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Issues of Global and Local Quality in Arts Education

Aspectos de la Calidad Global y Local en la Educación Artística

Questions de qualité globale et locale dans les arts

Anne Bamford

University of the Arts London, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Quality is not a random occurrence in arts and creativity partnerships. The achievement of quality must be planned. Any arts partnership requires both quality assurance and quality control components. Quality assurance manages quality of processes, while quality control measures deliverables—‘products’—against standards. This paper looks at quality from a global and local perspective and argues that arts experiences from children and young people need to be:

- “Fit for purpose”: i.e., The arts education experience should be suitable and relevant for the intended purpose and the intended participants/audience.
- “Right first time”: i.e., There are certain sets of attributes that are generally associated with quality arts engagement and arts partnerships within education and these can become ‘pre-requisites’ for a programme, thereby mistakes should be eliminated, or at least reduced.

This paper outlines the key components of quality arts education and suggests that the focus of research needs to move forward from an impact of the arts to quality of the arts.

Key words: arts education; quality assurance; arts partnership; arts evaluation; quality monitoring.

RESUMEN

La calidad no surge por azar en las asociaciones del ámbito de las artes y la creatividad sino que es necesario planificar para lograr este objetivo. Cualquier asociación en el campo de las artes requiere de componentes para el aseguramiento y el control de la calidad. El aseguramiento se encarga de la calidad de los procesos, mientras que el control analiza de manera contrastativa lo que se entrega (el producto) contra los estándares. Este estudio considera la calidad desde

las perspectivas local y global y plantea que las experiencias artísticas de los niños y jóvenes deben ser:

- “Adecuadas al objetivo,” es decir, la experiencia en educación artística debería ser apropiada y pertinente según las metas planteadas y la audiencia o los participantes objetivo.
- “Buenas desde el inicio,” es decir que hay ciertos conjuntos de atributos que generalmente están relacionados con la calidad de la participación y la asociación en las artes dentro del campo educativo, los que pueden convertirse en requisitos previos para un programa, permitiendo eliminar o, por lo menos, reducir las posibilidades de error.

Este estudio presenta los componentes clave para una educación artística de calidad y sugiere que el foco de investigación debe avanzar desde el impacto de las artes hacia la calidad de estas.

Descriptores: educación artística; aseguramiento de la calidad; asociación artística; evaluación artística; monitoreo de la calidad.

RÉSUMÉ

La qualité ne repose pas sur le hasard. Pour l'atteindre, il faut planifier. Tout partenariat d'arts exige des éléments d'assurance et de contrôle de la qualité. L'assurance de la qualité gère la qualité des processus, tandis que le contrôle de la qualité mesure d'après les normes les produits livrés. Ce papier examine la qualité à partir d'une perspective globale et locale et affirme que les expériences d'arts des enfants et des jeunes doivent

- « Corresponde au but » c'est-à-dire que l'expérience éducative des arts devrait être appropriée au but visé et pertinente pour l'auditoire ciblée.
- « Être bien du premier coup » c'est-à-dire qu'il y a certains ensembles d'attributs généralement associés à des engagements d'arts de qualité et de partenariats d'arts au sein de l'éducation qui peuvent devenir des préalables pour un programme. Ainsi, les erreurs pourraient être évitées ou du moins réduites.

Ce papier résume les éléments clés de l'éducation aux arts de qualités et suggère que le point central de la recherche doit avancer de l'impact des arts à la qualité des arts.

Mots clés : l'éducation aux arts; l'assurance de qualité; les partenariats d'arts; l'évaluation des arts; la surveillance de la qualité.

Introduction

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, the arts community has strived to get the arts recognised as an essential part of the education curriculum. Arguably, arts and culture—at least as curriculum rhetoric—exists in most education systems around the world.¹ Yet the quality of the arts and cultural experience can vary considerably from one learning environment to the next.

In France, a survey conducted by the *General Inspectorate of National Education*² suggested that although some good quality teaching of the arts in primary school was observed, quality was characterised by “the unpredictable nature of courses in individual schools manifested by irregular practices and a lack of consistency and continuity” (Eurydice, 2009, p. 63). Some of the weaknesses highlighted included: a lack of confidence on the part of the teachers and lack of practical and theoretical training. The report suggested three specific areas for quality improvement including the clarification of expectations and requirements; the reform of monitoring systems; and the development and sharing of resources and good practice.

In the United States, an extensive review of quality reported in *Project Zero's*, “The

Qualities of Quality” (Seidel et al., 2009) commented that, “the *quality* of arts learning opportunities that are available to young people is a serious concern” (p. 7). The report summarised the perception of the quality of arts education offered in many schools as being “uninspired and infrequent.” Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) voiced similar concern over the poor quality of arts education, especially if more ‘integrated’ models of arts learning were adopted. They argued that, “Art policy thinkers have often cited the harm in reduced quantity and quality of arts education” (p. 3).

Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) perhaps had reason to voice this concern. The 2007, *Nation’s Report Card on The Arts*³ concluded that results in music and visual arts had become worse or stayed the same over the past ten years. While it could be argued that this test instrument measured only a thin slice of the totality of arts learning, the results showed that over the past decade there had been little change in the schools offering the arts more than three times a week and that pupils from black and ethnic minority families and boys continued to be over represented in the lowest performance band. Despite this, quality was only mentioned once in the report and that was to suggest that “differences in access to art instruction and quality curricula might influence student achievement in the arts” (p. 13).

In 2005, *The Education Commission of the States* began a study aimed ultimately at ensuring access to high quality arts education in United States’ schools. This Commission (published in 2006) came to the conclusion that, “We are convinced that arts education is a function of both supportive policy and quality practice” (p. 4). The Commission also noted that there was strong interest in knowing how to implement high-quality arts education (p. 8). By way of a practical suggestion, it was muted that the *Artscan* database⁴—that currently collects arts education data from the various states in the United States—could be expanded to include more in-depth information on indicators of quality (p. 12).

Generally, there are frequent references in arts education evaluations to concerns about variability of quality, yet these studies rarely provide substantial models that could be adopted to redress the situation (Bamford, 2006; Robinson, 1999; Sharp and Le Métails, 2000). Such variation in quality brings into focus the need for more consistent approaches to quality assurance. The issue of quality assurance is highly pertinent to arts education, yet there is a lack of appropriate quality assurance mechanisms for the arts in schools and in some cases a reluctance from the arts sector to put substantial research and pedagogical focus on quality assurance. For example, an analysis of the Eurydice report (2009) declared that, the arrangements for monitoring quality in the arts has “received little attention in recent research studies” (p. 10). They argued (p. 61) that only three European member states—Greece, Ireland, and the United Kingdom—had undertaken any recent⁵ evaluation or quality monitoring of arts education.

Furthermore, the majority of academic articles pertaining to quality and arts education refer more to either the impact of the arts on overall educational quality or on ‘canons’ of quality in terms of the sorts of material pupils should learn. For example, the *National Centre for Education Statistics* (Carey et al., 2002) writes of the arts being “essential to a high-quality education” (p. 31) and in Europe the potential

of arts education to enhance the creativity of young people was used to justify the need to continuously improve its quality (Austrian Presidency of the EU, 2006, p. 3). Similarly, Weiss (2004) highlighted the need for ‘accountability provisions on arts instruction’ in her report to *Education Commission of the States*.

Yet, quality is not a random occurrence in arts education. The achievement of quality is crucial and must be carefully planned and implemented. As definitions of the arts become broader, quality assessment procedures need to give due consideration to hybrid art forms and the types of creative experiences emerging from less traditional, wider ‘popular’ culture. Quality assessment cannot be focused solely upon Arts (with a capital A). Any quality assurance mechanism must be inclusive and flexible enough to also be applicable to a range of practice that could be considered as arts with a small ‘a’.

The Project Zero report on quality (2009) maintained that quality assurance in arts education, “requires educators and others to reflect deeply about a range of issues” and while not recommending any best practice models, it does provide a set of possible tools that can be used by individuals or groups to pre-emptively plan for quality by informing decision making around issues of quality. While arguing that the “drive for quality is personal, passionate, and persistent”—and consequently largely lies beyond what can be modelled or replicated—the report (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 85) also suggested that “the drive for quality [in arts education] is persistent and far-reaching.” Thus, any approach to quality assurance should take into full account the perspective of the cultural constructors and players such as artists, performers, critics, and the audience. Without consultation with the significant ‘players,’ quality assurance could be seen to be something imposed, outside, and additional.

Context

The issue of quality is pertinent to both arts education in schools (conducted by specialists and generalists) and the growing trend towards arts education partnerships or collaborations where outside artists may be charged with some or all of the responsibility for arts education. The involvement of professional artists in arts education has been recommended in several studies as one way to raise the quality of arts teaching and learning, encourage greater creativity, improve teachers’ skills and confidence, and provide access to a wider range of cultural resources (Bamford, 2006; Robinson, 1999; Sharp and Le Métails, 2000). Eurydice (2009, 81) argues that:

Given the current institutional and organisational setting within which arts education takes place, developing good quality education seems to call for a collaborative approach between different players at the level of policy-making as well as in schools. In the latter case, cooperation should not only take place within educational institutions, but could also involve professionals from the artistic domain.

If collaborative arts education is to become a more common approach, then internationally there are some attempts to instigate robust quality assurance systems. For

example, the Dutch regional networks provide some ‘personal’ quality assurance through a detailed web of locally-based contacts. Also in the north of the Netherlands, they introduced an online checklist to determine *if schools were of sufficient quality to receive partnership with artists*. While this system turned the quality assurance debate on its head, its effective operation was still dependent on three cultural facilitators who manually interviewed and reviewed each culture group to determine their ‘match’ to the needs of each schools, in a similar way to the operation of ‘Creative Agents’ in the England-based Creative Partnerships model.

The Aberdeen City Council⁶ (Scotland) proposed a set of markers of quality arts education. These included:

- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth
- Progression
- Depth
- Personalisation and choice
- Coherence
- Relevance

There have been other initiatives in Europe. For example, the *European National Quality Agencies* (ENQA) recently commissioned a project to develop a typology of new providers and provisions in education, though such schemes are for education *in general* and are less specific to the arts. While aimed at higher education providers, ELIA⁷ approached quality assurance and enhancement from three aspects: Awareness raising/self-evaluation frameworks; Regional capacity-building training; and the development of a Handbook of Principles and Guidelines for European Quality Assurance (2008).⁸

In a more centralised system, the *Culturalcel* in Belgium attempts to provide guidance for and some monitoring of—the quality of arts in schools. The *Cultural Rucksack* in Norway uses a system of regional groups as a form of ‘on the ground’ quality assurance, with each local authority being responsible for the quality of individuals or groups included on the local online rucksack register as partners in the delivery of arts education. While such systems of on-the-ground selection and monitoring of quality could perhaps be the most thorough and robust method, the high cost of maintaining such systems means that it is not feasible as a comprehensive quality assurance programme for arts education.

Adopting a quite different approach to quality assurance for arts education, the *Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection* (ASEP) in Greece, administers a set of competitive examinations that all teachers, including internal and external specialist teachers, have to pass in order to be able to work in schools.⁹

Despite the moral and legal imperative for robust quality assurance processes, there are no standard or generally accepted quality assurance methods for arts, culture and creativity education.

Principles of quality assurance in arts education

Quality assurance manages quality of processes, while **quality control** measures deliverables—‘products’—against standards. **Quality assurance** or **QA** for short, in

this instance refers to the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of arts education (including service or facility) to ensure that standards of quality are being met. Very succinctly, there are two key principles that characterise QA:

- **“Fit for purpose”**: i.e., Arts education should be suitable for the intended purpose and the intended participants/audience
- **“Right first time”**: i.e., There are certain sets of attributes that are generally associated with quality arts engagement and arts partnerships within education and these can become ‘prerequisites’ for a programme.

Despite the supposed simplicity these two principles may suggest, a number of quality assurance dilemmas exist in terms of arts education. The first set of dilemmas concerns homogeneity versus heterogeneity. For example, should quality be standardised for mass markets or customised for particular contexts, with all the attendant costs of such customisation? Should quality assurance be absolute or flexible? The second set of dilemmas raises cultural issues. Can judgements of quality be largely tacit, based on professional judgements and peer review or should they be explicit, based on transparent criteria and more open reporting arrangements? It is important to assess the needs and purposes of quality assurance for three particular groups of stakeholders: students, teachers, and arts partners.

Seidel et al. (2009) suggest there is not one model of quality assurance but rather, multiple ‘markers’ that tend to indicate or precede quality practice. These markers can be seen through the interplay of four different but overlapping ‘lenses,’ namely, *learning*, *pedagogy*, *community dynamics*, and *environment*. Within these lenses are sets of factors associated with quality, but these factors are affected by curriculum decisions made and by policy and decision makers. In turn, the decisions made are altered by reflection and dialogue. The ‘tools’ proposed at the end of the report are intended to be used collaboratively within the school and stakeholder community and the tools themselves are structured in their conception, but flexible and open-ended in their application. While criteria need to be explicit, the tools and methods for applying these should allow for subjectivity and personal variations in the criteria used to judge the output items. Similarly, the criteria should encourage application of relativity, by providing opportunity to define criteria in a manner relative to the particular learners and learning context.

It is important to realize that *quality* in terms of arts and cultural education is ultimately determined by the intended users—namely children, young people, and schools—not by society in general. High quality does not apply **only** to more traditional genres of arts practice or to those that are the most expensive. For example, you can have good and bad opera programmes in schools as you can good or bad rap projects. Similarly, quality operates separately to price, and in many instances low cost or free options may be considered high quality if they meet a market need and are fit for purpose and contain certain attributes proven to be associated with quality. Conversely, expensive projects can fail to be either fit for purpose or right first time.

While the focus thus far has been on quality at a global or national systemic level, at a local level quality assurance activity ensures that schools—and ultimately

children and young people—are delivered the highest quality arts experiences. While the value of having a robust QA system is undoubted, there is no single method for conducting QA. In the arts, there are generally two main models for determining quality. The first is to adopt a consumer-based approach. This approach focuses on the users and so arguably is about quality of arts experiences defined by the children and young people and/or the teachers and schools. This approach aligns to the ‘fit for purpose’ definition.

Quality through the eyes of the child

Determining quality through the eyes of the child involves intrinsic quality assessment and focuses on dimensions such as captivation, pleasure, imagination and the building of social bonds. From a child’s perspective, a “good” arts experience may be defined by feelings of well-being including fun and happiness. This feeling is most likely to occur where there is a positive connection between the artist¹⁰ and the child and where the artist encourages the child to question and instigate personal meaning-making.

Children, of all ages, place a high priority on the expressive aspect of the arts. For most young artists, the narrative—and later the symbolism—of the art form are of considerable importance. Therefore, in the child’s mind, quality is often applied when the artistic process¹¹ generates communication and leads to an enlivened sense of perception, sensation and/or alertness. To the observer watching a child in the midst of such a significant art experience or encounter, the enlivened sensibilities are obvious and even awe inspiring.

It could be argued that, from a child-centred approach, many of the quality indicators are evident less in product and more in process. But this is not exclusively the case. To supplement these intrinsic, process-centred quality measures, a child-focused quality assessment could also highlight the extent to which the process led, directly or indirectly, to an enhanced arts product.

Some aspects of arts production lend themselves more readily to ascertaining if the product itself has improved. For example, for a child learning an instrument it is relatively easy to determine if the correct note is being played. Conversely, it is more complex to determine if the use of a new form of blue in a painting marks a significant shift in enhanced art skills or merely a different decision. While the acquisition of new art skills may be more challenging to pinpoint, especially in the short term, it is possible to document through the arts product a child’s capacity for trying new creative and/or cultural experiences or the development of cultural awareness and memory. Children’s art products (or arts understandings) might also be changed (and ideally enhanced) through increased confidence and self-belief in their arts products and through encounters with increasingly complex understandings of the arts, which may serve to change or challenge attitudes.

Yet while most educators would claim to put a child-centred approach first, in reality, children are rarely decision makers in arts education programmes¹² or in determining which artists come to the school or how they work within the school.

Quality through the eyes of the school

Determining quality of arts education from the perspective of the teacher or the school is likely to focus more on the personal and social attributes of the artists, arts educators and/or arts organization and the interplay of these with the culture of the school.

Schools tend to want to choose artists whose mode and patterns of communication most closely align with the mores of the school system. Primarily, from the school's perspective, they often equate the 'best' artists as being those artists who show a clear understanding of the culture and context of the pupils, teacher and the school community. Gaining such an understanding is often difficult if the encounters between artists and schools are brief and fleeting. Schools tend to favour artists that are skilled in planning and organisation, with a strong propensity for clearly communicating their ideas, information and values.

In other schools, quality may be defined in terms the artists' positive impact on partnership or community building. This could include the way a programme or performance promotes outreach to parents and the community and contributes to the school's external profile, 'brand,' or identity. Quality art programmes may promote a positive social atmosphere, build more effective discipline procedures or provide recreational opportunities (such as lunchtime or after-school clubs).

For some schools the real value of bringing an 'outside' or 'professional' artist into the school environment may be the professional learning that occurs within the school staff. This could include raising staff understanding and awareness of the arts and creativity and changing or positively challenging attitudes towards the arts and creativity. In the majority of cases though,¹³ it will be an existing member of teaching staff (with or without specialist training) that will be charged with the full responsibility for arts education.

Quality through the eyes of the artists and arts organisation

The other major approach to defining quality is to focus quality on the providers. In this case the focus is on external providers to the school and includes artists and arts organisations. This approach aligns to the 'right first time' definition.

Critics influence perceptions and judgements of quality and can have significant consequences (Eisner and Flinders, 1994). The educational critic makes judgements about relative value of given tasks and how they have been performed. Eisner (1993, p. 388) describes the effective educational critic as someone who "points out what goes on in one setting, explains how the situation works, and makes credible judgements about its educational merits." In this instance, quality becomes defined by the values, belief systems, and community mores that undergird the judgements the arts community itself makes about the 'look and feel' of quality arts education. This may be considered as being an artistic (rather than consumer) definition of quality.

There has been considerable debate about the relative merits of a consumer focus or an artistic focus in quality assurance (Boorsma, 2006; Fillis 2006; Unwin et al.,

2007). The argument has been made that an increasing utilitarian view of the arts has led to an imbalance towards the clients or consumers, with inadequate emphasis given to artistic merit and the position of the artist. If a provider-based approach is adopted, then quality is usually defined by critics (in other words experts or connoisseurs) with the ability to use criteria and experience to make informed judgements about quality. Alternatively, peer approval can be used to judge quality, in the same way as accountants, lawyers, and doctors, amongst others, use professional bodies of peers to 'register' members, thus ascribing them with the assurance that they have met the quality standard applied by their peers.

In this sense, the critic or peer group makes judgements about relative value of given tasks and how they have been performed. For either provider or profession-based QA systems to work, there needs to be clear and transparent values, belief systems, and community mores that undergird the judgements made. Quality in this context is defined by a mix of:

- **Merit**, i.e., the intrinsic beauty or artistry of the project and
- **Worth**, i.e., its applicability, usefulness, contribution, and desirability to a given school or educational context

To provide more specific criteria that could be used in a profession-based QA model, 'merit' criteria could include the artistry of the process and product and the beauty of design and the way the arts education project 'works.' This can include the presentation of new and interesting ideas and the balance between divergence and convergence ideas.

Artists led groups might argue that quality assurance has a stronger ethical dimension and they might look for quality within evidence of negotiation and collaboration and the capacity bring new audiences to the arts or make the arts more accessible.

Judgements of merit tend to remain quite stable over time, so to this end, once established, merit can be assumed over an extended period of time and does not necessarily need to be as regularly assessed.

Worth on the other hand is determined by the **context** of arts education projects and partnerships and can vary considerably from one situation to the next and needs to be assessed on a regular basis. Indicators of worth can include the emergence of new ideas and innovations and a demonstrable value to the development of art education skills, knowledge and/or practice. Once again, a perhaps less 'high arts' professional definition of worth might also consider the relevance of the arts education programme to teachers and children. More socially-orientated arts practice might consider arts education to be of most value when it pushes conversations and ideas beyond what is already known.

It is important to note, that you can determine merit **before** an arts education project begins, but quality assurance of worth can only be conducted **during and after** (sometimes a long time after) a project is complete.

It is generally accepted that worth is historically determined. Like good art, high quality arts education may not always present a 'pretty' picture. Unpalatable art often gives rise to depths of critical appreciation and in the same way, arts education that

at first may have seemed obscure, difficult and impenetrable, might ultimately give rise to the greatest impact. Conversely, quality arts education does not have to be new and beautiful to still be good. The ordinary may be very extraordinary, and often the very best arts education may be obvious simply as extremely well-executed everyday practice.

Catalytic efficacy contends that quality is in part defined by the “degree to which the process re-orientates focuses and energises participants” (Lather, 1986, p. 67). Under this conception, ‘good’ arts education should be meaningful and important, energising experience and intensifying insight and feelings. It should give rise to social, cultural, or educational advancement and formulate new ways of thinking and feeling. As Cassirer (1974, p. 149) states, arts education should always give rise to “motion, rather than mere emotion.”

Linked to ideas of catalyst, is the concept of *actionability*. While the two terms are related, they may also be quite distinct. For example, arts education may be catalytic in the manner in which it changes people’s feelings and understandings, but the ideas flowing from this experience may—for a number of reasons—fail to be enacted. This definition might equate quality arts education as being one that makes a strong contribution to the improvement of general education. As is argued in the 2008 *Arts Framework* (US Department of Education), “The Arts make schools a better place.” Courtney (1997) proposes that one criterion for valuing arts education is the extent to which it improves art, education, and art education. This form of quality assessment should not be interpreted to mean whether or not an arts education experience is ‘useful’ and it is not to support the recent rush of ‘evidence’ to show the value of arts education in achieving a whole host of other educational or social goals. People rarely buy a painting or listen to music because it is deemed ‘useful.’

Imagination is critical to quality assurance in arts education. Creativity is generally perceived to exist at the heart of high quality arts education.¹⁴ But creative achievement is not simply reliant upon the skills, abilities, or traits apparent in a programme of arts education. Perceptions of creativity may be determined by environmental variables such as politics, socio-economic conditions, and educational systems. In artistic quality assurance, the so-called ‘facts’ are often symbolic representations of recorded and unrecorded observations, feelings, momentary insights, and tacit signs. When these ideas of quality are conveyed through the symbolic representation of arts education practice, stakeholders are able to create a personalised ‘picture’ of what quality might look like within their context.

Subjectivity and perspective inevitably contribute to the final shape of the QA report and determines the messages it communicates. Artistic QA strives to produce a persuasive argument that is presented through the symbolic interface of artistic languages. In this sense, effective arts education serves primarily as a catalyst, and as such, ideas of worth extend beyond the inherent qualities of the arts education itself to the impact on the children, teachers, artists, and arts organisations and ultimately the audience, reader, or viewer. In the broadest impact, quality arts education may be marked by the extent to which it provides opportunities for deriving meaning and ultimately improving education.

Art education takes place in a temporal, social, historical, political, geographical, and ecological context. This means that quality is never an absolute, but rather interplays between:

- people (children, teachers, parents, and school directors)
- situations (schools, informal learning settings)

Given this, notions of “form” provide a way of determining the merit and value of arts education. *Form* is the configuration, arrangement, and style of the arts education—put simply its structure and methods. The arts have historically emphasised the importance of ‘form’ as a generation of feeling and, in turn, the relationship of feeling to insight (Eisner, 1993). The term ‘form’ is used in artistic and literary language to imply the manifestation that results from the fashioning of particular parts into a holistic, creative shape. It implies the creation of expressive frames that are visually, audibly, and/or imaginatively perceivable. Form also exists in relationship with the reader or audience. A modernist view of form argues that ‘*seeing is believing*’ and as such, quality arts education has a form that is obvious, apparent, and can be palpable and identifiable. The postmodernist view of form applied to the quality of arts education argues that form exists as the result of interactions between makers and audience and is multi-layered and affective. In other words, quality arts education can be seen to be believed, but also, *believing in quality* allows it to be seen. As Cassirer (1974, p. 144) suggests, “We may have met with an object of our ordinary sense experience a thousand times without ever having “seen” its form. We are still at a loss if asked to describe not its physical qualities or effects but its pure visual shape and structure. It is art that fills the gap.”

The difficulty is that good quality arts education is often ‘known’ in an instinctual sense before it can be fully revealed in traditional ways of seeing. The artist or critic (or teacher or child) may know what she thinks, but why she does what she does the way she does is less explainable. Such significance is implicit but not conventionally fixed. Langer (1957, p. 251) argues that:

We cannot conceive significant form *ex nihilo*; we can only find it, and create something in its image; but because a man has seen the “significant form” of the thing he copies. He will copy it with that emphasis, not by measure, but by the selective, interpretive power of his intelligent eye.

Despite the inherent difficulties of identifying significant form, there is no doubt that in arts education practice significant form exists. Quality arts education cannot be easily understood through quantitative analysis alone and the trend towards quality assurance may fail to capture the most salient elements of quality as it exists in the very best arts education. Langer (1957, p. 57) cautions, “Like living substance, a work of art is inviolable; break its elements apart, and they no longer are what they were and the whole image is gone.” In the same way, it is important to avoid models of quality assurance in arts education that attempt to ‘break down’ arts education into its component parts and analyse these in isolation for the whole.

Just as quality arts education exists in its completeness, its quality of form is not static nor is it replicable. Anyone with experience of arts education knows that a project or programme that may have worked brilliantly with one group of children in one situation, may not work at all when applied to a new context. In this sense, quality is ultimately born in the imaginings of the collective group of people involved in an arts education project. Cassirer (1974, p. 144) describes this in an analogy to the work of an artist:

If we say of two artists that they paint 'the same' landscape we describe our aesthetic experience very inadequately. From the point of view of art such a pretended sameness is illusory... For the artist does not portray or copy a certain empirical object—a landscape with its hills and mountains, its brooks and rivers. What he gives us is the individual and momentary physiognomy of the landscape. He wishes to express the atmosphere of things, the play of light and shadow. A landscape is not 'the same' in early twilight, in midday heat, or on a rainy or sunny day.

Through this story, Cassirer (1974) accentuates that form is defined by place and time. Effective arts education is not singular but perhaps a collage of collected practice and reflects the human feelings of all involved. Passion constitutes a vital aspect of effective arts education. Lather (1986) refers to this as being the 'new rigour of softness.'

Consistency of quality

In an attempt to bring the perspectives of the child, teacher, and the providers (artists) into a single quality framework, UNESCO commissioned¹⁵ a survey specific to issues around quality. In a somewhat unexpected result, the parameters of quality arts education were very uniform. From this consistency, a framework of quality was developed that captured salient structures and methods that when combined were most likely to lead to high quality outcomes for children, teachers, and the arts professionals. The following is the framework for quality that emerged from (and contributed to) the *UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education*.¹⁶ Quality programmes have:

- Active partnerships and collaboration including shared responsibility for planning, implementation, and assessment and evaluation
- Opportunities for public performance, exhibition, and/or presentation
- A combination of development within the specific art forms (education in the arts) with artistic and creative approaches to learning (education through the arts)
- Provision for critical reflection, problem solving, and risk taking
- Accessibility to all children and young people
- Detailed strategies for assessing and reporting on children's learning, experiences and development
- On-going professional learning for teachers, artists, and the community

- Flexible structures and permeable boundaries between schools and the community
- Access and relevance to local resources, environment, and context for both materials and content
- Strategies to encourage people to go beyond their perceived scope, to take risks and to use their full potential

While it could be considered that these pillars of quality are at the heart of all education, a number of case studies indicated that these qualities were achieved with greatest ‘on-the-ground’ impact within arts-rich educational environments.

Overview of tools and models of quality assurance

While the first half of this paper outlines the main arguments surrounding quality assurance, what artistic quality assurance may look like, and the various perspectives from which artistic quality assurance can be framed, the following section looks more specifically at some of the ‘tools’ for QA applicable to arts education. Quality assurance approaches can loosely be divided into two dimensions (see fig. 1): **market-state (fit-for-purpose)** and **internal-external (right-first-time)**, with systems occupying different places in the resulting four-quadrant model.

Figure 1. Common dimensions of Quality Assurance systems¹⁷

If we look at the **market-external** quadrant, quality assurance arrangements might include formal agreements and kite-marks.¹⁸ The **state-external** quadrant contains strategies such as accreditation, licensing, or external peer-review systems¹⁹ that could be applied to arts education. Within the **internal-state** quadrant, quality assurance arrangements for arts education might include codes of practice and quality management (QM) systems²⁰ while in the **internal-market** quadrant, benchmarking and best practice²¹ may be more common.

Increasingly, self- and peer-assessment tools are being used. For example, the

Federation of Music Services in England runs a peer-quality evaluation process. Under this process, all the *Music Services* have ascribed to a set of quality principles and indicators. In small groups, directors of several local services visit one music service and using the agreed evaluation framework, they make a set of critical reflections about the quality for the service they review. This feedback is intended to encourage overall growth in quality and is not perceived as being a punitive measure. All music service directors are both reviewed by peers and in turn review other services. In this way, the model from music services combines both self- and peer-assessment with a low-cost example of specialist (peer-based) visits to organisations to assess quality. ELIA operates a similar system for European Arts Schools within higher education

Online user-generated feedback is an increasingly common way to review quality. There are a number of available models of user-engagement in QA available across a variety of fields. For example *Trip Advisor*²² encourages customers who have stayed at hotels to complete a follow-up online survey, that is then used to inform a 'star'-based system that rates the qualities of the hotel experience. There is also a facility for customers to add narrative (qualitative) comments about the experience, so prospective clients can read the experience of others. There are a number of examples of similar systems being applied in arts education, especially to 'rate' artists who come into the school, such as the DAISI²³ or LEAN²⁴ project.

Apart from the customer feedback given, many online systems are designed primarily as a way to promote citizen and user engagement. People like to feel that their views and opinions are valued and that they are adding either directly or indirectly to better quality. Engaging users in QA can build professional expertise and networks and encourage participants to feel a sense of belonging and to share experiences.

Surveys can provide quite large samples of quality information. Online technology makes surveys relatively easy and low cost to administer. Survey questions, though need to be carefully designed to avoid ambiguity and to reveal a range of different types of responses. Blogs and other online sites where individuals can submit written, audio, or visual observations can also be used as a form of surveying the quality of arts education, and generally these less structured opportunities provide data of considerable value.

Case studies provide an empirical way to investigate QA of arts education in the 'real' context of schools. It is important to remember that all case studies represent complex individual and organisational choices and decisions will not be uniform. Case studies provide a very transparent and effective form of QA for arts education, but can be cost heavy in terms of human resources and time. 'Best practice' case studies can be helpful in enhancing quality, though if confidence levels to teach arts education are already low, these can appear unobtainable and actually be de-motivating. *Cameos* are similar to case studies but attempt to provide a detailed descriptive 'picture' a particular aspect of quality within arts education. *Vignettes* are short narratives based on first-hand observations of arts education 'in action' that serve to add 'texture' to QA.

This critical incidents approach involves identifying needs or aims of an arts education project and then assessing the perceived change in action. A 'critical incident'

can be described as a singular example, which although seemingly trivial reveals a microcosm of the whole situation. Artists and teachers can be asked to identify 'critical incidents' that show good (or bad) quality in action. These can be very insightful, both in terms of their selection and content, but often they can reveal information that is perceived to be overly sensitive and controversial and need to occur in a very supportive feedback environment. Observations are an important quality control tool to ascertain whether espoused aims of arts education are being enacted in practice. Ideally observers should be 'outsiders' and free from bias, though peers can also form an observation team.

Focus and discussion groups are organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of arts education. Such groups are particularly suitable for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic. Discussion groups are less formal and can involve participants, non-participants, sector staff, project workers, children, parents, and/or other stakeholders. Discussion groups offer a dual purpose of being a valuable QA mechanism and also developing learning networks. Participants in focus groups tend to be the more 'enthusiastic' members of the stakeholder community and so may not reveal the 'true' picture of the situation for arts education. Focus groups and discussion groups can be held online but whether in the online or actual environment, a skilled facilitator is an important factor in determining the value of the information gained. Interviews are useful where comments are sought related to specific areas of quality. Consideration should be given to the timing of interviews, as pre-, during and post-interviews can produce quite different quality results.

Portfolios or journals are personal documents maintained on a regular basis that aim to provide a space for reflection and reflexive planning. These can be valuable sources of deep information in regard to QA and can be an important tool for assessment in arts education. Generally artists (and pupils) feel more comfortable keeping a journal than do teachers. As with other methods, the value of the journal depends on the honesty of the content contained and the training the individual has in reflective practice. Portfolios and journals can work very effectively online and allow a broader community to have access to deeper aspects of arts and education practice. Encouraging children, artists and teachers to make personal reflections about quality can be very revealing, but once again, this needs to be in an environment that encourages a sense of security and openness. The working methods of arts quality assessment using journals often revolve around thick description including personal histories, vignettes, and personal connections presented in oral, visual, or narrative form.

A mind or concept map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to a central key word or idea. Mind or concept maps can be important in QA as they can assist both memory recall and divergent responses and often reveal connections and experiences that are not immediately obvious. Network webs can provide a very useful way to visually present the connections and associations generated as a result of an arts and education partnership. With a network web, the participant 'plots' the people or associations they have developed as a result of the project. In

a general sense, the bigger the web, the more the arts education programme is likely to be good quality.

The arts themselves can become methods for QA. Arts-based methods such as photo elicitation can form very useful methods of QA for arts education especially with young people or people without a strong verbal command. Drama (especially role play) and poetry have also shown to be useful QA arts or education.

Conclusion

Quality is often seen as the proverbial elephant in the room for arts education. This has had negative consequences for arts education. Quality assurance is not the enemy of creativity, but should be seen as an ally. Indeed, the countries that have embraced QA have seen marked improvements in the impact of arts education programmes. To this end all quality assurance systems need to be evaluated and analysed within the given situation in which they operate. The best quality assurance framework for arts education should be flexible in its approach. It is an epistemological truism, that the social reality can be seen through different conceptual lenses.

Hence, there is no single model that will effectively resolve all the QA considerations in arts education, but it sometimes serves a heuristic purpose to be able to distinguish between the different models. This paper outlines a basic typology for quality assurance consisting of two dimensions, respectively: 1) market-state (fit-for-purpose) and 2) internal-external (right-first-time).

Using this typology we get an overview of the different approaches, which have proved to be useful to policy-makers and arts educators and hence of value as independent variables for those evaluating the criteria for good quality programmes. A new rigour for arts education is emerging through the contribution of several recent studies. Equally, developments in both technology and in the broader educational research around quality assurances practices for education provide us with practical tools that can be applied to the complexities of monitoring the quality of arts education.

There is also evidence that teachers and policy makers are keen to ensure that issues of quality are more central to debates surrounding arts education. Additionally,

if the current pattern continues to involve more collaboration and partnership in arts education, we need robust QA systems to warrant that those partnerships are based on sound principles and practices and that the resultant outcomes are of highest quality. The resources for arts education come from a number of sources, including both public and private funds. Funders will be looking for reliable models for determining if their resources are used wisely

Yet any model alone is not enough. Another finding is that criteria for evaluation of quality must be explicit, and that the tools and methods for applying these should allow for subjectivity and personal variations in the criteria used to judge arts education. Furthermore, the criteria should encourage application of relativity, by providing opportunity to define criteria in a manner relative to the particular learners and learning context.

Despite these challenges, it is important that the debate around quality gains a foremost place in arts education. There is little point in proactively advocating for the inclusion of the arts in the curriculum if the quality of provision that the children receive is poor or inadequate. The challenge is to develop robust systems that can be simply and effectively applied before, during, and after arts education programmes occur.

In May 2010, some of the world's leading arts educators and policy makers met in Seoul, South Korea to produce the *Seoul Agenda*²⁵ for arts education. While the UNESCO Road Map did a powerful job of global advocacy for the arts, let us hope that in the next decade the discussion around arts education will be less about 'why' and more about 'how' and 'how good is it.'

While outstanding practice exists in many places, it could be argued that arts education is in need of improvement in more places. But this improvement does not come out of nowhere. Knowing where we are and where we want to get to requires a *roadmap*. And this can be provided by quality assurance programmes. Those committed to good quality arts education should not fear QA but embrace it in the interest of the teachers, artists—and above all children.

Notes

1. The UNESCO world survey conducted in 2005 (Bamford, 2006) indicated that arts education is a compulsory part of school education in 84% of countries. Within these countries, 94% of the respondents stated that arts education was taught as a freestanding subject in its own right as a mandated part of the curriculum. A similar study conducted by Eurydice 2009 with European Commission member states, found that all member countries had arts education (usually music and visual arts) as part of compulsory core education.

2. Reported in Eurydice Report 2009 p. 63.

3. National Centre for Educational Statistics Institute of Education Science US Dept. of Education NCES 2007-488 The Nation's Report Card.

4. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/69/42/6942.pdf>

5. Recent was defined as being post-2000.

6. http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/SchoolsColleges/arts_ed/scc_Arts_Education_cfe.asp

7. European League of Institutes of the Arts.

8. http://www.elia-artschools.org/_downloads/publications/position/position_2.pdf

9. Eurydice 2009 p. 81.

10. The term 'artist' is used in a very broad sense in this paper and can include all art forms; a single individual or an arts group; teaching artists; specialist or generalist arts teachers and educators; or any person charged with formal or informal arts education including—but not limited to—parents, care-givers, and friends. The UNESCO survey (Bamford, 2006) suggests that teachers are largely responsible for teaching arts education. "Teachers" of arts education include both generalist and specialist educators, artists, and the members of community. The survey also indicated that artists and the community are taking an increasing role in the teaching of arts education.

11. Interestingly, the child's view of the value of process over product is also evident in Jordanous' study of Creativity Using Corpus Linguistics Techniques (2010). Jordanous found that 'process' was in 9th position with a G2 value of 1986.72, whereas 'product' was in 409th place with a G2 value of 75.38.

12. The UNESCO study showed that only 8% of children were consulted in relation to the design of arts education programmes (Bamford, 2006).

13. Approximately 85% of all arts education is taught by generalist teachers with less than 3 months training, with 81% by specialist teachers, 56% taught by artists (additional to teachers) and 73% taught by parents, and the community or other providers (Bamford, 2006). Note these percentages are cumulative as some schools have the arts taught by all groups.

14. Although 'artistic' is only number 34 on the Top 100 words in creativity corpus, sorted by descending signed G2 (Jordanous, 2010, p.7).

15. Bamford, A. 2006. The Wow Factor: Global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education Waxman, Munster.

16. UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=30335&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

17. Adapted from the work of Middlehurst, Robin (2008). Quality assurance and accreditation for virtual education: A discussion of models and needs. www.unesco.org

18. Such as is the case in Creative Partnerships in the UK and the Cultural Rucksack in Norway.

19. As was described in the Greek accreditation example.

20. Such as proposed in the tools suggested within the "Qualities of Quality" (Seidel et al., 2009).

21. Arguably, for example the set of criteria proposed in the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education.

22. <http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/>

23. Devon Arts in Schools Initiative (DAISI). <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/rfo/devon-arts-in-schools-initiative-daisi/>

24. Lewisham Education Arts Network (LEAN) <http://www.leanarts.org.uk/>

25. Being written at the time of publication of this paper.

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