Workshop International Monitoring and Comparative Research in Arts Education – reporting for UNESCO

May 25 – 27, 2011 in Wildbad Kreuth, Germany

Discussion of some key issues

Robin Pascoe, Murdoch University, Perth Western Australia

There are three overarching issues to be faced with designing an arts education monitoring program:

> Definitional: what constitutes the field of arts education? Underpinning this question are contrasting views on theories of knowledge in arts education (and the arts), world views of those who define and describe the field, ideologies and histories.

> Pedagogical: what are the most appropriate, effective and efficient ways of teaching and learning the arts?

> Judgmental: what are appropriate measures and methods of making judgements about arts education?

Each of these issues impacts on the others. The field is complex and further complicated by competing interests seeking status, legitimacy and hegemony. In considering each of these issues, I am also consider them as a whole, arts education as an ecosystem.

As Bamford's (2006) study showed defining and describing the arts education field is contextual with differing approaches taken being highly situated in culture and location. The debate in Australia over the *Shape of the Arts in the Australian Curriculum* (ACARA Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2010) serves as a case study for many of the tensions and arguments about the nature and purpose of the field. The first task of this project then is the development of a contemporary definition and description of arts education that is inclusively sensitized to context. It needs to be broadly endorsed by the arts and arts education communities in ways that immunize it against controversy (to the best that this can be done).

Cascading from that definition and description there needs to be a comprehensive, careful summary of approaches to teaching and learning the arts. These descriptions of pedagogy should not be prescriptive but inclusive, open and rich with explicit recognition of the contextual complexities of the definition for arts education developed earlier.

With these two foundations in place, the community is in a position to consider ways of making judgments about the impact and their effectiveness of arts and education. These judgments can only be made based on shared knowledge and understanding of arts education itself and its practice and pedagogy. Without such a shared understanding there is inadequate basis for judgment. This framework provides a scaffold on which to formulate methods of making judgments. Such judgments need to be reliable and trustworthy. While recognising a necessary subjectivity in all judgments made, the judgments need to have public confidence and robustness.

A key issue in this developmental process is to recognise that measures or metrics used in making judgments are essentially limited. As pointed out by Russell (2003) what can be measured in the arts is limited to

- comparisons of amount - *is there more or less of something*?
- comparisons of qualities - *are two or more samples or examples the same or similar or are they different?*

Measures or metrics for making judgments are not just limited, they are also necessarily contextual. It is important to recognise that those judgments that can be made are shaped by context. The person or people making the judgments, their setting and the purposes of the judgments impact on the process as well as the results of the act of making a judgment. Therefore, these measures are not absolute but relative. As a result, they cannot be a simplistic checklist.

Given this perspective, it is important to argue for the project to take account of the intrinsic limitations of measures of arts education and processes of making judgements about the field. Judgments need to be contextual, situated and focused on the truly measurable. They need to recognise how all judgements are in essence qualitative balancing a necessary subjectivity with a desire for honesty and reliability.

In other work I have argued for the need for **_dynamic markers_** for arts education.

The concept of dynamic markers

Dynamic markers are observable signs or indicators of pedagogic practice - they reflect how concepts are put into action. They are observable - noticed, perceived and interpreted as significant or meaning making. Yet they are not fixed and static. They are dynamic - responsive to change and development in shaping contexts that are themselves in states of flux; they are malleable, flexible, fluid, pliable, and able to be bent without breaking. The concept of dynamic markers is built on the recognition that arts education is not fixed but diverse, situated and personalized. Its contexts are variable and impact on pedagogic practice. These dynamic markers have the advantage of being more than checklists. They serve as tools for teachers, principals, parents, policy makers and the broader community when they make judgments about the quality of arts education in schools. In parallel and intrinsically linked with these dynamic markers, the study outlines ways of judging standards of excellence, the extent to which arts education can be considered outstanding, desirable, functioning optimally and meeting its stated purposes.

Dynamic markers for arts education in schools

My research identified that there are four inter-connecting sets of dynamic markers. They can be considered as nested contexts each impacting on the other – the concept of ecosystem for arts education in schools. There is a need to consider dynamic markers in the frames of what happens in the classroom; what happens immediately outside the classroom in the school; what happens in the world of parents and community; what happens in the broader education sphere through systems and curriculum authorities; and, what happens in the broad field of the arts and society.
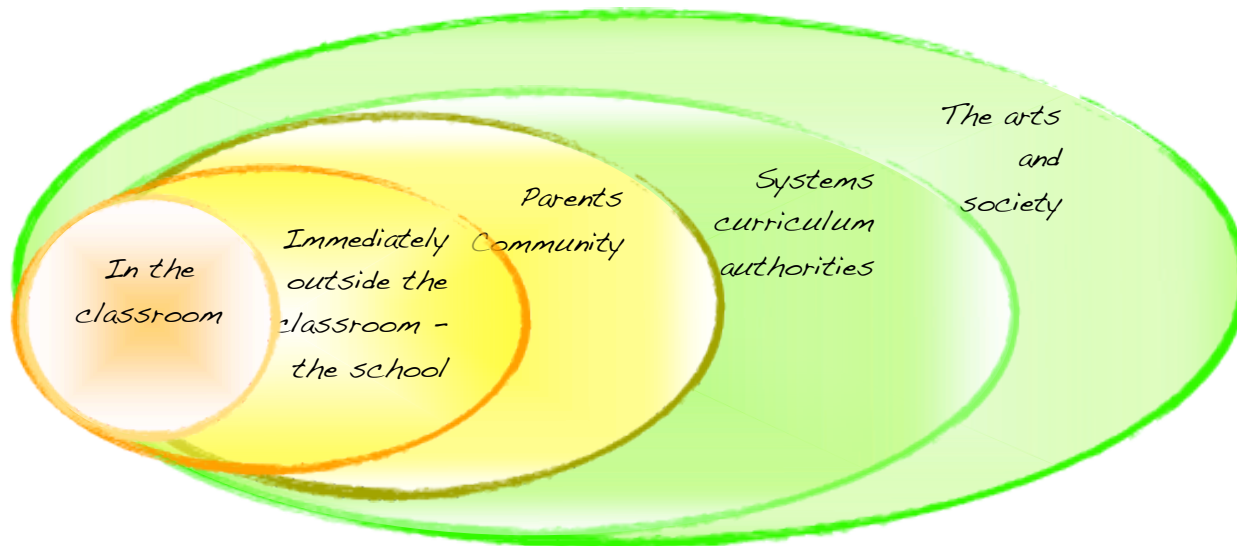
Nested contexts for arts education in schools

To expand on this idea, my research identified three clusters of dynamic markers for arts education _in the classroom_ that weave together: outcomes of learning in the arts in schools; content and processes of that learning; and, approaches to teaching the arts in schools. The dynamic markers focus on overarching and unifying principles while also recognizing the unique and distinctive nature of each of the art forms of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts and a diversity of approaches, mediums of expression and emphasis within each of them.

Dynamic markers for arts education in classrooms	
Students developing	• Personal, social and cultural identity and agency through their arts learning • Enactive, iconic and symbolic meaning making in and through the arts • Embodied learning - cognitive, somatic and empathic learning • Engagement , enjoyment and success in the arts
through **Learning opportunities for**	• Arts Practice in Dance, Drama, Drama, Music, Media and Visual Arts • Aesthetic knowing applied to Arts Practice and Responding • Responding to their own and others art experiences in Dance, Drama, Drama, Music, Media and Visual Arts • Working with touchstones of the arts: creativity, imagination, play, story, improvisation, transformation, design, symbol, metaphor • Action and reflection in the arts • Process and product in the arts
and **Teaching approaches that provide**	• Multi-modal arts rich experiences • A range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles • Arts rich learning and teaching environment • Co-construction of learning in the arts • Balance between teacher structured delivery and student exploration • Pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness in teaching the arts

To recognise fully the implications of these markers, there is a need to unpack further these complex concepts. For example, it is important for teachers, administrators and parents to understand the concept of personal agency, identity and autonomy developed through learning the arts. Similarly, the role of teachers in balancing teacher-directed technical skills development and mastery with enabling student agency and identity, needs to be understood when reading a listing such as this. Unpacking the role of the identified Touchstones is also rich ground for developing understanding.

This complex set of markers for the arts in classrooms can be represented as an interweaving of what is learnt, what is taught (content) and how the arts are taught (pedagogy and environment) . These markers are mutually dependent; all of them are necessary for contemporary arts education. They are the weft and warp of the fabric of contemporary arts education.

Just as dynamic markers can be identified for learning and teaching in the classroom, so too can they be identified for school administrators, parents, community and curriculum systems/authorities.

Making judgments though using dynamic markers in reflective and reflexive internal conversations

Accompanying these dynamic markers is the concept of a qualitative evidence-based approach to making informed judgements through engaging in a process of reflection and reflexive action. The purpose of the reflective and reflexive internal conversation (Archer 2007) about arts education for a teacher or school administrator, curriculum developer or parent, is to review what has happened in order to confirm or change what might happen in the future.

The development of these tools is predicated on a reflective and non-condemnatory or censorious approach - it has an improvement orientation rather than a negatively critical one. There is focus on developing skills of reflection and reflexive action through using a set of qualitative principles - dynamic markers – as the basis for the necessary internal conversations of teachers, administrators, curriculum writers, parents and community members. Providing further structure to this process is a set of rating scales focused on knowing and understanding of principles of arts education – the dynamic markers themselves; and how these dynamic markers are being used or applied. These tools for measuring are based on similar descriptive and qualitative rating tools used in education. They are not numerical scores to be summed or averaged.

These rating scales have been developed specifically for arts education following the lead provided by models such as Concerns-Based Adoption Model CBAM (Hord, Rutherford et al. 1987) and Level of Use of Technology (RMC Research Corporation 2005). Using an analytical ratings model (Andrich 2010) the ratings scale sets out to provide a descriptive continuum of possible responses.

For example, for application and use of an arts education concept/process/approach identified in the set of dynamic markers the following possible ratings for the markers have been identified:

UA0	Non-use/application	No evidence of use in your classroom
UA1	Awareness	Exploring value and demand on use of recently acquired knowledge and understanding of concepts/processes/approaches
UA2	Exploration	Supplementing the application of existing concepts/processes/approaches Using concepts/processes/approaches for extension or enrichment not yet an integral part of primary program
UA3	Mechanical application	Begins to use concepts/processes/approaches relying on pre-packaged materials and step-by-step operations with a short term focus on own classroom
UA4	Routine application	Concept/process/approach used regularly in own classroom with short term and mid term focus Little thought towards developing use or application beyond routine
UA5	Expansion	Use and application moves beyond routine through developing use in new contexts with increased understanding of short, mid and long term consequences Shares examples of use with colleagues
UA6	Autonomy and collaboration	Concept/process/approach used with autonomy, confidence and full integration in teaching and learning Collaborates with colleagues to apply concepts/processes.approaches
UA7	Renewal and innovation	Active reflection and reflexivity in use of concepts/processes/approaches with a focus on developing alternatives, exploring new developments for both personal, classroom and school applications

The dynamic nature of changing contexts and the complex interconnections between the dimensions of quality arts education in schools needs a nuanced approach in the use of dynamic markers. Simply listing them could potentially encourage reductive and simplistic checklist approaches. What is needed is knowledge and applied understanding of them in context.

Bibliography

ACARA Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2010). "The Shape of the Arts Curriculum." from http://www.acara.edu.au/arts.html.

Andrich, D. (2010). Review of the Curriculum Framework for curriculum, assessment and reporting purposes in Western Australian schools, with particular reference to years Kindergarten to Year 10. Perth, Curriculum Council of Western Australia.

Archer, M. S. (2007). Making Our Way Through The World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bamford, A. (2006). The WOW Factor: Global Research Compendium on the Impact of the Arts in Education. Münster, Waxmann Verlag GmbH.

Hord, S. M., W. L. Rutherford, et al. (1987). Taking Charge of Change. Alexandria, VA Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

RMC Research Corporation. (2005). "Levels of Use of Technology." Retrieved April 20 2010 from http://www.rmcdenver.com/useguide/cbam.htm.

Russell, S. (2003). Getting Assessment Right Drama Grades 9-10. Barrie, Ontario, Data Based Directions Quality Resources for Educators.