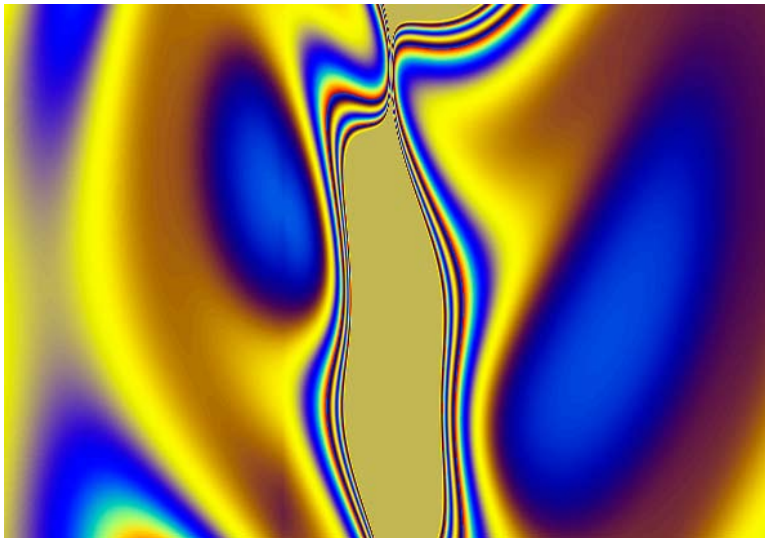


Unspoken Truths

About aesthetics in Swedish schools



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ISSN: 1402-1757

ISRN: LTU-LIC--07/24--SE

NR: 2007:24

Front cover picture generated by the phrase “unspoken truths” by use of the software TEXTIMG (<http://www.soban-art.com/download.asp>)

English Abstract

Unspoken Truths – about aesthetics in Swedish compulsory schools

Unspoken truths – about aesthetics in Swedish compulsory schools is a licentiate level thesis which investigates aesthetics in the Swedish compulsory school. The aim of the thesis is to recreate aesthetics as expressed in current curricula as well as in teachers' reflections. This is being done by use of a combination of interviews of teachers and studies of theories and curricular texts. Theoretically the study is based in John Dewey's pragmatist heritage supported by theories from Wittgenstein's theories concerning text, critical discourse analysis method and Bourdieu's theories about art and society.

The results show that the term aesthetics, which is frequently used in both juridical documents as well as in daily speech, is being used in a variety of ways. The word aesthetics is being used in thirteen out of the 23 syllabuses for the Swedish compulsory schools as well as in the general curriculum (Lp094). The first part of the study consisted of an investigation of syllabuses and the curriculum. Eight different meanings of aesthetics were identified: Aesthetics as a tool for value and judgment, aesthetics as a skill, aesthetics as experience, aesthetics as a way of expressing oneself, aesthetics as a certain kind of knowledge, aesthetics as a secondary tool for learning other skills/subjects, aesthetics as a way to describe a subject and aesthetics as existentialistic value for human beings. The conclusion was that curriculum and syllabuses provided little guidance for teachers regarding how to interpret aesthetics. Consequently the next phase became an investigation into how teachers reflect upon aesthetics.

In the second part of the study teachers were interviewed about aesthetics in school, both in a group and individually. Six teachers from six different subjects and three different schools were interviewed. To open up for the teachers own reflections, a fairly inductive group interview was performed. This was later complemented by individual interviews. The interviews showed that the teachers wanted to work more aesthetically. They expressed frustration over the fact that it was difficult to apply teaching methods to facilitate aesthetics. Despite this they were not able to define aesthetics. However they were eager to discuss and reflect upon different aspect of aesthetics in school and when the material is seen as a whole, they actually show a versatile understanding of aesthetics as being a constantly changing phenomenon which is fundamental for human existence.

The thesis ends with speculations regarding consequences of this study. A way forwards is to see learning as communication and change from a view of language to a multimodal and multiliterate view of communication.

Swedish Abstract

Osagda sanningar – om estetik i svensk skola.

Osagda sanningar – om estetik i svensk skola är en sammanläggningsuppsats på licentiatnivå som fokuserar begreppet estetik i den svenska skolan. Syftet med uppsatsen är att återskapa estetikbegreppet så som det används i aktuella styrdokument och av lärare. Detta görs med hjälp av en kombination av teoristudier, läroplans- och kursplanstudier och intervjuer med lärare individuellt och i grupp. Studiens teoretiska grund är förankrat i pragmatismen i arvet efter John Dewey med stöd från teorier från Wittgensteins tankar om text, kritisk diskursanalytisk metod och Bourdieus teorier om konst och samhälle.

Studien visar att estetikbegreppet, som används flitigt i såväl styrdokument som i vardagligt tal i skolan, har en varierande innebörd. Ordet estetik finns med i 13 av de 23 kursplanerna för grundskolan samt i läroplanen (Lp094) vilket kan verka mycket. I den första delen av studien utfördes en läroplans- och kursplananalys och hela åtta olika innebörder av ordet estetik visade sig i texterna: estetik som redskap för värderingar, estetik som färdighet, estetik som upplevelse, estetik som uttrycksmedel, estetik som en form av kunskap, estetik som redskap för inläring av andra ämnen/färdigheter, estetik som benämning på ett ämne och estetik som existentiellt värde för människan. Konklusionen var att styrdokumentet gav lite styrning och stor frihet för läraren i tolkningen av ordets innebörd. En logisk uppföljning var därför att undersöka hur lärare ser på estetik.

Den andra delen av studien blev därför en intervjuundersökning av lärares reflektioner över estetik i skolan. Sex lärare från sex olika ämnen och tre olika skolor blev intervjuade. För att öppna för lärarnas egna reflektioner i grupp, genomfördes först en gruppintervju i induktiv anda. Därefter kompletterades detta med individuella intervjuer. Intervjuerna visade att lärarna önskade att arbeta mer estetiskt. De uttryckte frustration över att det var svårt att använda undervisningsmetoder som tillvaratar det estetiska. De definierar inte heller innebörden av estetik. Trots detta var lärarna ivriga att reflektera över olika perspektiv på estetik i skolan och i materialet som helhet visar de en förståelse av estetik som ett dynamiskt, ständigt föränderligt fenomen som är fundamentalt för människans existens.

Uppsatsen avslutas med att spekulera kring konsekvenser av dessa studier och drar linjer mellan studien och teorier och filosofi kring språk och lärande. En väg som pekas ut är att se på lärande som kommunikation och ändra synen på språk till ett multiliterat och multimodalt synsätt där alla uttrycksmedel ses som lika viktiga och kompletterande för elevernas liv.

Norwegian abstract

Usagte sannheter – om estetikk i svensk skole.

Usagte sannheter – om estetikk i svensk skole er en licentiatavhandling som fokuserer på begrepet estetikk i svensk grunnskole. Målet med avhandlingen er å gjenskape estetikkbegrepet slik det brukes i aktuelle styringsdokumenter og blant noen ungdomsskolelærere. For å oppnå dette brukes en kombinasjon av teorigstudier, læreplan og kursplansstudier samt intervjuer med lærere individuelt og i gruppe. Studiens teoretiske fundament er grunnlagt i pragmatismens arv etter John Dewey støttet av Wittgensteins tanker om tekst, kritisk diskursanalytisk metode og Bourdieus teorier om kunst og samfunn.

Studien viser at estetikkbegrepet som brukes flittig i både styringsdokument og i hverdagspråket i skolen har en stor variasjon i meningsinnhold. Ordet estetikk er med i 13 av de 23 kursplanene for grunnskolen samt i læreplanen (Lp094) hvilket kan virke mye. Den første delen av studien besto av en læreplan- og kursplansanalyse og hele 8 ulike betydninger av ordet estetikk viste seg i tekstene: Estetikk som redskap for vurderinger, estetikk som ferdighet, estetikk som opplevelse, estetikk som uttrykkmiddel, estetikk som en form for kunnskap, estetikk som redskap for innlæring av andre fag/ferdigheter, estetikk som benevnelse på ett fag, og estetikk som eksistensiell verdi for mennesker. Konklusjonen var at styringsdokumentene ga lite styring og stor frihet for læreren i tolkningen av hva estetikk betyr. En logisk oppfølging ble derfor å undersøke hvordan lærere ser på estetikk.

Den andre delen av studien ble derfor en intervjustudie av læreres refleksjoner over estetikk i skolen. Seks lærere fra seks ulike fag og tre ulike skoler ble intervjuet. For å åpne for lærernes egne refleksjoner i gruppe, ble først et induktivt inspirert gruppeintervju gjennomført. Deretter ble dette komplettert med individuelle intervjuer. Intervjuene viste at lærerne ønsket å arbeide mer estetisk. De uttrykte frustrasjon over at det var vanskelig å finne undervisningsmetoder som ivaretar det estetiske. De hadde vanskelig for å definere hva estetikk innebar. Til tross for dette var lærerne ivrige etter å reflektere over forskjellige perspektiv på estetikk i skolen og materialet som helhet viser at lærerne har en forståelse av estetikk som et dynamisk, stadig foranderlig fenomen som er fundamentalt i menneskers eksistens.

Avhandlingen avsluttes med å spekulere omkring konsekvenser av studien og ser linjer mellom studien og teorier og filosofi om språk og læring. En vei som pekes ut er å se på læring som kommunikasjon og å endre synet på språk fra verbalspråk til et multiliterat og multimodalt syn der alle uttrykksmidler sees på som like viktige og kompletterende for elevers liv.

Preface

“Music is the language of us all!” The whole family sings along. Seven Scandinavians joined in Australian music. The car is filled with the enhanced emotions of unity, understanding and joy – we are on our way to surf and the music is great!

Ville is digging it, His head dances in the baby-chair. The other kids laugh with him, joke with him, encourage him. We all sing along “It is hard to speak emotional..”.

I really love my family!

Back home in Sweden I knew winter had conquered the last straws of green. I could have been there – been sitting in my room writing my thesis, reading my books trying to write dry academic text about – this...

I look lovingly at Cecilia. A smile knowing that within days I'll give her a happy surprise. She takes my hand and says that this song is exactly what we are writing about. Then the refrain kicks in again and we all join in the chorus.

Back home I could have been sitting in my office in Luleå, reading black ink on white paper. I'd rather be listening to black and white keys making the music Dewey, Shusterman, Wittgenstein and whoever, write about. I could have been looking at lights forming a new set of letters, read my mail or written to someone – perhaps my supervisor Eva. We could have been discussing this thesis' academic qualities. I'd rather be singing it!

In the car there is no need for black ink, LCD screens or supervision at the moment. We “find the hours that the clocks cannot define” as Cat Empire sings for us. Time flies and we actually enjoy riding a crammed car in the hot sun.

Becoming a dad put my life into perspective. I am the last one in a long line of fathers. And everyone of them must have felt this peculiar feeling of being privileged. It feels like I have become more

important since I no longer put myself first. I really love my son.

Back home, if I had not been on daddy's leave, I would have been attending seminars in Piteå. Nice colleagues and friends supporting each other in the strange task of writing something very few will ever bother to read, and learning something to the degree that very few will be able to understand what we are talking about. We all support our peculiarities – lead by Sture – our grand old man.

But I am not in Sweden. I am going surfing with my beloved family in a rented car. Melbourne is great! Life is great! Black ink on white paper will have to wait – at least until the song is finished.

Not quite like music, but special in its own right, words on paper can also burst to life. A poem or a great novel, or even a brilliant academic text can be meaningful in a way that lifts me from the dreary grey days in the office. These are my influences, but that is not the purpose of this book. I only want to be happy. Learn and enjoy the good things in life such as my family, good music, art, a good film, go skiing, travel – or drive a car playing a song that explains “how to explain”¹.

¹ The title of the song in this foreword is “How to Explain”. It was performed and written by The Cat Empire on the record The Cat Empire.

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List of publications

- P1 Thorgersen, Ketil & Eva Alerby (2005). One Word to Rule Them? The Word Aesthetics in Curricula for the Swedish Compulsory School, *Utbildning och Demokrati nr. 1 vol. 14* p. 63-79
- P2 Thorgersen, Ketil (2005). A Draft for a Raft of Reflection, peer reviewed paper presented at *Reflected Practice Conference, Gloucester 2005*
- P3 Teachers Reflecting on Aesthetics. Accepted for publication in the peer reviewed journal *Nordic Research in Music Education Yearbook vol. 9. 2007*

1. Introduction

Can anything really be aesthetic? That question tricked me into this.

In Norway I worked as a teacher in a secondary school, primarily as a music teacher, but also as an English and a Physical Educational teacher. Additionally I worked part time at the Teacher's trainers college in Stavanger as a teacher in music teaching methods. The department was called "the Department of aesthetics". Several of the teachers working in the department were engaged in a network of teachers called "Aesthetic network". At the time I was studying for my masters degree in music education, and was eager to discuss words, concepts and notions trying to make sense of them in what I considered to be scientific at the time. I lingered into long discussions with my colleagues regarding what aesthetics might be. My main problem was aesthetic used as an adjective. "How can anything not be aesthetic?" I said. I argued that for the word to have a purpose, it would have to have borders regarding its use. A justification for the existence of a word in my view at the time, meant that the word had to have an opposite – something to function as a mirror for the word. I might have argued well, or it might be that the colleagues silently agreed that pretended ignorance was the best strategy to get rid of me. No matter what the reason was, the fact remains that I never experienced anyone who could or would enlighten me in these matters.

When I got the position as a PhD student in Luleå in a project labelled "Aesthetics and learning", I finally had the chance to dive into the exciting world of aesthetics. I was fascinated by the title of the project. From my Norwegian background I had not experienced the same matter-of-course attitude regarding the word aesthetics that I saw in Sweden. It suddenly seemed that aesthetics was everywhere. That the word popped up all over the place when I was looking for it was in itself not surprising, but what surprised me was that aesthetics seemed to be used in every way imaginable – even in

formal documents. The word aesthetics had not been present as an actively used word through my years in the Norwegian compulsory schools except as a popular label on a set of subject – practical-aesthetical subjects² . This label existed also in Sweden, but here aesthetics also labelled formal parts of the educational system: In gymnasiums one possible education is labelled aesthetic, and the teachers teaching the subjects involved in this specialization even calls themselves aesthetes. A look in the syllabuses for the compulsory school as well as the gymnasium revealed that the word aesthetics appeared frequently. I set out to find out what this could mean.

My quest for insight into aesthetics lead me to follow three courses in a huge lake³ of aesthetics. One course went with a current of philosophical theory, I navigated the currents of the lake until I settled down with a set of islands that provided me with a perspective on aesthetics that I could accept. The chosen island was called pragmatism and the journey there was a long one. Another course lead me to try to identify the meanings of aesthetics in the current curriculum and syllabuses for the compulsory school. To manage to do that I needed tools for understanding what words mean. In the currents of philosophical theory I found Wittgenstein and his notion of language game. The third course I tried to follow was to find a spot on the draft where I could understand how teachers saw aesthetics. The lake has been crossed several times since I did not have a proper map, and never really knew what the goal was. I can now say that I know the lake pretty well, but I am still not sure if the quest for insight is fulfilled since each time I come back to somewhere, I discover something new. The quest might even have changed by the end of this journey.

The second and third course lead me to write two articles and one conference paper which this book is built around. Since my opinion is that all parts of the quest builds on each other and is intertwined,

² Popular label for Physical Education, Music, Art, Crafts, Drama and other subjects considered non-theoretical.

³ For a deeper explanation of this metaphor see the chapter 6: *A Draft for a Raft of Reflection*

the articles and the paper are built into the book as chapters illuminating their particular part of the quest. The first article can be read in the chapter *Publication One: One Word to Rule Them? The Word Aesthetics in Curricula for the Swedish Compulsory School* beginning on page 39. That article presents what I learned when I tried to identify different meanings of aesthetics. The chapters preceding that article provides insights into the methodological, epistemological and ontological basis for this thesis necessary to understand why this study has been performed the way it has, and also to be able to take stands regarding whether or not the study is trustworthy. Between the first article and *Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection* (page 75) the view on aesthetics that my journey has led me to is presented: A pragmatist view on aesthetics founded on a notion of aesthetic experience. The chapter on pragmatist aesthetics should be read both as a part of the important process of clarifying the preunderstanding that necessarily has influenced my interpretations of the empirical material studied, and also as some kind of result. The view on aesthetics presented in the chapter *Pragmatist aesthetics* (p. 59) was a theoretically founded view on aesthetics that emerged through the collected work with the complete journey on the lake⁴.

Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection (p.75) is a conference paper about the combination of a pragmatist ontological and epistemological platform combined with a methodology inspired by Critical discourse analysis (CDA). It is also here I develop the raft metaphor to describe how I see the social world. This can be considered to be a methodological and epistemological paper preceding the interview study in *Publication three*.

Publication three: Teachers reflecting on aesthetics (page 93) is the article where the interview study is presented. It can be considered the second part of the second study. In between the second and

⁴ It is however important to keep in mind that the view presented as pragmatist aesthetics is only one way of looking at aesthetics and that other ways of viewing and using the notion might be just as valid. That is also why the empirical studies where needed.

third publication, a short interlude presents some thoughts on reflection since that is central in both the two last publications and also leads over to communication that proves to be central in the end.

Finally after the two publications regarding the interviews with the teachers, the thesis ends with two short chapters. The chapter *Discussion of the results* (p. 125) aims to discuss issues that bridges all the previous chapters – both the theoretically and the empirically based ones. At the end there is a chapter where I take the analysis one step further and aim to use the analyses to stipulate some possible ways forwards – how would it become then?

Of course others have been journeying before me. Both following the same currents and even initiating them. And the lake is full of theory, thoughts and taken for granted knowledge about aesthetics, as well as conflicts and doubts. And as most lakes, this lake also leaks to other lakes at the same time as it is filled with more or less fresh content from other lakes. Within the lake I have been journeying, the ones who have travelled close routes to mine are worth mentioning in order for the reader to be able to verify if I have been where I claim to have been, and that I actually have visited unexplored parts of the lake.

Monica Lindgren (2006) has travelled quite close to where I have been in the PhD thesis she defended a year before this licentiate thesis is presented. She did a thorough discourse analysis of teachers', school leaders' and school documents' constructions of aesthetics. She did this as a part of her study to see if there was anything to be gained from letting go of timetables in school in order to improve the condition for aesthetic work forms in school. What she found was that the agents in school were mostly concerned with the conditions for aesthetic work, and that they never really talked about art. Aesthetic activities were described as unique by the respondents, in her study but at the same time the discourse regarding aesthetics is very much a part of the general school discourse. Aesthetic activities were described as fun in opposition to more boring theoretical activ-

ities. The thesis was built upon a social-constructivist base and performed as discourse analysis, so the premises and background for her study and this book are quite different. She also sees aesthetics as more closely connected to the arts than this text does. While this text presents studies very focused on the word aesthetics and the directly connected notions, her thesis utilize a method that aims more to find the different ways the different discourses construct the word aesthetics in relation to the organisation of the school timetables than the actual content of the word aesthetics.

Another one who has explored similar waters is Heidi Westerlund (2002) who discussed music educational philosophy from a pragmatist perspective in her thesis. She has explored much of the same philosophical base regarding aesthetics, education and learning as I have, while her methodological approach as well as her aim differs much from mine. In her thesis she is concerned only with the music subject in school, and she has a philosophical approach, concerning herself with theory of music educational philosophy and not with empirical data. I relate to her thesis in the chapter *Pragmatism* (p. 21).

Aesthetics in school in Sweden has also been researched during the later years by Jan Thavenius (Aulin-Gråhamn & Thavenius 2003; Thavenius 2004). He has tried to establish a new concept called Radical aesthetics on the basis of his findings in a big project founded by the government to analyse and thereby improve conditions for aesthetics in school. I touch upon a critique of Thavenius' concept in publication one. Radical aesthetics does in my view lack analytical stringency and while the writings and reports are interesting reads, the findings have more of a general application value directed towards a broader public than this text has.

Besides these there are several researchers who are working within similar projects, but not as close. Anders Marnar (2005) is writing about aesthetics in school from a semiotic point of view. His writing is more connected to art philosophy and less empirically based than what I am presenting here. Tomas Saar (2005) is also exploring sim-

ilar waters, but from a music educational point of view. He makes a separation between what he calls strong and weak aesthetics, and argues that Swedish schools are characterized by a “logic of training” where aesthetics in its creative and free forms are seen as quite dangerous.

All these publications are with me in my writings, and to a certain respect I build upon them and draw upon them. Westerlund is important in my ontological and epistemological cogitations, Marner comes up with thoughts about the function of the arts and language which influence my last chapters and Lindgren influence my methodology and provides me with results to reflect mine against. However, I try to write the text in such a way that it can be read without knowledge of what others have done.

Aim

The aim of this thesis is to recreate aesthetics as expressed in current curricula as well as in teachers' reflections.

Identifying and understanding how the notion of aesthetics is being used by important inciters of schools is important in order to illuminate preconditions for aesthetics in school. As a consequence, I will try to clarify the historical roots of the concept of aesthetics as well as to provide the reader with a theoretical framework for understanding the texts of this study. The pragmatist basis for the study also makes it required to present possible consequences of the study's findings as part of the thesis.

The two main parts of the study, presented mainly through the three publications (chapters 4, 6 and 8) have the following research questions: For *Publication One: One Word to Rule Them? The Word Aesthetics in Curricula for the Swedish Compulsory School* (p. 39) the research question is: How does the word aesthetic(s/al) reveal itself in the Swedish curriculum and syllabuses?

For *Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection* (p. 75) the aim is to illuminate the methodological and epistemological choices in the interview study. This is done by presenting a metaphor of a raft, and by discussing critical discourse analysis in the light of pragmatism.

For *Publication three: Teachers reflecting on aesthetics* (p. 93) the aim is to bring forward some teachers' reflections upon the word aesthetics. The key question is, how aesthetics is being recreated by these teachers.

Before I begin to write about the findings and aesthetics, I want to present the ways in which I have chosen to perform the research – the philosophical and methodological choices that has steered the course.

2. A pragmatist foundation

This study is built upon the view that it is impossible to study anything without being someone. In other words: Doing objective research in the meaning of presenting the objective truth about a part of the world as it is, is impossible. The researcher will never be able to investigate anything “as it is” because writing involves perceiving, interpreting and recreating what is seen. This process can only be done on a personal basis regardless that certain branches of science claim that it is possible to study the world without any personal prejudice. To study something therefore means studying it and interpreting from a specific perspective. This in turn has certain consequences. Here the chosen perspective is pragmatism, and the following paragraphs are provided to clarify which consequences it has to choose this pragmatist approach to research. Methodological considerations will come in the following chapter (p. 31)

Pragmatism

At the end of a century there seemed to be a wish for all sorts of rankings, and in a ranking of the most harmful books of the 20th century, an American conservative newspaper⁵ ranked John Dewey's *Democracy and education* (1916) as the fifth most dangerous book. Such an honour indicates how influential Dewey has been on the field of education during the last century. How could the book be considered harmful by the conservative scholars behind this ranking one might ask. To that I may only speculate: Dewey has been considered the father of the progressive education movement that has shaped the educational development in the western world from the 1930s and onwards. His most famous words are “learning by doing”⁶

⁵ <http://www.humaneventsonline.com/article.php?id=7591>

⁶ In fact it is difficult to find where Dewey actually wrote “learning by doing”. Having investigated the matter it seems like the only occurrences of the phrase is in *Democracy and Education* (Dewey 1916) on page 184. and in *Schools of*

– three words that has been used and misused to promote educations where pupils are active and learn through personal hands-on experiences (introduction of Dewey 1997 by Tomas Englund). Dewey was concerned about the theoretization of education and its problems and propagated for alternative ways of teaching, but Dewey and his pragmatism involves so much more than “learning by doing”. In this chapter I will outline some central features of pragmatism in the spirit of Dewey which I find relevant for this thesis. I will also connect to contemporary thinkers – most notably, Richard Shusterman and Moira von Wright.

Dewey is today considered to be one of the two most influential of the second line of pragmatists along with his friend George Herbert Mead. They were both inspired by the works of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce who have been seen as the originators of pragmatism (Shusterman 2002 ch. 11). The pragmatist movement started in Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the 1870s, but the term “pragmatism” never appeared until James wrote a paper called *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*. Here he announced that he would “[...] start upon the trail of truth: the principle of 'pragmatism' as enunciated by Charles S. Peirce” (as cited in Shook 1998). In Peirce's article *What Pragmatism Is* (Peirce 1905), he opens by ridiculing the experimental scientists' narrow-mindedness. The need to take stands against the leading paradigm suggests that pragmatism lines in well with other theories from the turn of the 19th century in starting off as a reaction against experiential science' belief in atomism as the only path to knowledge. In this paper he describes several of the characteristics of pragmatism such as a holistic approach, consequential thinking, contempt for “[...] one word being defined by other words, and they by still others, without any real conception ever being reached” (ibid p. 161) as well as metaphysics. He points at the importance of context and the problems of preunderstanding, doubt and atomism. However he limits pragmatism to a philosophy in which experiments provide the

Tomorrow (Dewey 1915). The important thing is that Dewey himself argued against this simplification of his ideas of learning through experience which is a more complex and fundamental view on life and being.

only path to true knowledge and in which observation and communication have no place. His view on language and reality differs from later varieties of pragmatism.

Around the turn of the century, Dewey and Mead as well as other influential pragmatists such as Addison W. Moore, were colleagues at the University of Chicago. They never formed a research group or a formal organisation, but they all somehow related their work to the thoughts of James and Peirce. The pragmatists were products of their time and therefore heavily influenced by Darwin's theories on evolution.

Dewey started an experimental "laboratory school" to try out his ideas on education. He resigned his post in Chicago in 1904 because of disagreements over "the Laboratory School" and began working at Teachers College at Columbia where he staid until he retired in 1930. During these years and his retirement years he produced his most influential books such as *How We Think* (1910), *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Art as Experience* (1934) along with a huge amount of other books, papers, articles and correspondence⁷. This background says something vital about pragmatism as a platform for doing research: It is not enough to just think about, analyse and write about issues in society. The researcher also has an obligation to act and take a stand according to Dewey. The consequence of this principle in this thesis, is that the last chapter takes the results to a consequence level by speculating on how the issues raised throughout the thesis can lead to improved learning situations in school.

The idea that everything is in constant development and that there are no fixed rules that decide that human beings is the supreme animal lead to a very flux and anti-metaphysical social theory. The pragmatists viewed knowledge as a part of the world as opposed to something solely in the mind. The notion of truth was also questioned and the ruling view of truth as static objective knowledge was

⁷ For more information on Dewey's writings see the Centre for Dewey Studies <http://www.siu.edu/~deweyctr/>

replaced by a dynamic view of truth as whatever is agreed upon as true at a certain time and at a specific place. This view of truth is still one of the marks of pragmatism, even though variations exist.

For my thesis this is important because the view of truth affects what research can find out and what role research will have in a society. In a pragmatist view research will be important in order to find better explanations that work better for the current society rather than to find out how something objectively “is”. This view on truth also involves a few problems when it comes to research: If the point of research is to help to develop whatever works best as true at this point in time, and for the current social structure and people, how is it then possible to come up with revolutionary ideas that breaks with the current paradigm? The present agents in power in the present paradigm will probably have a strong interest in keeping the world as it is, and then any research result that breaks with such ideas will not work for these people. The pragmatist response to such an argument would be that history has shown that it is not easy to change the ruling ideas about how something is seen, but that it has happened and happens again and again when enough research points to problems with the present understandings and suggests explanations that have fewer problems.

This way of viewing the development of knowledge also points clearly to pragmatism's Darwinist heritage: Knowledge develops gradually with sudden bursts of change, much like nature develops according to the theory of evolution. The test if anything works as an explanation will show in its use: If it is tested, talked about and included in daily usage, it proves true – for the time being. There are however no guaranties about tomorrow, another society or different settings since truth for human beings is knowledge, and knowledge is always contextual and personal.

In much the same way as with truth, another key feature of pragmatism is its in-between position regarding reality. In opposition to both positivism's belief in an absolute reality that can be studied objectively (Kjørup 1999), and social constructivism's belief that all

perception of reality is a social construction (Burr 1995), pragmatism accepts that there is an objective world. However it can only be studied in accordance with the frames provided by history and social convention and there will be continually changes regarding what is considered real. What is considered real is in turn not equal to an objective truth, but is a reconstruction of human beings' and social conventions' representations of reality. Margolis (in Shusterman 2002) lists five doctrines describing pragmatism's view on reality:

1. Reality is cognitively intransparent: that is, all discourse about the world is mediated by our conceptual schemes [and no single perception or scheme can claim apodictic privilege or necessity].
2. The structure of reality and the structure of human thought are inextricably symbiotized: that is, there is no principled means by which to decide correctly what the "mind" contributes to what we take to be the world's real structure or what the "brute" world contributes.
3. Thinking has a history, is historicized: that is, all the supposed fixities, invariances, necessities, universalities of thinking and world... are contingent artifacts of the historical existence of different societies... [and are] under the constraint of changeable history.
4. The structure of our thinking is preformed and self-modifying: that is, tacitly formed by antecedent culturing processes that we cannot entirely fathom, though by participation in these same processes (as we must) we alter them...
5. The phenomena and entities of human culture are socially constituted or constructed, have no "natures," ... are only histories: that is, persons and selves, artworks, artefacts, texts, actions, institutions, societies, words and sentences and the like cannot be characterized as falling under "natural kinds" ... having assignably fixed essences or [being explainable] by reference merely to ... physical things. (Shusterman 2002 p. 192-193)

These doctrines summarize pragmatism's balanced view on reality: Reality is here, but we can only see through the cultural filters of the

time and culture we are a part of. It is impossible to factorize different ways of perceiving the world. We are shaped by our social heritage and context, but at the same time shape it, and what we create is meaningful, but only in the current scheme of things.

Dewey had several agendas in his text production. Most of his writings concerned school, education and thinking, aesthetics, democracy and systems of government or communication and social dynamics. The texts have a holistic ambition almost to the point where it is impossible to distinguish the parts of the whole issue at hand. The holistic approach to an analysis of society, which to me is a very attractive part of his theories, has in fact been one of the most frequently criticised parts of his version of pragmatism (Shusterman 2000). In this thesis I strive towards the holistic, but I try to enter via the specifics – the smaller parts, which cannot really be looked at without seeing the bigger picture since the part is not the same without its context. This will be discussed more thoroughly in *Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection* (p. 75).

Another feature of Dewey's theoretical framework was his wish for practical implications of theory. Dewey himself was a true believer in democracy and not only wrote that democracy was superior to any other governmental and social systems, but he also worked actively to improve democratic rights for people. The same holds for his view on education: He not only wrote about how teaching and learning should be, he actually started schools to try his ideas as well as try to implement them in existing schools (Field 2006). Pragmatism in this respect means not only analysing a part of life, but also to propagate solutions. Shusterman (2000) refers to the same principle when he talks about somaesthetics⁸ – it is not enough to theorize about a bodily philosophy of aesthetics, you also have to practice it. Moira von Wright calls this aspect of pragmatism – the strive to figure out “how does it become then?” the pragmatist question of truth (von Wright 2000 p. 47).

Within the covers of this thesis I will not live my theories, but I will

⁸ I talk about somaesthetics at in the chapter *Pragmatist aesthetics* p. 60

at least provide the reader with ideas of possible consequences of my studies. Some answers to “how does it become then?” will be speculated upon in the concluding chapters as well as along the way.

Pragmatism had a strong influence in the United States in the first third of the 20th century, but was then displaced by analytic philosophy to gain new strength towards the turn of the millennium with philosophers such as Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. In Europe however, pragmatism has never managed to get rooted as an important philosophical inciter, even if it has been embraced by some educational theorists. The reason for the lack of influence may be because American philosophers to a large extent have ignored or at least taken lightly upon the long and strong European philosophical tradition (Shusterman 2000).

A pragmatist view on education, teaching and learning

This chapter on my ontological and epistemological base started out by stating that some of Dewey's ideas have been very influential in the Anglo-American and Scandinavian educational systems the last hundred years or so. I also pointed out that Dewey has been misread (introduction of Dewey 1997) and that he has been interpreted as striving for practical hands-on experience where method is more important than content. If Dewey is read more thoroughly though, a much more refined understanding of education will appear.

First of all Dewey was a strong advocate for participation and learning through experience. However this should not be interpreted to mean that pupils should not reflect. On the contrary, Dewey talks a lot about reflection and communication as a path to learning. In fact learning is something that happens in interaction with others in Dewey's view – “Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession” (Dewey 1916 p. 11). In other words we learn in relation to other people by recreating and sharing experience. In school the relational part is particularly obvious since

the setting consist of at least two people – a teacher and a pupil, and the learning is supposed to take place as a consequence of their relation.

von Wright (2000) talks about the difference between having a punctual and a relational view on pupils as a starting point for teaching. A punctual perspective sees the pupil as the sum of his or her abilities and defines the pupil as autonomous and independent. In this perspective adequate education is defined on the basis of an analysis of the skills the pupil possesses within the subject of interest, and compare that with a standard of what the pupil is expected to know, and prescribe which action to be taken. If a pupil is characterized in terms of “brilliant piano player”, “bad writer”, “average football player” and so forth, this probably stems from a punctual view of pupils. A relational perspective on the other hand, sees the pupil as a person. In fact von Wright stresses that there are no pupils – or children for that matter, only human beings. A relational perspective on learning implicates that pupils are seen as whole persons with personal needs, wishes, histories and circumstances. To view pupils in this perspective means to meet each pupil's needs and communicate in order to find the most fruitful path forwards. The word relational, not only points to the relation between the teacher and the individual pupil, but also that the pupils relations to others are a part of who the pupil is, what needs he or she has and how facilitation of learning can take place. The title of von Wright's book is *What or Who?*, a phrase I interpret as pointing to the fact that school has a history of promoting punctual skills and see the pupils in terms of his or her abilities in a performing certain task – a “what”, rather than to be seeing the pupil as a person – a “who”. I will come back to this in the chapter *Discussion of the results* (p. 125)

As I wrote earlier, Dewey had a holistic view of the world, and this goes also for education. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) combined two concepts in the title that by no means are self-evident, particularly not in the time when it was written. For Dewey it was important that education was performed in a socially aware

manner. School should facilitate learning that eventually might lead to a better society at the same time as helping the individual to grow. In order to achieve such an education, school has to see method and content as one:

When there is no intimate organic connection between the methods and materials of knowledge and moral growth, particular lessons and modes of discipline have to be resorted to: knowledge is not integrated into the usual springs of action and the outlook on life (Dewey 1916 p. 418).

Education should help pupils to understand and live in a moral and socially conscious way. In Dewey's view such an education involves democracy on all levels, but as he states in the citation above, methods must be chosen so that pupils actually live the knowledge they acquire. I will describe practical implications of this in the concluding chapters, but first I will sum up this more general chapter by listing some necessary features for an educational praxis that takes a pragmatist approach: All pupils must be met on their own level, according to their own needs and based on their own personal desires. It is vital to consider factors on every level from individual, through societal to global in order to ensure a good life for everyone. To achieve this, method and content must be in concurrence.

How different theories relate

In this thesis I have utilised different theories and theoretical frames in order to understand aesthetics in school and bring forward this understanding. These theories play different roles and have contributed to specific parts of the picture I try to draw.

A raft can be an example of how the theories might relate as the parts the raft is constructed of. The hull is the basis – the thing that I stand on and from where I can feel safe, observe and use all the other parts of the raft. If the hull fails me nothing else will work either since the raft will sink. The theories I make use of most extensively in this thesis is pragmatism, critical discourse analysis

(CDA) and the theories of Wittgenstein and Bourdieu. These could all have provided the hull, but in this thesis I have decided to trust a hull of pragmatism. I could also have decided to trust pragmatism to provide me with every other part of the raft in order to be sure I had a vessel consisting of compatible parts, and for the most part I have. The views on learning, education, society and in fact all major ontological and epistemological parts is of pragmatist origin. However – as is often the case with homebuilt boats, I've decided to improve and augment a few vital parts. In the present raft, the other theories have become parts as sail, ladder and rudder – all of them carefully chosen and adjusted in order to fit and improve the raft of pragmatism. Wittgenstein helps to understand how language, communication and text operates on board the raft⁹. It is particularly his later ideas about language games that is being used to complement and clarify Dewey's and Shusterman's pragmatist writings about the same issues. CDA helps out with steering by providing reminders as to what methodological choices to make¹⁰, and Bourdieu's theories helps me to understand what art is and how art is socially and historically constituted¹¹. Bourdieu has also helped me in my understanding of how school and society works, but that plays only a minor role in this thesis. The theories are seen from a pragmatist base and are being used as parts of a pragmatist approach to research. I have tried to avoid incompatibilities between theories, but in cases where that is questionable I have discussed possible problems and solutions. Throughout this journey the reader will have the opportunity to verify to what extent the vessel is seaworthy.

⁹ See the chapter *What is text?* Page 33 for an explanation of the Wittgensteinian approach.

¹⁰ See *Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection* at page 75 for more on CDA.

¹¹ See the chapter *The rules of art* at page 65 for more on Bourdieu.

3. Methodological considerations

In order to investigate any problem or focus for wonder, there is a need for concrete actions. What separates research from other ways of investigating, developing, revealing and presenting aspects of the world, is not only the systematic approach of gathering and analysing data. Many other fields show the same zeal about coming to terms with something. An example is the detective investigating a crime (Ericsson 2001), or the writer of a biography (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994). There are several aspects that amount to what might be considered a scientific method of investigating a problem, but to draw a systematic line defining what such aspects might amount to, is beyond the scope of this thesis. The interesting thing however, is that despite the similarities of research to other genres and occupations, there is a distinction between scientific research and other kinds of research. The distinction might be subtle and is constantly moving, being recreated and changed into steadily new agreements upon what science is. This text is trying to fulfil the premises set by the scientific society. In fact, the purpose of being a PhD student is to learn to master the codes of a culture within what is considered scientific in that period of time in that environment. This text has to conform to, and relate to other scientific texts, but not only that, it will also relate to non scientific texts and cultures in the same way as I relate to other fields of experience than scientific ones. The same way that this text both draws upon, relates to and comments other texts, as well as constitutes a text of its own, the texts I have been studying are parts of the same process.

In this thesis I study all means of communication as text in accordance with the concept which in Sweden is called “det vidgade textbegreppet” – a concept which has no direct counterpart in English that I know of. Directly translated it should mean something like “the expanded notion of text” and refer to the linguistic turn in philo-

sophy as well as more contemporary applied terms like multiliteracy or multimodality (Jewitt 2005). As I will discuss through the following line of thoughts, an expanded notion of text is not without problems – something I will elaborate further on through the concluding chapters of the thesis.

Text analysis

This thesis is built around language, communication and text in different shapes. The empirical material of the first study (p. 39) is written text, and is analysed as text in a Wittgensteinian fashion. The second and third publication (p. 75 and 93) consists of interviews with teachers, and are therefore not considered text in a narrow traditional sense. However, to be able to study it in a consistent manner in accordance with the scientific demands previously described, the interviews were transcribed to written text after first having been recorded in order to keep the otherwise temporal oral language. The first part of the textual, linguistic research process is in other words a sort of interpretation in itself since it involves transforming one kind of “text” into another. The second part of the process is the actual analysis stage, where text is processed through text. An important part of the process of understanding a material is to transcribe, deconceptualize through combining parts into themes or categories, as well as reconceptualizing through writing new texts. The process of presenting a result of a research process is therefore an important part of the research process itself, since without this reconceptualization, the analysis would stay fragmented and with little contact with the world from which it came (van Manen 1997). Along with this fairly linear process, there is a continuous parallel process of relating to other texts – scientific texts as well as other means of communication. To be socialised into a culture of science is in other words a socialisation into a world of text; interpretations of text and communication. A process that can never be anything but subjective in any stage of the process. It is therefore important that the method and the methodological choices are transparent in the text in order for the reader to be able to believe in

the results on the right premises – or not.

In this case the methods have been described in the publications that this cloak is shaped around, but I would like to linger on some of the common methodological denominators of the three different studies.

What is text?

To learn to do research involves turning stones looking for tools to understand and grasp the reality to be studied. In my case I started out looking for tools to help me understand the curricular texts of the Swedish compulsory school. I wanted to be able to understand how the word aesthetics were being used in these texts and still leave the word open for interpretation and not rule out other meanings of the word. I wanted my interpretation of aesthetics in curricula to be positive, but still critical. My earlier education in research (Thorgersen 2003) had been performed from a Bourdieuan perspective, so I did not believe that categories should be set in stone. I wanted to make a dynamic, flexible, transparent, and still analytically interesting investigation into aesthetics in the curricula. Besides finding pragmatism and Dewey as I have already described, I also found Wittgenstein. In my view the idea of language game in Wittgenstein's texts worked well with my impressions of pragmatism, but I would learn later that others thought differently.

It might seem strange to combine Wittgenstein and pragmatism as I have done since Wittgenstein often is considered an important initiator and key figure within analytical philosophy. This is not due to Wittgenstein branding himself as analytical. In fact he rejected all other theoretical frames as inadequate. His own writings are written in such cryptic manners (especially Wittgenstein 1933) that they can be interpreted in many different ways – despite that Wittgenstein claimed that they were very clear (Monk 1999). The way I have described Wittgenstein's theories of language games here is compatible with pragmatism in a way that the two enhance each other

(Shusterman 2002). Pragmatism provides a platform which explains why language exists and a view of communication as a certain kind of social practice, while Wittgenstein provides a structured philosophy of language. As I have shown, pragmatism and analytical philosophy are not only far apart, but pragmatists spend quite a lot of ink on explaining why analytical philosophy is a waste of time. Wittgenstein is not surprisingly considered one of the founders of analytical philosophy since his aim was to outline a system for the understanding of language that could be investigated in a systematic scientific way. In this process he pointed to the problem that a lot of words have a diversity of meanings depending on in which situation they are used and by whom. He ended up in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 1933) with the conclusion that science should only deal with words that can clearly be demarcated from others, and leave the rest for philosophers to deal with. The words ethics and aesthetics are used as examples of what can not be defined and understood scientifically: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)” (Wittgenstein 1933 §6.421)

There are ongoing discussions regarding whether or not, or to what extent, Wittgenstein can be considered an analytic philosopher (Glock 2004). There seems to be almost a consensus that he was analytic in his first book, but the discussions as to whether he turned away from analytic philosophy in his later works¹² or not, still goes on. I will not in this thesis take stands in this question, but only point at the fact that I find the later works more in line with the pragmatism I indulge in. It is also in the later works the idea of language game, which I make use of throughout the thesis, is explained and developed.

Wittgenstein's prime interest was language, how it works and how words get their meaning, their function and how they are being

¹² E.g. Russell wrote that: “The later Wittgenstein, on the contrary, seems to have grown tired of serious thinking and to have invented a doctrine that would make such an activity unnecessary” (Russell (1985) *My Philosophical Development* p. 161 in Glock 2004)

used. His interest in language stems from an understanding that language constitutes how we understand the world we live in. This turn of focus in philosophy towards language that became dominant through Wittgenstein, has been called the linguistic turn of philosophy. Wittgenstein's idea was that most words have no fixed everlasting meaning and that different meanings of a word depends on context, personal background, history and interpretation. Accordingly he believed that most words cannot be given demarcational ostensive definitions, and that even stipulative definitions will be understood depending on the same factors. Wittgenstein therefore saw language as a game. Wittgenstein formulated a language game like this:

Imagine a language-game in which A asks and B reports the number of slabs or blocks in a pile, or the colours and shapes of the building-stones that are stacked in such-and-such a place. Such a report might run: "Five slabs". Now what is the difference between the report or statement "Five slabs" and the order "Five slabs! "? Well, it is the part which uttering these words plays in the language-game. No doubt the tone of voice and the look with which they are uttered, and much else besides, will also be different. But we could also imagine the tone's being the same – for an order and a report can be spoken in a variety of tones of voice and with various expressions of face – the difference being only in the application. (Wittgenstein 1997 – Statement 21)

A word is only meaningful if a person understands what kind of word it is, and how it functions. It is vital for an understanding of even simple words to have acquired an understanding of the social setting in which a statement is uttered and what social codes that constitutes the context. A word gets its meaning only when all the unsaid information in a statement is understood. This in turn can only be understood once you are a part of the social culture in which the language is used. One might then believe that we understand each other once we belong to the same culture, but as I interpret Wittgenstein, complete understanding of another persons intentions and thoughts is impossible. That is also the understanding of lan-

guage that constitutes the base for this thesis. A word has no essence, Wittgenstein argues, it is more a question of family resemblance. “Why do we call something a 'number'?” (Wittgenstein 1997 – Statement 67) he asks, and explains that it has resemblance with other uses of the word number. His metaphor is good because it explains why demarcation is impossible. How can anyone give a descriptive explanation of the looks of one family that excludes the features of all other families, or even explain which are the key features of the family, without exceptions? It is impossible the same way as it is impossible to explain what the key features of the word aesthetics are if we demand that there should be no exceptions to the features and that no other word should share the same features. It is on this basis I have approached the word aesthetics in both studies in this thesis, as well as in the chapter *Aesthetic experience* (p. 60). This does not rule out reflections over the application and definitions of words for educational praxis. On the contrary, since words have such a complex nature, and are so fundamental for our understanding of the world, it is essential to discuss and reflect upon central words and concepts in order to improve the educational praxis. This is also the stand Dewey takes in *How We Think* (1910). Definitions and unnecessary dwellings upon words is a waste of time he writes, but only if they cause no problems in the communicative process. However this is often not the case: Meanings of words are very often a cause of misunderstandings, whether we are aware of it or not, and in such cases Dewey stresses the importance of investigating and developing the understandings of words. A word can only be defined by the way it is being used, and in the context it is being used. It is therefore important not only to look at the words in themselves and their verbal context, but also to the total context in which a word is being used. While Wittgenstein is concerned mostly with the structures and functions of verbal language, Dewey is mostly concerned with language as “[...] gestures, pictures, monuments, visual images, finger moments – anything consciously employed as a sign is, logically, language” (Dewey 1910 p. 171)

This rather long line of thoughts regarding language, meaning and communication might seem pointless unless the special conditions

this study is done within is considered. I am a Norwegian research student interpreting Swedes and Swedish texts and writing in English. In all cases – even when every step of the research process takes place in the same language – the processes described above will take place. In my case the possibilities for misunderstandings and misinterpretations is even more prominent. Since we use the language as tools in our processes of thinking and that our ways of expressing ourselves form our thinking, it is always difficult to properly understand people from other languages. In my case Swedish and Norwegian is very similar and since I have been living in Sweden for some time I think I am able to understand it almost to the point of being Swedish. However I have asked for help in a few cases when I have been unsure of how certain words and sentences might be interpreted. Then to formulate this in a third language which is not my own either is a challenge which introduces another level of interpretation. This text represents the last stage of this process of analysis. It is my hope that my awareness of the implications of the process and my attempt to make my reflections transparent will ease the reading and make it possible to might catch a glimpse of the world that incited this text. However this text is a new text and must be regarded as such. The following text is the analysis of the curriculum and syllabuses of the Swedish compulsory school.

4. Publication One: One Word to Rule Them? The Word Aesthetics in Curricula for the Swedish Compulsory School

Published in

Utbildning och Demokrati nr. 1 2005 vol. 14, 63-79

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One word to rule them?

The word *aesthetics* in curricula for the Swedish compulsory school of today

Ketil A Thorgersen & Eva Alerby

The aim of this article is to analyse how the word *aesthetic(s)* is used in the contemporary curriculum (Lpo 94) and syllabuses for compulsory school education in Sweden. This will be done from a Wittgensteinian point of view, with an emphasis on the diversity in the usage of the word. Lpo 94's use of the concept of aesthetics indicates that it is seen as something complementary and different to intellectual knowledge and bodily knowledge. It seems as if it has some kind of existentialist meaning. Apart from this, the curriculum says nothing about what this complementary thing called aesthetics is. This might explain why the syllabuses for 13 out of 23 subjects mention the word *aesthetics* in quite different ways: as a tool for value and judgement, as a skill, as experience, as a way of expressing oneself, as a certain kind of knowledge, as a secondary tool for learning other skills/subjects and as a way to describe a subject. The article ends with reflections on what purpose the curriculum has when words are used in such a diverse manner.

Introduction

In Nordic education, subjects and themes like music, dance, arts and crafts, physical education and drama are often referred to as “practical-aesthetic subjects”. The word *aesthetic(s)* is used as a noun, a verb and an adjective, both in everyday language and in legal documents and school textbooks. On this basis it would be easy to assume that the word has a clear definition, understood by all agents in this field. Having spent most of our lives in the Norwegian and Swedish education systems, as a pupil, student, teacher or researcher, our experience tells us clearly that this is not the case.

As a part of its strategy to offer all children the same educational opportunities, the Swedish government has a system of regulations as to what should be taught and learned in schools. Every school in Sweden is bound by national regulations. At the top of the hierarchy is the law governing schools, the Education Act. Then there are the Compulsory School Curriculum (hereafter called Lpo 94, since that is the abbreviation commonly used in Sweden) and the national syllabuses, which were last revised in 1998 (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a). Based on these documents, each school and every local authority is obliged to draw up local plans for how to implement this in a local setting. In this article we will focus on how the word *aesthetic(s)* is used in the national syllabuses and in the Compulsory School Curriculum. Rather than giving a stipulative definition, we will explore the different flavours of aesthetics that are presented.

The aim of this article is in other words to find out how the word *aesthetic(s)* reveals itself in the Swedish curriculum and syllabuses. By going through governing documents for Sweden's compulsory school system and searching for the intentions and inherent meanings implicated by the usage of the word, we hope that both the reader and we ourselves will have a fuller understanding of it by the end of the article. From the first look it was obvious that *aesthetic(s)* is used in various ways throughout the syllabuses. As part of our method as well as a kind of result, the article will present a way to systematize how *aesthetics* operates in the different settings studied. To be able to understand the word in a broader context, it is necessary to view how *aesthetics* has been used historically in philosophy, and what the current status of the word is, as well as to define the theoretical foundations on which this article will be built.

An outline of philosophical views of aesthetics and the current state of the concept

The history of a philosophy of aesthetics is not as old as the roots of the word may suggest. While the word originates from the ancient Greek *aisthētikos*, which means “of sense perception” (Pickett 2000), aesthetics as a philosophical concept can only be traced back to the 18th century. In 1750, Baumgarten published his book *Aesthetica*. The idea of making a philosophical system out of the beauty of the arts had been growing in the intellectual communities of Europe, and Baumgarten was the first to develop what could be called a scientific system of aesthetics (Kristeller 1952, p. 33). Coincidentally it

was his view of what the content of a philosophy of art and beauty should be, “a theory of perception” (Dahlhaus 1995, p. 5), that guided his construction of the word. His choice of word to label this branch of philosophy was therefore a German adaptation of the Greek word *aisthētikos*: *aesthetica* (Emt 1996), which has subsequently evolved into *Ästhetik* in German, *aesthetics* or *esthetics* in English, *esthétique* in French and *estetik(k)* in the Scandinavian languages. Baumgarten’s word was adopted, as was his view that there needed to be a scientific way to talk about art and beauty, but his premise which was the basis for the word, namely the distinction between what is perceived through the senses and what is understood by the intellect, was soon abandoned (Emt 1996). Immanuel Kant might be considered the one who defined a *philosophy of art* (Kristeller 1951) that endured the test of time. After being extremely critical of Baumgarten’s concept in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he developed the concept of aesthetics to a fuller extent than anyone so far in his *Critique of Judgement* (Kant 2000). In this book Kant uses the concept of aesthetics to talk about judgement of taste and the beautiful. At the beginning of the first part, “Critique of aesthetic judgement”, he states that aesthetic judgement is “not a cognitive judgement, and so not logical, but is aesthetic – which means that it is one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective” (Kant 2000, p. 49). Despite the subjective nature of aesthetics, Kant recognizes the human wish to make universal claims as to what is good taste (Kant 2000). This dispute regarding taste, normativity, subjectivity and objectivity has been a key point in the philosophy of aesthetics. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1995), Kant did not intend his theory to be a *philosophy of art*, but his theories have been interpreted as such by others.

Aesthetic theories and discussions of art flourished in the 19th century, and they were elaborated on, discussed and developed amongst philosophers and artists alike. Aesthetics was developed into a science of beauty in the arts, where discussions revolved around how to perceive beauty in art and how to evaluate what defines good art (Dahlhaus 1992). This branch of philosophy developed further in the 20th century as a result of the wish of artists to detach art from common taste, and to escape the prison of beauty. On this basis Heidegger argues that there has been an aesthetification of art. By this he means that it is no longer representation that is important for an art object, but the forms, lines, sounds, shapes and concepts in themselves. This leads, in Heidegger’s (Young 2001) view, to the death of art, because art is supposed to be an “absolute necessity, not items

of luxury to provide stress relief” (Young 2001, p. 8). Adorno and Horkheimer worked in the early part of the 20th century and were part of what has been known as “the Frankfurt school”, which defined what is now known as critical theory. Adorno’s writings on aesthetics have been influential because he brought together social theory and aesthetic theory, such as that of Kant and Hegel, in the light of modern art, but with a critique of modern western society as a fundamental presumption. Their claim was that the pursuit of freedom in society is inseparable from the pursuit of enlightenment in culture (Zuidervaart 2003). It is with this heritage that Pierre Bourdieu enters the scene in the last half of the century, claiming that aesthetics exists, but as a socially and historically constructed silent agreement between *agents in a field*¹ (Bourdieu 1996a). This sociological and critical view of aesthetics developed simultaneously as a more experience-, psychologically and phenomenologically based branch, represented by John Dewey and later Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Shusterman. Dewey (Shusterman 2000) bases his theory of aesthetics on experience and argues that good art gives rise to good aesthetic experiences. Shusterman (1999), who claims to put forward a pragmatic view of aesthetics, sums up the previous century like this:

Dewey’s essentially evaluative, phenomenological, and transformational notion of aesthetic experience has been gradually replaced by a purely descriptive, semantic one whose chief purpose is to explain and thus support the established demarcation of art from other human domains (Shusterman 1999, ch. 3).²

Shusterman goes on to criticize the dismissing of the concept of aesthetic experience which is the solution provided by several philosophers to the challenge of the impossible task of defining what aesthetics is, and what sets aesthetic experience apart from other experiences. Gadamer (1995) takes the same line when he suggests integrating aesthetics into hermeneutics.

The current state of the philosophy of aesthetics is of course a difficult landscape to explore, since writing history is easier in retrospect. Preluding the turn of the millennium, the concept of truth has degenerated along with notions of object/objectivism versus subject/subjectivism. As part of what is often referred to as postmodernism, there are no longer any main paradigms of truth to relate to – truth is seen as temporary and relative to time and space. Leading theories are referred to by names like “social constructivism”, “deconstructivism” and “post-structuralism”, all of them aiming to explain how mean-

ing is constructed in society, in and between human beings (Jackson 1996; Kjörup 1996). If everything is constructed in society and nothing is true, what then is the purpose of philosophy? And if anything goes as far as good taste is concerned, what is the point of discussing aesthetics? Metaphilosophic discussions like this have been growing in recent decades. This does not mean that the whole field of aesthetic philosophy has changed into metaphilosophy, but there does seem to be a tendency to doubt that there is such a thing as aesthetics, or philosophy for that matter (Shusterman 1999).

In a report from a recent research project on aesthetics in Swedish schools, Jan Thavenius (2004) states that *aesthetics* has many meanings and lists five different ones, the first being quite similar to what Baumgarten proposed – a sensory as opposed to an intellectual meaning. The second meaning is more along the lines of Kant and the 19th century’s view of aesthetics as the philosophy of beauty in art. These two are in Thavenius’s view the ones most commonly used in the school context. The third extends the second meaning to include popular cultural expressions as well, while the fourth meaning is that of an “aestetification” of society, the tendency for society to become more focused on how people present themselves through artefacts. The last sense is a sociological meaning of aesthetics; how the concept functions in society (Thavenius 2004).³ These meanings of aesthetics are on quite different levels, but they do provide insights into the complexity of defining the term. However, they lack a differentiation between an experiential, existentialist and expressionist level, as well as tools to discuss relations between social and individualist views, since these units of meaning are presented with no ontological basis. In our discussion we will not follow this structure, but we will refer to Thavenius’s categories on occasion.

To be able to discuss the results of our investigation of the usage of *aesthetic(s)*, there is a need to clarify some of the methodological and ontological foundations for this article. What view of the world and knowledge should be applied when reading it?

How to discuss and analyse the word

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1933, 1960) provided a starting point as to how to address this challenge of clarifying what aesthetics means in the Swedish compulsory school curriculum. Since *aesthetic(s)* is a living, breathing word in the Swedish language, it will have different meanings depending on in which setting it is being used, by whom and when. Wittgenstein’s solution was to let language live its own

life, and let science do what science does best: work with things that can be counted. He never managed to follow his own advice though, and his thoughts on language seem very appropriate in the light of late modernist and postmodernist theories.

One definition of *definition* is that it is an explanation of what a word means. Bengt Molander (1988) points out that there are several possible ways to achieve this. The most common kind of definition in scientific texts is what is called a nominal (Emt & Hermerén 1990) or stipulative definition (Molander 1988). The point of such definitions is to limit the understanding of a word so that the reader understands it in the same way as the author. That is to say, the author tries to persuade the reader to buy his or her understanding of the word, so that the reader understands what the author is implying by using it. Other types of definition are to point at an object to name it, or to use so-called lexical definitions, which are short descriptions of how a word is used (Copi 1982).

Wittgenstein (1960) introduced a different perspective on definition: “Questions like ‘what is the meaning of a word?’ paralyse us because we feel there must be a thing called ‘meaning’ that we ought to be able to point to. We should ask a different question: ‘what is an explanation of the meaning of a word?’”. This is how Wittgenstein (1960) opens the Blue Book.

On this basis, the present text will not try to give a nominal or stipulative definition, but rather, as Wittgenstein proposes, attempt to discern different aspects of the word, and how it might be understood, and to give insights into the possibilities and problems regarding this usage.

To identify and structure the different meanings of aesthetics used in the syllabuses, a document was prepared comprising all the paragraphs containing the word *aesthetic(s)*, so as to be able to read them and directly compare them. A struggle in this process was to avoid previous understandings of the word getting in the way of what the text said. Although we know that it is impossible to read without previous knowledge interfering, it is important to strive for an unbiased look at the empirical material to be studied: to be as critical of our own objectifications as of the material we objectify (Bourdieu 1996b). The texts were scanned for patterns, to see whether some uses of the word formed certain units of familiarity. On a more concrete level, what we did was to separate the paragraphs containing the word *aesthetic(s)*. Reading these carefully, on their own and in the light of the text as a whole, we tried to let the text talk to us and wrote down all our associations arising from how the word was used.

These keywords were numbered and we tried to put the possible numbers next to related uses of the word. After this first crude categorization, 16 different uses of the word had been singled out. These were eventually slimmed down to seven. Based on this structure, which was by no means meant to represent a final classification defining aesthetics, the different ways the word manifests itself in the documents are discussed below. Since the themes are not meant to be exclusive, they should be looked upon as different angles on the same phenomenon and will therefore overlap. Several of the quotations have in fact been placed under more than one theme. Those under the *skill* theme, as well as under the theme *value and judgement*, also frequently appear under other themes, which may explain their quantitative edge over the other themes.

The content of the contemporary Swedish curriculum

The word *aesthetic(s)* appears in 13 out of 23 national syllabuses⁴, as well as in the general curriculum – Lpo 94 (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a). There are obvious inconsistencies in the way the word is used in these different syllabuses, and the following discussion will hopefully uncover some of the meanings of the word as it reveals itself through the different texts. Possible explanations as to why the 13 syllabuses in question use the word, while the others do not, will also be covered. In Lpo 94 we read:

The school should stimulate each pupil towards self-development and personal growth. It should focus not only on intellectual but also practical, sensual and aesthetic aspects. Pupils should have the opportunity of experiencing the expression of knowledge in different ways. They should also be encouraged to try out and develop different modes of expression and experience feelings and moods. Drama, movement, dance, music and creativity in art, writing and design should all form part of the school's activity. Harmonious development and education provides opportunities for exploring, researching, acquiring and representing different forms of knowledge and experiences. Creative ability is a part of what the pupils should acquire (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a, p. 8).

Here *aesthetic* seems to refer either to some sort of a skill, some tool to stimulate individual growth, or some way of perceiving the world. Or maybe all three. Aesthetics is set alongside intellectual, practical

and sensual aspects, which combined are supposed to stimulate the pupil's personal growth. The word *aspect* in itself gives no indication as to whether Lpo 94 is talking about aesthetics as a skill, as a way of expressing oneself, or as a way to perceive the world, but considering the rest of the cited text, there seems to be an indication that the word *aesthetics* means all of these things. To refer to Thavenius (2004), this seems to correspond to his first and second units of meaning (*a sensory as opposed to an intellectual meaning* and *aesthetics as the philosophy of beauty in art*). What Thavenius's meanings lack, but is present in the above quotation, is an experiential and existentialist level. By this we mean that there seems to be a discourse represented in the quotation which says that aesthetics provides something fundamental to human existence, and that there is a certain aesthetic experience at the root of this. His three last units of meaning do not seem very relevant in this case. The quote above is the only time *aesthetic(s)* is used in Lpo 94 – it is in the syllabuses that the word really flourishes.

The syllabuses for Swedish compulsory school education cover all the 22 subjects taught in the schools. The syllabuses for art, crafts, home and consumer studies, mathematics, music, physical education and health, science studies⁵, biology, chemistry, physics, religion, technology⁶ and social studies all use the word *aesthetic(s)*. The rest, civics, English, geography, history, modern languages, mother tongue, sign language for the hearing, Swedish as a second language and Swedish, do not. The subjects which make use of the word are not only the ones that are referred to in everyday language as practical-aesthetic subjects. In fact, both English and Swedish, which to a large extent are concerned with what is generally considered art, poetry and prose, do not use the word, while less obvious subjects like chemistry, physics, biology and maths do.

A careful examination of the sections referring to aesthetics, in the light of the whole text and of the other sections containing the word, combined with detailed studies of each individual paragraph containing *aesthetics*, finally led us to identify seven different uses of the word:⁷

- Aesthetics as a tool for value and judgement.
- Aesthetics as a skill.
- Aesthetics as experience.
- Aesthetics as a way of expressing oneself.
- Aesthetics as a certain kind of knowledge.
- Aesthetics as a secondary tool for learning other skills/subjects.
- Aesthetics as a way to describe a subject.

The table below shows which uses are present in which subjects:⁸

	Value and judgement	Skill	Experience	Expression	Knowledge	Secondary tool	Describe subject
Art						X	X
Crafts	X	X					
Home & consumer	X						
Math	X		X				
Music		X	X	X			
Physical education	X	X		X			
Science studies					X		
Biology	X		X				
Chemistry	X						
Physics	X						
Social studies	X						
Religion				X	X		
Technology		X					

The themes in this table are not meant to be exclusive in the sense that aspects of one theme cannot fit into another. This reflects the theoretical approach of this article, the wish to see the familiarity between the different uses of the word *aesthetics*. So the comment about Thavenius's units of meaning being on different levels is just as applicable here. The meanings we have distinguished should therefore not be regarded as final categories, but rather as starting points for discussion. As was shown earlier, Lpo 94 seems to represent a discourse that regards aesthetics as something vital to human beings – an existentialist view of aesthetics in schools. Since Lpo 94 is above the syllabuses in the legal hierarchy, all these themes should be viewed in the light of this existentialist view by those trying to follow the rules. Whether or not those who wrote the syllabuses were aware of this is not for this article to speculate on, but the following presentation might help the reader to begin such an analysis.

The table shows clearly that there is a strong tendency to regard aesthetics as a *tool for value and judgement*. Crafts, home and consumer studies, maths, physical education, biology, chemistry, physics and social studies all show signs of such a discourse in their syllabuses. This is perhaps not so strange, considering the school system's focus on developing intellectual and critical abilities.

Pupils should . . . be able to use not only a knowledge of chemistry, but also aesthetic and ethical arguments on issues concerning the use of resources, pollution and recycling. (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Chemistry under "Goals that pupils should have attained by the end of the ninth year in school")

This quote also illustrates another distinct tendency in the syllabuses, namely to pair the two words *ethical* and *aesthetic*. Wittgenstein (1933) argues that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)” (Wittgenstein 1933, proposition 6.421.) This indicates either that there is a moral quality to aesthetics: that something aesthetic must be morally good, or that the only way to judge whether something is morally good or not is whether it presents itself in an aesthetic way. The first of these two interpretations can be considered pre-Kantian (Kristeller 1951), while the other can be seen as very postmodern. Before Kant there was no art that was not good for the soul, and today Wolfgang Iser (1997) amongst others believes that people these days, when religion and ideologies are dead, make their decisions on the basis of the best tasting choice (Nielsen 1996). Aesthetics has thus become the new moral: the ground on which we base all our choices. “Today, we are living amidst an aestheticization of the real world formerly unheard of. Embellishment and styling are to be found everywhere. . . . Homo aestheticus has become the new role-model,” says Iser (1997, p. 3) in his argument to prove that aesthetics has become the most influential factor in modern people’s lives. It is impossible to say whether the makers of these syllabuses had these existentialist views or the more pre-Kantian views in mind when writing their texts, or whether it was neither, but simply a fascination with the sounds of the popular Swedish words *estetik* and *etik*⁹ ringing together. Whatever the reason, the fact is that home and consumer studies, science studies, biology, chemistry, physics, social studies and crafts use these words as a pair.

Four of the subjects, crafts, music, physical education and technology, represent a discourse that regards aesthetics as a *skill*. Like the former theme, this one is also well in line with what is usually taught in schools.

A positive experience of movement and rhythm is in its turn a basis for individual and group exercises, and thus promotes not only improvisational and aesthetic, but also different motor skills (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Physical education and health under “Structure and nature of the subject”).

To see aesthetic awareness as a skill is well in line with the philosophical tradition of aesthetics. Especially during the 19th century, aesthetic skills were regarded as something for the gifted who possessed the *aesthetic awareness* needed to distinguish bad works of art from better.

Such views still exist though, and the influential Frank Sibley said as late as 1959 that sensitivity to good taste is rarer than other human abilities (Emt & Hermerén 1990, p. 160). Welsch (1997) gives an insight into a less romantic view of the issue of aesthetic awareness, by seeing aesthetics not as something within the human being, but as something culturally defined as a part of a whole. To be aesthetically aware, in his opinion, therefore involves having the ability to perceive and treat different inputs such as shape, intertextual elements, historical elements, sensory inputs and so forth as a whole and through them value the object in question. Whether or not this ability is something we are born with and to what extent it can be acquired by training remain open questions, however. This view fits in quite well with Bourdieu's perception of art as being culturally defined, and of aesthetic skills as really nothing other than the ability to recognize what society has defined as being good art (Bourdieu 1996a).

Closely related to, and perhaps not separable from, the skill theme are the themes *experience* and *expression*.

The subject also covers the aesthetic and ethical aspects of experiences arising from contact with nature (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Biology, under "Structure and nature of the subject").

Besides being representative of the view that aesthetics involves some kind of special quality of experience, this quote clearly shows that *aesthetics* is being used in quite a different sense from "the philosophy of art". Traces of Baumgarten, or what Thavenius (2004) refers to as the original Greek meaning, shine through here. According to such a view, *aesthetics* refers to sublime beauty capable of giving rise to a special kind of experience called *aesthetic experience*. Aesthetic experience is an important concept even today, but most philosophers deal with it as something only experienced through (good) art (Shusterman 1999). There is nothing in the other syllabuses that use *aesthetics* as experience which offers us any help in understanding how the syllabuses should be read regarding what distinguishes aesthetic experience from other experiences, only that it can be triggered by nature (biology), singing, playing and composing (music) and mathematical patterns (mathematics).

Aesthetic(s) in the sense of *expression* can be considered a kind of output of an aesthetic skill or ability, but we have chosen not to include it under the *skill* theme and to discuss it separately. In the syllabuses for music and religion, this aspect is most prominent.

The pupil uses music as a personal mode of expression when creating, and makes aesthetic reflections (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Music, under “Criteria for the grade Pass with great distinction”).¹⁰

This quote shows that it is the pupil’s reflection that is considered to be aesthetic, but it is a matter of reflection on his or her musical expression. In a traditional communication model of musical composition or artistic creation in general, this theme can be seen as reflection upon the creative part of the process. An oversimplified model for communication of music could look like this:

Composer —→ Artist —→ Listener

Here the two first roles represent expression and the last one the receiver. An assumption in this article is that communication forms the basis for man’s constitution of the world. Each individual is the centre of his or her own universe, and the way we relate to others is through symbols or language (Schütz 1980). Aesthetics plays a role in this communication, no matter what meaning of the word we apply. At first sight it seems a little peculiar that the receiving and reflecting aspects of the communication should be given so much more prominence than the creative aspect. All of this is in fact interconnected, however, and producing without reflecting and perceiving is not possible in our view, since in one way or another experience forms the basis for most of our actions. Creating by *reflecting* aesthetically can therefore be thought of as one way of communicating aesthetic *reflections* upon aesthetic *experiences*, which constitute a foundation or *knowledge* for making *judgements* on the aesthetic *value* of something. Another interesting thing shown by this quotation is the fact that this is a criterion for grading pupils. To achieve the highest grade in music, the pupil has to be able to show that he or she makes “aesthetic reflections”. That also means that the teacher has to give opportunities in lessons for pupils to express these reflections, which implies that the teacher has to be conscious of what *aesthetic(s)* means – how else can he or she grade the pupil?

This leads us to the theme of *knowledge*, which in this discussion appears as the last theme represented in more than one syllabus. Knowledge can be seen both as a premise for the quality of aesthetic experience, expression and judgement, and as an outcome of the same, depending on our view of knowledge. In this article, knowledge is seen as something more than what we know intellectually – it also involves what is commonly called *know-how* - the cunningness or skilfulness

required to perform some action. In the subject religion there is an attempt to distinguish between different kinds of knowledge:

Aesthetic expressions and symbols constitute an important part of religion and are included in the subject. Interpretation and experience of music, art, rites and ceremonial occasions are a complement to more theoretical knowledge (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Religion, under “Structure and nature of the subject”).

What distinguishes aesthetic knowledge from theoretical knowledge is an interesting subject for discussion. Is there a special knowledge regarding all the things we have characterized as defining aesthetic(s)? In our opinion there is no way we can distinguish different kinds of knowledge since, if they actually exist, they will be intertwined and interrelated to the extent that there is no usable way to view them as separate. However, there seems to have been a trend in schools especially, but also in the wider popular science debate, to embrace Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory (Gardner 1993). He does not talk about aesthetic intelligence (but does refer to a musical intelligence), but even so this kind of thinking seems to be gaining growing acceptance, and might be what shines through in the syllabus for religion. There is no doubt that aesthetics can be a part of knowledge, but it is hard to see any advantage in separating different kinds of knowledge and comparing them as if they were not part of the same sum of knowledge. If they were not, then how would we explain the similarity in use, and yet clearly different meanings, of the word *aesthetic(s)*?

Wittgenstein (1960) once more comes to our rescue: It is not the differences or the specifics that define a word, it is the familiarities between meanings. Some words, he said, have diversity in meanings in use which slide over into each other and are recognizable, but not really distinguishable as separate units. This is how it is with the word *aesthetics*.

The last two themes are found only in the syllabus for art, and are of a slightly different character from the others.

As a result of its aesthetic and communicative nature, the subject can contribute to promoting the school as a cultural environment . . . (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Art, under “Aim of the subject and its role in education”).

Aesthetics as a secondary tool is a discourse we have found to be fairly common in thinking about music as a subject in schools in

Norway (Thorgersen 2003). This means that it is music's usefulness for other skills or subjects rather than the actual music taught that forms the basis of the argument for teaching the subject. In this case, it is to promote the school's image in society as something valued that gives status, namely a cultural environment.

Final words

What kind of a guideline regarding aesthetics is provided in Lpo 94 and the national syllabuses? When pupils have to engage in aesthetic reflection to achieve the highest grade in music, does this mean that in that subject pupils should be focusing on the beauty of music, the performance and interpretative aspect, the expressionist or the communicative aspect, whether it can be considered art, or how it gives a certain kind of experience which is existentially significant? And how can the teacher evaluate this or even bring it into the classroom? How is a chemistry or maths teacher supposed to integrate aesthetics into his or her teaching? In what way is a teacher supposed to interpret the use of the word in the documents when this article has shown that the *aesthetics* can mean so many things? Is it a matter of the "philosophy of good art", the experience of beauty, reflectiveness regarding taste, a distinct and rewarding way for pupils to express their inner self, the existentialist view of aesthetics as the premise for all construction of truth, or does it simply mean "pretty"? With only the texts at hand, we can merely speculate as to what their authors meant by using the word in these particular subjects and not in others. And what about the other subjects, the ones which do not use the word *aesthetics* in their syllabuses, like Swedish and English? Are the syllabuses as a whole to be interpreted to mean that these subjects should involve less aesthetics than for example physics and technology, which do use the word? It is obvious to us that there are differences in how the authors of the different texts have interpreted *aesthetics*. This is not necessarily a problem, if the idea behind using a term which has such a diversity of interpretations is to empower the individual teacher and local discourses to make use of their particular knowledge and, within the broad understanding of the word, to let the teachers do what they feel is appropriate. If this is the case, the point of having these documents as legally binding measures to ensure equal education for all Swedish children is dubious. Depending on the purpose of the curriculum, and how the Swedish school authorities want these documents to serve as real guidelines in teachers' work, it could be important to be aware that *aesthetics*, along with other words, is interpreted and used in a wide range of

meanings. If those who draft these legal documents want one specific interpretation of aesthetics to be more prominent than others in schools, they must provide a stipulative definition of the word or make sure that everyone involved in writing the curriculum has the same understanding of it.

Notes

1. Or members of a society, in plain English.
2. Note that Shusterman's article is about aesthetic *experience*, but since in our opinion experience is the platform on which the whole concept of aesthetics rests, we find this to be applicable to this general outline.
3. Thavenius (2004) borrows the first four of these meanings from Nielsen (1996), who actually only devotes one paragraph to this question, and his outline is not intended as a full exploration of the different meanings of *aesthetics*. However, we find it interesting enough to form a basis for discussion.
4. Of these 23 syllabuses, only 21 are for individual subjects taught in schools. The other two are general syllabuses for *science studies*, consisting of physics, chemistry and biology (individual syllabuses for which all use the word *aesthetics*), and *social studies*, consisting of geography, history, religion and civics (here only the specific syllabus for religion uses *aesthetics*). It could therefore be argued that civics, geography and history have an obligation to relate to *aesthetics* even though their own syllabuses do not use the term, but this is not an important consideration in the present article, since the aim here is to discuss the different meanings presented and not which subjects are involved. Considering that Lpo 94 uses the word, all subjects are in any case obliged to relate to *aesthetics*.
5. This syllabus covers biology, chemistry and physics, which have their own syllabuses as well.
6. Technology only uses the word in the Swedish version, since the English translation omits the section "Evaluation, criteria for grades".
7. These are presented without any ranking in terms of importance. The ones with most hits are listed first, but this should not be taken to mean that they are the most important. This is not a quantitative analysis.
8. Subjects are listed in the order they appear in Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a.
9. *Estetik* is the Swedish word for "aesthetics", *etik* the word for "ethics".
10. Since the grade criteria are not translated in our sources, this quote is given in our own translation.

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5. Pragmatist aesthetics

This chapter might be considered both a continuation and specification of the brief historical passage of aesthetic philosophy in *Publication One: One Word to Rule Them? The Word Aesthetics in Curricula for the Swedish Compulsory School* (p. 39) as well as an introduction to the view on aesthetics that represents the view in this thesis. *Publication one* (p. 39) was written in an early stage of the work with this thesis and at that point I had not taken a stand yet as to which kind of aesthetics I would embrace. This chapter can therefore also be considered a kind of result since it represents the findings of my investigations into what a reasonable view of aesthetics might be. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the consequences of seeing aesthetics as based on aesthetic experience in accordance with the view held by Shusterman (2000, 2002 etc.) and Dewey (1934) in particular.

Aesthetics as a branch of philosophy, is often considered the philosophy of art, defining, describing, questioning and defending the purpose and function of art. As I wrote briefly in the previous chapter, this view of aesthetics has grown from Kant in the 18th century through the romanticist period of the 19th century and through to the analytic philosophy of today. Through the romanticist view on art as divine creation stemming from geniuses who by some inner force made brilliant art with the potential to change humans lives, aesthetics became a philosophy not only of art, but of fine art. When Baumgarten wrote the book *Aesthetica* in 1750 and introduced the word aesthetics as a philosophical analytic tool, he had quite different purposes with his concept of aesthetics. He found the word in the Greek language where the word was connected to the bodily perception of the world and Baumgarten therefore introduced the term aesthetics as an alternative path to knowledge – through the senses rather than only through thinking (Shusterman 2000b). Baumgartens view on aesthetics soon fell into the shadows when Kant entered the scene and adopted the concept as evaluative with

regards to art (Kristeller 1951). Kant's view that aesthetics was the philosophical basis for evaluation, interpretation, approval and disapproval, grew in the 19th century and became a key concept in the romantic view of the artist and the divine art. When modernity came to an end, and the idea of eternal truths died, the concept of aesthetics went into a crisis. Art had changed from having an entertaining function in society, mainly pleasing, and only to some extent challenging, to a position where the main purpose was breaking barriers, provoking and taking political and ideological stands. Aesthetics, which had been there as a help for defining and explaining which art was good and why certain pieces of art gave a specific aesthetic experience, no longer worked when the whole idea of art changed. There seemed to be no need for a concept that defined an artefact as art because art seemed to be more a socially defined label put on objects to suit a certain group of people's need to express themselves and distinguish themselves in a certain period of time¹³. Or could it be that aesthetics still had its place, but that the place it had in regards to art in romanticism was obsolete and that there was a need for aesthetics even in days to come? The last hundred years has been filled with attempts both to dismiss the concept of aesthetics as well as fill it with new meaning. In this chapter I will explain my pragmatist view on aesthetics, in the spirit of Dewey (1934) and Shusterman (Primarily 2000 & 2000b)

Aesthetic experience

Aesthetic experience had been a key concept in aesthetic philosophy ever since Baumgarten introduced aesthetics into philosophy. However the implications of aesthetic experience changed and from having been the foundation for aesthetics, it was the experience part of aesthetics that really met the most critical crisis in the 20th century. I will soon come back to why aesthetic experience was criticised almost to extinction, but first I would like to linger a bit on Dewey's view of aesthetic experience.

¹³ Of course this is a simplification, but a simplification which points to a distinct trend. I will write more about this in the chapter about art on page 65.

In the chapter about pragmatism (p. 21) I explained about Dewey and the other pragmatists relating to the world in a different manner than the dominant philosophies in their time as well as in the times to come. While Dewey (1910) in his early middle period argued that scientific, rational thinking is of higher value than other kinds of knowledge formation, he argued even more strongly for aesthetic experience as the most valuable way of learning in his later works (Dewey 1934). The title of the book *Art as experience* (1934) suggested both the vital part aesthetic experience plays in Dewey's thoughts about art, as well as a warning about a problem in Dewey's view of art and aesthetics. According to Dewey, aesthetic experience is the central part of aesthetics. Aesthetics without the experiential component was an impossibility for Dewey. He argued that aesthetic experience is a precondition for art. People strive for rewarding experiences that stand out from the boring events in the daily routine, and in Dewey that means positive experiences.

In my view on aesthetic experiences, rewarding experiences are not always pleasurable. The desire for aesthetic experiences is essential for human kind and, according to Dewey, a significant characteristic of a civilised society. In his arguments for aesthetic experience as characteristic as well as a foundation for a civilised society, it is important to read behind statements which today would be considered ethnocentric and racist which represents the leading ideas of the time, in order to try to understand his writings. The same holds true in his examples of aesthetic expressions that are capable of invoking such experiences – basically they are what is considered good art at the time or phenomena in nature that can produce similar experiences. He aimed to reclaim aesthetic experience from the philosophical realm and back to ordinary life.

Aesthetic experience is a communicative and social phenomenon in that we live the way we do through interaction with others in a social learning community. In a true pragmatist manner, aesthetic experience is not seen as solely social nor solely private or cognitive, but holistic: An experience may be private, but influenced by the history and social setting. The main problem with Dewey's writings on aes-

thetic experience occurs when he tries to define art by the use of the phenomenon aesthetic experience. According to Dewey, the wish for aesthetic experience is a precondition for the existence of art. As previously stated, Dewey defined art as something which evokes aesthetic experiences. The problem of defining art has been one of aesthetic philosophy's primary tasks, and Dewey's solution is unfortunately unsatisfactory. As several others (Bourdieu 1996) show us, art is as much a socially constructed phenomenon, as anything else. Shusterman convincingly claims:

By standard philosophical criteria, this definition is hopelessly inadequate, grossly misrepresenting our current concept of art. Much art, particularly bad art, fails to engender Deweyan aesthetic experience, which on the other hand, often arises outside art's institutional limits. (Shusterman 2000 p. 23)

However, I think Shusterman's critique is a bit too harsh. As I wrote in the earlier (page 21) a key feature of pragmatism is that it, unlike analytical philosophy, does not attempt to draw sharp demarcational lines between words and their representations. The prime interest is instead to point to the consequences of certain actions, ways of thinking, social structures, power relations and so forth. To demand that Dewey should comply with demarcational standards seems a bit unfair as that was never his aim. With this said, Dewey's understanding of art still leaves quite a bit to be wanted, since it, demarcation or not, fails to include so much of what is generally considered art today – art that either fails to produce aesthetic experiences or where aesthetic experiences never was the intention of the artist.

Shusterman (1997, 2000, 2002 and 2000b) shares the same goal as Dewey, and initiate a revival for a pragmatic view on aesthetics with aesthetic experience as the central component. In his most influential book *Pragmatist aesthetics* (Shusterman 2000) he even proposed a new branch of philosophical aesthetics called somaesthetics. Even if Shusterman is well known for his attempts to define rap and other popular genres as art or at least as equal to art, I see most of his writings as arguments for somaesthetics. The word is a combina-

tion of the Greek word *soma*, meaning body, and aesthetics. It is in other words an attempt to reinstate the body, and therefore also aesthetic experience, as the central element in aesthetics. Somaesthetics is, as Shusterman wrote, nothing new in the history of aesthetic philosophy.

The purpose is to show its potential utility, not its radical novelty. If somaesthetics is radical, it is only in the sense of returning to some of the deepest roots of aesthetics and philosophy. (Shusterman 1999 p. 263).

By this he referred to Baumgarten's original intentions of the concept of aesthetics as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, but not only as perceived through the senses. Implied in the concept of somaesthetics is the body as both the sensory perceiving instrument for aesthetic experience, but also the body as an expression in the experience. The body not only experiences the sensory input, it affects and is a part of the experience. It is therefore important that human beings are aware of their body in order to develop the possibilities for aesthetic experiences. As much as I can see the need to reintroduce the body as the centre in aesthetic experience, I still find the whole concept of somaesthetics to be quite superfluous. Shusterman himself also wrote that somaesthetics is meant not as much as an analytical tool as a way of living and a way of understanding how the body exists and develops in the world. In a pragmatist sense, such a concept might actually fit the label philosophical, since pragmatism as a philosophy is about finding a better way of living. Somaesthetics is still too much of a practical method, with most of its more epistemological and ontological features covered by other philosophies, for me to value it as a philosophical branch.

Immediacy or reflection ?

Shusterman and Dewey have both received critique for the weight they put on the importance of aesthetic experience as well as their use of the concept. Shusterman answers to this critique in a couple of texts, most remarkably his book titled *Surface and Depth* (Shusterman 2002). The title of the book is a direct answer to what critics has interpreted as superficialness. The importance Shusterman puts on aesthetic experience is interpreted as implying that the immediately experienced parts of something aesthetic is more important than reflection, interpretation, evaluation, social significance and other deeper aspects of aesthetics. As a central critic states:

We may conclude at this point that what is immediately felt carries the weight, so to speak, of an aesthetic experience. It remains for reflection to organize, classify, and relate these experiences to each other in such a way that meaning develops. (Johnston 2004).

In reply to the article by Johnston, Shusterman (2004) gives a clear account of what aesthetic experience implies in his texts. In line with how I presented Wittgenstein in relation to pragmatism on page 33 he stresses the different meanings of immediacy and primacy in different contexts and to different people. He insists that reflection and immediacy are interdependent. Even if aesthetic experiences are immediately perceived, they will linger and grow within the person and experiences could be enriched and changed through training and reflection.

This sense of immediacy — of direct, undeferred appreciation of meaning, enjoyment, and value — does not deny a role for reflection. Not only can prior reflection prepare the way for immediate enjoyment but reflection itself offers its own aesthetic pleasures of immediacy. (Shusterman 2004 p. 110).

It is not only the immediate bodily – sensual one might say, experience that constitutes the aesthetic experience. The experience, will

be dependant on bodily inputs as well as previous experiences, thoughts and reflections, but that does not mean that one part of this complex whole is more important, only that the sensuous-bodily part often will take place earlier in the temporal space. But even this is not certain – if we take a pragmatist view on the matter and refuses to see limits to aesthetic experience. If earlier experiences and reflections are considered parts of the whole that constitutes an aesthetic experience, what is then the most important part, or what happens first? It will be a question of the chicken and the egg – a question as impossible to answer as it is irrelevant and uninteresting in a pragmatist view on the matter. What is important is to see the whole, the synergy effect of the parts that constitutes the experience and what the consequences could be of such a view. In fact, as I argue in a recent article (Ferm & Thorgersen 2007) where pragmatism and phenomenology are combined, one value of applying a pragmatist view on aesthetics is the weight Shusterman puts on reflection.

A pragmatist view on aesthetics that presupposes aesthetic experience as an essential part of aesthetics – a part that cannot be removed and is the most basal reason why we strive for experiences through art and other media, constitutes the view of aesthetics in this thesis. However, to sense a piece of art, no matter how good it is, does not guarantee an aesthetic experience. In fact, aesthetic experience is tightly connected to art, but they cannot be defined in terms of each other because they are different, have different functions and can exist independently. However, to discuss aesthetics' place in society as well as in school, art plays an important role.

The rules of art

As aesthetics has been considered the philosophy of art, and even has been used as to demarcate art, it seems fruitful to delve into what art could be from a pragmatist point of view.

As stated previously, I do not agree with Dewey's definition of art by demarcating it through use of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experi-

ence, though fundamental for the existence of art, has very limited impact on what is considered art. The wording in the heading of this paragraph is borrowed from Bourdieu (1996), who I consider to have a view on art that is more contemporary pragmatist than Dewey's, and in most respects lies very close to my own understanding of the field¹⁴. While this is not a sociological thesis, I find the Bourdieuan views on art to complement the pragmatist view on aesthetics in this book¹⁵.

Bourdieu has built a way of looking at the world that has evolved from his sociological and anthropological work, but is very much philosophical in its nature. He is most famous for his analysis of the French's taste in relation to class and power (Bourdieu 1995) where he showed that people's aesthetic preferences were dependant on two main factors: cultural and economical capital. His view on society is quite complex and changed and developed throughout his lifetime, but I will try to explain briefly the most interesting features of his theories for this thesis.

Bourdieu claimed that the field of art can only be explained from a historical point of view (Bourdieu 1993 ch. 10). A field in Bourdieu terminology is an autonomous group of people sharing the same beliefs, words and so forth and can be seen as analogous to my metaphor about the raft (*Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection* p. 75). A field operates in relation to other fields, and can contain smaller fields as well as being a part of larger fields, all dependent on context. To say that there is such a thing as a field of art is therefore not controversial. It implies that art is a social definition steered by rules as any other human creation. Today, most academics agree that art is a factor of social dynamics, but how this dynamic operates and to what extent art is socially defined is not agreed upon (Bourdieu 1993). Historically though, art has been con-

¹⁴ Not surprisingly Shusterman's writings on the topic confers well with Bourdieu's writings since Shusterman worked with Bourdieu at *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociale* as guest professor for a year in 1990. For more on pragmatism in relation to Bourdieu, see Shusterman 2002 chapter 12.

¹⁵ For more on how I see the relations between the different theories I make use of see *How different theories relate* page 29.

sidered absolute and self sufficient. In addition to the term field, Bourdieu used a toolbox of terms to explain the dynamics of society. If we combine the word habitus and the terms symbolic, cultural, social and economical capital with the notion of field and discourse, we get an opportunity to understand Bourdieu's view on art to some extent. Within any field there will be discursive struggles. People and groups will be struggling to raise in the power hierarchies by acquiring different kinds of capital. The Marxist notion of capital is extended in Bourdieu's theory to involve other kinds of symbols that might involve an increase in status. The personal preconditions of each agent¹⁶ in this social dynamic is called habitus. Habitus is (more than) the sum of the socially, historically, genetically and relational factors that constitutes a person at a certain time in a certain space and can be considered embodied identity¹⁷.

How can an artefact be defined as a piece of art? How do we distinguish an ordinary urinal from Marcel Duchamp's "Fontene" or a baby hammering on a piano from a free jazz improvisation? And what is the purpose of art? This has been some of aesthetic philosophy's self imposed tasks to investigate. And as Bourdieu wrote:

What is striking about the diversity of responses which philosophers have given to the question of the specificity of the work of art is not so much the fact that these divergent answers often concur in emphasizing the absence of function, but rather that they all (with the possible exception of Wittgenstein) share the ambition of capturing a transhistoric or an ahistoric essence. (Bourdieu 1993 p. 255).

What Bourdieu claimed is that there is no such essence – or that the essence is that art is a moving, dynamic field that always will have

¹⁶ Agent is another Bourdieu term meaning someone who acts in the field or has interests in the field.

¹⁷ Bourdieu would most certainly disagree with this rigid definition since he avoided definitions himself because he wanted words to be defined through its use, much like it is in real life. I agree with this, and accept that my definition is false since it is too simple, but for the sake of the readers not familiar with Bourdieu, I think it gives an idea sufficient to understand my further arguments.

different content and function depending on its position and history. Any observer of a piece of art will be directed towards the piece of art in a way that is steered by his or her habitus: What stimuli I have been exposed to and the values I have been inflicted with, will be deciding in respect to how I perceive the piece of art. At the same time, the situation and how the piece of art is presented to the perceiver¹⁸ is important. The artist is in the same situation: He or she creates a piece of art in accordance with what is considered art combined with his or her habitus. Because of the struggles for power, status and influence within the field(s) of art, the leading edge will always change to avoid that art is kitchified – adopted by the commoners and thereby losing all distinguishing quality. Bourdieu explains aesthetic experience by means of this circle of history:

When things and minds (or consciousness) are immediately in accord – in other words, when the eye is the product of the field, [...] appears to the eye as immediately endowed with meaning and worth. (Bourdieu 1993 p. 257)

This could be interpreted as a dismissal of the existence of aesthetic experience, but I read it differently: This argument shows that it is impossible to predict what will invoke aesthetic experiences. Any attempt to bring forth a set of criteria that defines a piece of art or any other phenomenon aiming to invoke aesthetic experiences will fail for two reasons: The first reason is that such a list will be obsolete very soon after it is written, even in times where the dynamic of the field of art move slowly. The second reason is that every agent in the field will belong to other fields, have different habituses and have different approaches, aims and attitudes towards the situation and the piece of art. Art is an institution¹⁹ defined by the history of art in relation to its role in society. Its purpose is that of invoking aesthetic experiences as well as both providing a means for acquir-

¹⁸ “Perceiver” is really an inadequate word since a communication always will be at least two persons directed towards each other and develop meaning together in my view.

¹⁹ By institution I connect to Nerland (2006) who defines institutions as “systems for action and meaning making that both are socially regulated as well as regulating the activity that can happen.” (p. 49, my translation)

ing power as well as being a field in which power can be lost or gained. Later I will show how this view on art is important in a school where aesthetics is supposed to play an important part.

Summary of pragmatist aesthetics

I started this chapter by talking about aesthetic experience, how that had played an important role in romanticism, how aesthetic experience had been used to demarcate art and why I think such a demarcation is as inadequate as it is uninteresting. Because I had been presenting the problem of relating aesthetic experience to art, I chose to present my pragmatist view on art. However, pragmatist aesthetics is more than aesthetic experience and its relation to art. As pragmatism is about how things work and consequences of thoughts and actions in a holistic perspective, I will here try to condense a more complete picture of what pragmatist aesthetics might be based on the previous rhetoric.

Pragmatist aesthetics rests on a foundation of aesthetic experience. How this is invoked, or how this experience is different from other experiences, are not interesting according to pragmatist philosophy. An aesthetic experience is sought through things, phenomena and actions that are perceived as particularly meaningful in an emotionally strong way. This experience can be the basis for evaluation of art and can provide guidance in developing our own appreciation or creation of art. It is however important to be aware that a pragmatist view on aesthetic experience in the spirit of Dewey, is a socially shared experience – not something psychologically private. As Westerlund points out “[...] it is a serious mistake to understand Dewey's ‘experience’ as private experience” (Westerlund 2003 p. 47). As far as I'm concerned, pragmatist aesthetics rests on a foundation of aesthetic experience, and therefore involves other phenomena, things and actions than objects of art with the intention to invoke aesthetic experience. As Dewey (1934) showed, a piece of nature such as a sunset, may invoke such an experience, and Shusterman seems to enjoy to show how odd popular genres such as

rap and country musicals can invoke such experiences (Shusterman 2000 chapters 3 and 4), and also that bodily practice can invoke such experiences.

Is it then meaningful to talk about aesthetics, if it is being defined by use of such a vague and broad concept as aesthetic experience? A reader might ask: “how do I know if this was aesthetic experience or not”, when she has experienced something that shook her emotionally and intellectually. There is no easy answer to that, even though philosophers such as Beardsley and Goodman (in Shusterman 2000) tries to make lists of aspects of an experience that can define it as aesthetic. Such lists are easy to attack and will always be inaccurate because as Wittgenstein showed us – words live their own life, and as Bourdieu showed us – the present is constantly changing and so is history. What is certain is that the contents and the triggering will be different for different people, but at the same time it will be a consequence of the social background, the setting and the habitus. To what extent for example interpretation will be involved in, or a precondition for an aesthetic experience will vary from situation to situation, from person to person and from society to society, but since interpretation is a part of providing meaning, interpretation is a part of what is considered aesthetic. The same goes for communication, art, evaluation, ethics, beauty, ugliness, horror, involvement and even learning. The list could go on forever and might therefore render aesthetics obsolete since everything seems to fit in. But that is not the case in my view: All kinds of phenomena might invoke aesthetic experiences, but not always, not for everyone and that is what makes it interesting to discuss, develop and even train.

The role of aesthetics in school?

We are drawn towards it, inexorably towards what is beautiful. Never mind that we have different tastes. Beauty differs. But we are all drawn to it, and we are all to some extent addicted to it.

The quote above is from one of the teachers in the interview study I will be presenting in the article on page 93. Both in Lp094 (utbildningsdepartementet 2001) and in the interview study, existential aspects on aesthetics in connection to school as well as life is highlighted. The more concrete aspects of aesthetics in school is provided in the two publications *Publication One: One Word to Rule Them? The Word Aesthetics in Curricula for the Swedish Compulsory School* (p. 39) and *Publication three: Teachers reflecting on aesthetics* (p. 93), but here I will dwell on some on the possible consequences of such a view on aesthetics that I have presented above for school. The discussion will be continued in the concluding chapters.

In the article *One Word to Rule Them* (p. 39) I showed that the word aesthetics is frequently used in the syllabuses as well as in Lp094, but that the meaning of the word varied considerably between the 14 different instances where the word occurred. From a pragmatist and Wittgensteinian point of view, this is neither surprising nor problematic in itself, and can easily be explained as a result of aesthetics being a part of the language games of today, sharing the genealogy of school and art as well as belonging to the specific genre curriculum with its specific signifying marks and particular rules²⁰. As I will be showing in *publication three* (p. 93) teachers' reflections over aesthetics could be considered pragmatic. The view on aesthetics presented in this chapter, combined with the view on teaching and learning presented in the chapter *A pragmatist view on education, teaching and learning* (p. 27) should therefore be interesting not only for this study, but for all persons and groups somehow involved

²⁰ See the chapters on text (p. 32) on Wittgenstein (p. 33) and on art (p. 65)

with aesthetics in schools in Sweden.

In her thesis in music education Heidi Westerlund (2002) investigates a long lasting conflict within music educational philosophy between the leading music educational philosophers David Elliot and Bennet Reimer, from a pragmatist – Deweyan point of departure. The conflict can be described as a conflict of content versus method²¹, doing versus listening, autonomous aesthetics versus heterogeneous aesthetics (Varkøy 2003) and praxialist versus aesthetic (Westerlund 2003). Such discussions departure from differences in how learning, art and aesthetics are understood, and as the conflict has evolved, there has been several attempts to try to overcome the differences between what seems to be fundamental legitimation problems for music as a school subject. Westerlund's suggestion to overcome these conflicting views is to apply a pragmatist view on music education. As I argued in the chapter, *A pragmatist view on education, teaching and learning* (p. 27), this is a general feature of the pragmatist view of education that a holistic approach is necessary in order to achieve real learning. A pragmatist holistic view on music education means to view Reimer's "aesthetic music education" and Elliot's "praxialist theory" of music education within a holistic view on education, music and society. As Westerlund points out, much of the conflict originates in the individualistic view on learning both Elliot and Reimer puts forward. A pragmatist view on learning, art and aesthetics is holistic, social and historical and can therefore involve both the "aesthetic" view of music as an art subject held by Reimer as well as the praxial views held by Elliot²². I chose to present this conflict in music educational philosophy because I believe that it represents fairly typical views on aesthetics in schools, exemplified through this nourished conflict. The following are examples of questions that are common in debates regarding aesthetics in school: Should aesthetics in school be concerned with the high arts or with common culture? Is the purpose of aesthetics in

²¹ This conflict has also been referred to as a conflict between aesthetics and pragmatics – using both terms in their most narrow and popular meaning far from the usage in this thesis.

²² Others sharing the same critique against Reimer is Regelski and Bowman (Westerlund 2003).

education personal experiences and growth or cultural upbringing? Should the method or the content control what is taught in school? I could go on for a while. The answer to all these questions are that there is no answer to them that accounts for all situations and all persons', schools' and societies' needs. It is important to take social and historical issues into account, but most of all the important questions must be: What does this pupil/class/school/teacher need in order to develop as (a) human being(s) in today's (and future's) society? How does school as an institution facilitate such learning, development and growth?

So how can school facilitate learning within the social, historical and physical context in Sweden today if we accept the elucidation about aesthetics outlined in this chapter? First of all it is necessary to accept that aesthetic experience is the corner stone in aesthetics as well as to accept the premise set by the curriculum that aesthetics represents alternative paths to communication than prosaic verbal language. Children should be offered training in aesthetic communication involving both perceiving and creating. This will be lingered on more in the discussing parts of the thesis.

6. Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection

Peer reviewed paper presented at

*The 4th Carfax International Conference on Reflective
Practice*

held in Gloucester, England

June 2005

A Draft for a Raft of Reflection

Critical discourse analysis from a pragmatic point of view
as a method to understand teachers' reflections on
aesthetics

Introduction

In school we are supposed to learn. What we are supposed to learn is decided by the society in which the school is situated. What we in fact learn is not decided by anyone. Education is not a simple matter of providing the right stimuli to achieve the intended learning. Homo sapiens is too complicated for anyone to be able to foresee with any certainty what the outcome of an educational situation might be. Despite this we have teachers whose job it is to make sure that pupils learn what the society wants.

Communication is the keystone in any individual or communal development and it is only through interaction with others we are able to define ourselves as the person we are; To be someone means to be someone in relation to someone else. The meaning of things and events are being developed in close relationship with the people around us – in two ways: How would we know what purpose a handshake or a tie has, if we had not been a part of a culture where these things has a certain meaning? And how do these things work as symbols with which we interact with others? We are born into a certain time, a certain space, class and culture with quite specific rules as to what being human is, what is valuable and how power is distributed. While this might sound deterministic, it is not as bad as it sounds since individuals have choices within the system since the system is being constantly recreated by the subjects inhabiting it. It is in other words not a system which can be described once and for all with rules set in stone, but rather the opposite; a fluid system where rules constantly are created, reformed, questioned, recreated or dropped. To be

able to float and navigate this fluid reality, there is a need for tools. It would be a good thing with a steady boat, a map and a compass in this case.

A decent social network could suffice as boat, providing a fairly safe raft on which to explore the world. Language provides a fairly decent draft for trying to orient amongst different opinions, written and unwritten rules, strategies, habits, customs and power-relations. Ideology provides the compass which helps us decide where to go. These are not failproof tools by any means. A social network only supports you as long as you stay within their borders – and follow their rules. If your task on board is to scrub the raft's deck, the raft will be a very unsafe place if you try to act like the captain all of a sudden. However there probably is a way within the raft's system for someone who scrubs decks to reach the powers of a captain, but it might not be very easy to see, and it may very well prove dangerous to try. Fortunately you have access to the draft: Language will help you understand where you are, who you are and where to go. The problem with the language-draft is that it consists of symbols that are hard to define, and that may mean slightly different things to different people. But it is the only map available, and everyone else has to approach it with the same uncertainty as whether or not they understand it correctly. Within a society there is an agreement regarding the meaning of a symbol, but still it will always be interpreted differently by different persons because of their background. Someone who has experienced a shipwreck will interpret a symbol for reef different than someone whose only reef experience is great fishing, and the actions taken as a response to the symbol may therefore differ radically.

So even if the goal is obvious because our ideology gives us a clear position, it is still difficult to navigate or to even float in this fluid we experience as reality. So how do teachers approach this seemingly impossible task of teaching someone else something when we all understand thing differently? This is where the purpose of this paper is set: To investigate how critical discourse analysis in the spirit of Fairclough (1995), can be combined with an ontology inspired by pragmatism, to analyse teachers' reflections over aesthetics.

Aesthetics as Focus for Reflection

In the Swedish curricula for the compulsory secondary school (Utbildningsdep. 2001a), the word aesthetics plays an important part. The word aesthetics is being used not only in the general curriculum for all compulsory schools in Sweden, but also in 13 out of 22 subjects' syllabuses (Utbildningsdep. 2001b). The syllabuses for the Swedish compulsory schools cover all the 22 subjects taught in the schools. The syllabuses for Art, Crafts, Home and Consumer Studies, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education and Health, Science Studies²³, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Religion, Technology²⁴ and Social Studies all use the word aesthetic. The rest, Civics, English, Geography, History, Modern Languages, Mother Tongue, Sign Language for the Hearing, Swedish as Second Language and Swedish do not use the word aesthetics. The subjects using the word are not only those that are referred to as practical-aesthetic subjects in everyday language. Actually both English and Swedish, which to a large extent are concerned with what is generally considered art, poetry and prose, do not use the word, while less obvious subjects like chemistry, physics, biology and maths use the word. Having a Norwegian background myself, I found this to be a surprisingly extensive use of the word, especially since these documents are quite thin. Based on this curiosity I investigated how the word aesthetics was being used in these documents and found that there were a wide diversity of different uses of the word (Thorgersen & Alerby, 2005). The question that became urgent to me then was: How do teachers relate to this word? I decided to investigate this further and went out looking for some suitable tools.

Pragmatism and Critical Discourse Analysis

Pragmatism and Critical discourse analysis are not the most common couple in the halls of educational research. I do however think that a combination of these two perspectives may provide me with a way of understanding teachers' reflections, that would otherwise be impossible. Not

²³ The syllabus covering Biology, Chemistry and Physics which have their own syllabuses as well

²⁴ Technology only uses the word in the Swedish version since the English translation has omitted the section "Evaluation, Criteria for Grades"

that this combination is the only fruitful one, but, as I hope to show, it is fruitful, and to me the most interesting.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism has never been a clearly defined and unified group of people. This makes it important to clarify who in particular forms the theoretical base for a project. In this paper Dewey in particular, but also his friend Mead as well as to some extent the contemporary neopragmatic thinker Shusterman will help me. In the background I have outlined how I see the formation of knowledge, how the world is seen and what truth is. This is neither a relativistic, nor an absolutist ontological and epistemological view, but rather what might be called a pragmatist point of view. Yes, I understand that total understanding of another person's intentions with a sent message is impossible, but I refuse to let that insight mislead me to the conclusion that all human interaction is misunderstandings. Yes, I understand that individuals are bound by the formal and informal rules where they live, but I refuse to make the conclusion that we are all slaves of our class and that the individual is nothing but a socially determined product of society with no autonomy. On the contrary I think individuals together create society. All this is consistent with a pragmatist way of looking at life and it is not compatible with ontologies more commonly associated with discourse analysis such as social constructivism (Burr, 1995) and poststructuralism (Jørgensen & Philips, 1998) because these are, at least in their pure form, relativistic and deterministic: There is no real truth, and people do not exist as individuals, but rather as some part of a collective force (Hake, 2004; Burr ,1995).

Today Pragmatism is no longer alone when it comes to balance; Bourdieu represents this in between point of view, and so do life world phenomenologists like van Manen (1997). So why am I drawn to pragmatism when it would may be be more convenient to stick to Bourdieu or life world phenomenology? There are three reasons: First of all I am attracted by the fact that Dewey has been so influential in the reform-pedagogical movement that has been steering the pedagogical debate since the 1930s. "Learning by doing" or even "learning by deweying" were hammered into our heads when I went to teachers trainers college. However we never read any of his original work even if it is quite accessible, and the introduction to his thoughts were rudimentary at best. Dewey's influence

is quite interesting since as far as philosophical influence goes, pragmatism's influence was almost completely overrun by analytical philosophy in the 20th century (Shusterman, 2000). Secondly I am attracted by what I perceive as staying young. What Dewey and Mead wrote during the first 30 years of the previous century still looks fresh to me – especially the ontological and epistemological parts of it. Finally, I am attracted by the “no crap” attitude I interpret in the texts. von Wright (2000) calls “but how does it become then?”, the pragmatic question of truth, indicating that just analysing and deconstructing a phenomenon is not enough for it to be interesting. You also have to speculate on what the consequences of your thoughts could be. As a part of this, pragmatists have not been afraid to be normative. As an example Dewey uses much space in his texts arguing for his view that democracy is a precondition for a decent life (e.g. Dewey 1916). And it is in this issue of normativity and willingness to speculate on change and alternatives, I see a clear connection to critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Critical Discourse Analysis on a Bed of Pragmatism

During the relatively short life of discourse analysis, it has managed to split into several branches with different strengths and weaknesses (Jørgensen & Philips, 1995). From the seventies and up until today discourse analysis has developed to be a diverted field of clearly different approaches to research and within different fields of research, but still with some common denominators. Discourse analysis is concerned with use of language and how meaning is created in communication, the power relations these words represent and what kind of different meanings and opinions on how the world is at present. Discourse theory is generally considered a social constructivist method (Hansen, Ryrberg & Torfing, 2001, Laclau, 2001), but in my opinion it is possible to apply CDA on an ontology inspired by pragmatism. As I wrote earlier, pragmatists do not deny that there is an “objective” world out there, but our access to it and understanding of it will always be based on our linguistic interpretations of our sensory inputs, and therefore there is no objective truth to be found – only the representations that creates our understandings of reality (Daly, 2002). I will not in this paper go to lengths describing other varieties of discourse analysis than CDA, and according to Fairclough, he believes that “[...]the social world is indeed a socially (and in part discursively) constructed world, but at any point in time people are confronted with a

pre-structured world which has real properties and a real structure which cannot be reduced to, and are not unconditionally subject to, people's knowledge of it, beliefs about it or projects for changing it."(Fairclough, 2005)

To see things in their right context is in fact one of the important characteristics of CDA. Since meaning is created in a social context in relation to other things, other people and other phenomena, it is important to take these into consideration when doing the discourse analysis. In my study this means that when someone says that "the pupils think aesthetical subjects are so much fun", I will have to see that in the proper context: Where is it said, what kind of social group does the school recruit the pupils from, what kind of leadership do they have, are there any conflicting discourses which fights for power, what are the general political, educational and other relevant tendencies in society? A problem in this respect is balance. One of Dewey's key issues is balance (in particular Dewey, 1910), and the CDA I will be using will be strongly influenced by that. In this case balance is all about drawing a relevant line for where surrounding information gives useful input, and to choose this input wisely. Since Fairclough states that "[...] any level of organization may be relevant to critical and ideological analysis" (Fairclough, 1995, p.7), everything could be, and probably is, relevant if the aim is to find the ultimate truth about a text. To take everything into an analysis means ultimately to draw a map of the world in its present and historical states to enlighten the question in focus, a task fitting for God and not a PhD student in education.

This paper is a part of an ongoing project where I attempt to investigate how teachers reflect upon aesthetics. To get access to this I have performed a group interview as well as individual interviews, with six teachers representing six different subjects in which in the syllabus uses the word aesthetics in the assessment criteria. The teachers were situated on three different schools in the north of Sweden. According to CDA it is important to see the discourse from several different angels using different texts. The question then is how much empirical data I should collect besides the interviews to get a grip of how this text relates to other texts. In this case I am not so much looking for the social impacts on the reflection as what kinds of reflections that take place in these interview sessions. Why then do I not choose a more descriptive discourse analysis than CDA, one might ask. Basically because I believe in the importance of seeing discourses as a part of social practice, and thereby staying alert in

my analysis process. This means that even if I do not actually collect press writings about the school, or observe the teachers practice, read governmental documents or look at the political climate in the community, I still have a possibility to speculate on these issues because of my background and my presence in the same kind of social field as these teachers operate in. I have been working as a teacher for several years in secondary school like these do, and I have regular contact with pupils and teachers who live their daily lives in similar schools. I am therefore in a privileged situation because of my familiarity with the field, but at the same time this could be a major problem if I am not critical towards my own knowledge, prejudice, experience and involvement in the field. As Bourdieu states very clearly in *Homo Academicus* (1996) when he analysed his own field, the university world in France, it is important to be as critical towards your own theoretisation as towards your empirical data. CDA therefore provides me with tools to be able to analyse without just writing down my own preunderstanding.

This leads me over to another attractive point of CDA, namely denaturalisation. The point of denaturalisation is to discover what is taken for granted by those in the field for thereby to be able to criticise it. This could be a problem for me because of my involvement with the field since the fish is the last one to discover the water it is swimming in, but through going through everything that is being said in the interviews and really looking for doxas²⁵, I think I have just as good a chance as anyone to discover them. For example in my study it is interesting that the subject that is definitely most frequently mentioned is maths despite the fact that maths was not amongst the subjects they were asked to represent²⁶. This could mean that much of what goes on in these schools are actually being done on the premises of maths, or at least it shows that maths is very up front in their consciousness in their rhetoric about school. This could maybe indicate something about power relations between subjects in the schools. A more specific example is that after having talked for quite a long time about aesthetics in school, and all they talk about is aesthetics as alternative ways for the children to express themselves. When I finally ask them about how they think about pupils experiencing aesthetical expressions made by others, the room is filled with silence. When they eventually starts talking about this aspect of aesthetics, they use quite some time to

²⁵ Bourdieu's term for something that's taken for granted.

²⁶ Chemistry, Music, Religion, Physical education, Physics and crafts were picked because of their use of aesthetics as assessment criteria.

define the subject before they eventually reflect upon this what seems a comfortable way. This could be interpreted as an indication that when these teachers talk or think about aesthetics in connection to school, they are only concerned with a part of what might be defined as aesthetics, namely pupils practical or artistic work as opposed to more theoretical and traditional school work. If I then apply the pragmatic question of truth upon these reflections, I might end up with some interesting results. If maths rule the school's rhetoric, how does it become then? Will the assessment in other subjects as well be subject to the same demands on logic, abstract thinking and theorisation as maths? Being aware that this is only speculation, it raises some questions which could be important to follow up on to denaturalise and therefore open up the discourse for change.

I have already mentioned that power plays an important part in CDA. As a part of understanding the social interaction that constitutes the framework in which the discourses analysed is constructed, it is important to uncover the power relations on a macro as well as on a micro level. Fairclough talks about hegemony, a concept which stems from the old Greek word for cox – the person in charge for steering the boat. In a broader sense it has to do with political leadership, but within discourse theory it refers more to the processes which constitutes the power relations. A basic assumption in CDA is an almost neomarxist belief that the ideals of the ruling class, or to talk in terms of Bourdieu, the ones possessing the symbolic capital, is reproduced by everyone on society. This is again closely connected to the denaturalisation of fish's water.

Whether such a view on power is useful is to a large extent dependent on whether you believe in the neomarxist presupposition or not. Fairclough himself says that it is important to balance the view on reproduction, especially when it comes to ideology. Even though his view is that power is reproduced, he stresses that “[...] there is a danger of over-emphasizing reproduction” (Fairclough, 1995 p. 18) and points to several examples of Marxist theories that has done exactly that because they have believed in a deterministic reproduction. In its modern form with no clearly defined class possessing the capital, but a rather more complicated system of structures constantly moving, but where power still is reproduced to a certain extent, I have no problems with such a belief. Nonetheless it is important to be aware that the results in a CDA analysis is done on the basis of such an assumption so that if you do not believe in this yourself

you may have problems with the whole result of the study. In my material power relations are very difficult to uncover because of the nature of the questions asked. However I have seen a few examples. One is that the examples of teaching methods that they define as aesthetic are often explained as being good because pupils learn better. But what they learn are often theoretical knowledge, not aesthetic. Aesthetics in classrooms are subject to the power of the theoretical knowledge where aesthetics plays the role of motivator or recreation.

Fairclough sums up the essence of CDA in what he calls a three dimensional framework consisting of the actual text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice. To be able to understand the text, denaturalise the ideologies, power relations, discursive practices and so forth, not just the actual text, but all three dimensions must be taken into account. Historically there has been a struggle between those claiming that the text is autonomous once it has left the author, and those who claim that the text is nothing if the context in which it was created is analysed as well (Shusterman, 2000). CDA is in the latter category, while the pragmatism I define myself as part of takes an in between position. In all practical use this actually means that pragmatism and CDA is compatible. Pragmatism sees text as being constantly (re)produced by the society it operates in. If the text stops being a part of the discursive practice, it also stops to exist as text. However as long as a work of Shakespeare or a work by Beethoven continues to play a part in society, they will also be constantly reinterpreted, be used in new situations by new people with different backgrounds being part of new social constellations. The text might consist of the same letters, but is no longer the same text because it is read with new eyes, new associations in a new context (Thorgersen, 2005). This does not mean that Beethoven or Shakespeare and their time is irrelevant for the interpretation of the text. On the contrary, it is a vital part of the current story of the text, and therefore also the text, and different perspectives of the creation of a text could lead to another change in the text because this would change how people read it. CDA is not being used in historical studies as far as I know²⁷, but the following argument still holds true I think. If we accept that texts are constantly (re)created, we have to analyse the creation of the text in the frozen moment of time where the research sets in. This of course also means that the historical roots of the

²⁷ Despite that in principle all research is historical research since research is always analysis of something that has taken place.

text is a part of the current creation of the text, but to analyse a text as if we took a time-machine back into the 17th century and forgot all about today, is impossible. So even though on the surface pragmatisms view on communication and text may differ from that of CDA, they are still compatible in practical usage.

So what then does this three dimensional framework mean? I think it is useful to see it as a memo to ensure that the research takes into account the necessary factors in order to be able to get as complete picture of the issue at hand as possible. The point of the first part, text, is to look for patterns in the actual text, sentences, choice of words, metaphors and so forth, that may show hints of ideology, power, discursive struggle and other relevant factors of an analysis. In my study this is where the main focus is.

The second dimension is called analysis of discourse practice which involves how texts are produced, consumed and distributed. In other words how the discourse actually is constructed and spread within the field and in relation to other fields to talk with Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995). In my study the best example of this is when one of the participants spontaneously during a coffee break in the interview says “we never talk about aesthetics”. And the others agree. There seemed to be no active, conscious production, distribution or consumption of texts that constructs discourse on aesthetics. When I followed this up in the analysis as well as in the individual interviews, the picture gradually became more crisp: The teachers all agreed on everything and confirmed each others opinions. It seemed that they had no interests to protect, and despite their obvious involvement in the discussion, they gave no indications that there where any different sides in the discourse, or that there even was a discourse. When I followed this up in the individual interviews this was confirmed. But while investigating this I also came across a paradox. How come there is no discursive struggle, when they all seem to agree in their reflections that aesthetics both in schools and for people in general is really important? They all stress that meeting each pupil as individuals and to offer them different opportunities when it comes to expressing themselves. And when they gave examples of this, they imitated what I perceive as conservative middle aged male teachers who they obviously identified as representing the opponents in a discourse: “Now everyone should do this, and then everyone should do this”. There are in other words struggles on different parts of the aesthetics field, but there seems

to be no real hegemony on the whole field.

The third dimension of CDA is “[...] analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice” (Fairclough, 1995 p. 2) where the interpretation of the text is incorporated into social practice. The most obvious example of this from my study is when we talk about the syllabuses, and the participants show by expressing surprise at what it says and being very unsure of how to interpret the text, that this text have not yet, at least not on a micro level, been a part of sociocultural practice. The question then is which texts do have the hegemony?

These three dimensions are not exclusive and must be looked upon as inseparable parts of a whole. Fairclough says that they must be analysed both on a macro as well as on a micro level where no dimension can be analysed without taking into account the two other levels.

Ending on a self reflecting critical note...

This text started out being fluid, easy to read and stashed with metaphors. I really wanted to communicate what I had to say in a way that not only triggered your intellectual curiosity, but also made you feel the meaning by activating your associations and thereby involving more of the reader. As I wrote it is in both pragmatism as well as CDA's interest to change social practice, and to change practice communication is essential. And as long as I wrote about pragmatism and my ontological and epistemological base, it was fairly easy to play with language and break with some of the inherent positivism that scientific writing often is infected with. Interestingly the more I wrote about CDA, the more I stumbled linguistically. This could be because of my lack of understanding of the theories, but it could also be something else. Fairclough's texts are not very accessible to non academics, despite the fact that he stresses that CDA could be a basis for sociocultural change. So why doesn't he aim to communicate? To speculate on the basis of my own little writing I am tempted to say that it because of the nature of CDA. Trying to uncloak the hidden secrets of a social practice is no easy matter, and CDA reflects this. And now I come to the point where pragmatism and CDA is incompatible, namely when it comes to what I choose to call atomism. Pragmatism was the loosing

party in the ballgame between analytical philosophy and pragmatism. Analytical philosophy worked by pulling a phenomenon apart piece by piece to finally pull it together again claiming that it was the same phenomenon. Pragmatists never bought that way of understanding the world. They would rather look at the consequences of how something appeared or worked, and what implications that may have. The sums of the parts are not the same as the whole. The whole consists of the parts, but without the whole the parts are no longer parts, but self contained wholes. CDA also has the holistic perspective, stressing that every factor should be seen in relation to all others, but the methods outlined are still atomistic in their nature. That does not mean that they are bad, but that a modified CDA based on pragmatism would suit me better, and might make the next text I write on this issue more accessible. This modified version of CDA would look at the complete text for patterns or regularities or irregularities, but without looking specifically for the reproduction and power-relations, but rather use the aspects of CDA as reminders so that I do not act as a microphone stand to the agents on the field. It is important to be critical, but if all focus is on finding the structures that constitutes the power-play, I am afraid that a lot of other aspects are lost in the process. What I am trying to say is that this combination of CDA and pragmatism seems very fruitful in that it keeps the critical and atomistic elements in the picture, but always in a holistic perspective.

To meet the teachers as persons and to get access to their individual reflections is the aim of study. I believe that these persons who live on board the raft to be aware and awake and able to reflect upon their own raft, and thereby create a draft of aesthetics in schools. The challenge for me then is to see a bigger whole where persons are autonomous only to a certain extent and where social systems and language games sets the premises for what is possible. However I do not believe that I need to do this alone. If I enter their raft as a humble guest, as well as invite them over to mine for tea, we might be able to prepare a better draft for both rafts through common reflection.

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7. Interlude

The article to follow directly after this interlude continues where the previous publication ended. *Publication two: A Draft for a Raft of Reflection* was written to provide a philosophical and methodological background to understand the choices made in *Publication three: Teachers reflecting on aesthetics* (p. 93). The empirical starting point for both publications is a study of the content of some secondary school teachers' reflections upon aesthetics. While aesthetics and the methodological, ontological and epistemological considerations have been treated thoroughly throughout the thesis, a central term has so far only been touched upon, namely reflection. To prepare for *publication three* in which reflection is central both in the research method applied, but also in the results. Reflection will be even more important in the two last chapters *Discussion of the results* (p. 125) and *The broader perspective and way to go...* (p. 131), where reflection is lifted constructively as one possibility to improve learning conditions in school.

There has been an increased amount of research on professionals reflecting on their work as a method to meet the demands on efficiency, quality and at the same time a good working climate (Francis & Ingram-Starrs 2005). Professional reflection has been lifted as a remedy for all kinds of problems in the working life. I will here present reflection as it is seen in this thesis and outline how I see reflection from a pragmatist point of view and not try to give an overview over the field of reflection as such.

Dewey (1910) introduced the concept of reflective thought as a particularly rewarding kind of problem-solving thinking.

Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that supports it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought. (Dewey 1910 p. 6).

This quote really captures the strengths and immanent features of pragmatist reflection. Reflection questions beliefs and taken for granted truths in order to figure out how these lead to action, and thereby lay the grounds for reconsidering action. The quote in itself can be taken to support a notion of reflection as a purely psychological process (Francis & Ingram-Starrs 2005). However, seen in the light of pragmatist theory of learning and communication, a reflective process should be considered both personal and social. Reflection over experience in order to improve can be seen as a precondition for intended learning (Ferm & Thorgersen 2007). It is of course possible to learn without reflection, but in Dewey's philosophy, learning happens through experience. Learning through experience is in turn connected to reflection in order to achieve wanted learning outcomes (Dewey 1916, chapter 11). Collective and individual reflection will always be intermingled to some extent and can help to maximise the learning and minimise the effort (Dewey 1916). It is this collaborative view of reflection that is investigated in the following publication.

8.Publication three: Teachers reflecting on aesthetics

Accepted for publication in

Nordic Research in Music Education Yearbook vol. 9. 2007

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Teachers Reflecting on Aesthetics

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Abstract

Aesthetics is an interesting word in Swedish compulsory schools. The word aesthetics is being used in 13 out of 22 syllabuses in a variety of ways. This article investigates reflections upon aesthetics by six secondary school teachers teaching different subjects. The study shows how the teachers (re)construct a multifaceted and coherent notion of aesthetics despite their claim that they never talk about aesthetics. The pragmatist base of the research made it possible to investigate the seemingly contradictory and fragmentary statements about aesthetics through continuous reflections throughout the interviews and the different stages of research. The research process thereby became a learning situation for everyone involved. The reflections showed that the teachers primarily saw aesthetics as providing an alternative opportunity for pupils to express themselves. According to these teachers aesthetics is important in school. However they show frustration that they never are able to facilitate ways of working that are as aesthetic as they would like to. They express that aesthetic experiences are vital for human beings and that pupils learn easier through aesthetic ways of working. The teachers point to several obstacles both within the school system as well as in traditions. Through their reflections they also showed several problems they were unaware of themselves. The group interview part of the study proved to be particularly rewarding both from a researcher's point of view as well as from the teachers. There is little room for reflection in school today and a result in this study also involves a sketch of possible improvements to today's situation, trying to answer the pragmatist question of truth: How does it become then?

Aesthetics, reflection, pragmatism, teaching

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Teachers Reflecting on Aesthetics

“We never talk about aesthetics” he said. It was in the middle of a group interview about aesthetics. We had been talking about it for a long time, and I felt the interview was going well. All the six teachers seemed involved, interested and supportive of each other. We had met after work in an attempt to provide me with some insights into how these teachers reflect on aesthetics: Six teachers from different disciplines and different schools, and me. After an hour or so I reminded them of the coffee and cakes on the table, and when the mood shifted from serious investigation to leisure, the utterance fell. Everyone agreed. So what is there to say about music educating teachers reflecting on aesthetics?¹

Aesthetic theory, history, thoughts and praxis have played a big part within the field of music education for a long time (McCarthy & Goble 2002). However, music education is not a subject separated from the rest of society or other ideas, theory and praxis in school. School-subjects are increasingly crossing each others borders, as well as cooperating, erasing and confusing the borders and the nature of subjects' traditional methods and content in school. However, despite the increase of creative occupations in society, so called aesthetic subjects are often marginalized in schools (Marner 2005). Formal music education in Swedish compulsory schools is a part of a system aiming to educate the pupil to what the society believes will become a good citizen, as well as serving a personal purpose. From both a societal as well as a personal viewpoint, music education is a part of an educational mix of subjects, methods, people, relations and systems that together forms the educational parts of their lives.

The aim of this article is to bring forward some teachers' reflections upon the word aesthetics. The key question is, how aesthetics is being recreated by these teachers. By reflection in this text, I mean how the teachers formulate their understanding in a communicative and recreating context. Since the aim of this article is to explore the teachers view on aesthetics I have chosen not to focus much on my own understanding of the word nor on aesthetic theories. Instead I have chosen to design the study in a fairly inductive way to avoid too much of my own preunderstanding taking precedence. However, I am aware that since I am the one asking questions and interpreting the answers, my preunderstanding of the issues at hand

will affect what I see. I will therefore not present an outline of aesthetic philosophy or present a stipulative definition of aesthetics since that will guide the readers reading away from this more inductive understanding of these teachers' reflections on aesthetics. The study takes place in a secondary school setting, and in order to put the results in context, the following provides a brief background.

The word aesthetics appear in 13 out of the 22 national syllabuses (Utbildningsdep. 2001a), as well as in the national curriculum for compulsory schools in Sweden (Utbildningsdep. 2001b; Thorgersen & Alerby 2005). Looking at the written texts alone, aesthetics seems to play an important role in classrooms in Sweden: The syllabuses not only for music, but also for Art, Crafts, Home and Consumer Studies, Mathematics, Physical Education and Health, Science Studiesⁱⁱ, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Religion, Technologyⁱⁱⁱ and Social Studies all make use of the word aesthetics. However, the meaning of aesthetics vary quite a lot^{iv}. Because syllabuses in Sweden are short documents that focus goals for what pupils should have learnt rather than what content teaching ought to have, the frequency of the word is considerable. My initial surprise with the distribution of aesthetics in the curricula, led to an investigation into how the documents used the word aesthetics (Thorgersen & Alerby 2005). Since curricula are supposed to have an impact on the learning environments in schools, I found it interesting how the word was being used in a variety of ways, more or less open for the individual teacher's interpretation. This article follows up on this.

Before I go on to describe the results of the study, an explanation of the analytical and methodological choices I did seems necessary. It is important to understand the philosophical foundations of the article – how I as a researcher see the world, to be able to read the results from an adequate perspective.

What is real?

Communication is the keystone in any individual or communal development and it is only through interaction with others we are able to define ourselves as the person we are; to be someone means to be someone in relation to someone else. The meaning of things and events are being developed in close relationship with the people around us. We are born

into a certain time, a certain space, class and culture with quite specific rules as to what being human is, what is valuable and how power is distributed. Individuals still have choices within the system since the system is being constantly recreated by the subjects inhabiting it. In other words it is a fluid system where rules constantly are created, reformed, questioned, recreated or dropped. To be able to float and navigate this fluid reality, there is a need for tools. In this case it would be a good thing with a steady boat, a map and a compass. Unfortunately we do not have access to any such good tools, but we do have language which could suffice as a coarse draft to navigate to, we have a raft in that we belong to a social group which share the same symbols and identification marks to a large degree, and we steer by our ideology, a moving compass at best^v.

I place my research within the heritage from the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey's later and middle works (in particular 1916 and 1934). This is very much in line with one of the leading pragmatists within the field of aesthetics today – Richard Shusterman (1997; 2000; 2002). Within a pragmatist tradition truth is seen as an explanation of the world which works in that particular time and for that particular group of people. This truth is however never seen as final, but since pragmatists primarily are concerned with consequences of thoughts and actions, it is not a problem if the current explanation is not the final ultimate truth about a certain phenomena. The pragmatist focus on consequences and an understanding that the world is continually changing provides a base for looking ahead of demarcational disagreements and analytical models.

Because of my choice of methodology in this project I find it necessary to explain how I see the relations between methodology and epistemology in this article. The reason for this is that the methodological approach in this article is strongly influenced by critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1996) - a method commonly performed with the poststructuralism or social constructivism as points of departure. Instead I aim to perform an analysis inspired by critical discourse analysis with the pragmatism outlined above as my point of departure in this study.

According to Fairclough, “[...] the social world is indeed a socially (and in part discursively) constructed world, but at any point in time people are confronted with a pre-structured world which has real properties and a real structure which cannot be reduced to, and are not unconditionally subject to, people's knowledge of it, beliefs about it or projects for chan-

ging it” (Fairclough 2005). Since meaning is created in a social context in relation to other things, other people and other phenomena, it is important to take these into consideration when doing the discourse analysis. This fits well with Dewey's ideas, and particularly the weight he puts on balance (in particular Dewey 1910), and the method I will be using is strongly influenced by that.

Another attractive point of CDA is denaturalisation. The point of denaturalisation is to uncover what is taken for granted by those in a field in order to be able to criticise it. This could be a problem for me because of my involvement with the field. However, since I am aware of this problem I still hope to be able to see beyond some of the doxas – the taken for granted truths amongst the teachers.

Power plays an important part in CDA. As a part of understanding the social interaction that constitutes the framework in which the discourses analysed are constructed, it is important to uncover the power relations on a macro as well as on a micro level. A basic assumption in CDA is an almost neomarxist belief that the ideals of the ruling class are reproduced by everyone in society. In this work, it was difficult to find references to power structures in the empirical material^{vi}.

Fairclough sums up the essence of CDA in what he calls a three dimensional framework consisting of the actual text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice. To be able to understand the text, denaturalise the ideologies, power relations, discursive practices and so forth, not just the actual text but all three dimensions must be taken into account. Historically there has been a struggle between those claiming that the text is autonomous once it has left the author, and those who claim that the text is nothing if not the context in which it was created is analysed as well (Shusterman 2000). CDA is in the latter category, while the pragmatism I define myself as part of takes an in between position. In all practical use this means that pragmatism and CDA are compatible. Pragmatism sees text as being constantly (re)produced by the society it operates in. If the text stops being a part of the discursive practice, it also stops to exist as text. This study can be considered a study of language in use (Dewey 1916) with aesthetics as the focal point.

Pragmatism provides no methodology, but since pragmatists are concerned with consequences, any method will suffice as long as it serves the

purpose of the study. CDA provides tools to see the text from different angles and keep looking for features of the texts as described above. However, I will use the described elements from CDA more as reminders than strict rules in my analysis.

How to do it?

Based on the above I designed a study on a pragmatist base where the purpose was for the teachers to recreate an understanding of aesthetics. It was important to do this in a context where they were stimulated not only to verbalise their thoughts about aesthetics, but also to encourage recreation and reflection in a communicative setting. To be able to catch some of the discourses, as well as the dynamics involved in how meaning is constructed, I chose to perform a group interview with six teachers representing different subjects and from different schools and complement this with individual interviews. Earlier research has shown that professional conversations can become rewarding arenas for professional development (as shown in Orland-Barak 2006), and because of how I see the formation of knowledge I saw it as important that the teachers could be able to benefit from the research situation. Focus group interviews have the advantage of providing familiar surroundings for the participants and is a way of accessing group related dynamics (Wilson 1997). However, more personal aspects tend to get lost because of the presence of unfamiliar others (Morgan 2002), so I chose to complement the group interview with optional individual interviews. The teachers were chosen so that they represented six different subjects where the word "aesthetics" was mentioned in the syllabus' criteria for evaluation of the pupils. The reason was that since the word aesthetics was a part of how the teachers should grade the pupils, the teachers' consciousness about aesthetics might be more up front than in other subjects. To create a stimulating and safe atmosphere I searched for teachers whom the headmaster thought would be reflective and talkative. They were invited in pairs so that every teacher knew one of the other teachers. In the initial group interview I opened by stating that the more they talked, leaving me on the sideline, the better results I would get. I tried to avoid that my presence, what they might read as authority, status and knowledge in the subject, might have a too profound influence on the material for it to provide interesting information. I therefore participated in the discussion, but strived to leave space for the others to be active. After the group interview I asked all the

teachers if they would be willing to participate in an individual interview to deepen some aspects from the group interview. Two teachers responded positively and were interviewed for about 35 minutes each.

I did a transcription and a rudimentary analysis of the group interview between the group interview and the individual interviews. This was done in Transana^{vii} which made it easy to sort the reflections into some kind of themes, take notes while transcribing and based on that make a rough mindmap to serve as an interview guide during the individual interviews. The group interview and the two individual interviews were then analysed together in Transana. I was looking for themes from three different angles, pragmatist themes such as consequences and balance, CDA themes such as powerstructures and unsaid doxas and finally an open approach where the purpose was to let themes grow out of the material in a rather inductive way.

In the next level of analysis I left the Transana analysis behind and returned to the interview transcripts and the actual sound of the conversation again and tried to fit thoughts and statements to a mindmap^{viii}. The two levels of analysis were then brought together to form the base for the written text.

In the following I will present my interpretations of the most important aspects from the interviews. I will be interpreting along the way in accordance with the pragmatist view that all human representations is interpretations. However I will try to be clear regarding on which basis my interpretation takes place, whose voice that speaks, and on what grounds I reason. For this to be possible, it is important for me to step back from my own text from time to time to try to recognize my own preunderstanding and how this influences the interpretation so that the reader can be made aware of that as well. To be a researcher in my own field means being as critical to my own interpretations as to the field I am interpreting (Bourdieu 1996).

Another consequence of the holistic pragmatist perspective is that the themes I present by no means are meant to be exclusive. They are meant as a help to focus on certain aspect of the whole phenomenon, always bearing in mind the totality. To provide the reader with small peaks into the interview situations I have chosen to write out a few longer reports from the interviews where I link actual citations from the interviews with

small descriptive comments from myself. The presentation aims to follow a logical path representing my recreation of the content from the interviews. The results are presented in three main themes. *A versatile understanding of aesthetics* starts out by clarifying the teachers own definition(s) of aesthetics on a more linguistic level. The next two parts *What do they talk about/What is explicit* and *What do they not talk about/What is implicit* are concerned with aesthetics in use and as function. These are inspired by the part of CDA that is concerned with doxas – one implicit and one explicit main theme. Finally a short discussion of consequences of the study is discussed under the heading *How does it become then*.

A versatile understanding of aesthetics

“Are we talking about something which involves all the senses?” one of them asked. The others nodded thoughtfully.

Throughout the interviews, the teachers tried several times to come to terms with what we were really talking about. They seemed to struggle with talking about it despite the fact that the conversation was running freely and in a friendly and inspired tone. Even though they were talking about aesthetics all the time they seemed to need some kind of stipulative definition and since I never gave them one, they came up with several during the interviews.

“It is, I think, that you work with all senses; to get to work with your hands and experience what you do with other senses”, one of the teachers says when trying to explain aesthetics. It has to do with the whole person, not only what school usually focuses on: the brain. This seems to be something they can agree upon as it is repeated several times during the interviews. They even use the word aesthetic almost as synonymous with practical sometimes. This coheres well with the fact that the first 45 minutes of the group interview was being spent on talking about aesthetics as an alternative language. I will return to that later.

Words like beauty, beautiful, pretty and nice came up frequently during the interview, but when asked whether these words could be seen as synonymous to aesthetic, their answer was no. Working with aesthetics in schools obviously involves working with beauty, but could also involve

working with ugliness or artefacts that involve horror or other kinds of feelings.

When the teachers tried to sum up their understanding of the word aesthetics at the end of the interview, they came up with a set of keywords. The words they chose to use were *creation, beauty, joy, inspiration, production, emotions, impression, experience, satisfaction and influence*. These words are presented with an indulgent smile and hesitating silence, indicating that they knew that the task of coming up with a stipulative definition of aesthetics was an impossible one.

“But even in these closed societies things change regarding what’s beautiful. People want something new, see new things...” She was interrupted by an eager voice: “And then some revolutionary person went against everyone else and initiated a new trend.”

When looking at the material as a whole, the teachers actually present a dynamic and versatile definition of aesthetics. Despite their frustration over their lack of success in their attempts to define aesthetics, they actually describe an understanding of aesthetics that is interesting because of the same instability that makes it so difficult for them to present a precise definition. The report above is one amongst several that show me that the teachers are having a hard time defining aesthetics because it changes all the time. The one stable characteristic about aesthetics is in other words its continual shift towards something else. The teachers point to the fact that what is considered good taste, good art and fashion changes over time. “I think you can get used to just about anything” one of them says, and the others agree. The teachers believed that all cultures would have some kind of development concerning what is considered good taste depending on two components: *Struggle for status symbols* and *strive for new experiences*.

The first of these factors, *struggle for status symbols*, is presented as something inherent to humankind. They point to the seeming paradox that people want to distinguish themselves from others, but at the same time struggle to fit in. This way of viewing aesthetics is comparable to established theories of aesthetics such as those by Bourdieu (1984) and pragmatism (Shusterman 2002).

The second factor, *strive for new experiences*, resonates with main currents in philosophies of aesthetics as those dominating before the mid 20th century concerning themselves with aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience has more or less been dismissed by analytic philosophers because it proved impossible to demarcate aesthetic experience from other kinds of experiences, and thereby all analytic definitions failed (Shusterman 1999). The problem with dismissing aesthetic experience in the rhetoric about aesthetics is that it renders the concept of aesthetics lifeless and without purpose (Shusterman 2000) Dewey (1934) argues that art provides the most holistic means of communication because of human beings need for aesthetic experiences. The teachers in this study recognize this, and argues that it is in human nature to pursue aesthetic experiences and that it is this struggle that is the reason for why aesthetics exists at all^{ix}.

The background lined up here hopefully provides the reader with understanding of the versatile understandings of the word aesthetics the teachers presented. Despite their own insecurity as to what aesthetics is, and what to actually talk about during the interviews, they reflected and thereby created an understanding of aesthetics that in my opinion is consistent and at the same time fluctuating in what I interpret as a dynamic view on aesthetics that takes several aspects of human existence into account. Sometimes they see it from a psychological point of view, sometimes from a biological and sometimes from a sociological and even historical point of view, but as Wittgenstein (1997) show us, this is how words operate. Words have different meanings in different contexts and for different people, but these meanings are related in a meaningful way. Wittgenstein labels this phenomenon language-game, indicating that this process has rules and that people have interests and different positions in the game. Wittgenstein actually points to the words ethics and aesthetics as examples of words that cannot be defined (Wittgenstein 1933). My attempt to unravel the teachers' definitions of aesthetics will hopefully provide a platform for an understanding how the teachers talk about aesthetics in school.

What do they talk about/What is explicit?

Aesthetic expression as alternative language

I initiated the group interview by asking the group if they could give examples of where aesthetics played a role in school. They soon began to talk about ways in which pupils could express themselves through practical ways of working as opposed to the traditional theoretical ways pupils usually utilize.

“I am glad you say that! I've received a lot of bickering over this.” one of the teachers said with gratitude. She had just presented her way of working aesthetically in year seven with pupils designing and creating their own metal boxes. The primary goal of this exercise was for the pupils to learn to cut metal plates, and the way it was done by other teachers was to let every student make their own, identical cable cutter. “And how cool is that on a scale from one to five? Zero?” she laughed. When the teachers tried to explain why making their own boxes was more aesthetic than making a cable cutter, one of them said this: “Because they want to. [...] It is a basic need for the pupils to create”. The first 45 minutes of the group interview they talked about aesthetics as ways for pupils to express themselves. They obviously agreed that aesthetics in school somehow had to do with pupils expressing themselves practically. It was obvious that they considered aesthetics to represent alternative ways for the pupils to work in order to learn the content of theoretical school subjects. This is connected to their arguments for why aesthetics has a place in school – as a goal in its own right as well as a tool to learn other skills and acquire theoretical knowledge.

We had been talking for almost an hour about aesthetics without ever touching the subject of experiencing music, art or other kinds of expressions. Despite my decision to lay low I finally asked if they could see any way that aesthetics could involve experiencing other's works. They all fell silent. One of the teachers started to answer, but obviously had nothing to say so she fell into that thoughtful mood again. “Experiencing what others do, well we have been doing that with videoing performances” one of them finally said. “That's something I

really miss at our school” one of them continued, “We really need some display cases for the pupils to exhibit their products”. They were back on track.

The view that aesthetics primarily has to do with pupils' working methods was in fact so strong that when I finally asked if they could see some ways that aesthetics could involve experiencing other's works, they had problems coming up with anything. When they eventually connected the question to their own experiences they were still talking about pupils expressions, but this time placed in a communicative setting where other pupils were recipients. After a few minutes one of the teachers remembered that they actually used art as inspiration, but this still shows that when these teachers think about aesthetics in school, their focus is on pupils' methods of work as alternative language. To me it seems important to reflect upon why these teachers were so inclined to talk about work methods for pupils when they reflected upon aesthetics in schools: In one of the individual interviews the teacher expressed that she was happy with the group interview because they had the chance to talk together about more fundamental issues than the burning issues they found time to discuss during work hours. She also explained how focus was how to make the day to day work in the classroom work, how to solve problems and how to make pupils work and learn. The teachers preoccupation with aesthetics as an alternative language does not seem strange on that background since motivation and variation is the immediate use of aesthetics they can make in their everyday work. Especially those who are not teaching music and the arts are inclined to see the purpose of aesthetics in school that way.

Why aesthetics in school?

“We are drawn towards it, inexorably towards what is beautiful. Never mind that we have different tastes. Beauty differs. But we are all drawn to it, and we are all to some extent addicted to it. Some read lyrics and some do maths, but it is still something beautiful we need in life.”

Why should aesthetics be a part of compulsory education? Should not school be concerned with teaching pupils hard facts and skills they need in order to cope with life? The citation above shows that this teacher regards aesthetics as an essential part of our lives. Statements like that are repeated several times during the interviews, and represent a quite

profound discourse. I interpret this as implying that we need aesthetics in school because school should reflect what is important in life. People spend huge amounts of their time on aesthetic activities, striving for experiences that lift them from the boredom of everyday life. In the curriculum for the Swedish compulsory school there seems to be a similar discourse represented.

The school should stimulate each pupil towards self-development and personal growth. It should focus not only on intellectual but also practical, sensual and aesthetic aspects. Pupils should have the opportunity of experiencing the expression of knowledge in different ways. They should also be encouraged to try out and develop different modes of expression and experience feelings and moods. Drama, movement, dance, music and creativity in art, writing and design should all form part of the school's activity. Harmonious development and education provides opportunities for exploring, researching, acquiring and representing different forms of knowledge and experiences. Creative ability is a part of what the pupils should acquire (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a p.8).

In an analysis of the Swedish curriculum for the compulsory schools as well as the syllabuses, an experiential and existentialist level was recognized in the citation above (Thorgersen & Alerby 2005). To be able to express and experience the world in an optimal manner, people should be given the opportunities to experience aesthetics as well as express themselves aesthetically. The teachers' statements confirm such a discourse in school. The teachers present quite a few examples of how and why aesthetics is important in school, examples that in my opinion all fits under the understanding of aesthetics as fundamental for human existence as outlined above. However it seems to be fruitful to organize the reflections into arguments for aesthetics for its own sake, and arguments for aesthetics as a means to achieve something else.

This distinction should be regarded as nothing but a rough organisation of tightly interwoven arguments. I am aware that nothing can be done solely for its own sake, at the same time that I see that everything can be important in its own rights even when the purpose of the activity is to achieve something else. There will always be learning and effects of activities that are unintended and which cannot be foreseen. If a teacher does music for the sake of learning music because she believes that music is

important to people, she will still have underlying assumptions such as music being important to improve a person's life or that music will bring joy. On the other hand even when the teacher does music in order to train something else, be it comprehension of English speech or group cooperation, it will still have impact on the musical learning for the pupils, and therefore also on music per se. That means that it is the intentions of the teachers that is the basis for the division and not the outcome of the activities.

Aesthetics as a means to achieve something else

“If we never work aesthetically there would be nothing besides reading and answering questions.” She laughs. “Now we are busy with both the American revolution and the industrial revolution at the same time for some strange reason and they work together in groups. They cut and glue and make posters, draw and write nice letters. That is when there's activity in the classroom. Then you get that wonderful atmosphere that you just want to have!”

All the first examples the teachers came up with in the interviews were about how aesthetics could be a help in different subjects. The first thing that popped up was the fortunate effect of working aesthetically because the pupils liked it so much. The pupils were happy and the atmosphere changed in the classroom when they employed more aesthetic ways of working. One of the teachers brought up the use of “storylines”^x as an example of how pupils can achieve better learning results through working aesthetically. The aim of the teacher in this case is for them to learn history, but the utilization of “storylines” makes the learning more effective and the activities more fun for the pupils.

They also brought up working with songs to learn maths, and decorating their exercise books as examples of how aesthetics can be important within schools. This conception of aesthetics role in school as decorative is not uncommon (Johansen 2003). In this study the teachers show a versatile and dynamic understanding of aesthetics and its role in school, but other studies show that a conception of aesthetics as décor can be a source for conflict (ibid). Music teachers, arts teachers and others who consider the content in their subject to be valuable in its own right, tend to dislike being seen upon as merely convenient décor to any project in

school, especially if they are tucked away in isolation for the rest of the year. The reason for the absence of this conflict might be because of the open attitude and the opportunity to actually reflect upon the matters together, or it might just not be a problem in the schools represented in this study. It may also be that the nature of this study, where the teachers are first interviewed together with other teachers from other subjects, leads to more careful statements regarding matters that might hurt others than another, more private method could have provided.

While the previous paragraph described a view far from the existential view that often accompanies arguments for art education, the following conception shows the opposite. To work aesthetically is presented as a kind of necessity by one of the teachers commenting on why they should work aesthetically: "Isn't it partly for our own survival? I mean, we see how the pupils enjoy it." The others agree. It has to do with joy as well as better learning. The point is "[...] for it to be more practical so you can – experience on another level" as one of them says.

They also connect these alternative learning scenarios to a very interesting conception of the purpose of schools. Society no longer wants or needs people to be faithfully following the rules. The goal for school is "to create such pupils – freely thinking and creative that can start their own companies". The connection between training creativity and society's needs seems to substantiate a justification of why aesthetic ways of working should have a place in school. This could be seen as complete to what is treated in the next paragraph: aesthetics for its own sake.

Aesthetics for its own sake

The group interview has been going on for more than an hour when a teacher tells about her son who learned to love opera in school. "Neither I nor my husband is interested in opera or classical music, but my oldest son got it in secondary school. He was totally sold." The others look at her with interest. This teacher had not been as active as the others during the interview, but now she is eager to tell. "He is going to the opera all the time now" The others lighten up. This is something that triggers them. "This is also the purpose of school" one of them says "to expand the pupils' views on the world."

This teacher's son had obviously had strong aesthetic experiences which had changed his tastes of music. The example above is an example of how the teachers argue for aesthetics for its own sake. Not only can aesthetic educational methods be useful to achieve other means, but they express that aesthetics is important in its own right. The music teacher and the sports teacher began talking about how not everyone will become professionals, and that it is important to meet everyone where they are so that they get good experiences and can have something with them in life. Then a third teacher said: "That is why it so important that these practical aesthetic subjects exist and continue to exist for their own sake, so to speak." She went on to explain that this is most prominent in subjects like music and arts, while in her subject, social sciences, aesthetics is more a means to learn the intended curriculum. The conception of aesthetics for its own sake seems to be more connected to specific subjects than the conception about aesthetics to achieve something else. "[...] That is why they love these subjects so much. Because they really get to create something that makes them feel and so on". Another example one of them brings up is circus in school. Circus is done at his school as some sort of non curricular activity that the school has chosen as a focus area. These activities are not graded, something which is an advantage for this kind of aesthetic work according to this teacher. "[...] and there we really focus the visual expression – the timing. This is probably where we work most with aesthetics I think".

Philosophically aesthetics solely for its own sake is a problematic notion. Motivations behind or the the consequences of choosing a certain content or method in education will always be something more than just the content or the method in itself. To take the example from above that the pupils love the practical aesthetic subjects are important for their own sake. The purpose or the outcomes of the education will involve other aspects than aesthetic ones. Examples of such outcomes or motivations can involve improving quality of life, increase motivation for school, bring joy and variety to the work and lessen the burden of disciplining the pupils for the teacher. To find a person who argues for listening to, or performing or composing music just for the purpose of listening, performing or composing, would be hard I believe. Other motivations will always be part of an activity. However, the examples I point to as representing aesthetics for its own sake, are of a kind that lies on another level than motivations such as improving the learning of history or vary the methods to learn a language. The non-aesthetic motivations I recognize in this theme

are of a more fundamental and universal kind that applies to most of the choices we do in life. This conception is also very closely tied to what I wrote regarding their definition of aesthetics considering aesthetic experience as being vital for human beings.

That the conception of aesthetics as being important in its own rights exists does not mean that it is very profound in the teachers' reflections regarding school. Their everyday considerations are characterized more of what works – how to get pupils to learn a certain content in a better way. One of the teachers put it like this: “The longer into the term we come, the more we sink into what's close to praxis, and just there around Christmas we can't think of anything else.” There is therefore nothing to suggest to what extent the reflections they make regarding aesthetics as important in its own rights are reflected in practice^{xi}. However, the following paragraphs may provide some indications as to how they refer to the practical aspects of working aesthetically in school.

Challenges and obstacles

“After I began teaching in secondary school I have only tried storyline once but that failed. I find the organisation in secondary school quite strenuous because of the tight schedules with only a short time in each class and the long time between lessons. The pupils forget the feeling and thought they had there and then” She goes on to explain the positive effects of storyline: How they learn better and more, how they are motivated and the joy of the situation. “And then I have seen how incredibly much they have learned. And I have not asked one single question.”

The teachers stress the positive effects of working aesthetically, but nonetheless it is obvious that aesthetic teaching methods are the exception and not the norm in their and their colleagues' classrooms. We had been talking for only a very short time when the first obstacle for aesthetic ways of working arose. The teacher in the example above showed a genuine frustration over how her secondary school organised the timetables. Coming from a background in primary school where a few teachers taught everything in the same class, she experienced secondary school as fragmentary meetings. Meeting with classes in only one or two subjects was seen as a hindrance for utilizing the methods she found most rewarding.

The timetable structure seems to constitute such a strong external factor that she surrenders to it. It is part of the secondary school culture, a culture she says that she has problems understanding and come to ease with. Other teachers support this to a certain degree, but in this matter there are apparent differences between teachers as well as schools. As another teacher says in the individual interview when asked about external conditions: "Of course there may be differences, but nothing is impossible." The particular school she worked in has specialised in music and dance and have organised their timetable a little differently than the others. They have organised longer lessons to be able to work with projects that need longer time and might cross the borders between subjects. Their team organisation of teachers also makes changes in the timetable only a matter of talking to a few people. This teacher still experiences timetable changes as problematic but still possible. Most teachers look at their subject as the most important thing in school, she says, and the curriculum for the subject is not very negotiable.

Another obstacle that comes up is insufficient material. "I am a bit envious of you two" one teacher says to those two working in the school specializing in music and dance, "because you have a good technology room. In my school we have to drag a cart from classroom to classroom, and then something is missing and you might only have one wall outlet." On the issue of insufficient material, one of the teachers brings up the need for somewhere to show the pupils' artefacts. They talk about this in a matter of fact way, indicating that it annoys them, but that they will not go to lengths trying to change it. This might be because they see how school struggles with economical priorities in a rapidly increasing competitiveness, or because they see that their subjects and interests are so marginal in the school culture that the status of the subject never will allow for such investments to be made – or something completely different. They do mention the economical priorities the school struggles with in connection to buying equipment for music education.

Seen in the light of earlier research on status in schools (Thorgersen 2003) several statements indicate that the teachers acknowledge a low status to aesthetics, something which in turn leads to a losing position regarding priorities. This is speculation on my part, but the fact remains however that the teachers mention these external factors as annoying hindrances on their road to better teaching, and that they never mention any solution to the problem, or present any hope of improving conditions.

“I am glad you say that!” She smiles when the others acknowledge her choice of letting the pupils design and make a metal box instead of the traditional cable cutter. “I’ve received a lot of bickering over this.” When the others wonder why that is, she speaks with a low masculine voice, obviously trying to imitate a middle aged man with a local accent: “What do they learn by this then?”

Conservative colleagues are another obstacle they bring to the table. As I stated previously, the teachers in this study do not complain much, they merely state problems as if they were unchangeable. When telling about problems with trying a new method one of the teachers speaks with a low masculine voice, obviously trying to imitate a middle aged man with a local accent: “What do they learn by this then?”. The teacher she imitates are male, a bit slow and talk with a local accent. I take this to imply that there is a discourse at these schools that oppose change and that these are perceived as having a quite strong impact on the school culture. I will come back to this under the heading “taken for granted truths”.

“It is hard to convince a pupil who is disappointed!” They all laughed sympathetically. He had just explained why pupils have too high expectations on themselves. Another teacher answers: “How many clothes have ended up in the closet after being brought home from sewing class, never to be used” She imitated a sobbing girl: “I had imagined it differently” The music teacher immediately responds by imitating another pupil: “It doesn’t sound like on the record”.

The obstacles I have presented so far are all structural factors connected to factors outside the relational meeting in the classrooms. The teachers also present obstacles that can be seen more as pedagogical challenges. One of the things they bring up is the conflict between pupils' expectations and the results they can be expected to achieve. Often pupils have a clear idea of how something is supposed to sound, how a piece of furniture, a painting or other mean of expression is supposed to be, all based on their previous experiences. These ideals are sometimes not within the pupils reach because of lack of proficiency, training and maturity. As the teachers say: “What might be a very good result for one particular pupil can disappoint very much.” Some pupils have too high demands on their abilities, and it is the teachers' task to help them adjust these. One teacher comments this by saying that sometimes aesthetics is not the most important thing even in activities that is often considered aesthetics such

as music making, crafting or painting. This connects to the previous arguments about the goals for education not being the same as the outcome of the classroom activity, but it also presents an interesting challenge to the teachers concerning the existentialistic significance of aesthetic experience. If pupils experience rows of disappointments in activities where they would expect rewarding aesthetic experiences, how will that shape the pupils' perception of these activities and their place in school? Will the disappointments lead to a rejection of these activities and expressions over all, or will this only affect how the pupil relates to them in a school setting? Considering that it is in the nature of aesthetic experience to be rewarding, repeated disappointments will at least influence motivation for the activity and expression within school. This again will influence the teachers' conditions for accommodating the pupils learning environment. The teachers recognize this problem and discuss briefly how to solve it. "You must talk to them and let them understand that this is indeed very good" one of them says. Aesthetic activities should, in other words, be objects for dialogue between teacher and student so that the pupils understand the purpose of the activity in order for him or her to set reasonable expectations for the activity. In my view this also means that the teacher must listen to the pupils' individual needs and overcome these challenges through dialogue. This is about seeing the pupils as a "who" rather than as a "what" (von Wright 2000) – to be interested in the pupils' needs as a person. A problem, if we see aesthetic activities as something personal that provide rewarding experiences, is how to grade such activities.

Grading and evaluation?

A lot of ground had been covered, but we had still not talked about evaluation and grading. Since one of the reasons for choosing teachers from these subjects had been because aesthetics was a part of their grading criteria, I had prepared something for them. "We will not spend much time on this" I said, handing out copies, "but I would like you to read through this with me." I read out loud the paragraphs containing aesthetics as an evaluation criterion and listened. Afterwards the room was silent except for small confirming, understanding and surprised noises... They read it through again. "I must admit that if a pupil asked me what this means, I would not know what to say", the music teacher exclaimed.

The teachers were not prepared for discussions about evaluation and grading in relation to what the curriculum said. As the report above shows, they were both surprised and confused regarding the content. They expressed that they ought to have known the criteria, but none of them remembered having read this before. The fact that curricula are not implemented is nothing new (e.g. Goodlad 1979), but I would have thought that the grading criteria was one part of the curriculum that would be read because of the increasing pressure in school regarding educational quality and measurements of pupils' learning. This preconception on my part proved to be wrong. The teachers reflected on this by showing one of the few disagreements during the interviews. While one teacher says "But I don't think that we use this (aesthetics) more just because it says so in the curriculum" another one disagrees by saying that she thinks the curriculum "in time will be rubbed in somehow." The others agree with both of these statements. One of them points to their duty to perform the teaching that is prescribed in the curriculum. The argument then seems to be that even though teachers do not bother too much with reading curriculum and syllabuses, they have to relate to them because of the jurisdictional consequences of not doing so. They also point out that their mission is to fulfil whatever goals society has set for school. There seems to be a discrepancy between what actually happens and how they think the curriculum should work. This also suggests that they believe in some sort of silent socialisation over time that implements the central ideas of the curriculum into school discourses, but on the other hand they are not satisfied with not having thought these issues over. If the premises for how grading and evaluation is performed is unreflected, it will be difficult for pupils to understand the criteria because it is hidden in implicit practice.

What do they not talk about/What is implicit?

A heading like this might be a bit ambitious and a bit unfair to the participants. How can anyone expect that everything is told in about three hours? My intention with this part of the article is merely to see what they have said in relation to different settings and larger reflections that they never talk about, but nonetheless are present underneath what is said. A central feature with CDA is to reveal taken for granted truths, hidden

power relations and see discourses in relation to society as a whole, and even though I do not follow CDA strictly, I am attracted to these particular aspects of it as I believe they provide a means to lift the empirical analysis to a more socially relevant and critical level. While discussing previous conceptions I have touched onto adjacent reflections, but here I will try to see even more general tendencies.

Balance

One central aspect that they never really talk about, but nonetheless is central in their reflections, is balance. One of Dewey's (1910) core issues was balance, and the teachers show this as well. A pragmatist view on life is probably very close to how the teachers view their professional life. The main thing is how a situation is, and how it can be. This seems very close to what von Wright (2003) calls the pragmatist question of truth: "How does it become then". To illustrate how this is visible in this study I will go back to a few issues I have presented earlier from a slightly different angle.

Balance is central when the teachers talk about the challenges involved in facilitating the pupils' aesthetic experiences when the expectations of the pupils exceed their abilities. The kind of balance we are talking about lies at different levels. First of all it is the level of who bears the responsibility. The teachers do not blame anyone. They see that it is their primary responsibility to facilitate pupils' learning, but at the same time they acknowledge that pupils have a responsibility themselves and that they must be an active part of the learning process. Another example that shows balance on a more social level is when the teachers discuss the purpose of school in society and the place of curriculum in school. The same versatility they show in their definition of aesthetics is also shown in this view, but without the confusion. In their view curricula is needed, and teachers are obliged to follow them because schools are service institutions for society. At the same time they are autonomous in the way that they do what works and choose their methods and actions based on experience and beliefs rather than on laws. I see this as an example of the struggle between change and reproduction that forms society (Fairclough 1996; Thorgersen 2005). The teachers on the one hand reproduces both their own experiences of what school and teaching is supposed to be as well what society expects them to reproduce through laws and guidelines.

At the same time they seek change. They point to a wish for change through organisation and more integration of subjects as well as a variety of methods to meet each pupil in their individual development. But as the pragmatics they are, they choose their fights. Some problems they do not waste time presenting solutions to because the origins of the problems are at levels beyond the individual teacher's immediate reach. To other problems that they are closer to be able to solve, they present possible or already implemented solutions.

Working with aesthetics in school is presented as important for a variety of reasons, as this article has shown, but the teachers are not satisfied with how this is implemented in school. Even though they present good examples of how aesthetics can be used in school, these are often presented as alternatives to what might be considered traditional classroom activities as the following citations proves: "If we didn't utilize aesthetics in school, we would just be reading and writing" and "[...] then I have seen how incredibly much they have learned. And I have not asked one single question."

Taken for granted "truths"

Dewey (1910) exhibits balance when discussing whether or not truths that are taken for granted should be an issue for education or research. On the one hand he says that to discuss something that everyone agrees upon as true is boring and a good way to destroy all motivation. But, on the other hand if it becomes evident that what we thought was taken for granted by everyone really was a source of misunderstanding, then it is of the most prominent importance that it is investigated. Uncovering truths taken for granted are one of the attractive focus points of CDA, and a place where pragmatism and CDA complement each other. The following is a presentation of some taken for granted truths I believe to have seen in the material.

The first example of a truth that is taken for granted concerns how people learn. It is shown through several statements that the teachers believe that learning through experiencing with the whole body will provide a more long lasting kind of knowledge than learning through reading, listening and writing as in a traditional classroom. "What I have created and experienced sticks" one teacher puts it. In particular the lack of

involvement of the tactile sense and muscular experience trouble them. "When you have learnt something in your body it will stay there your whole life". This seems consistent and is probably a central part of what I choose to call the linguistic discourse. In the material I see that the examples they choose and the wording implicates that they suppress a strong discourse that is less politically correct. The sentence "[...] then I have seen how incredibly much they have learned. And I have not asked one single question." is just one that shows that besides the fact that she obviously believes that storyline provides a really good means for the pupils to learn, this surprises her, or it has surprised her at least, because she expected that testing and evaluating through questions would have been necessary for real learning to take place. This seems to be another example of the conflict between new ideas and the reproduction I mentioned above.

A second example of a truth that is taken for granted concerns what kind of content school should present to pupils, and the teachers' role in this process. The teachers state that it is not the schools role to teach pupils good taste. They all agree that normative aesthetics have no place in school with one exception: nature. "Imagine how horrible it would be if the pupils began thinking: "nature is ugly – let's remove it! Let's live in cities here." one of them says. This is an example of how the teachers see learning in school as neutral objective knowledge in all non-vital matters. School should only influence pupils' taste in cases where a certain norm is necessary in order to avoid damage to humanity. Normative aesthetic values should in other words only be taught when they imply ethical values of a universal kind. Seen in a historical light, this is interesting. Why did music become a school subject? Because of the church and the need for the church to teach hymns to pupils. Secondly it was a part of the project to educate to the good taste to provide pupils with opportunities to break free from the lower classes. These teachers show that they think all aesthetic expressions should have equal value in school – at least that is what they say^{xii}. From a democratic point of view this is really interesting. If all aesthetic expressions have equal value in school, how does school prepare children for a life in society? Dewey (1934) and Shusterman (2002) say that art's function in society is distinguishing. To be able to navigate in society through the classes, it is necessary to recognize that communication is a matter of mastering the right codes within the group you want to belong to. If – to be prejudicial for a moment – only the working classes listen to Bruce Springsteen, wear caps and t-shirt and drive old tuned up

cars, those references would effectively exclude you from being able to communicate in another class. Bourdieu (1984) is perhaps the one who describes this best through his notion of cultural capital^{xiii}. People define their place in society by belonging to social groups that use certain characteristic symbols to distinguish themselves. Those who possess the most cultural capital in a society have the power to define what good taste is. This process is so subtle that the ones in power always will try to evade other groups absorbing the good taste and thereby the distinction, so aesthetic ideals will move. This is in accordance with the teachers' own dynamic understanding of aesthetics in society as a whole, but the teachers' consequence of this insight is not that school should train pupils to acquire cultural capital.

No discourse

The previous paragraph brings me over to what started the whole article. "We never talk about aesthetics", one of the teachers said in a break, and the others agreed. In other words, there is no explicit discourse regarding aesthetics in school. Aesthetics is not talked about as such, and therefore there is no discursive struggle and no fight for cultural capital or status improvements: Even if I power-relations were up front when I analysed the material, in accordance with the CDA inspiration, almost nothing was found. The teachers showed deep insight into the dynamics of school and society, and their reflections were open and creative. However there were no fights and almost no disagreements. There were no interests to protect and almost no enemies to criticise when it came to aesthetics in school. While they found the issues interesting and the discussion rewarding, they showed several times that they had not thought these things through. They presented an exemplary honesty in not trying to cover their bewilderment, but still struggle to create meaningful discussions. Through these discussions they managed to refine and define aesthetics in a way that showed that they had experiences and that they had much to share and recreate together. The group interview was by far the most interesting and rewarding of the interviews and the teachers, as well as I, learned throughout the session.

How does it become then?

If teachers get time and tools to reflect together to share and recreate why and how they perform their classroom activities, they would have a fairer chance of improving their teaching. In my view there is no such thing as perfect teaching in all time and for everyone, and therefore all educational activity will have potentials for improvement. Through this group interview the teachers managed to reach agreements on why aesthetic ways of working were important in their view. They managed to identify how they look after this in some of their teaching as well as some aspects they were less satisfied with. To change social practice is not easy, but through recreating awareness in a group, improvement is possible. As the teachers say, there is no room for reflection on more fundamental issues in school.

If such space and guidance in how to organize the reflection were to be provided, the teachers would probably themselves identify how they could take care of their ideals. They would probably be able to get behind the oral conceptions and see the some of the hidden and less politically correct discourses and thereby be able to change and develop their teaching in accordance to that. They might realize that changing the methods in a classroom is closely connected to the school culture as a whole, and that the status of a subject or a method is changeable, but not without struggle. As things are now they have no room for reflection and therefore much is to be denaturalised in order for them to be able to take control over their own professional lives.

As this article shows, subjects traditionally seen as aesthetic (Marner 2005) have the potential to become important subjects when teachers get together and reflect over their pedagogical praxis. All the teachers in this study recognize the importance and the need for more aesthetics in school while at the same time admitting that they utilize such teaching methods to a very little degree. In a situation where teachers could learn from each other and recreate good, common pedagogical platforms, music which has the tradition, the theory and the methods to work aesthetically, would be able to lead the way in the compulsory schools develop their pedagogical ideas and praxis.

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Endnotes

- i All quotes are translated from Swedish by me in such a way that the perceived meaning has been in focus more than the authenticity of the actual aural wording.
- ii The syllabus covering Biology, Chemistry and Physics which have their own syllabuses as well
- iii Technology only uses the word in the Swedish version since the English translation has omitted the section "Evaluation, Criteria for Grades"
- iv Aesthetics through the history has often been seen as the philosophy of beauty and the fine arts, but in this article this is not the case. Within the pragmatist tradition of Dewey and Shusterman aesthetics is a much broader concept which is a natural part of human beings' lives. One of Dewey's projects was to reclaim aesthetics from the fine arts and this article can be seen as a part of that project.
- v For more on this metaphor see Thorgersen, 2005 (distributed through <https://www.ltu.se/pol/d283/d6895/kettho>)
- vi This is discussed more under the heading *No Discourse*
- vii A transcription computer program with built in categorising abilities – <http://www.transana.com>
- viii Done in the computer mindmapping programme cmap – <http://cmap.ihmc.us/>
- ix More about this under the heading "why aesthetics in school".
- x A method for work in the classroom where pupils learn by creating characters and stories for the character to live in based on whatever theme the teacher picks to achieve the intended learning.
- xi This will be the focus of a coming observation study of aesthetic communication in classrooms.
- xii I have not investigated which aesthetic expressions they choose to present to pupils. That will be an interesting area for another study.
- xiii For an explanation of how Bourdieu relates to pragmatism see Shusterman 2003, *Cultural Analysis and the Limits of Philosophy: The Case of Bourdieu*

9. Discussion of the results

The aim of this thesis was *to recreate aesthetics as expressed in current curricula as well as in teachers' reflections*. I argued that “[...] identifying and understanding how the notion of aesthetics is being used by important inciters of schools is important in order to illuminate preconditions for aesthetics in school.” (p. 18). If the preconditions have been illuminated as I set out to do, what could that mean for the learning in the classrooms? In the following I will discuss connections between the different parts of the results with the conditions for schools in mind. I will also discuss how aesthetics is being recreated by the results combined.

To connect to the chapter *A pragmatist view on education, teaching and learning* (p. 27), I would like to discuss if the points made there can be connected to the results of the study. Is the teaching and learning the teachers and the curricula describe somehow connected to the pragmatist view on teaching and learning? von Wright (2000) talks about a punctual and a relational perspective on teaching. In a pragmatist view it is important not only to adept the methods and content to each pupil, but to actually show interest in the pupil as a person. The teachers talked a lot about pupils' needs for alternative learning methods and a plurality in for the pupils to represent themselves in their reflections upon aesthetics. The pupils are almost always described as archetypes. There are exceptions though. The story about the pupil and son who discovered opera that was told in publication three (p. 109) comes to mind as one particularly strong example of where the content, the method, the teacher and the pupil met in an ultimate meeting which provided for a learning experience out of the ordinary. However even this is presented as something which happened because that is the kind of things schools do – not as intentionally adapted for this particular pupil because of his personal needs. To speculate I would say that the punctual perspective still is dominating in these classrooms despite the teachers wish for this to change. I base this on the teachers complaints over lack of

time and frustrations over lack of aesthetic ways of working in school and their wish to reflect over pupils learning environments and obvious interest in their pupils. In the curricula the relational view is much more prominent. The curriculum states that –

Knowledge is a complex concept which can be expressed in a variety of forms – as facts, understanding, skills and accumulated experience – all of which presuppose and interact with each other. The work of the school must therefore focus on providing scope for the expression of these different forms of knowledge as well as creating a learning process where they balance and interact with each other to form a meaningful whole for the individual pupil. (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001 p. 6).

This connects to aesthetics as expression as well as to aesthetics as fundamental for human beings, but it also says something about how school should make sure that everything is meaningful for each individual pupil. This can be done by caring for each personal pupil by building a relation where teacher and student share the same scopes, views of the world and are interested in each others' past present and possible futures.

The citation above also connects to another feature of pragmatist learning in the expression “meaningful whole”. School subjects are not set in stone, they are a heritage developed through history all the way from Aristotle, and is just one way of dividing the world into parts. In a pragmatist view of learning that is not how we live in the world. Life and learning is a totality where everything is related and intermingled, dynamic and still whole: A view that demands for the teacher to facilitate such an understanding. The teachers show different perspectives to this. They are aware that they teach for a future where the pupils will live in a complex world and where they will need a complex set of competences to succeed. One of the teachers also shows her frustration over the problems she has had with working with Storyline – a method to integrate subjects and themes in an experiential way. These secondary school in Sweden are still primarily working with reading and writing. The frustrations they

show in expressing that aesthetic ways of working is problematic, can be related to the traditions they are a part of: Punctual perspectives on pupils, subject centred teachings and therefore lack of real democracy, meaning pupil involvement, and varieties in teaching and learning methods. This is something the teachers themselves seem to sense. It is important at this stage to point to the fact that I only have the teachers own words for how teaching and learning takes place in these schools. In order to develop these thoughts further, a study of classroom interaction would be needed. On the basis of the theoretical foundation from pragmatism and the results from the studies, it would seem fruitful to facilitate improvement through continuous reflections. The relations between teaching methods, learning and the meaning of education for the individual pupil as well as for society are vital topics for reflection. A possible pragmatist outcome of such reflections regarding aesthetic will follow in the last chapter (p. 131).

The results of the three publication show both differences and similarities in the way aesthetics is conceived within the Swedish educational field. In both the first and the last publication, a broad variety of conceptions are revealed. The span between simplistic understandings of aesthetics and the more complex notions are obvious in both studies. As the second study shows, it is possible to incorporate more simplistic notions, like aesthetics as beauty for instance, into more complex systems of understanding. I actually interpret my results as pointing in a different direction from the main results from the fairly similar study by Lindgren (2006). In her study the teachers mainly see aesthetics as being a fun alternative to theoretically boring subjects, or as more therapeutic activities for pupils with problems in school. In this study I choose to interpret the teachers complex understanding of aesthetics as being dynamic and versatile instead of as in Lindberg's study, fragmented and to a certain respect simplistic.

The teachers in this study have problems with the curricular texts on several levels. They do not understand the implications of the uses of the word aesthetics and they disagree as to how and to which

extent curricula have any influence on the educational praxis. As I show in publication one (p. 39) the problem of understanding the implications and meanings of curricular texts are stems from a feature in how curricular texts are written as well as lack of reflection over the content. The nature of the curricular text is to disguise the ideologies behind it and write in such a way that it can be interpreted in slightly different ways by those who read it (Nyrnes 2006). While the teachers interviewed put their doubts and problems on the table, the curriculum and syllabuses is written in a way that blurs any doubts, conflicts and misunderstandings because it is a document that several different actors contributes to and which several different interests have to agree upon. Seen against this background, it is not surprising that the study of the curriculum and syllabuses showed a very fragmented view of aesthetics.

A question I would like to put is whether it is necessary or even desirable that the texts that are supposed to provide guidelines for schools are this fragmented and open for so many interpretations. Since curricula and syllabuses in Sweden are supposed to be complemented by guidelines which treat how the goals should be reached locally, the government obviously believes that local needs demand local actions. Possibly this even implies that local variations of how goals are interpreted are accepted or even desirable. For this to work, teachers, schools and local governments must work continually with recreating meaning in the juridical texts so that they are being reflected upon and utilised in a conscious manner. As my interview study shows however, this is not necessarily the case (see also Lindgren 2006). The teachers involved in my study both said clearly and showed more indirectly through their reflections, that the goals concerning aesthetics in school had not been worked with and reflected upon enough for them to feel safe in their reading of the curriculum. "I must admit that if a pupil asked me what this means, I would not know what to say." one teacher comments on a citation from the syllabus in her teaching subject. The citation treated how a pupil could get the highest mark in music. The teachers had not embodied the content of the syllabuses and the curriculum to the extent that they had a deep understanding of the con-

tent. The content was not something they owned and that was reflected and conscious.

What is special about the Swedish curriculum and syllabuses is that they provide no guidelines for how the goals should be reached with no references to method and content. In Norway the curriculum looks quite different with specific content for each year in school, but as e.g. Johansen (2003) and Varkøy (2001) show, the same tendencies in teachers' comprehensions of the curriculum can be seen there. What then is the purpose of a curriculum, if it is not internalised and if it never makes it to the educational praxis? One of the teachers in the study expressed that the curriculum somehow sipped into school sooner or later. That seems to me an observant thing to say: The time involved in incorporating a curriculum is quite long, and the timespan also implies that what develops to be considered the general feel of the curriculum somehow incorporates into the everyday school life. Seeing that curricula and syllabuses are texts, that also means that they will be read in ways which the creators of the texts never intended²⁸. Consequently, minor words like aesthetics will not be dwelt on long enough for it to be part of the "sip over" the teacher talked about unless it somehow is lifted into some discussion that plays an important part of the debates in school. In this case they do not talk about aesthetics in school, and consequently there is no debate – no discursive struggle regarding the notion of aesthetics. Space for reflection is therefore not only a necessity when teachers are dealing with pupils learning. It is just as important to facilitate reflection in order for teachers to develop their praxis.

²⁸ For more on text see the chapter *Text analysis* at page 32.

10. The broader perspective and way to go...

This chapter is a consequence of the pragmatist basis of this thesis. The pragmatist question of truth is “how does it become then?”, and the purpose of this chapter is to speculate on the consequences of my study for possible continuing research as well as educational praxis. What I will propose here is an extended notion of communication, literacy and text. This thesis has shown that the curriculum and syllabuses demand that aesthetics should be an important part of the educational praxis. The interviewed teachers agree to the importance of aesthetic activities in the classrooms, but still present such activities as alternatives to what they present as regular teaching and they see them as difficult to achieve. One consequence of the philosophical and theoretical aspects lifted in this thesis combined with the results of the studies could be a need to redefine not only how the school should teach, but also what the school should teach since these are inseparable entities of a whole.

As Bowman (2004) points out, the current discussions on education agree that the Cartesian mind-body dualism no longer holds true and that the body and the mind are inseparable entities. However this holds true only in talk and in reflective thought he claims – educational praxis and unreflected thought still holds the Cartesian dualism in high regard. The reason for this is in Bowman's words that “[...] we have attempted to walk around Descartes rather than through him.” (ibid p. 33). This is in my view why school still advocates reflective writing and talk – measurable proofs that we are able to think rationally, as the most valuable ways of communicating. It is about time the educational praxis takes steps to “walk through Descartes”. This chapter advocates this through a notion of aesthetic communication (Ferm & Thorgersen 2007).

Today every person has to navigate an increasingly complex world

due to information overflow, degrading safety nets, social insecurity, missing ideologies, higher and less clearly defined demands as well as problems of identity. How this affects people in general and pupils in particular is uncertain, but reports show that children are increasingly stressed²⁹. When basic concepts as truth and reality are dissolved and where the information exists in new formats through different kinds of media, this leads to new demands in education in order to empower pupils to understand and take control over the complexity. To be able to understand, navigate, contribute and control the world they are in, pupils need to practice more ways of communicating than writing expository essays, since so much of the communication in society take other forms: Television, computers, arts, graffiti, movies, sms – to name a few. To practice, reflect and learn how all tools of communication work is in my view an important contribution in order for pupils to understand and take control over their own lives.

Just as with the case of taking a punctual versus a relational perspective of teaching and learning (von Wright 2000³⁰), changing from a view of communication that is Cartesian to a perspective that involves all kinds of human communication, is not so much about what you do as with what intentions you do it. If we accept the notion that communication is a complex combination of different ways of mediating intentions and recreating views of the world, there has to be a shift in the way school approaches communication. As I briefly mentioned on page 32, the terms multiliteracy and multimodality have been launched to meet this challenge, primarily motivated from a view of multimedia and computers as vital parts of the communicative reality today that pupils need to master. The term multiliteracy involves a view on communication that implies that all means of communication is seen as complimentary and equally important. Seen pragmatically this could mean that the most appropriate, effective or rewarding means of communication should be the one utilized. This is by no means an easy matter. What is

²⁹ See “Barnombudmannens” homepage <http://www.bo.se> for several reports on this.

³⁰ See ch. *A pragmatist view on education, teaching and learning* p. 27.

appropriate in one situation, might be a complete failure in others, and what might be rewarding for one person might not be meaningful at all for another person. This is a part of the educational challenge.

The term multiliteracy consists of two parts: “multi” meaning *many*, and “literacy” meaning *the skill to read*. In other words the term points to the skill of mastering many ways of reading many different kinds of communicational media. It seems that the term has gained some recognition in the English speaking world since its birth in 1996 (according to <http://www.multiliteracies.ca>), but is still in its infancy. The equivalent term in the Swedish language *det vidgade textbegreppet* (the expanded notion of text) is quite common and even used in juridical documents (e.g. in the syllabus for Swedish), but suffers from severe problems regarding the Cartesian dualism described above.

The expanded notion of text is a concept that relate to the linguistic turn in philosophy and represents an attempt as I see it, to walk around Descartes, rather than through him. By regarding other ways of communicating as text, all the connotations, attributes and functions of text comes along. Other means of communication will therefore be valued by their function as text, and not by their immanent strengths, features and functions in communication. If music is considered text, music's role in communication will probably be valued by how it can convey meaning the same way text does – articulate, reasonable, structured and easily analysed. According to Marner (2005), this way of viewing aesthetic ways of communication is not uncommon and can be found amongst others in the works by the influential Swedish socio-cultural theoretician Säljö (cf. Marner 2005). The problem is to change the view on communication in such a way that every communicating form is valued on its own terms. Music for instance has been a part of human history for as long as we know, but its role has not been to communicate rational analytical and structured meaning. And its purpose is not solely entertainment either or it would never have survived all historical change, and existed in almost all known cultures. Music is an important part

of communication in a culture in that it functions as a way of sharing and recreating the way we understand ourselves and the world we live in. The same can be said of visual representations of various kinds, but again with different communicative strengths. The list could go on.

As said previously, Dewey referred to communication as “[...] a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession” (Dewey 1916 p. 11), and this process happens in lots of ways. An important challenge in particular, is to find a way to see all communication forms as equal, valued on their own and equal terms and then implement it in the educational praxis. That way aesthetic communication can exist on equal terms with rhetorical verbal communication skills and pupils can be offered opportunities to master more ways of communicating and thereby also be better prepared to meet the complexity of the world we live in. The term multiliteracy gets us halfway there. It moves the focus from the actual communicating content to the process of understanding and interpreting it – a gain in two respects: It calls attention to the fact that text or any communicative media is recreated in the social process of interpreting. This means that we recognize that text, music, art or other means of expression are only static as physical artefact with all mediating features removed – in which case they would no longer be text, music, art or other means of expressions since they have lost their social function. Additionally, the way I comprehend multiliteracy, it implies a focus on the need for several ways of perceiving, understanding and interpreting: In other words that the ways of reading we practice when we interpret a text is not sufficient when reading other media. There are a few problems connected to the term though: The skill literacy is still closely associated with verbal text so there is still a danger that the association with text will linger on. To me it is therefore vital to combine the notion of multiliteracy with a conception of aesthetic communication.

Aesthetic communication as I see it refers to communication in the realm of pragmatist aesthetics described in chapter 5 (p. 59). It describes ways of communicating that somehow has a connection to

aesthetic experience either in that it invokes such experiences, aims to invoke such experiences or relate to aesthetic experience in a communicative manner in order to practice or reflect upon such experiences. Aesthetic communication is multimodal in nature and involves the whole human being as well as our artefacts. Another problem that concerns all the terms described here, is that they do not involve the whole process of communication. Multiliteracy deals with the interpretation of the communicating activity or artefact and “an expanded notion of text” or multimodality deals with the artefact or the expression. But what about the process in between? A challenge in the future might be to come up with and develop a concept that includes all facets of the communicative process that constitutes teaching and learning. With such a tool we are able to speak about teaching and learning within a communicative setting where all means of communication is seen as equally important and as complementary.

To empower teachers to improve their ways of facilitating aesthetics and improve pupils' communicative skills is an important task as both the juridical documents demands – and the teachers want this. I propose a project where teachers and researchers work together to reflect over and develop strategies, methods and relations to the notions of aesthetic communication and multiliteracy and multimodality in order to improve and develop the educational praxis according to the challenges I have listed above. Such a project ought to have value because it makes use of teachers' own reflections and needs, gets tested right away and has impact on teachers' and pupils' day to day life. That way it overcomes the problems listed earlier about curricula having very little impact, a problem which is even more prominent when it comes to school research (Alexandersson 2004). Research and development projects like the one proposed here might help overcome this gap between teachers and research. To empower pupils through active work with developing aesthetic communication and multiliteracy seems to me a very interesting and important tasks for the Swedish school system in order to meet the demands from a society where meaning is created in increasingly complex manners.

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