

## **‘MEDIA EDUCATION IN EUROPE’ CONFERENCE**

**BELFAST**

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### **MEDIA EDUCATION: IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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I should say from the outset that I am not an expert or specialist in media education. I am not familiar with much of the literature in your field. The research into arts education that I have been involved in has only occasionally addressed learning in the area of media education. Consequently, I would be grateful if you, as a community of eminent specialists, will forgive any misunderstandings on my part. These result from my comparative naivety.

Through this morning’s presentation, I want to make the case for research and evaluation in the field of media education to focus more directly on investigating the effects and outcomes for learners of media education.

But what do I mean by effects and outcomes for learners? In general terms, I mean ‘what do learners take away from the experience of education?’ Effects and outcomes for learners might include a number of broad generic categories that could result from education in any subject in the curriculum. These would include:

- The acquisition of new subject knowledge, understanding and skills
- Shifts in values
- Changes in attitudes
- Changes in behaviour
- An emotional response like enjoyment in the learning process

- Improved motivation to learn and improved behaviour
- The transfer of any positive effects and outcomes to other areas of learning

I am not suggesting that all programmes of education produce, or intend to produce, all of these outcomes. I simply list these to illustrate, in broad terms, what could be included under the concept ‘outcomes’ or ‘effects’ in education.

Clearly, it will be important for studies to continue to examine the nature of media education provision and its pedagogical processes. However, without greater attention to the impact on learners of that provision, the potential influence and authority of the research is likely to be restricted. In particular, evidence of effects and outcomes can be a powerful tool to inform education policy makers.

I would therefore like to illustrate how recent approaches to research into arts education in the UK have focussed on effects and outcomes and how this approach could also be applied to media education – with the promise of some considerable benefits.

Undoubtedly, the existence of several competing definitions of what comprises media education challenges and complicates any research aims in this area. The picture may be even more complex when seen from a European rather than single country perspective, with the possible increase in the range of approaches to media education. However, media education is not unique in this respect – it would seem, for example, that there are still several contrasting versions of drama and even music being taught in English secondary schools. **Even if a number of different interpretations of media education are included in any programme of research into media education, the mere diversity of codes of practice should not in itself be an insurmountable obstacle to the rigour of the evaluation.** I am suggesting that the kinds of effects and outcomes that I have enumerated above are generic and can be explored in the context of all forms of media education, whether or not they are intended or prioritised outcomes – educational outcomes do not always relate directly to educational aims.

What then is the case for a greater emphasis on effects and outcomes in research into media education? There would seem to be several justifications for increased attention to effects and three may be highlighted here.

Firstly, the status of media education in the curriculum could be advanced on the grounds that it delivers specific contributions to pupils' learning over and above other subjects and disciplines. If this is the case, there is a pressing need to identify and provide empirical evidence for what may be distinctive about the learning outcomes that media education may generate. Or does media education simply duplicate outcomes achieved by other subjects? If so, does it offer an alternative, and for some perhaps a more appealing route to outcomes similar to those achieved elsewhere in the curriculum? Or does it achieve a wholly different set of outcomes that other curriculum areas find hard to produce? The answers to such questions could usefully inform the rationale for building and developing media education in the school curriculum.

Secondly, a research programme that investigated outcomes would yield valuable data enabling intra-discipline comparisons. In other words, the learning outcomes of the different versions of media education could be contrasted. For example, what pattern of effects would result from a skills-based practitioner teaching the production of moving images or digital media? How would this compare to those resulting from a teaching programme that focused on 'television literacy' or a cultural studies analysis of media organisations?

Thirdly, more robust and rigorous evidence of effects is the first step to examining effective teaching and learning practices. How can one recognise what constitutes effective teaching and learning in media education without having adequate data on outcomes? I would suggest that without some evidence of effects and outcomes, any judgement of the value of media education is based on connoisseurship and ideological debate. The availability of evidence on impact would allow analyses of the relationship between pedagogy and context on the one hand, and outcomes on the other. The

implications for policy and practice of the results of such research could then be provided at the teacher, departmental, school/college or national level.

If such arguments for a closer focus on outcomes are accepted, we need to move on to the question of how can valid and reliable data on effects and impact be garnered. By what means and methodologies could a more outcomes-oriented approach to researching media education be progressed? In theory, a number of options are available for consideration:

- evaluation of outcomes by the creation and administration of objective tests (e.g. psychometrics);
- examination results and teacher assessments;
- assessment of completed products and artefacts (e.g. film and video output);
- triangulated perceptions through qualitative or quantitative data (e.g. from learners, teachers, artists, significant others and researcher observations)

All of these present problems and all have their limitations. Take tests, for example: many of the possible effects on learners from engagement with media education are not amenable to testing. Also, the amount of tests that would be required to adequately reflect both the curriculum content of media education programmes, as well as the wide array of possible outcomes make this option prohibitively impractical.

Examinations and assessments serve a very different function than research and evaluation. Examinations and assessments only measure a small proportion of the potential range of learning outcomes generated by arts-based activities. Examinations and assessments are themselves part of the learning process and they too need to be evaluated as contributors to (or detractors from) learning outcomes. Therefore examinations and teacher assessment cannot themselves be regarded as sufficient evidence of learning outcomes.

Attempting to gauge outcomes from the products fashioned by participants is fraught with problems. From our experience, it entails unacceptably high levels of subjective interpretation by the researcher. Discussing the products with the pupils or students who created them often tends to engender a discourse concerning what is intended rather than one that centres on impact and outcomes. Also, doing this as part of the data collection for the research can be unhelpful as it tends to concentrate on the product as the key element of the programme at the expense of encouraging reflection on the impact of the entire educative process.

Ruling out the first three options leaves us contemplating the fourth: the self-reported perceptions of learners, corroborated wherever possible by accounts from teachers, artists and significant others through a process of triangulation. In other words, the perceptions of a range of informed parties can be compared to ascertain the specific outcomes from a learning process. This is in fact the method that we have used and developed in our research into arts education over the last ten years, though we readily acknowledge that the approach has its limitations. These drawbacks include:

- the risks to validity in using the method with younger children. (To what extent are they conscious of, and able to express, what they have derived from the learning process?),
- the scope for pupils' responses to be predicated by researchers or teachers. (When questioning pupils, can we avoid putting words into their mouths?),
- the possibility that all participants, including the learners, might fail to recognise salient learning outcomes, while other effects are collectively distorted or inflated. (We collectively ignore what we weren't looking for, while exaggerating the importance of what we wanted to be achieved.)
- and finally the probability that the method favours the most articulate learners and those with a propensity for self-reflection (thus distorting our understanding of what the cohort of learners as a whole derived from the experience).

Nevertheless, in spite of these challenges, we believe that this approach, especially when accompanied by strategies to reduce the risk of these drawbacks, is the most feasible and that it promises the best chance of collecting valid data on learning effects and outcomes.

I would now like to illustrate our use of this method and point to its possible relevance to the field of media education. I would like to draw on the results of a research project that we completed 3½ years ago and reported under the title *Arts Education in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness*. Incidentally, in so doing, I will present some previously unpublished analyses and data from this study.

The main aim of the study was to investigate the range of outcomes attributable to arts education in secondary schools. It also sought to investigate the hypothesis that engagement in the arts can boost general academic performance. The research consisted of four different strands of data collection, including a questionnaire-based survey of pupils and schools, and a large data set of end-of-year test and examination results from approximately 27,000 pupils. But it is the results from the case study component of the research that I want to focus on today. These case studies were conducted in five secondary schools, all with good reputations in the arts. The data collection exercises included annual interviews with two cohorts of pupils (approximately 79 pupils in total each year). These pupils were performing well in the arts and we tracked them for three years. We also interviewed school managers and arts teachers, as well as observing arts lessons, often by videoing them. Unfortunately, none of the five schools offered a significant component of arts-related media education to allow them to be studied in the same way.

I referred earlier to a range of generic learning outcomes that one might expect to identify as resulting from any area of the curriculum. I'd now like to share with you the outcomes that we identified in this research as having derived specifically from arts education experiences.

Outcomes relating to the learning of art form technical skills and knowledge were by far the most frequent effect type mentioned by pupils (see Table 1). Outcomes in the personal and social domain were also frequently cited (e.g. enhanced self-esteem, self-confidence, social skills, especially those required for effective teamwork). Next came a block of three broad types of outcome: enjoyment and fulfilment; transfer effects; and communication and expressive skills. The least cited outcomes related to developments in creativity and the social and cultural domain – the two areas emphasised in *All our Futures*, a report from a national enquiry into the role of creativity and cultural education in the English schools’ curriculum.

**Table 1 Frequency of effects (broad categories) as nominated by pupils**

<b>Broad categories of effect</b>	<b>N</b>
Arts knowledge and skills	1177
Personal and social development	736
Intrinsic immediate effects: enjoyment and therapy	371
Extrinsic transfer effects	363
Communication and expressive skills	356
Creativity and thinking skills	199
Knowledge in the social and cultural domains	98
<i>The top category is made up of:</i>	
<i>Technical skills</i>	<i>871</i>
<i>Knowledge, understanding and appreciation</i>	<i>306</i>

Source: Harland *et al.*,(2000).

But of more immediate interest here is how these results broke down by the individual art forms. A key finding of particular relevance to our present concern with the distinctiveness of subject’s contributions was that each of the main art forms generated distinctive effects. For example, dance offered increased awareness of the body and movement; art promoted expressive skills; drama nurtured empathy and the valuing of others; and music extended active listening skills. Thus, it was concluded that, to achieve the full canon of effects from the arts, pupils require exposure to each of the individual art forms. To illustrate such findings, here is a comparison between the most and least frequently nominated effects for drama and the visual arts (see Table 2).

**Table 2 Comparison of most and least cited effects (broad categories) for drama and visual arts as nominated by pupils**

	<b>Drama</b>	<b>Visual arts</b>
Most	technical skills social skills self-confidence awareness/ valuing of others enjoyment expressive skills	technical skills enjoyment expressive skills art form knowledge, critical appreciation creativity transfer to work/ careers
Least	awareness of surroundings art itself interpretive skills knowledge in cultural domain	interactive communication skills thinking and problem-solving skills social and moral awareness language/speech development

Source: Harland *et al.*,(2000).

Some sense of the distinctive contributions of these subjects begins to surface and interesting differences become apparent. Social outcomes figure prominently for drama, but not at all for the visual arts. Instead, the visual arts register high scores for art form knowledge and critical appreciation, creativity and transfer to work/ careers. All three of these are absent from the drama column. Media education in the form of practitioner-producer shares affinities with both drama and the visual arts. It is pertinent to ask whether this particular type of media education would generate effects similar to drama (e.g. social outcomes from the group-oriented activities involved in film production). Or would its effects be more akin to the visual arts, for example creativity associated with, say, film editing roles or enhanced art form understanding through enriched knowledge of media languages and representations).

Let us look at another comparison by contrasting the degree to which specific effects were achieved by different art forms in two broad categories: cultural education (see Table 3) and creativity development (see Table 4). The tables show the approximate proportion of references to each of the specific effects.

**Table 3 Art forms and cultural education**

	<b>Visual arts</b>	<b>Drama</b>	<b>Dance</b>	<b>Music</b>
Knowledge in cultural domain	High	Some/low	Some	Some/low
Awareness of surroundings	High	Low/some	Low	Low
Social and moral issues	Low	High	Low	Low

Source: Harland *et al.*,(2000).

Look at the contrasting positions of the outcome ‘increased awareness of social and moral issues’ in the visual arts and drama. Its high profile in drama is perhaps not surprising in view of that subject’s use of social and moral debates as a basis for improvisations. Its low ranking in the visual arts is somewhat unexpected given the extent to which social and moral issues are explored by visual artists in most genres. Again, it is intriguing to speculate whether media education – in each of its various guises – would resemble drama or the visual arts in this respect. Of course, comparable research into the outcomes that might derive from media education is the only way to move beyond speculation.

This may raise some interesting questions. The type of learning outcomes may depend on the type of media education that you espouse. But will your choice of media education type be informed by the type of outcomes that you seek? Or will your choice be driven by other considerations?

How does the development of creativity compare across the different art forms? This next table again reveals some significant differences.

**Table 4 Art forms and creativity development**

	<b>Visual arts</b>	<b>Drama</b>	<b>Dance</b>	<b>Music</b>
Thinking/ problem solving skills	Low	Some	Low	Some
Creativity/ experimentation	High	Low/some	Some	Low/some
Imagination	High	High	High	Low

Source: Harland *et al.*,(2000).

The broad category of creativity development included three sub-categories: lateral thinking and problem-solving skills at a general level; creativity as experimentation and inventiveness in the making process; creativity as a capacity for imagination. **Relative to the visual arts, the low level of creativity in the making process in drama, as well as the other art forms, is striking.** A number of explanations have been posited to account for this. One leading contender among these is the view that the comparatively high degree of creativity as experimentation in the visual arts is largely due to the intensity of individual inventiveness. In drama the higher level of group work may dissipate any individual experience of creativity – you don’t experience creativity as an individual and may not recognise the collective creativity. Another explanation has pointed to the more ephemeral nature of the products in drama compared to the visual arts – it stays on the canvas, so I can see what I’ve created. Both these explanations, however, would seem to raise corresponding questions for media education.

Earlier, I suggested that one reason for advocating a research approach that focused on outcomes was that it facilitated explorations of how different effects might be associated with different versions of media education. . A final reference to the *Effects and Effectiveness* study can be used to illustrate this potential. The following table displays the frequencies of a selection of learning outcomes nominated for drama in each of the five case study schools (see Table 5). School A, for example, described how its drama

courses were informed by a particular approach to drama teaching developed by Dorothy Heathcote. This centred on a philosophy, which led to activities drawing on explorations of tensions to be found in social situations and emotional states. As a reflection of this, the school attracted the highest number of nominations for developments in understanding social issues, one's own and other's feelings. However, it scored the lowest for enjoyment. In contrast, School C's drama provision accentuated improvisation techniques and its strength in terms of outcomes were to be found in improvisation skills, teamwork and language development. Obviously, more cases would be needed to establish clear associations between different versions of a subject and their attendant patterns of effect. But these data do at least signal the kind of comparative analyses that could be possible if the samples studied were extended. Most importantly, such analyses could be very informative to teacher trainers and their students in so far as they could identify what the 'pay-offs' or learning outcomes are derived from the competing definitions of a curriculum area.

These analyses also start to shed light upon the relationship between outcomes and pedagogic practices – the third justification for a more outcomes-based approach. In this respect, the schools and departments that participated in the study found the results a helpful tool in aiding their reflections on their approaches to teaching and learning in these subjects.

**The next table shows the wide variation between schools in reporting specific effects.**

How is it that drama teaching in school A produced much greater effects concerning understanding social issues and other people's feelings, while school D seemed to produce more in self-expression and enjoyment? Both were teaching drama, but presumably with very different pedagogical approaches.

**Table 5 Selection of effects by school: drama**

Effect	School				
	A	B	C	D	E
Understanding social issues	14	2	5	6	0
Helps understand other's feelings	13	9	9	6	9
Helps understand own feelings	4	2	3	2	1
Improvisation skills	1	2	15	4	10
Teamwork	4	7	11	11	9
Language development	5	1	10	2	0
Communication of ideas	1	3	5	6	0
Expressing yourself	6	7	5	10	7
Enjoyment/buzz	9	12	13	20	12

Since completing this study, we have conducted another three-year project which has researched the impact of arts programmes on children and young people between the ages of 4 and 18. As a major part of the Arts Council of England's *Arts and Education Interface*, this latest study examines the effects of 15 arts interventions organised in two urban areas in England. Most of the interventions included multiple phases, so around 40 different examples of artist-based 'projects' have been studied. A few of these could well be categorised as media education projects – involving making a radio programme, a film and tarntablism. Unfortunately, however, there were insufficient cases of such projects to allow the researchers to reach any general findings about 'media education' projects in the way that we could, for example, about music or drama projects.

Whilst I am not in a position to be able to relay any of the findings of this latest study – the draft of the final report has not yet been submitted to the sponsors – I can say that the new project has allowed us to develop and improve the methods used to evidence and examine learning outcomes. For example, in the earlier study (*Effects and Effectiveness*), as you can see, we used simple 'vote' counts to gauge the frequency with which different outcomes were cited. In the latest study, these basic frequencies have been combined with ratings of the strength of impact to give a more valid and accurate portrayal of both

the level and degree of outcomes experienced. In the earlier study, our perspective on learning outcomes tended to be rather static. In the latest project, more attention has been given to analysing the potential for dynamic and developmental progress in the acquisition of learning outcomes. How do outcomes develop over time? A notion of ‘outcome routes’, for example, has been employed to investigate whether and how one learning outcome might progress to another. Similarly, the study also includes pre- and post- shifts in attitudes and considers whether learning has been sustained through different phases.

To sum up, I hope the two studies I have described could be of benefit to you perhaps in two main ways. Firstly, it may well be that our methodological experiences in trying to gain some empirical purchase on learning outcomes could contribute to your deliberations on the future directions of research and evaluation in the field of media education. Secondly, I would hope that if similar investigations were to be conducted in this area, our two main studies into arts education would provide you with a pool of comparative data to contrast with the outcomes achieved by media education programmes. This would seem to be important since realistically, it is likely that looking across different research projects is probably the only way we will be able to explore the question of the distinctive contributions from different subject areas.