Expertmeeting Art for art's sake, LKCA June 28th 2013

Response Folkert Haanstra

It is a pleasure to comment on the OECD report 'Art for art' s sake? The impact of arts education'. Let me first state that I am generally positive about it because it deepens and widens the results of the previous review, the REAP Report from 2000. We must conclude that many transfer claims still cannot or not yet be substantiated and that the most convincing results concern near transfer, as in the case of theatre. A positive example of far transfer concerns the effects of music education on intelligence. But I have some comments on this outcome.

The report also puts the brain outcomes of arts education, outcomes that have attracted a lot of attention also in The Netherlands, in the right perspective. I hope that this thorough but sobering report will find its way in policy papers and arts education advocacy documents. But I must confess that I am a bit doubtful about this, because we know how tempting it is to go beyond and often far beyond the empirical evidence.

In my response I want to make three points, and I go from concrete and specific to more philosophical. My first point concerns the review methods used, the second concerns the research agenda for arts education and the third the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental outcomes.

Review method

In the ongoing discussion on the empirical evidence of instrumental outcomes of arts learning the REAP report published in 2000 by Winner and Hetland was a milestone. REAP stands for Reviewing Education and the Arts Project.

I was a milestone because of its broad scope (it covered all art disciplines and a range of cognitive outcomes) in combination with its review method: meta-analysis instead of a traditional narrative review. The traditional review is more subjective, it lacks formal rules and there is no systematic way to deal with conflicts between studies, that is between positive and negative outcomes. In meta analysis or quantitative research integration outcomes of collected studies are transformed to a common metric and an average effect size can be calculated. Moreover through meta analysis one can systematically examine characteristics of the studies e.g. whether length of the treatment or background variables of teacher and students make a difference in the effect size.

Meta-analysis has its difficulties and it is time consuming , because one needs basic data and statistics of the collected studies that often are not reported. I know this very well because for my dissertation study I carried out meta analyses. But scientifically it is an important step forward in research integration. Therefore I think it is a pity that the present review lacked the resources to use meta-analysis for integrating the new studies that appeared after 2000 or for effects that were not included in the previous review. This is acknowledged in the report, for it is stated that and I quote:

'*our narrative summaries could lead to a meta-analysis of each group of studies, as meta-analysis is a far better method of synthesizing studies than simply tallying positive and negative findings.*

Indeed, simply tallying is inconsistent with good statistical practice because it disregards sample size and effect size. Let me show the problems of tallying in the example of effects of music education on intelligence. There are two quasi experimental studies mentioned: the Bastian study is tallied as positive effect, the Ho study as no effect. But in the Bastian study two intelligence tests were used and only one showed significant positive effects for the music groups. Still the Bastian study is rated positive. I would say it should have a positive and a negative rating. From the five experimental studies four are rated positive. The Nering study is rated positive, even though the study only showed positive results for two subtests of verbal intelligence and not for the other tests. The Neville study also is rated positive, even though the report states: the study does not show that music training in itself improves intelligence since music training was not disentangled from the effects of any kind of training with a small student/teacher ratio. So if I had done the tallying I would have rated three negatives instead of one. Therefore I think the strong conclusion in the executive summary: 'music education strengthens intelligence' is at least debatable and only meta-analysis can lead to a convincing outcome in this respect.

Agenda for further research

The answer that the report gives on the question in the title: Art for arts sake' is somewhat ambiguous in respect to future research. On the one hand the authors insist (especially in the conclusion) on the importance of justifying art education in its own terms and not instrumentally, while on the other hand they are arguing for more rigorous and theory driven studies and experiments that examine the transfer. I quote:

The research priorities for the coming decade involve better methodologies for impact studies and even more important, is to develop sound and testable theories about why and how arts education would have an impact on various outcomes of interest.

Research topics mentioned are for instance:
-Search for plausible links between specific arts and specific non-arts skills and subject matters
-Examine the effects of explicit teaching for transfer in the arts
-Explore whether using the arts as entry points to academic subjects is particularly useful to certain kinds of students

But do we really need this kind of better research into side effects of arts education, that is enhanced learning in non-arts disciplines, while we agree that these effects cannot and should not be its main justification? To prioritize better transfer studies in our research agenda would be inconsistent with that conclusion.

Therefore I totally agree with another proposal on future research the report makes:
Better understanding the relative effectiveness of different kinds of pedagogies in different arts forms on the acquisition of artistic skills themselves . This is a kind of research that is much more developed in academic domains than in arts education. Even when not dealing with transfer from the arts to another domain, studies on the skills and dispositions developed by arts education, and on the different impact of various pedagogies in the arts should contribute to the improvement of arts education.

I realize however that internationally speaking it probably will be more easy to get funding for research on transfer. For The Netherland this is not necessarily true. So far, no

substantial transfer studies have been carried out in The Netherlands en there are no Dutch studies part of review. The only long term effects that have been thoroughly studied in The Netherlands are effects on cultural participation in later life. For some these are intrinsic effects, others would call them instrumental.

In the Netherlands the last decades show a substantial increase in empirical studies into arts education, but this increase is mainly due to an increase in policy research. The percentage of studies involving educational psychology and pedagogy as scientific disciplines has dropped. I think that kind of research is most needed when we want to improve the quality of arts education .

L' art pour l'art

I come to my last point. The title of the report is, I think, deliberately provocative : Art for arts sake? Question mark.

As we know 'L art pour l'art' is a 19th century expression meaning that the only "true" art is divorced from any didactic, moral or utilitarian function. *To be useless and unprofitable is one of the characteristics of an art work of a genius* to quote Schopenhauer. This romantic 19th century spirit is quite different from the role of arts for the innovation and 21st century skills strategies of OECD countries.

Art for arts sake can be considered as the purest form of an art intrinsic goal as opposed to instrumental goals. The notion of intrinsic goals is not without problems. Let us look what the last part of the report states about intrinsic learning in the arts:

Students who gain mastery in an art form may discover their life's work or their life's passion. But for all children, the arts allow a different way of understanding than the sciences and other academic subjects. Because they are an arena without right and wrong answers, they free students to explore and experiment. They are also a place to introspect and find personal meaning.

One can conclude that all the so called intrinsic values of art are instrumental in one way or another. Therefore some people say that it is a false dichotomy that we shouldn't use anymore. But to consider all goals of arts education as instrumental is not clarifying. The distinction is a relative one, but it is a tool which helps to analyze differences in goals and values. Uses of the arts which are in direct connection with the media and the contents of the arts involved or with the unique ways of knowing they represent are of a different kind than are the uses in which this connection no longer exists for instance art as a means to strengthen intelligence.

Instead of the 19th century l'art pour l'art view, let me finish with a beautiful quote on the intrinsic value of arts education from the philosopher Nelson Goodman

'How works of art, and through them our worlds, may be comprehended and created must be part of basic education for the millions of us who will never be artists of any kind. Why? Because this will equip us better for survival and success? Rather, because advancement of the understanding is what makes survival and success worthwhile.'

Reference:

Goodman, N. (1984). *Of Mind and Other Matters*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press p.150