

Art Education: Are we on the right path? What must be evaluated?

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we on the right
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Abstract

Faced with a global change that is imposed on a humanity confronted with its own survival, the education system and art education must be reviewed. Recent evaluations of the system being unconvincing, this critical article offers other possibilities of evaluation to avoid wrong turns and better adapt education to contemporary challenges. It clarifies the terminology regarding the concept of art, then addresses the issues of evaluation related to education in the art of living, to the challenges of social distinction and symbolic violence, delusions of creativity and reality of education in the field.

Key Words: Art, creativity, evaluation, global mutation, illusion, liberal, otium, scholè, symbolic violence

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

Global mutation and evaluation

It seems that we are now facing a turning point in the missions assigned to the education system. Without denying the knowledge related to the cultural heritage accumulated by humanity, the ecological, social, cultural and economic necessities impose on us not to reproduce traditions and habits that seem to lead humanity on its road to ruin.

To prepare for future changes and to anticipate them, each individual must be able not only to learn to change his/her beliefs and habits, but the majority must also be able to seek and propose new solutions. Collective or individual, these solutions will have to be better adapted to be both sustainable and flexible. This tendency for change is an ability of the living that we call creativity, and it seems that many human beings are abundantly endowed with it.

In this context of necessary change, it is good governance to examine the performance of all the systems currently in place to assess their global and local relevance in relation to new challenges, then to choose between those which should be abandoned as they are detrimental to the new challenges, and those which should be preserved, improved, and furthermore, conceived and invented. To perform such a task, evaluation is a prerequisite, including in areas to which such an approach has never been applied.

It is in this context of urgency that, across the whole planet and in all areas, evaluation and classification tools are being developed and perfected. Although they may be inefficient or diverted from their intended uses, these tools can allow us to anticipate certain risks while creating an environment preparing for adaptation and change. But make no mistake, this trend in evaluation and change is also used for political and strategic purposes to promote competition among systems and among human beings. This often one-sided struggle gives rise to inequality and injustice, causing a rise in anxiety and protectionism, while helping to boost industrial production and consumption. Let us always keep in mind all of these positive and negative

agencies to avoid naively giving in to mirages of a controlled and fairer future.

Art Education: Are we on the right path? What must be evaluated?

Heritage and creativity

The school, which has always been a centre for the evaluation of learning, has been for some time encouraged to use on itself the tools it had so far reserved for its students. This is how local, national and even international evaluations and rankings are flourishing, aiming at facilitating the selection of the most efficient establishments (e.g. Academic Ranking of World Universities), but also at establishing a competition or an emulation between different education systems (e.g. the OECD¹ Program for International Student Assessment or PISA).

In this context of evaluation and preparation for change, the French state organized an international symposium on the evaluation of the effects of artistic and cultural education. (Pompidou Center, Paris, January 2007) As a member of the scientific committee of this event and moderator of several round table discussions and debates, I was in the perfect position to observe this scientific event.

Although my systemic and epistemological views on the foundations of this meeting are more radical than those adopted by its sponsors, I agreed to participate in all the stages of its scientific development. In preparing the symposium, the scientific committee had agreed to avoid the complacent and self-satisfied approach of the advocates of art education and to refuse to indulge in the laments of the permanently dissatisfied. Similarly, the committee had to reiterate several times that the evaluation in question was focusing on the performance of art education and not its student's. Despite these precautions and warnings, the scientific committee had to refuse most of the proposals for participation because they were based on these three approaches. This onsite observation shows that these views are well-entrenched. Fortunately, we were able to attract researchers really

¹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

concerned with a scientific evaluation of the impact of artistic and cultural education.

At the symposium, it was interesting to observe that almost all researchers felt compelled to pay tribute to the supposed merits of artistic experience and its ineffable, inexpressible and immeasurable poetic dimensions. This attitude probably results from the cultural good will which requires everyone not to denigrate the arts but also from the difficulty of understanding scientifically what is deemed elusive.

These precautions taken and honors rendered to the various merits of art education, the quantitative or qualitative research presented was not able to demonstrate in a decisive and convincing way the positive effects of art education. As no economist or social economist presented his/her research, it was impossible to assess the impact of school art education on the citizens' cultural practices and preferences according to their class or education. This data is of course generally available, but nothing really helps us discover where the interest in art and culture is formed outside the family environment. Similarly, no study has managed to highlight the chain of cause and effect between compulsory art education and the improvement of individuals' well-being.

At most could we verify that a quality art education contributed to improving students' self-esteem and that the artistic practices undertaken in class had a slight positive impact on their learning or behavior in other disciplines. But, as shown by France Rauscher, musical education has as much impact on the learning of other disciplines as a mental management session or an information technology course. (Rauscher, 2007). All of these barely positive results were not really favorable to the defenders of the teaching of these disciplines at school. Remember that all these studies did not address the intensive art teaching that is practiced in some schools or as an extra curricular activity.

While waiting for better days, it therefore seemed reassuring to claim that traditional evaluation methods were not very suitable in the area of education, which is probably true; and that the effects of art education might

be found outside the school, which is also probably true (e.g. O'Farrell, 2007). As for me, I was surprised to see that all these researchers from around the world (and especially the Anglo-Americans) were not dismayed by this irrelevant and barely favorable outcome.

However, my research hypotheses were confirmed. As I shall try to show, the research presented did not seem to take the right distance with the challenges or with what is really relevant to evaluate.

Flash-back

Let's study more precisely the area of visual arts and discuss the problems posed by the use of the word 'art'. Because of the semantic differences between the concept of art in the Latin and Anglo-Saxon world, we found it necessary to address this sensitive point.

The original Latin word was used as an equivalent to the Greek concept of *tecknè* used to name certain types of human production. In ancient Greek society, which openly displayed its class divisions, the value of *tecknè* depended on the social origin of the producer. That is why free men and notably aristocrats practiced liberally certain *tecknai* while service employees practiced them mechanically and in exchange for a wage. We return later to the impact of this opposition between liberal and servile arts (For more details on this topic, see: Darras, 2009) .

In French, when it comes to culture, the term 'art' refers almost exclusively to liberal practices which, throughout the whole of Euro-Mediterranean history have qualified the practices of the elite, then, from the Renaissance, the practices of some painters and sculptors. This term refers to the word 'Kunst' in German. Today, art education mainly focuses on the so-called scholarly or major arts and on legitimate culture and is only marginally concerned with applied arts, art crafts and all their variants in the cultural and creative industries. This division is widely shared by all Latin cultures. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon world has better kept alive the two antique modalities.

Art Education: Are we on the right path?
What must be evaluated?

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

It is therefore the context that determines whether the word 'art' refers to the liberal arts or other meanings. There is 'artistic' art: Fine Arts in a museum, but any visual production can be considered as falling into the 'art' category. Designations such as street art, children's art, popular art, etc. are acceptable in the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary yet they are problematic for cultures which have favored the liberal, scholarly and major conception of art. For the Anglo-Saxon, the concept of 'art' refers to a place of production, to the technique used or the types of producers; for the Latin, the use of the term 'art' is problematic as it introduces marginal or without intention to be art production into the liberal world, which calls for an extension of the category and a debate on the possibility of this extension. In summary, in the Anglo-Saxon world, the term is open and depends on the context, whereas in the Latin world, it inevitably implies the scholarly and artistic context. In fact, many contagions between conceptions have modified these categories. The term 'art' is considered as a positive added value and today everyone tends to claim to produce it.

But the French conception of artistic education does not cover that of art education. Accordingly, the objectives are substantially different and the programs are too.²

We may however consider that the recent addition of the word 'cultural' in the term 'artistic and cultural education' announces a revision of the hegemonic role of art and a democratic progress.

When the generalization of education systems was developed in Europe in the 19th century to meet the demands of democracy and the need to train employees and managers for the industrial revolution, the educational world faced many options. First, the expansion of educational liberal practices in the form of education to the aristocratic way of life (Scholé & Otium) of the elites; secondly, the development of technical and communication skills responding to the demand of industries and the emerging public society. The liberal version of Scholé and Otium has gradually imposed itself and

² With the term 'art and crafts', the British were in some way between the two approaches.

progressively resulted in art education, which is now being evaluated. (On this topic, see Darras, 2006).

As you can see, we argue that what should be evaluated today derives from choices made at that time and even more from the direct and indirect effects that these choices have now and will have in the future, if they are continued.

In our view, the fundamental issues must be properly addressed for us to know whether what we are evaluating is what must be evaluated. More specifically, the question is: are the contents and values transmitted by liberal art education still adapted to today's society and to the new roles it must play?

As such, questions could be formulated as follows: as defined by its origins and its programs, is school art education still geared to the needs and urgencies of contemporary society? Does liberal art education still have a place in the general education system? More specifically, does liberal art education have a place for all or for the majority in the general education system?

Let's consider four points of view on these issues.

1. Preparation for the art of living: scholè and otium

In the tradition of ancient Greece and Rome, the liberal education of young citizens focused on developing an art of life. The scholarly and sophisticated 'leisure activities' for which young aristocrats were prepared included what we would call today a kind of overall artistic and aesthetic education aiming at the enrichment of the spirit as well as building quality social relationships. These relationships consisted of sports, poetry and music competitions and also banquets and symposia. (Bertelli, Malnati, & Montevecchi, 2008). The Greek Scholè (School) and the Roman Otium (Leisure) are the ancestors of our educational institutions and modern entertainment. Their resolutely aristocratic programs were consistent with a society divided into very distinct classes where slaves had most of the constraints and were given the arduous tasks. Let us not forget that Greek democracy was a social and cultural environment reserved for the privileged.

Art Education: Are we on the right path?
What must be evaluated?

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

This educational model has been adopted by most European ruling classes until now and, in the 19th century, this model has greatly inspired the first generalizations of primary and secondary education required both by the rising social and democratic ideas and by the demand for a higher level of the qualifications required for the industrial development of Europe and its imperial policies.

In this era of triumphant progress, did the process of expansion and generalization of the values and lifestyle of the dominant class to other segments of the population have any meaning? Yes, it obviously had meaning for the students coming from social backgrounds that still had this lifestyle, and also for those who, through social climbing, raised themselves to this lifestyle (On this topic, see Stankiewicz, 2007 & Darras, 2007). At the time, the poorest students rarely had access to a higher level of education. The system has therefore remained socially consistent until the generalization of primary and secondary education spread across all social classes.

Is this model of literary, poetic, musical and visual art education which had gradually found its way into the school still adapted today? We feel that this issue needs urgently addressing.

If, as we argue, the mission of this type of art education is to prepare the majority to join the sophisticated lifestyle of aristocracy and its cultural form: the intelligentsia, we can easily predict the outcome of this education and its result: the system is failing spectacularly. It fails those who expect more than a little technical and artistic initiation, and it also fails those who will never accede to this lifestyle. In both cases, it fails, causing dissatisfaction, resistance and symbolic violence. But we will return to this.

On the other hand, if one considers that the social purpose of cultural education is still aimed at the development of quality leisure activities destined to train free men and women, well-informed and critical consumers, and active players in their free time, then, it is possible to immediately identify the teaching practices that are adapted to these objectives and which ones are not appropriate anymore. The fact is many teachers have

already adapted their courses and programs accordingly. Education to a hypermodern 'otium' would consist in developing the capacity of assessment, judgment, criticism, debate, understanding, but also the practice of contemporary audiovisual and digital culture (movies, games, social networks, comics, etc.) constituting the core of the leisure activities of our time, which are widely practiced by all young people and even by their parents.

Art Education: Are we on the right path?
What must be evaluated?

Thus linked to ancient Scholè and Otium, no one could dispute the legitimacy of education to free time that would constitute a 'cultural and artistic' education. (On this topic, see the text of Alain Kerlan in this issue) In this new system, a significant part should be given to the artistic and scholarly heritage, which should be considered in line with the complexity of the social and cultural dynamics that have created it and that it has helped nourish. This is what Cultural studies and Cultural history courses already do, which, among other things, criticize and redefine the ideological and hegemonic foundations of art history.

2. Social distinction and symbolic violence

Without minimizing the intellectual, spiritual and hedonistic elevation which is brought by Otium, the second point of view also takes into account the symbolic power struggles that take place within it. If we consider that art education helps prepare young people (elites) for games of social distinction by providing them with scholarly knowledge and helping them to forge sharp judgment tools, we must be lucid: the time and resources which are devoted to school education are derisory compared to the power of development of the family background. This disproportion is so great that it threatens any plans to compensate for the cultural 'shortcomings' of the family through school. (There are obviously exceptions, but they are marginal and must be evaluated with precision.)

On the other hand, it is quite obvious that this attempt for an accelerated cultural upgrade produces symbolic violence in all students who cannot socially or symbolically access the practices of 'legitimate' culture nor benefit

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

from the cultural capital of the elites. Their lack of interest in art education linked to this cultural capital reflects more the symbolic violence they suffer than their resistance to a process of cultural colonization, which is not only forced, but is in vain.

This sociological view inspired by the theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, but also by British Cultural studies should be verified through an evaluation process. One could then measure the social and individual gains and losses caused by this model of art education. What is its contribution to cultivated education? How does the cultural values of the elite seep into all types of backgrounds? What impact do they have on the cultural practices of young people from different social strata and beyond that, on their adult practices? How many students were able to increase their cultural capital and access the social practices of the upper class more easily?

Conversely, how many students have been discouraged and even humiliated by cultural discrepancies that cannot be compensated for? How many victims of symbolic violence are produced by this model of art education? How many teachers are exhausted by the impossible task entrusted to them? How many of them have finally modified art education programs to suit the social and cultural environment of the school in which they teach? What are these programs? Etc.

3. The argument of artistic creativity

As we said at the beginning of this paper, to meet new global challenges, training must give young people a major role in the creative process. Since the beginnings of Western Modernism, various scholarly artistic fields have succeeded in imposing the idea that creativity is a crucial dimension to the production of artworks. Under the banner of the 'Avant-Garde', part of the art world embarked on a major change of its forms, values, criteria and institutions. The concept of newness that was driving the industrial revolution and the emerging consumer society had also entered the art world. Some artistic movements even claimed they led the changes in society, but beyond this propaganda orchestrated by the 'critical' cultural elite, it is clear that the

changes in the small world of art did not have the overall repercussions expected, and that the artistic 'revolutions' generally remained confined to their world.

Sometimes, they deliberately tried to cut themselves from the world which resisted their utopia and pretensions. In contrast, cultural and creative industries such as film and broadcasting, music, design, fashion and, today, multimedia, have really accompanied the major technological, economic and social changes of the 20th century. They have really contributed to this change by providing technology with abundant contents. With the exception of museum development, has the field of art – including contemporary art – had such an impact?

Evaluating the impact of art education could focus on the assessment of agencies that the world of art must develop to impose on education its contents, its history, its values, its criteria, its 'superiority' and in particular its creativity, when confronted with the same arguments, including that of creativity developed in media culture (On this topic, see Maigret & Macé, 2005). How does art education manage to prioritize and valorize these productions and to impose the belief that artworks are the highest form of creativity? What are the effects of this competition on students? Is their everyday culture taken into consideration, enriched, put into perspective, criticized, and discredited?

Are the aesthetic criteria of scholarly culture imposed on their judgments of taste or is it the opposite? What is the impact of the variables of gender, 'race', class, age, etc.? If working in a creative job is a dream for most of the youth, is it contemporary artists who inspired them or the players in the creative industries? Does school art education give you the desire to be an artist? And if so, what type of artist? These are questions that remain to be asked and for which we await answers.

Finally, a large study should begin on individual and collective creativity. Is creativity a faculty, a disposition, an individual potential or a social construction? Is it a combination of individual disposition and social construction? In both cases, is this 'capacity' equally divided among all

Art Education: Are we on the right path? What must be evaluated?

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

humans and if this is not the case, will the school system produce a new segregation between the 'creative' and the 'non-creative'? How will it be able to stimulate creativity and compensate for its absence? Should we talk about creativity or creativities like we talk about multiple types of intelligence? And if so, which 'creative' activities are the most relevant to stimulate creativity or compensate for it?

4. Educational realities

This fourth point of view concerns the study of educational realities, power struggles, conflicts and resistances that take place in art education. In France, for example, there has always been an internal resistance to 'all art' and, since the 19th century and especially in the 20th century from the 1970s, many educationalists have tried to expand the 'artistic' dimension to visual culture in general and in particular to 'subordinate' cultures such as comic strips or the mass media.

In the field of visual art education, internal conflicts, often resolved in the teacher's own classroom, were therefore focused not only on the field of art but on the field of 'plasticity' that was limited to the world of forms, while the concept of 'visuality' was open to all visual culture and to the issues related to the policies of representation.

However, the vast majority of teachers in art education cannot fundamentally call into question the instrumentalization of visual education by the art world. Their studies and beliefs encourage them to prioritize cultural productions and respect the legitimacies advocated by art experts. The fact remains that many teachers are faced with major discrepancies between the tasks dictated by the curriculum and the reality in which they find themselves. They invent and improvise different solutions, but most of the time they are caught in paradoxes, contradictions and 'double bind'.

An evaluation of all these attempts, successes and failures would be welcome to help one another survive the disharmony between objectives and reality. The result of these evaluations would allow us to review the

actual teaching practices and their evolution while allowing us to identify the most hazardous situations and those that are the most promising.

From her observations and surveys conducted for UNESCO³, Anne Bamford (2006) demonstrates that poor quality education programs do more harm than good. 'Put crudely, this meant that in a global sense about one quarter of all the arts and cultural education a child receives is likely to have a negative impact (i.e., make them less creative, less confident, less imaginative, attend school less and so on. (Bamford, 2007, p. 26).

Art Education: Are we on the right path?
What must be evaluated?

Conclusion

As we have tried to demonstrate in the four macro, meso and micro evaluation research programs, assessing the impact of the education system and of all academic disciplines is necessary. The evaluation of art and cultural education therefore exceeds any venture to legitimate and safeguard the current system. The educational challenges of the 21st century are such that they require us to revisit and revise the initial directions which, in this area, have always been disputed and whose impact has always been very limited.

Assessing the roots of educational devices would allow us to keep what works and eliminate what does not. But for an in depth change, we must have the courage to revise our initial choices in order to avoid reproducing the mistakes of the past and perpetuating a behavior now obsolete.

Is this major change a utopia? While no doubt all depends on the importance of the challenges humanity will face in coming decades, but also on the results and interpretations of the research programs we recommend. But it is likely that education in the art of living in a protected and restored environment is becoming the main objective of education systems. I believe that the movement has begun.

The ecological scholé and otium may be the future of the school and humanity.

³ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

Art Education: Are
we on the right
path?
What must be
evaluated?

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Art Education: Are we on the right path?
What must be evaluated?