

Book Review

Educating for Creativity: Bring the Arts and Culture into Asian Education.

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This publication is the report of two Asian Regional Symposia on Arts Education – “*Measuring the Impact of Arts in Education*” held in Hong Kong SAR, China during 9 – 11 January 2004 and “*Transmissions and Transformations: Learning Through the Arts in Asia*” in New Delhi, India during 21 – 24 March 2005. While the first meeting focused on the instrumental use of arts in education, the second explored ways in which the arts could be better integrated into education in Asia. Both regional meetings were among the totally six symposia aiming to strengthen arts education curricula and creating the conditions for the integration of arts education programs into national education systems. Embedding this aim was the belief that arts and arts education could be the precious mean to realize “quality education” contributing to the holistic growth and development of human being as “being” a human. (Forward: vii – viii)

As an introduction indicated, this report provides an overview of recent arts education practice and reform in Asian region. The report is organized into six sections. It begins by the presentation of the evolving Asian perspective of the relationship between the arts, culture and education together with discussion on the alternatives to conventional ones. The following section summarizes the aims and outcomes of the two above-mentioned meetings. The remainder of the report is made up

of presentation from the meetings, beginning with papers describing the benefits of integrating the arts in Asian education, followed by case-studies illustrating how the arts can be integrated into education and used instrumentally to achieve educational objectives. The next section is a collection of examples of teaching, policy and curriculum reform efforts, both formal and informal. The final section of the report focuses on defining the way forward in terms of efforts to mainstream the arts in Asian education. In this section, research methods and frameworks are explained and two key initiatives are introduced: a new school which will put the arts and culture at the center of curricula and education; and the proposed Arts in Asian Education Observatories, which will act as clearinghouses of information about the arts in Asian education and serve as a resource for arts education advocacy in the region. (Introduction: 3)

Significant points raised in this publication provoke the reconsideration of educational goal and delivery systems. These points include, for example, what an educated person would be like, whether “literacy” could be interpreted in terms of reading and writing only or it could as well be the product of oral and kinetic transmission of knowledge and wisdom, and ultimately what indicators of human development should be. In addition to educational issues, the arts which have been recognized as rich sources of human and community development are

quested for their potential in promoting human's growth both physical and psychological rather than solely "the arts for the arts' sake". The arts are therefore proposed to be a valuable means for achieving the so called "educated people without giving up their own identity". (Section 1)

Based on the Hong Kong SAR's symposium, the arts have enormous impacts on education. It contributes to learners' intellectual and social development, an improvement of the quality of education, an increase in learners' creativity, and an enhancement of the safeguarding of cultural diversity. Moreover, an agreement was reached on the New Delhi's meeting that through the arts learners are enabling to better understand their own and other cultures contributing to an enhancement of their sense of identity and belonging. (Section 2)

There are two approaches, according to the publication, to the integration of the arts into education. One is "*arts education*" and another is "*the arts in education*". It is stated that the arts education approach is the time-honored one in which art is taught as part of the curriculum. Learners have "art" classes, and teaching-learning process focuses on developing their artistic skills and an appreciation for the "arts", usually as a valued part of the prevailing culture. The arts in education approach, on the other hand, uses the arts as a means for improving the quality of education, through: boosting teacher/learner motivation, enhancing the teaching and learning processes, encouraging active learning techniques, and increasing community participation. Furthermore, the arts in education approach is believed to have positive impact on learners' self-esteem, creativity, problem-solving skills and ability to work in team. These things could be seen as the quality of people for a knowledge-based society where people have to be capable of communicating, team-working, responsibility taking, and problem-solving. (Section 3)

Studies included in this publication indicate that to integrate the arts into education is possible and has a number of effective approaches. Central

to such a possibility and effectiveness is the arts and creativity within teachers themselves. This means that while teachers are looking forward to learners' creativity, they have at the same time to reflect the one of their own. From the studies, the arts involves not only material objects, but they also included actions such as playing, singing, drawing, and dancing. Thus, an implication from those sample studies indicates that it is not the lack of the arts resources, but of teachers' knowledge about, access to, and creative thinking that matters. (Section 4)

In addition to teachers' competence, integration of the arts into education needs political supports in terms of educational policy and reform. It is presented in the publication that the realization of using the arts as an instrumental means for educational quality improvement requires mutual understanding about what is meant by "*the arts in education*". Clarification of relevant issues such as the perspectives on "*the arts*", education outputs, teaching approaches, teachers' training, materials and resources have to be made among those involved, particularly policy-makers with traditional perspectives about the arts. (Section 5)

This publication is of the benefit to at least two groups of readers: those who are teachers and those who are not. To teachers, the publication provides an idea for stepping back from traditional perspectives of the arts, art classes, and the function of the arts. It stimulates them to take a closer look into what involves in the arts and rethink of its significant implications. The arts are no longer set their boundary beyond school curriculum and instructional activities. They are instead non-formal sources and methods of learning. Teachers are able to use the arts as their instrumental means for encouraging and enhancing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outputs of learning, not only for their learners but also for the teachers themselves. The levels of integration the arts into educational curricula are seen to be flexible in response to learners' development and subject contents. The arts could also facilitate the feasibility of delivering

integrative curricula where several subjects are based. Above all, be accepted the truth that learners very much enjoy outdoor lessons and activities more than the indoor ones, and total physical response activities more than dully passive ones. The arts in education could be one of the alternatives.

With relevance to those who are not in teaching profession, “the arts in education” might possibly be replaced by “the arts in living”. Appreciation for the arts is not merely an artistic dimension. It is rather learning about life and to live with their life. The visual arts help people understand and connect their physical existing with cultural root of life. They could take pride of having foundation of their life through the appreciation for knowledge and wisdom that created and transmitted through the work of the arts. On the other hand, the performing arts enhance people’s aesthetic and positive ways of seeing the world. While, through the arts, people are encouraged to be self-focused, motivated, and creative, they could greaten their social life through the ritual, festive, and cooperative implications of the arts. By putting the arts into life, people could be seen to be able to slow down their living and have more time to learn and reflect the life both of their own and of the others contributing to the harmony of living in the context of diversity.

In regard to Thailand, the arts in any form have been used in both formal learning activities in schools and in daily life. However, the formal recognition of the arts in education is in the form of “*arts education curriculum*”. The real integration of arts into classroom activities for subject instruction depends mostly on the ability of teachers. Unless the integration of arts into classroom activities is truly and actively recognized as part of school curriculum and teacher’s training on this issue is organized actively and continuously, the product of the Thai educational systems is seen to be difficult to reach what is called by the educational reform as “learners with analytical thinking and creativity” contributing to the national mobilization to be a knowledge society with social harmony.

The review concludes with good and bad news. The good one is that this UNESCO’s publication is free of charge. Those who need to get into the detail of what presented therein could contact the UNESCO Bangkok’s Office. The bad news is that this publication has been published since 2005, the number of its available copies at present is therefore unpredictable.