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Why Test the Arts?

The Western Australian Experience

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Abstract

Comprehensive system assessment of the arts has only occurred twice before in the world; once in Western Australia in 1996 and again the following year in the USA.

Now in 2003 / 2004 Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) as part of the Department of Education and Training is again undertaking systemic assessment of the Arts. Considering the inherent difficulties in assessing a learning area that is primarily practical and performance based, why do we persist?

Collecting information about the educational standards of students at Years 3, 7 and 10 sends a strong message to educators and the community about current performance and good practice in the Arts. Using a variety of innovative performance tasks MSE tests the art forms of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts. Using a Rasch measurement model to analyse the data, achievement scales are produced calibrating item/task difficulty with person ability. Mean student achievement is reported by year group. Sub-group achievement is reported according to gender, aboriginality and language background.

The benefits of this program are manifold. School release materials allow schools to test their own cohorts and compare individual students to the state wide results. Teachers participating in the marking of the random sample gain invaluable professional development and the system is provided with valuable information to inform curriculum planning and standard setting.

Introduction

Western Australia's commitment to systemic testing of the Arts is the basis of this paper. It provides: background to the testing program; details the test design and measurement methodology; and provides an overview of the results. In looking at these three areas we hope to also address the question of the research value of this assessment program to education specifically and the wider community generally.

It could be argued that the Arts are not an essential part of a curriculum. Yet Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) as part of the Department of Education and Training (DET) (Western Australia) has continued to include assessment of the Arts in its random sample testing program. Since 1990 MSE has provided information about educational standards across the curriculum in the Western Australian government school system. It not only monitors and reports on system level performance in the eight learning areas as described in the Western Australian *Curriculum Framework*, it also assists schools to validly and reliably monitor the performance of their students in each learning area.

The *Curriculum Framework* sets out what all students should know, understand, value, and be able to do as a result of the programs that they undertake in schools in Western Australia, from kindergarten through to Year 12. [*Curriculum Framework, Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 6*] The Arts (consisting of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts) is one of the eight learning areas as established by the *Curriculum Framework* and is required to be taught in some form across all years of compulsory schooling. Since policy endorses the equal status of the eight curriculum areas, it therefore follows that system-level assessment and monitoring should occur.

The enthusiasm of the Arts community for information derived from system level monitoring is another important contributing factor supporting its continued inclusion. The Arts has now been tested twice, once in 1996 and again in 2003 / 2004. In comparison, Literacy / English and Numeracy / Mathematics dominate the testing program and since 1998 have been assessed annually. It is recognised that if the Arts are not maintained in the testing cycle, at least at their current rate, a message about the value of the Arts to the system will inevitably be communicated. Proactive arts teachers who realise the importance of maintaining and supporting such a program have been invaluable allies in recognising the danger of letting the Arts slip from the testing program.

Systemic data collection in the Arts has also been important in the debate on setting achievement targets. It has provided reliable quantitative data about outcome levels and the percentages of students who are achieving specified levels.

Evolution of the Testing Program

The 1996 report *Student Achievement in The Arts in Western Australian Government Schools* summarised the performance of representative samples of students from Years 3, 7 and 10 against the December 1996 draft version of The Arts *Student Outcome Statements*, through the disciplines of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts. The testing program was preceded with an intensive eighteen months of development and consultation that involved curriculum experts and specialist arts teachers refining and developing the instruments for the testing program.

In each of the disciplines the students were required to complete two tests (a process and analysis test) that contained a range of item types and questioning techniques. Multiple choice, short answer and extended response were included together with planning procedures and the presentation or performance of final products. The process task in the 1996 Arts assessment sample for all art forms was designed to be administered to groups of students and was practical in nature. As a result, sampling of whole classes was

necessary. This process was restricted by the limited number of students who took classes at school in the various art forms, particularly at Year 10, and because all five art forms were tested in the one year.

Assessment materials were released in the art forms of drama, music and visual arts at the beginning of 1998. The materials allowed schools to use authentic arts assessments to compare their students' performance with the mean and distribution of the state and are still in use. Due to the nature of the 1996 assessment sample, all materials used in the testing process were also used in the school release materials. This meant that secure test items to use as link items for the 2003 / 2004 assessment were not available. This has meant that longitudinal data could not be gathered.

The Random Sample 2003 / 2004

Many lessons were learnt by MSE in the time between 1996 and 2003. The very small samples, resulting from testing all art forms in the one year, proved a concern as was the difficulty in capturing and presenting student performance for the public report. There were logistical problems associated with accurately gathering student work samples that needed to be considered, as were ways to increase the sample sizes. In the interim years two other performance based learning areas had undergone systemic testing – Languages Other than English (LOTE) and Technology and Enterprise (T&E), further informing the discussion. Assessment in both these learning areas shared similar challenges to assessment in the Arts. Both of these learning areas required either video performance based assessment or the collection of large awkward work samples. Their experiences greatly informed the second Arts random sample.

One of the first decisions made when planning for 2003 / 2004 was to split the testing program. This decision was based on the experiences of the 1996 program. The very small sample sizes achieved, the very individual nature of each of the art forms and the need for individualised tests influenced this decision. A survey of schools Arts enrolment numbers revealed that there were relatively small numbers of students studying each art form in schools and those schools tended to offer several of the arts subjects. This created problems for drawing a sample that was representative, without burdening particular students or schools.

Visual Arts and Media were trialled and tested in 2003. Dance, Drama and Music were assessed in 2004. Schools were surveyed to confirm the art forms offered and the samples were only drawn from schools that indicated that they offered at least half an hour of the art form in question. From this information it was decided to assess Visual Arts at Year 3, 7 and 10, while Media was tested at Year 10 only. Dance and Drama were tested at Year 7 and 10, and Music was tested at Year 3, 7 and 10.

Development of the Assessment Materials

The assessment materials were developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in consultation with DET and additional expert consultants. The materials were developed and refined in five key stages.

The first stage involved the initial planning with ACER, DET and curriculum experts. The broad aims, scope and shape of the assessment were initially mapped out in Western Australia in consultation with a range of curriculum and assessment experts. This initial planning comprised the establishment of idealised Arts assessments. These idealised assessment plans were conceptualised with reference to their capacity to capture and describe the Arts curriculum standards detailed in the *Curriculum Framework* and the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*. During this initial consultation period, it was determined that the assessments in each of the five Arts areas must assess

student achievement in the:

1. Expression of understanding of their own world in the planning of an artwork;
2. Planning of an original artwork based on a theme or topic;
3. Technical performance proficiency in performing or creating their artwork;
4. Reflection, response and evaluation of their own artworks; and
5. Reflection, response and evaluation of an artwork created by an external artist.

The second stage consisted of the development of the preliminary assessment tasks and materials by ACER. Detailed assessment tasks and materials were developed to meet the assessment needs determined in the initial planning. In each case, the tasks followed the same generic format:

1. Student generation of ideas based on a given theme or topic;
2. Student consideration of the way in which their ideas could be manifest in their art form;
3. Detailed planning of an artefact or performance piece;
4. Creation or performance of an artefact or performance piece;
5. Viewing and critical reflection of their own arts works; and
6. Viewing, analysis and critical reflection on an externally produced artwork.

More specifically the Arts tests were developed around the theme of *Identity: Self and Place*. For Visual Arts this equated to "You and your Favourite Place". The tests comprised of several different tasks that addressed the four Arts strands and the overall theme. The students started by answering questions related to a painting by Leon Pericles (a prominent Western Australian artist). They completed a mind map and an observational drawing of a still life before embarking on a visual diary that led to their art work based around the theme. It was not expected that the students would complete a work in the same way that they would in class. The entire test took just less than a day and the tests were completed individually.

The Media tests were developed around the idea of "A day in the life of..." It followed the same outline as the Visual Arts test in that the students answered questions related to a stimulus, completed a mind map, planned a plot and storyboard, then filmed and reflected on their production. The Media test took an entire day. Responses to the stimulus and their own work were completed separately but the storyboard and filming were completed as a group.

Feedback from schools and teachers in the first year of testing indicated that there were significant logistical problems associated with the use of a full day of testing. As a consequence of this, the Dance, Drama and Music assessments completed in the second year of testing were condensed to be completed in one half day. The Dance, Drama and Music assessments therefore had slightly fewer tasks than the Visual Arts and Music assessments.

The dance test used an image from the book *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan as a stimulus. The students were asked to plan, rehearse and perform a short piece based on their movement ideas elicited by the image. They watched their performance and reflected on the process. The Year 10 students had the added task of watching another performance based on the same stimulus and reflecting on that performance as well. Except for the reflection task the test was completed in small groups.

The drama test was developed around the theme of Belonging. Students chose from three plot outlines and developed a piece that resolved the plot in some way. The performances were recorded and the students reflected on their performance. Again the Year 10 students watched another performance based on a similar theme and reflected

on that performance as well. Again, except for the reflection task the test was completed in small groups.

The music test was developed around the theme of 'Place'. Students composed a piece of music in groups of three developing the sounds of their chosen place. Each group was also required to include a solo for each instrument. The Year 3 students worked with tuned and untuned percussion instruments while the Year 7 and 10 students were encouraged to use an instrument that they were learning. Voice and body percussion were also encouraged.

The third stage of the development process was to pilot the assessment materials in a small sample of schools. The assessment materials and tasks for all five art forms were piloted in a small sample of Western Australian schools. This was completed early in the test development process to determine the appropriateness of the demands of the tasks for both the students and the administering teachers. In addition to this, the piloting enabled qualitative data to inform the further development of the assessment guidelines, timing and the substantive content of the individual items and tasks.

The assessment materials in each art form were revised with reference to the feedback received during the piloting. In addition to this, early piloting of the Visual Arts and Media materials revealed two critical assessment issues:

1. It was apparent that Year 7 students did not have sufficient Media planning capacity and technical skills to provide meaningful data for the Media assessment.
2. It was apparent that Year 3 and 7 students did not have sufficient experience and skills to reflect on and evaluate externally produced artworks to provide meaningful data for either assessment.

On the basis of these findings, and with a view to minimising the overall time and demands of the arts assessments, it was decided that the Media assessment and the response and evaluation of externally produced artworks in all arts areas would be conducted at Year 10 only.

The fourth component of the process was the critique of the assessment materials by DET and external experts. The assessment materials revised post-pilot were then submitted for review and critique by an expert panel comprising DET representatives and curriculum and assessment experts. This was an extensive substantive and technical review of the materials with respect to their alignment with the Outcome and Standards Framework, their feasibility and appropriate range and accessibility. The assessment materials were further revised according to the findings of the review.

The final stage to the test development process was the field trial of assessment materials. After the refinement of the assessment materials on the basis of the pilot data, the assessments were trialled in Western Australian schools. In most cases, each assessment in each Arts area was completed by approximately 150 students. The assessments were administered by the specialist Arts teacher in each area in each school. The field trial was conducted exactly as it was anticipated the final random sample would be conducted.

Following the field trial, the student work was centrally marked by specifically trained specialist arts teachers. The material to be marked included the students' written plans, reflections and evaluations, and art work. The Visual Arts product were completed on A3 sheets, the Media products were submitted as short video movies, the Dance, Drama and Music performances were filmed at the time of the assessment and submitted on videotape.

The student written responses were marked with reference to a detailed scoring guide for each item or task. The artefacts were marked with reference to a criterion based marking scheme based on the communicative success of the works and the manifestation of the technical elements of the relevant Arts area in the works.

The scored student data were then analysed using Rasch methodology. This supported a detailed qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the measurement properties and quality of the assessment tasks and items. The analyses of the trial data enabled judgements to be made regarding:

1. The degree to which each assessment task or item could be considered to be measuring the same construct (i.e. achievement in the Arts area);
2. The capacity of the scoring codes to discriminate between different levels of achievement; and
3. The relative difficulties of the different achievements.

The assessment items, tasks and scoring guides were then revised in light judgements made from the combined quantitative and substantive review of their properties. In each Arts assessment the broad technical and substantive measurement properties of the assessment materials were supported by the trial data. Hence the subsequent revisions of the materials took the form of fine tuning, rather than substantively altering the assessment materials to be used in the final sample assessments.

Limitations of the Testing Program

During the test development process a number of compromises needed to be made from the original idealised assessment plans. The compromises came from the necessity to minimise the total time and demands of the assessments and the developing understanding that, in some Arts areas, the overwhelming focus of teaching and learning is on the development of technical skills and production of artefacts. Where it became necessary to remove material from the assessments in order to lessen their magnitude, the material selected for removal was generally that relating to the two strands of the Outcomes and Standards Framework that refer primarily to 'Responding'.

One significant compromise, based on experience of the Visual Arts assessment, in the development of the assessments was the omission of a uniform technical skills assessment task. The Visual Arts assessment included the requirement for students (Years 3, 7 and 10) to complete a pencil sketch observational drawing of a chair, a ball and a bag. The assessment of this sketch was completed using a set of technical performance criteria that were highly specific to the common content of the task. The advantage of this was that the data produced by the completion of the common task could be used to link and anchor the specific different achievements across year levels as the basis of the common achievement scale. The disadvantage was that the task added a significant time to the assessment and provided technical performance data that arguably was partially replicated in the students' individual creative artworks. The initial planning of the Dance, Drama and Music assessments included similar common technical skills tasks in each area. These were removed from the assessments in order to lessen the assessment demands. The consequence of this is that the only artefact to be assessed in each arts area is the one created solely by the students. This satisfies the requirement that the artefact, and the assessment of the artefact can reflect the substantive and conceptual aspects of the creative process. However, assessment of the student technical skills evident in their artefacts can only be completed using a more generic set of criteria that can accommodate the full range of student creations. As a consequence, this method of assessing student technical skills, although still feasible, loses some of the specificity of an assessment based on student completion of common tasks. Ideally, as for the Visual Arts, the assessment would include both types of student work.

Considerations

It is commonly recognised that achievement in the Arts takes place through a process of development and review which eventually culminates in a presentation or performance. In Western Australian schools this process generally takes anywhere from five weeks to a term or even as long as a semester. The MSE Arts tests followed a similar process but condensed into a day or less. The development of an arts work, like a well-written essay or a well made piece of furniture, needs time, reflection and the opportunity for reworking and revision to fully develop. While standardised assessment cannot allow unlimited time or materials, important insights into student development are still apparent and can be fairly judged in the time given. Therefore, the benefits to both schools and the system in keeping state wide testing are extensive as long as the results are used and interpreted sensitively.

Marking

A huge benefit of the testing program is the involvement of current and pre service teachers in marking of the random sample. This paid professional development opportunity allows those interested teachers to be part of the consensus process and to see a huge range of student work across a variety of school settings that they would generally not be privy to. Teachers who participated in the marking describe it as the 'best professional development' because it not only allows them to see the range of performance, but helps them interpret the framework consistently.

Data Analysis

After all the student work was marked, the data were analysed using Rasch measurement methodology. Rasch analysis of the item function and student achievement enables the construction of a measurement scale of item difficulty and student ability on the same measurement scale. Student ability is defined as the amount of the latent variable (in this case Arts ability as described by the items derived from the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* in each of the five art forms) that is evident in each student. Item difficulty is defined as the amount of the same latent variable that is manifest in each item. The relationship between student achievement and item difficulty is a probabilistic one. By convention, a student of equal ability to the difficulty of an item will have a 50% chance of successfully completing the item. Evidently, where a student's ability is greater than the difficulty of an item the probability of success for the student on the item will be greater than 50% and conversely where a student's ability is less than the difficulty of an item the probability of the student successfully completing the item will be less than 50%. In each case, the greater the magnitude of difference between the ability of a student and the difficulty of an item, the further away from 50% (either greater or less depending on the direction of the difference between student ability and item difficulty) the probability of success on an item for a student becomes.

As for the analysis of the data from the field trial, the first analytical process was to determine the degree to which the measurement items in each assessment could be considered to be measuring a unidimensional construct. This process (known as the analysis of fit) supported the final cleaning and fine tuning of the assessment scoring system to be used for the final analysis. This analysis is conducted at an item by item level. As the assessments have already been completed by the students it is no longer possible to modify the nature and text of the assessment items however, it is essential to recognise that each assessment item must be considered as both the item text together with the scoring system for the item. Changes to the measurement system for any item can therefore be referred to as change to the item. There are three primary courses of action available on the basis of the analysis of item fit:

1. Make no change to an item;
2. Modify the scoring system to combine or 'collapse' different response categories;
and

3. Remove the data from the item from the data set.

The course of action for each item in the assessment is determined by both a quantitative analysis based on the Rasch item characteristics and a qualitative analysis of the substantive properties of the item. The overwhelming majority of assessment items remained unchanged as a result of these analyses. This is to be expected given that each measurement item had previously been analysed and refined in light of the findings of the field trials.

Following this initial tuning, the data could then be used to construct measurement scales against which the item difficulties and student abilities could be reported for all items and students in each art form. Separate scales were constructed in each art form for the student written reflections and their artefacts. Where students completed group artefact projects separate scales were formed for the group production and the performance of randomly selected individuals in the groups.

In order to construct measurement scales in each art form that covered the range of students completing the assessments, it was necessary to include some common assessment items between the year levels. These items, known as 'link' items take the form either of identical written response questions that are scored in the same way across the year levels, or artefact scoring criteria that are applied the same way across the year levels. These link items can then be used as the basic building blocks for the construction of joint measurement scales. Before the scales can be constructed, some analysis is conducted regarding the suitability of the link items as foundations for the joint scale. This analysis (known as differential item functioning or DIF analysis) is based on the principle that, in order to be useful as links, the items must function in the same way for the different groups of students who completed them. Only the items that satisfy this requirement are included as links for the building of the final measurement scales.

The measurement scales form the basis for the assessment and reporting of student achievement in the Arts. For each art form, the assessment items can be scaled and ordered on the basis of their difficulties. This provides a picture of the nature of increasing achievements in each art form.

The last component to this process is the mapping of the measurement scale back to the Outcomes and Standards Framework from which the items were initially derived. Working with curriculum specialists the item descriptors are examined against the levels of achievement and decisions are made about where the level cut-offs reside. These cut-offs then provide the information about the percentages of students that achieve at particular levels.

Results

In undertaking a testing program on such a scale the expectation is that the information gathered will be of a quality that is useful for a variety of audiences. The main audiences for this program are the teachers and schools involved in the testing program and the government education system in which the testing took place.

The type of information collected included details on students skills and understandings in relation to the individual art forms and the percentages of students that achieved at specific levels (in relation to the state's curriculum). The other information gathered includes details about sub-group achievement. The sub-groups targeted are gender, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students (ATSI) and Language Background other than English students (LBOTE).

Students Skills and Understandings

In the public report that is prepared following the analysis a vast component is dedicated to describing what students can and can't do as a result of the testing program. This

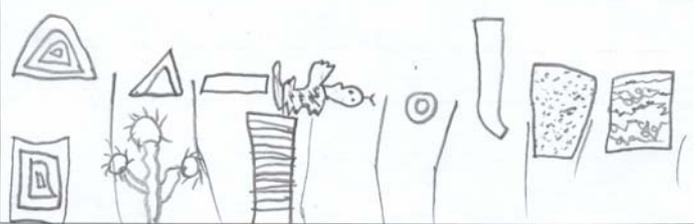
information is useful for improving and clarifying a teachers understanding of where students' strengths and weaknesses lie. The information is presented with percentages and attached work samples to provide an additional visual reference. It is important to note though that individual students and schools are not identified in any way by the report.

The examples that follow are from the Visual Arts testing program conducted in 2003.

In the visual arts assessment students were asked to show how the artist uses colour, shape, line and patterns in the reproduction.

Question 4

Complete the following table to show how the artist uses colours, shapes, lines and patterns in *A Landscape of Memories*.

<p>Colours</p> <p>yellow, purple, green, pink, blue, black, brown, orange, gray</p>
<p>Shapes</p> <p>triangles, Δ, □, squares, ○, circles, ovals, rectangles</p>
<p>Lines</p> 
<p>Patterns</p> 

In the context of this task, around 66% of Year 3 students were able to identify and list different colours, shapes and lines in a given art work (level 1 associated activity). Approximately 45% of students were able to do the same with patterns (a level 3 associated task). Some students found it easier to describe the elements pictorially than with words. Less than 10% of Year 3 students could generalise or discuss the effect of colour, shapes, lines or patterns on an art work (a level 4 / 5 associated task and not shown in the example).

Providing information in this format allows teachers to see the skill level of students at different ages and the way that they present their ideas. This example is from a Year 3 student.

For the practical side of the visual arts assessment students were required to produce an observational drawing, a visual diary and a final piece of art work. The marking guide provided the categories the student work was assessed on and the codes to apply. A similar format was applied to the presentation of the practical components of the

assessment in the report. Percentages and descriptions were provided about what students could and could not do with attached work samples. The following examples are drawn from the Year 7 and 10 work.

The observational drawing consisted of a chair, bag and ball (chosen for their availability across a variety of school settings). One of the marking categories for the observational drawing was perspective. In the context of this task, in demonstrating their understanding of perspective when drawing a chair, 50% of Year 7 students could demonstrate some sense of perspective but still angled legs or included some flattening or tilting of different parts of the object (level 2 skill). Thirty-one percent of students demonstrated a good sense of perspective with some minor inconsistencies in the drawing. They were demonstrating level 4 skills. Just fewer than 8% of Year 7 students were able to demonstrate perspective and foreshortening occurring across the entire picture (a level 5 skill).

Year 7 Observational Drawings

Low



High



Students were given a range of materials in which to construct their art work including three different frieze papers, tissue papers, and a variety of available dry medium. The topic for the art work was "Me and My Favourite Place". One of the categories the student work was assessed on was the use of visual arts elements and principles.

In the context of this task eighteen percent of Year 10 students showed some cohesion of elements and principles in their work however it was very basic – use of zones or baseline and sky. Fifty percent of Year 10 students demonstrated a conscious arrangement of their work including a better visual spatial sense but from a limited point of view (a level 3 skill). However, 29% of students at Year 10 were able to compose their work for a particular effect - the work was sophisticated. These students were demonstrating level 5 / 6 skills.

Year 10 Art Work



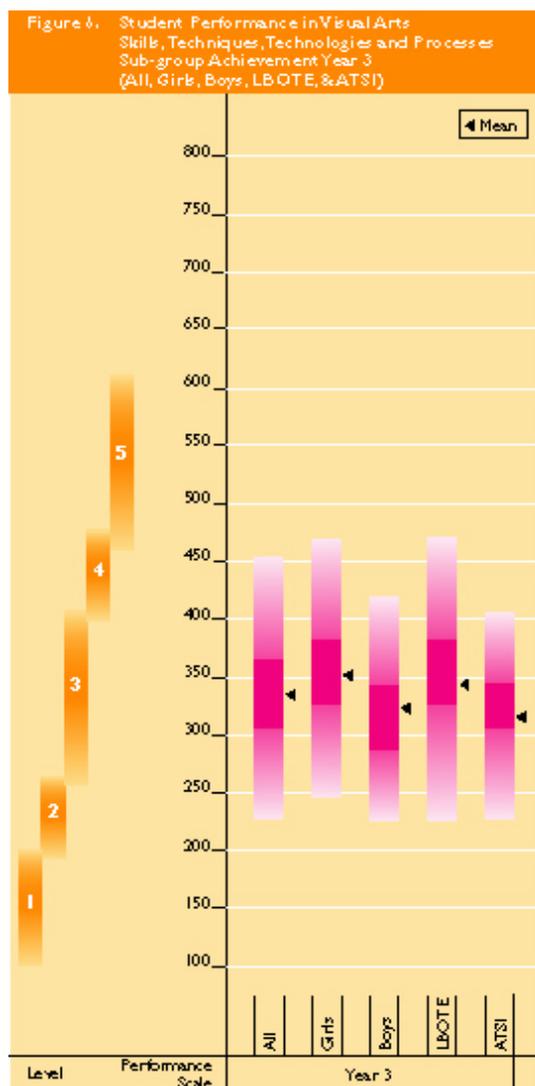
Basic schematic drawing with ground line focus. Some control demonstrated in use of medium. (Level 2)

Year 10 Art Work



Sophisticated layering and image development. Good understanding of visual language (line, shape and colour) is evident. (Level 5)

Figure 1.



State Means and Percentages

In addition to identifying what students are capable of the testing program allows us to provide information on the percentages of students that achieve at a particular level. This information is also included in the Department's Annual Report and provides an interesting snap shot of student achievement.

In the Visual Arts Skills, Techniques, Technologies and Processes assessment (the practical):

- ❖ Year 3 and Year 7 students typically achieved outcomes associated with level 3, and Year 10 students achieved outcomes associated with level 4.
- ❖ About 96% of Year 3 students achieved outcomes associated with level 2
- ❖ About 93% of Year 7 students achieved outcomes associated with level 3
- ❖ About 65% of Year 10 student achieved outcomes associated with level 4.

The results of the testing program are also represented graphically.

This graph also contains information about the way the different sub-groups performed. (See Figure 1)

Means are calculated and items are looked for in which the sub-groups may have performed better or worse on in their given ability group.

Provision of Results to Schools

Traditionally MSE has not provided results back to participating schools due to several factors. Firstly, the sampling methodology used (random sampling) meant that all students in a particular year group were not assessed, so returning part cohort data to schools was considered to be potentially misleading. Secondly, in many learning areas more than one test form is used in the program so it was unlikely for an entire school cohort to complete the same test so it would not be possible to compare the students' raw score results and finally, as the testing takes place with Year 3, 7 and 10 students, where Year 7 is the final year of primary school and the results are not available until early the following year, the value of providing the results to primary schools again seemed minimal.

With the advent of more whole class sampling, the provision of results back to schools became more viable. The T&E learning area was the first to offer complete feedback to schools and because the Arts sampling in Visual Arts and Media in Year 10 was class based results were offered back to secondary schools early in 2004. Results in Dance, Drama and Music will also be offered to schools early in 2005.

The results consist of the numerical student codes used by MSE to identify students and a number to represent the achievement level for each outcome assessed consistent with the Western Australian *Outcomes and Standards Framework*. The state means for year levels were also included as a comparison for teachers to examine their student's results against.

The results are designed to provide one piece of information to teachers and schools on student achievement and are not necessarily representative of student capabilities when considered consistently over time.

Conclusion

The place and value of systemic testing has been debated at many levels of educational circles over many years. It has not been the purpose of this paper to enter that discussion except to say that, in our opinion, there is a place for systemic testing but it is certainly not the only piece of information to be used by schools when making judgements about student work and should be interpreted only in the context from which it was derived.

Standardised assessment in the Arts may be seen as restricting the creative process generally advocated by Arts specialists in schools. Condensing the process to less than a day, restricting the materials used or the available performance space and not allowing any interaction with the teacher are foreign concepts to a highly effective arts program. For some teachers, the anecdotal feedback suggested these restrictions were distressing to students who were used to spending time developing their ideas and subsequent work. Despite this, the range of student achievement suggested that there were students who were capable of working under pressure and produce a high standard of work regardless of the conditions.

So when all is considered, the Arts as a learning area, has greatly benefited from the random sample process. The information gathered has benefited the schools that participated, through the provision of centrally marked and analysed results, it has benefited teachers who have participated in the marking process through a high quality professional development opportunity and the system has benefited from quality data that provides a snap shot of state wide achievement in this learning area. These positives definitely outweigh any perceived negatives involving a compromise to the arts learning process and it is hoped that the Arts will continue to be part of the MSE random sample program in the years to come.

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