

PART IV

EDUCATION

1. TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ARTS CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

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Abstract: *The arts afford ways of knowing with proven rewarding consequences on the life quality of individuals and of communities. The benefits of exercising an imaginative capacity, esthetic reasoning and attitudes, and ability to interpret and communicate ideas have been shown to be fundamental to the well-being of individuals and communities. The literature is thus full of arguments as to why arts should not be reduced to mere adjuvant routes instrumental to learning in other areas. This paper proposes a discussion of some of the main arguments in the literature for an integrated approach to arts curriculum and pedagogy, with particular emphasis on the Romanian discursive practices concerning arts education.*

Key words: *arts, learning, curriculum, integrated*

Arts are generally praised for their intrinsic educational value, as well as for their instrumental value for learning in many areas and aspects of life and the world in general (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004). Consequentially, arts are called to inspire production of new resources and solutions for learning and development in both formal and informal educational settings.

The argument most frequently advanced in support of this rather novel way of positioning the arts in education evokes the arts' capacity to facilitate a way of constructing and experiencing knowledge that is rewarding in that it engages participants imaginatively, emotionally, volitionally and cognitively, whilst impacting both individuals and communities aesthetically and culturally.

Still, in the vast majority of approaches to planning and delivering the school curricula, arts are barely making it in the time-table, often strategized to simply provide adjuvant opportunities for learning, instrumental to performance in other school disciplines - namely those enjoying circumstantial, privileged statuses in the curriculum. This is particularly the case in the Western educational cultures measuring quality by standards and success by hierarchies of tested academic performances solely in the areas of knowledge included in the national and international academic examinations, such as the Baccalaureate in Romania, or PISA, and TIMSS etc., internationally.

Revitalizing arts' potential for creative, imaginative learning actions, and noted positive social impact is ranking increasingly high in the discourses of educationalists all over the world, emphasizing its' resourcefulness and relevance for the social, cultural and economical requirements of a world working its way through globalization.

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The modern age of formal education has reluctantly looked past cognitivist and behaviourist stances on learning and development, generally structuring school based learning on notions of *transfer* and *schema* and on measurements and predictions of academic performance, placing the arts at the margins of curriculum approaches. In the post-industrial age the arts and education have regarded each other with suspicion notes Ewing (2010), a fact explained by O'Toole (2010, apud. Ewing, 2010) with several specific arguments. His arguments are introduced here with comments on how the Romanian practices of planning and delivering mainstream school curriculum in the past century seem to generally reflect strikingly resembling probable causes to the effect:

- the perception that arts are a form of elitism, accessible only to selected few and heavily relying on their level of formal education directly assumed to relate to arts' consumers and artists' ability to apprehend arts. In the Romanian educational setting, arts are marginalized in the mainstream curriculum (with less coverage on the school time-table in the later age of mainstream education), an arts-intensive curriculum being afforded via vocational education. This arrangement is prompting a very explicit stance on arts learning, that of arts being reserved to those who are talented and/or willing to professionally or academically play a part in the arts, by pursuing further, higher education routes in the arts, and thus attempting the *specialist* status. This type of either/or approach to school curriculum and school based learning prompts an elitist pedagogical stance on arts and arts education.
- the misconceptions or baggage from their own prior arts experiences that many teachers have, along with other relevant decision-makers in the educational setting (i.e. parents). The memory of recent half-century long communist history is still very rich in vivid examples of censorship and politicized approaches to participation to arts. There are two main art forms represented in the Romanian mainstream school curriculum – Music and Drawing. Of the two, Music has historically notoriously been detoured from its educational purposes as a school subject-matter during Communism, to serve as ideologically imbued platform for indoctrination, by prompting learning contents with a political agenda (i.e. so called patriotic songs praising political leaders, school routines placing a strong emphasis on the whole school student body's participation to the daily singing of the national hymn, before the start of the school day, with children standing up and facing portraits of political leaders, a routine occasionally expanded to include larger student effects in political events such as the annual manifestations of 23rd of August).
- a lack of confidence or expertise with particular or all art forms. In this respect, the curriculum for secondary education in Romania has long time ago embraced a segregated approach to learning contents, strictly dividing vocational routes for arts majors; even on those, the curriculum is generally restricted to learning contents pertaining to certain art forms, such as music, drama, visual arts and choreography and a general focus on a targeting professionalization as the end-result of schooling.

- the dearth of quality and sustained pre-service and in-service arts professional learning for educators. As previously argued (see Mitescu Lupu 2012, 2013; Mitescu, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Mitescu Manea, 2014) the current Romanian discursive practices in the policy and exercise of the teacher training indicate: a) the absence of a coherent plan to support induction for beginning teachers during the early stages of their careers; b) cultural learning traditions grounded in a ‘transmission of knowledge’ rationale place the bulk of formative resources for in-service professional learning for teachers in the hands of control-bodies such as the school inspectorates in every county, depicting an overly-centralized structure of managing teachers’ requirements for professional development; c) a general down-playing of collaborative understandings of learning and development, visible in either the complete lack of partnerships with other, community based stakeholders in arts education (arts and culture organizations, universities etc.). Where school-university partnerships do exist, they are exclusively focusing on matching curricular aims (i.e. secondary schools providing an arts intensive curriculum in partnership with the local or university of arts, the partnership focusing on preparing and recruiting students for the tertiary level of arts education).
- intense political arguments within and between the arts disciplines themselves, leading to fragmentation and loss of voice. As the delivery approach to arts education is common practice at every level of arts education provision in Romania, the opportunities for collaborative, inter-disciplinary or integrated approaches to arts in the school are simply lacking, leading to professionals inwardly looking into possible developments in their specific art form, which produce only contextualized initiatives, in isolation or making unilaterally instrumental any other art form, fellow artists and/or arts educators being generally perceived as competing for similar resources and solutions.
- limited systematic large-scale research on the impact of arts on student learning, leading to the impossibility of quantifying their impact in ways preferred by governments.
- the continued dominance of traditional academic curricula as the main passport for entering tertiary education.

Fully understanding the implications of this type of mutual suspicion between arts and education and the noted, and possibly enhancing circumstantial facts explaining it, Ewing (2010) advances the thought that any potential collaborative vision between arts and education be first and foremost subjected to examination in the sense of its’ formative aims and planned course of actions, without favouring either of the disciplinary contents or goals in learning. This would imply reconceptualising the role and place of arts and their specific ways of constructing knowledge. In Gadsden’s view (2008) reconceptualising the role and status of arts in the curriculum impinges epistemological shifts away from traditional approaches and conceptions of learning which place strong emphasis on contents-specific academic knowledge, and emerge in a disciplinary structure of learning contents, operating with taxonomic, hierarchical approaches to apprehending life and the world.

As it can easily be noticed in current educational policies and practices, rarely has Ewing's (2010) desiderate of a new, integrative approach to arts in the school-based learning been materialized.

For example, traditionally pertaining to a curricular area designed to develop communication skills, the Literature is not primarily regarded as an art form in the current Romanian mainstream curriculum. It is awarded a special status in the curriculum significantly impacting how learning is structured in relation to its contents. The separation of Literature from the general Arts curriculum reflects, in a certain perspective, the disruptive nature of disciplinary learning. Most frequently conceptualized in a cognitivist manner, learning Literature ends up in checking boxes in lists of attainment targets rather than emphasizing the creative, intricate, highly personalized, fluid, integrative manner of reading, writing and making meaning that exploring literature is generally packed with. Literature, a form of human expression more likely requiring trans-disciplinary means of teaching and learning, which build on the formative potential of tools for knowing distributed in the practices of constructing knowledge of so many other school subjects, is reduced to merely apprehending scripted textual ways of making meaning from the literary productions selected to be part of the school curriculum.

Traditional codifying practices of the arts into discrete categories (Flood, Heath & Lapp, 2005) and past tendencies to oversimplify arts processes and products (Ewing, 2010) are expected to be replaced with a movement toward expensive, multi-layered, even organic ways of thinking about the arts and the ever-increasing number and diversity of art forms (Perso et al., 2011).

There are a number of relevant meta-analyses available in the literature, discussing the research exploring the many positive effects of arts learning in relation to the intellectual, emotional, social and cultural development of those who are presented with opportunities for arts education. However so, referring to the general stream of literature on education and learning studies, there are those who voice concerns noting the lack of commonality between arts programs being mentioned in published studies and reports (Bryce et al., 2004) or present relevant data about contextualized arts initiatives in education, as O'Toole (2010) was arguing when explaining why education and arts look at each other with suspicion.

Other studies note a focus on correlation evidence (i.e. a relationship between student learning and their involvement in arts programs) and less of a well defined body of research is exploring a direct causal link between involvement and learning (Winnner & Hetland, 2002; Ewing, 2010; Bryce et al, 2004). This majority of mainly cognitivist approaches to understanding learning and development in relation to arts participation is completed by Hetland and Winner's (2004) meta-analysis of 'transfer' studies, discussing evidence of causal relationships between: a) classroom drama and verbal achievement (*comprehension* – when working with structured plots and *oral language development* – especially when working with structured plots such as role-play and vocabulary), noting that the transfer of skills from one domain to the other

needs to be explicitly taught since it does not occur automatically; b) music listening and spatial reasoning, and music instruction (to groups and individuals) and spatial reasoning (for students aged 3-12). Whilst noting these positive effects, Hetland and Winner argue that the arts “have great value in a child’s education, but that this value is due first and foremost to the importance of learning in the arts. While arts study may in some cases in-still skills that strengthen learning in other disciplines, arts programs should never be justified primarily on what the arts can do for other subjects” (Hetland & Winner, 2004).

Relevant reports on the impact of arts education in schools internationally include *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999), *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002), *The Wow Factor* (Bamford, 2006), *Arts Integration. Frameworks, Research & Practice* (Burnaford et al, 2007), *The International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (Bresler, 2007) etc. These large scale reports present overwhelming evidence of the positive effects of participation to arts education over the social and cultural well-being of individuals and communities, particularly focusing on learning experiences in the Western world. As such, improvements impacting schools, students, teachers and communities are evidenced in academic, social, cognitive, behavioural, health, social, economic, lateral thinking, and creative skills.

Smaller studies show relationships between participation in arts programs, in a range of schooling phases, and increased academic achievement (Bamford, 2006; Catterall, Chapeleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Wetter, Koener, Schwaninger, 2009), student engagement (Fletcher, 2005; Russell, Ainley and Frydenberg, 2005), and attitude to attendance (Uptis & Smithrim, 2003), attitudes towards learning (Hunter, 2005; Galton, 2008), sense of motivation (Bamford, 2006; Catterall, Chapeleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Hunter, 2005). Studies focusing on exploring the impact on behaviours of arts learning and participation show evidence of improvements in capacity to empathise (Catterall, Chapeleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Hunter, 2005) as well as on cooperation, collaboration, and communication (Hunter, 2005). Moreover, research exploring students at risk related to a range of factors, including disengagement from schooling and low literacy levels (Baum & Owen, 2007) present encouraging evidence of arts’ positive impact on school participation.

The literature is presenting little or no evidence of large scale, in-depth published research on the practices of arts education and their impact on individuals and communities in educational cultures not traditionally following Western conceptions of learning and well-being. As the 2009 Eurydice report shows, the Romanian educational landscape is one such space, with little if any initiatives to shift away from ‘the scientist paradigm’ (Eisner, 2008) of structuring education, more interested in certainty and precision of following scripted actions than in the fact that these actions and the methods they entail might simply not work. In this paradigm, arts education remains at the margins of mainstream curriculum.

Elsewhere, noting current political discourses on educational reform, Mitescu Lupu (2013) concludes upon observing that a lack of interest in

considering the potential that arts present education with, places current Romanian political discussions in the category of those marked by no serious effort to regard the activity of the mainstream education system as a project directed towards a holistic approach to understanding development, learning and life, taking note of the fast paced transformations in the world we live in and the growing complexity of every aspect of life a person needs to find resources for. That is, if we admit to Robinson's (2011) understanding that creativity - understood as the process of developing new ideas that have value - and innovation - the process of putting in practice these ideas - are core abilities to facing these challenges that cannot be developed outside a culture of creativity. Moreover, creativity is not a concept subdued to one specific topic or academic subject, a realization which prompts even more emphasis on the imperative of considering holistic, culturally bound and relevant formative prospects for learners to engage with, in the reformed school system. To this aim, integrated, comprehensive approaches to arts in the curriculum require being more seriously looked into, as the number of research based evidence is increasingly supportive of their many positive effects on participants to arts.

Historically the idea of integrated approaches to arts in the curriculum emerged at the beginning of the XXth century, departing from John Dewey's notion of curriculum. It was William Heard Kilpatrick, colleague and collaborator of Dewey's, who proposed the *projects method* - a forerunner to the integrative approaches - as a reaction to the pitfalls of the school's traditional approaches heavily relying on subject-matter delivery. Killpatrick's proposal in „The Project Method” article (1918) was that children's interests play a central role in planning and structuring knowing and knowledge in school, so that classroom learning gain in relevance and meaning for the learners. Dewey had distanced himself from both subject-based and project-based approaches to school learning, arguing at Harvard University, that neither resolves the emergent pedagogical problem. Dewey's proposal was that school disciplines be thus structured so they allow clearer connections between various aspects of knowledge, and between knowledge and people's goals and day-to-day preoccupations and interests (Kliebard, 2004, p.149, apud. Burnaford et. al., 2007). As such, it is mandatory to explore the connections between school subject-matters in order to identify possible ways to structure the learning contents and the learning experiences so that they stimulate both the curiosity and the comprehension of the outer world, affording children to explore it and apprehend it as a continuous source of aesthetic delight.

To Dewey's pedagogical arguments favouring a more serious consideration of the manifold potential for learning that integrative approaches to school curriculum entail, Eisner adds an argumentative perspective opposing the general trend of recent research to advocate evidence of positive effects of arts education, and of integrated approaches to arts in the school curriculum building on a 'transferability' stance. Eisner is simply reminding us that “What we enjoy the most we linger over. A school system designed with an overriding commitment to efficiency may produce outcomes that have little enduring

quality. Children, like the rest of us, seldom voluntarily pursue activities for which they receive little or no satisfaction. Experiencing the aesthetic in the context of intellectual and artistic work is a source of pleasure that predicts best what students are likely to do when they can do whatever they would like to do” (Eisner, 2002, p.xiii).

Eisner’s insight into what makes the arts learning experience unique brings forth issues of young people liking to take part in their learning experiences and being committed to learning and of learning having aesthetic features in the design of the educational environment and in the factual learning practices. It also invites further reflection on what constitutes quality and successful learning action. It is precisely this triumvirate of a) participants sense of personal commitment to learning, b) quality and c) success of learning experiences that should further be guiding arts learning initiatives which in turn could help providing situated evidence of how arts impact Romanian learners.

This article has advanced a brief discussion of some of the main arguments in the literature for an integrated approach to arts curriculum and pedagogy.

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