

Tuesday 15 June - The French Institute

SESSION 1: Visual Arts and Cross Curricular Approaches to Education – Chair: Clive Gray (De Montfort University)

Transcription of Henri de Rohan Csermak's presentation

Henri de Rohan Csermak (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale) -
Making "Arts Histories" a compulsory subject in the French curriculum, a very new development.

Focus: Making arts history a cultural subject- a few practical details on the way we tried to enhance the cross curricular activities and especially this new subject art history in our system.

It is very interesting for me to see that we had the same changes here in France. This new teaching art history was trusted to old teachers and to old subjects and I have to emphasise it is the first year of this new teaching. We try first to teach teachers because we know it's new for them and it's not a matter of changing habits, it's a matter of turning their knowledge, their abilities and habits to this new approach of art. So first, teach teachers.

Secondly, there is a responsibility for teachers and for all of us to update their knowledge. Unfortunately once many teachers finish their examination and education, they kind of stop learning themselves. To be a teacher is to learn throughout life. A third point, we are trying to develop resources and mainly resources online. The minister of culture has developed a wonderful tool, by collecting resources all over the country, working with all kinds of cultural structures, museums, structures for performing arts etc. It's constituting an important reference/ a database for teachers to know what is close to them, what they can visit, where they can bring their students to and also to have documentary knowledge.

Trust all teachers but also trust them and enhance the sense of responsibility towards the work of art and the relation between the students and art history.

Partnership: everyone knows how divided things are in France. The administrations are very famous for the red tape. It is very interesting to see a new beginning for new partnerships. Usually there was already a culture for partnership. From the beginning of the 90's to 2005/6 there was lots of money and everyone was encouraged to form partnerships. It was in many ways a big success and we're very proud of this. Now it's time also to organise partnership and it is important to tell that not everything is art history because you could see everybody rushing into this new teaching and anything that was already done could be only labelled art history. We tried to organise partnerships and discuss the contents of the resources. It's also the beginning of a new reflection on the scale of partnership: local, regional and national level. It's also a new way of thinking because France is still a very centralised country. It's kind of new to think at different scales of territory.

We talked a lot about museums and university, and it's very interesting to see that every teacher has been trained in university and then this lynch between academic organisation and secondary school is lost. Maybe that would be the main challenge, to

restore a three partnership between education, culture and academic studies- that's a real challenge in France.

Third point: examination. The main level to bring teachers to do something is to say that students will be evaluated at national level. We have two national exams: Diplôme National de Brevet (at the end of secondary school) and the Baccalaureate (at the end of High School). Art History won't be for next few years compulsory for the Baccalaureate- maybe something will be done, it has been announced, but at the moment it's still optional. On the other hand at Diplôme National de Brevet it will be compulsory for every student. It drives us to define what we expect/ are the requirements for the students at this point. It won't be a test from memory, it wouldn't be only a test for knowledge, it won't be a do you recognise the Mona Lisa, but it will aim to test the reaction towards any work of art. The capacity to analyze, a capacity to react in a clever and enlightened way to a work of art of any art, music or visual arts, a capacity to relate this work of art or various work of art one another, to a style, to a historical context, and a capacity to connect works of art to one another with different artistic languages. That's both very modest and very ambitious and we have to remember that those students are only 14 or 15 years old. We hope that we can also get students to draw connections between their artistic practice and their artistic knowledge but the new thing is that the aim is no longer the practice. The practice is the practice. There is also a new aim as looking at the work of art for the benefit of looking and knowing the work of art. There is no doubt that this will enrich the practice.