Drama op school. De invoering van een nieuw vak in het Nederlandse voortgezet onderwijs

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Summary

Chapter 1
Introduction and presentation of central question

Drama is one of the school subjects recently introduced into Dutch secondary school examinations. Nevertheless its status as a regular curriculum item is still questioned. The answer to that question cannot be given without a prior examination of characteristics of any school subject as such. A survey of existing theories leads to the following six categories:
1. A school subject pertains to a defined area of expert knowledge, in most cases derived from scientific disciplines as thought in universities;
2. furthermore it disposes of a technical language of its own;
3. specific educational goals, related to general pedagogic ones;
4. teaching matter, selected according to these goals, interpreted for the benefit of specific target groups and arranged into a curriculum;
5. a method of assessment of the teaching process;
6. and means for selection in view of further schooling.

The formal decision to include a subject into a school curriculum offers no guarantee for its actual establishment. Goodson investigated the struggle around the introduction of Environmental Studies in England, during the sixties and seventies. Allowing for the need of continuing research he discerns a pattern in the process of any discipline (area of knowledge) becoming a school subject.¹

1. Initially a subject is a very loose amalgamation of subgroups and even idiosyncratic versions, often focussed on pedagogic and utilitarian concerns.
2. A subgroup emerges arguing for the subject to become an academic discipline so as to be able to claim resources and status.
3. At the point of conflict between earlier sub-groups and the proselytizing

¹ Numbering is mine. H.C.
`academic` subgroup, a subject association is often formed.

4. The association increasingly acts to unify sub-groups into a *dominant coalition* promoting academic status.

5. The dominant coalition calls for discipline status and for university departments to be set up to train its disciplinary specialists.

6. Some subjects (for example, rural/environmental studies) are blocked at this point (university admissions policies play a role here).

7. For the successful subjects a final stage is the creation of a university discipline base. The subject is now defined increasingly by university scholars.

Judging the development of Drama as a school subject in English secondary education one must conclude that, though officially recognized in 1951, it did not attain acceptance de facto. It is not included as one of the compulsory subjects in the Education Reform Act of 1988. There still exists no association of interest groups (proposals of fusion of two organizations, National Drama and National Association for the Teaching of Drama, came to nothing in 1989). Drama seems to have stuck in phase three of Goodson’s development scheme.

Concerning social factors relevant to the emergence of a new discipline a model is offered by Ben-David and Collins.

For a new subject or discipline:

1. the ideas necessary for creation are usually available over a relatively prolonged period of time and in several places;

2. only a few of these potential beginnings lead to further growth;

3. such growth occurs where and when persons become interested in the new idea, not only as an intellectual content but also as a potential means of establishing a new intellectual identity and particularly a new occupational role.

They argue that conditions under which interest, as defined under 3, may be awakened, can be identified and used as a starting point for an eventually predictive theory. A description of the development of Drama in Dutch secondary education might offer some corroboration to their theory.

The present study concerns the following main questions:

1. Why does Drama, though in straight connection with (secondary) education for centuries, only with difficulty attain some recognition as a school subject?

2. What factors do count in the development of Drama as a school subject?

3. Can Drama justifiably aspire to the status of a school subject?

4. Are developments in regard to the implementation of Drama as a school
subject exceptional or common?
5. Is in regard to school education the distinction between Arts and other school subjects relevant?

Chapter 2
The history of a controversial school subject

Only with great difficulty Drama recently attained the status of a regular school subject. Counteractive were:
- scarce social acceptance;
- notwithstanding support for school theatre since the 16th century, resistance on moral grounds from ecclesiastical authorities, both catholic and protestant;
- resistance from Music, Arts and Physical Education teachers, afraid that their position, also with difficulty attained, might be infringed – government cutbacks on education during the seventies and eighties, causing reduction or even elimination of non-compulsory subjects like Drama;
- scarce interest from the Ministry of Education for art activities in school.

In addition to that there existed much vagueness on the issue of what Drama means. Drama teachers could not agree on content and goals of their discipline. For a long time there was not even consensus regarding the question whether Drama could or should be a regular school subject. The Drama teacher was de facto a therapist, a worker in socio-cultural or professional training, or a student councillor, specialised in Drama techniques.

The educational innovations during the eighties and nineties gave an impulse to redirecting Drama towards participation in the standard curriculum. A new compulsory school subject had been introduced, CKV (Education in Culture and Arts) consisting of combined different art subjects, Drama included. The implementation by government measures (e.g. various teachers, from Latin to Ballet, count as qualified) tends to reduce this to phase one of Goodson’s model. The absence of a State examination completes the picture of an amalgam.

Chapter 3
Area of knowledge

For a long time Drama had to do with vagueness about its area of knowledge. According to the interpretation that Drama counted as a way of
learning, a didactical method and so placed it within the area of General Didactics, interchangeable with other methods.

In consequence of this vagueness no technical language came into development. The discipline still has several appellations.

This uncertain existence of Drama was enforced by its fulfilling diverse organisational functions: regular school subject not included in final examinations, teaching method in use for other school subjects, extracurricular subject or technique, incorporated within school programs or otherwise. Consequently Drama in education remained an amalgam of small subgroups or even purely individual beliefs.

When goals were defined for Drama, interpreted as a set of teaching methods, they were not unlike the characteristics of any other regular school subject - correlated with general pedagogic goals, but identical with them. This flaw lead to non-identifiability and became a hindrance for well defined curriculum planning. Some progress was made, though, in construction of learning models.

Drama sometimes is equated with play. This is questionable. Huizinga's elaborate definition of play contains only one really distinguishing element. Play is different from non-play being "a free action, consciously 'not meant' and outside of daily life." This is, in the definition of the area of knowledge sought for, an element, but only that. The equation Drama = play is too narrowing. It also leads to confusion with other disciplines (sports, for instance).

The area of knowledge of Drama as a school subject will be found within the realm of theatrical arts and will be based upon expert knowledge as taught in Art schools, mostly practical, an university Drama departments, mostly theoretical. This is at difference with the situation of most traditional school subjects, based only on university disciplines.

From the expert knowledge of Drama a new model in the form of a staging scheme is proposed as an addition to well known models organised by items, tables and schemes.

Chapter 4

A school subject

The Dutch Advisory Council on Government Policy has formulated four criteria for any field of knowledge feasible as a school subject: acceptance within society, usefulness in view of general educational goals, and in view
of further professional training, and finally, validity as a specific goal within school education.

This last criterion must be qualified as a circular reasoning of no use. Otherwise Drama fulfills the other three criteria. First, theatrical arts, from which the area of knowledge for Drama should be derived, constitute a common and generally accepted phenomenon in modern society. Secondly, the theatrical model, used as an analytical instrument, facilitates reflection on social functioning, and theatre techniques can be useful in view of desirable social behaviour.

Thirdly Drama offers a meaningful introduction to several professional studies, and also contributes to the attainment of such a general cultural and artistic inside as considered desirable within the academic world.

I propose a web for the realm of Drama that displays many fields of learning which together constitute a pluriform area of knowledge, from which a political and subject-oriented choice can be derived in view of the specification of a curriculum.

The analysis of core objectives and final attainment targets clarifies that the actual choice leads, on the one hand, to limitation - no World, but Western Culture - and otherwise to widening. General Theory of Arts, complementing Theory of Theatre Art. Drama, pertaining to this field of learning, proves that it can be considered as one of the art subjects.

The proposed web offers an arrangement for the analysis of main goals and final attainment goals, adaptable to political choices for educational contents.

Analysis of examination syllabuses, by practical, academic and pedagogical goals, shows a substantial emphasis on academic goals within high school education, versus more pedagogical and practical ones in primary and comprehensive schools.

Contrary to Goodson’s hypotheses the impulse toward this development did not come from basis professional groups, but was enforced by politicians, instigated by university authorities.

Chapter 5
Curricula

The demand for measuring learning effects led a century ago or so, to a quantitative interpretation of learning. Art subjects were supposed to aim for qualitative educational goals, which therefore could not and should not be tested.

For Drama as late as in the seventies still only general pedagogical goals
were stipulated, furthermore not specifically for school education, but for all the fields where it was of use. Teachers active within secondary schools increasingly felt the need for explicit teaching goals in view of an assessable curriculum.

Individual teachers in diverse schools developed their own curricula much in the same way. Firstly, they worked without structuring at overcoming fear of play and acquiring pleasure therein. Later on they developed programs which allowed for personal options of students. Finally the insight grew that this freedom of choice was largely fictional, as students had few insight in subject matters, which left them largely dependant on their teacher. This led to the demand for a well structured curriculum, which should also focus on skills.

The case of the final examination programs CKV (Education in Culture and Arts) 2&3 for highest pre-university classes proves that the aforementioned criterion three for validity of school subjects (see Ch. 1) needs to be restated: specific educational goals imposed partly by society, as represented by politics, partly related to general pedagogic goals.

During the seventies already the approach of Drama fulfilled three out of the four criteria, several years later formulated by the Advisory Council on Government Policy.

Drama even had a specific goal within school education, like other art subjects, being seen as a counterweight to the mass of other so-called academic subjects, an idea which in short time evaporated. The concretising of two other criteria, namely preparation for social functioning and cultural transfer, often did not concur with aspirations of the powers-to-be. The criterion of preparation for professional schooling was not met. Whether other school subjects did fulfil that task is a matter of doubt.

Chapter 6
Assessment of learning effects

A.D. de Groot suggested in 1974 the development of a learner report, meant as an instrument to enable the student to clarify anything he had learned, in such a way that relevant learning effects are lost from sight. In his opinion quantitative educational measurement is inadequate as an evaluation of valid educational goals.

Earlier research on the usefulness of the learner reports was done by quantification. This led to ignoring some meaningful students' observations. I did an experiment on my own with learner reports whereby mentioned learning effects were catalogued in a qualitative way. One result was that
students do not distinguish learning effects within the sphere of the subject area and those pertaining to the enlargement on self-knowledge, neither those within the cognitive and affective areas. This last observation affirmed De Groot’s opinion that ‘all important so-called attitudinal and affective (or emotional) objectives are largely cognitive in nature’.

Some researchers prejudicially denied any testing validity to the learner report, for children ‘may tell little lies and fairy tales’. An analysis of four different evaluation methods, effectuated within the frame of a case-study of Dutch (as native language) in the first class of secondary schools (students 12 years old) showed however learner reports indicating by far the most expected learning effects. 80%, compared to observations by external reporters. 65%, written examinations, 30%, and a meagre 20% for the teacher’s home-made tests, on which he based their term results.

Recently developed Drama tests, focussed on skills, seem to be useful. These consist in experts’ consensus appraisals of practical assignments. A qualitative assessment, practical and more objective, could be found in the review model, based on elements of the existing tests and the teacher’s expertise.

Chapter 7
Conclusions

1. Answers to central questions

1. Far into the 20th century most school management as well as Drama teachers themselves did not consider Drama a fully fledged school subject. Only fairly recently Drama were allotted not only instrumental assignments but also specific professional ones.

The slight interest displayed by the Ministry of Education for Drama within school made the extracurricular area, which, on the other hand, got attention of the Ministry of Culture, a more attractive field of activity for Drama teachers.

Other Art disciplines, functioning as compulsory school subjects, with low standing though, had in times of budget cuts to fight for their own status and considered the introduction of new subjects of Drama and Dance a threat.

The substance of Drama was insufficiently clear. Identification of Drama with play gave way to associations with Physical Education. The connection with theatre gave offence to protestant circles. Only recently theatre has met general acceptance in society.
2. In practice introduction of Drama as a school subject depended on the well known fortuitous coincidence of the right person on the right moment in the right job. Only one element wrong led to negative results and was counterproductive generally.

3. Drama can aspire to the status of a regular school subject on several counts:
   - There is a specific area of knowledge, based on theatre expert knowledge.
   - There is a technical language, in development: the staging scheme proposed in this study is a contribution thereto.
   - Specific Drama goals have been defined, in relation to general pedagogic ones.
   - A Drama curriculum has been specified according to these premises.
   - Drama learning effects can be assessed as well, or as badly, as those of other subjects.
   - Drama’s possible contribution to selection in view of professional or academic schooling is not called upon, like that of other Art subjects, and not only those.

4. Developments of Drama, and of the other Art subjects, do not differ substantially from the pattern sketched by Goodson for other disciplines.

5. Furthermore this study leads to the conclusion that there is no relevant difference between Art subjects and other ones within the sphere of school education. Art subjects fulfil the criteria generally accepted for any school subjects. Other differentiating aspects signalised in this study pertain to social acceptance, the source of professional knowledge, and technical facilities.
   As regards usefulness of Art versus other subjects no difference was ascertained.

2. Relevance of cited models

The ways Drama developed as a school subject in England and the Netherlands were comparably in accordance to Goodson’s model. By comparison the same applies to the development of the newly introduced subject ‘Home Economics – Health Care’.

Contrary to Goodson’s suggestion developments are not linear. Particularly what he calls the end-phase is not always attainable (Drama in the Netherlands) and not necessarily the last stage of development (Drama in
England). Economics, on the other hand, a successful subject right from the beginning, enjoyed academic prestige many years before it was introduced in secondary education.

The development of new school subjects is not linear, but rather like a web with nodes, the stages Goodson signalised. Only then a subject will gain a strong position when all nodes have been connected.

For Drama one condition counted for eliciting interest in something new: the converging of several affirmative elements at critical moments. This is an insufficient base for a prognostic theory as aspired to by Ben-David and Collins.

3. Postscript

It is too early to speak of a successful end-phase for Drama and other Art subjects. At least the following requirements must be stipulated.

1. The theoretical foundation needs strengthening. This calls for research funding. An experiment in co-operation of professional Arts schools and cognate university disciplines could mean a useful start.
2. Research is required into the effectiveness of current curricula. Important hereby is the attention to the role of students.
3. Techniques of examination and assessment need being researched. Experiments with the Review model will be useful.