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Arts-Based Methods in Education –
A Global Perspective

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the field of arts-based methods in education with a general theoretical perspective, reviewing the journey of learning in connection to the arts, and the contribution of the arts to societies from an educational perspective. Also presented is the rationale and structure of the book, as well as a summary of the following chapters.

1.1 Learning and the Arts: A Long Journey

To what extent the personal encounter with art and culture is important for the optimal development of children and young people has been repeatedly emphasised in theories of learning and development (Gardner 1994; Winner, Rosentiel & Gardner 1976) and by research findings (Deasy 2002; Fiske 1999; Rabkin & Redmond 2004). Research surrounding the encounters that children have with art and culture has been characterised by various approaches to child development, educational theories, and developmental psychology (Knowles & Cole 2008). Additionally, changing policies and strategies have influenced the research process (Akuno et al. 2015).

The present contribution was initiated by the intention of the editors to investigate these arts-based encounters from a global perspective. Being aware of the need for further studies that would touch upon the cultural,

inter-cultural, cross-cultural, and global elements of arts-based methods in education, the editors started discussing a possible publication project in November 2016. The first call for papers was sent out in January 2017, and at the time the editors were expecting to collect about 12 contributions for a special issue that River Publishers was interested in hosting. The response from the scholarly community was overwhelming. The editors received such a large quantity of well-qualified, original, diverse, and relevant insights that the single publishing project multiplied. Against the background of this prolific harvest, the editors are offering the present special issue and wish to make the reader aware of two related works. The first is the anthology called *Arts-based Methods and Organisational Learning: Higher Education Around the World*, soon to be published for the Palgrave Series Studies in Business, Arts and Humanities, which focuses on higher educational settings and organisational learning (Chemi & Du, in press). The second project is a culturally specific anthology, which is currently being prepared with a projected publication date of 2018: *Arts-based Education- China and its Intersection with the World* (Du, Chemi & Wang, in preparation), a collection that focuses on cases from different regions of China, on Chinese art, and on cross-cultural projects involving China. This overwhelming response to the editors' invitation from different scholarly traditions and educational contexts is indicative of a growing global interest in arts-based methods in education. This tendency is consistent with a body of literature that has been based on high-quality research in recent years.

The most recent and exhaustive contributions that help frame the diversity and complexity of this field are *The Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education,* edited by Mike Fleming, Liora Bresler, and John O'Toole (2015); *The Routledge International Handbook of Creative Learning,* edited by Julian Sefton-Green, Pat Thomson, Ken Jones, and Liora Bresler (2011); the Waxmann's *International Yearbook for Research in Arts Education,* which has come to its third (edited by Shifra Schonmann in 2015) and fourth editions (this latest edited by Aud Berggraf Sæbø in 2016). In Britain, the living observatory of the programme Creativity, Culture & Education (2017) provides an always updated monitoring of creative partnerships involving the arts and education in a local and global perspective. However, already in 2007, Liora Bresler edited and published a fundamental contribution to the broad global perspectives on the field of arts education: the *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*. In this extraordinary collection, the thematic sections touch upon multiple heated topics in the field of arts

education studies and provide information about the global perspective of this field, thoroughly and systematically. Contributions and commentaries are collected from experts all over the world and involve a multiplicity of arts genres and traditions.

These contributions tend to bring together perspectives from all over the world and include a large variety of artistic genres and research methodologies. The topics that they touch upon span from policies to pedagogies, from social impact to philosophical conceptualisations. They are informative on specific topics, but they also offer a clear monitoring of the ways in which the general attention to the arts in education evolves through time. For instance, the introductory chapter in Fleming, Bresler, and O'Toole (2015) describes how policy statements have alternatively supported and ignored the needs of arts education. Here, and in the specific contribution of Akuno et al. (2015), is possible to read about the UNESCO attitudes towards this field as moving from reinforced priorities in 2006 and 2010, with respectively the Lisbon Conference (Portugal) and the South Korea World Conference, up to the surprising UNESCO rejection of the arts and creativity as priorities for education: "if nothing else, all that contemporary activity and global decision-making suggest a high level of both interest and confusion about the nature and the importance of the arts and their relationship to education" (Fleming, Bresler & O'Toole 2015, p. 1). Our contribution to the above literature aims at offering clarity on diverse practices and sustaining the theoretical and empirical attention to this field from a global perspective.

One example of the above-mentioned ebbs and flows in the field of arts education is the case of drama education in particular, where it is plain to see how educational practices are directly related to policy trends. When Bolton described the situation of drama education in the world in 2007, only a few years after the landscape had changed, it was modified according to fluctuating educational policies that chose whether or not to value the role of drama in education. According to Bolton (2007), the Scandinavian countries had a leading role in drama education going back to 1942. His review demonstrated how this positive trend continued through the first years of 2000, only to be substituted by a clear recession, which built up to the slow disappearance of drama as school subject or as a training subject at the educators' colleges. Very recently, Iceland inverted this trend by making drama education obligatory at all levels of compulsory schools (Thorkelsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir 2016). According to Chemi (in press), "for

a long time, Anglo-Saxon cultures seemed to have taken the lead in both research on drama education and in educational practices (Bolton 2007) as the Drama and Theatre section of the *International Yearbook for Research in Arts Education* in 2015 testimonies (Schonmann 2015)". In this way, is plain to see how research interests and perspectives follow the evolution of practices and policy. The case of drama education also brings forth the issue of cultural colonialism, which is as fundamental to global perspectives as ours and relevant to the arts at large. The assumed Anglo-Saxon expertise in drama education is criticised in Rajendran (2015) as part of a larger cultural exclusion: "Euro-American or Western centric interculturalism [...] tends to neglect histories and hierarchies of cultures" (p. 230). Despite this strong claim, the volume containing Rajendran's critique (the Drama and Theatre section of the *Yearbook* in Schonmann 2015) still disseminates cases drawn mostly from Western cultures or geographical placements. However, already in the subsequent yearbook, the 2016 *International Yearbook for Research in Arts Education* (Saebø 2016) reveals a more global picture, including examples of arts education from across different continents. The geography of arts education is slowly extending and reaching perspectives that are truly global and increasingly culturally inclusive. The present collection emerges from the need to continue making contributions in this direction, but further culturally diverse studies are still required.

Global trends are outlined in Wagner (2015), who considers the UNESCO research (Bamford 2006) and the OECD research (Winner & Vincent-Lancrin 2013) and Akuno et al. (2015) in this area to be the most recent and relevant landmarks in this field. Summarising the empirical contributions of these studies, Wagner (2015) emphasises a possible taxonomy, founded on "five basic approaches, paradigms, or objectives" (p. 25) to arts education: (1) the art-specific approach (artistic skills for their own sake); (2) the economic approach (economic output of creative industries); (3) the social approach (community projects with the arts); (4) the educational approach (integration of the arts in education); and finally (5) the political approach (building citizenship through the arts).

To the above categories, Chemi (in press) adds the health/therapy approach, which overlaps with several of the above-mentioned categories, but which she believes is an autonomous and independent perspective: "the application of the arts to health and therapy is a long-standing tradition and it has been made especially relevant to education through the self-regulation thinking. For instance, Sefton-Green et al. (2011) emphasise that the so-called

soft skills of emotions regulation and of monitoring of cognition (meta-cognitive skills) are a fundamental part of the students' mental health and resilience" (Chemi in press).

We believe that global and cross-cultural perspectives are needed in order to fully understand what is really occurring in arts education and what the perspectives are for future practices, studies, and policies. In order to introduce the cultural and educational contexts in the current special issue, we wish to touch upon the changes in the theoretical conceptualisations that have characterised this field through the years.

1.1.1 The Arts Are Good for Learning

The constructivist approach to the child's self-development and self-expression has had a great impact on how the teacher and educator think about art, culture, and aesthetics as active learning tools in the classroom. Similarly, the role of Dewey's pragmatism (Jackson 1998) and his description of an experience-based pedagogy have stirred the theoretical understanding of the pedagogical role of the arts away from earlier, narrower directions. As Akuno et al. (2015) describe in their historical review, from the time of the ancient Greek conceptualisation of aesthetics, the arts seemed to deal primarily with beauty and morality (i.e. ethics and virtue).

Generally, from international research, it is confirmed that the involvement of art and culture in the lives of children does support their social, emotional, and cognitive well-being and development (Chemi 2014; Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013; Holst 2015). Whether this meeting is about being an active maker, or otherwise an (active) audience member, is not relevant, as both encounters activate complex responses and require engagement. Children's participation in artistic and cultural experiences appears to strengthen their ability to concentrate, and to engage in personal and social identity perception, which later in life may increase their confidence and ability to engage in social contexts. Within cultural and artistic experiences, children are offered a safe and challenging environment, resulting in a curiosity-stimulating, identity-building, and intellectually challenging approach that can lead to a positive attitude toward learning and development. The reason that the artistic learning environments are challenging is because they stimulate the child's ability to reflect, to find perspective, and to be critical, and they encourage creative thinking, empathy, and both metaphorical and logical-scientific thinking. Indeed, understanding art and cultural experiences is conducive to the overall development, whereby body, senses,

cognition, and emotions are developed together. Artistic environments are often very safe despite any learning, understanding, and development challenges. The reason is that children who get early positive experiences with learning framed through arts and culture will have an opportunity to maintain a positive desire to develop further artistic experiences. This may contribute to learning readiness, creativity, and mental and emotional resilience later in life (Goleman 1995). Artistic learning environments address some of the children's prerequisites for learning: one learns through empirical, aesthetic, and discursive forms of learning, respectively (Austring & Sørensen 2006; Hohr & Pedersen 2001), and through their sensory language, arts and cultural experiences offer the opportunity to talk to both a real and a fantasy world—therefore addressing different learning approaches.

Ensuring accessibility to art and culture for school children means investing in community-building, and encouraging the development of resilient, robust, innovative, and competent individuals. This accessibility (Gardner 1994) is both physical and logistical (i.e. children actually have the opportunity to experience art and culture), but are also of mental and emotional nature (the cultural and artistic offerings must be developed with children, are meaningful in the child's life and important for their development). According to Perkins (1994), "bad habits of looking and thinking [that are] deeply rooted in the human organism" (p. 25) can be re-trained through positive habits, and the arts offer excellent cognitive training. The challenges hidden in the arts demand the activation of deep thinking, which happens to be rare in the shallow approach to art that is more typical in the mass culture of consumerism.

1.1.2 The Arts in Society

In recent years, no contribution to the arts in education seems to have been entirely free from the debate surrounding the role of the arts in education and in society at large. Advocacy can be present to a higher or lesser degree, but scholars and practitioners must often deal with questions about the impact of the arts on learning and society. No other culture beyond our Western-oriented, industrially advanced and technological culture under-prioritises the function of the arts in society, placing artistic practices in secondary roles compared to the production of goods, economic wealth, or commodity seeking. In Ward (2015), it is possible to find the historical reasons for this tendency, going back to Cartesian dualism (cognition *against* emotion) and the more mechanistic view on aesthetics formulated by Kant (Ward 2015, p. 108)

and disseminated during the eighteenth century. If on one hand Kant had the fundamental role of acknowledging the human capacity for original thinking and creativity, on the other hand he understood aesthetic experiences as basically cognitive and almost subdued to mechanic reactions. Romanticism, in an attempt to transcend the perspectives on aesthetics produced during the Enlightenment period, ended up replicating the gap between reason and emotion, scientist and artist, Apollonian and Dionysian (Chemi, Jensen & Hersted 2015). The state of aesthetics during early and advanced industrialism is characterised by opposite tendencies, such as the dandy's "art for art's sake" as inconsistent to the instrumental use of the arts for acculturation's sake. Critical theories emphasise the risk that capitalism would instigate "new forms of oppression" (Ward 2015, p. 109). The consequences for the arts would be multiple: exclusion from power, the arts being seen as the arts "increasingly at odds with the material reality of life in the modern capitalist state" (Ward 2015, p. 109), or inclusion in the bourgeois *Bildung* as an element of cultural and moral elevation for the gentleman. Later on, the arts would transcend this gap in several ways, one of them being the closeness to progressive approaches to education, as the works of Dewey (2005) and Montessori (Ward 2015) confirm. Postmodernism made all the above contradictions explode in one rebel act against any restriction for the arts, with the consequence of either indulging in Marcusian pessimism about the emancipatory function of the arts, or experimenting with extreme, playful, and/or disruptive artistic behaviours. Examples of the latter can be the *murder* of authorial voice in the novel (as Barthes stated in *The Death of the Author* in 1967) or on stage (see Beckett's minimalistic plays, Chemi 2013) or in the visual arts (see pop art or street art). Today, neoliberalism and consumerism, together with "the lack of effective opposition to neoliberalism" from the artists' side (Ward 2015, p. 117), has turned the arts into a commodity to purchase or a service to measure. The value of the arts is measured in economic terms and put up against a monolithic practice of education. This (unfortunate) tendency contributes on one side to generate false expectations about the arts' educational output—either as a cure for all educational dysfunctions or as a mere distraction—and on the other side contributes to the construction of the rhetoric of advocacy. We hereby distinguish the discourses of advocacy from scientific arguments for the specific functions that the arts have always had—and still have—for human development, survival, and opportunities to thrive.

Arguments for the central role of the arts in human development and social life can be drawn from several disciplines and scientific traditions.

The neurosciences reveal the workings of the artistic brain (Levitin 2006) and how emotions are fundamental to learning (Immordino-Yang 2015; Immordino-Yang & Damasio 2007). Philosophy interrogates itself on the possible disruptive benefits that artistic practices can have on the imagination of future educational environments (Lewis 2012). In the studies of Ellen Dissanayake (2000, 1995), anthropology and evolutionary biology offer a clear link to the function of survival through social connectedness. According to these theories, what makes humans special is not the mere fact of living in societies, of being capable of making things (handiness), or of learning, but rather the fact that human beings are profoundly dependent on these activities. Many other animals live in clans; some of them even use tools (even though humans differentiate themselves for the tool specialization), and almost all of them learn from their upbringing, but only the survival of human beings strongly demands this. For this reason, humans had to come up with specific strategies, and art was one of these. Indeed, art came to permeate all elements and stages in life with an attitude that Dissanayake defines as "making special." Human beings are the only animals capable of and interested in cognitive abstractions such as symbolising, aesthetic elaboration, imagination, and innovation. The arts have been, through time and across cultures, inseparable from humanness and human development. In the current contribution, we will bring a variety of cases from different cultural and geographical contexts that describe in which ways the arts are—and will be for the future—fundamental tools and environments for education.

1.1.3 Our Contribution

The originality of our work in the present special issue relies on the variety of geographical contexts of the cases and writers' background (India, Japan, the US, the UK—including Scotland and Northern Ireland—Iceland, Denmark, Italy, and China), the novelty of empirical data, the variety of art forms (drama, improve, multi-arts, arts-integration, visual arts, movement, theatre, dance), and diversity of methodological approaches. When a collected work contains this level of diversity, however, the editors face a challenge in the effective presentation of a common thread. This is not because commonalities are not present, but rather because the possible angles to emphasise can be many. The potential stories can be endless. While discussing which angle to take, the editors became aware of an emerging dramaturgy, a sort of rhythm that the chapters were generating. This is the story that is going to be told and the reason for the chosen sequence of chapters.

In Aristotelian terms, a dramaturgical progression is constituted by: (1) introductory events; (2) a dramatic event or *catastrophe*; and (3) resolution of events, or *anagnorisis*. Following the Aristotelian template, Chapters 1–6 introduce the field of arts-based methods in education with **general theoretical perspectives** by Tatiana Chemi and Xiangyun Du in Chapter 1 and with **a list of cases** that touch upon **artistry in teaching** in Chapter 2 where Kimber Andrews explores the role of the teacher as a choreographer through an arts-based approach and how the teacher activates the curriculum through a performative approach in the classroom; **novelty and difference** in Chapter 3, where Tatiana Chemi addresses the topic of school learning enhanced and extended by means of artistic methods and approaches in the context of broader educational reform in Denmark; **enhancement of understanding** through in-depth analysis, using Activity Theory, of music improvisation activities for preschool children in Scotland by Una MacGlone in Chapter 4; **enhancing literacy** in Chapter 5 where Hiroaki Ishiguro depicts Japanese multimodal drama performance as child-centred performance ethnography in the form of a picture-mediated reflection on 'Kamishibai' (paper drama performance); and **arts-integration** in Chapter 6 by Todd Elkin and Arzu Mistry, through their studies on how accordion book practice supports the development of agency in teachers/learners/artists and promotes motivation and self-directed learning.

As the core of the whole collection, the very dramatic elements of arts-based methods *in the flesh* are represented by provoking and poetic contributions: in Chapter 7, Dina Zoe Belluigi shows how arts-based methods are well-placed to enable disruptions to the normative positioning of researcher, respondent and subject, drawing on the author's reflections of opening the research processes to the possibilities of methodological ir/responsibility, which is **the bright and dark sides of this field**. In Chapter 8 Alison and colleagues present a set of experiential visual open work is built from a myriad of words, languages, cultures and critical theories, which is an attempt of **bringing the sensory (back) into scholarly research**, where it belongs.

Chapters 9–11 maintain the role of providing a resolution to the drama being told and offer perspectives for the further development of arts-based conceptualisations. These perspectives emphasise **the inspirational function of arts-based methods in education** in Chapter 9, where Chiaki Ishiguro and Takeshi Okada outline their model of the psychological process of inspiration through art appreciation (ITA), showing that its core consists of a dual focus on the artwork (and the artist) and the viewer's own art-making, and **the enabling (and constraining) involved in educational encounters with the**

arts in Chapter 10 where Rannveig Björk Thorkelsdóttir tends to determine the aspects enabling or constraining the subject of drama in Icelandic compulsory education, using the lens of practice architecture theory. Finally, in Chapter 11, with the purpose of bringing this dramaturgical storytelling to a conclusion, Pamela Burnard and colleagues suggest **arts-based methods as the creation of possibilities for future education**.

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