



Speech given by Jan Jaap Knol during the opening of the symposium

Teacher and Artist training, competences and qualifications for education in art and heritage.

Amsterdam, 25 March 2010

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

On behalf of the Dutch delegation, I am delighted to welcome you to Amsterdam! Over the coming days, under the guidance of Rolf Witte we will discuss the competences and qualifications required by teachers and artists for education in art and heritage.

Each time we meet, I am once again reminded that we are part of an extraordinary process. However different they may be, every EU country is keen to enhance the synergy between education and culture to promote the cultural and creative development of young generations.

I would like to begin by presenting three propositions for your inspiration and consideration.

Proposition 1. Cultural education at schools should be taught in a structured way

The OMC process illustrates the increasing importance given to cultural education in Europe. After elementary skills such as literacy and numeracy, cultural education should be an integral part of young people's education. It is vital to the artistic and personal development of every individual. It improves interpersonal relationships and helps forge communities. And it literally gives children access: to taking part in cultural activities and to cultural capital. Cultural education is quite frequently spoken of in such lofty terms. One of the greatest challenges that faces policy is not to leave it at that. We must communicate the content of what we are trying to accomplish in explicit terms.

Let's take a look at America. The writer E.D. Hirsch, author of the book *Cultural Literacy*, published in 1987, opens his controversial book with the words: "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."

And later, continues: "That children from poor and illiterate homes tend to remain poor and illiterate is an unacceptable failure of schools, one which has occurred not because our teachers are inept but chiefly because they are compelled to teach a fragmented curriculum based on false educational theories."

Hirsch's book is a passionate argument for the importance of shared cultural knowledge; he ends his plea with a long list: 'what literate Americans know'. It is a heterogeneous list of writers, famous artworks, proverbs, and ideas from the natural sciences. Hirsch's interpretation of cultural literacy is so broad as to be, in effect, synonymous with general development: the elementary knowledge required for forming an opinion on all kinds of subjects, and for fluid social interaction. When we talk of cultural education, are we actually referring to a cultural dictionary of this kind? A knowledge-based approach can certainly be contested. But, without embracing the ideas Hirsch advocates, I nevertheless share his criticism that cultural education is far too fragmented. Individual projects can be extremely beneficial, even tremendous, additions to the education programme. But if that programme itself has not been designed as a targeted, cumulative learning process, we are doing

students a serious injustice. In which regard I am delighted that our first keynote speaker later today is Professor Barend van Heusden of the University of Groningen. He is heading an important major study into the development of an ongoing curriculum in cultural education.

Proposition 2. : Fun isn't enough

Oddly enough, the lofty terms used to describe cultural education are often coupled with the idea that culture for children has to be 'fun', first and foremost. Well... 'fun' is just one aspect. Far more basic – mindful of Kant's Kritik der Urteilskraft – are the potentialities art gives us to shape our views of the world with sensitivity and imagination. And if art irritates it could have an even more instructive content: simply overcoming the aggravation art inspires and getting to grips with it is a crucial step forward. Culture does of course afford a great deal of pleasures and is often a lot of 'fun': as relaxation, as recreation. Many schools and after-school clubs run activities that give children a fun, enjoyable way of experiencing culture. But the proviso 'fun' does not give children sufficient scope for their capacities for learning and self expression. It is crucial to offer cultural education in a way that piques children's curiosity and eagerness to learn. Allowing them the space they need for their own way of experiencing, perceiving and processing – in short, for active cultural participation – is all to the good. The new media offer great new opportunities for this. But rather than the word 'fun', I would use the terms "inspiring, open and provocative" for good cultural education. Are the poems children write simply 'fun' or is poetry a language they can use to articulate their feelings, perceptions and experiences? And if theatre is only fun, how come successive, new generations contemplate the depth of meaning of Hamlet's words:

*What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action like an angel! In apprehension like a god! The beauty of this world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?*

Proposition 3. Cultural education thrives when teachers and artists work together

Over the next few days, we will be bringing the worlds of education and culture together. The first day will be devoted to education, and day two will focus on the cultural perspective. In practice, they will work in tandem. But it would be a mistake to consider teachers and artists as mutually interchangeable. Artists are first and foremost artists. Their primary distinction is their direct contact with the material their art is made of: paint, words, clay or something else. Where in an average education process the student is often 'forced' to look at reality a certain way, artists-in-training – if all goes well – are constantly challenged to take a creative, associative approach to the world, and to translate this in their art. A good teacher also has many of such an artist's traits. But is primarily responsible for ensuring a structured education

programme. Unlike the artist – if all goes well – he has been trained to supervise students and encourage them to develop their aptitudes and reflective judgement skills.

Together, the teacher and the artist have a lot to offer the student. Three preconditions are, however, essential.

Firstly: Both must be sure that the school board and government policy encourage their collaboration.

Secondly: the students must be given continuity. Which doesn't mean that they are constantly working with the same artist; probably quite the opposite. But continuity in the sense that the collaboration is embedded within a programme.

And thirdly: it is crucial to understand that creativity is not simply instrumental in achieving some economic or profit-oriented goal or other, however realistic and important that may be. To quote Flemish cultural philosopher Johan Sanctorum: cultural perception is pre-eminently problematic, awkward, private, sometimes ugly, anti-social, alienating – a bumpy quest for identity and, preferably, not for prefabricated 'icons'. It is in precisely such an approach that artists can demonstrate their value to education.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we are the guests of the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture. Located in an early 17th century complex of buildings from where, originally, the well-to-do used to distribute bread, butter, cheese and peat to the poor. And tomorrow we will be in another beautiful old building: Felix Meritis also founded by affluent city fathers. True to the spirit of the Enlightenment, this society was dedicated to promoting the arts and sciences. Schumann and Brahms were among the renowned musicians who played in the famous concert hall there in the 19th century.

In our hectic 21st century, it is tempting to look back nostalgically at what might appear to have been less tumultuous times. When the extremely wealthy helped the extremely poor. Or when man's faith in knowledge and reason was unbounded.

Grand ideologies and their accompanying social connections are on the wane. The impact of digitalisation and commerce is immense. Globalisation, migration and technological innovations are forcing our societies to change at breakneck speed. In many of our countries, there is a widening gap between citizens of the world who see the advantages of globalisation, and those who feel it is threatening their identity, their safety and the cohesion of their communities.

In trying to strike a balance between a sense of belonging on the one hand and the struggle to reap the rewards of today's boundless potential on the other, many people are also aware of this gap within themselves. These issues are perhaps too numerous and too immense for our symposium.

Nonetheless I am convinced that cultural education can help. Culture is and shall remain an excellent medium for *stories* that inspire and connect people. Culture is and shall remain the place where feeling and imagination give people wings. This is nothing new. Quite the reverse. Quintillian already touched upon it in ancient antiquity, writing: *The love of literature and the value of reading do not cease when one leaves school, but when one dies.*

Thank you for listening; I wish you an enjoyable, fruitful conference.