



The Future of Artistic Creativity: Models of Integration in School Curriculum

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1. Artful creativity

Given the assessment on school creativity that the almost 2000 practitioners have formulated, during the research project Many Ways of Learning, most of them responded that they considered their own creativity higher than students. For which reason? And how is this apparent gap meaningful to teachers? Is there anything to do about it? My study focused on the qualitative investigation of school creativity, as generated in development projects that were based on the use of the arts in school contexts. It means that the research project Artfulness, a qualitative study within the macro-frame of the larger and quantitative research project Many Ways of Learning, didn't look at arts education as ordinarily developed in schools, but at semi-formal and extra-ordinary learning settings.

If we bring into perspective the teachers' perception about their own creativity, the background of this creativity gap reflects another paradox that the creative school-subjects are in the midst of: On the one hand, society is confronted with demands for creativity, but on the other hand, the teachers experience great barriers in the systematic integration of creativity in learning and teaching.

Despite the radical changes in today's world, such as globalization, technology, increasing complexity and speed "we insist on educating our children as if all these things are not happening" (Robinson, 2011). As Robinson, Ron Ritchhart complains about the failure of American schools' attention to thinking: "failing to smart" (Ritchhart, 2002, pp. 3-11). He claims that despite the many attempts to focus on a nuanced way of thinking ("deep thinking"), the schools still fail. "Although Karen mentions understanding, thinking, reflection, and metacognition (thinking about thinking) as important, students never engage in these practices in a way that imbues them with any meaning" (Ritchhart, 2002, p. 5). Similarly, one can interpret the above results from the research project Many Ways of Learning as follow: Although some teachers and educators mention creativity and innovation as key part of learning and development, it seems that students do not engage in creative practices in a way that is meaningful to them. Just as Ritchhart asks "how can we fail at smart?" I wonder: "How can we fail at creative?".

In Vejle, where the arts in education are seen as whipped cream, the delicious excess fat, in contrast to the nourishing –but boring- rye bread, some teachers had integrated the arts (whipped cream) with academic subjects (rye bread), baking a wonderful meal for learning brains. Among their dilemmas, these teachers mentioned the purpose of teaching. They articulated the schism academic / creative subjects by pointing at three different types of learning: 1) learning in a broader sense as (self) development, education and applied learning, 2) learning in academic subjects, directed towards a subject-specific competence, 3) learning targeted the national tests. Implied was a frustration that concrete results are expected in the national test, which take time from a more experimental and creative learning and teaching. If students are expected to score high in standardized national tests, the classes are being organized by targeting learning towards skills and competencies in measurable parameters, in other words, teachers teach how students can best respond to the tests. Learning is then interpreted as directly proportional to the high score, and children will acquire a rote learning, they will quickly forget in favor of some more useful skills.

2. The cultural gap and Dewey's ideal

According to American philosopher John Dewey, works of art "hint at what life might be like if we sought more often to shape ordinary experience in an artistic manner. They thus offer indirect lessons about fashioning the more mundane aspects of our lives" (Jackson, 1998, p. 6). In his works Dewey has studied the extra-ordinary experience in the arts and the unique learning we can get by observing artistic processes and artists (1963, 2005). The utopian view, which holds that ordinary and mundane learning experiences can be enriched through the arts, remained essentially an unsolved issue in Dewey, even though his learning ideal still figures strongly in educational literature.

What does the Dewey's philosophy means in concrete terms? How is it expressed in schools? In my fieldwork I have studied the differences between the standard approach to learning through ordinary educational settings and the extra-ordinary approach, the Dewian ideal based on innovative pedagogical resources. Research results show a different logic in the teacher's and the artist's approach when they are involved in educational programmes involving arts activities and experiences.



To think as a teacher	To think as an artist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To successfully implement the curriculum • “Length” • Skills • No waste of time (optimising) • Student’s own expression • Cognitive and educational output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To focus specifically on the work of art • “Depth” • Artistic drive • It takes time to “digest” • The work of art’s own expression • Aesthetic and medium-related output

Drawn from key informants statements and practical approaches, the above model shows the divergence between the two cultures. Danish teachers within the Artfulness project have shown a focused interest in completing the curriculum, as determined by school and national standards. The artists involved in the project were instead exclusively focused on the artwork and the challenging process implied: resistance from medium and material, need to involve non-professionals in the creative process, and the attempt to coordinate the artistic instance with a sort of learning. For the artists, the learning goals were indeed blurred and peripheral and something they didn't question. The artists tended to look at the aesthetic output and to proceed by working on “depth”, while the teachers fixated on the educational focus on academic outputs and, strangely, proceeded to add new tasks if the creating process happened to take a shorter length of time than had been planned. This continuous rush for new tasks (working on “length”) didn't allow a real immersion in a specific task, or the cultivation of an authentic artistic mindset (digging deep).

The teachers wanted to develop skills more than they wanted to develop mindset or artistic drive, and they wanted to highlight the student's own expression. Based on the interpretation of art as means of personal expression, this wish was not always honoured by the collaborating artists, whose wish was instead to “serve” the artwork's own needs and procedures. In one school, for instance, the students were involved in painting a huge colouring book, which was drawn by the professional artist and developed by him in collaboration with the schoolteachers. This very simple and (apparently) unimaginative task did not allow for self-expression at first sight, at least not the free student's self-expression, which the teachers were expecting. Nevertheless, the project became a serious learning opportunity for the students, who were invited to find their personal brushstroke within the bounded task and to understand the specific quality of artistic quality. Which they did: very young students reported that they had learned that “art doesn't need to be precise and stop when it stops” and that “art doesn't need to be straight and precise, but it can be very different” (Chemi, 2012, p. 37, my translation). In spite of a project task that seemed to be very undemanding, the artistic activity turned out to be optimally challenging and flow-generating. In spite of the minor focus on learning outputs, the project counted several learning outputs in social relationships and understanding of artistic techniques and mindset.

Regarding the perception of time and project duration, artists and teachers hold a completely different professional approach to this matter: while artists are unaffected by long creation periods, teachers try to optimise time when designing teaching projects. This is revealed by “no waste of time” strategies and the addition of tasks, which is largely incompatible with artistic processes. When artists collaborate with schools, nevertheless, teachers come to admit that the artistic path takes time, and unlikely regular school processes cannot be optimised. As a consequence of their collaboration with professional artists, teachers within the Artfulness project concluded that art in learning settings needs and offers several detours. The learning journey changes from being a linear movement from A to B, into being a longer, more challenging and obscure detour. To be able to learn from the arts and artists, as Dewey wishes for a better individual learning and growth, we ought to integrate the two different mindsets. In doing so, we might achieve what I define an “artful teacher”, who is able to optimise time by taking the art-detour, because learning obtained by artistic detours happens to be embodied, easier, funnier, more personal, more motivating, as students and teachers within the Artfulness study report. These aesthetic learning processes call for in-depth thinking and reflection, which the artful teacher ought to prioritise when designing educational projects or programmes. For what is concerned the teachers' main focus on the students' own self-expression, this must be integrated with knowledge about, understanding for, and appreciation of the artworks' formal qualities and the artistic generative processes. In this way, learning outputs can be seen as more than academic achievement, and the arts' contribution to learning can be viewed as more than an ancillary support to academic performance. Learning within an artful mindset implies a broader view on school learning, for the key reason that art offers many optimal opportunities for formal, mediated, meaning-based and material learning.



To think as an artful teacher

- To successfully implement the curriculum, taking the time needed to focus specifically on the work of art
- To cultivate both “length” and “depth”
- To focus on skills and artistic drive or mindset
- Optimising the use of educational time, by giving the students time to think and “digest”
- To cultivate student’s own expressions through the specific means and procedures of works of art
- Cognitive and educational output by means of the aesthetic and artistic attention to qualities (of medium, matter, meaning)

3. The arts, well-being and learning

Being asked about what kind of deep thinking and cognitive challenges their students experience within arts programmes in school, teachers within the Artfulness study mentioned among the others that students appear to be more experimental and daring; to be or become more curious (“They learn that they can learn without the teacher”, Chemi, 2011, my translation); to learn that they must make an effort (processes take time and technique pays off); to cope with complexity and accept that “not everything can be understood” (ibid.). The same teachers, being asked about what kind of positive emotions their students experience within arts programmes in school, mentioned that students experience and maintain flow for a longer time than in traditional teaching settings; experience meaningfulness (“They feel that if they make an effort, they can do something meaningful”, ibid.); experience an appreciative process, with visible consequences for self-esteem and self-confidence; understand that their role in the creative process is unique and necessary (“My contribution is just as important as the others”, ibid.).

The Artfulness study’s results show a wide range of reported positive emotions from the students, in the domain of social relationships, learning of academic and non-academic content, self-perception, overall well-being.

The arts projects in all of the visited classes exhibited appreciable amounts of fun and joy, and more specifically from an educational perspective, most students reported that the opportunity of interacting with or learning about the particular elements of art forms was a source of joy, fun and satisfaction. They highlighted several sources of their positive perception: 1) the tangible, material, sense-based, dynamic and mediated activity (the “making” of artworks or parts of artworks, using arts materials and processes); 2) the complex and multi-level planning and understanding of arts creation (the adoption of the artist’s mindset and values); 3) the ease in acquiring academic knowledge by artistic means. In this regard, students report that it had been fun to learn.

Learning is reported as a source of positive and energising emotion and something students don’t take for granted. Students describe an optimal learning synergy: from learning to joy, from joy to learning.

However, it must be stressed that students do not report a generic or indistinct joy for learning, but a specific content-related learning, which is mediated in a new, creative and engaging way. They have very clear ideas about what they were learning and what made them happy about the project: the enjoyment they reported is associated with both the experiential and educational level. Students rejoice because the experience is fun and also because their academic learning has been easier and was accompanied by a new and different learning, which is relevant to them and which schools normally don’t cover, such as animation art or design techniques.

The positive emotional experiences that students mention are: fun, ease, comfort, satisfaction with academic achievement or learning outcomes, commitment and enthusiasm, interest, curiosity, feeling of perseverance and success experiences, ownership, mutual respect and responsiveness, and positive approach to social relations.

Pleasure seems to arise from multiple dimensions such as the social (working with others), the artistic and arts-mediated (drawing and cutting to create animation and to master certain technical elements of the artistic process), the educational (learning in an interesting way, or to learn academic subjects in a new engaging way), the expression-based (to be allowed to generate and appreciate own artworks). An interviewed child summarises most of the above in this comprehensive statement: “It was fun to work together in different groups [social]. It was fun to learn how to erase the images [technical and artistic]. It was a good and new way to teach mathematics [didactic]” (ibid.).

Large cognitive benefits are reported at both emotional and intellectual level, the former as positive emotions (fun, commitment) and the latter as cognitive intensity (complex, challenging, thinking matter to be reflected upon, and which calls for attention to detail and awareness to quality).

Concerning the mentioned didactic elements, interviewees report great satisfaction for the opportunity of teaching and learning “in a different way” and that the art project has been “more fun than a regular school day” (ibid.).

Csikszentmihalyi’s flow model, well describes the balance between the level of cognitive intensity and positive emotions as the balance between challenges and skills. Consistent with the flow theory, the experienced –and reported – satisfaction for the arts projects builds on the teachers’ ability to create learning environments where



children can be challenged cognitively, while experiencing success and emotional gratification. Moreover, these environments seem to offer the teachers themselves opportunities for positive flow experiences.

Finally, in the following section we will see in which specific way the arts affect emotions and cognition.

They do it by means of, among the others: complexity, "opacity", metaphors, communication "in absentia", inputs by senses and body, meaningfulness, "sociality".

The arts build a complex environment, a complex system of messages, which must be decoded. By doing so, they put up a network of meanings, which are simultaneously complex –and therefore challenging- and safe – therefore prone to generate positive affects. Learning environments in the arts are and feel "safe", because the arts offer us an extraordinary experience, which differs from the ordinary, everyday life. These environments are safe because they are make-believe. The experience within the arts is safe because, in spite of its intense emotional impact, it is still extra-ordinary.

Elliot Eisner (1991) maintains that what is unique in the arts is that they express meanings that are often non-literal (representational symbols). Differently from scientific symbols, which point to the meanings they intend to convey, relying upon their transparency, artistic symbols are opaque (Eisner, 1991, p. 31). The opacity of the arts characterises all kind of artistic artefacts, even the more realistic ones. Works of art are built on a systematic and consistent strategy of concealing and disguising, which is not only extraneous to other epistemic traditions, such as science, but in contradiction with it. Science needs to explicate and communicate as clearly as possible; art does *necessarily* hide its meanings, purposes, tools, processes and so on, in order to express through complexity. Even the cultural attempt of showing "what is hidden" in art replicates the artistic disguise: for instance Realism pretends to replicate reality faithfully, but does that by means of make-believe features. These elements of disguise, complex multi-layered texts and opacity are at the very core of the artistic dialectics. For David Perkins art is invisible, and "the invisibility of art is virtually a logical consequence of how art functions as a symbol system" (1994, p. 21). The concept has a forbearer in Goodman (1976), who expresses the arts' density as *repleteness*.

The paradox is that the "invisibility" of art seems to contradict the other specific quality of art: the thingness of the arts. The arts are artefacts, things that are visible, clear, and approachable by the senses. And partly they are, as "it's not the work that is invisible but our way of looking at it that fails to make it visible" (Perkins, 1994, p. 32). The cognitive work we are asked to perform in the arts is to perceive and understand what awaits and what hides. What awaits is what is immediately offered to perception and decoding. What hides is often not separable from what awaits, and can be defined as what is hidden in artworks and waits for an act of discovery to take place.

Artists' strategies are mostly hidden, the arts' purposes, meanings and messages are conveyed by means of thick symbols, metaphors and allegories, making the perception and understanding of the work of art a complex task of decoding man-made displays. Often the arts signify *in absentia*, that is by the absence of colour, sound, movement and so on. The cognitive puzzles offered up by the arts, oblige us to slow down the rhythm of our thinking and to direct our attention toward a deep understanding and reflection. The reason is that the arts are meaningful and generate meaning, whatever forms they take, either as fully-shaped or fragmentary or incomplete material presence, abstract or absence.

Therefore, even though many different activities are able to generate a positive feedback or to cognitively challenge individuals, or again to generate flow experiences, works of art are systematically and programmatically conceived and designed to generate positive emotions (in Aristotelian terms) and flow experiences. Works of art offer a huge learning playground with huge learning opportunities.

As in Fredrickson (1998, pp. 304-306), we can say that the arts can systematically and purposely stimulate positive emotions such as joy (as the interviewees within the Artfulness study have reported), which can lead to a momentary urge to play and a durable building of necessary physical, intellectual, social skills. When participants in the Artfulness project report an increased interest, either for the academic matter mediated by the arts or for their newly discovered artistic competences, this leads to a momentary urge to explore and to a durable building of knowledge. In both cases, interviewees have reported both a strong desire to learn about, play with or explore the art forms experienced within the project, and a deep learning, which they considered different from and more enjoyable than ordinary school learning.

To conclude, I wish to develop on the above food-metaphor, according to which the artistic school subjects are alike whipped cream, against academic subjects that are alike rye bread. Such a strong opposition misses several points: art making is not only fun, but demands training and repetitions that can be terribly boring; academic subjects are not just boring stuff that are good for our learning, but can be incredibly engaging and fun. Thinking artfully at the future of schools and education, we might imagine a full integration of both subjects' areas in the whole curriculum. Several school practices already experiment with this integration, designing their curriculum in the same way the Danish food tradition blends nutritional agents in a very popular dish: rye-pudding with whipped cream!

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