

# Education through Arts and Culture: A Forward-looking perspective

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## Abstract

While art education is suffering from a lack of respect and legitimacy, it is important today to reverse our point of view and consider that the human legitimacy of artistic education should be the starting point of any educational policy in this area. The author proposes to decipher educational policies, to problematize the issues of artistic and cultural education and to assess learning in the long term and in a plural way, notably by addressing its impact on its various stakeholders. He concludes his article with a plea in favor of aesthetic experience.

**Key Words:** Art, artistic and cultural education, diversity, evaluation, aesthetic experience, inequality, educational policy, values

For (far) too long a time, and still today, and even in the countries where it seems most firmly established, art and culture education has suffered and continues to suffer a lack of consideration and educational legitimacy. As a result, this desire for *legitimization* expects a great deal – and certainly too much – from assessment to the point that, in the search for justification and recognition that have continuously been put off or rejected, exaggerated virtues have been attributed to culture and artistic activities, virtues whose very exaggeration does more harm than good. The issue of the “effects” of this education is therefore often. Has anyone ever required mathematics to have a certificate in “citizenship education” before allowing it to enter the halls of learning? It is high time to transcend this state of affairs and waste no more energy in pointless efforts at *justification*. The educational legitimacy of arts and culture or of cultural and educational practices – that is to say, their anthropological, human legitimacy – the legitimacy which is quite simply their due share in any liberal arts education and which is a specific and inherent dimension in each of the humanities – must no longer be the destination or the limiting horizon, but the *point of departure* of all policy, as of all educational philosophy regarding this subject. This change in attitude is not without consequences for the formulation of the educational challenge itself, and of course for the job that research is to do. This symposium has certainly served to make this known, even though this was not its explicit topic and the desire for legitimization continues to invest and to perturb the demand for assessment. The considerations put forward here, in this wholly tentative forward-looking perspective, are framed in this perspective and are an effort to aid in this shift for research into the area of culture and arts education which looks to the *future*, while doing the necessary work on its development and on the elucidation of its bases.

## TOWARD THE ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

Indeed, even though the existence of a common discourse, reinforced by the work of international organizations<sup>1</sup>, leads one to believe that educational policies around the world aimed at developing culture and the arts pursue the same goals and have the same objectives, the alert observer soon sees that, beneath appearances, there are real differences in both conception and practice, which are linked to the history, the traditions and the educational and cultural particularities of each country; these differences in turn are found in country-specific projects and intentions.

Indeed, arts and culture do not enter the school systems in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, South America and Quebec in quite the same way or at the same point in time, or for exactly the same reasons. Moreover, on this issue, the United States has an awareness and knowledge of its educational history which is lacking in other countries (Eisner, E.W. & Day, M. D.2004). Such *philosophical, historical and political* bearings were certainly missing in the work presented during the symposium. It is true that such bearings were not the object; nevertheless, this absence underscored, through their very absence, the need for them to figure in any attempt at assessing culture and arts education.

This is true, in the first place, because no significant comparative work can be conducted in the absence of a certain level of knowledge of the structure being studied and compared, and it is hard to see how this knowledge could do without the cultural and historical context. The importance of comparative studies was rightly emphasized on several occasions, and there can be no doubt that they would greatly contribute to knowledge in this area. Still, it is necessary to find the means necessary and to avoid an over-hasty reduction—with assessment as an excuse—of the structures that are being studied to a sort of *lowest common denominator* which would erase their specific traits. To limit ourselves to just one example,

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<sup>1</sup> As the first world conference on arts education organized by UNESCO (Lisbon, March 2006) shows.

the intervention by an artiste in a school— even if one sums up all the possible forms under the general heading *artists in schools*—also depends on the status granted to the artist in the concerned countries and cultures, and more generally on the place that they occupy in their histories and cultural imaginations. From this point of view, it is probable that the artist's educational intervention, in the context of a country like France, will differ from the artists's involvement in South America or Quebec.

But there is a second fundamental reason for a call for cultural and historical contexts to be taken into account. If they are not considered, two deviations, or two prejudicial reductions cannot fail to become operative: On the one hand, educational policies and their stereotyped formal justifications are sucked into a kind of *pidgin* of cultural and arts education, reciting virtues and aims that are too general, in which declarations of intent do not help to clarify objectives at all. On the other hand, research tends to be limited to the study and evaluation of factors which are both too broad and general, or too specialized. Thus sociological studies will invariably point to the reproduction of cultural and social inequalities—since cultural and artistic activities do nothing to change this general law at a *statistical level*—whereas the most advanced studies in cognitive sciences based on brain scans will reveal (to no one's surprise) the links existing between skills in the musical domain and measured capacity in the area of formal intelligence.

Thus the remarks made by Jean-Marc Laurent in his “Synthesis in Six Lessons” deserve to be repeated here prospectively: assessment does mean “questioning the values that a policy embodies” and the study and clarification of those values should be among the very first duties of research in this area. We were aware of this before this symposium: although cultural and arts education is becoming internationalized, as is shown by the “road map” intended for governments following the first world conference organized by UNESCO, cultural and arts education, its place, its role in the academic curriculum and the basics of education are all topics for debate which implicitly or explicitly point to different systems of values and different social choices. Philosophers, political scientists, specialists in aesthetics,

historians of culture, sociologists and are historians, and even the economists of art, must take an interest in this area, which is anything but trivial. One may even be amazed that they should not yet have done so in proportion to what is at stake: not only in terms of education, but also in terms of the history of art and culture. How can they be induced to do so? A mobilization of social science research in this direction could form one of the useful extensions of this symposium. The comparative dimension would be entirely included in this effort.

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## **FOR A PROBLEMATIZATION OF THE QUESTIONS CONCERNING CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC EDUCATION**

In addition, such a mobilization would have the advantage of contributing to a better *problematization* of the field of cultural and artistic education. There is a need here, a political and epistemological demand that appears in the work presented at this symposium. If research is to serve the political project without being a slave to it, it cannot limit itself to taking up the question in the terms and the stereotyped language in which it is formulated; in the area of education less than in any other, as Israel Scheffler (1960) and Olivier Reboul (1984) each showed, on either side of the Atlantic, and with the same philosophical demand for attention to language. Everyone agrees in a general way when it comes to the necessity of evaluation; but do

politicians and men of science understand it in the same way? Nothing is less certain, and how could it be otherwise? The only way to escape ambiguity and progressive shifts from one field to another is by sticking to one's own field. Research and the contribution of the scientific community require the scientific construction of the object of study, and this is simply good epistemological logic. Let us allow, invite and encourage the scientific community to take the time to construct the field of artistic education theoretically and to construct their problematics, rather than pushing it to provide hasty answers to insufficiently formulated questions.

The construction, clarification and confrontation of theories and models of investigation in the field of cultural and arts education is indeed necessary.

This does not mean—quite the contrary! — that it is necessary to put all empirical investigations before this theoretical work. Both of them can and must advance on the same front, provided that they are completely involved. Research cannot limit itself to recording and measuring the possible “effects” of cultural and arts education, even though these effects are expected from educational policies; it is still necessary to understand them. Such understanding implies explanatory models, and they exist, at least potentially. From the papers and debates that this symposium has made possible, four explicative models, four theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing and studying the field of cultural and arts education can be distinguished:

1. The cognitive model, notably illustrated by Howard Gardner, following in the track of Project Zero. This is certainly the predominant model, judging from the number and extent of the research papers based on it.
2. The skills model of E. Eisner, which was not much in evidence explicitly at this symposium but which was nevertheless mentioned in passing in several papers, and whose merit most particularly lies in the intention of better delimiting the intrinsic aims and effects in this domain.
3. The model inspired by pragmatism and “post-modernism” sketched out by Larry O’Farrell, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches.
4. The aesthetic experience model finally, which links John Dewey’s approach to contemporary aesthetic reflection, some aspects of which were put forward by Alain Kerlan and Roselyne Erutti, and which is related to the holistic conception more particularly defended by Richard J. Deasy.

Let us point out how the opposition— or at least the confrontation, the split— between an approach inspired by positivism and one inspired by hermeneutics runs through this rough draft of a classification. As all have understood, it is in no way a matter either of claiming that this list is exhaustive or of choosing among the models. Instead, it is a matter of

emphasizing the importance and necessity of the theoretical work that underlies them and the preliminary conceptual clarifications that this work requires, and the manner in which this theoretical work organizes research activity. It is indeed one thing to record – and even to evaluate – for example, the effective impact of an artistic practice on pupils' self-esteem, or the impact of an artist's intervention on the development of the young child's language skills. It is quite another to be able to explain it.

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### **FOR A LONG-TERM EFFORT AT EVALUATION: BUT WHAT HAS BECOME OF THESE CHILDREN, THESE TEACHERS, AND THESE SCHOOLS?**

Cultural and arts education structures are usually long-term structures. All forms of education require time, and arts education can only be realized in the long term; it is even characterized by a specific temporal experience. Moreover, the aims and objectives which are generally attributed to it, whether from an intrinsic or an extrinsic point of view, presuppose a long-term framework. And yet, there has not been much research into the long-term effects. This is a distortion which needs to be corrected. Pupils, classes, teachers and even educational institutions have benefited, for a semester, a year and sometimes for several years, from a particular structure or program: a resident artist, a special partnership with a museum, a theater, etc. What remains of all that? What remains for the pupils, not just at the end of the year, but also at the end of their school days? And for the teachers, for the educational institutions, for the cultural and arts institutions and the participants themselves? Arts education programs and structures most often have, by their very nature, a practically experimental status: one may as well consider and study them as the laboratories which, in part, they are. Few pupils compared to the number belonging to a particular age group, and few schools have enjoyed this chance of having benefited from the presence of an artist in the school, or from a special cultural partnership, such as certain lyrical theaters offer, for example; a better knowledge of these pupils' later schooling, of what becomes of them in terms of culture

and education, should therefore be one of the concerns of research into these experimental situations. And this is all the more true when young children are concerned. Similarly, few pupils in technical schools and few technical schools benefit from ambitious cultural and arts education structures; where they exist, these situations have a practically experimental value, calling for appropriate analysis and follow-up, including not only the *in situ* study, but also a longitudinal study, following up over a reasonable period the concerned group of students as well as the effects on the school and on the involved educational players.

### **FOR A PLURAL APPROACH TO THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL AND ARTS EDUCATION ON PUPILS, CHILDREN, AND ON TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS AS WELL. OF THE TEACHER AND THE SCHOOL?**

The symposium was intended to shed light on the effects of cultural and arts education on children and young people. It is of course legitimate for an educational policy to ask, in the first place, what benefits the learners drew from it. However, the works discussed at this symposium have shown that an assessment of cultural and arts education cannot be limited to just this goal. Pupils, teachers, schools and their environment, and intervening cultural institutions form a system, and the impact of CAE is even felt. On this subject, certainly more than on any other, analysis and assessment must better consider the system and its different elements. Indeed, the involvement of teachers in artistic projects and practices is not without effects on the very profession of the teacher, on the functioning and the dynamics of the class-group, on the educational relationship, and on the educational contract. These ricochet effects should be the object of particular studies. The school itself, the educational establishment, can also be affected in varying ways according to the level of teaching of a number of arts education programs, and notably in the English-speaking world. Is assessment here – assessment of the efficiency of the policy or of the structure, as well as of its impact – to be limited to measuring the intended and expected effects? This



would mean misunderstanding the complexity of the educational field. The players are never the executors of a policy; and effects are always mediated. What are these mediations, what are these shifts?

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## **FOR AN ANALYSIS OF CAE-SPECIFIC SITUATIONS**

Let us go further: the effects that a CAE structure can exercise on pupils, teachers and in schools depends in the first place on the nature of the structure itself, and even more on the pedagogical and educational situation, which the partners in the structure, teachers and cultural participants, and even pupils, construct within the given structure or program. It is necessary to emphasize this point: a teaching and educational situation is never simply given; it must always be constructed. What do arts and cultural education situations depend on? What are they based on? How do they hold together? In what ways do they differ from other teaching and educational situations? What are the prerequisite conditions for them to bear fruit? There are many different, CAE-specific situations, not only because they are often considered as an innovative space, but also because the concerned cultural participants are different from one another, and because artistic disciplines themselves differ. A listing, a typology and an orderly analysis of these many situations are needed. Before the effects are even assessed, it is consequently important that the particularities and the logics be better known. That is why an evaluation of the effects of CAE cannot be done without preliminary analyses: an analysis of the procedures, the functioning, and the modalities of the construction of cultural and arts education situations. What do teachers do in these situations? What tasks fall to pupils and to outside participants? Over-concentration on the effects comes down to treating all of this as a black box, which is a questionable behaviorist perspective.

## **AT THE HEART OF THE EFFECTS: WHAT SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS DO ARTISTS, OUTSIDE PARTICIPANTS, TEACHERS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS MAKE?**

So let us open up the black box a little bit, and let us take an interest in what happens *in situ*: in the classroom, the museum, the studio, etc. Let us take an interest in the particularities of the situations. One of these particularities results from the more direct relationship established between the pupil and the world of art, between the world of school and the worlds of culture, between artistic creation and personal expression. This indeed is the point wherein the difference between an “ordinary” arts teaching situation and the arts education structures that many programs have developed today becomes patent. The intervention by an artist and the cultural partnership are two of the most significant modalities. Today, art and artists not only enter schools, but also hospitals, prisons, social centers, and so on. Thus the artist appears as a pedagogue. But what does he contribute specifically? What situations does he construct? What tasks does he involve pupils in, how and to learn what? How does this differ from the work of the teacher? Visiting artists and resident artists have acquired experience, knowledge and know-how that is not often formulated or made explicit; but this needs to be done, these skills and this experience need to be analyzed, as do, in the same way, the skills and the experience acquired by cultural institutions, the practices and educational aids that they have created and developed for young people and school-age children, notably in their cultural and educational services.

In a more general way, if cultural and arts education for all finds its privileged locus more that ever in schools, this education is less than ever limited to using the ordinary means at the disposal of the school. The assessment of policies, programs and structures, of their conditions and of their effects, needs to take this “de-schooling” of arts education into account. The growing role of cultural institutions in the educational field cannot but affect these institutions themselves: their identity and their functioning are

necessarily changed. To what degree? On what points? The listing and the study of these impacts deserves to be integrated in the problematics of assessment.

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## **BEYOND EFFECTS: FOR A RE-CENTERING ON WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF ARTS EDUCATION – AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE.**

It will be said that all this takes us too far afield from the central object, arts education itself. On the contrary, we are bound to return to it. One of the questions asked at the symposium was the following: Do the different arts have specific effects? Apart from the particular case of education and musical skills, in which the link with cognitive skills was often underscored, a precise answer to this question, going beyond what can be sensed through simple intuition, is hardly to be found. Is this really surprising? There are two tendencies: On the one hand, attention is directed to general educational effects, know-how and ways of being that come under the heading of what are called “cross-disciplinary skills” – in short, the focus is on extrinsic effects. As a result, the specific contributions of the different artistic disciplines – and even pedagogical conditions – become difficult to discern. Thus when a structure seems to foster the development of self-respect, is this to be attributed to the kind of art concerned – music, drama or plastic arts? Or is it to be attributed to the pedagogy underlying the project that was realized? On the other hand, assessment focuses on the specific aspects of the different artistic disciplines, their specific knowledge and know-how, in short, on the didactics of music, plastic arts, etc. As can easily be seen, the notion of cultural and arts education needs to go beyond this opposition. If it is limited only to the extrinsic value, it runs the risk of getting lost in generalities; if it is limited to the intrinsic value, it loses what justifies it by differentiating it from “scientific education.” In his opening remarks to the symposium, Emmanuel Fraisse noted that here lies, more than an opposition, a “polarity”, a constitutive “tension.” He proposed getting past the intrinsic-extrinsic opposition to the benefit of the education in art/education

through the arts polarity. Nonetheless this necessary leap presupposes a common denominator. Indeed, “education in art” and “education through the arts” do have something in common: aesthetic experience. Is an education in art that does not require a first-person aesthetic experience really an arts education? Certainly, it provides learning of specific knowledge and know-how, but what of its educational dimension? Similarly, would an education through arts that was not grounded in the opportunity for a personal aesthetic experience really be an education through the arts? At this point, assessing an arts education structure or program means, perhaps, first evaluating the nature, quality and particularity of the aesthetic experience that it offers and makes possible, and better yet evaluating the aesthetic attitudes and the aesthetic behavior that are appealed to and are taught.

This point of view, on which this forward-looking perspective will end, without claiming to close it, comes down to considering aesthetic behavior as a specific and fundamental form of human behavior, a basic component of the human psychological profile, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2000) has put it. And aesthetic behavior, as such, deserves to and must be taught.

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