

Anecdotes and General Observations on Occasion of a Comparison of Hungarian and German Art Curricula Or: How to handle Diversity?

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Abstract

In 2012, Cyprus hosted the European InSEA-Congress. The Cyprus conference programme included a contribution by a group of German and Hungarian art educators (among them the authors of this article): as a transnational and collective presentation, this contribution broke the mould of the usual practice of individual presentations. The group showed the intermediate results from a collaboration between international researchers, who work together under the framework of ENViL (European Network for Visual Literacy). The participants, among other topics, engaged in an exchange about the development of art curricula in Switzerland, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, and France: about the instructions released by ministries, the circumstances and guidelines as well as the actual working conditions and available resources.

Key words

InSEA, art educators, collaboration, visual literacy, art curricula, comparatistic

In 2012, Cyprus hosted the European InSEA-Congress. The meeting was well-visited and offered an impressive variety of demonstrations and lectures. The overall experience is best described as one of breathtaking diversity – each presenter was allotted a 10 minute slot and the scope of the individual presentations reached from weaving in Kuwaiti museums; reflections on the art of walking by InSEA President Rita Irwin; teaching models and concepts from Finland and Hungary; strategies of handling iconoclasm in the museum of Nicosia; star gazing in South America; students’ drawings from Germany; and Taiwanese cloth printing. Participants felt similar to the protagonist of Caspar David Friedrich’s “Wanderer above the Sea Fog” (1818) who experiences a comparable delirium of infinite forms in soft motion. And perhaps, a Kantian sense of disinterested pleasure, paired with a subtle shudder when confronting infinite variety, was an appropriate attitude for visitors of the 2012 congress.

Still – the climate in Cyprus, the prices and general sense of exhaustion, were not really conducive to an exclusive immersion into aesthetic contemplation and disinterested pleasure.

Some additional benefit was called for. But what was the best option at the InSEA conference for those who were looking for such additional benefits?

The Cyprus conference programme included a contribution by a group of German and Hungarian art educators (Claudia Birkner, Gila Kolb, Gabriella Pataky, Ernst Wagner, Kati Zapp, – among them the authors of this article): as a transnational and collective presentation, this contribution broke the mould of the usual practice of individual presentations. The group showed the intermediate results from a collaboration between international researchers, who work together under the framework of ENViL (European Network for Visual Literacy).

An International Déjà-Vu

To prepare for the Cyprus conference the network had met in Salzburg in January 2012. On this occasion, the participants, among other topics, engaged in an exchange about the development of art curricula in Switzerland, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, and France: about the instructions released by ministries, the circumstances and guidelines as well as the actual working conditions and available resources. The result was collective Déjà-Vu. The conditions in all countries under discussion were surprisingly similar, to the point of almost appearing identical. Competence orientation is the only really important requirement for ministries, when issuing instructions to the available experts (such as teachers, or, occasionally university-based didactic specialists). The limited interest given to the subject in public discussions is, thus, mirrored by the authorities’

limited interest in the subject and its teaching contents. This, in spite of the wish for more recognition, gives the respective commissions a great degree of independence and a valuable liberty. The resources that are available for the development of teaching curricula, however, mainly consist of travel funds and time budgets for the experts in charge. Neither school administrations nor higher education institutes are able to offer real content-related support or to provide non-material resources (such as expertise, research results or any other form of academic substantiation). The general impression participants of the Salzburg meeting shared, was, therefore, the following: we are left to our own devices and improvise as well as we can. On a side note: art teachers are pretty good at this.

Hungary – Germany

But let us return to the InSEA-Congress in Cyprus. First, the three German participants, who collaborate within the framework of the graduate school “Gestalten und Erkennen” (www.gestalten-und-erkennen.de), presented on current developments in German curricula in “the age of competence orientation”. Immediately afterwards, Gabriella Pataky, from Eötvös-Loránd-University (ELTE TOK) in Budapest, did the same thing for the Hungarian side. There are considerable differences between both countries, which are partly explained through differences in their respective histories, as Pataky pointed out with respect to the post-communist society in Hungary. Fair enough – and yet another aspect of the conference’s breathtaking diversity, even if only on a relatively small scale. And all of it within the limits of the pluralism a conference such as this one offers, a pluralism the visitor can easily absorb with a sense of disinterested pleasure.

After that, the group presented a comparison of both systems and the performance (read as: “individual competence”) that was expected of 10-year-olds (in both countries, this is the age at which pupils leave elementary school and enter secondary education). It became quickly apparent that there are not only a number of similarities but also some significant differences – more details are given in the table of comparison in the appendix to this article. A common aspect is, for instance, the tendency of conceptualising competence not only in terms of knowledge but also in terms of skills and attitude. In the field of art education, such a conceptualisation of competence also encompasses – and this is another parallel – two basic abilities: the ability to receive and the ability to produce (Gaul, Kárpáti, 2008). Beyond this, the areas in which competences should be developed are similarly defined, in both countries: arts and craft are the central areas, although there is an additional focus on traditional handicraft in Hungary, which we do not find in Germany (a country in which concepts of “Volkskunst” are contaminated since the era of National Socialism). Here

again, historical circumstances account for differences in national profiles. Another parallel is the inclusion of key qualifications (such as personal, social and methodological competences) – beyond subject related competences, these are important factors for evaluating the individual performance in both countries.

With regard to the conceptual structure of curricula, there are, however, further differences. In Germany, the actual contents or specific topics in which students develop their competences are not strictly regulated (as competences can be acquired through the engagement with any topic); while, in Hungary, teaching contents are explicitly regulated. The same can be stated about artistic techniques. One should, however, note that for this aspect in particular, there are diverse approaches in each of the 16 German states. Due to the federal structure, it is difficult to offer general remarks about the situation in Germany. An approach through foreign eyes, however, makes visible that, in spite of all the difference between the individual states, the spectrum is limited. The table in the appendix to this article, therefore, focuses on Bavaria, as an example.

North-Rhine-Westphalia, for example, releases core curricula but the concrete teaching contents are determined by each school individually. (The website of the North-Rhine-Westphalia ministry offers the following explanations for this choice: “Through a focus on essential education contents and competences, core curricula grant individual schools a surplus of pedagogical flexibility, because they do not cover the entire range of educational work and teaching time. It is the responsibility of each school to specify the curriculum and select adequate teaching materials in order to shape their specific profile.” (<http://www.standardsicherung.schulministerium.nrw.de/lehrplaene/kernlehrplaene-sek-i/einfuehrung/> 15.7.2012) „Ideally, the choices made in teachers’ conferences, when defining topics and methods, reflect the required areas of competence and subject allocations. This obligation should – with respect to individual teaching groups – allow for an adequate measure of flexibility.” (<http://www.standardsicherung.schulministerium.nrw.de/lehrplaene/kernlehrplaene-sek-i/gymnasium-g8/kunst/hinweise-und-beispiele-kunst/schulinterner-lehrplan-kunst.html>) By contrast, in other states, such as Bavaria, there is a compulsory canon of education contents. “The [Bavarian] curriculum will continue to define, in an adequately concrete manner, the forms of knowledge and skills that should be acquired, and locates these contents within the overall structure of the educational path.” The centrally determined curricula, therefore, provide “descriptions of the expected competences and correlating subject materials, structured according to learning areas in each subject.”) ISB, Lehrplan*PLUS*-Handreichung, Munich 2011, p.16.

A more differentiated explication of these themes might have its value, but, for now, the vague sketch should suffice. The crucial point for the following

observations is that, in spite of all the differences, there is a vast area of similarities in structures and concepts. These are, for instance, parallels in the conditions under which curricula are created and the dominance of a relatively similar competence model. The comparison can easily be extended to other European areas, as exchanges about the experience in diverse national contexts (such as the one our research network hosted) illustrate. These insights signal that there are two possible directions for further observations: either we focus on the parallels or we work with the differences.

Working with Differences

To provide a detailed account of the differences in teaching curricula – as an end in itself – may be justifiable in an academic context. For our research network the qualitative development of this practice, however, gains relevancy on yet another level. For a group of transnational researchers, such practices are only valuable, if the comparison between us and the other, the familiar and the foreign, results in critical self-reflection. Through an acquaintance with alternatives and variations, it is possible to sharpen our own profile: what is it that makes art education unique in Germany or in Hungary? How can we find answers that respond to the specific situation and national histories of both countries? Where are the blind spots? The basic patterns? On which concepts do firmly established ideas rely?

From comparative practices understood in this way a new and more self-reflective form of diversity emerges. Europe as a cultural territory has always been a territory of diversity. Art historians have found and still find such differentiations in the well-known “schools” or “artistic landscapes” on the basis of which every museum is organized. Differences, however, not only occur on a spatial and synchronous level, but – as one might anticipate when talking about a continent in which a concept of progress was developed that turned out to be not only successful but also fraught with consequences – also diachronically. Both aspects can be found in correlating metaphors that are coined in order to bring disparate parts together. In our context they can also serve as a framework for further interpretations: there are, for instance, Romano Ruggiero’s slogan of “the contemporaneity of the unctemporary”, catch-words such as “hybridity” or “glocal” (as a marriage of global and local), as well as images from the political realm, such as “Europe of the Regions”.

A number of methodological questions arise in this context. (With respect to the comparison between the Czech Republic and Germany, see: Uhl Skřivanová Vera, “Kompetenzorientierung im tschechischen und deutschen Kunstunterricht, Komparation der Bildungsinhalte”; in: *BDK Mitteilungen*, Hannover 1/2012, pp. 27; and: Uhl Skřivanová Vera, “Kompetenzzuwachs im

Bildungsgang. Das Fach Kunst an den bayerischen Gymnasien durch die Augen einer tschechischen Kunstpädagogin“, *BDK INFO*, Munich 2010, 15, p. 54.)

One general problem emerges if one considers the role of the language in which a comparison between different countries is performed. Individual words and expressions are equipped with a baggage of connotations that easily get lost in one-to-one translations; this is important, especially if meaning is regarded as a central aspect that is generated on more than one level. Two prominent examples that closely intertwine with art as a subject (and with the specificities of the German language), are the expressions “Bild” (for which English lacks an adequate equivalent, as the word can be translated into “picture” as well as “image”) and “Bildung” (here the English equivalent is “education” which bears entirely different connotations – if looking for a translation that captures some of the meaning the German word carries, one would probably choose “forming” or “formation”). In which language a comparison takes place, is, ultimately, also a question that leads us to issues of power and cultural dominance. And whether the usually inevitable use of a third language (English as a *lingua franca*, for instance) creates more problems than are solved, is a question that needs to be discussed anew for every single encounter of this kind.

Scientific methodologies are of the greatest importance in this context. For the work that is presented here, we have developed a method of dialogue between partners (mostly telephone interviews), without however reflecting this method with respect to specific research standards. If one wanted to extend on and substantiate this approach, the following steps should be considered:

1. Basic concepts need to be extracted from the original documents (in the interviewee’s mother tongue) by a team of two experts (one of them a compatriot, the other from a different country).

2. Basic concepts need to be contextualized through further interviews with national experts: what does a concept respond to? Why did it develop in the way it developed and not in any other way?

3. The comparison should be carried out under consideration of a carefully selected *tertium comparationis*.

These principles of hermeneutic procedures (Bohnsack, Marotzki, Meuser, 2011) should however – particularly in the context of a larger research design – be critically reviewed, for instance in light of more recent approaches, such as discourse analysis in the tradition of Michel Foucault or, as Skrivanova (Skrivanova, 2011) suggests, a qualitative content analysis that relies on Mayring’s work. One might also want to discuss whether procedures of triangulation (Schründer-Lenzen, 2010) could possibly be employed in order to secure a certain quality.

These methodological questions demonstrate that, if a comparative approach is going to be productively employed within the field of art pedagogy, such a project requires a subject-based institutional framework and excellent personnel. Such a background is crucial in order to protect the European wealth of art pedagogical concepts, in order to conserve and further develop these ideas. What is required is a European association of art pedagogical (or perhaps even cultural education) research institutes that continues the work of the “Arbeitsstelle für vergleichende und historische Kunstpädagogik“ (Office for Comparative and Historical Art Education), which was founded by Diethart Kerbs at the Berliner Universität der Künste but unfortunately has ceased to exist. (Adelheid Sievert stated in 2009 that “a tremendous deficit becomes apparent through an international comparison... If the Office for Comparative and Historical Art Education is not maintained, the deficit in the context of international art education research will increase.” See: Torsten Meyer, Andrea Sabisch (Eds.), *Kunst Pädagogik Forschung: Aktuelle Zugänge und Perspektiven*, 2009, Bielefeld, p. 84.

In spite of this and many other warnings, the institute’s websites announces today that “The office has ceased to exist in 2010... it used to host an extensive library.“

(http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/arku/content/index_ger.html - 14.7.2012)

Developing Similarities

We have previously pointed out that comparative research in the field of art education requires a *tertium comparationis*. A common framework of reference, in which diverse approaches are mirrored, could – as a matrix – provide such a setting. (And this is the focus ENViL has been working on in the period after the conference). Efforts of developing such a framework face a set of theoretical and practical challenges. Is it, for instance, possible to develop a core text from the parallels that emerged though the comparison of art educational concepts? The best response is perhaps found in the belief that there are certain abilities students have improved after participating in art lessons, for one teaching unit, one term, their childhood and adolescence – improved with respect to subject-related knowledge, practical skills and general attitude.

Subject-related, in this context, means orientation along concepts of “Bildkompetenz” (picture/image competence) as the central competence art lessons convey. Here, one should resort to a rather broad understanding of the term “Bild”, preferably the definition that has dominated visual studies since the iconic turn in the 1990s, and which the “The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany” has also agreed on. (In the *Einheitlichen*

Prüfungsanforderungen (guidelines for exam expectations), “The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany” defines “image“ as a “a general concept that comprises two- and three-dimensional objects and artefacts as well as visually inscribed information and processes and situations of visual experience.” (KMK, *Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung Kunst*, Bonn 2005, p.4.) This approach unites diverse “visual constellations” as potential material: it covers the areas of art (that is: Fine Arts on the professional level), applied arts (architecture and design) as well as everyday aesthetics (ranging from folklore to youth culture aesthetics, and from interiors and furnishings to body performance). Such a framework of reference does not limit the user/observer to a specific selection of materials, but instead acts as a framework of meaningful possibilities.

Which materials are qualified as useful is determined through two perspectives: on the one hand, there is the empirical context and, on the other, there is the consensus-oriented discourse carried out by expert communities. The relevancy of empirical factors within the general framework is justified by the belief that specific approaches develop in specific regions: through traditions that are unique to these regions. In Switzerland, competences in the area of design (there is an independent discipline called “design education” and the subject is also taught at schools as an independent subject), and in Hungary, traditional handicrafts play an important role – these are, therefore, positions our general framework of reference needs to cover. This discourse allows for a structural understanding and organisation of the field, but also grants the possibility of excluding positions, which contradict generally accepted norms (such as human rights).

The framework thus defines a field of references on which expert communities can agree and which serves as a site of orientation for the national development of curricula, for higher education institutes where subject methodologies are researched, for the authors of textbooks or for independent art schools. It offers a map that helps individual actors, small units and bigger “tanks” to find their coordinates. The further development of such a general framework of orientation hides many practical and methodological challenges. Therefore, such an enterprise requires a close collaboration of concept developers and empirical researchers (who give the project the much needed academic backing). Work that has already been done in the fields of music and language education can pave the way for such a project. (For the teaching of languages, there is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which was developed in the 1990s: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre_en.asp. In the field of music education there is a project that follows a comparative approach: „meNET“: <http://menet.mdw.ac.at/menetsite/german/index.html> (the menu item

“Topics & Results“ leads to “Music Education”, “European Countries” and “Learning Outcomes”, all of which are important here).)

At this point, I would like to shortly return to the InSEA-congress in Cyprus. The project of establishing a “European Framework of Reference” that the Hungarian-German group proposed was received with great interest: new partners were won and an InSEA mandate was obtained. The following conference in Canterbury 2013 gave ENViL the chance to present further considerations in three panels. The work will go on and the next world conference in 2014 will be the platform for the presentation of first results.

Reference

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Appendix

Working on Curricula in Europe

A Comparison of two Regions (Hungary – Bavaria) with respect to Discussions about Competence-Oriented

(The structure used here is based on suggestions by Vera Uhl-Skrivanova.(Německo,Skřivanová,2011))

Table 1

	Hungary	Bavaria
Name of the Subject	Visual Education	Art
Time Budget	2 – 1 Lessons per Week / in Senior Classes Optional	2 – 1 Lessons per Week
Extent of curriculum for each form (in A-4 pages)	National curriculum 1-2 pages General guidelines 10-20 pages	1 page

Table 2

Conditions and Organisation of the Work on Curricula

	Hungary	Bavaria
Validity Period	New curricula released in 1995, 2003, 2012	Average validity 10 – 15 years, no stable rhythm
Legal and organizational consolidation of the curriculum within the educational system	The government releases a national curriculum, which underlies the curricula for the 7 diverse school types (these are equally released by the government)	Released by the ministry, differentiation for diverse school types (Germany: some states release core curricula whose contents are specified by individual schools.)
Responsible for establishing curricula	Commission of 7 experts (3 teachers and 4 teaching methodologists)	Curriculum commission (4 teachers) working at one of the state-institutes that appertains to the ministry
Guidelines issued by the ministry	The national curriculum underlies all decisions	Unity with respect to form and degree of competence orientation

Resources available for curriculum work	3 months, meetings once in 10 days, financial recognition of the work through an additional part-time contract at the ministry	2 years, 6 meetings per year, travel funds and reduced teaching hours for members of the commission
Support by higher education institutes	Direct involvement of university-based methodologists, in Hungary extensive research is done at the university level	No accompanying research, members have to resort to their own resources and to the research done by the Graduate School „Gestalten und Erkennen“.

Table 3
Curriculum and Teaching Staff

	Hungary	Bavaria
Education of teaching staff		Range covers untrained staff (at elementary schools) to teachers who were educated at art academies (secondary schools)
Support at implementation	Extended in-service training for teachers	In singular cases teachers get additional training/ communication at workshops for teachers and higher education institutes

Table 4
Conceptual Approach / Competence Orientation

	Hungary	Bavaria
Is there an orientation along concepts of competence (expert communities agree on)?	Competence orientation introduced in 2003/07	Yes (to a large extent)
How is competence conceptualised?	Interplay of individual action on three levels: knowledge - skill - attitude	Interplay of individual action on three levels: knowledge - skill - attitude
Dimensions of the subject-competence model	Reception and Production/ Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception - Imagination • Analysis – Interpretation – Evaluation • Production/ Design • Communication

Integration or separation of these dimensions?	Integrative understanding	All dimensions are taken as individual aspects of an integral education process
Emphasis on reception and production respectively	Proportion of both aspects changes according to age: in secondary school, reception skills become more important	Balanced (both aspects intertwine)
Metacognition taken into consideration?		Rudimentarily
Fields of reference/ teaching areas	Art(-history), incl. architecture, design, media	Art, architecture/design, everyday aesthetics – incl. performative aspects (see: KMK-definition „Bild“)
Consideration of teaching contents and material in the curricula?	Yes	Only partially obligatory, materials that are included rather serve as suggestions
List of artistic techniques, processes and methods that should be taught?	Yes	Partially, but again these are suggestions and not obligatory
Standards of Education/ general Competence model	Yes (in the general guidelines)	Yes
Central Exam?	In final exams as an elective	Only in the context of a central higher school leaving exam (Zentralabitur), for anyone else evaluation through individual teachers

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