

**Outcomes-based aesthetics?
Reflections over aesthetic communication and
outcomes-based learning based on a study of six syllabi**

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ABSTRACT: Outcomes-based curricula have become the global norm in the last decennia. School authorities have more or less left behind their old habits of either forcing upon teachers a set of content to teach and methods to use, or leaving teachers alone because they trust their professional knowledge to choose what is best for their learners. The current gospel is different—to preach to teachers what the learner is supposed to have learned after a certain amount of schooling. The teacher is responsible for leading the student to this predefined set of knowledge or skills, whilst students and their parents have become the customers, and the teacher the waiter who facilitates the desired learning prepared by the chef—Mr Jurisdiction.

In their last book, What is Philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) discuss how science, philosophy and art have different tasks in the construction of knowledge. Whilst the three are considered complimentary to the human quest to develop knowledge, what is most important is that knowledge is not something that is, but something that becomes – just as human beings are in a condition of constant becoming. The way knowledge or insight becomes is different for science, philosophy and art. Science’s role is to demarcate, pull apart, test and reconstruct current knowledge and phenomena in order to develop new knowledge. Philosophy’s role, on the other hand, is to question truths and invent and present new terms in order to create new possibilities for the human imagination to understand their being in the world, whilst art’s role is to construct the world anew. The arts present a new holistic version of (or at least parts of) the world so as to help us understand our being in unforeseen ways through their appeal to the complete set of human faculties for perception, processing and possibly bypassing narrow expectations.

So what does this ontological backdrop have to do with outcomes-based curricula? Educational science has not considered knowledge to comprise a set of objects for a very long time. Rather, in all theories of teaching and learning, knowledge is considered to be a series of socially or psychologically developed constructs. The idea that the knowledge outcomes of an education should be predefined so as to ensure maximum quality can consequently be considered to be the antithesis of an education based on educational science. This article questions outcomes-based learning as a viable system for formal education through the study of the syllabi for English as a second language and the learning the mother tongue in the three Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, which have all introduced new syllabi in the last ten years following the introduction of outcomes-based logic. These syllabi will be analysed from the theoretical framework of aesthetic communication developed by Ketil Thorgersen and Cecilia Ferm Thorgersen. Aesthetic communication is an attempt to transcend the division between sender and

receiver that theories of multimodality and multiliteracy suffer from, and also to take into account the existential aspects of the arts.

KEYWORDS: *Curriculum studies, aesthetic communication, language education, outcomes-based learning*

On the 15th of April 2012, the Swedish minister of culture was nearly forced to resign for having eaten a piece of cake. The cake in question was probably tasty as the party sharing it all seemed to enjoy it very much—cheering and toasting. The cake was a full-size model of a Black woman, and was being eaten mostly by women. So what was all the fuss about? What did the minister do to cause such an uproar? She was unknowingly being a part of an art installation by means of which the audience, including the minister, were having their cake and eating it too. The artist, Makode Linde, had used his own head as a part of the cake and was screaming as if in agony as the white, middle-class audience cut the black flesh of the womanly shaped cake. Screaming coloured women do not usually rumble the world of élite politicians or middle class connoisseurs.

On the 23rd of March 2014, thousands queued outside a storehouse in Stockholm. The famous street artist Banksy was having his first exhibition in Sweden. Or was he? The rumour that was spread through social media as well as through all the main media channels was that Banksy was having his first unofficial official exhibition in Stockholm on this date, but no one knew for sure. In the stream of messages on Twitter and Facebook during the event, a common assumption was that this was a scam of some kind—but they still came. They entered, looked, acted and reflected, talked and even started to paint. But Banksy was not there, and the works on display were probably not Banksy's according to those who ought to know. But no one knew—or at least very few. Everyone participating became part of the artwork that was (not) Banksy's. Graffiti is not usually created collectively by thousands of people in a city with zero tolerance towards street art (Thor, 2014).

On the 21st of January 2009 a young woman tried to take her own life by jumping off a bridge in central Stockholm. Medical personnel came to her rescue, drove her to a psychiatric clinic and treated her for depression. The woman had a history of mental instability. But this time it was not a cry for help or a self-destructive desire that drove her actions. It was her final art project at the University College of Arts Crafts and Design, in the form of a part of an installation she filmed during her own hospitalisation, and for which she used public money, time and care to create political art. Sweden was in agony. For a while—until they got it—some of them....

INTRODUCTION

These introductory examples of artistic practices here in Sweden have all spurred public debates, but an important question to ask is whether or not schools prepare for understanding, reacting, acting and creating in response to such kinds of aesthetic communication. In paragraph 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration for Human Rights, it is stated that, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations, 2007, para. 28).

While this paragraph is frequently cited, a small part of it is often forgotten: “through any media”. What does this mean? Do our schools prepare students to participate in society through any media? Do schools facilitate fluency in all kinds of human communication? These three introductory examples from Sweden in the last few years have aroused public debate, personal engagement, anger and joy, and have opened up new ways of understanding what it is to be Swedish in our time. They all depart from the visual realm of culture, and are presented in combination with sound and even tactile sensations as communicative modes. Just to make it clear from the outset: I consider schools in general to be failing to prepare students to understand and act “through any media”. Consequently this article investigates how syllabi for learning primary and secondary languages fail or succeed to facilitate such learning.

Bamford’s study of arts subjects, which was commissioned by UNESCO, showed that countries with high-quality arts education scored better on PISA and other international comparison tests, and that a low-quality arts education was worse than none at all (Bamford, 2006). Meanwhile, in the USA, efforts are being made to increase the quality and quantity of arts in schools because of assumed transferable skills (<http://www.pcah.gov>).

In Swedish schools, problems with maintaining high-quality art education have been highlighted. Lindgren (2006) showed that aesthetic activities in school, as opposed to more serious subjects, are often regarded as fun, and are considered to have different compensatory functions, such as helping learning in other subjects or improving mental well-being.

“Aesthetic learning processes” is a term coined in Sweden during recent decades in an attempt to describe something unique about the learning that takes place when educational activities connected to the arts are involved. There have been several attempts to describe what aesthetic learning processes might be, and why they are a good thing. These different attempts all place themselves in a discursive position in relation to, or even in opposition to, what is perceived as “ordinary” teaching and learning in school, which is still described as highly focused on absorbing facts through verbal and mathematical symbols (Marner 2008, Thorgersen 2007, Lindström 2009).

Lars Lindström has been at the forefront of defining and outlining what aesthetic learning processes might be. His way of describing them in terms of four different forms – about, in, with and through the arts – points to certain problems with the ambiguity of the term. Marner (for example, 2008) has developed the concepts “media specific” and “media neutral” to refer to a dichotomy between two different views on the role and importance of the arts in schools. The dangers of a media-neutral discourse of arts in schools can be summarised through its connection to multimodal theory, such as the “Design for learning” project (Kempe & West, 2010; Selander & Kress, 2010). Multimodal theory can be understood as an extended semiotic theory of the plethora of symbols human beings use to communicate. A central point in this theory is that different modalities work together to meet different communication needs, and are not exchangeable in the sense that the same meaning can be construed through use of a different modality. Marner (2008) makes exactly this point when he warns that a discourse of general aesthetics, in which all modalities connected to different arts and crafts are collected as “aesthetic”, assumes that they

have the same function in learning. While different modalities and arts might serve similar purposes in certain circumstances, such as providing existential experiences or offering holistic understandings of complex phenomena, the meaning which is constructed through these mediations will always be different to the outcome of any other modality. It is therefore important for the citizen and artist to have media-specific knowledge and experience if he/she is to navigate communication in an informed and reflective manner. I will in this article use the terms “media” and “modality” as synonyms since they are interchangeable in the theoretical framework proposed here.

From an international perspective, the discussion of these terms might seem provincial, as discussions in other countries are different. The overview of the Swedish discussions regarding aesthetic learning processes nevertheless defines an important background for understanding the analysis outlined in this article.

As described above, all media works as a filter through which intersubjective meaning is constructed. Mankind cannot communicate without forms of mediation. The media are the vehicle through which to convey a message, and to experience joy, horror, to fall in love or feel cold or comfortable. Every kind of media or modality has particular traits that are always interacting with, and working alongside and in opposition to other kinds of media. What I will describe in the following is how I see media and modalities as parts of communication. How is learning constructed? Why have I developed a theory of aesthetic communication? This discussion builds on Dewey’s idea that the emotional existential involvement with a means of mediation has the potential to existentially surprise us with a new understanding of (parts of) the world. The aesthetic is as such seen as opposed to atomized logic. According to Dewey, learning takes place through communication, and communication through the arts is a holistic type of communication.

In 2005 I published an article that analysed the word “aesthetic” in the Swedish curriculum and syllabi entitled, “One word to rule them – the word aesthetic in the Swedish curriculum” in the journal *Utbildning och Demokrati* (Thorgersen & Alerby, 2005), and later published as a book chapter (Thorgersen, 2006) and as a part of my PhD thesis (Thorgersen, 2007). In this article I showed that the word “aesthetic”, not only was very frequently used, but also that it had very different meanings in different parts of the curriculum and syllabi. Eight meanings of the word “aesthetic” were identified:

- 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;
- and finally aesthetics as existential necessity.

The analysis of the 1994 curriculum and syllabi will form a backdrop to this article, wherein the primary empirical material for analysis is a comparison between the three current Nordic syllabi for teaching English as a secondary language and the primary language or mother tongue—Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Following that article,

as a part of my PhD, I started to develop a theory of aesthetic communication along with Cecilia Ferm Thorgersen that will be used in this article to filter the readings of the six syllabi. Along with theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Arne Næss, John Dewey and Spinoza, the ideal of outcomes-based learning/learning outcomes will be critiqued as a functional concept with regards to aesthetics and the arts.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

The aim of this article is to present a critical reflection on curriculum and syllabus construction based on a loose analysis of six Nordic syllabi for language teaching; and scrutinized through theoretical frames of aesthetic communication based on Dewey, Næss, Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari.

This article draws upon a mish mash of different theories developed at different times, which some might find incompatible. However, they can all be considered as belonging to one philosophical family. Deleuze and Næss have both written extensively about Spinoza who they all consider to be one of their prime sources of inspiration. Another one of Næss' inspirations was Peirce, the founder of the branch of philosophy called pragmatism, of which Dewey is the most famous figure. Pragmatism argues for a particular understanding of truth in terms of its temporality, evolution and consequence. An idea or some form of knowledge is true if its consequences are adequate for involved people at the same time (Dewey, 1958; James, 1907). This claim to consequence can also be found in Deleuze's theories, which claim that an idea's possible implications are what make it valid in philosophical terms. This connects with the title of Deleuze's book on Spinoza, *Practical philosophy* (Deleuze, 1988). The mish mash therefore works—at least in this particular context—and is therefore philosophically acceptable. Because these four philosophers cover a wide range of themes, this article will make no attempt to give an honest account of their theories' complexities. Instead their terms and basic thoughts are briefly introduced, hopefully in enough detail to make the arguments later in this article understandable. Before presenting the analysis, there is a need to bring forward some of the philosophical ideas that are central to this article.

In 1997 the pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman wrote the article “The End of Aesthetic Experience”, which went through the arguments of various philosophers who had dismissed aesthetic experience as a viable term for any philosophical argument (Shusterman, 1997). Shusterman concluded, by leaning on Dewey, that critiques of aesthetic experience were based on a misconception that philosophical arguments should be about demarcation. Instead Shusterman asked what aesthetic experiences do to us and mean to us, rather than what distinguishes them from other kinds of experiences. Without aesthetic experience, Shusterman claimed, what would the value of the arts be? How can it be that art exists in all past and present cultures known to man if it doesn't offer meaningful existential ways to understand the world? The lack of ability to consider aesthetic experience apart from other kinds of experiences, such as sexual ones, cannot be used to argue against its existence.

In their last book, *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) attempt to distinguish the task of philosophy from those of the arts and sciences. The three kinds of actions are all generative; they all aid man in making sense of the world, and

construct knowledge or understanding as ontological practices, but art, science and philosophy are still not the same. Their argument is that the task of philosophy is to construct terms or concepts that allow us to think about the world in new ways. One example they use is the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) that allowed for a fundamental change in the ways we consider the body and mind. Science fulfils its task by coming up with theories and testing them through experiments and analytical demarcation—pulling the world into pieces and putting them back together in order to increase understanding of the parts in the whole and the whole of the parts. So what is art’s role in this triad that constructs understanding? Art shows the world in new shapes and constructs. It uses affects and percepts to let us experience the world in new and unexpected ways. As Dewey (2005) argues, art provides unique access to the world by means of holistic involvement. The arts, sciences and philosophy could in other words all be considered as practices that provide different and complementary accesses to developing and extending our existential notions and insights. So how is it that the traditional school system values science almost exclusively, thereby neglecting the constructions of knowledge that are central to science as well as to art and philosophy?

“Possibilism” is a term used by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss to present a view of a world where anything is potentially possible. Any given situation can have an eternal amount of possible outcomes and often possibilities that are unforeseen or even considered impossible (Næss & Haukeland, 1999). Næss was the founder of the “deep ecosophy” movement, which considers nature, man and the universe, past, present and future as one integral whole in which everything and everyone is deeply interconnected and dependent on each other and the sum of the parts. This holistic approach is derived from Spinoza’s ideas about God as the totality of everything—a power with no intent, and for which all parts are the totality while simultaneously being only one aspect of God. The only intent that is real is the will to be true to the nature of each being, and thereby to the nature of the whole (Spinoza & Lagerberg, 2001).

For human beings this means searching for happiness through being good towards others, oneself and nature both now and in the future, since these are not only interconnected but are in some respects the same. It is easy to understand why this idea appeals to those worried about the environmental damages civilisation causes through liberalism’s investments in short-term happiness. Næss claims that the idea that everything is possible is not only an interesting thought, but an absolute necessity in order to prevent the world wrecking itself. Mankind—all of us—need to help each other imagine all kinds of potentially possible futures. All human beings are fortune-tellers of their own lives, guessing the future and making choices constantly based on these guesses.

The guesses made are based on our experience, but as Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze, Spindler & Holmgaard, 2004) show, history is not a linear and predictable path, but rather the opposite. The use of a rhizome as a metaphor explains how causality works in unpredictable ways. A rhizome is a stem of certain very sturdy plants that has the capability to asexually produce both plant and root from its nodes. It is shaped in unpredictable ways to the extent that if it is split into pieces new plants will arise from each piece. Rhizomes can be thousands of years old or be eaten like the well-known rhizome ginger. The rhizome is in other words a metaphor not only for causality, but

also for human interaction and networking. But how is this important for education, and in what ways does it connect to aesthetics and the arts?

In the conclusion of my licentiate thesis (Thorgersen, 2007), I questioned the terms “multimodality,” “multiliteracy” and, in Swedish, “*Det vidgade textbegreppet*” (an extended notion of “text”), as adequate for thinking about the arts. The extended notion of text suffers from the problem of being verbal-centric in the sense that it acknowledges music, dance, images and so forth as texts, with the consequence that a verbal text and the analytical and semiotic tools associated with it depart from verbal text as the norm, whilst other texts, such as music, are anomalous. The popular terms in social semiotic theory, “multimodality” and “multiliteracy”, have been critiqued for presenting a simplified view of communication by separating understanding, decoding or comprehending a message (multiliteracy), and the presentation in an intended message (multimodality).

The term aesthetic communication grew out of this discussion. It was inspired by John Dewey (2005) and arose from a search for a way to derive a view of music and music education from the complex social and personal perspective that understands music and music education as something more than the sum of their parts: musical structures, musical elements, social settings, human beings, historical lineage etc. This theory was applied to music education, but constructed so as to be able to analyse all aesthetic education. In three recent papers (Ferm & Thorgersen, 2007; Ferm Thorgersen & Thorgersen, 2008; Thorgersen, 2013) this theory was further elaborated upon to involve the following aspects of awareness that can be improved in education and participation in artistic practices in order to increase understanding of, and fluency in, any form of aesthetic communication:

- Awareness of yourself as subject – your role and aesthetic competencies;
- Awareness and attention to others’ roles and aesthetic expressions;
- Awareness of the context wherein communication takes place;
- Awareness of the intended, perceived functions of aesthetic mediation and their potential variations.

These four are deeply intertwined, of course, and also braided with other levels of forces in phrases such as:

- The expectancies of all parties involved;
- The impetus or force that drives and disrupts communication;
- The particular experiences of all individuals and social groups involved in communication
- Discursive power structures, history and doxa.

As a part of the theory of aesthetic communication, the study of a medium’s particular pros and cons as co-creator of meaning is important from the perspective of Marner’s (2008) argument presented earlier. Also, how a particular medium operates in relation to and together with other mediums is central. Aesthetic communication propagates different kinds of awareness as the competence to strive for. The danger of choosing *awareness* as the competence to train in an educational context is that the measurement of to what extent a student is aware is often understood as to what extent this awareness is verbalized. Awareness should hence be understood in the

medium's own terms, which is to ask about to what extent a student can reflect on, for instance, how a reggae back beat works, and should be measured in its media-specific context to avoid the risk of simplifying and trivialising the meaning constructed in aesthetic communication.

Having said that, it is important to acknowledge that interesting shifts happen in media translations as well. What happens to a piece of music when it is translated into a photograph, a dance or a Haiku poem? The original meaning potential is changed while certain essences are maintained and developed, contributing to the task of art, and thereby, according to Deleuze & Guattari, to the presentation of new versions of the world on display. Another consequence of this task of art and philosophy (and science to some extent) is that education should be creative. If we recognise that knowledge is always in socially reconstructed flux, as is suggested by both Dewey and Deleuze & Guattari, then education should be about constructing knowledge rather than repeating it. Knowledge, of course, does not reside in books, and does not reside in our minds either. Rather, knowledge is what we do and the potential for action – how we *make sense* amongst ourselves, for “to make” is an active, performative verb. How can education aid students in their making of sense through a range of different modalities?

The term “aesthetic communication” implies existential opportunities and possibilities. In a formalised educational setting, it means facilitating learning that involves presence, representation, imagination, reflection and emotions, and where knowledge and skills are treated in those particular contexts that bear on the individual in their social environment. Art is considered to be a particular form of persuasion or manipulation, not in a negative sense, but as a realisation that the intention behind the message is a call for empathic understanding of “the other”. The neutrality of this view of persuasion and manipulation is comparable to Foucault's usage of the term “power” as being everywhere, unavoidable and important to see through and learn to master. The manipulation the artist performs is to use a medium for its best possible way of making the other see the world in a new way – a way that more resembles the insights or ideas that the artist had. In this article the theory of aesthetic communication will function as a frame for investigating the three syllabi to understand how language learning can be understood as both aesthetic and artistic education.

METHOD

The three countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, they have similar backgrounds when it comes to cultural heritage and educational history. Norway was a part of Sweden as late as 1905 and a part of Denmark up until 1814. Sweden and Denmark have had long-standing disagreements about the landscape of *Skåne*, which has been both Danish and Swedish. The three countries have separate languages now, and share their linguistic heritage up until so recently that speakers of the three languages understand each other with only slightly more effort than they understand dialects of their own languages. Whether or not to include Finland in the study has been a hard decision. It shares some of the characteristics described above, but I have decided not to include it at present because of my lack of knowledge of the Finnish school system. I have lived or studied for

periods of my life in the three chosen countries, giving me a fair understanding of their school systems. The syllabi have been analysed in their original language, and all translations in this article are my own. There are official translations for the Norwegian and the Swedish syllabi but there is a common agreement among Nordic scholars that Swedish translation is below par, so I have decided to ignore the official translations and translate any quotations myself.

This study has philosophical aspirations in the sense that it follows the (lack of) logic of Deleuze's theories of "rhizomatic" causality. The empirical part of the analysis was designed to identify, distinguish and critically scrutinise the syllabi. First I went through the texts sentence by sentence, coding it with the open source qualitative computer software RQDA (<http://rqda.r-forge.r-project.org>). In RQDA, all sentences can be categorised into one or more categories, and searched for and reassembled into meta-categories. In this case I analysed each sentence looking for potential meaning with the intention of applying an inductive approach. Having coded the sentences I went through the rest of the texts looking for other sentences about the same things, and coded them in the same manner. Then I did the same with sentence number two and so forth. Another tool that was helpful was the quantitative text analysis software Voyant-Tools (<http://voyant-tools.org>), which allows for an easy frequency search for individual words or phrases in and between files, and to represent their relative frequency graphically in their textual context. When this detailed but very basic content analysis was complete, the previously mentioned aspects of aesthetic communication, along with the aforementioned theories, were applied as a lens through which to reconstruct aesthetics in the syllabi.

AESTHETICS IN THE NORDIC SYLLABI

At first sight the six syllabi look very similar in their goal-based language. They are all examples of the ruling paradigm of outcome-based education that, instead of defining how to work with teaching and learning, or defining what content should be treated in the syllabus, defines what pupils are expected to know at the end of their education and at certain points during it. Also the syllabi exist in fairly equal settings as mandatory subjects within compulsory schooling. Denmark's syllabi are slightly different because they are quite a bit longer with approximately 20,559 words in the Danish syllabus and 14,098 words for English language, compared to Sweden's 3,987 for Swedish language and 2,522 for English, which is the shortest. Norway's syllabi are of an in-between size, even though the syllabi cover upper secondary school, with 4,454 words for Norwegian language and 3,222 words for English. Sweden's syllabi do not include upper secondary school, but instead include grading criteria. Sweden's syllabi give the most compact impression, while language teaching and learning in Denmark's syllabi give a less distinct and slightly less formal one. In sum, the Swedish syllabus is the most compact, despite having slightly more words than the Norwegian one, because it includes the national criteria for grading.¹ The structure of the syllabi are also fairly similar, insofar as they all have a section for a general legitimisation and explanation of the subject and its relevance for school, student and

¹ Denmark's syllabi are even longer, because they include a teacher's guide to the syllabi following the actual syllabus. In Sweden such a guide is also available along with a guide for grading. These parts have not been included in this study, and Norway has no such complimentary guides as far as I have been able to find out.

society at large. Meanwhile, the section for the goals that should be reached has been split into three areas.

The word “aesthetic” is present in the three syllabi for learning the mother tongue. In particular, in the Danish syllabi, the word “aesthetic” is particularly frequent, being used 17 times, ten times as a noun and seven times as an adjective. In the syllabi for Swedish and Norwegian, the word “aesthetic” appears only as an adjective, four times in the latter syllabus, and eight times in Swedish. In the three syllabi for English as a second language, the word “aesthetic” appears only once in Norway’s syllabus, and is absent from Sweden and Denmark’s syllabi for English. Even when similar terms, such as art, culture (in an artistic sense), creativity, creation, drama, music, singing, media (meaning different complementary forms of expression) occur, these are curiously absent in the syllabi for English as a second language. Even if there is a formula that refers to different art forms, these are usually presented as acquaintance with art as culture, rather than involvement in art. An example of this can be seen in Norway’s English syllabus, which states that students are expected to “participate and experience children’s culture from English speaking countries through words, images, music and movement” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006b, p. 6). One exception is when the Norwegian syllabus for English states that “oral, written and digital texts, film music and other cultural expressions can inspire student’s own performance and creativity” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006b, p. 10). It seems safe to conclude that learning English as a second language is considered to be a much more instrumentalist or mechanistic form of learning than learning to master the mother tongue. I will return to this in the discussion part of the article.

There is obviously a quantitative difference in how much aesthetics are prescribed in the syllabi for the mother tongue or a second language, but what lies behind the frequency of the word “aesthetic” and related terms in the syllabi for the mother tongue? In my reading of the six syllabi, I came up with eight different meanings of the word aesthetic:

- Aesthetic as an aspect of presentation,
- Aesthetics as an aspect of personal expression,
- Aesthetic as semiotic possibility,
- Aesthetic as beauty,
- Aesthetic as a kind of varnish or wrapping,
- Aesthetic as an adjective,
- Aesthetic as a tool for judgement,
- Aesthetic coupled with ethics.

Some of the instances of the word “aesthetic” are present in several of these meanings, whilst others are represented only once. These can nonetheless be understood as recommended understandings of what aesthetics are assumed to mean in an educational setting of learning and teaching a language. The meanings constructed here correspond to a large extent to the ones that appeared in my 2004 article (Thorgersen & Alerby, 2005), even though the new ones are constructed from a Nordic set of data, and then only from the syllabi for language. What is missing in the new data is aesthetics as existential necessity, aesthetics as a secondary tool for learning other skills/subjects, and aesthetics as a way to describe a subject. This is not unexpected. Aesthetics as existential necessity was only found in the general

curriculum in the old data, whilst the other two were only found in the syllabi for music and arts. Since languages, at least in Nordic schools, have a much higher status than subjects likely to be labelled aesthetic in the Nordic countries (Thorgersen, 2003), which is to say Music, Visual Arts, Crafts and Home and Consumer Studies, the meaning of aesthetics as functional for something else is not actualised.

Even if literature as art is highly regarded in society, the language school subjects have not been considered aesthetic. This phenomenon is also seen in higher education, where there are universities and university colleges for music, visual art and theatre, but, at least in the Nordic countries, there are only a handful of courses available for those searching a path to become a writer. Writers of *belles-lettres* are hence usually autodidactic to a higher degree than in these other disciplines. Still, aesthetic qualities are seen as important in the syllabi for the mother tongue languages and with respect to expression and comprehension. When the meanings in the syllabi are filtered through aspects of awareness in the theory of aesthetic communication the formulations regarding aesthetics in the syllabi do not quite fit in with the theory.

The first aspect of awareness, *Awareness of yourself as subject, your role and aesthetic competencies*, has to do with the effectiveness of persuasion. What is my message, what are my possible modalities to convey the message, and who I am in the communicative situation, are the three questions to ask to begin developing this awareness. The syllabi touch upon these questions in formulations such as in the Danish syllabus for Danish language in which education is supposed to help students “lay out texts, so that they encourage communication and reflect aesthetic consciousness” (Undervisningsministeriet, 2009a, p. 10). In this rubric consciousness and self-reflection seem to be more related to the visual appearance and presentation of the text rather than to the text itself. In the Swedish syllabus something similar can be seen: “Through combining text with different aesthetic expressions so that they purposively work together, the student can strengthen her text and make the text’s message more persuasive” (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 13). In this formulation the text as an aesthetic tool is respected but aesthetic awareness is still only justified when it is combined with other kinds of expressions. In the six syllabi there are no examples of awareness of aspects of the production of text in relevant genres or through usage of rhetoric for conveying a message. However, in both Norwegian syllabi there are passages about creativity that might be interpreted to cover some of this awareness, such as a passage that expects students to be able to “write creative texts in both forms of Norwegian by the use of different linguistic tools and styles” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006a p. 10). Whilst this could be seen as an attempt to get students to develop awareness of their own aesthetic competencies, it requires teachers to already have such a teaching goal since otherwise it could be seen as a quite mechanistic demand.

So if the meanings of aesthetic in the syllabi are little concerned with the development of personal aesthetic expression, is it then that awareness and attention towards others’ aesthetic expressions is in focus? There are a few examples in the English syllabi that could be interpreted in this way, such as those concerning reading and experiencing English literature, and reflecting upon the aesthetic qualities of texts. Curiously, in the syllabi for learning the mother tongue, even this kind of awareness is hard to find. In the Swedish syllabus for learning the mother tongue it is expressed most clearly, and also connects with the first kind of awareness:

Encountering different kinds of texts, theatrical and other aesthetic expressions, the student is given prerequisites to develop their language, their own identity and their understanding of the surrounding world. (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 1)

This is stated in the introduction to the syllabus as a part of its aims. However, the relations between identity construction, aesthetic awareness and the understanding of personal expression in relation to others are vague. It would almost seem from the citation that merely encountering fine art will enable some sort of personal growth—as if art in itself is necessarily good.

In the Nordic countries this belief in art as inherently good and liberating has been tested through what is called the “*folkbildning* movement”, which was a strategy developed by workers associations to give a broad education to their workers, though in accordance with bourgeois taste, as a pathway out of the oppression of the working class. Apart from folk-schools, free schooling, public libraries and cheap extracurricular education, concerts of classical music and public reading of classics have been given to working class audiences in the first decennia of the 20th century. In the municipal music and culture schools this practice was eventually abandoned in favour of more active participation in the arts, such as developing instrumental and singing skills, and later even dancing, painting, writing and so forth. It took quite a while before this ideal was abandoned, and then because it was realised to be somewhat paradoxical insofar as the working class was thought to be more free by being less working class, and by annexing bourgeois taste whilst at the same time overthrowing the middle and upper classes (Brändström, Söderman & Thorgersen, 2012).

The above citation from Skolverket does not state that aesthetic expression should be fine art, and provides no help for selecting what kinds of expression the student should meet, and in what ways. The assumption that there is a predefined desirable causality between exposure to art and its understanding or production is one of the dangerous misconceptions of education in the arts. As Deleuze (Deleuze et al., 2004) shows, causality works in unexpected ways and is to a large extent impossible to foresee, and moreover that a predefined causality could be seen as going against the purpose of art. So if there is little in the syllabi about the first two kinds of awareness, what is being covered by them?

Surprisingly, only a few of the other occurrences of “aesthetic” in the current theory of aesthetic communication fit with the two last types of awareness. Awareness of the context wherein communication takes place, and awareness of the intended, perceived and functions of mediation and its potential variations are the last aspects of aesthetic communication. This position is fairly well represented in the Swedish and Norwegian syllabi. In the subject Norwegian, the student should learn to “describe the interaction between aesthetic functions in complex texts and reflect on how we are influenced by sound, language and images” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006a, p. 9) and, in order to achieve grade A (the top one) in Swedish, the student has to “combine text with other aesthetic expressions so that they work together adequately” (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 9).

The first quotation in particular exemplifies the awareness of the functions of mediation and even the second one hints that this is where the emphasis should lie in

the syllabi. The awareness of the context wherein communication takes place cannot be found in these syllabi, which, in relation to the whole hints at a pedagogical ideal for the artistic aspects of learning a language when linguistic elements are regarded as fairly instrumental tools, and when the communicative and social aspects of the artistic language are left out.

SCRUBBY PATHS TO SOMEWHERE?

Just encountering the number of “aesthetics” or similar words gives an impression of mother tongue syllabi that are constructed around a notion of language as art. An interesting finding in all the three countries was that this was not the case when learning a foreign language. While learning to master the mother tongue seems to be a fairly complex task involving play with identity construction, experimentation with genres and styles, getting acquainted with different genres and styles and so forth, the syllabi give the impression that learning a second language is a fairly mechanical task. The parallel to a discourse within music that has only been challenged in the last 30 years or so is obvious, in the sense that the hegemonic principle of creative music-making was for a very long time that the student had to master the handicraft before composing or improvising. Not only should she know her instrument fairly well, but she should also know her notation and harmonic theory, and have a good knowledge of the tradition (Strandberg, 2007). Within visual arts education, this tradition of the master/apprentice relationship wherein creativity was reserved for the master has gone almost to the other extreme where the craft of being skilled as a painter, drawer or creator of sculptures has lost status to conceptual art wherein the idea and creativity is valued higher than the skill with which the pencil is drawn (Marner, 2005). Considering that communication is at the core of what defines a language, it is bewildering to see that communicative awareness and play have such low profiles in the syllabi for learning a second language, but when analysing the syllabi for mother tongue education, the communicative aspects are hidden in other kinds of logic. When the ability to become a skilled user of a tool for communication is decontextualised in a school setting so that neither spatial or time contexts, intention or reception plays a vital part, the point of learning to master the tool will probably evade most students.

Instead of asking, “What is a verb?”, “What is an argument?”, both Deleuze and Dewey would rather ask, “What does a genre do?” and “What does an argument do?” Since everything is eternally becoming, and terms and knowledge change depending on where, when and by whom they are being used, the pragmatist questions are more functional in an educational setting. Theoretical concepts are dead without being acted on, and action leads to consequences, albeit inconceivable ones. From this perspective nothing *is* and everything is constantly *becoming* through our communicative reconstructions of them. A service to learners would therefore be to let them play with communication as artists, and with conventions, and manipulate and to persuade through a shift between awareness of context, modality, “the other” and their own intentions. Aesthetic communication is not (only) about the creation of high-status pieces of art to be sold for millions at auctions, but is just as much to form an active citizen in the (multi)media culture, wherein genres are shifting, borders are blurred between genres and modalities, and media persuasion is constantly increasing. In order to be able to understand and act upon the rhetoric of the 21st century, I would suggest that there is a necessity to provide a school experience wherein aesthetic

communication is at the centre, and wherein knowledge is considered socially reconstructed and temporary, though still true for the time being – a school in which art students desire to construct a communicative form that constructs the content and dissolves the borders between form and content whilst at the same time enhancing it – and a school in which students are allowed to experiment on the basis of reflection and thereby become a part of the construction of knowledge and communication.

Artists work in various ways. Some would say that they have no idea what message they want to convey through their medium, while others can name that message explicitly. This should not suggest that the first artist has less to express, but only that the message might be of a less explicit character, or that it was developed along with the form. The process of creation is not linear, as those who have experienced it all know, so how can we expect students to approach learning in a linear, preconceived manner as being towards predefined goals for what they should learn. How can anyone assume that it is possible to define in advance what knowledge should be learned in school, while at the same time being aware that knowledge is constantly changing? Having clearly defined learning outcomes is the current trend of the school world, wherein PISA tests define the quality of education. To define learning outcomes is to decide that the same knowledge that is valued today will be valued in x years when the student is finished, and also to advance the idea that the maximum potential of a student's knowledge can be guessed at by curriculum makers.

In the arts and creative disciplines this is even more absurd considering that art, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is valued for its function as presenting the world anew. Such artistic practices can be considered to be the antithesis of predefined learning outcomes. So what might be a better solution? Learning outcomes-based curricula came, after all, as a healthy reaction to canon-based curricula in which no one cared much what students learned as long as they did their predefined tasks. How about letting go of the idea of a curriculum altogether? Instead, spend the money on teacher education and professional teacher peer tutoring, whereby teachers are constantly engaged in a dialogue concerning what is important knowledge, and for whom, when and how it is constructed through communication, and how we can imagine better ways to do it. Take the money from controlling the quality of schools, and let researchers, artists, students and teachers work together in pursuit of the ever-changing ultimate education wherein playful manipulation can live alongside serious conversation.

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Manuscript received: June 13, 2014

Revision received: September 13, 2014

Accepted: September 9, 2014