

Art for Art's Sake?! International Patterns of Legitimizing Arts Education

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In this article, we will discuss different perspectives on patterns of legitimizing arts education. By different patterns we mean different justifications and logics in how arts education is argued for in the scientific as well as in the political sector. We will propose a brief definition and systematization and present our discussion with international colleagues at the "Cultural Policy and Arts Education" panel at the International Conference on Cultural Policy in 2014.

At the International Conference on Cultural Policy (ICCPR) - hosted by the department of Cultural Policy at the University of Hildesheim from 9-13 September 2014 - we discussed patterns of legitimizing arts education with experts from different countries. One finding of the conference was that the need to legitimize arts education is a crucial topic in many countries because arts education is mostly considered a minor topic compared to other subjects such as economics, natural sciences, etc. that are taught at schools, at universities, or make it onto the political agenda. Yet there is also a strong belief in the potential of arts education, which is reflected in statements made by researchers and politicians and expressed, for example, in the Seoul Agenda. The Seoul Agenda is a result of the Second World Conference on Arts Education in Seoul 2010 and has raised high expectations of arts education fostering development in society. Its goal number three states accordingly:

“Goal 3: Apply arts education principles and practices to contribute to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing today’s world

3.a Apply arts education to enhance the creative and innovative capacity of society

3.b Recognize and develop the social and cultural well-being dimensions of arts education

3.c Support and enhance the role of arts education in the promotion of social responsibility, social cohesion, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue

3.d Foster the capacity to respond to major global challenges, from peace to sustainability through arts education.” (UNESCO 2010:8)

In the German context, this goal and its subitems have been received with skepticism. Because of Germany’s experience with the Nazi regime, the German constitution guarantees the freedom of art in article 5 (3). The Nazi’s instrumentalized art for their purposes and the legitimation of the political regime. Against this backdrop, using the arts for other purposes than enriching people’s lives is seen very critically in Germany and constitutes a sensitive point that causes many discussions.

Before summarizing what we have learned from the international debate, we will outline our understanding of Germany’s system of arts education.

A definition of „arts education”

There are many different definitions of arts education in Germany. Below we present our definition for the specific field of research that we focus on. In so doing, we use the German terms because there is no exact translation and their significance has to be explained. For example, there are two terms for education in the German language: *Erziehung*, which can be translated as education, and *Bildung*, which means not only education but also cultivation, formation, and even culture in an objective sense.

From our point of view, there are three major approaches to arts education (Reinwand 2012:108ff.): *künstlerische Bildung* (“artistic education”), *ästhetische Bildung* (aesthetical education), and the more comprehensive *Kulturelle Bildung* (cultural education). ([Vanessa Reinwand: Künstlerische Bildung - Ästhetische Bildung - Kulturelle Bildung](#))

Künstlerische Bildung (“artistic education”) refers to education (often in special schools or higher education institutions) in the arts. Participating in *künstlerische Bildung* is playing the piano, dancing, or painting. One learns certain techniques and the historical background of the works of art.

Ästhetische Bildung (aesthetical education) is a broader subject that includes *künstlerische Bildung* but also involves sharpening the senses and strengthening the ability to express oneself. This does not have to happen only in contact with works of art but can also occur in dealing with everyday objects, observing nature, or listening to sounds like the noise of the street. The core of *ästhetische Bildung* is to detect the intensity of experiencing and the possibilities of using and educating the senses.

Finally the term *Kulturelle Bildung* includes both *künstlerische* and *ästhetische Bildung* and is composed of the rather *weighty* German terms *Kultur* and *Bildung*. On the one hand, *Kulturelle Bildung* describes a biographical, self-educational process in dealing with music, dance, painting, or any other aesthetic practice in an active (i.e., practicing arts) or a reflective way (i.e., perceiving arts); on the other hand, it is

an expression regularly used in reference to the social domain of out-of-school institutions or informal settings in Germany where one can learn and be taught about arts or take part in different arts education activities. This sphere has developed to a considerable extent since the 1970s and has today evolved into a complex *field* involving many stakeholders.

In contrast to school learning, *Kulturelle Bildung* also has certain pedagogical implications. For example, there are principles such as the voluntary nature of these activities, the idea of autodidactic learning and studying without a fixed curriculum, or involvement and an interest in strengthening abilities instead of focusing on faults. This different understanding of educational processes in the domain of *Kulturelle Bildung* as opposed to the *normal* school scenarios often results in misunderstandings between teachers and actors in *Kulturelle Bildung* contexts. Thus, these different understandings can make it difficult to transfer the concept of *Kulturelle Bildung* to schools. Schools generally offer only music or visual arts lessons and sometimes theatre. Teachers have to work by a certain curriculum and often there is no time for the pupils' personal art activities. There is a strong systemic pressure on teachers to act in congruence with the organizational demands of the institution.

Except for extraordinary projects in which an entire school is involved and perhaps artists from the outside are hired, art and music lessons become less and less important in schools – in contrast to PISA subjects like math or languages (Programs for International Student Assessment, PISA, of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD). The significance of arts education compared to other subjects in school is continuing to decrease, whereas the efforts in informal *Kulturelle Bildung* seem to be rising; at least if one believes the speeches of politicians.

This shows that in Germany one has to make a sharp distinction between arts education in daily school life and arts education outside of school or in short-term school projects. However, over the past years, there have increasing efforts – for example, by private foundations – to bring more *Kulturelle Bildung* to schools or, even going a step further, to change school systems by incorporating *Kulturelle Bildung* into daily school life.

On this point, we started a lively debate with our international colleagues whether this is possible: Is it really possible to change schools by involving out-of-school actors such as artists or cultural agents? Would it not be more successful to start by changing teacher education or making the cultural sector more interesting to pupils? We also have to ask ourselves critically, why are we interested in bringing more arts education to pupils, adults, or seniors to begin with?

These questions led us right to the heart of our research topic:

Why do we - and our international partners - think arts education is important and has to be implemented in schools?

There are different patterns of legitimizing arts education. One suggestion is to differentiate five different approaches, as proposed by Eckart Liebau, the head of the UNESCO Chair for Arts Education in Germany (Liebau 2013:68ff.):

- The economic approach focuses on the direct economic effects of arts education such as the growth

of creative industries or professional services. Here, arts education is not demanded for its own sake; rather it is its side effects that are important.

- The second approach is based on the heritage or diversity argument that is often emphasized by UNESCO. Arts education is important to save and preserve cultural heritage and the diversity of cultural expressions.
- The third approach is a social-political one: “Here, arts education is seen as a socially therapeutic means of high potential” (Liebau 2013:69). Arts education serves to empower underprivileged people and to give structure to their lives.
- The approaches four and five either focus on arts education’s potential to advance personal or social development. Both aspects are contained in our definition of *Kulturelle Bildung* and, according to Liebau, are found especially in Europe. The “subjective approach” emphasizes the development of personality through the personal biographical experience of art. The “social approach” sees the purpose of arts education in developing new forms of artistic expression and in promoting innovation in the arts. In other words, the idea is to produce novelty to keep the art institutions running and support audience development.

In the discussion with our international partners, other approaches were added.

One approach focuses on side effects. Here, the arts are used to support learning in other subjects and develop academic skills. The popular journalistic slogan “Music makes you smart!” is a good example of this approach. In the same vein, the new German federal program for underprivileged children “Culture empowers people!” ([Bündnisse für Bildung. Kultur macht stark](#)) alludes to expectations that arts education can produce tremendous side effects.

- In other countries arts education has gained an important role in building and developing national identity. This approach that arts education could be helpful in preserving national identity is not very common in Germany and in the Nordic Countries. In Germany, there is little debate about national identity outside of discourses on cultural foreign policy or cultural heritage, owing to its historic experience with the brutal Nazi regime and the Second World War in the context of which national identity played a major role in the political system.
- There is another important approach referred to “art as a need.” In this case, arts education is important because the arts represent a special way for humans to express their ideas and communicate. People in different circumstances have the intrinsic need to do arts – regardless if they live in times of peace or in troubled regions such as Egypt, Syria, and other Arab countries. In this respect, art has the same right of existence as language.
- Another contribution to the discussion was that we should not get entangled in self-justification and stop problematizing our subject. Why is there no need for legitimizing other subjects such as math or chemistry? We should be careful not to put ourselves in a vulnerable position and should rather focus on discussing aspects of quality than of legitimization.
- After summarizing these approaches, which to a greater or lesser extent instrumentalize arts education for other purposes, Sigrid Røyseng, a Nordic researcher at the Department of Communication and Culture at BI Norwegian Business School, proposed another concept. As opposed to the technical rationality of instrumentalism, she refers to the concept of ritual rationality in an anthropological sense. In the theory of ritual – rediscovered by the anthropologist Victor Turner –

there are different phases, for instance, the liminal phase. “Liminality is seen as a quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs when the participants in the ritual no longer hold their original status, but have not yet been reintegrated with a new social status. In the liminal phase the participants of the ritual will often meet some kind of (supernatural) powers. The ritual establishes a new way of structuring their identity, time or community” (Røyseng and Varkøy 2014:110f.). This perspective is more in the line of justification than instrumentalization and sees arts and culture as transformative forces.

So what does all this mean in our context? Perhaps some of the beliefs reflected in the different patterns of legitimization can be useful for the practice of arts education. Only the belief that things can change our lives can help us take action. In the following sections, we will sketch the most current patterns of legitimizing arts education in Germany and to what extent they are useful for research.

Which patterns of legitimizing arts education are currently being discussed in Germany?

Arts education in Germany is regarded as a human practice that helps us come into contact with ourselves, others, and our whole social environment, and it is therefore important that everyone has access to it. It is a basic human right that everyone should have the possibility and capability to participate in the cultural life of society. Arts education is a way of bringing this right to life.

Another variety of the argument that art has a right to exist for its own sake is discussed (along the lines of Bourdieu) primarily as a means of distinction from the rest of society. Art is used as a mechanism by members of the bourgeoisie to distinguish themselves as connoisseurs from the so-called uneducated and the ignorant. According to this logic, patterns of legitimization other than the one revolving around autonomy are *dangerous* because they exploit the arts. In this perspective, the autonomy or freedom of the arts is the only valid argument.

There also exists a long tradition of using the arts for social improvement and as a method in social work. Another prominent pattern of looking at art is as a medium for self-education and personal development.

Over the last 15 years or so, arts education has experienced a boom, especially in politics and in some parts of the economic sector. This boom has mainly been caused by legitimizing arts education with reference to two other factors:

- Firstly, a hope for a broad gain in creativity that would contribute to a rise of the creative industries (the economic approach).
- Secondly, the findings of PISA constantly show that pupils’ academic success statistically correlates with their parents’ socio-economic status. The chances of underprivileged pupils breaking through this barrier are very low. There is thus the hope of solving social and educational inequalities by introducing arts subjects and by organizing a bit more theatre or a few music projects. This can be called the partake approach.

Which patterns are useful in a research environment? Which ones are only political?

From an academic point of view, the economic and the partake approaches are not very useful for the discussion and advancement of arts education. There is no proof that dealing with arts makes a person more creative. There is also no knowledge as to what kind of arts education could make a society more creative and therefore deliver economic benefits.

However, the arts do not exist by themselves; there is always a social and political context to consider in order to understand why and how people engage and are involved in arts education. One of our international partners, Clive Gray (Professor of Cultural Policy Studies at the University of Warwick), came to the radical conclusion: „Evidence is rubbish!“ There are always certain beliefs in arts education, and since this is so, we as researchers should take a different approach. We should not play this political „game“ but observe policy making instead: we should describe the approaches applied in legitimizing arts education; we should criticize beliefs not substantiated by proof; and we should finally deconstruct legitimizing patterns. But we have to be aware that there are different logics at work at the scientific as well as at the political level and that lobbyism uses research and prepares „packages“ for politicians. We also play that game, but as researchers we at least have to lay our cards on the table.

From a research point of view, arts education is not really very well suited to solving the complex problems of society that exist because there is a selective school system and a competitive and profit-oriented economic system. Problems of disparity should be solved by political transformations and not by offering a *drop in the bucket* and overburdening arts education with hopes it cannot and should not be expected to fulfill.

Therefore a suitable education system that produces less inequality should certainly not build on arts education alone. Yet arts education, seen from the perspective of its potential as a transformative force, can play a crucial part in providing a broad, general academic basis that includes a range of different abilities and multiple ways of learning and forms of expression.

All in all, it is important that the public comes to know arts education not as entertainment for privileged people or something that has to be legitimized by it being useful for other purposes but as a crucial part of basic education for all. Arts education cannot perform miracles in making people more creative or changing the school system into a better one. But dealing with the arts can help people manage their lives in better ways, and the potential that it offers should not be refused to anyone.

What then are the challenges for research in arts education in view of these legitimizing patterns?

Even if arts education is considered a human right and supporting it should therefore not require evidence of further positive side effects, we think more research in arts education is needed.

In Germany there is a lack of an academic discipline called *arts education* or *Kulturelle Bildung*. Researchers who deal with this subject come from many different disciplines such as pedagogy,

psychology, neuro-sciences, sports science, or philosophy and typically do not feel associated with the discipline of *Kulturelle Bildung* specifically. Therefore there is a lack of an academic arts education community and of systematic efforts to promote junior scholarship in the field.

To begin filling this gap, we established the [Federal Network for Research in Arts Education](#) in 2010, which at the moment is the only German network of this kind. Every year we help to organize a federal interdisciplinary congress on research in arts education, which is hosted by a different university each year. With the support of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, we initiated a young academics network of PhD candidates, who are expecting to be awarded their doctorate in different disciplines at different universities but all feel *at home* in *Kulturelle Bildung* and meet regularly to discuss their work in progress.

The members of this federal Network for Research in Arts Education are convinced that in Germany

- we need more interdisciplinary research studies that pursue a common research question from the viewpoints of different disciplines;
- we need more young academics who are interested in arts education processes;
- we need theoretical research that focuses on basic questions in the different areas of art and develops good theories on, for example, what is it like to play music, dance, or paint and what aesthetic processes occur if you immerse yourself in different forms of art;
- we need more research on outcomes, but not primarily with a focus on side effects but on individual and biographical situations in which the arts play a crucial role;
- we need more longitudinal research;
- we need to observe the different pedagogical situations in which arts appear;
- we need to investigate the social and political role of arts education and take a critical approach in the process;
- and we finally have to worry about transferring the insights of our research to the everyday reality of arts education to make its practice a better one. Of course we must not forget the social and political contexts that influence the impact and beliefs in arts education. They are very important indeed! Yet we should not build our debate on political beliefs alone; instead, we should concentrate – at least to some degree – on findings from research.

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