

Liora Bresler
Editor

International Handbook of Research in Arts Education

Part 1



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International Handbook of Research in Arts Education

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INTRODUCTION

Liora Bresler

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.” At the institutional tertiary level, the disciplines of music, visual art, dance, and drama and the various disciplines of arts education are often housed within one college. This location has intellectual and political ramifications. The umbrella of “arts education,” for example, proved to be a powerful tool in forming the arts component in the National and State Standards in the United States. In working on Goals 2000, the arts education organizations – National Art Education Association, Music Education National Conference, the American Alliance for Theater and Education, and the National Dance Association came together to forge a common vision and coordinate shared goals. At the artistic level, we are increasingly witnessing the generation of innovative artwork with mixed forms of representation, where the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic combine to create new types of art.

This development has not transformed the arts disciplines. The individual disciplines have maintained their distinctive identities, organizations, traditions, and areas of practice and scholarship. What this reframing and its institutional, curricular, and artistic structures generate is a productive tension between the individual arts disciplines and the larger arena that is referred to as “arts” and “arts education.” This productive tension creates interest in learning about existing practice and research in the various arts education communities to explore ways that they can cross-fertilize each other.

Intensified cross-fertilization is part of a larger characteristic of the twenty-first century, manifested in both artistic and intellectual spheres: the *softening of boundaries* (Detels, 1999) between what used to be solid concepts and domains. Softer boundaries allow *border crossing* (Giroux, 1992). Within the individual arts disciplines, crossing borders is manifested in the juxtaposition of artistic genres and styles. For example, performance centers traditionally dedicated to classical music now host what used to be “music untouchables” (Nettl, 1995) – music typically played in night clubs. Similarly, leading classical musicians such as Yo Yo Ma, Nigel Kennedy, and

Daniel Barenboim cross musical genres to perform folk and indigenous musics of various cultures, as well as popular music and rock.

Crossing boundaries is evident in our conceptualization of knowledge and its reorganizations into new disciplines. I regard the concept of discipline as an open-ended one, much like the concept of art (Weitz, 1956). In order to exist, it needs boundaries. At the same time, to maintain its vibrancy and cutting-edge quality, it needs to be able to extend these boundaries, to venture into new territories. Cross-fertilization is manifested at the university level with the emergence of hybrid disciplines, such as biophysics, molecular biology, computational neuroscience, social psychology, and psychological economics. What does this mean for the interaction of the disciplines of arts education with other disciplines?

Crossing borders is not a new phenomenon for arts education. In the past, arts educators reached out to other scholarly disciplines, initially to legitimize and strengthen their position in the school curriculum. A familiar example from the United States was in the “post-Sputnik” era of the late 1950s and 1960s, when the heightened attention to science and mathematics prompted all school disciplines to articulate rationales in order to justify their existence. Music and art educators realized that they, too, needed an explicit, solid basis for their subject to secure its place in public schooling. In this endeavor, the discipline of philosophy provided arguments articulating a broad educational role for the arts, highlighting cognitive aspects and connecting them intimately to what has traditionally been regarded as the essence of art: affect (e.g., Broudy, 1958, 1972; Langer, 1957). In establishing cognition as fundamental for the arts, psychology, too, provided useful support (e.g., Arnheim, 1966, 1974; Meyer, 1956; for more recent empirical psychological research on the cognitive merits of the arts, see Rauscher, Shaw, & Ky, 1993; Rauscher et al., 1997). If the flow of ideas and findings from philosophy and psychology was generated by policy and a need for advocacy, it ended up affecting the conceptualization and practice of arts education. For example, the philosophical area of aesthetics shaped the curriculum movement of Discipline Based Arts Education, as did the discipline of art history (Dobbs, 1998; Greer, 1984; MacGregor, 1997).

The change of research climate as part of the post-modern paradigm has also affected research in arts education. In the 1980s and 1990s, we note a framing of the arts within broad sociocultural ideas and contexts (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1986; Wenger, 1998) in ways that further expanded the theory and practice of the arts. Anthropological and sociological perspectives view the arts as reflecting a society and what it values (e.g., Geertz, 1976; Small, 1998), serving as social and political tools; such lenses draw attention to the communal and spiritual roles in diverse cultures (e.g., Ajayi, 1996; Blacking, 1995; Nzewi, 1978/9; Yanagi, 1989). Examinations of other cultures serve to “make the strange familiar,” and at the same time, can “make the familiar strange,” helping us discern implicit value systems in our own cultures.

The handbook is based on this dialectic of familiar and strange, autonomous disciplines and soft boundaries. It is grounded in the distinct traditions and areas of scholarship within a specific arts discipline, but with a view to outlining connections and common principles, where individual chapters are placed within a larger perspective. The handbook does not propose to blur the distinctions among the various disciplines of arts education. Rather, it aims to cultivate an awareness among the various arts

education communities about compelling, relevant literatures in their “sister” disciplines, and to foster communication and dialogue among these communities in order to enrich knowledge and informed practice. To this end, most individual chapters focus on one subject (e.g., music education, dance education), while seeking to draw connections and communicate with readers *across* the various arts education disciplines. These connections are highlighted by the organization of chapters within sections.

To summarize, this handbook aims at two related functions. On one level, the handbook is expected to be a distillation of knowledge in the respective disciplines of dance, drama, literature, music, and visual arts education, with inclusion, when relevant, of media. It is meant to be a standard volume that synthesizes an existing scholarship, helping define and shape the past and present, and point to the future of that discipline. In that respect, its purpose is to address, interpret and organize a field of research within arts education, mapping theoretical and practical directions, and providing conceptual definition to an area of inquiry. More than an object, the power of this handbook is in the *processes* it sets in motion, its generative momentum, its ability to frame significant themes, juxtapose interpretations, launch new directions, and propel people to pursue innovative directions. Its second function is based on the assumption that communication among the arts disciplines will advance each of them individually and facilitate cross-fertilization.

Accordingly, in searching for topics and scholars, I aimed at a balance among the arts disciplines. I was cautious about overreliance on the perspectives of the two arts disciplines with longer traditions and wider practice – music and visual arts education, and underrepresentation of dance and drama. I found the inclusion of poetry and literature to be generative in that it provides additional important lenses to conceptualize the arts disciplines. Literature and poetry, though often not included in the institutional and political “Arts” umbrella, share with the arts a deep aesthetic tradition and rich scholarship, as well as aesthetic goals, contents, and pedagogies.

In addition to the individual arts education frameworks, the chapters are informed by diverse theoretical frameworks. These include aesthetics, anthropology, cultural psychology, cultural studies, critical theory, sociology, and curriculum theories, among others, illustrating the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary educational thinking and research.

Another principle that shaped the contents and structure of the handbook is its commitment to international perspectives. Indeed, the scholarship outside the mainstreams of academia in North America, England and Australia is significant and compelling. International literature is reported by some 50 International Advisory Board members from six continents and 35 countries. Serving as windows or appetizers (depending on one’s view and relationship to scholarship) to diverse cultural contexts, these commentaries, placed at the end of the chapters, include summaries of research and scholarship in some 20 languages.

Existing as an underlying assumption, more understated but not least important is the commitment to the living presence of art. All of us, in the various disciplines of arts education, have come to be where we are out of love of the arts. While research can at times seem distant from the experience of art, this handbook aspires, through loosely structured interludes, to maintain connection with artistic experiences.

In terms of organization, the handbook is organized into 13 sections, each centering on a key area in arts education research. Preludes, written by the Section Editors, introduce the theme of the section, providing context and conceptual frameworks. The individual chapters typically address cross-cultural research related to the central theme of the section from the perspectives of the particular art discipline (i.e., music, visual art, dance, drama, literature, and on occasion, media). Interludes provide reflective, often expressive and poetic meditations on the theme.

In the spirit of soft boundaries, issues and themes could belong to more than one section. For example, informal learning, while it exists as a section of its own, is clearly ever-present, in the strictest of formal setting as well as in the more laissez-faire settings of cultural centers. Creativity underlies all human endeavors, as do the body, social issues, and technology in its broadest sense. And each of these themes has a history, often a rich one. Specific themes, such as metaphor, for example, were identified in various sections (in this case, in composition, appreciation, informal learning, and the body). These recurrent themes operate much like a sonata with its separate movements but shared motifs.

The “planned handbook” provided a solid model for the “operational handbook.” But in the process of becoming the organic body that it is, as all processes do, it assumed a life of its own. Part of the work of this editor involved facilitating exchange of drafts between authors, both within as well as across sections; this helped authors stay aware of what others were doing. In that sense, the handbook is a huge mosaic with striking themes and emerging patterns. It is, of course people who construct themes, play with boundaries, and do the unexpected. Bob Stake, for example, who initially opted to write for the evaluation section, became caught up by Maxine Greene’s interlude on Appreciation and wrote his own interlude as a response to hers, crossing from one section to another. Another example of the handbook’s emergent process occurred after two authors in two independent sections who did not know each other read each other’s preliminary drafts; Julian Sefton-Green and Lissa Soep then chose to merge their chapters. Initial chapters by Monica Prendergast and Carl Leggo’s, as well as Rishma Dunlop’s, assumed the form and style of poetic interludes.

As important as what is in a handbook is what is not included, the *null*. One early decision was to leave out explicit discussion of research methodologies and methodological issues, too vast and complex to be treated with the dignity and the thoroughness they deserve. Other key areas that are not included are teacher education and policy.

Every project is embedded within a concrete set of circumstances. This book started as an invitation over breakfast during a conference of the American Education Research Association, following my editorship of a book series on arts education. That invitation, from what was then Kluwer Publishing (now Springer) resonated with my interest in having the various communities of arts education gather around a set of issues and a joint mission. My own history involved crossing intellectual as well as geographical borders. In my earlier role as a musician, my thesis in musicology observed how history and ideology shaped artistic styles: while focusing on music, I also noted similar patterns in the visual arts, literature, dance and drama (Bresler, 1982, 1985). Crossing geographical borders when moving to the United States was equally formative in alerting me to the power of multiple cultural perspectives in facilitating perceptions and

interpretations (Bresler, 2002). The excitement of creating this space for the various communities of arts education was directly related to my own crossings which I found to be immensely enriching journeys.

Acknowledgments

Handbooks are, by nature, collaborative work. This particular handbook involved many hundreds of people. It was, to draw on the common adage, raised by a whole village, one that, in its scope, felt as big as a city, but (miraculously) was able to maintain the closeness and caring of a smaller community.

The role of section editors – Gordon Cox, Sue Stinson, Regina Murphy, Magne Espeland, Sarah McCarthey, Margaret Barrett, Beau Vallance, Minette Mans, Tina Thompson, Doug Risner, Tracie Costantino, Pam Burnard, Kim Powell, Peter Webster, and Rita Irwin, cannot be overly emphasized. This project would not be possible without them. Grounded within various arts disciplines – music, visual art, literature, and dance – and different countries, including the United States, Canada, England, Australia, Namibia, Ireland, and Norway, they were deeply wise, thoughtful, and hard working. Generous beyond the call of duty, they showed an impressive ability to care about larger ideas as well as great attention to detail (and there were lots of both!). I could not have imagined better, kinder and wiser companions along this fascinating road.

This book, a collage of more than 100 pieces, was created by 116 authors, leading scholars in the disciplines of arts education. Mostly North Americans, British, and Australians, this group too encompassed diverse countries, from the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and Denmark, to Nigeria, Cyprus, Israel and Japan. Clearly, this handbook is based on their knowledge, wisdom, and commitment to the field and to this project. Another crucial yet invisible group is the reviewers. Each chapter was reviewed by at least four (including section editor and editor) people, often more. These reviewers, listed at the front of the handbook, undertook the important task of providing informed, thorough feedback.

A handbook of Arts Education cannot be complete without art. I am deeply indebted to Jana Mason, an acknowledged and inspiring visual artist with a deep commitment to education. Previously a prominent scholar in educational psychology, Jana has worked diligently and artistically to create images for the sections.

Tracie Costantino and Su-Jeong Wee did an outstanding job of helping with central aspects of editorial and management work. Gabriel Rusinek, provided a generous, highly skilled proof reading and invaluable feedback at the very last stage. Their dedication and great attention to detail, as well as sound advice and wisdom in various aspects of this project is greatly appreciated.

I could not wish for better teammates at the publishing house – initially Michel Lokhorst, then Harmen van Paradijs. Harmen's work through the various stages of the manuscript was exemplary – prompt, judicious, ever attentive, always insightful, combining attention to detail with deep understanding of the bigger picture. In her position as Editorial Director of Social Issues, Myriam Poort was gracious as she was wise, helping in difficult moments to negotiate between the ideals of scholarship and the aim

of wide accessibility and commercial interests. Bernadette Deelen provided the needed technical support. Marianna Pascale manifested extraordinary skills and dedication to this project, proving to be thorough, thoughtful, and gracious even at situations that would have been overwhelming for any other person. John Normansell, from the production end, worked tirelessly and with impressive commitment, late nights and weekends, to create the final version of this work.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this handbook to all those that inspired me in the various domains of life, artistically and intellectually. These include my teachers, friends, colleagues, students, children, and foremost, my husband – Yoram.

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Section 1

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