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## In Conversation With Four Handbooks: On the Current State of Arts Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

Entering the new millennium, the field of arts education asserted to have undergone some substantial changes. I explore these assertions by analysing the discourse in four recent international handbooks on arts education, focusing on the perspectives of the editors, specifically the lens they use to frame, organise, thematise and shape the field of arts education. Based on the key concepts, recurring themes and grand narratives that the editors' lenses collect and show, I firstly describe the historical timeline formed by the four handbooks published from 2004 to 2017. Given the constraints set, my research does not include the 3-volume International Encyclopedia of Art and Design Education has been published in 2019. Secondly, I search for dimensions that are overlooked or underexposed, due to these lenses. To conclude I connect these findings to my experience as an art teacher leading to the

observation that art in education bears a particular potential for education. To address this however, research and education that relates more closely to the nature of the arts is needed.

### Introduction

The question as to how the field of arts education sees itself has been the starting point for this article. I selected four leading international handbooks, because handbooks collect and arrange key concepts and, by doing so, construct guidelines to thematise the field. Being looked upon as books of guidance by definition, handbooks also function as a reference to scholarly collection. Therefore, editors of handbooks can be considered key figures in the field of interest. Following their lines of thought and editorial criteria provide an in-depth insight into the field's self-conceptions.

To make a selection of the existing handbooks, I used the following criteria: edited and published in the new millennium (2000 to 2017), a large number ( $\geq 30$ ) of chapters, a consistently international perspective and a multi-disciplinary perspective including visual arts, music, theatre and dance education. Four handbooks meet these criteria: *Handbook of Research and Policy in Arts education* (Eisner, 2004), *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (Bresler, 2007), *The Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education* (Fleming, 2015) and *Palgrave Handbook of Global Arts Education* (Barton and Baguley, 2017). A few current handbooks in other languages than English, such as German (Buschkuhle, 2012; Peez, 2012) and Nordic languages (Kallio-Tavin, 2015) were also found. For the sake of consistency and comparability I focused on handbooks in English only.

### *The Four Handbooks at a Glance*

The handbooks show a striking difference in size: Eisner's handbook consists of 36 chapters on 879 pages, Bresler's is composed of two volumes with 65 chapters, 80 international commentaries, 13 preludes to introduce each chapter and 24 interludes, providing short observations, totalling 1627 pages. The two most recent handbooks (Barton & Baguley, 2017; Fleming, 2015) do not continue the trend of an expanding number of chapters and pages. Fleming cuts the number of chapters back to the level Eisner introduced: 37 chapters divided in 6 parts and 424 pages. Barton and Baguley collect 32 contributions, also divided into 6 parts on 572 pages. This quantitative decrease of chapters, pages and commentaries is inversely proportional to the broadness of the scope of the most recent handbooks. Whereas Eisner focuses on the visual arts mainly and all contributors are based at Anglo-American universities, Bresler opens the discourse to both the 'other' than visual arts disciplines and to non-western countries, which explains the significant growth of the amount of pages and involved nationalities of authors. Bresler also presents the most vivid conversation between

authors, countries and disciplines.

Fleming does not continue the international commentaries and the contribution of non-western authors and issues, with 21 authors from the UK, 13 from the USA, 10 from Australia. The remaining 11 authors come from Sweden (1), Germany (3), Norway (2), Taiwan (1), Singapore (1), Hongkong (1), and Nairobi (1). The contributors to this handbook tend to have a different professional background though. In Eisner's and Besler's' handbook they all are professors, lecturers and scholars connected to the arts education departments of universities, whereas some of Fleming's authors have an artistic background as actor, dancer, musician or artist educator. Barton and Baguley's handbook collects a majority of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds of authors with several contemporary and indigenous artists as well as artist educators.

### **In Conversation with Four Handbooks**

To review this broad field, I chose to focus on the different lenses used by the four editors. During the process of reviewing I observed that Eisner is mainly focusing on research, whereas Bresler targets on (re-)defining the art disciplines. Fleming calls for the arts as starting point for education and Barton and Baguley make a case for advocacy above all. Looking through these different lenses provides an in-depth insight into the field's self-conceptions and shifting rationales in the arts educational landscape.

#### ***Eisner's Lens on Academic Research***

*In trying to understand Art you have to keep the albatross flying while you study it.*

(Eisner, 2004, p. 2)

Referring to a flying albatross as a metaphor for art opens the *Handbook of Research and Policy in Arts education* by a spatial metaphor that underpins Eisner's vision on research in arts education. It also illustrates one of the core dilemmas in the field of arts education.

In doing scholarship, especially in the field that embraces the idea that art is a distinctive and important form of human experience, there is a tendency in using technical language and high-level abstractions to lose sight of the concrete conditions that give professional activity in this field significance. (Eisner, 2004, p. 2)

Eisner's lens on research shows two main concerns: firstly, the predominance of psychology in academic educational research and secondly, the ambiguity of art to meet with scientific standards and to transcend them artistically at the same time. Eisner observes that the core of

the arts is easily lost out of sight in the effort of understanding it through research.

### *Academic Research*

Not the fact that art and arts education are researched scientifically, but the way science is defined is Eisner's main concern. While preparing the publication of the handbook, Eisner was invited by the John Dewey Society to address research in arts education in 2002. Answering this request, Eisner described how education in the US, becoming its own field of study in the fourth quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, received its initial guidance from psychology. The early psychologists who were interested in making psychology into a scientific enterprise, strived to emulate the work done in the so-called hard sciences (Eisner, 2002). To illustrate the faith placed in the science of psychology as foundational for educational research, Eisner cites Edward L. Thorndike:

A complete science of psychology would tell every fact about everyone's intellect and character and behaviour, would tell the cause of every change in human nature. [...] In proportion as we get such a science we shall become the masters of our own souls as we now are masters of heat and light. (Thorndike, quoted in Eisner, 2002, p. 5).

Although Eisner observes that Thorndike's optimism was not shared by all at his time, for example John Dewey had reservations regarding what science could provide to so artful an enterprise as teaching, he concludes that Thorndike won and Dewey lost: educational research became strongly based on the 'hard science' of psychology (see Eisner, 2002). To date, psychology can still be seen as dominant in educational research. Noteworthy to remark that Eisner's handbook itself, in spite of his reticence of psychological and social sciences as expressed in his editorial, is dominated by this research tradition as well. The first chapter in the handbook (Chalmers, 2004), consisting of 7 pages written text and 15 pages of references, illustrates this. This strong relation with social science research traditions might be related to the fact that Eisner's handbook is the first handbook published in the field of arts education at all. Eisner considers the book a milestone, whereas handbooks in other scientific fields already have been published (see Eisner, 2004). It is also the first substantial publication in the field of arts education that seeks to meet with the academic tradition of handbooks, compiling chapters on research, theory, policy and concepts in an academic framework. Eisner explains this late entrance in the academic arena by pointing out that the roots of arts education are based in the *practise* of teaching art. On top of this, it was the arts and crafts themselves, and not an academic scientific tradition, that served as major models for teaching art. Theory and research were to come later. To illustrate this, Eisner indicates that the first journal on research in arts education in the USA was only initiated in 1960. At that time art educators struggled to assess the theoretical robustness of the field (see Sullivan, 2004).

### *A Grand Narrative*

The research on children's drawing is an example of the way knowledge is constructed in arts education within an academic theoretical framework. Several chapters on visual learning elaborate on the long tradition in arts educational research on children's art. Traditionally child art is valued in the cognitive, psychological perspective of the child's development as natural artefact of childhood which is essentially unaffected by culture (see Wilson, 2004). For more than a century the notion that child art is something that children make by themselves and the idea that children are creative in different ways than adults, formed the 'grand narrative' of arts education. Chapters such as 'Development and Learning in Art' (Kindler, 2004), 'The Art of Infancy' (Matthews, 2004), and 'Sculpture, representational development in a Three-dimensional Medium' (Golomb, 2004) explore this narrative and the long history of efforts to describe what is often referred to as 'stages' of children's art. These stages have been regarded as genetically unfolding processes, assuming a biologically driven development. The chapters in section three problematize this framework, by shifting emphasis to culture trends that diminish the importance of biological imperatives and emphasize matters of value (see Kindler, 2004; Matthews, 2004). The artistic development of children becomes regarded as the product of learning rather than the consequences of unfolding genetically conferred capacities.

Wilson's contribution to this same section, however, sheds another light on this phenomenon, built on the assumption that child art is itself a cultural construction. Wilson claims that art pedagogues created child art, which is a form of art that does not exist anywhere else except in schools around the world (Wilson, 2004). Two primary functions for school art are distinguished here: the school art style is to provide behaviours and products that have the look of humanistic learning—the appearance of creativity. The second function is morale boosting, that is, it heralds that school art is fun and easy, leading to the conception of children to enjoy school.

This shift from the traditional psychological research into a post-modernist cultural study approach involves a whole range of new insights and perspectives. Wilson reveals child art as an ideological term that has to be understood in terms of power and control. Although the exercise of power was conducted with the best of intentions and genuine concern for the well-being of children, Wilson states that it is time to embark on a new contemporary vision on arts education, closely related to the current visual culture:

I have claimed that opposing views are useful, that local knowledge should compete with the notion of a world system, and that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the study of children's images will most likely consist of many intersecting intertextual stories rather than one master modernist narrative. (Wilson, 2004. p. 326).

Another ‘grand narrative’ in arts education in Eisner’s handbook is the role, function and discourse on aesthetics. The relevance of aesthetics is described in two chapters: *Aesthetic Education: Questions and Issues*, (Smith, 2004) and *Aesthetic Judgement and Reasoning*, (Freeman, 2004). Another chapter explores the reason why aesthetics became irrelevant today: *Curriculum Change for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Visual culture in arts education* (Freedman, 2004). Used as ‘an all-inclusive concept, capable of being all things to all art educators’ (Hamblen quoted by Tavin, 2003, p.129) the term aesthetics is employed in different ways throughout the discourse in the four handbooks. Bresler invites five authors to elaborate on aesthetics from the perspectives of visual arts, music, theatre and dance (Dissanayake, 2007; Efland, 2007; Harris, 2007; Mans, 2007; Peters, 2007). In the two most recent handbooks the grand narrative of the aesthetics is not present, except for one article in Fleming (Peter, 2015).

These examples of different perspectives on grand narratives in arts educational research is typical for the way Eisner’s handbook documents paradigm shifts. Whereas he seeks to establish a landmark handbook that solidly grounds arts educational research traditions, it invites contributors to interrupt these traditions at the same time. By doing so it shows shifting rationales in research (see Eisner, 2004, p.5).

#### *Art Based Educational Research*

Eisner’s awareness of the limitations of traditional scientific research is also shown in the fact that he established an institute for Art Based Educational Research (ABER) where the methodology of art-based research was explored during the period 1990 to 2003. ABER developed research methods with characteristics that draw primarily from the arts and humanities rather than science, such as the use of aesthetic qualities in both the inquiry itself and the presentation of the research through forms of prose and poetry (Barone & Eisner, 1997). A structural framework delineated by ABER used the following seven design elements: the creation of a virtual reality, the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the use of contextualized and vernacular language, the promotion of empathy, personal signature of the researcher/writer, and the presence of aesthetic form. Eisner and Barone had been talking about arts-based research as early as 1997, all of their examples being literary, not artistic in the broad sense. Sullivan publishes *Research Acts in Art Practice* in 2006 (which is devoted to the visual arts), but this is a justification of existing artistic activity as a form of research. While this is not an ABR methodology, Sullivan presents his ideas in the Eisner’s Handbook. Although the institute explored this research for 23 years prior to the publication of the handbook, these alternative research forms are not represented in it. Eisner announces a wide range of writing styles: “Some display the traditional accoutrements of scholarly social science research, whereas others display interpretive and other forms of qualitative scholarship” (Eisner, 2004, p. 2). However, the

handbook's dominant writing style is based on academic standards and does not reflect artistic approaches.

#### *Conclusions on Eisner's Handbook*

Eisner's lens on research shows a twofold focus. Firstly, he seeks to mark a milestone since the handbook was the first to be published in the field of arts education. The handbook seeks to define relevant categories and ideas for research by collecting and re-defining the fields grand narratives, like children's art and aesthetics. The bulk of the research collected in the handbook is rooted in an academic research tradition, which provides its scholarly substance. The research as presented is mainly related to the social sciences tradition. Because art in education is rooted in the practise of the arts and crafts, this scholarly tradition is relatively new to the field.

Secondly, Eisner seeks to initiate a scholarly tradition that is rooted in the arts and humanities research traditions. He acknowledges that research in art bears the risk to forget "the art in order to understand the psychology" (Eisner, 2004, p. 2). Although his editorial lens targets a new, artistic way of research rooted in artistic tradition, the artistic is predominated by the academic in his handbook.

#### ***Bresler's Lens on Defining Disciplines' Boundaries and Crossing Them***

*Over the past 40 years, a quiet development has been taking place—a positioning of the individual arts and the respective disciplines of arts education within a larger umbrella of 'The Arts'. (Bresler, 2007, p. xvii)*

This first sentence of Bresler's handbook gives account of her editorial lens on defining disciplines' borders and crossing them, referring to both arts disciplines and academic disciplines. By doing so, Bresler seeks to broaden the perspective on arts disciplines and their interconnectedness as well as on artistic tendencies within academic research traditions. Bresler relates this relevance to a post-modern paradigm in research and in art, both reflecting contemporary cultural and social values (see Bresler, 2007, p. xviii).

Bresler also seeks to re-establish a balance among art disciplines: music and visual art have longer traditions and wider practice in arts educational research, whereas dance and drama are often underrepresented. By including poetry and literature, this handbook provides additional lenses to conceptualize arts educational disciplines. The character 's' transfiguring the reference in the handbook's title from one single art discipline to the larger umbrella 'The Arts'. Art as represented in Eisner's handbook is equal to visual art: 21 out of the 36 essays describe the practice of visual arts education and 7 chapters deal with teacher's education



practise of mainly visual art. Bresler's handbook consists of 65 main chapters, of which 11 on visual arts education, 8 on drama and theatre education, 14 on music and 6 on literature. On top of this conceptual border-crossing, the handbook also seeks to expand perspectives more physically: Bresler shows a strong commitment to international perspectives, proved by the attribution from outside the mainstream academia in North America, England and Australia that founds Eisner's handbook. Bresler's 50 international advisory board members come from 6 continents and 35 countries. The handbook itself also gives account of a strong international ambition: each chapter of the handbook consists of an average of 5 core chapters, followed by the same amount of international commentaries literally from all over the globe. These international commentaries give an insight into the relevance, or the lack of relevance in the subject matter of the chapters, as seen from a totally different cultural perspective.

### *Crossing the Borders of Academic Research Traditions*

As it comes to the academic tradition as initiated by Eisner, Bresler is clearly standing on Eisner's shoulders. The academic standard is represented in traditional topics brought together in chapters such as research, curriculum, history, assessment and evaluation. The arts educational 'grand narratives', such as the endured attention on Child Art is captured in the enlarged context of Child Culture. Art-related topics such as composition and creativity are added to the traditional academic scope of Eisner's handbook (Cox, 2007). Three sections' themes are not seen in any of the other three handbooks: the body, technology and spirituality, of which especially the last is scarce in academic research.

Bresler also includes some contributions of unexpected, non-academic formats, like several interludes that give account of personal experiences. These interludes reflect on the chapter's themes in a variety of writing styles, such as autobiographical notes, personal experiences and observations. Literature references are often absent, and the word 'I' is frequently used. This shows commitment to the living presence of art, next to the robust academic collection of scholarship and research, addressing the fact that research can at times seem distant from the experience of art (Eisner, 2004, p. 1). One example of an artistic interlude is typographically designed as a Dadaist poem starting with: "WARNING, You are entering a messy text, a deconstruction area, Hard hats NOT required, (Soft hearts mandatory)" (Prendergast & Leggo, 2007, p. 1459). Maxine Greene opens her interlude with a personal memory: "Stories and pictures enchanted me. I remember collecting words like "carnelian", "porcelain" and "roundelay" and puzzling how they could summon images in my head" (Greene, 2007, p. 657).

An example of the vivid conversation is represented in section two on history. The core article describes the construction of the history of curriculum from the perspective of the theoretical work by French sociologist Bourdieu (see Stankiewicz, 2007). The history of



visual education is mapped in terms of formation and transmission of human capital, based on the desire of both nations and individuals to build human and cultural capital. The article concludes that “Theories or practises that have worked for the West should be fully examined in the context of other nations before being implemented” (Stankiewicz, 2007). The first international commentary to this article originates from the university of Sorbonne in France and highly appreciates the resonance of Bourdieu’s framework (see Darras, 2007, p.31). Darras concludes that the biggest challenge for contemporary arts education is waiting for new teachers that are ready to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Educated in the practice of modern and postmodern art as they are to date, they are not prepared to face an educational system ignorant or hostile to issues and objects fashionable in artistic circles. “The history of this resistance, these gaps, these daily inventions and ‘quick-fixes’ remains to be written” (Darras, 2007, p. 34).

The second commentary originates from the University of Eastern Africa (Akala, 2007, p. 35) noting that the early forms of art that preceded the western art culture are given marginal analysis by Stankiewicz. Akala mentions a tension between the attention paid to the contemporary production of sophisticated art, and the ethnic orientation assumed in precolonial times. Akala concludes with the definition of the need for “...qualified art teachers who can enhance culture-sensitive but internationally captivating arts” (p.35). The third commentary is from the Stockholm Institute of Education in Sweden (Asen, 2007, p. 37). Asen describes how the Swedish art curriculum has developed itself parallel to the historical lines as drafted by Stankiewicz, concluding that a major theme in contemporary Swedish arts education curricula is the study of semiotics and visual culture.

This series of commentaries only already shows a dazzling variety of questions and perspectives. Although there is a tendency to talk to each other instead of talking with each other, these international commentaries enable the reader to frame themes in different international perspectives.

#### *Defining and Crossing the Borders of Arts Disciplines*

At an artistic level, Bresler also observes a tendency to cross the borders of disciplines. The generation of innovative artwork based on mixed forms of representation, combining the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic to create new types of art is seen as an example of this. Bresler presumes that, although the individual disciplines maintain their distinctive identities, organisations, traditions, area of practise and scholarship, a productive tension between the individual arts disciplines and the larger arena of the arts might be generated by this. To underpin this, Bresler’s handbook contains various chapters that define and redefine the individual art disciplines, in both contemporary and historical perspective. A cross section of chapters that define the discipline drama illustrates this: ‘A history of drama education’ (Bolton, 2007), ‘Proteus, the Giant at the Door: Drama and Theatre in the Curriculum’

(O'Toole, 2007), 'Wrestling with Assessment in Drama Education' (Schonman, 2007), and 'Drama Education and the Body: I am, Therefore I Think' (Osmond, 2007). The handbook contains the same collection of disciplinary-focussed chapters on dance, visuals arts, literature and music.

The emphasis on disciplinary scholarship shows that Bresler does not define border crossing as blurring the distinctions among various disciplines but rather as cultivating an awareness among various arts education communities about compelling concepts and relevant literatures in their 'sister' disciplines, to foster communication and dialogue. Bresler hypothesizes this intensified cross-fertilization in the arts as part of a larger characteristic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the softening of the boundaries of what used to be a solid sphere (see Bresler, 2007, p. xvii). Bresler regards the concept of discipline as an open-ended one, much like the concept of art itself. "In order to exist, it needs boundaries" (Bresler, 2007, p. xviii).

Bresler's positive connotations of border-crossing might be related to the expectation of overcoming the self-referential focus of art disciplines since it invites the arts to transcend their specialist language and disciplinary-bounded concepts, whereas art educators are invited to talk to the public in common language about art again.

#### *Conclusions on Bresler's Handbook*

To conclude, this handbook relates to two aims objectives: it collects knowledge of the art disciplines dance, drama literature, music and visual arts education, focused on the definition of the art disciplines' borders in historical and contemporary perspective. Notably, Bresler avoids framing arts education in concepts such as interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity. By doing so, she puts the arts disciplines in an open, artistic arena, rather than provoking a theoretical, philosophical discourse. This approach also holds the potential to address the essence of art instead of ducking into specialist debates. The second aim of the handbook is to stimulate a process that might launch new directions, based on the assumption that communication among arts disciplines will advance each of them individually (see Bresler, 2017, p. xix). The handbook itself is an example of this communication. Because of its structure of chapters, interludes and commentaries, it functions as a meeting point itself.

Both aims seem to be successfully implemented in this handbook. Whereas Eisner calls the albatross to keep on flying, it actually sails the air throughout in this second handbook. This handbook combines an academic tradition with an inspirational, personal approach of research. To date, there is no other handbook that meets with the landmark Bresler set as it comes to its physical scale, as well as its academic span and artistic ambitions.

#### *Fleming's Lens on the Arts*

*Art is part of life.* (Fleming, M. 2015, p. 2)

By readdressing the arts as the primary field of attention, Fleming creates a new openness to explore the potential of art for education, as illustrated by the handbooks title. Fleming starts *The Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education* (2015) describing the current confusion on the nature and importance of the arts and their relationship to education. Fleming illustrates this by giving account of UNESCO's unstable directions in arts educational policy. In 2006, UNESCO announced the arts to be a priority area within education, but changed its mind only 7 years later: in November 2013 UNESCO removed arts education from its list of priorities, rather surprisingly along with creativity. "If nothing else, all that contemporary activity and global decision-making suggest a high level of both interest and confusion about the nature and importance of the arts and their relationship to education. That at least is nothing new" (Fleming, 2015, p. 1). His answer to this confusion is to shift the focus: not education, but art should be leading in the discourse on arts education again.

#### *Arts and Education*

The title 'Arts and Education' indicates that the book is focussed on art but still broad in scope. It defines the arts and education not just in terms of school and "it embraces reception as well as creation of arts, and concepts of learning about and through the arts" (Fleming, 2015, p. 2). Moreover, the arts are not limited to the visual arts, music, dance and drama but also encompass media arts, literature and poetry.

The handbook is divided into six sections: the role of theory; historical perspectives; arts education and the curriculum; arts education and the wider community; researching the arts; and widening perspectives. With 12 chapters the section 'Arts education and the curriculum' is the largest section of the book. It contains chapters on curriculum issues in the different art disciplines (Barrett, 2015; Buck, 2015; Hickman, 2015; O'Toole, 2015; Pieper, 2015) as well as on art therapy's early years' education (Jennings & McFarlane, 2015) and the continuing discussion on arts integration (Grumet, Randolph & Stanley, 2015).

The arts curriculum as largest section of the handbook refers to a focus on education rather than art, which seems to contradict the emphasis on the arts stated in the introduction. As the smallest section 'Researching the arts' is very modest, compared to the two preceding handbooks. It contains three chapters that show contrasting visions on research. One makes the case for more theory-based research and for more objectivity and detachment in researching the arts and education (Harland, 2015) and the two others represent an entirely different research paradigm, propagating unorthodox methods and ways of reporting and advocating the value of using the arts as a form of research (Haseman, 2015; O'Donoghue, 2015).

Whereas the precedent handbooks provide several chapters overviewing international trends in research and research agendas, Fleming gives account of his intention not to strive for a comprehensive overview but ‘to complement rather than duplicate other work’ (Fleming, 2015, p. 4). The collection seems to be based on subjective choices by the editor. Re-naming the field as Arts *and* Education in the title of the handbook, and taking the arts as starting point for the discourse can be seen as an example of this subjectivity. The two precedent handbooks used an *educational* lens mostly, illustrated, for example, by the robust attention paid at the arts educational history represented (Bresler, 2007; Eisner, 2004). Fleming chooses to give an extensive account of the shifting rationales in arts education rather than clarify the background of this.

### *Overcoming Dichotomies*

Fleming focusses on art and invites the contributors to do the same. He calls for an inclusive understanding of the term ‘Art’, referring to a mix of high art, popular-culture-based art, media art and traditional art. By doing so, Fleming seeks to overcome all kinds of prevailing dichotomies in arts education, like high and low art. Another well represented dichotomy is the intrinsic versus instrumental justifications of the arts in education, which has dominated decades of discourse in arts education. Intrinsic arts education is most clearly defined in the Discipline-Based Arts Education (DBAE) tradition in arts education, which approaches art as a school subject, akin to modern languages. Elliot Eisner, editor of the first handbook in this article, is one of the founding fathers of DBAE, that considers the arts as a language that one can learn to use, understand, appreciate, and create. (see Eisner, 2002). One of the rationales of DBAE is to help students to become more efficient problem solvers, a presumption that might help to justify the arts’ role within the school curriculum. Its main focus though, is on what only art can provide, like the unique potential of the arts to invite a human being to connect to his or her poetic capacities, feelings and multiple perspectives. Art is seen a distinctive form of human experience.

Fleming puts forward that the discourse tends to bring intrinsic arts education into contrast with the tradition that advocates arts education based on instrumental justifications, such as the presumption that art can make young people smarter, more collaborative or better in academic skills. Many authors of chapters in the four handbooks refer to this instrumental benefit of the art (Dobbs, 2004; Efland, 2004; McCammon, 2007; Varkøy, 2015) but Fleming is looking for perspectives to move away from both instrumental and intrinsic justification. Therefore, he notes the danger of making claims that are only true for one or two of the art forms. Theories that seek to define art tend to take a different formulation when focusing on the artist (early expressions theories), the artwork itself (formalist and representation theories), the audience (aesthetic attitude) or the context (institutional theories) (Fleming et al., 2015). These theories often lose their impact and credibility when applied to all the art forms in general. At the same time, the focus changes when the theory is driven

implicitly by particular art forms, like the formalist theories on arts education are more closely associated with visual art and music, whereas representation theories tend to ignore music (see Fleming, 2015, p. 3).

An important observation here is that

In education the relative emphasis on making and responding to art varies in the context of different art forms and in different cultural contexts. The study of literature, for example, is frequently seen almost entirely in relation to analysis and response. Again it is helpful to see beyond the simple dichotomy and recognise the importance of not just analysis and response but of genuine, felt response to a work. (Alkuno et al., 2015)

This citation shows that for a long period of time, this inclination to over-generalise and over-theorise dominated research in arts education. The trend arises when assuming that one's own way of theorising is the only way. (Alkuno, 2015). The statement that Fleming seeks to make is that the formulation of one theory to be universally applicable for all the arts in education, is not sustainable nor desirable for contemporary arts education since it narrows the discourse unnecessarily. Moreover, it undermines the role of the artistic, which is about overcoming dichotomies by nature. The absence of the term 'discipline' is a salient feature in this handbook, also showing Fleming's focus on the arts. Whereas Bresler made a case for crossing the borders of arts disciplines in order to transcend disciplinary differences and deepen understanding, Fleming seems to start at this level right away.

#### *Conclusions on Fleming's Handbook*

By overcoming dichotomies, this handbook seeks to create new discourses, or put existing debates into new perspectives, like the popular neuroscience perspective on the arts and education is represented in one article (Heath & Gilbert, 2015), whereas in another (Neelands, 2015) this perspective is dismissed as too fashionable. Fleming's abandonment to overrate one value over the other, creates space for a new kind of discourse. He enumerates the different rationales of art in education, such as: the potential to develop creativity, enhance cultural understanding, transform and empower communities, cultivate spirituality, give expression to what is not fully understood, promote tolerance and mutual understanding, without overestimating one function above the other. "Art has the potential to inform and enrich the way we engage with the world, and to put us in touch with our freedom" (Fleming, 2015, p. 2).

All of these potential outcomes of art can have important implications when brought into education. The specific editorial lens of Fleming states that it is important to overcome the tendency to address one half of a dichotomy and to disqualify the other. Fleming's awareness

of the existence of contrasting visions and starting points prohibits the discourse becoming superficial and contributes to the concept of art as part of life, and therefore, of education.

### ***Barton and Baguley's Lens of the Advocacy***

*The significance and impact of the arts are well documented globally, however, there continues to be a disjuncture between what is prioritized in education policy and it perceived benefits, particularly in Western countries.*

(Barton & Baguley, 2017, p.1)

The editorial introduction of the fourth handbook, *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Arts Education*, reveals the lens of its editors on advocacy in the first place. The introduction enumerates the benefits of arts education of all sorts and forms across the globe. The editors contextualize this advocacy in the global tendency to marginalize arts education. The handbook readily builds upon the tradition as constructed by the three preceding handbooks. The editors observe that governments, like other stakeholders in the education sector, tend to ignore these benefits, in spite of the extensive research that has been undertaken and built upon in the respective arts discipline areas.

Barton and Baguley proclaim two strategies to overcome the disjuncture between art's potential for education and the inconsistency of policymakers' acknowledgement of this potential. Firstly, they propose that the main goal of arts in education should be to facilitate, stimulate and organise the encounter of human beings and art. Secondly, the editors proclaim that continuing and deepening the research in arts education is equally important (Barton & Baguley, 2017). The editors relate encounters with art in educational contexts to a broad palette of benefits, of which the potential of "transformative power" (Barton & Baguley, 2017, p. 4) of art is the most striking. Barton and Baguley do not explain what this transformative power exactly contains nor is any of the chapters elaborating on this idea. Nevertheless, the editor's lens on advocacy provides a passionate plea for more arts education serving multiple purposes. They state that all research done provides a vast amount of evidence on how learning in the arts "develops creative and imaginative thinkers, as well as encourages divergent and convergent thinking and multiple purpose solutions to problems" (Barton & Baguley, 2017, p. 2). Here Barton and Baguley implicitly embrace the instrumental approach of arts education. Approaches such as arts-immersion is mentioned to have provided evidence of improving students' learning outcomes in areas like literacy, numeracy and science. The arts also enhance skills which have been noted as important for surviving and thriving the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including "creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, self-direction, initiative and collaboration" (Barton & Baguley, 2017, p. 3).



*Arts Educational Benefits Outside the Field of Arts Education*

This strong emphasis on evidence-based, instrumental arts education is underpinned by the editors' choice to focus in two out of six chapters on the areas where this instrumental arts education finds its natural habitat such as social justice (section four) and health and wellbeing (section five). Contributions such as 'Applied Theatre as a Medium of Communal Communication: Access to Justice Project In Kwale, Kenya' (Wabende & Park, 2017), 'Understanding Caregiving and Alzheimer's Disease Through the Arts' (Cole, 2017) and 'Growing Wellbeing Through Community Participatory Arts: The Aishinaabek Cervical Cancer Screening Study' (Sameshima, Slingerland, Wakewich, Morrissette & Zehbe, 2017) illustrate the instrumental approach to arts education, that proves its benefits for something important outside the artistic/ educational field. This instrumental approach however turns out to be controversial in arts educational research when brought into dialogue with two pivotal chapters of Eisner's (2004) handbook. In 'Cognitive Transfer from Arts Education to Non-arts Outcomes' Hetland and Winner (2004) give account of meta-analytic review of the effects on non-arts cognition that reports a minimum of causal conclusions. No evidence for a beneficial relation between arts education and academic achievement, creativity and reading is found. (Hetland & Winner, 2004). In 'Spirit, Mind and Body: Arts Education the Redeemer' (Gee, 2004), also in Eisner's (2004) handbook, a description of the broad range of assertions about the capacity of the arts to assist in spiritual and moral development, improve academic performance, and induce psychological and even physiological well-being are used to promote support for all types of arts and arts education programming. Gee states that this development erodes rather than strengthens the position of arts education. "Art educators are urged to proclaim those distinctions in the public arena just as they also differentiate between more and less credible arts education advocacy claims." (Gee, 2004, p. 115).

*Recent History*

*The Palgrave Handbook of Global Arts Education* is an exception as it comes to attention paid explicitly to historical perspectives of arts educational traditions. The editors' introduction shows a focus on a more recent historical perspective like the first United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) world conference in 2006, resulting in the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education (UNESCO, 2006) and the beginning of the World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE) (see Barton & Baguley, 2017). The Second UNESCO World Congress on Arts Education in Seoul (2010) resulted in the 'Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education.' Early in the millennium UNESCO planned its first World Congress of Arts Education, that took place in Portugal 2006. A major theme of this conference was access and equity. The same year, shortly after the conference, UNESCO announced that arts would be a priority area within education. (Fleming, 2015, p. 1). These two connected events generated considerable interest worldwide, and lifted the status and profile of arts in educational systems. At the Lisbon conference, 1200 international delegates adopted a 'roadmap' for the development of the arts.

This UNESCO Roadmap aimed to provide arts educators with robust and evidence-based outline of the importance and provision of arts education. Two out of four handbooks (Barton & Baguley, 2017; Fleming, 2007) refer to the key aims that this Roadmap listed in the editorial introduction which are: to uphold the human right to education and cultural participation, to develop individual capacities, to improve the quality of education and to promote the expression of cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2006, p. 2) This resulted in a lively debate and contestation leading to a second World Conference, held in South Korea, where a set of 'Goals for the Development of Arts Education – The Seoul Agenda' was delivered (Barton & Baguley, 2017).

### *Conclusion on Barton's and Baguley's Handbook*

In spite of the handbook's title that suggests a nation and culture transcending perspective, the debate as presented in the handbook shows a domination by western concepts, as the new millennium is a western concept itself. This is illustrated by the fact, for example, that a vast amount of people in non-western cultures and nations live in another era, like the Chinese in 4714, Hebrew in 5777 and the Muslim in 1438. The handbook introduces relevant and urgent questioning though, such as the question of how to overcome and respond to the western-dominated perspective that constructed the field of arts education, as it also dominates the larger field of education.

Barton and Baguley's handbook images arts education as a field with a history if not tradition of shifting rationales. To defend its place in school curriculum, arts education became adaptive like chameleon where it comes to its justification. At various periods in the history of arts education these justifications have promised to prepare students for the industrial work place, to foster creativity, to provide for healthy integration of personality, to develop the aesthetic lens for understanding, and to assist students to more adequately negotiate the contemporary world of commercial applications in art and visual culture. (Eisner, p. 5). These and other rationales have found their way into arts educational practice and academic discourse.

### **Analysis of the Handbook Conversations**

In this section I analyse the way the editorial lenses thematise and problematize the field of arts education, asking questions such as: what perspective is missing as a result of these lenses, and also: what lens might be missing? I describe some dimensions that are overlooked or underexposed, due to these editorial lenses. I conclude with some observations and recommendations to address art's particular potential for education.

The lens on academic research of Eisner frames arts education as a field that takes its place among fields that take their scholarship seriously. This can be understood as an emancipatory

movement related to the political status of arts education within the field of education at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This lens strongly positions arts education as a scholarly field, which holds the potential of empowerment. Some aspects are overlooked on behalf of this lens, such as the maintenance of the characteristics of the arts in relation to research. Eisner's motto for research to "keep the albatross flying, while you study it" (Eisner, 2004, p. 2) is not a lived value yet in his handbook. His awareness of this, however, prohibits the research as presented in his handbook of losing the essence of the field.

The lens on border definition and border crossing of Bresler creates the space needed to overcome the danger reported by Eisner, that is, to lose sight of the essence of art in the process of academic research. A lens that is equally broad and deep prevents a missing or overlooked perspective to occur in Bresler's editorial lens. She actually represents the albatross perspective as editor. A disadvantage might be that it is hard to meet the standard that Bresler sets. The substantial handbook in two parts is too comprehensive and maybe too expensive as well, to find its way to the classroom art teacher or artist educator's studio. Unintentionally, the handbook might broaden the gap between arts educational practises and its scholarly research and reflections on it, while its main intention is to bridge the gap. Another side effect of Bresler's all-inclusive lens is the extended broadness of the field of arts education, that might devalue some clear views on the very nature of arts education. The lens also provides unique perspectives on arts education however, that are overlooked by the other editorial lenses, such as sections in the body and spirituality.

The lens of Fleming on the arts and artistic approaches in arts education creates the possibility to overcome dichotomies in arts education, such as instrumental—intrinsic, that predominated the discourse in arts education for a long time. He also shifts from the educational to a more artistic focus. The new paradigm of 'art for life' that Flemings lens initiates, calls for new approaches of arts education that are more related to the nature and potential of the arts. However, whereas this editorial lens is inspirational and provocative, it does not meet with the content of the handbook edited on behalf of this lens yet, as is shown by the strong and traditional emphasis on curriculum studies.

The lens of Barton and Barguley on global arts education entails a political mindset, related to ample attention for advocacy of arts education. This lens on advocacy for global arts education involves an implicit defensive tone of voice that is related to the fields' history of marginalisation in the school curriculum. In its attempt to advocate the benefits of arts education the editorial lens follows the political mainstream of UNESCO initiated conferences and statements, which are formulated very broad and open.

## Conclusions

Within the 14 years that the publication of these four handbooks took place, an impressive collection of 170 chapters, 300 authors and almost 4000 pages on research in arts education is constructed. Almost every possible vision on arts education is represented in the four handbooks.

Although the four reviewed handbooks show a strong orientation on the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they relate to the new millennium context in different ways. Where Eisner collects dichotomies, Bresler defines and reframes, Fleming seeks to overcome them, Barton and Baguley's handbook seems to choose the policy of ignoring the dichotomies. Eisner addresses a presumed backlog by establishing a fundament for academic discourse, whereas Bresler continues his effort by defining and crossing artistic and academic disciplines. Both Eisner and Bresler address the instrumental—*intrinsic* dichotomy. Fleming seeks to transcend the borders as carefully defined in the first two handbooks, by placing the focus on the arts. Barton and Baguley seek to use the dichotomies in the discourse in a global context, addressing the tensions between western and non-western traditions.

Overviewing the vast amount of sections, chapters and issues that the handbooks have assembled, it is not hard to see that several contributions produce contradictory statements. Significant results of research, such as the conclusion that there is little evidence of cognitive effects through instrumental goals in arts education, can provide powerful new starting points for subsequent research. Evidence shown by previous research is however often ignored rather than taken as a starting point by succeeding researchers. This tendency to browse through existing research might be related to the endeavour to substantiate advocacy for arts education. Researchers in arts education seem to be focussed on collecting rationales in order to justify its position in education, although the potential of the arts itself might be substantial enough to authorize it. Assertions made in the last handbook, such as the claim that arts education has the potential to enhance transformational processes in education, are not clearly defined yet. The same can be observed on behalf of the introduction of a 'global arts education', which is waiting for clear definition and framework to contextualise the notion of 'global'.

As a result of this history of shifting rationales, of which all handbooks give account abundantly, the majority of the different rationales tends to persist somewhere in the arts curricula of arts education. This development might contribute to an impossibility of mapping the arts curriculum as well as to complications in collaboration within the field of arts education (Wilson, 2003). It is my experience as an art teacher and artist educator in secondary and higher education that these co-existing visions on arts education prohibit the field of arts education to define itself. Even one team of arts educators at one school can

represent a broad collection of contradictory visions or traditions that disturbs or interrupts rather than reinforces collaborations.

### *Epilogue*

Dwelling on the metaphor of the flying albatross of Eisner's overture deepens the understanding of the dilemmas of arts' place in education. Everyone who has seen an albatross flying, would recognize its power, magnitude and grace. The albatross has the largest wingspan of any birds, reaching up to 12 feet. Yet, there are not many people who actually have seen an albatross flying. Albatrosses nest on remote oceanic islands, a preference related to the fact that they are highly efficient in the air, using a technique that allows them to cover a thousand kilometres a day without flapping their wings. That is why albatrosses can travel 15,000 km or 10,000 miles over the sea before returning to land. This metaphor reveals some of the challenges that research faces to understand art and art's place in education. The best option for the researcher seems to become, metaphorically spoken, an albatross, which means staying close to the artistic process of art making and being an artist him or herself.

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