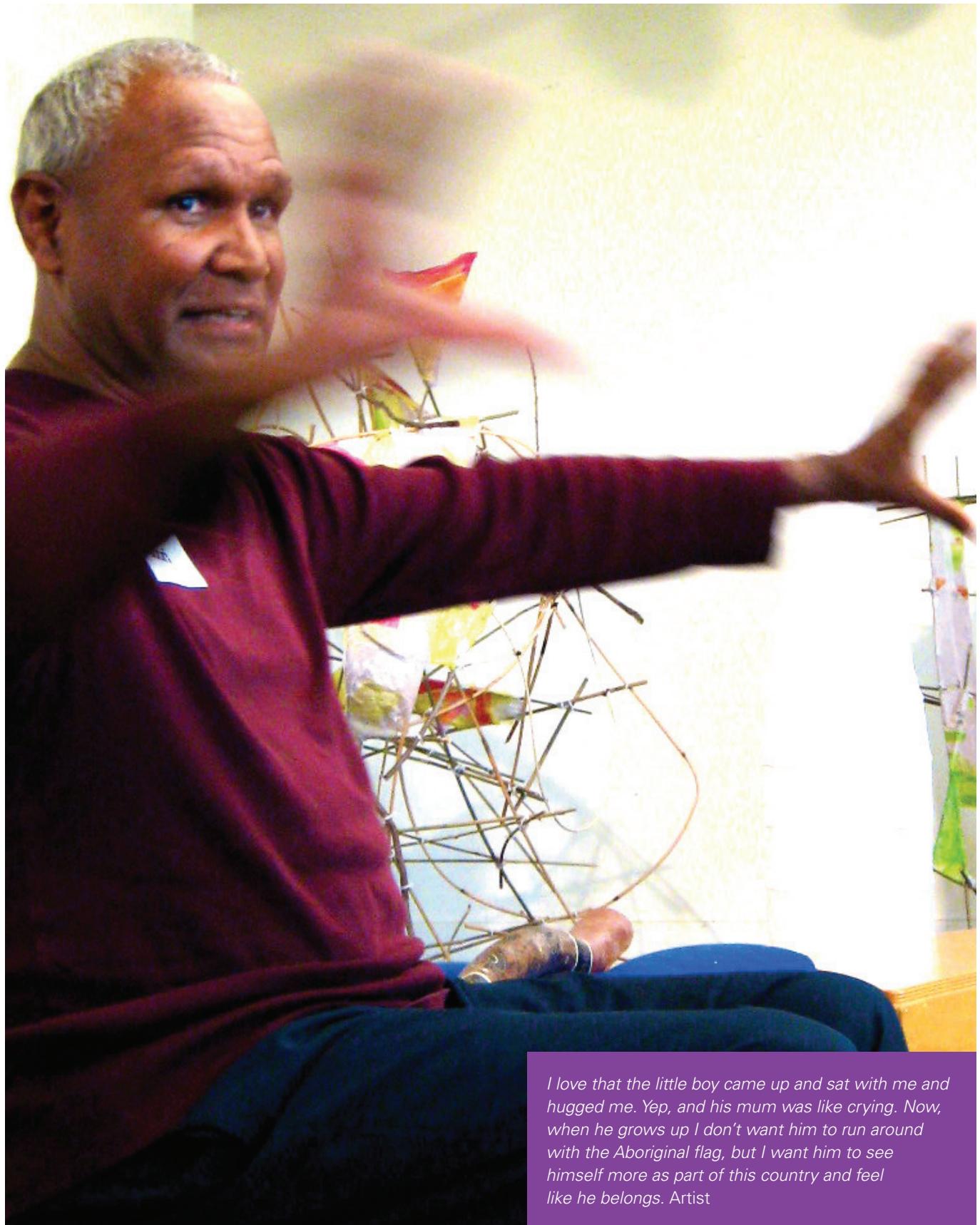
Other outcomes associated with learning through the arts were also noted by children and included creative thinking, art appreciation, group work skills and cultural appreciation. These more abstract areas of learning were given little emphasis by young people in comparison to the more concrete and active elements of making art. In contrast, the artists nominated providing children with opportunities to experience learning processes, sometimes modelled directly on their own arts practices, as the main benefits. They also believed it was important to support the concept of 'learning to learn' capacities such as self-efficacy, communication, collaboration, problem-solving and risk-taking. These opinions were reinforced by observations, which indicated many instances of children, even in short, one-off workshops, demonstrating a growing confidence to participate and contribute throughout the activities.

Outcomes such as creativity (12%) and the development of confidence (9%) were also given some attention by the parents. All the workshops observed gave some emphasis to creative processes stimulated by the artists as 'starting points'. When given enough artist and other adult guidance as well as sufficient time to explore open concepts and techniques, the children demonstrated positive development in individual risk-taking, collaborative sharing and communication, and confidence to initiate and direct their own art-making. Such commonly observed encounters with learning were well supported by the artists, staff, families, teachers and the environment.



# CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

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*I love that the little boy came up and sat with me and hugged me. Yep, and his mum was like crying. Now, when he grows up I don't want him to run around with the Aboriginal flag, but I want him to see himself more as part of this country and feel like he belongs. Artist*

To some degree all the workshops provided opportunities for 'cultural citizenship'. They provided occasions for children to access cultural knowledge that may not otherwise be available to them, particularly for young people coming from disadvantaged areas and individual families offered subsidized support to attend workshops. Public access to the program and inexpensive fees make the workshops available to most families, though the research has helped to identify the need for ArtPlay to further develop participation-building strategies and processes so as to enable a more diverse range of families to access the facility.

The presence of practicing artists provided the children and parents with direct encounters with cultural knowledge rarely available to them. The data indicate that children, parents and teachers valued the opportunity to see how artists work and to meet them personally. Such encounters helped to de-mystify the image of the artist and their profession and this may help to break down misconceptions that possibly limit children's aspirations to engage in the arts. While important, the status of the artist did not appear to stimulate children and parent enrolment in the workshops, although in the case of the long-term workshops, such as the ArtPlay MSO Ensemble and the ArtPlay Puppet Troupe, there was some evidence that the participants chose the workshops because of the kudos gained from working alongside established artists.

The focus on child-centred, open and creative learning commonly emphasized throughout the workshops offered children opportunities to develop their own culture-producing capacities. Opportunities to imagine, create and make in a supportive and non-evaluative setting, engendered confidence in children to explore and communicate their ideas. The artist-led workshops commonly gave emphasis to collaborative art-making that involved child-child and/or child-adult co-creation. Such experiences required the children listen attentively to others, articulate and assert their personal views, consult and negotiate. Through these experiences, the children were actively developing the cultural tools and communicative capacities necessary to function successfully in a civic society.

Openings to critically interrogate difference and equity, in relation to cultural knowledge, were rarely observed in the workshops. At times children were exposed to different cultures, mainly through the cultural backgrounds of the artists, but it was uncommon for artists to explicitly engage children in discussion and art-making centred on issues of power, inequity and agency. The generally short duration of

the workshops potentially limited the capacity of artists to probe these complex issues and in most cases this was at odds with the primary reasons why children and families come to ArtPlay. Opportunities to engage critically with cultural knowledge were observed in some of the school and longer-term workshops but the possibilities for the children to develop their critical agent capacities were rare. The short-term nature of many workshops limited the opportunity for children to actively contribute to workshop planning and decision-making. In the school and longer-term workshops the children were still largely guided by the artist's plan although these young people were able to contribute to group processes that focused on the development of emergent artworks and more complex topics including identity.

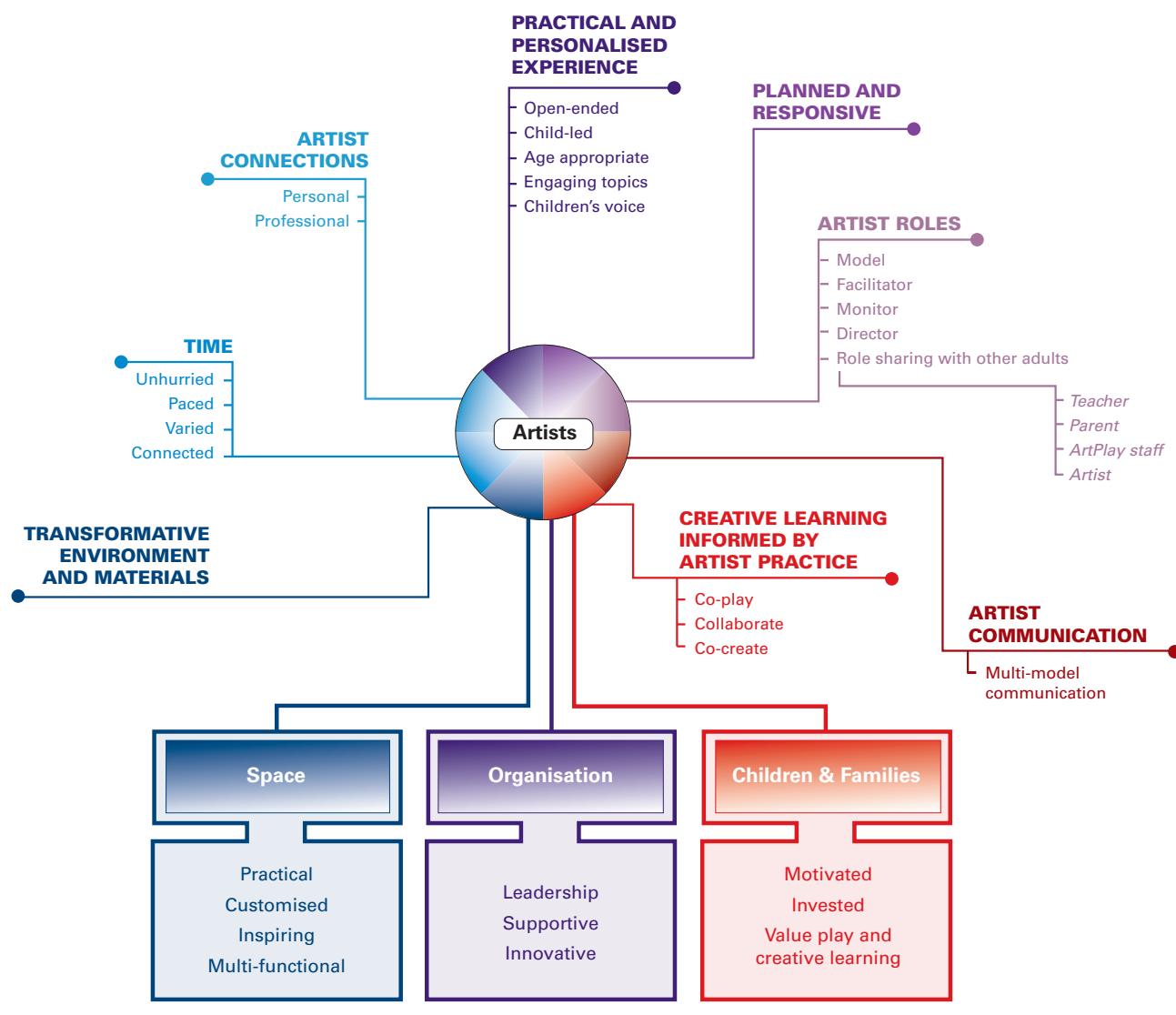
A focus on relationship building was as a key artist goal in several workshops. To realise this goal, artists deliberately planned group experiences that would encourage children to relate to each other and when present, to their parents. There were possibilities extending from this goal for participants to connect with others as part of larger, community-focused events. These normally took on the form of final public performances, presentations, and exhibitions that invited families and friends to view and celebrate the artworks created and such events provided broader community connections amongst the users.

Cultural citizenship is a broadly encompassing concept that makes reference to the opportunities children have in and beyond the practical workshop experiences at ArtPlay. It also draws attention to the rights of children to contribute to organisation practices and governance, and the responsibilities that arise from such input. While this was not a primary focus of the research, we observed how ArtPlay consults with children, families and artists, and the ability for them to contribute to general organizational decision-making. Strategies included contracted time support provided by the artists' to engage in documented reflection following their workshops, family 'Have Your Say' days, and child membership with voting rights in a grant-funding committee. These strategies resonate with the principles of cultural citizenship. In order to involve a broader range of voices into the ArtPlay development, dedicated staff have been employed to build relationships with 'hard to reach' children and families from diverse backgrounds. This ambition to broaden ArtPlay's reach by building relationships with potentially excluded groups has been the focus of further research<sup>4</sup>.

4. [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/artplay/the\\_access\\_program](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program)

# ENGAGING PRACTICE

Figure 5: Engaging Practice



## THE ORGANISATION

The Creative Producer, Simon Spain, uses the metaphor of the “cooked” and the “raw” to outline the philosophy underpinning the ArtPlay “studio”. He believes the children are provided with “raw” materials by the artist and from these, “create” their own inventions based on their interests and needs. This capacity to create is supported by the availability of engaging, artist-quality materials and an open and custom-designed studio-like environment dedicated to specific activities.

The approach to arts experiences promoted by ArtPlay leadership focus more on exploration and immersion than pre-determined, adult direct art-making. Artists employed at ArtPlay are guided by this position explained Alex, the Program Manager, who at times needs to advise artists to “limit the palette” they are working with so more space is left for the children “to think about innovative ways of using things”.

*What struck me when I first came here, being new to the place, was that to me it's been the balance between it being very creative and open-ended and welcoming and multi-aged, and yet underpinning that is a sense of order and intention and always philosophy and direction. Artist*

Artists were well supported by ArtPlay staff, many of who were also artists or arts educators. This support ranged from welcoming participants and assisting artists as required during the workshops. The workshop support staff are present during all public workshops, both pre-school and public six-twelve year old programs but only required to host the long-term workshops, which are largely self-managed by experienced artists. School programs are supported by ArtPlay School Coordinators who work closely with artists to develop, implement and evaluate the workshops offered.

ArtPlay was regarded as a supportive environment by 95% of the artists. This support included:

- Planning advice and feedback
- License to focus on play, creative inquiry and innovative practices
- Access to dedicated arts studio and quality materials
- Funded time for reflection
- Access to professional learning programs

Acting as hosts, the ArtPlay staff provided emotional and practical support to children and families, engendering a positive atmosphere, one that can reduce anxieties and promote receptiveness to what is to follow. They invited and settled participants as they arrived and also modelled their enthusiasm for the upcoming activity. Families noted how welcomed they feel by front of house and other ArtPlay staff who provide personalised interactions, before, during and following the workshops, a service that includes making parents themselves feel confident in their own creative abilities. Such support complements the creative role of the artist in a variety of ways enabling a degree of continuity and connectedness with participants that may have otherwise been limited and restricted by the short-term encounters with participants.

*They give a hand for everything, material and space wise, and they just help in controlling the situation if there is somebody who needs help, to find the toilet, but also just being part of the workshop. If there is a question about the topic they [ArtPlay staff] would come to me. They don't take part in guiding and questioning the children like I do, but may make some suggestions. We talk before the children come and I explain what we're going to do. They don't take part in the introduction but they do take part in the whole workshop. I wouldn't be able to work with twenty kids with all their parents alone (without ArtPlay staff). Artist*

## THE PHYSICAL SPACE

Open to transformation the environment is continually custom-designed for the needs of each age group and art program, helping to engender immediate and focused interest.

*What struck me when I first came here, being new to the place, was the balance between it being very creative and open-ended and welcoming and multi-aged, and yet underpinning that is a sense of order and intention and always philosophy and direction. Artist*

Parents were appreciative that ArtPlay had been "specifically designed for children" and described the physical and psychological qualities of the environment as "beautiful", "relaxed", "unhurried", and "flexible" to the specific needs of children and families.

*There are not too many spaces so they don't get lost in it. They have enough space to be themselves, to feel safe in that environment, and to be creative. Parent*

The artists' valued the aesthetic experience and emotional atmosphere, one they described as "a beautiful light space with few distractions." They also valued highly the flexibility and multi-functional potential of the environment, one which could be adapted to meet the specific needs of the artists. Described as a "blank canvas," the space was considered an "inspiring" environment, open to "reinvention and reshaping" and able to be "divided into different zones."



## CHILD AND FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

ArtPlay attracts families for a range of reasons. As a central location with ready access to public transport and parking ArtPlay is a convenient destination for many families.

*We don't live that close. We catch the tram in and then we go to the playground, the Yarra river, the NGV [National Gallery of Victoria] and we might go around to the State Library and meet Lucy's dad for lunch. It's becomes a big part of our life. It's becomes a bigger experience. Parent*

The children and families who attended were largely predisposed to benefiting or learning from the experience. They elected to come, a decision in itself that shows interest and commitment, and once at ArtPlay, actively encouraged their children to take part in and enjoy the activities on offer. A preparedness to travel to the city and pay for a workshop (approximately \$AUS10), requires a parent's investment in the arts and cultural experiences offered at ArtPlay. Driven largely by children's interests and/or adult perceptions of what children would be interested in, the parents come expecting anything from a one-off holiday fun experience to something more explicitly educational. Some families are motivated to enroll their child in a series of linked workshops to extend their learning, while other families value the opportunity to sample diverse one-off workshops without having to make a long term commitment. According one artist, "Some people just want something to do quick, something quick and easy to do, and some parents have really planned and thought, 'yeah, I really want my kids to get a lot out of it'."

In workshops involving children younger than eight years, the parents are required to attend and in most cases co-participate. In workshops involving older children, adult participation was more negotiated with children and ranged from observation to providing technical skill support. Whether they attended or not, all parents had to commit to dropping off and collecting children and paying the necessary fees. Such a supportive family culture encouraged child's engagement but it did not necessarily guarantee it.

## THE ARTISTS

*When we sat down it was so subtle. At first, I wondered what is really happening here? Is my child going to be engaged, because she's never one to sit at storytime. Then after ten or fifteen minutes it seemed like magic. All the kids were involved and the artists' just seemed to know exactly what and when to present to the children. It was all so seamless. They managed to get a level of engagement and intense interest with all the children without saying what to do, or giving out things. They just presented stuff for the children to take themselves when they felt that they wanted to. Parent*

Artists were the key protagonist at ArtPlay, responsible for generating and leading practical workshops. Artist-child interactions were the key factor in child engagement and learning.

### Connections

Artists quickly established relationships with the children, by introducing themselves informally, personally, and at times, playfully to children. This helped to alleviate any uncertainties and engage participants who, in most cases, had never met the artist before. Direct references to the artist's practice, enhanced by personal stories engendered an open 'emotional connection' between participants, identified as a key element in artist child relations (Galton, 2008; Barkl, 2006; Parks, 1992). By exposing their personal, and in some case, cultural lives to children, artists were aiming to expand children's awareness of their place in the world. As noted by an Indigenous storytelling artist,

*I love that the little boy came up and sat with me and hugged me. Yep, and his mum was like crying. Now, when he grows up I don't want him to run around with the Aboriginal flag, but I want him to see himself more as part of this country and feel like he belongs. Artist*

## **Practical and Personalised Experiences**

Whilst artists were focused on practical learning their emphasis was more on experience than product. This was in contrast to 'how-to-do' workshops that families noted were commonly offered in out-of-school contexts. Parents appreciated the orientation to open-ended and creative learning encouraged at ArtPlay.

*I think it's a personalised experience as opposed to you know going to en masse children's concert. They can come to a place like this and create something about their own experiences. Parent*

*People say it's not like cookie cutter here. There are art classes and art things around that are just so 'cookie cutter'-like here's a box and everyone decorate the same box. It's absolutely colour by numbers almost. It's so boring. It's great here because the level of creativity and the environment itself is brilliant. Parent*

The need for individual programming presented a challenge in workshops that often involved children whose ages spanned three to four years in difference. Catering for such diversity required particular skills in the Preschool programs where the developmental differences between years was accentuated. Also in the School programs it was common for groups to comprise multi-grade levels, with many students not accustomed to working together before coming to ArtPlay. Attending to the individual interests and needs of children were further compounded by the fact that artists were not able to build their knowledge of the participating children with most workshops, especially the Preschool and Public programs involving once-off sessions. Despite these challenges the experience of artists supported by ArtPlay staff, teachers and parent, provided a strong basis for personalised experience and learning.

## **Planned and Responsive**

To promote autonomous, personalised and creative learning which catered for a wide spectrum of interests and abilities, the artists adopted planned and responsive approaches to working with children. The artists were aware of the need for clear focus to the activities they presented to children, as explained by one artist.

*Preschoolers need a strong basis from which to launch their creative play/narratives – either a strong evocative design, a rich narrative starting point or very specifically worded questions. Working with twenty children necessitates very clear directions and strongly guided group work. Artist*

The artist attention to planning, however, was not a recipe for success. The ability to respond to the immediate needs and interests of children was a key point made by artists who noted that while it was important to have ideas on workshop structure and 'starting points', it was just as important to be "flexible and adaptable" both in terms of pace and content.

*Any type of rigid process or presentation is usually counteractive to the intentions and expectations of families and children. It works better if artists are open and flexible in how they communicate and their approach and goals. Artist*

Families supported this balanced approach to working with their children. As one parent stated,

*I think the importance is having variety and the openness of the program. You can't structure completely a program beforehand with children and expect them to engage. There was structure to the 'story', while leaving scope for each child to create individually, without being restricted in what they made, or did. Parent*

This ability to plan for possibilities aligned with the invitational style approach adopted by artists, one in which children were given opportunities to present their views and lead their own art making.



### **Communication**

Artists were aware that children were interested in practical activities and that the workshop introductions needed to be “simple, clear and involve not-to-defining demonstrations.” Put succinctly by one artist, “less talking and explaining is best” demonstrating the artists were clearly aware that establishing and maintaining engagement with young people required effective artist communication (Barkl 2006; Pringle, 2002). The artists used multiple forms of communication to initiate and sustain children’s engagement. For example, artists working with younger children commonly drew on embodied, oral and visual forms of communication to effectively engage children. This capacity aligns with the artists’ preferred ways of communication, which relied more on embodied demonstration rather than abstracted oral explanation. The fact that the artists were effective communicators belies the long-standing, yet unsubstantiated, belief that artists lack skill in this area. This focus on multiple modes of expression and reception aligns with long-standing support for multi-symbolic and integrated learning (Dyson, 1990, Wright, 2011, Connery, John-Steiner & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010).

## Roles

To promote engagement and learning artists needed to astutely and responsively move in and out of a repertoire of roles, particularly the roles of model, facilitator, engagement monitor and director. These roles were commonly shared with other adults at ArtPlay, including other artists, ArtPlay staff, teachers and parent/guardians.

The artists commonly introduced, stimulated and explained arts processes and techniques through modelled practice, also in line with other studies (Pringle, 2002; Barkl 2006; Brice-Heath & Wolf 2005). This was highly engaging to children on multiple levels. It reinforced the professional identity of the artist and exposed young people to the high level of specific knowledge and expertise of artists. Artist modelling ranged from giving inspirational examples to providing specific technical skills. Generally skills-based instruction was tailored to individual needs. Didactic skills based instruction, disassociated from children's specific and short-term needs did not engage children.

Responding to children's needs artists needed to 'act on their feet' and attune their responses to individual interests and goals, offering advice as required. As noted elsewhere, child engagement requires opportunities for children to lead their own explorations whilst gaining feedback as they do (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Taking on the role of facilitators' they drew on informal and personalised approaches to interacting with children. Artists are orientated to dialogic and scaffolded communications with children (Galton, 2008), a practice that was particularly evident in the studio-like workshops that emphasised child directed individual and small group experience. Artist facilitation was put aptly by one school student.

*Well, they [the artists] never say they really don't like what you're doing. They always, like, keep giving you advice to do -- make it better and stuff, instead of just saying -- instead of giving you a whole different idea.*

When working towards a clear group artistic outcome, such as a performance or joint presentation, the artists also adopted the role of 'director'. This role was most evident in multi-session workshops, involving older children who were sufficiently skilled and experienced, for example the ArtPlay MSO Ensemble and the ArtPlay Puppet Troupe. In such cases the a master and apprentice relationship was evident between artists and children.

The artists needed to skillfully decide when to interact with children and when to stand back allowing children to learn for themselves. This role of 'engagement monitor' involved strategies that manage dis-engagement without stifling independent and child-led creative processing. At times the children were disinclined to participate, or so eager they threatened to dominate at the expense of others.

In the case of the former, artists, with the support of ArtPlay staff and parents, were able to provide one-to-one support which generally re-engaged children, but not always. In the cases where the children were over-dominating or distracting others, the artists avoided using any authoritative child-management strategies, and instead simply gave time for children to reengage. This flexibility with time was crucial. When needed, children will create their own 'time-out' – engaging in playful, social and sometimes mischievous behaviours. Artists generally let such behaviours take their course, informally defusing and re-directing through the use of humorous and gentle quips. As noted by one teacher, artists need to avoid taking on the role of behaviour 'managers', which can break the contract between the artist and child as co-artists.

Working with unknown children and sometimes groups of forty participants (child and parents included) artists commonly worked in pairs. Eleven of the eighteen workshops observed were led by artist teams and pairs of artists led all of the Preschool workshops, which required high levels of direct engagement with young children. To sustain engagement and promote learning effective role sharing was needed between artists, ArtPlay staff, and teachers. For example, an artist would act as the lead communicator or director of the group while the second artist, ArtPlay staff member or teacher would check for disengaged children.

At ArtPlay, the parents are encouraged to participate alongside their children, particularly in the Preschool Program. Families have responded positively to this invitation evident in the following father's comment.

*I can't remember which, after the first-class, they asked me how things went or how I enjoyed it, and my answer was I had an absolute ball because I let everything go, and for the adults in particular, to be able to come in from the suburb to a group of people that you are never going to see outside of this group is a real opportunity just to let it go. You don't have to worry about getting hung up about what you are doing or how you're behaving. The kids pick up on that. They can see dad sort of letting his hair down and prepared to be a clown.*  
*Parent*

By modelling their own enthusiasm for playful learning, the parents encouraged rather than directed their children's participation (O'Reilly & Bornstein, 1993). For some artists parent participation was a sensitive issue, one that required them to model and guide parents in their interactions with their children. As another parent commented, at ArtPlay, "it's more about collaboration rather than parents doing it for kids." This comment points to the potentially negative impact parents can have on their children's art making if they over-direct and do not allow their children to learn

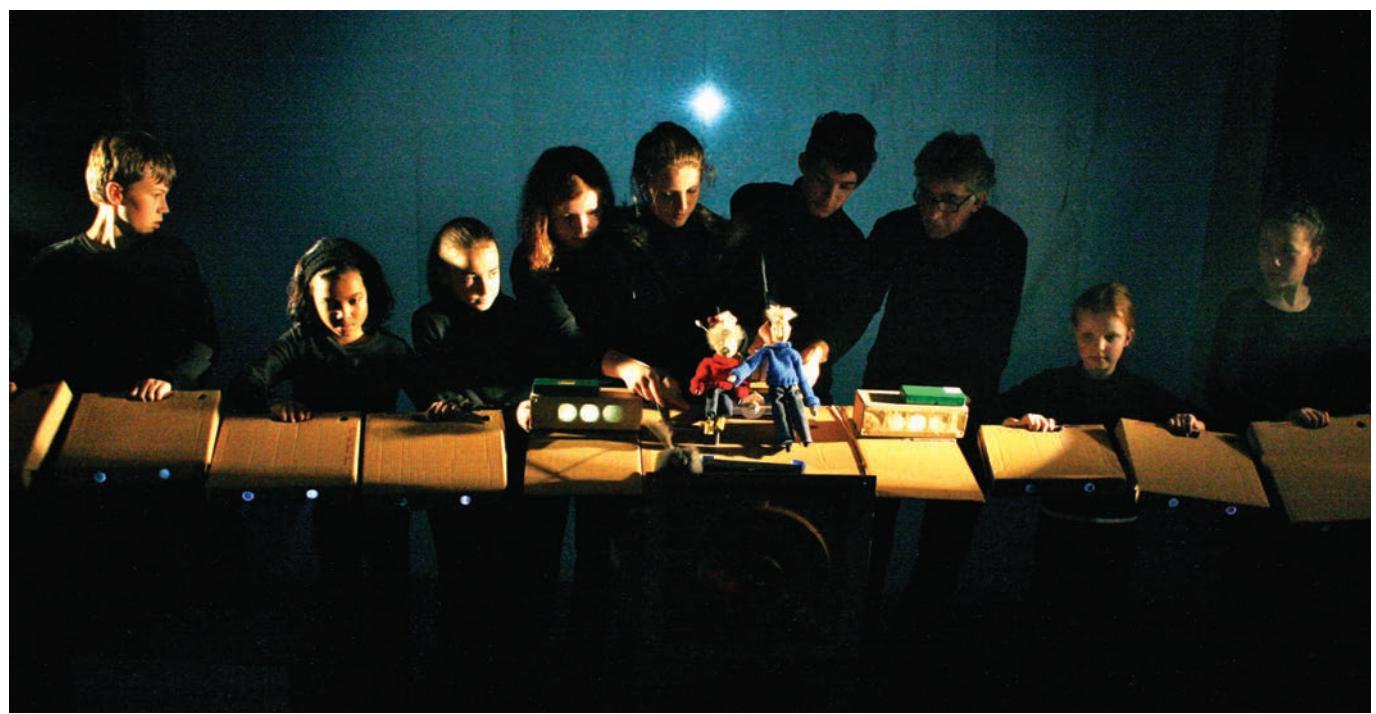
through their own processes. Such intervention can also be at odds with the aims of the artist, particularly when these focus on child-directed and creative learning.

### Creative Learning Informed By The Artists' Practice

The artists commonly acted as co-players, encouraging children, and in some cases also their parents, to participate through their own playful modelling, particularly in the early years performance arts workshops. In all the workshops observed artists encouraged children to play with ideas and materials so as to generate unexpected and new possibilities. In this respect play was synonymous with creative exploration. Artists, drawing from their own practices, were invested in collaborative projects, particularly when working in multi-session programs involving older children and children who had established relationships, such as in the case of school workshops or the ArtPlay Puppet Troupe. In single-session workshops involving younger children unknown to each other, artists were less likely to expect collaboration focused on the development of a group developed creative outcome. Resonant with other studies, the artists were adept at engaging children in creative processes through co-playing, collaboration and co-creation (Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2002; Selkirk, 2009; Brice-Heath & Wolf, 2005).

For some artists, their work with children not only informed their personal art practices, it was part of their art practices. When surveyed a number of artists commented that their

work with children was 'inextricably' linked to their own practices. One artist said, "I don't distinguish between my personal creative practice and my work with children – it is all part of my creative practice." This belief underpins the emphasis given to co-creation evident in some workshops, particularly longer-term programs such as the ArtPlay MSO Ensemble, and the ArtPlay Puppet Troupe. These programs enabled young people to contribute as 'artists' with the adult practitioners acting as directors and models. In the case of the Puppet Troupe a clear master-apprentice relationship was observed between the artists and the children. In both cases the young people involved were experienced and mature enough, and had sufficient time, to generate and input their ideas and skills into the co-production of artist-quality performances. It was most evident in these programs that artists explicitly drew children's attentions to the mechanics of creativity; the creative processes children were working through to resolve problems and generate innovative and accomplished outcomes. For artists co-creating with children extended beyond imparting knowledge to learning themselves from children. Put aptly by one artist, "The workshops are an opportunity for us to learn how to learn from the children in a dynamic way where we can be free to take their imaginative lead." Children were rarely observed co-creating with artists in single session public workshops or school workshops that were more focused on collaboration amongst children, or individual art making.



## Transformative environment and materials

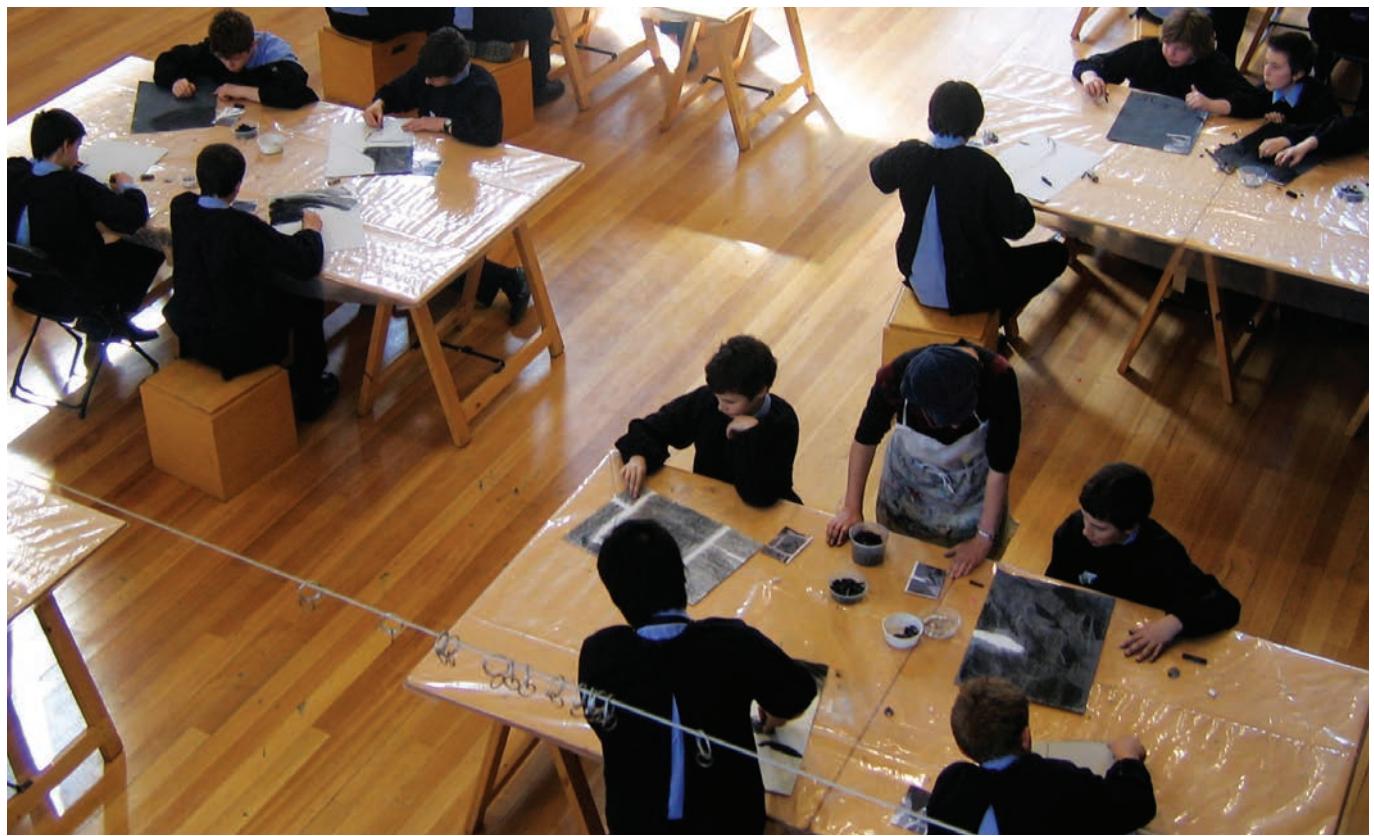
The artists purposefully transformed environments to inspire and engage children. Artists shared their knowledge and expertise with children, through the environments and materials they offered to children. This ranged widely from large open spaces punctuated with a few stimulating props such as large silver tubes, intimate shadow play enclosures, and studio-like configurations set up with a number of work stations. This flexibility to change was important to engaging return school groups, as explained by one teacher.

*Number one they get engaged with the environment; the open space, the shifting space and that transient furniture. It's never the same environment they walk into, so even if they are coming back for the second part of a workshop, it's changed again and that sort of almost excites them and yet it's also comfortable.*

Providing sensory-rich materials stimulated engagement and inquiry, such as a collection of purposefully chosen recycled materials used for jewellery construction, or the vibrant shimmer of a colourful silk fabric, used to suggest a wave of water within a theatre arts workshop. Cognitively-rich materials, ones that were simple to control, and flexible

to diverse forms of creative manipulation and symbolization, also promoted engagement and learning. In contrast those materials that largely pre-determined child responses and creations, for example puppet templates, were less likely to engage children, particularly if the 'rules' of how to use such materials were not clear.

Interconnected and complementary, the aesthetic, technical and communicative potential of the materials, tools and resources commonly used in the workshops helped to transform how children engaged with the experiences offered. For example, in the Preschool Jam workshops the young children and their families were invited into the artist's world through an intimate introduction to the artist's double-bass, called 'Blum'. Further to this they engaged an array of aesthetically vibrant materials including a rainbow coloured set of spinning bells. The children were also encouraged to improvise and 'jam' with an array of music-making tools generating their own cognitively rich musical responses. In diverse ways and on multiple levels access to such materials, tools and resources, gave emphasis to discovery-based approaches learning more so than to the development of technical competence with particular techniques and processes.





### Time

The effective use of time and timing are essential to maintain momentum, encourage child-led and in-depth inquiry and cater for individual concentration and energy levels. Artists had to maintain a high level of animation, physical activity, and interaction, to sustain group engagement, particularly in performance arts workshops that required artists to responsively pace a series of varied activities.

Families indicated that they value the relaxed and non-rushed atmosphere at ArtPlay. In the case of drop-in workshops participants could determine their own pace and point of completion. In some workshops the sense of time is intense with children being required to do quite a lot over a short period of time, for example What if Dance and the ArtPlay MSO Ensemble. To manage such intensity requires artists to clearly lead and prompt but not present a rushed approach to the workshop content. It also required artists to be aware

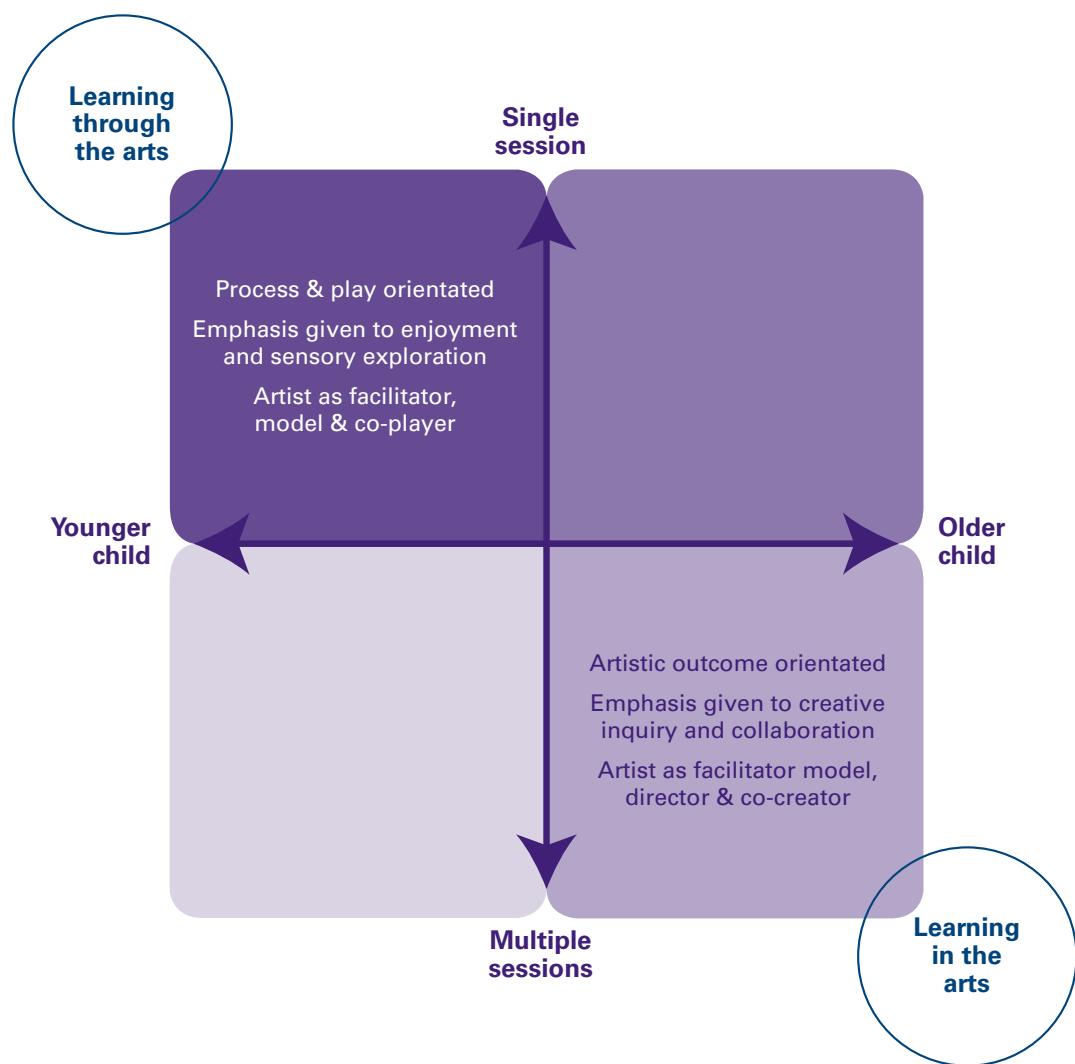
that while children can and should be treated as co-artists, they are not co-adults and thus have different physical and emotional needs that will invariably impact on their ability to concentrate and sustain engagement. Commonly the ArtPlay workshops were effectively paced though artists needed to ensure there was sufficient unpressured 'time-out.'

Whole day sessions encouraged in-depth and uninterrupted focus at ArtPlay. For school groups, the opportunity to focus on one activity, in a dedicated arts facility, all day maximized learning. As one teacher noted, "working a whole day here is like a week of art sessions at school because it's all here." This sentiment is shared, as explained by one young student who explained that at ArtPlay, "it's much more focused. At school, there are quite a few distractions and, you know you've got time and all that here."

## CONTEXTUALISING ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

To engage children, the programs needed to be attuned to the specific needs of individuals and groups. The focus on learning in and through the arts demonstrated at ArtPlay varied in orientation between the programs. The age of children involved and the length of the workshop informed the workshops goals and the key roles adopted by the artists. Different orientations to engagement and learning were also evident in the programs. The short-term programs, involving younger children, focused more on playful and exploratory learning encounters, while the longer-term programs with older children emphasised both exploratory processes and the production of artworks and performances. In multi-session workshops involving older children who came with the expectation to develop skillful artistic outcomes, the artists are more likely to act as directors, particularly if there was a culminating performance (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Orientations to engagement and learning



## ENGAGING PRACTICE ACROSS WORKSHOPS

The positive conditions for engagement and learning that emerged from the research:

- Access to 'artist quality' materials and equipment
- Adequate time given in 'studio-like' workshops for child immersion and self-directed learning
- Artist demonstrations of specific skills and techniques throughout the workshop as required
- Clear artist direction, demonstration and modelling
- Clearly planned and articulated workshop goals and structure
- Effective planning of sequence, pace and organisation
- Effective role sharing between artist teams or artists and ArtPlay staff
- Emphasis given to both process-orientated child-led discovery and to the achievement of specific art products and presentations
- Emphasis given to both the exploration of materials, specific skills and techniques, and to the production of a quality work
- Encouragement for children to take on new challenges
- Informal relations with the artist which engendered a emotionally supportive atmosphere
- Inquiry-based project topics that relate to young people's interests
- Opportunities for both individual and group exploration
- Opportunities to collaborate and co-create
- Regular opportunities for participant input
- Responsive artist facilitation and feedback tuned to children's interests, creative processes and practical skill needs
- Short and practical introductions supported by artist demonstrations and multi-modal communication
- Simple to use, aesthetically engaging, cognitively rich, and readily transformable materials that are open to creative interpretation
- Spaces, generally large, set up for specific and singular arts activities
- Supportive ArtPlay staff who welcome and make families feel secure and comfortable, and continue to act as hosts and facilitators throughout the workshop
- Workshop content and tasks accessible to diverse abilities and ages (up to four years difference in some workshops)

## ENGAGING PRACTICE SPECIFIC TO WORKSHOP TYPE

### Preschool Programs

- A guided rather than directed approach to child behaviour management, utilizing playful re-directions and one-to-one encouragement with children that were flexibly integrated into practical arts experiences
- Arts experiences explored through creative play
- Diverse and multi-modal/multi-arts experiences incorporated throughout the workshop
- Environment set up with comfortable seating for children and adults and dedicated contained areas set up for specific activities
- Personal and playful and invitational artist connections
- Workshop content and tasks accessible to diverse abilities and ages (from two year olds to five year olds) and focused on learning through direct and embodied experience (concrete operational not abstract)

### School Programs

- Supportive ArtPlay school program coordinator who acts as liaison, between teachers, students and the artists. If required he/she also co-facilitates the workshop working alongside the artist
- Teachers support artists primarily by encouraging student participation and monitoring student behaviours
- Intensive full day workshops

### Long Term

- Artist one-to-one and small group mentoring that encouraged young people to extend specific skills and creative ideas and take on new challenges
- Children engaged as apprentices to artists
- Clear artist direction, demonstration and modelling
- Opportunities for young people to learn about the professional experiences of artists
- Rich and thought provoking topics of inquiry
- Sufficient time for participants to explore and develop ideas
- Intensive full day workshops

# CONCLUSION

The distinctive combination of artistic, developmental and cultural elements housed at ArtPlay where children, parents and teachers are able to engage directly with artists and art-making in a non-school environment, provided a unique research opportunity. We have investigated the multi-dimensional nature of ArtPlay, why families come to ArtPlay and what they gain by doing so. We have also identified the conditions that enable positive encounters with artist-led programs in a public arts facility. The great majority of children and families are indeed engaged when they participate in the offerings at ArtPlay. The key learning outcomes were the development of confidence in the children who are challenged to try 'something different', and in doing so engage in creative and collaborative learning processes. The analysis of the child, parent and artist views on learning indicated that children most value the practical hands-on learning experiences. Such learning is also valued by artists and parents but they also see practical art-making as a means to an end, with learning dispositions such as the development of creative thinking and self-confidence commonly cited as the key aspirations they have for engaging their children with the arts at ArtPlay.

Parents also benefit from the experience and they value the arts experiences offered at ArtPlay. Beyond the benefit of taking home ideas for further arts activities, the parents also value the opportunities to play alongside their children and observe how their children interact and respond in a public space. The knowledge gained from this project has led to further research with the City of Melbourne to explore child and family engagement in other sites across the city, including libraries and public parks and informed the early development of a child and family play policy across the council.

Intensive, full day schedules, informal artist-student relations, and access to dedicated arts facilities are the main factors that engage school groups in the workshops. The learning generated in the School programs has reinforced the value and need for effective engagement between ArtPlay and schools and a commitment to building and sustaining long-term partnerships. The potential value of these partnerships has gone beyond the arts arena with the teachers from one school adapting the observation engagement framework for their own use in consultation with the researchers. This has implications for other arts partnerships with these principles of engaging practice, the design of the learning environment and reflection being applicable to both community and school-based arts programs.

This study was undertaken in an open and receptive environment, rightly identified as a 'rich site' for research (Davis, 2008). Throughout the investigation we have actively sought the views of all those involved at ArtPlay and our formative analyses have stimulated on-going reflection, interrogation and exchange which has strengthened the organisation's capacity to target, broaden and deepen the programs. The process and outcomes of this research are also now widely referred to in subjects in Melbourne Graduate School of Education's post-graduate and breadth offerings. The value of ArtPlay for research and learning is immense and a number of subjects incorporate student observations of ArtPlay into the assessment requirements and ArtPlay leadership (*pro bono*) for guest lectures.

In summary this research has:

- generated knowledge that is relevant and accessible in relation to child engagement, learning and cultural citizenship, and the conditions that support such constructs.
- provided a multi-faceted representation that will assist artists, arts organisations and other professionals to reflect upon and articulate their working practices with children and families
- engendered the development of a research-informed culture at ArtPlay one that has generated continuous improvement and growth

This is the first large-scale study into child and family engagement in a public arts facility. The length, scale and depth of the research is rare in arts education and has generated interest globally and invitations to speak both nationally and internationally. The relevance and reach of this research has already extended beyond ArtPlay and has implications for any program and/or site that aspires to deeply engage children and families in the arts.



# ABOUT THE RESEARCH



Soon after it opened, communications between the City of Melbourne and the University of Melbourne were established to research the phenomena of ArtPlay. This partnership, with support from the Australian Research Council and the Australia Council for the Arts, led to a four-year study entitled, Mapping and augmenting engagement, learning and cultural citizenship for children through ArtPlay workshops with artists. The project began in July 2007 with the opportunity to conduct sustained and in-depth research within a space specifically designed for art and play experiences for children aged 3-13 not previously available in Australia.

We set out to investigate ArtPlay based on the findings from our pilot study: we would examine how children respond to the workshops (engagement), what they gain or benefit from such experiences (learning), and what broader encounters with culture and community were evident (cultural citizenship). As is the convention, we would extend and deepen our preliminary review of the pertinent literature and research related to these areas. We, the researchers, underwent an evolution of thinking

about these areas in response to the unfolding map of ArtPlay, and so our searching of the literature was ongoing. Our theoretical understanding of engagement evolved in a fairly linear way from what we thought was a solid understanding to a much deeper and complex conception of the term both generally, and specifically to the context of ArtPlay. Our exploration of cultural citizenship transformed from a somewhat vague conception (in retrospect), to a confident definition and positioning of ourselves and ArtPlay in relation to the various relatable perspectives presented in the literature. We brought a collective practitioner knowledge to the project. We three have been or are: teachers in schools, teachers in non-school settings, professional development leaders for teachers, curriculum writers, assessors of arts learning from early childhood to tertiary, writers of teacher support materials, teacher educators, researchers and artists, and we brought all these perspectives to what we initially thought was the "easiest" of the three areas of investigation – learning. Ironically, it has proved to be the most difficult of the three areas to conceptualise in relation to ArtPlay.

We adopted a mixed-methods approach aligned with ethnographic and participatory action research (Delamont, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010; Whyte, 1991). The data collected included multiple observations, interviews with artists, ArtPlay staff and key stakeholders, family surveys, family focus groups and meeting notes. Eighteen workshops selected for detailed analysis, provided a representative sample of diverse art forms, age groups, and workshop types (see Figure 1) that were grouped into four programs:

- Preschool Workshops for 3-5 year olds
- Public Workshops for 6-13 year olds
- School Workshops for 7 -13 year olds, and
- Long-term Workshops for 7 -13 year olds

(see Appendix for a complete list)

## ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a common concept in the fields of arts education and educational psychology, and we have drawn widely on theoretical views (Russell, Ainley & Frydenberg, 2005, Wefald & Downey, 2009). We have also sought examples of tools, indicators and methods with which to identify and map child engagement (Chapman, 2003, Chappell & Young, 2007, Jones, 2009). With data collected via observations, interviews and focus groups, we have both tested and generated ways to interpret engagement in relation to the particular context of ArtPlay. We decided that a general definition for engagement would include the positive affective and cognitive state of self-motivated involvement characterized by initiation, sustained dedication and absorption. We have both tested and generated ways to interpret engagement in relation to the particular context of ArtPlay, and developed an Engagement Observation Checklist (Table 1) for an accurate and consistent identification of what was taking place at both the group and individual level during the workshops.

Table 1: Engagement Observation Checklist

Types of Engagement	Evident when
Taking In	children display sustained attentiveness, concentration and receptivity to verbal and non-verbal presentations and demonstrations
Putting In	children exhibit a willingness and confidence to contribute, verbally and non-verbally, their ideas and initiate and lead their own activities
Taking On	children transfer enthusiastically and confidently, and readily become focused on a new task
On Task	children actively and willingly participate in set tasks for significant periods of time, showing concentration and precision
Time Out	children display short period of non-disruptive non-participation followed by a willing readiness to re-engage

Non-engagement is evident when participants show little or no self-initiative, are readily distracted, and through expressions of negative affective-motivational states including, defensiveness, disruptiveness and frustration.

Working in pairs and guided by the above checklist, the researchers undertook 100+ hours of observations which served as the primary data for this study. Equally important and complementary to observation interpretations were those given by the participants themselves and we gave emphasis to the reflections of the children and parents in the analysis of engagement.

## LEARNING

The nature of short-term, community-based programs involving irregular users whose backgrounds are unknown can confound attempts to provide systematic evidence of development and attainment. We are accustomed to the complexities of evaluating learning in and through the arts and did not attempt to collect evidence of learning against normative scales and indicators. It was not appropriate in this context to use a traditional pre/post test style testing for such relatively short encounters and with the diversity of experience, backgrounds and ages in any one group of children. Rather we developed a more a holistic approach to investigating learning, one that took into account the key 'ingredients' for learning, (Leadbeater, 2001:6), social and personal development, (Arts Education Partnership, 2004) and the "habits of mind learned in the study of an artform" (Project Zero, 2010:7). Learning encompasses knowledge, skills and "learning to learn" dispositions and evidence of positive approaches to learning are considered an outcome in themselves (Hyson, 2008: 23). Our position was that evidence of positive approaches to learning are in themselves a strong indicator of the effectiveness and value of an arts program.

## CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

Cultural citizenship is a dynamic and multi-layered concept that refers to both elements of cultural learning and knowledge, and a way of living that embodies the civic principles of a communicative society (Stevenson, 1997 & 2003a). Re-conceptualisations of children, informed by rights-based discourses and a turn from dominant developmental frameworks to the 'sociologies of childhood'(Lee, 2005), have engendered a complex and dynamic view of the nexus between children, the arts, culture and citizenship. Children are now acknowledged as current rather than future active participants and as competent interpreters of the world (Cobb, Danby & Farrell, 2005; Drury, 2006). This transformative view of children, moving from a dependent and deficit perspective to one where they are considered capable and entitled, underpins a conception of children as cultural citizens. Starting from this position, we have further refined our interpretations of cultural citizenship in light of practice-centred inquiries at ArtPlay. The interconnected, two-strand analysis examined workshop and consultation practices. As a result we identified a number of factors present in the workshops (Table 2) that enable children as cultural citizens.

Table 2: Enabling Factors for Cultural Citizenship

Enabling factors for cultural citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• accessing cultural capital and diverse cultural knowledge through direct encounters with artists</li><li>• imagining and creating cultural products and cultural knowledge</li><li>• developing cultural tools and communicative capacities</li><li>• critically engaging with cultural learning and knowledge</li><li>• actively participating in community-connecting activities</li></ul>
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## ARTISTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN

A large and growing body of research has investigated arts partnerships involving artists and young people in both education and community-based contexts. Research into partnerships between artists, arts organisations and schools has primarily focused on partnership structure, teacher training and student outcomes (Fiske, 1999; Catteral, 2002; Catteral and Waldorf, 1999; Hunter, 2005; Horowitz, 2004; Galton, 2008; Imms, Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger, 2012). Concurrently to this work a growing interest in the impact of arts on social and community engagement has led to a body of research focused on artists working in non-school community contexts (Brice-Heath, Soep & Roach, 1998; Mulligan & Smith, 2009; Bamford, 2006; Reiss & Pringle, 2003). Within these studies the significant role of artists is often cited but rarely researched in any depth except for a few notable exceptions (Waldorf, 2003; Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2002; Brice-Heath and Wolf, 2005; Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2011). These studies have identified a number of artist roles including, modelling, communicator, co-learner and collaborator, scaffolder and creativity generator (Pringle, 2002; Barkl, 2006; Galton, 2008; Brice-Heath & Wolf, 2005). In the large-scale Teacher Artist research led by Rabkin the authors make the strong claim that "Teaching artists teaching strategies are aligned with what experts agree are

the principles of good teaching (Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2011: 2). Several studies have also pointed to the significance of the emotional connection between artists and young people (Galton, 2008; Barkl, 2006; Parks, 1992). This survey of roles associated with artist practices involving young people highlights, as Pringle notes, "a picture of a particular form of creative practice, which is extremely complex and sophisticated and involves the artists simultaneously adopting a range of different roles while taking a variety of approaches to engaging with participants" (2002:10).

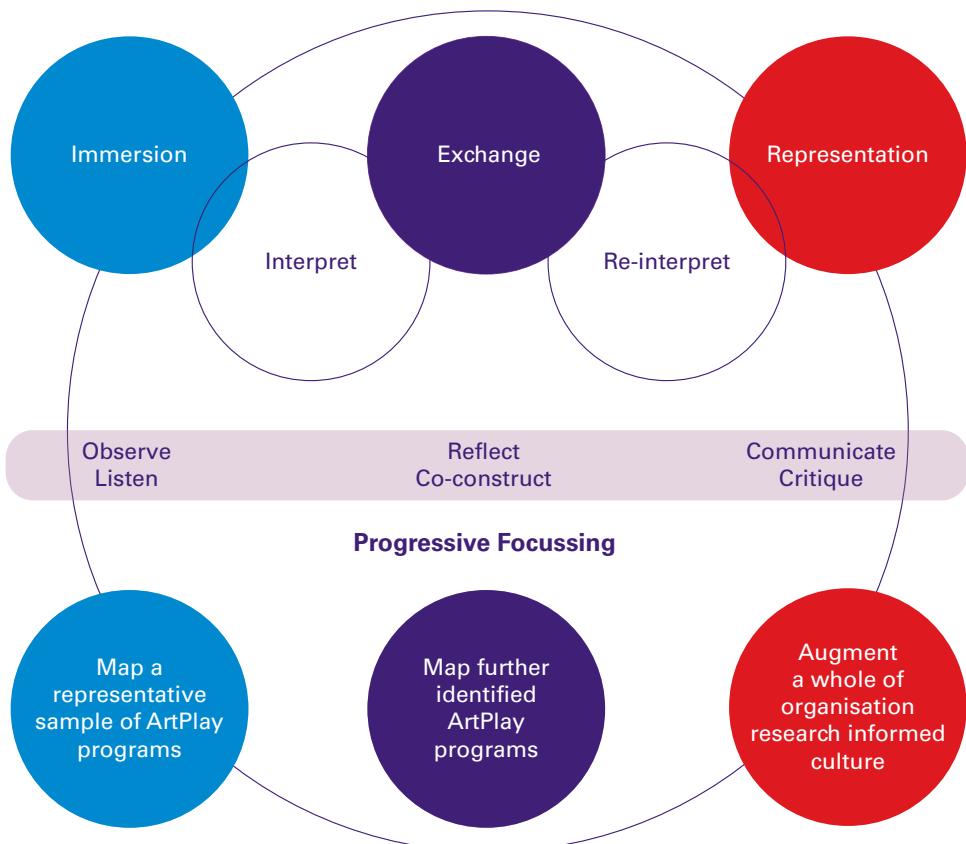
What this review of the literature has uncovered is that whilst artists are commonly noted as a significant contributor to the social and educational outcomes of arts experiences involving young people, this contribution has rarely been the primary focus of research. What is missing from the reporting of these larger studies is sufficient information on interplay between the backgrounds and beliefs of artists, their areas of artistic expertise, the age of the young people they work with and the contexts in which they work. Taking these factors into account enables a more multi-dimensional and complex reading of why artists work with children and how they do so.

## EXPERIENCE, PRACTICE AND THEORY

We immersed ourselves at the site to describe, explain and interpret what the experience at ArtPlay was from the perspectives of children, parents, artists, teachers and the staff. Opportunities for exchange were generated by this immersion, ones where we sought and shared thoughts with the participants. Many informal exchanges brought about co-reflection and a clear line of communication of value to both the participants and us. We have also contributed to the more formal processes with ArtPlay which has included sharing information at staff meetings and the development of planning documents and family forums. This commitment to periodic feedback and generating exchange was important in maintaining a direct relationship with the participants, one in which they felt informed and valued. Importantly, it has contributed to the development of a research-informed culture at ArtPlay that has a layered reflective practice underpinned by practice-led theory.

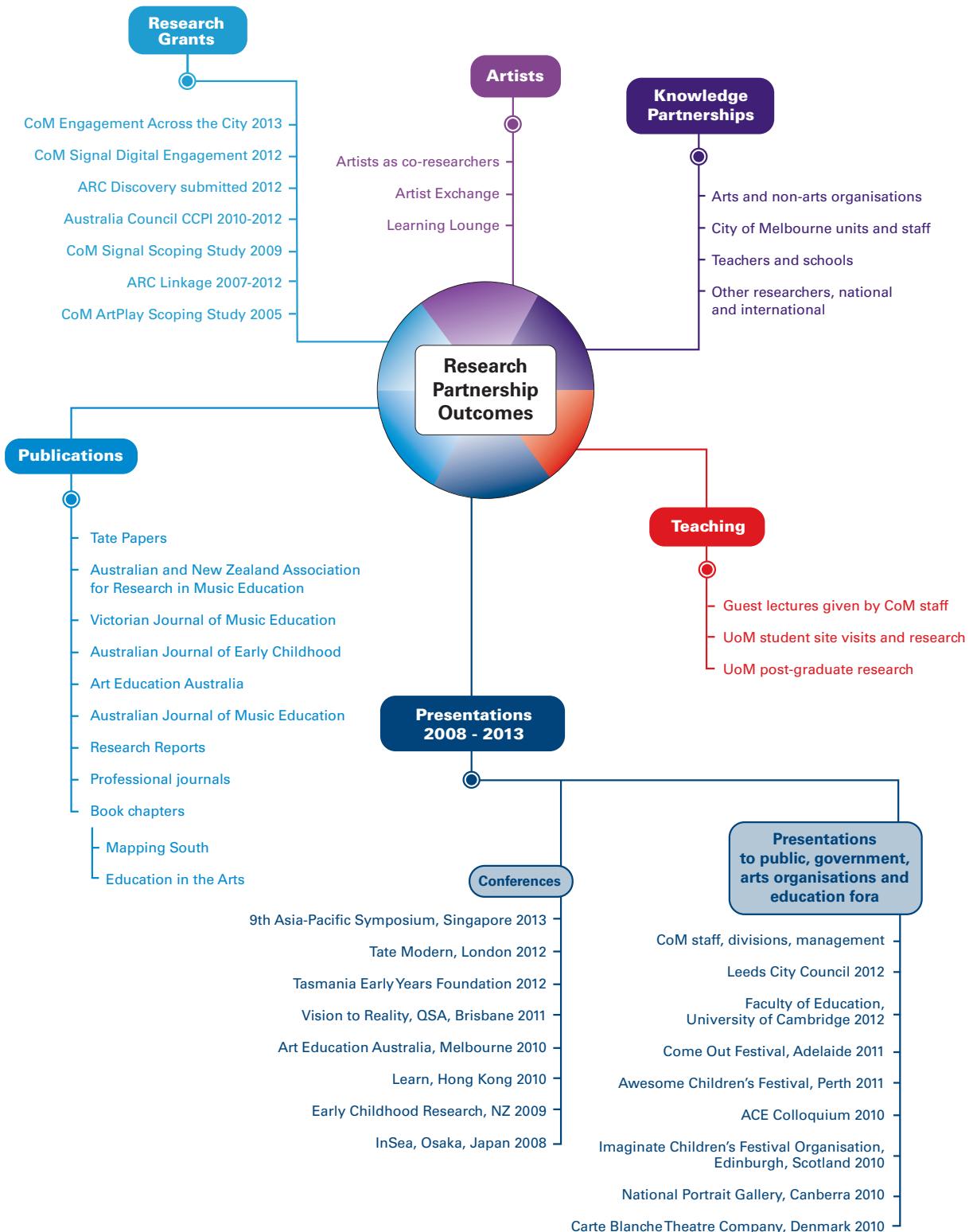
This on-going productive exchange has generated multiple grant applications and fed into program and policy development at ArtPlay. One significant outcome from the partnership between ArtPlay and The University of Melbourne has been the design, implementation and evaluation of the ACCESS Program, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts<sup>5</sup>. The continuous learning from the partnership has led to broad-ranging outcomes and relationships, including a significant number of publications and presentations given locally, nationally and internationally, research input into program and policy development, and a number of research partnership activities including the involvement of University of Melbourne students (Figure 8). Throughout this process of 'representing' the research, ArtPlay staff and artists have been engaged as co-writers and co-presenters, a position that mirrored other participatory processes inherent in the research and signifying the emphasis given to relationship-building, co-reflection and co-ownership throughout the project. In summary the research has evolved through cyclic and inter-dependent processes including, immersion, exchange and representation reflected in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Experience, practice and theory



5. For more information go to [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects)

Figure 8: Research Partnership Outcomes



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# APPENDIX THE 18 ARTPLAY WORKSHOPS USED FOR IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION

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Preschool Workshops	Artists	Participants	Duration	Artform	Age group
Coming Closer	Boori, Dominic & Victoria	16 children with parents	One-off 2 hours	multi-form with story telling, dance & visual arts	Under 6
Playscapes	Kath & Sian	20 children with parents	One-off 45 minutes	visual arts & craft	6 & under
Pocketfool for Preschoolers	Jen & Heidi	20 children with parents	One-off 1 hour	multiform: drama	Under 5
Preschool Jam	Nico & Martin	17 children with parents	One-off 1 hour	music	Under 5
Microscope drawing and dancing	Briony & Gregory	17 children with parents	One-off 1 hour	science/visual arts/ dance	Under 6
Public Workshops – 6-12 years	Artists	Participants	Duration	Artform	Age group
Men of Steel. Object Theatre.	Tamara & Sam	19	One-off 2 hours	puppetry/theatre	6-9
In the Studio	Jessica	10	One-off 2 hours	visual arts: sculpture	7 -9
Homage to Nolan	Edna	12	One-off 3 hours	visual arts: painting and mixed-media	6 – 12
What if Dance?	Mia & Thaila	25	One-off 2 hours	dance/creative movement	4-7
Shadow Play	Lynne	20	Drop-In	puppetry & visual arts	5-8
School Workshops	Artists	Participants	Duration	Artform	Age group
Rajasthani Potters	Giri Raj Prasad & Manori Lal	20	One-off 4 hours	visual arts: ceramics	10-12
Accessories	Ricardo & Claudia	24	One-off 4 hours x 2 days	visual arts: jewellery	10 -12
Performance Drawing	Zhen	15	One-off 4 hours x 2 days	visual arts: digital and collaborative drawing	9-12
Animask	Heri	20	One-off 4 hours x 2 days	visual arts: puppetry	10-12
Drawing to Music	Linda	25	One-off 4 hours x 2 days	visual arts: drawing and music	9-10
Portraits and Book Making	Marianne	26	One-off 4 hours x 2 days	visual arts: drawing and book making	11 -12
Long-term Workshops	Artists	Participants	Duration	Artform	Age group
ArtPlay MSO Ensemble	Gillian	20-25	3 x 2 all day workshops	Music	8 -13
ArtPlay Puppet Troupe	Rebecca & Ken	13	4 x all day workshop	Visual Theatre/ Puppetry	8 -13

# PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

## POCKETFOOL FOR PRESCHOOLERS (THEATRE ARTS)

As a result of a successful grants-funded program, ArtPlay scheduled Pocketfool for Preschoolers as a regular monthly public program. The artists, Jennifer and Heidi, identified a need for more, what they termed, "original theatre" for young children. ArtPlay provided them with their first opportunity to develop their performance skills into interactive workshops for both children and their parents. The 'Transport' workshop combined theatrical and playful drama, music and visual arts experiences with children aged three to five and their parents. This artist-led, imaginative journey involved a series of short encounters that included a train, a boat, tigers, sea life hidden treasures, and culminated in the children and parents sharing a ride on a magic carpet.



## COMING CLOSER THROUGH INDIGENOUS STORY-TELLING (STORY AND VISUAL ART)

Boori, an experienced Australian Indigenous storyteller and writer, led the Coming Closer workshop. It involved children aged three to six years, three younger siblings and twelve parents. Grant-funded, the workshop involved a partnership between the lead artist/storyteller and two experienced early years teachers, Dominic, a specialist in visual arts, and Victoria, a specialist in language and community publishing. The two-hour workshop began with storytelling that was physically enacted by the participants led by the artist, who also played a didgeridoo. The children were then invited to tables set up with black drawing media and areas for mono-printing and block printing led by Dominic. The children were encouraged to reflect on memorable aspects of the stories and represent these through their images. This series of workshops resulted in a community-published booklet, Coming Closer: Listen with your Heart, coordinated by Victoria.

## PRESCHOOL JAM (MUSIC)

The two Irish artists, Nico and Martin, have worked extensively at The Ark in Dublin. This workshop involved children aged four to five years and their parent in forty-five minutes of playful, active and improvised music-making that culminated in a whole group 'jam'. Throughout the workshop young children, with and without their parents, co-created and co-directed music making using angklungs, bells, whistles and other novel instruments.

*I've run music workshops for people of all ages for a very long time. And I've always come back to children. I prefer to work with children, and I've developed a lot of workshop techniques that I can use for all ages. Nico*





## MICROSCOPE DRAWING (ART/SCIENCE)

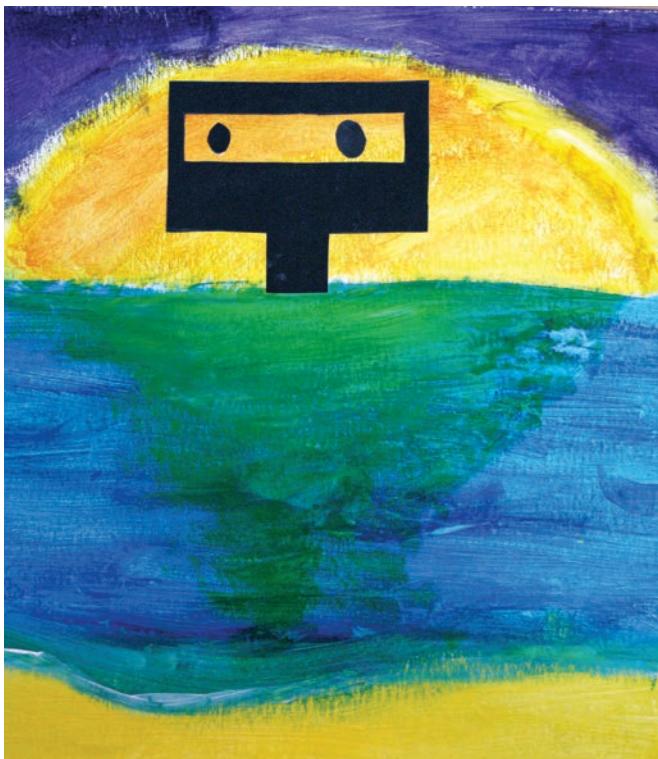
The promotional text for the workshop, Microscope Drawing reads, "Peek into the lens of a microscope and enter a tiny but vast world of mystery, wonder and scientific discovery". The workshop began with a demonstration, led by a visual artist Briony and a scientist Greg, both dressed in laboratory coats. Running for one hour, this workshop involved three-to-five year olds, younger siblings and parents. Through the use of a magnifying device named 'Cyclops' and later a sophisticated microscope, the children were invited to "play at being scientists", encouraged to view and self-scan a wide range of materials including their own hands, a strawberry, an ostrich feather, computer chip, coin, and handmade paper. Following this inquiry, Briony led the children in a line playfully through the space, whilst a magnified image of a live millipede was projected on a nearby screen. The children eventually settled at tables laid out with drawing materials, small magnifying glasses and photographs of microscopic forms that served as a reference for their drawings.

## PLAYSCAPES (VISUAL ARTS)

This series of drop-in weekend workshops was undertaken outside the entrance of ArtPlay, led by two teaching artists, Kath and Sian, both experienced with working with young children. The environment was set up with several trestle tables laden with colourful felt and small buckets of water. Children were invited to explore and mould with felt making and clay activities. In addition to this, children had access to a range of felt, natural materials, small houses and play figures with which to construct personal, non-permanent play environments or 'playscapes' on nearby large boulders. Flexibly scheduled, the one hour 'drop in' session required the artists to re-introduce the activity as new families arrived, all the time focused on guiding the felt-construction experience of settled children. At any one time twenty children aged two to seven years were present, supported by parents, grandparents and guardians.



# PUBLIC PROGRAMS 6 – 13 YEAR OLDS



## HOMAGE TO NOLAN (VISUAL ARTS - PAINTING)

The *Homage to Nolan* workshop was programmed to link with a current and nearby retrospective public gallery exhibition of the artist Sydney Nolan. It ran for over two hours and involved a group of children aged from six to twelve years. Parents were in attendance, and to varying degrees, interacted with children to provide support. The workshop began with a slide show and discussion based on Nolan's work with particular reference given to a series of paintings entitled the Ned Kelly series. To stimulate their own paintings the children were introduced to a few general painting and mixed-media methods evident in Nolan's work. The remainder of the workshop centred on child-led painting and mixed media studies in a studio-like environment, where participants moved freely to collect materials and revisit computer based Nolan images. The workshop was led by Edna an experienced professional who had worked primarily in Israel in areas including arts therapy, educational resource development and integrated learning programs for both children and adults. The workshop ended gradually as participants completed their paintings.

## WHAT IF... DANCE? (CREATIVE DANCE)

*What if...Dance* was a booked, two-hour weekend workshop that involving children aged four to six year olds, three of whom were boys. The workshop was facilitated by two experienced artists, Mia and Thaila, both who taught in an established creative dance school for children. The workshop began with non-threatening ice-breaking warm-ups that led into a number of short individual and group creative movement explorations, stimulated by large flexible tubes placed throughout the space. The two artists provided evocative and prompting music and modelled a variety of movements for the children to follow, all the time actively encouraging individual improvisation and group responsiveness to each other, and to the music. The young people rotated between being dancers and audience members throughout the workshop. Parents stayed on as observers with only two female parents actively participating. The workshop concluded with the artists inviting the children to reflect on the experience through the development of a 'placement' which involved creating small constructions, using aluminium foil, ribbons and other materials. These served as a reference for post-workshop reflection between children, families and artists.





## MEN OF STEEL (PUPPETRY/THEATRE)

Running for two hours, the *Men of Steel* workshop focused on creating 'Object Theatre' with a group of children aged six to nine years. The two lead artists, Tamara and Sam, were an experienced team who had devised and performed their own Object Theatre shows that had toured locally and internationally. The artists began the workshop by demonstrating how to develop characters and act out scenarios using everyday objects including metal biscuit-cutter stencils and a range of fruit and vegetables. Next the young people, grouped in pairs, worked behind waist-high plinths that served as platforms for them to develop and show their Object Theatre performances. Some parents stayed on to watch on the side, whilst others left, returning at the end of the session. The artists, supported by an ArtPlay staff member, watched and advised the children as they rehearsed their performances. The workshop concluded with a group showing of several short, playful and slapstick 'object theatre' pieces.

## SHADOW PLAY (PUPPETRY)

Upon entering the *Shadow Play* workshop children aged five to eight years, and supporting adults, were led into a darkened space set up for shadow puppetry. Lynne, a puppet artist, experienced with working with children, began by playing with shadow puppets projected onto a large screen. Given some simple instructions and examples, children and their parents created simple shadow puppets using cardboard, rods and various drawing and collage materials. With no requirement to book, new families progressively arrived requiring Lynne to give a series of rolling introductions and instructions. Throughout the workshop she and the ArtPlay staff roamed to encourage and guide, though most children and families were largely self-reliant. The workshop culminated with children returning to the darkened room to play with torches and their created puppets which were projected onto a large screen or on the inside walls of small domed tents. The children co-played with other children and their parents for some time. Participants stayed from forty-five to ninety minutes, with attendance ranging from eight to sixteen children at any one time.





## IN THE STUDIO (VISUAL ARTS - CONSTRUCTION)

The promotion for the *In the Studio* workshop read, *Make animals from paper and cardboard with contemporary visual artist and sculptor Jessica New. This hands-on family workshop will teach you how to shape new and recycled paper materials into your own animal kingdom friends to take home!*

The two-hour workshop, on a Saturday morning, involved children aged from seven to nine years. Parents were required to be present and most actively supported their children's art-making. The artist Jessica, a final year university student studying sculpture, who had never undertaken a practical workshop with children before, began by showing images of her work. Following this, with assistance from an ArtPlay staff member, she introduced the children to a collection of animal head templates and a few construction techniques. Next the children moved to a large open space set up with four tables and began, with the help of their parent and the ArtPlay staff member, to create three-dimensional animal head forms, based largely on the templates provided. Set up nearby was a collection of materials including, coloured thin card, stiff paper and collage materials available for self access. For most of the workshop Jessica remained stationed at a separate table, managing the use of a hot-glue gun and advising children, as needed, on how best to join materials together. Throughout the workshop the children, actively aided by their parent, worked solidly to create and decorate their animal forms.

# SCHOOLS PROGRAM

## RAJASTHANI POTTERS (VISUAL ARTS - POTTERY)

Set up in a stage-like configuration, the Rajasthani Potters workshop began with the students sitting in a wide arc facing the traditionally-dressed artists sitting on the floor. The artists sat on the floor with two aged and non-mechanical stone wheels before them and a display of their pottery behind. This all day workshop, run by two Indian potters, Giri Raj Prasad and Manori Lal, involved students aged ten-twelve years. Using age-old traditional methods the two potters demonstrated their pottery skills before inviting students to co-create pots with them. One of the artists Prasadi said that, *the pottery that the children have done today, it's been printed in their minds and they'll take it back with them, and it's a different feeling when someone comes from India to Australia that's like eight thousand kilometres far, and they're treating them like a family and they'll have this thing in their minds forever and ever.* Later in the workshop the students generated designs to inscribe on their pots that were fired several days later as part of a public kiln-firing event. The students came from an inner-Melbourne school with many students belonging to immigrant families from South-East Asia. The students were supported by their classroom teacher Pam, and by a social welfare aid Caroline, who saw that her role as supporting the students who have a "high need linguistically and culturally". Whilst the students live in a nearby suburb but as noted by one the teachers "they rarely come into the city and rarely venture outside of their community and cultural group".



## ANIMASK (PUPPETRY)

Animask involved two four-hour workshops spaced three weeks apart. With reference to his own childhood art experiences, the Indonesian puppetry artist Heri introduced himself to the children,

*Good morning everyone... When I was a kid I liked art. In my parent's house we didn't have money so we had to create ourselves from our imaginations. You can create anything as long as you have imagination.*

The task Heri set for the students was to create masks that symbolised political, environmental and or social issues. For example two girls created a face with one side symbolising water and the other representing Africa. In the second week students further developed their mask and constructed shadow puppets that were used in a culminating group student shadow play. Students participated aged ten to twelve years. Two teachers and the ArtPlay South Kids coordinator supported this workshop.

## WALKA ACCESSORIES (VISUAL ARTS)

The Walka Accessories program involved young people aged ten-twelve years (thirteen male and nine female) and their teachers in two four-hour workshops spaced three weeks apart. Led by two international Chile-born artists, Ricardo and Claudia, these workshops focused on the design and construction of both individual and group jewellery making activities using recycled materials. The workshop was supported by the ArtPlay South Kids and Big Draw coordinators. A strong focus of these workshops was engaging the students in a similar process of design adopted by the artists which a teacher thought was, "probably more engaging to kids than anything else". The students participating in this workshop came from an outer-Melbourne suburban school. One of their teachers felt the students were not exposed to diverse cultures in their local communities and thus coming to ArtPlay and the city helps to "break down" established and potentially narrow viewpoints.



## PERFORMANCE DRAWING (VISUAL ARTS)

This workshop was led by a young Australian performance drawing artist Zhen, who first completed a Fine Art degree, and more recently, teacher education training. She has decided not to teach full time because she, "could not live without art". Her program, undertaken over two whole days, spaced several weeks apart, involved the development of a large accumulative and temporal whole group charcoal drawing that was documented through stop motion photography. Concurrently to this activity students created portraits of peers using digital drawing tablets. This workshop was supported by the ArtPlay Big Draw coordinator.

A group of students from three grade levels, were involved in the workshop including students aged nine to twelve years of age. The older children had been to ArtPlay before. A teacher Stacey noted that the students responded positively to ArtPlay because,

*The room is so large and they get plenty of room. They can run around. They've got two different activities amongst the time that they're doing, so they can go from one to the other. They can make plenty of mess, and they don't have to worry about it, and they really are enjoying the whole environment that they're in.*

## BIG DRAW: DRAWING TO MUSIC (MULTI-ARTS)

In this workshop the artist Linda, self-described as an experienced ‘teaching artist’ led a group of students aged nine-ten year, through two four-hour workshops spaced several weeks apart. The students, supported by two teachers, came from an outer Melbourne primary school. Introduced by the artist as “chaotic play” the students were involved in a diverse range of abstract-orientated drawing experiences, some of which were created in response to music and movement. In the second workshop the group viewed a kinetic art exhibition in a nearby public gallery. The nature of the workshop aligned with the goals of Big Draw coordinator Greg who valued opportunities to engage students “physically” in unrestrained drawing and in experiences that promoted an inquiry into the “materiality” of art media.



## BIG DRAW: PORTRAITS AND BOOKMAKING (VISUAL ARTS)

This program involved three all day workshops, undertaken several weeks apart, the tasks set for students included the construction of personal sketch books, small self-portrait drawing and finally large composite drawings, created both individually, in small groups and finally as one whole group. The group comprised of boys aged eleven to twelve years who were supported by two teachers, Patricia and Melanie and the Big Draw coordinator. The Melbourne artist Marianne described herself as a painter who has become interested in drawing-based animation. She saw her goals for the workshop being more about “shifting the way the students were perceiving” rather than assessing the “graphic quality of their work.”

The students were enrolled in a boys-only privately funded school located in central Melbourne. Their teacher Patricia considers the school “fortunate” and “with excellent facilities”. Whilst the school provides extensive opportunities to study the arts, as Patricia continues to note,

*Coming here exposes the students, a smaller group admittedly, to working a professional artist, in a much closer proximity and in a completely different situation, and that’s what I think is so important.*

# LONGTERM PROGRAMS

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## ARTPLAY PUPPET TROUPE (VISUAL THEATRE / PUPPETRY)

Over a period of three years a core group of young people, aged seven to thirteen years, became regular subscribers to the visual theatre/puppetry programs led by Ken and Rebecca, and came to be known as the ArtPlay Puppet Troupe. Each annual program involved a small group of up to thirteen young people, who participated in up to five 4-6 hour workshops, undertaken either intensively over several consecutive days or spaced several weeks apart, scheduled during non-school periods. Engaged as apprentices to the two artists, who acted as directors and mentors, young people co-scripted, co-created and co-presented evocative and professional public performances such as *The Man who Loved Boxes*. The central ambition of this program, as noted by Rebecca, was to Rebecca, "to take them through the process that we [artists] would go through if we were devising a piece of work." The artists were responsible for generating open and provocative 'big' topics for inquiry, and pre-planned how such topics may be developed, for example through black theatre or shadow theatre. In *The Man who Loved Boxes* workshop the artists encouraged the young people to develop ideas and themes that were 'unexpected', 'carefree' and 'whimsical'.

*When asked about the experience of working with the artists the young puppetry artists put forth comments such as "you have to think about it and focus" and "they [the artists] talk you through it, let it sit in your mind, what to do. If you forget it, they don't get angry, they just say, 'oh ok, this is what you do.'*



## ARTPLAY MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ENSEMBLE (MUSIC)

Initiated by ArtPlay Creative Producer, Simon Spain and musician Gillian, who at the time was the Education Officer for the MSO, this program has now run for eight years (2004-2011) with a new group formed each year. The Ensemble program has involved three-to-four two-day workshops, spread three months apart in the school holidays, with new groups formed each year. Each two-day workshop involves the creation of a piece of music inspired by a piece from a current MSO concert program available to the children. Gillian chooses a piece she feels has elements that can form the basis of a collaborative composition by the children. The first day (10:00am-3:30pm) is usually based at the Iwaki Auditorium, home of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in the ABC Centre. Over the two days, there is a mixture of small and whole group work. With no more than six, the children are periodically clustered into sub-groups to work on components of the final work. Depending on the MSO musicians involved, the instruments played by the children and their expertise, these groups could consist of an orchestral grouping like strings, or an instrumental mix. Led by a MSO musician, each group works in a separate rehearsal space spread throughout the complex. Gillian moves from whole-group leader to roving between groups, actively supporting and facilitating. The following day the workshop moves to ArtPlay, with Gillian clearly positioned as the musical director. Most of the day is spent on further development of the parts that are progressively linked and layered with each other to form a multi-sectioned composition and rehearsing in readiness for a final performance in front of families and friends. The children return again in a few months to work on another improvised composition stimulated by another composer featured in the MSO program.

*I try to take them through a process that is exactly what the musicians [professionals] would do. I give them the same task and questions [as the musicians]. They nut out how to make the piece work among themselves. The process itself is authentic, and it has applications across a really wide sphere. I hope that the skills that they learn, the way they approach that problem solving is creative and honest. It's not about imposing the quickest and easiest solution, but really trying to kind of nut out what's needed, what's required or what's wanted, and struggling with that, you know, they struggle and they see musicians struggling. That's what I aim for in the projects. That's what I think is the art of ensemble*



When I go to art  
play it feels like a  
different world.