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field of art education:
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Abstract

After reminding us that in a fast changing world, the role of the school is to learn how to learn, the author notes that there is a large gap between declarations of intent and the implementation of art education. He then undertakes in six lessons a critical assessment of the International & European Symposium of Research on the evaluation of the effects of artistic and cultural education. He addresses diversity, epistemological issues, aptitudes and skills, practical implication, teaching methods and the evaluation of educational policies.

Key Words : aptitude, art education, skills, epistemology, evaluation, school objectives, impact, intent, implementation, method, educational policy, practical

A European and international symposium on research in the field of evaluation of the impact of art education on children and young people has been held in January 2007 in Paris (Centre Pompidou). It has gathered about 60 researchers from different countries all over the world and 300 teachers, educators and students.

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The context which enabled the organisation of the first international and European symposium on research to assess the impact of education in the field of arts and culture.

In education, the issue of evaluation emerged against a backdrop of deep changes in views on the purpose of school education several decades ago. In developed societies where human and cultural capital is the main asset, the ability to call upon aptitudes, knowledge, know-how and self-awareness is, more than ever, the main factor of growth and development. It is also what enables each and every one of us to find his or her place in a world which is constantly evolving. In the era of information technology where our knowledge is rapidly outdated in the face of swift technological progress, the ability to keep learning as long as we live is becoming a bigger challenge than the ability to master technical expertise per se in a given area. Consequently, what we are now trying to assess is the ability of our education systems to enable most of us to acquire this lifelong learning aptitude rather than a mere basic standard of knowledge in each age group.

It is within this context that the role played by education in the field of arts and culture is enhanced, not only with a view to increase people's artistic abilities, but also in order to stimulate their ability to learn in general.

Although education policies across the world devote some place to art tuition, as shown during the first international conference on that topic organised by the UNESCO in Lisboa in March 2006, there is nevertheless a wide gap between official declarations and their implementation at school level or in other educational settings. If the issue of artistic and cultural education is now being raised once more with such intensity, it is precisely to fill this gap.

Main conclusions of the symposium

This summary is presented in SIX LESSONS

FIRST LESSON

Research work on assessment methods presented during this symposium has highlighted the diversity of objectives pursued by policy-makers as well as the facilities created in connection with artistic and cultural education together with the diversity of structures for what is referred to as artistic and cultural education in general.

Is this diversity an obstacle which needs to be overcome to make research on evaluation process possible? Is it necessary to agree on the basics before embarking upon a form of evaluation, as in the case of medical research in order to identify certain indicators of individual well-being?

We can answer to this question from two points of view:

1. Even if we do have to adopt a common language, the diversity of purposes attributed to artistic and cultural education should not hamper evaluation process. To appraise, first and foremost, and particularly in the etymological sense of the word, means to question the values that policies, a framework and field action are imbued with and to highlight, if need be, the gap between these values and those which are referred to in speeches preceding action or policies. The presentation of research work in the field of evaluation can only be relevant if the values and objectives which those involved identify with are clearly detailed and explained. One must be wary of any form of naïve idealism. Artistic and cultural education is not a good thing per se. It may be linked to many different types of values: the transmission of a heritage, the development of children's creative ability, or the conformity to a figure of authority or a creative standard. However, in every case, studies and research must undergo control and evaluation processes just like any other research field.

2. To the diversity of objectives of an artistic and cultural education one should add the diversity of structural modes in the field of arts and culture. Every artistic ability develops in its own way, thus creating the need for a precise definition of the field in which an evaluation is to be carried out. However, the way in which the arts and culture are structured varies according to the cultural context. The distinction between different artistic fields in Europe or the United States, for instance, is relative. It would seem incongruous in Subsaharan Africa where different elements such as drama, dance, visual art and music are blended within a single cultural experience.

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These two points raise the following question: is it feasible to construct a general epistemology of research on the evaluation of artistic and cultural education or is one limited to a particular type of epistemology for each artistic and cultural field, each type of epistemology being strongly contextual, i.e. dependent on the way in which the artistic and cultural landscape is structured?

SECOND LESSON

On the basis of these prerequisites it is possible to clarify certain epistemological and methodological problems in connection with evaluation.

We mostly stressed the limits of quantitative evaluation.

Let us look at the basics once more. The quantitative approach relies on two key concepts: effectiveness and efficiency. The effectiveness of any action is measured by the discrepancy between the result attained and the intended objective. Its efficiency is judged by the means required to obtain a result, the idea being to reach an objective as fast and as cheaply as possible.

This vision of evaluation is based upon a theory of action which relies on two faculties: understanding and will. Understanding is the ability to define a quantifiable objective and the path or strategy required to attain it. Will is the ability to alter reality in accordance with the plans which have been laid out.

The limits of such a vision have been demonstrated very clearly.

The behaviour of children cannot be assessed in its full complexity and wealth from a mere quantitative angle.

Four remarks were made to support this assertion.

- First and foremost, it is necessary to outline and organize the whole range of potential effects which are to be analysed. As pointed out by several contributors, the complexity of the experience involved in attending classes on art and culture makes it difficult to reduce it to a series of basic behavioural patterns.
- Each of these effects is in itself the result of a construction. The notion of creativity, for instance, is a construct, the content of which varies according to the cultural context. Indicators can measure certain behavioural traits which are so many clues to the creativity of individuals. However creativity itself can neither be observed nor measured.
- Although we can measure an effect, this does not give us any idea of its intensity or its quality.
- From a methodological point of view, measuring a rational process or a type of cognitive behaviour raises fewer methodological problems than measuring the aspect of behaviour which is linked to sensibility and subjectivity. But are these problems really insoluble?

Action is not just about exercising the will to act

Three observations support this remark.

1. One does not act upon children as one manipulates a variable in an experimental setting. The evaluation process must take into account the way in which children reach or not the targets which they have been set.
2. It is difficult to isolate the artistic and cultural education variable from the other factors involved in the learning process. It is also difficult to alter the different factors which have a bearing on artistic and cultural education facilities set up for children and which may have an impact upon the behaviour of children. As a result it is often impossible to establish links of

causality between the effects observed and the facilities which had been set up. The only effects in the field of artistic and cultural practices which are directly generated by the experimental system can be connected to the system itself.

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3. It is difficult to set a precise time-scale to ascertain the effect of an action. Indeed, certain effects are directly linked to the developmental stage of the child. One has to take into account the degree of maturity of the children as well as the stage which the project has reached.

Having been made aware of the limits of a quantitative approach, the next stage must allow its integration into an analytical and qualitative approach.

This compels us to use measurement tools in line with an approach aimed at highlighting the abilities and the aptitudes of the individuals concerned.

Which abilities and aptitudes?

The THIRD LESSON to be drawn from this symposium focuses on the following: which abilities and aptitudes are developed by means of an artistic and cultural education: are they intrinsic or extrinsic? The importance given to the intrinsic and extrinsic effects in the course of research and evaluation work may vary depending on the purpose defined for artistic and cultural education. Should the arts be taught because they contribute to improve results in other academic fields such as arithmetic, reading and writing, or as a subject in their own right, because of the benefits they provide?

Caution should be exercised when relying on arguments which tend to demonstrate the extrinsic effects of an artistic and cultural education

The difficulty involved in demonstrating extrinsic effects: the issue of the transfer of abilities

1. Research has shown that learning music has an impact on time-space skills, on mathematical ability or in terms of intellectual plasticity and the ability to learn new complex tasks. Other research has also highlighted the

links between acting in plays and speech development. But we were also reminded that in a number of cases, the assertions according to which an artistic education produces better school results are not really proven scientifically.

2. My second remark refers to what was said earlier, that it is impossible to draw hasty conclusions on the basis of noticeable links or causes and effects. Does music tuition actually boost school results or does it develop better cognitive abilities which encourage schoolchildren to learn music? And is the family circle, the cultural heritage, or the study of music itself which is linked to such an aptitude?
3. Last but not least, even though research highlights that abilities developed through artistic and cultural education facilities can be made use of in other sectors, it is difficult to prove that there really is a transfer from one area to another. And even if there is, one cannot automatically conclude that an ability in one area of learning will automatically translate into an ability in another area; instead it must be seen as a re-processing or a reconstruction of previously acquired behavioural patterns and ideas.

Therefore care must be taken when using arguments which stress the extrinsic effects of artistic and cultural education.

The only theory which may be used in support of a transfer hypothesis is a theory of knowledge which details the common cognitive functions or behavioural patterns involved in different forms of knowledge and activity.

Such a theory is of no real help to anyone wishing to increase the space given to artistic and cultural education in the school curriculum. Although we can say that an artistic education draws upon cognitive functions and aptitudes or upon aptitudes which are likely to be used in other areas of knowledge, this gives us no idea of the added value that it can bring in general terms. Despite the fact that school results can be ascribed to the implementation of schemes which have a behavioural, cognitive or social impact, the same result could surely be obtained without having to resort to a

costly and time-consuming artistic education programme. As previously explained, indirect methods of learning are never as efficient as direct methods.

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The limits of the instrumental justification of an artistic and cultural education have quite rightly been emphasized. In terms of education, they subordinate art tuition to other subjects and justify the marginal position or the lower rank given to art tuition within the school curriculum. But has anyone ever thought of turning this problem round and questioning what contribution the study of mathematics can make to the development of artistic abilities in children? The question raised during this symposium is indeed of the utmost importance.

Is the whole point of an artistic and cultural education to prepare children to “live poetically on earth” to quote Hölderlin, to transform the way they relate to the world and to themselves, or to boost their performance in different school subjects?

The issue at stake is very different, depending on which option is pursued.

FOURTH LESSON

Only the recognition of the specificity of the aesthetic experience and of the continuity between this experience and other types of relation to the world makes it possible to affirm the added value represented by an artistic education.

Several contributions have stressed the effects of the implication in an artistic practice both as specific mode of thought and relation to the world and in terms of development of aptitudes making it possible to reestablish the continuity between the aesthetic experience and other modes of knowledge and relation to the world.

What are these competences and aptitudes?

1. The ability to explore all the possibilities in a given situation. The pupil is used to looking for the one and only correct answer, which the master is supposed to know, eliminating all other answers which are considered

wrong. When he takes part in an artistic project however, he learns that there is no right or wrong answer but a multitude of possible answers to the questions which the implementation of the project raises. It also teaches him that the result is never known in advance and must always be constructed. Each one of us can confirm that in almost all the different fields of human experience, be they individual or collective, affective or social, professional or political, it is unusual to be faced with a question for which there is only one correct answer. In this respect, an artistic education has educational virtues which are far superior to mathematics, at least as it is taught to children and teenagers.

2. The ability to imagine what you cannot observe directly and therefore to plan and anticipate, which develops in close interaction with self-confidence and self-expression abilities,
3. The ability to be original, i.e. the ability to construct one's own answer, to enter into the construction process of a personal and singular view of the world. It is part of self-construction and self-esteem.
4. The aptitude to focus on an action, to listen to one's inner self and situate oneself in the world.
5. The ability to stand a certain tension. Being faced with situations which cannot be dealt with in a mere rational manner leaves us with a choice between two attitudes: to flee or persevere, to learn to manage the tension inherent to waiting, to look for the mental trigger which will generate solutions which go beyond those a purely rational approach might have provided.
6. Artistic education makes us relate to norms in a different way. The ability to express oneself in an autonomous manner does not in any way encourage "any old thing". Learning about artistic practice enables people to discover that working on different forms of expression is an essential moment of expression which can enrich it and allows us to communicate. It requires lasting personal investment, the ability to learn a language with its own vocabulary and grammar, a prerequisite for mutual understanding.

7. The aptitude to situate one's work in the world, to present it to others. It teaches children to relate their production to that of their peers but also from a professional angle, even if this initiation remains fragile and must be comforted by added experience. It requires a sufficient level of self-esteem while making it possible to avoid the transformation of this self-esteem into self-satisfaction.

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There is no doubt that the specificity of the artistic experience and the competences that it makes it possible to acquire are in harmony with many other fields of human experience.

To conclude this mention of competences, know-how and self-awareness specific to an artistic education, I would express the wish that research projects also try to highlight the effects of an artistic and cultural education on cultural practices. The research presented has shown the impact that artistic and cultural facilities in education has on children's vision of art, but we have no data on the impact of an artistic and cultural education on children's artistic and cultural practices, on their attendance of cultural institutions or their input at home, their "room culture". The only references to these aspects focussed on the impact which artistic and cultural educational action has on the way children acknowledge cultural diversity and its legitimacy. One must now go beyond those bounds.

FIFTH LESSON: The question of the methods and the pedagogical approach

Evaluation processes cannot be reduced to the observation of the effects and the impact of an artistic and cultural education on children. Evaluation processes must also highlight the approach used, the methods which have the best impact, learning processes in connection with abilities, attitudes and values. It is the only way to make sure that the effects which are sought and observed can be reproduced.

To evaluate also means to focus on the analysis of conditions which enable a pedagogical system to be effective

Artistic education must contribute to reinforce the ability of pupils to think for themselves and learn on their own. It must create the conditions which will allow children who are not already aware of their potential to realise it, accept it, master it and then learn to use it. The aim is no longer to attain a result known in advance but to be inventive and open oneself to numerous possibilities. Such a view of artistic education has a strong bearing on the assessment of results. Effectiveness is no longer seen in terms of the gap between the observed and the anticipated result. Efficiency is not measured according to the cheapest means possible of attaining results. The evaluation of the effectiveness and of the efficiency of an artistic education action should focus on a study of the conditions which enable the process initiated to deploy its full range of possibilities.

In the field of artistic education, the teacher is more like an artist or a surfer than a surveyor. The creator does not decide in advance what he wants to achieve before starting to work. He sees in what direction his project evolves, how to make full use of its implementation, how to let himself be carried by the project itself. While understanding and will define and construct the aim of the project as well as the required strategy, in a relationship of submission to the knowing and acting subject, the creative process consists in developing possibilities which are unpredictable by nature. In the same way, a surfer does not have a set plan of action before climbing on his board, he does not try to submit reality to his will, instead he lets the wave carry him, sees in which direction it moves and uses it for maximum effect. The same can be said of a teacher. The best teacher is the one who can detect the potential of a child and create an environment which allows this potential to develop on the basis of guiding values.

The question of the necessary requirements for art tuition to produce the effects sought has hardly been outlined. It should become one of the main research areas in years to come.

To date, it has merely been broached from the angle of the partnerships between artists, teachers, schools and cultural institutions.

In this respect, the symposium confirms what we already know about the impact of partnerships between artists, teachers, cultural institutions and schools, the content of art courses, the quality of the results, their intensity and their frequency.

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A number of papers have shown the impact of art initiation classes in partnership with artists and of joint work with researchers on children's behaviour but also on teaching methods and the dynamics of change in schools.

Many contributions have stressed the particular impact of such initiatives undertaken in schools with children and young people from a disadvantaged background, transforming the relations between pupils and between pupils and teachers, renewing teaching methods, and motivating pupils anew in regard to schoolwork.

Changes are also visible in the school curriculum, in particular with the integration of art tuition or classes with an artistic dimension not only in specific classes, but also in the curriculum as a whole, even scientific subjects, in particular when they rely on resources provided by the cultural environment.

There is also an impact on the professional identity of teachers as that of participating artists.

The main merit of these studies was to make the players involved rethink their methods. The experimental dimension of research and the fact that a group is placed under observation always produces an effect anyway, in particular in terms of teachers' and contributors' behaviour. This research has shown that one of the main points of the evaluation processes is to come up with tools to analyse teaching methods enabling those concerned to take a step back and reassess them and adjust them if required in line with new research findings.

This should be completed by comparative studies aimed at assessing the scientific effects of the different partnerships, according to the different situations of the participating artists: "intervening artist", "artist in residence", "teaching artist", and depending on whether the artist works in cooperation

with a teacher who is not specialised in an artistic subject or on the contrary with a music teacher or an art teacher.

Effects can also be observed on artistic structures. Thus the renewal of the Operatic institution, the diversification of the repertoire which the operation "Ten months of school and opera" led to. Sadly to date very little evaluation work has been done on the impact of cooperation between schools and cultural institutions on the latter, or on the place given to artistic and cultural education in their artistic and cultural projects, or on the professional identity of the staff who keep them alive.

However, the main limit of the studies which have been presented to us, and this was clearly shown during the last three days, is that they are difficult to carry out on a widespread basis.

SIXTH AND LAST LESSON

How to go from the evaluation of experimental action to the evaluation of policies?

We cannot as yet draw upon any empirical research on a large scale. Likewise, most of the research to date has been carried out over a limited period, when lengthier studies would really be necessary. This was repeated on various occasions during these three days. Of course, only highly qualitative studies targeting small groups make it possible to analyse in fine detail specific effects which can be attributed to various educational projects. And naturally, a larger number of case studies, as underlined, pointing at the same conclusions, are interesting clues on the pedagogical systems and types of approach which can produce the best results. But such an accumulation of case studies is not to be confused with the requirements of the evaluation of a set of policies. From the observation of small groups no conclusions in terms of policy evaluation can be inferred. Between the two, there is seemingly not only a difference in scale but also an epistemological difference.

Too often, we are content to pass on examples of good practice like so many pieces of a jigsaw which only has to be completed to give a complete image of the reality of things. In reality, we do not have this complete image.

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Is reference to good practice part of a defensive strategy the purpose of which would be to hide the lack of policy? There are several “magical” words in French borrowed from the vocabulary of biology or fluid physics to describe the passage from “micro” to “macro”: capillarity or contagion. The generalisation of action initially tried on an experimental basis is supposed to operate by capillarity or by contagion from successful experiments. We also trust in the ability of exemplary actions to spread like oil. These metaphores are of no explanatory value, not even of descriptive value.

Is the implementation of actions considered to be exemplary a chaste veil on the absence of any sort of thought concerning the objectives and the means needed for schoolchildren to benefit from policies in the field of artistic and cultural education?

This question must now be dealt with by all players involved in artistic and cultural education. What is at stake is the reinforcement of the place of art education in the curricula, and in the non formal education of children, and the improvement of the quality of the methods of education and of the policies in this field.

Translated from the French by Martine Stirling