

164 A Preliminary Assessment of a New Arts Education Programme in Dutch Secondary Schools

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Abstract

In The Netherlands a new compulsory programme, Arts and Cultural Education, has been implemented since 1998 in order to stimulate the cultural interest and the cultural activities of young people. Attending cultural activities is at the core of this programme and these activities should be of 'generally accepted quality'. A research project by Utrecht University describes and evaluates the introduction of this new programme. The results presented are based on questionnaires from 89 teachers, 1100 students between 14 and 17 years old. Analyses show that arts and cultural education students do participate more in traditional culture

(theatre, museum and classical concerts) than other secondary school students. However there are substantial differences in the opinions of teachers as to which kind of cultural activities should be permitted for the new programme. Results also indicate that the majority of teachers are quite liberal in accepting the choices of their students. About half of the cultural activities of the new programme fall into the category of popular cultural activities (cinema, pop-concerts, dj-/vj-events). Students who do not (or not yet) follow the arts and cultural education programme visit these activities to the same extent.

Context

As in many other European countries there has been a long tradition in Dutch secondary schools of organising student visits to concerts, theatres or exhibitions. In the 1950s there was no discussion about what cultural activities should be promoted, it was accepted that the cultural canon of classical music, traditional theatre and the established collections of visual art museums should form the content of school visits. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a growing uncertainty about what cultural activities to promote and as a consequence cultural activities in schools became more plural in character. The main goals were no longer cultural consumption (reproduction), but more instrumental goals such as personal growth and social awareness began to emerge. In the 1980s there was a tendency to return to the arts and their intrinsic values and new projects for cultural visits by students were initiated.

Often these visits had a noncommittal character. They were part of voluntary extra-curricular activities or they were only intended for students who had chosen an art subject in their examination programme. Furthermore, it often depended on the school policy or the enthusiasm of one or two teachers as to whether these cultural visits were organised on a regular basis. For the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, worried by decreasing cultural participation of younger generations, this was an unsatisfactory situation. Arts education is thought to be one of the important instruments to promote cultural participation. Studies into the effects of arts education programmes in primary and secondary education have confirmed that these programmes can stimulate cultural participation at a later age, even though arts socialisation in the parental family and the level of education are more important [1].

Several attempts have been made to intensify the contacts between school and the professional arts. This has been done by promoting cultural projects through extra subsidies and by strengthening the intermediary function between schools and arts organisations. In 1998, these

efforts entered a new phase with the introduction of the new arts education programme, CKV1, which required schools and their students to visit cultural institutions.

CKV1: Arts and Cultural Education 1

CKV1 is short for Arts and Cultural Education 1. The programme is part of a large-scale innovation in Dutch secondary education, built upon the principle of independent and individual study. CKV1 is one of the common core subjects, compulsory to all fourth and fifth grade students of the upper two levels of secondary education and will be introduced at the lowest level in the near future.

The general goal of the new arts education programme is that when students are confronted with a variety of cultural activities they learn to make motivated choices that are meaningful to them. The core of the programme is the participation in cultural activities: students should experience cultural forms, for example, by visiting an exhibition, a movie, a concert or a play or reading a book. Such cultural activities should be of 'generally recognised quality', but if possible also reflect the students' interests. To prepare students for their involvement with and choice of a particular cultural activity, the programme supplies them with background knowledge, not by a compulsion to rote learning art historical facts and figures, but by giving them an understanding of the interrelationships between different art disciplines by means of a thematic approach. Practical activities such as studio art or playing instruments form a very small part of the new programme. These activities are meant to support the preparation and 'digestion' of cultural activities, but they are not an end in themselves.

The new programme is rounded off with a school examination. By that time students should have visited at least six or ten (depending on the educational level) cultural activities. The examination is entitled the arts portfolio and it consists of reports of the cultural activities, reports of the thematic studies and the results of practical work. Once the portfolio is ready, the pupil gives his or

her views on choices, experiences and findings. This reflection takes the form of the pupil giving a presentation, preparing a report or providing a summary account for the supervising teacher.

The new Arts and Cultural Education programme is taught preferably by a team of teachers of different subjects, such as mother language, foreign languages, visual arts, music and drama. Every school has one or two teachers who co-ordinate the activities, provide information and maintain contacts with local arts organisations and cultural institutions. Within the boundaries of the examination programme, each school can determine the contents and organisation of the programme. From pilot projects it emerged that this new programme offers different practical organisational as well as teaching options for schools.

Research questions

The Dutch Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs commissioned a research project to assess the implementation of Arts and Cultural Education (CKV1). The first general research question was: How do schools and teachers give shape to the new programme with respect to its content and teaching on the one hand and its practical organisation on the other hand? Secondly the project examines to what extent the new programme serves its purpose, which is: does it change the attitudes and the cultural participation of youngsters? Further, does it do this over a short period (that is while taking or directly after the arts lessons) and/or over a longer time frame (that is after a year or more)? The Department of Sociology at Utrecht University, together with Cultuurnetwerk Nederland, the centre of national expertise for arts and cultural education in the Netherlands, is conducting the research project. The project will monitor the students until 2002. This preliminary assessment is based on an intermediate report [2] and the final report is planned for publication in 2003.

Research design and instrumentation

In the research project data has been collected at secondary schools over a period of three years from 1998 to 2001 (a final data collection is planned for Autumn 2002). The analyses presented are based on the data collection of Spring 2000 when we visited 67 secondary schools in 14 municipalities throughout in the Netherlands. The schools vary in their educational level, ranging from pre-vocational secondary education to preparatory university level.

At the schools both teachers and students were interviewed. The co-ordinator of the new arts education programme was interviewed mainly about the organisational aspects of the arts education programme. Almost all, (40 out of 42), co-ordinators participated in the interviews. Furthermore, all teachers of the arts subjects received a questionnaire and we received 89 replies representing a response rate of about 50 percent.

Last but not least, at each school three or four classes of students were selected for study for the research. During school time they filled in a questionnaire under the supervision of their teacher. Classes of students involved in the new programme and classes not involved were represented in the sample. This provided a control group in order to consider questions about the effects of the new arts programme.

At the two highest educational levels all fourth and fifth grade students in schools which introduced the programme in 1998 were submitted to the new arts education programme. Therefore, the control group consisted of fifth graders at schools who started the new programme in 1999, students in their third year of secondary education, who had not yet participated in the programme and students of the lower secondary school levels, who have not yet participated. We ended up with 1100 students from 106 classes of four educational levels and of three different grades. The students in these classes are between 14 and 17 years old. Table I shows the distribution of classes: both classes with the arts education programme and control classes.

Results

The research questions cover a wide range of issues, but in this article we limit ourselves to a few topics. First, we discuss to what extent teachers support the main ideas behind the new programme. As the cultural visits by students are the most important part of the new programme, we also present the different views of the teachers on the choice of cultural activities, as well as the actual choices made by the students. Secondly we discuss the results on cultural participation in the short term.

Opinions of teachers

A large majority of the teachers support the main objective of the new arts education programme and consider it important that their students have the opportunity to experience many different arts forms and disciplines. A large majority agree that the action-based aspect of experiencing cultural forms and activities is more important than conveying theoretical knowledge about art and culture. In fact in the lessons, arts concepts and styles are discussed to some extent, but these are not examined in any way.

In contrast to the arts subjects in lower grades of secondary education the practical activities of students are of minor importance. About one third of the teachers disagree with this and state that the practical activities should be the core of an arts education programme. These teachers fear an intellectualisation of the arts in secondary schools. The specialisation of teachers obviously plays a role here, 40 per cent of arts specialists believe that practical activities should be at the core of the programme, in contrast to only 20 per cent of language teachers who believe this.

'Generally accepted quality'

The cultural visits by the students are not meant to be limited to a series of compulsory pre-structured class visits under the direct control of a teacher. However, it is up to the school to decide what freedom the students actually have in selecting their activities and how they interpret

the requirement of a 'generally accepted quality' of cultural activities.

The results of the questionnaires indicated that class or group visits under control of the teachers take place in about thirty per cent of the visits. The other 70 per cent are visits by small groups, couples or individual students. Both teachers and students were asked about the student's freedom to choose cultural activities. From these sources it became clear that only a small minority of schools gave students no choice at all. The other extreme, of students deciding for themselves without any consultation occurs in a minority of schools (about 20 per cent). In most schools (about 60 per cent) the students can choose themselves but first have to consult with their teachers.

In these consultations several factors play a role. What matters first of all is the opinion of the teacher concerning acceptable quality. We will discuss this in more detail shortly. Other factors concern the range and variety of cultural activities with which a student engages (so a student can for example combine 'rap' music with Shakespeare) and whether the student is able to justify his or her choice. Lastly, the level of cultural experience of a particular student plays a role. Some teachers for whom all activities are acceptable said that it all depends on how the activity is reported and reflected upon. In their opinion a good report or criticism can justify any choice.

We asked what kind of cultural activities were acceptable for the new programme considering the demand of 'generally accepted quality' of these activities. A large majority of teachers (69 per cent) agree that one should accept all activities offered by a theatre, a concert hall or a museum. On the other hand only 28 per cent agree that activities should be restricted to these official institutions and that for example activities in community centres should not be allowed. A majority of the teachers (58 per cent) state that activities should be 'live' and should not be media presentations (television, CD, video etc.). About 29 per cent were of the opinion that all forms of

popular culture (e.g. croon songs, soaps operas and comic books) should be acceptable. Almost a quarter felt that only activities by professional artists are acceptable, so no amateur arts should be included.

To make these general criteria more specific the teachers were presented with a number of possible cultural activities and were asked; (a) if they were accepted unconditionally; (b) if they were not acceptable at all; or, (c) if it depended on other factors, such as the ones just mentioned (for instance the total range of visits by a pupil). Table II shows the results.

Many forms of youth culture (e.g., rap or pop) or mass culture are considered acceptable for the new programme provided they are live activities. Television programmes and CDs (including classical music) are rejected, because teachers want their students to experience the actual performances. Most teachers consider some activities like a fashion show or a DJ show dubious. Also movies create a lot of discussion, for some teachers only films shown in the art cinema are acceptable, but not the regular Hollywood movies. Others state that there are many Hollywood films that have become classics and that they belong to our cultural heritage.

Cultural participation of students

As stated previously, the students have to participate in six to ten cultural activities, depending on the level of education. What kind of activities do they choose? It appears that the large majority (77 per cent) of the students select film as at least one of their cultural activities for Arts and Cultural Education. Museums and theatre also form part of the cultural activities of more than half of the arts students. On the other hand attendance at classical concerts is quite low, with only 12 per cent of students attending. The question is: do students of the new arts education programme participate in cultural activities more than their schoolmates who are not follow this programme? And does it hold for both high culture and popular culture? Students were asked how often they

attended different cultural activities during the last year (see Table III).

A distinction was made between high culture on the one hand (top panel) and popular culture (bottom panel) on the other. High or traditional culture is represented by museums, theatre, cabaret, ballet, and classical concerts; popular culture is represented for example by cinema, pop-concerts or DJ or video events. This distinction is not absolute but is the result of a factor analysis in which cultural activities tended to cluster in these two groups. It should be noted that the table shows the patterns of responses of all students, whether they are studying the new arts education programme or not.

In order to find out about the effects on cultural participation we wanted to compare the students following the new arts programme with other secondary school students. We statistically controlled a number of other characteristics to make sure that a difference between both groups is not caused by any kind of selection effect such as age, gender, level of education and cultural participation of parents (see Table IV).

Analyses show that arts and cultural education students do indeed participate more in high culture than other secondary school students. However they do not participate more in popular culture than their schoolmates. As we saw before, students generally do select some forms of popular culture, especially movies, as one or two of their arts and cultural education activities. About half of the cultural activities of the new programme fall into the category of popular cultural activities. This means that the students involved use to some extent their every day cultural behaviour – especially going to movies – for this new school subject. Among the control variables the cultural consumption of the parents turns out to be most important. Students of 'culturally active' families participate more in high culture. This outcome is in line with previous research. Female students and students of the higher educational levels also show a greater interest in high culture. The effects of these vari-

ables are however relatively small compared to the effect of the parental participation in the arts.

Complexity of cultural participation

Arts and Culture Education (CKV1) students more often visit the theatre or a museum. But it is also interesting to know whether these students make other choices when attending a play, a movie or visit a museum compared with their fellow students who are not studying this new arts education programme. In the case of film, it may be that arts students, although visiting with the same frequency, do pick other movies than their schoolmates. They may attend more films shown in art cinemas in comparison to the Hollywood films. More generally, the question is: does the new arts education programme lead to a more complex choice of cultural activities? Whether art is experienced as pleasurable or rewarding to a large extent depends on how much it challenges people. It is claimed that more challenging art is preferred by those with more artistic training, for this training will add to knowledge to successfully solve the 'problem' the artwork poses [3].

Students were asked to mention the last movie, performance or museum they attended. Eight experts judged the complexity of these cultural events. Their judgements vary on a scale from one – least complex: no background knowledge required – to seven – most complex: requires a strong mental effort. The agreement between the judgements of the experts was satisfactory: the correlation of the complexity judgements varied between 0.65 (theatre performances), 0.84 (museums) and 0.92 (films).

Further analyses show that there is no difference between arts and cultural education students and other secondary school students concerning the complexity of the last attended movie. This suggests that the programme does not lead to a more complex choice of movies. Because film is frequently chosen as one of the programme's compulsory activities, this can be interpreted as a disappointing result for the

programme. However, concerning performing arts and museum visits there is a difference between art students and other secondary school students. The arts students choose more complex theatre and music performances and visit more complex museum displays and art exhibitions.

Attitude towards art and culture

The effect on the frequency and the complexity of cultural activities may be said to be somewhat trivial, as cultural consumption forms part of the programme. Students are required to attend cultural activities. At this stage, it is probably more informative to study the attitude of secondary school students towards the arts. Do students think more positively of arts and culture?

We presented the students with a number of positive and negative statements on arts and culture. The analyses show no difference between students who follow the new programme and their fellow students in their attitude towards art. Secondary school students who tend to hold the more positive attitude towards art are girls, students with parents who participate in cultural activities, students of the higher educational levels, and of the higher grades, and children of immigrant worker origin.

Conclusion

The new compulsory programme Arts and Cultural Education was implemented in 1998 in order to stimulate the cultural interest and the cultural activities of Dutch youth. Attendance at cultural activities is at the core of this programme and these activities should be of 'generally accepted quality'. This term is interpreted variably as the research shows that there are substantial differences in the opinions of teachers about which cultural activities are permitted for the new programme. Results also indicate that the majority of teachers are quite liberal in accepting the choices of their students. In many schools the range of acceptable activities is by no means restricted to the traditional canon of art, as was

the case in arts education in the 1950s. A new arts education programme that strictly prescribes activities that fit in the traditional cultural canon and aims at acquiring facts and figures on cultural literacy by rote learning, as for example Hirsch [4] propagated, is hardly feasible in present Dutch secondary education. It would be opposed to the general approach of teaching in the arts, which values the active role of learners and adapts and adjusts learning activities on the basis of evolving needs and interests.

This does not mean that the discussion on the new programme is closed. Several authors think that the programme is taught in an overly permissive way [5]. Our results show that about half of the cultural activities of the new programme fall into the category of popular cultural activities. Students who do not follow the arts and cultural education programme visit these activities to the same extent, and when we considered film we also conclude there is no difference in the kind of films students of the new arts education programme and their schoolmates visit. So one may ask what the educational gains of this new subject might be in this respect? Obviously it should be the student's reflections on the visits: the analyses and criticisms the student makes and the class discussions that result from them. However, not only is there disagreement among teachers about what cultural activities are allowed, there is still uncertainty about the criteria with which to judge the reports and criticisms of the students.

Future analyses of our data will show what effects on the frequency and complexity of cultural participation remain when students have left school and whether different approaches by teachers lead to different effects on their students. These outcomes can help to shape this new arts education programme further.

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Table 1
Distribution of school classes in the sample (N=106)

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grade	pre vocational (vmbo)	senior general (havo)	pre university (vwo)
3	25	3	7
4		35	19
5			17

Note: Control groups are shades

Table 2
Extent to which examples of cultural activities are acceptable for teachers (N=86)

	% yes	% depends	% no
A pop concert in a concert hall	74	26	–
A rap performance in a concert hall	68	30	2
A concert by André Rieu (music for a million violinist)	65	29	6
A pop concert in a community centre	32	58	10
A fashion show	17	63	20
A DJ – or VJ event	19	45	36
A James Bond movie	17	50	33
Graffiti on the walls in the street	12	49	39
The opera Carman on CD	7	25	68
Video clips on TMF or MTV	2	23	68
A soap opera on the television	2	18	80

Table 3

Cultural consumption of secondary school students (N=1100)

How often in a year do you attend...?

(percentages)	0x	1x	2x	4x	12x
High Culture					
Classical concert	91	4	4	1	1
Ballet	91	6	2	1	0
Cabaret	82	13	5	0	0
Theatre	68	18	13	2	0
Museum	41	27	25	6	1
Popular culture					
Youth events	68	23	9	1	1
DJ – VJ event	54	9	16	12	9
Pop concert	54	22	18	5	1
Cinema	5	9	26	48	12

Table 4

Participation in high culture and popular culture (N=1100)

Standard regression coefficients (T – values)

	Participation in High Culture		Participation in Popular Culture	
Class submitted to new arts programme	.165	(5.6)	.36	(n.s)
Level of secondary education	.141	(3.9)	-.61	(n.s)
Culture track in secondary education	.061	(2.1)	.024	(n.s)
Grade	.028	(n.s)	-.039	(n.s)
Age	.017	(n.s)	.125	(3.0)
Ethnic minority	-.038	(n.s)	-.019	(n.s)
Parental cultural participation	.375	(13.5)	.204	(6.4)
Female	.098	(3.7)	.010	(n.s)
Size of residence	-.026	(n.s)	.046	(n.s)
Adjust R-square	27.7%		5.0%	

Note: not significant (T < 1.7)