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8. POSITIONING ARTS IN THE CURRICULUM: POSSIBLE DISCREPANCIES AND WHAT THEY SIGNIFY

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Abstract: *Discrepancies in the way arts are positioned and approached in mainstream curricula in Europe afford awareness over the great diversity of contextualized actions and the social, cultural and historical tenets informing arts' role and place in relation to school based learning and education. Diversity invites exploration and may allow a better understanding of what functions as a constraint and what as an affordance to the pedagogical reforms and epistemological repositioning almost every national system of education embarked on, in contemporary Europe. It is proposed here a critical reading of the documented approaches to arts in educational practice in contemporary Europe, framing four main false dichotomies: reason vs. emotions, theory vs. practice, general aptitudes vs. specific ones and individual competences vs. collective capacity building.*
Key words: *educational practices, discrepancies, arts, curriculum, false dichotomies*

1. Introduction

Arts are a relevant part of European mainstream education, and they are included in the core curriculum of most types of schools on the continent. At least, this is what the Eurydice Report: *Arts and Cultural Education at School in Europe* (Eurydice, 2009) is telling us in the most comprehensive analysis of educational policies and practices in Europe, to date. The measure of, and the reasons for Arts' presence in curricula differ greatly from one system of educational practice to another. In some approaches to planning the curriculum, various artistic forms are reunited in one comprehensive learning unit called *Arts*, in others they produce disciplinary learning units, called after the specific artistic form (i.e. Dance and choreography, Music, Photography etc.). The learning contents pertaining to Arts are either reduced to Music and Visual Arts, or are extended to include drama, dance and choreography, crafts, new media arts, architecture etc.

2. Discussions

Structuring and allocating the time resources for learning arts in the curriculum also greatly vary. Whilst the image is quite homogeneous for primary education, where arts are present in the mandatory parts of the curricula in all European systems of education, in secondary education the image is not so homogeneous, the arts being moved in either the *optional* section in the curricula, or in the extracurricular activities offered in some schools and systems of educational practice. Everywhere in secondary education curricula, the time allocated to studying in the arts is significantly less than that allocated to sciences, language and mathematics.

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When explicit concerns address the marginalization of arts in the curriculum, chances are some educational programs and projects attempt some kind of compensatory action towards diminishing the structural deficit in the curriculum. Such is the case of programs like *Creative Partnerships* in England, *Cultural Rucksack* in Norway, *Kultur Agenten* in Germany, or *p[Art]s* in Austria (Bamford, Wimmer, 2012). *Creative Partnerships*, for example, is a program intending to significantly impact the long term commitment and participation of young people to school learning, by employing artists in the planning of curriculum. This program in particular aims at provoking change at the level of the school as an organization, not only at the level of students' learning, in their encounter with the arts and culture.

The Eurydice Report makes this great variety of positioning Arts education in the European curricula most visible when discussing the goals and aims of arts education. At a general level, in all European countries arts education aims at training students for understanding, knowledge and skills in the arts. Additionally and vastly contextualized, school systems may attribute to arts education merits in training students for "critical reasoning", "cultural heritage", "individual expressivity", "cultural diversity" and "creativity". Only in half of the educational systems included in the Eurydice Report, however, these formative aims associate learning in the arts with lifelong learning goals and abilities.

The discrepancies in the educational policies and practices on arts education in Europe may be easier to grasp should we consider the particularities of the historical trajectories of arts and arts education in Europe, presenting many turning points and not quite a homogenous picture for the historical recognition and prestige assigned to the various forms of artistic production and expression we know of today. Discrepancies in the way arts are positioned and approached in mainstream curricula in Europe afford awareness over the great diversity of contextualized actions and the social, cultural and historical tenets informing arts' role and place in relation to school based learning and education. Diversity invites exploration and may allow a better understanding of what constrains and what affords the pedagogical reforms and epistemological repositioning almost every national system of education embarked on, in contemporary Europe. It is proposed here a critical reading of the documented approaches to arts in educational practice in contemporary Europe, framing four main false dichotomies: reason vs. emotions, theory vs. practice, general aptitudes vs. specific ones and individual competences vs. collective capacity building.

Reason and emotions. Historically inherited from the period of Enlightenment the assumption that the functions and the purpose of intellect are significantly different from those of the human emotions has prompted a number of hypotheses concerning the various areas of human activity (implicitly, of the educational activity), and their roles and purpose in relation to various projections on human accomplishment. As a result, a great dividing gap has been envisioned between arts and sciences and between their subsequent roles in

education, with the later dealing with knowledge, facts and objective truths, and the former with the emotions, subjectivity and self-expression. Science was credited to produce objective, depersonalized, therefore reliable knowledge, whereas arts performs a compensating role by allowing for an introspective filtering of the world; sciences were regarded as truly useful, whereas arts were granted merely a complementary role in education (Robinson, 2011). In the modern world the authority over establishing what constitutes knowledge worthy of attention is unalienable and is attributed solely to an objectivist approach to understanding, teaching and learning.

A discussion of arts and sciences departing precisely from considering the point of their absolute dichotomy, as modern age proposed for education, is particularly interesting as it affords pedagogical explorations beyond the confines of complementarities of their functions in the curriculum. Sciences are deemed to cover a vast spectrum of knowledge, aiming to explain how the world works in itself; sciences are concerned with all aspects of life from nature to extra-terrestrial space, from human personality to social systems. Arts, on the other hand, are concerned with describing and expressing qualities of experiences; they cover a vast spectrum of practices, styles and traditions, historical and cultural (Robinson, 2011). Thus understood, arts and sciences fulfil complementing roles in education, providing opportunities and specific tools and means for structuring learners' knowledge about themselves and the world.

With all the advantages it affords educational practice in terms of planning and organizing a seemingly well rounded curriculum, made of well-defined and properly interconnected learning units, each responding to individualized content standards, hardly ever overlapping and allowing for a maximized efficiency in distributing pedagogical resources towards accountable educational ends, complementarities also allows for a different prioritization of the educational roles arts and sciences play in the curriculum, with the balance of pedagogical resources attributed favouring either, or. As such, it follows that over-emphasizing one in the detriment of the other is also possible, running at the risk of breaking the harmony of arts and sciences in the same, holistic educational vision.

This separation of roles for arts and sciences, albeit vividly disputed by the psychological and neuro-physiological research over the past decades (see Gardener, 1993; Goleman, 1996), is maintained in many approaches to curriculum planning today. The time may have come, though, along with the limits of an approach to curriculum building on the complementarities of functions for arts and sciences, also to carefully consider the similarities of knowledge production processes in both arts and sciences, as Robinson (2011) warns: they both include objective and subjective elements; both rely on knowledge, emotions, intuition and non-rational elements; both are driven by personal investment and motivation and both are highly creative (Robinson, 2011, p.229).

Forming a deep understanding of what complementarities of roles and positions in the curriculum actually entails for both the effects on learning and for the actual learning experience, and deeply understanding what may constitute a common ground for both arts and sciences in terms of knowledge production seem advisable enterprises. Even more so when reformist discourses on education almost everywhere claim to invest a very big interest in identifying approaches to learning and pedagogical resources able to afford the school learning with opportunities for revealing to learners the ongoing dance between intellect and emotions that normal human activity and functioning entails (Goleman, 1996).

Theory and Practice. Situated anywhere between progressive and traditional perspectives over what counts for an educational horizon in the ongoing continental reform rhetoric, the approaches to arts in the curricula across European systems of mainstream education varies greatly. This diversity is making visible a variety of false dichotomies in planning and delivering the curriculum, with that of opposing theoretical and practical aspects of learning and learning outcomes fuelling ongoing debates in education.

This particular opposition has interesting historical explanations. On one hand, in the history of Western Europe education, the Industrial Revolution has brought to the fore of pedagogical attention the importance of connecting the outcomes of schooling to the requirements of the new forms of organizing economic activity, labour and production. At its best, schooling was supposed to aim at professionalizing young people, meaning preparing them in knowledge, conduct, attitudes and skills for the work life. That meant that what was deemed worthy of making the object of learning in school was to be decided against new criteria: knowledge and skills that serve in the best and most efficient way to placing young people in jobs. From this angle, arts were not only marginalized, but to the extent they were allowed in the curriculum, they were transformed in content and approach so that it helped prompting deductive, propositional, practical and pragmatic knowledge to the fore of school based learning.

On the other hand, the history of arts and art schools in Europe provides other explanatory routes for the emergence of this particular dichotomy. In Ancient Rome it was possible to separate between *artes liberales* - dedicated to cultivating the spirit of the free man – and *artes mechanichae (iliberales, sordidae*, lat.) – preoccupied with manual production of goods and exclusively performed by slaves. Music was always assimilated to *artes liberales,* whereas painting and sculpting were included in the *artes mechanichae* – and the status quo of this separation will preserve throughout the entire Middle Eve. With the emergence and rise of guilds of painters and sculptors promoting specific ways of production and commercialization of art works, as well as specific forms of training based on apprenticeship models and complete immersion of disciples in the life and work style of their masters (Heinich, 1993), it is created a context of practice where a new social and economic status appears within reach for both the visual artists and the visual arts. In order to rise to the status of *artes liberales,* the visual arts of painting and sculpting were subjected to an

intensified intellectualization process in the course of the XVI-th and the beginning of the XVII-th century. About that time two academies of paining and sculpting have been documented to have been set up in Florence and, later, in France, promoting the study of philosophy, anatomy and mathematics along with the learning of drawing and sculpting (Darras, in Bresler, ed., 2007). The academies and the guilds have had a parallel functioning up until the XVIII-th century, when the guilds would disappear.

The visual arts have had a long and difficult history being confirmed among the *artes liberales*. Their long journey to affirmation has included stages of deep transformation and assumed *intellectualization*, the academies promoting a double pedagogical strategy: one designated to the reasoning and theory, the other to the hands and practice (Batteux, 1747, in Heinich, 1993, p.93). The echoes of these formative practices can be recognized in some of today's arts schools' ethos, restricting the legitimacy of manual, technical, practical learning in visual arts for the benefit of pedagogical approaches worthy of *artes liberales*, like the study of aesthetics, art theory, history of art etc.

In the mainstream curriculum, the tendencies to marginalize arts are explainable by this very ambivalence of arts education's advocates: should they voice an *intellectualist* approach, it follows that the pragmatic, job – related value of the knowledge they advocate for is reduced; should a more technical, manual approach to arts learning be advanced, the low intellectual status inherited from the age of *artes liberals vs. artes mechanichae* is brought to the fore of curriculum decision making. Either way, it may seem like a lost battle. Yet arguments in favour of sorting out this error in interpreting the curriculum have been put forth by a huge number of well-known educationalists: Johann Pestalozzi (1746 – 1848), Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952), Rudolf Steiner (1961 – 1925), Carl Orff (1895 – 1982), John Dewey (1859 – 1952), Lev Vygotsky (1896 -1934) and many others.

In overcoming the shortcomings of this false dichotomy, all the writers mentioned above propose placing the learner and the learning experience at the centre of our pedagogical thinking and curricular decision-making. By making the learner, the experience of learning and the learning action the priority in educational practice, the material and immaterial, theoretical and practical aspects of learning are engaged in a dynamic relationship to one another, shifting our focus from the dichotomy of theory and practice to finding what best serves enriching the learning experience and motivates participation to learning. To this avail, arts in all forms of expression may serve us well.

General versus specific aptitudes. The Eurydice Report (2009) is eloquently introducing empirical evidence of a great scope of aims which the arts education in Europe is directed at: in some approaches to curriculum, arts are credited to train and develop specific skills and competences, in others - general, trans-curricular ones.

This diverse way of positioning toward educational goals has its' roots, yet again, in the cultural and historical tenets of the Industrial Revolution, in providing mass access to education, and in the rationalist view prompting

quantification and cost-efficiency of investment in the social service of education by specializing formative routes and strictly correlating it to the requirements of the work market and material production. Specialization and early enrolment of students on educational routes fit for their intellectual potential were common attributes of post-war educational practice on both sides of the Atlantic, and continues to inform the educational practice in many countries today (Robinson, 2011). A key element in organizing education systems like that is the timely and proper diagnosis of the general and special aptitudes of the students, following a pedagogical logic placing with every subject a set of specific aptitudes for which the students need to prove initial appropriate potential. The human intelligence is considered a general potential, possible to appropriately diagnose by measurements of verbal, logic and mathematical intelligence. A special aptitude, named talent, is attributed to performing in the arts.

In contemporary cognitive psychology, the notion of talent is approached by researchers such as K. Anders Ericsson, or D.K. Simonton as a far more complex semantic reservoir. The talent functions as a "package, an ensemble" of characteristics acting simultaneously and harmoniously, much like the instruments in an orchestra (Kaufmann, apud. Stănciulescu, E., 2013). Talent may have genetic determinants; yet not the talent itself is inborn, as the genetic determinants for certain capacities and abilities, which may, at some point, form the nucleus of a talent (Coyle, 2009). Most forms of talent are, to a great extent, the result of social experiences and (self)education. Some are manifest early in childhood, others become manifest later during teenage, or even later in adult life. That is also because only in a social/ life context the "button" arousing the various characteristics of a person credited to harmoniously orchestrate a response to a situation and reveal noticeable performances can be activated. Also, talent is not just about technique (i.e. hearing, voice, sensing colour and forms, etc.), as it is about a number of volitional and motivational aspects as well (i.e. being particularly interested about a phenomenon, a capacity to self-motivate, and self-discipline etc.) so far ignored in education (Stănciulescu, 2013).

Narrow educational pathways to specialization may have been a profitable strategy for common people decades or hundreds of years ago, when access to a profession may have constituted the springboard for an improved economic and social status because it was, to a greater extent than it is today, reasonable to expect that the parameters of life – professional or otherwise – may not change too much within the span of a lifetime. Today, "it is not possible, nor is it comfortable or profitable to set yourself – at any given age – on just one lane, however easy advancing on it may seem (or however much talent one may think he or she possesses, in order to perform in a certain area)" (idem). Talent needs a far more complex reading than it needed a few decades ago. Moreover, change has become so intrinsic to contemporary life, that it is simply not reasonable to think that any talent relevant for activity today will be necessary in the exact form and expression within the next few years (idem).

Moving beyond this false dichotomy in arts education and in curriculum in general, comes as the reasonable thing to do. Disciplinary approaches to learning could be replaced by integrated and trans-disciplinary forms of structuring knowledge, for the simple reason that integrated approaches to learning afford the students opportunities to explore and uncover the myriad of possible combinations in which their characteristics, dispositions and abilities may become visible in their responses to the learning situations.

Individual versus collective perspective. We are used to think that creative labour is the manifestation of a solitary creative genius breaking through the confines of general conventions, progressing unabatedly towards creation and its' end products – i.e. a work of art, an original idea etc. – animated solely by one's will and personal qualities. Albeit history and collective memory is full of examples explicit of how we assimilate the work of art to the identity (name) of the creator (artist), this image of creative labour may prove deceiving. As Robinson put it, original ideas may spring out of the creative inspiration of the individual mind, but they never appear in a cultural void (2011, p.241).

In many national curricula the notion of creativity lacks a clear, operational definition and consideration; its' recognition is more implicit and determines a very diverse picture of approaches in the educational practice. In this diversity of approaches, one prominent dichotomy is that made explicit in how individual and collective planes intertwine in the anatomy of creative processes. On one hand, traditional approaches to school learning prompt an educational process structured on lessons, classrooms, standardized curriculum delivery and academic assessment, following the logic of accountability of learning outcomes and a cost-efficient view on investment in education. The pedagogical focus is on the direct relationship between the learners and the disciplinary contents being taught to them in the classroom, the memorization of which is later subjected to standardized testing.

On the other hand, the majority of proposed curricula - as the Eurydice Report shows – seem to associate creativity to specific areas of study and disciplines, namely those in the Arts curriculum. This is particularly challenging when it comes to assessing creativity (Craft, 2008) and to committing to a particular definition of the term *creativity* in the proposed approaches to school learning. Assimilating creativity to artistic creativity has almost a boomerang effect on the importance attributed to creativity and to arts in school cultures prioritizing records of quantifiable individual academic performances. Here arts and creativity will most likely be found at the margins of curriculum, less of an academic priority, more of a complementary, luxurious accessory to mainstream education. Moreover, it is very possible that in the course of transposition, creative processes available for teaching and learning in the classroom to bare very little similarities to the creative processes in the various art forms, out of the school.

Discussing the relationship between the perspectives of the individual and collective aspects of creativity is important for both forming a deeper understanding of the concept, and for locating possible continuities and

discontinuities with the school culture and the approaches to creativity in the curriculum. The arguments put forth in this respect by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD (Lucas et al. 2013) seem worthy of attention. The OECD proposes a model of creativity based on five general dimensions: inquiry, perseverance, imagination, cooperation and discipline.

- *Inquiry* stimulates creative processes by focusing on the general disposition of seeking what is interesting, what stimulates, engages and may satisfy one's sense of wonder in the problem-spaces one engages with. This disposition prompts an interest for questioning what is relevant in the problem, to explore and investigate on multiple possible ways and challenge stereotypes and habitual manners of thinking about the problem, not taking anything for granted and engaging with a certain degree of scepticisms in taking things at their face value.
- *Perseverance* names the resilience, the tenacity in confronting adversities and difficulties, the courage to be different and take positive risks, a certain level of tolerance to uncertainty and being ready to see the road ahead, even when the aims are not yet clearly stated.
- *Imagination* stands for the ability to identify original solutions and possible courses of action, readiness to try, test and improve ideas, to make connexions, to analyze and structure in new ways separate elements and to be intuitive about new possible connexions and ideas.
- *Collaboration*, because creative processes are social and are collaborative in their nature (John-Steiner, 2006 apud. Lucas et al, 2013). This means to share the fruits of creativity, to offer and receive feed-back – which is an action catapulting the desire to go on, to listen and to contribute relevantly to the ideas of others, to be a part of other people creative labour, when participation is relevant and instrumental.
- *Discipline* is the counter-point of that state of dreaming, traditionally associated with creative work, particularly in the arts. Creative labour may include routine work (if only we consider the number of hours going into perfecting a dance choreography, or in music performance etc., before going on stage), technique and skilful structuring of the creative product. Being disciplined means to allow time and pay attention, effort and will for training new techniques and perfecting older ones, it means reflection and inquiry over one's own creative work and its' various parts and aspects, and it means informed decision-making and taking pride in one's work. Attention to details, diligence in correcting errors and will to see the final product working well, just as intended or better are also distinctive components of the discipline of creative people.

Should we look at things from this perspective planning the curriculum beyond the confines of the myth of individual creativity (i.e completely free and relying solely on inspiration) – well to popular with many educationalists today, many of whom are the arts teachers themselves – seem possible. In writing this argument I have departed from thinking that we have a better chance at

foreseeing courses of possible action on our way to embodying educational reforms in the classrooms should we try to understand whatever lies ahead – for better or worse - on our way to fulfilling new visions of education.

3. Conclusions

It is important that, in deciding what the way ahead may look like, when considering the great diversity of approaches to educational policy and practices in Europe, to strive for a deep understanding of specific differences and in making informed decisions. This is particularly challenging in educational cultures where change is habitually pressured in a top-down manner, without the exercise of inquiry, critical analysis and consensus building on an on-going, multi-voiced debate of possible courses of action and examples of best-practice. Whilst comparisons are often proposed, it is quite frequent that these comparisons are surfacing the deep cultural and historical tenets of various educational approaches, at the expense of rushing into not quite successful implants of practice from one system of education to another.

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