

**Building capacity:
Literacy and creative workforce development
through International Digital Arts Projects' (IDAprjects)
exhibition programs and partnerships**

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Table of Contents

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1. Executive Summary	3
2. Context	4
3. Towards a literate and creative workforce	5
3.1 Literacy in the 21 st century	5
3.2 The creative workforce	6
3.3 Education	6
4. IDAprjects	8
4.1 Background and governance	8
4.2 Aims and results	8
4.3 IDAprjects as CCD	9
5. Intersections, outcomes and directions – Summary and exemplars	10
5.1 Partnerships	10
5.2 Young and emerging	10
5.3 Established artists	10
5.4 The sector(s)	11
5.5 Digital democratisation and aesthetic apprenticeship	11
6. List of references	12

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1. Executive Summary

- IDAprojects programs present new and emerging digital art practice alongside seminal works of the digital art canon in a way that promotes discourse, artist development, and collaboration.
- IDAprojects programs deliver across a breadth of policy areas including:
 - arts
 - technology
 - education
 - research and development
 - creative, interdisciplinary research clusters
 - social inclusion and political economies
 - cross-cultural collaboration (cultural diplomacy).
- IDAprojects is a valuable industry partner for education and research organisations, and is well equipped to be identified and exploited as an ARC Linkage partner.
- IDAprojects plays an important role in contributing to the creative capacity of populations through:
 - developing important skills associated with the experience of the arts
 - delivering education programs
 - developing Community Cultural Development (CCD) programs.
- IDAprojects, through its own specialist personnel and networks, can play an important and evolving role in the development of creative capacity in the workforce, especially in emerging economies and industries.
- IDAprojects is an organisation that can couple arts education, education through arts and technological expertise in order to realise artistic, social, economic and educational ends.

2. Context

This report articulates opportunities, possibilities and processes for the effective construction of creative capacity through partnership with IDAprojects. The report will speak to the myriad of successful international partnerships that IDAprojects has recently undertaken and demonstrate, through bibliographic research and policy interpretation, the benefits of the IDAprojects model of national and international cross-cultural technologically mediated exchange.

The report seeks an audience of policy makers, international cultural agencies, educational and research institutions of national and international significance, cultural diplomacy organisations, arts tastemakers and creative entrepreneurs.

The author has had an informal, non-financial relationship and affiliation with IDAprojects since March 2004 as an educator and artist.

3. Towards a literate and creative workforce

3.1 Literacy in the 21st century

In an environment of exponential growth in technological processes and the increasingly important role new technologies play in society (Kurzweil, 2005), a new literacy centred upon technology and its creative and social application has emerged (Robinson, 2001). Given the rapid rate of technological advancement and its potent potential for multi-faceted communication, a new skills set (that includes, *inter alia*, interpretation, creativity and symbolic languages – all of which feature in arts education) becomes an increasingly important base. The emerging literacy of knowledge transfer and application (predicted by Toffler, 1971) has become at least as important as the traditional literacy sets.

Essentially, emergent and proliferating ICT has led to a new communications paradigm – one that takes place in technologically mediated spaces and embraces a multi-faceted symbolic language. Combined with the increasing sophistication of visual language through digital manipulation and the explosion of personal online spaces, the requirement for a new skills-set (incorporating production, consumption, interpretation, creativity, symbolic language) leading to a technologically-facilitated literacy becomes an increasingly important tool for communication within the workforce, creative industries and the community (Australia Council submission to Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council [PMSEIC], 2007).

Conservative models of education call for literacy in language and mathematics – commonly referred to in Australia as 'literacy and numeracy'. Arguments in favour of literacy gleaned through creative endeavour have long been discussed and debated in the form of 'knowledge transfer' – the learning of a particular subject through another subject (for example, learning geography through music). The efficacy of this approach remains unproven (Winner and Hetland, 2000), though associational evidence for impacts on academic attainment has been noted (Caterall and Waldorf, 1999). What has been shown to be effective however is the development, through art pedagogies, of a suite of 'in demand' instrumental or generic skills – particularly creativity, analysis and interpretation (Oakley, 2007). When these skills are pursued as part of a program that invigilates technological literacy through creative projects, there is a building of capacity within the creative industries, in current or future workforces, and the development of resilient, flexible and adaptable workforces with the ability to cope with change (Robinson, 2001).

It has been concluded that the successful development of technological literacy and engagement requires several things. These are identified by Harris & Lane (2007) as:

- Access to technology and qualified personnel
- Opportunity to be creative using the technology
- Experiencing best practice examples of technological literacy
- Community consultation and involvement

In pursuing literacy and engagement in this way, a range of partner organisations (community, institutional, government) is required to make the most resilient and sustainable impact. In terms of technological education, and the development of capacity within the workforce to operate successfully within technologically mediated knowledge or service-based economies (or effect the transition to such an economy), such partnerships are crucial in maintaining project relevance across cultural differences, facilitating the experiencing of best practice examples, and ensuring the continuation and refinement of the capacity building process.

It is the 'creativity, openness and elasticity of the arts' (Matarasso, 1997) that makes them an excellent catalyst for developing a creative, literate and engaged society¹. Programs that embrace technology in the arts component significantly value-add to the experience in preparation for, and participation in, technological change with its own impacts upon the workforce, the society and the economy.

3.2 The creative workforce

Recent Australian research (Oakley 2007; Bamford, 2006) indicates that innovation across the economy is tied to creativity, open-ended enquiry and interpretation (Oakley, 2007; Lestor & Piore, 2004). Coupled with the notion that a workplace of the future is unimaginable² in terms of its technological environment and employment specific skills (Robinson, 2001), it becomes essential that a workforce is creative and skilled in areas that facilitate workplace efficiency and change.

These skills are identified in Kate Oakley's 2007 report *Educating for the Creative Workforce: Rethinking Arts and Education*. Encompassing team-work, problem solving, cultural understanding, decision-making, communication, analysis, interpretation, risk management, open-ended enquiry, project management, and stability and dependability, Oakley points to research that demonstrates that these non-cognitive skills sets are brought about by a prolonged or habitual interaction with the arts. Combining the development of these skill sets with projects facilitating technological literacy and visual communication would be a particularly potent way of cultivating these skills and preparing future generations for workplace longevity.

3.3 Education

Bamford (2006) notes the importance of arts education in several guises: as *education in art* (the transmission of cultural heritage and the enabling of the creation of an individual artistic language) and *education through art* (transferability, generic skills development).

The notion of education through art has been outlined in the discussion of 3.1 and 3.2. Education in art will be discussed hereunder.

Bamford's seminal work observes that the arts appear in the educational policy of almost every country in the world and contains an element of core and non-core subjects. The core subjects in emerging nations tended to concentrate on culturally-specific artforms, whilst economically developed countries embrace new media in the core curriculum (although the amount of time spent under the curriculum varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and has a widely variable mix of outcomes in skills acquisition, conceptualisation and research, process, exhibition or performance, and documentation).

Bamford also notes that a quality arts education is more likely to be achieved when the responsibility for the delivery of the program is shared between artists, teachers (and their institutions) and organisations. With such a mix, the education remains focussed on the key areas: arts development and curriculum relevance. The inculcation of organisations ensures community support and significance.

As expected, this form of education can be difficult to incorporate into an already stretched and often under-resourced curriculum. As such, operating the program as an extra-curricular activity or specialist module in partnership with professional organisations or higher education

¹ I draw the reader's attention to Matarasso's '50 Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts' insert in the Executive Summary of Matarasso, F 1997 *Use or ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts* Comedia, UK.

² For example, a child starting primary school (Grade 1) in 2007 will finish school in 2019 and, assuming a retirement age of 60, will retire in approximately 2061. What will the workplace look like? What skills are required? What will their job entail?

learning institutions creates important institutional links, personal networks, and artistic and professional development opportunities for emerging and established artists.

A program that involves conceptualisation, workshop creation, masterclasses, critiques, exhibitions, performances and analysis (as exemplified by the Stockhausen Courses [http://www.stockhausen.org/stockhausen_courses.html], and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School [AFTRS] Short Courses) creates highly regarded opportunities for its participants, and equips them with the necessary artistic and professional skills to take advantage of them. However, neither of these programs travel outside of their own geographic area – the Stockhausen courses are located in Kuerten, Germany, and the AFTRS short courses are based in AFTRS premises.

What is needed is an intensive education experience delivered within a community. The experience – lectures, workshops, exhibitions – contextualise current emergent practice within current best practice in the field and masterworks. Delivering on the ground and in the community gives rise to a sustainability and momentum to the project and the skills acquired long after the expert educators and facilitators have concluded their sessions (Harris & Lane, 2007). Failing to implement innovative pedagogies, programs and programming as it pertains to 'visuacy' is untenable from the 'point of view of the discipline but also from that of the future competitiveness of the country' (Davis, 2007). When read in conjunction with the non-provision of technological/digital skills sets, the situation is rightly read as being dire and in urgent need of redress. Not implementing programs targeted at achieving outcomes in this area not only affects the development of artistic practice (and potentially harms the immediacy and materials of engaged and mediated arts practice), it has the wider effect of inhibiting the development of a literate, well-rounded and competitive workforce able to negotiate changing work practices.

Organisations that can couple arts education, education through arts and technological expertise are scarce. It requires an internationally linked network of artists, educators, technologists, artist-educators, policy makers and advocates to satisfactorily acquit the multitude of objectives sublimated in a program of the type described above. International Digital Art Projects (IDAprjects) is one such organisation with a track record of continued success. This organisation is examined in chapter four.

4. IDAprojects

4.1 Background and governance

Commencing in 1999, IDAprojects was instrumental in developing a new discourse around research technologies, professional art practices and academia. From its inception, IDAprojects has successfully brokered partnerships with leading international institutions in delivering international touring exhibition and performance programs, and international research and education initiatives.

IDAprojects is directed by Stephen Danzig, an internationally renowned artist and new media practitioner with a background in economic development, health and medical sciences and education. He leads an international team of specialists with expertise and responsibilities in contemporary arts practice, education, Community Cultural Development (CCD), research, cross-cultural collaboration and exhibition design.

4.2 Aims and results

IDAprojects aims to:

- promote Australian and international artists by broadening their audiences through cross-cultural dialogue
- promote opportunities for sustainable art practices
- establish a new discourse by pushing boundaries in theory and production thus expanding current debates and ideas in contemporary art and culture
- disseminate and research cross-cultural identity through new technologies and professional art practices
- cross-promote and link with similar projects, organisations & people who will collectively disseminate important work to a global community
- maintain the highest business standards of protocol and transparency
- encourage networking opportunities for Australian and international artists including business and institutional exchange

(IDAprojects Prospectus, 2007)

These aims demonstrate the foci of IDAprojects. Interrogation of the themes of network, education, research, access, opportunity and identity through IDAprojects' programs lead to global networked communities of artists, policy makers, educators, researchers and entrepreneurs. This reflects the creative cluster identified by Florida as indicative of the model of a workplace team that links technology, creativity and business: 'the super-creative core of this new class includes scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers, and architects, as well as the "thought leadership" of modern society: non-fiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts, and other opinion-makers' (Florida, 2002).

IDAprojects brings together individuals into global networks that can be directed into numerous policy areas. It is worthy to note that these cross-disciplinary clusters are also highly regarded by higher education research teams in the UK and Australia (DEST, 2003), where significant advances through research are achieved through the intersection of (previously considered) discreet discipline areas. Indeed, interdisciplinarity is no longer a dirty word (Dissanayake, 2000); it has become an essential component for international competitiveness.

4.3 IDAprojects as CCD

The arts practice known as Community Cultural Development (CCD) may be defined as a process-driven practice that addresses social/political/economic equities through professional standard arts practices. Through CCD practice, fields including skills development, social inclusion, interpersonal relationships, socio-historical interrogation, health and wellbeing, and civic citizenship can be addressed and developed through a suite of activities comprising workshops, exhibitions, performances, lectures and affiliated partner-institution programs (Sudmalis, 2007).

This practice intersects with economic and cultural policy – although these different policy areas remain mutually exclusive and divergent in some national policy frameworks (Holden 2007). Cultural policy as a facilitator of social inclusion policy and praxis, with significant and substantive results in health and wellbeing, literacy, the reduction of recidivism, cultural and religious tolerance and respect, and civic citizenry have been well documented and discussed (Matarasso 1997 and many others). The former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has expressed the position of the wholistic benefits of the arts and its intersection with social inclusion, progression and quality of life: ‘when more ... [people have] ... access to the joy of art, it is not the art alone that they learn; it is the art of living, thinking and creating’ (Blair, 2007). Evidence and policy support the contention that participation in and access to the arts gives rise to a healthier, more engaged and resilient community.

IDAprojects has an important role to play in the attainment of social inclusion and resilience objectives through participation and access to its programs that link international best practice digital art, digital art workshops, research and education. The tenets of IDAprojects’ practice support inclusion, reward and promote excellence, and promote partnerships with communities and institutions ensuring the sustainability of the process and its outcomes. The principle tenets of IDAprojects’ practice are discussed in chapter five, with exemplars iterated in chapter six.

5. Intersections, outcomes and directions – Summary and exemplars

This chapter will outline a number of significant activities undertaken by IDAprojects in the noted area. It is intended that this section will speak to the range of activities and outcomes that lead to increased capacity in the sector.

5.1 Partnerships

IDAprojects has successfully negotiated partnerships with international institutions including:

- Queensland University of Technology
- Beijing Film Academy
- Yokohama Art projects
- University of Tasmania
- Monash University

In doing so, IDAprojects has played a significant role in establishing research frameworks that intersect with contemporary professional practice in art that is created with technology or experienced through technology. It has stimulated research into digital identities, emergent audio-visual and interactive acculturations, and cross-cultural identity. Consequently, the role of IDAprojects as industry partner has been established. This has significant national and international implications for funding opportunities and specialist consultants.

5.2 Young and emerging artists

In providing access to contemporary masterworks, formal and informal lectures, discussions with leading contemporary artists and artworkers, and delivering workshops with internationally renowned practitioners, educators and researchers, IDAprojects provides opportunities to young and emerging artists to further enhance their skills and network with important leaders in their field.

This mentorship process is built upon the premise of access-opportunity. In order to contextualise their own developing artistic language and premise, young and emerging artists are given access to works that shape the prevailing artistic landscape and to the creators of those works. Young and emerging artists are also given the opportunity to engage, often on a one-to-one level with mentors who are leaders in the field, participate in workshops and present work in international exhibitions.

The exhibition of work by the students of the New Media Department of the Beijing Film Academy in the 2005 and 2006 IDAprojects international touring festival, and as part of the 2007 Yokohama New Media Arts Festival is testimony to this.

5.3 Established artists

The structure, networks and collegial nature of IDAprojects has attracted leading and established artists and arts workers as participants, researchers and mentors. Digital artists, interactive systems engineers, educators, filmmakers, musicians, performance artists and researchers collaborate readily on a variety of national and international projects in Australia, China, Japan, USA, and Europe forming internationally networked creative research clusters.

Those attracted to the IDAprojects model are drawn from a variety of fields and countries. They include, but are not limited to:

- Li Xiang Ting (China)
- Peter Greenaway (Wales/Netherlands)
- Ryuji Enokida (Japan)

- Istvan Horkay (Hungary)
- Professor Wang Hong Hai (China)
- Professor Lui Xugang (China)
- Monika Tichachek (Australia)
- David Rozetsky (Australia)
- Ben Hibon (UK)
- Song Dong (China)
- Cui Xuiwen (China)
- Jean-Pierre Hébert (France)
- Brett Leavy (Indigenous Australia)
- Qing Qing (China)
- Manfred Mohr (Germany/USA)
- Laurence Gartel (USA)
- Mark Wilson (USA)
- Jerry Ulesman (US)
- Julie Rapp (Australia)
- Nathalie Grenzhaeuser (Germany)

A comprehensive listing, with examples of work, of artists, practitioners, educators and researchers may be located at <www.internationaldigitalart.com> .

5.4 The sector(s)

IDAprojects operates in a number of sectors:

- Contemporary digital art
- Education
- Technology
- Research and development
- Art and social theory
- Creative and innovative economies
- Social and political economies

The ability for IDAprojects to soften the boundaries of these sectors speaks to the strength of IDAprojects' creative cluster approach. With specialists in each of the areas listed above, IDAprojects is able to operate fluidly between and around them, resulting in the realisation of objectives in best practice contemporary digital arts practice, young and emerging artist support, education, the facilitation of agencies for social inclusion and change, and research and development. IDAprojects' reputation and abilities are strengthened by its strategic partnerships with key international institutions which allow IDAprojects personnel to deliver global best practice solutions and experiences on the ground in a culturally sensitive, collaborative and sustainable manner.

5.5 Digital democratisation and aesthetic apprenticeship

The notion of digital democracy speaks to the issue of access. IDAprojects programs are available to all: as passive observers or active participants. The proliferation of digital networks throughout the emerging and developed economies of the world has led to an increase in the amount of content, but not necessarily the quality of that content – most notably in the arts and cultural arena. In other words, having access is excellent, but at times, user-generated content does not meet minimum quality control standards (Chin 2007).

IDAprojects' curatorial standards admit only works that are peer-reviewed and considered important works of the digital canon. As a result, exhibitions and programs delivered by IDAprojects reflect the best practice of current digital works with relevance across the specific project's foci. IDAprojects' breadth of influence and activity, coupled with quality control standards implemented at each phase, means that its work services many publics through an 'aesthetic apprenticeship' of that which is cogent, considered, influential and important in digital arts practice alongside educative, inclusive and research oriented outcomes.

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