

# Aesthetic Education in Primary School: An Interdisciplinary Project

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## Abstract

*The curriculum for primary school combines the subjects of arts, music and physical education under the learning area of aesthetics. Based on the Greek *aisthesis*, which means perceptive faculty, cognition, understanding and perception, the learning area of aesthetics is understood to mean the perceptive formation of the whole person. Here, cognitive, emotional, sensory, and physical skills are addressed. The importance of Aesthetic Education is discussed and the question of combining arts, music, and physical education as a learning area is explored. An example is used to illustrate what aesthetic interdisciplinary work can look like.*

## 1. Introduction

The presented work is intended to show how topics of the aesthetic subjects art, music and physical education can be interconnected in a cross-cutting way in primary school lessons. For this purpose, the concept of aesthetic education is first discussed and a rationale for its implementation is given. Subsequently, it will be shown why these three subjects are summarized into one learning area. This is followed by a practical example and finally a brief conclusion.

### 2.1 What is aesthetic education?

Schiller [1] speaks of man's play instinct, in which the sensual and the forming instinct work together. Here, the object of the sensual instinct is life in its broadest meaning. It means all material being and all immediate presence in the senses. The object of the forming instinct is shape, by which are understood all formal qualities of things and all relations of these to the powers of thought. Thus, the object of the play instinct could be called living shape. This term would thus serve to designate all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, i.e. beauty. Here, the beauty has two effects in a kind of interaction. On the one hand, it has a dissolving effect, in order to keep both instincts within bounds, and on the other hand, it has a tensing effect, so that both remain in their power. However, if only one of the two instincts rules over man, he is in a state of

compulsion and violence. Man feels freedom only when both instincts work together: Who is only sensually tense is set at liberty by form, and he who is unilaterally ruled by laws is set at liberty by matter. It is only play that makes man complete; he is serious about the pleasant, the good, and the perfect, but with beauty he plays. Only the really existing beauty is worthy of the really existing play instinct. But since an ideal of beauty is given by reason, an ideal of the play instinct is also given, which man should always have before his eyes in play [1].

Man should play only with beauty, and he should play only with beauty, he is only fully human where he plays. Two senses lead man through appearance to the knowledge of reality; but what one sees with the eye is different from what one feels. One must begin to enjoy with the eye and free oneself from enjoying with the senses of feeling alone. One must rise to the seeing and satisfy oneself with it. Only then does one become aesthetically free and the play instinct can develop. The play instinct is followed by the imitative educational instinct, which regards appearance as something independent. Only when man can distinguish appearance from reality and form from body, he can also separate himself from it [1].

In nature, the compulsion of abundance or physical play creates a transition to aesthetic play. It approaches its independence in the free movement that is itself an end and a means. The power of imagination has in man its free movement and its material play, which rejoices in its self-power and boundlessness. From the material play of a free sequence of ideas, the aesthetic play arises through the power of imagination. The aesthetic instinct of education builds a joyful realm of play and appearance in which man is freed from all constraints [1].

Aesthetic education is a cross-curricular and interdisciplinary principle of learning in primary school [2]. Its guiding idea is the perfection of sensory cognition [3]. This sensory cognition is based on an active, acting engagement of the human being with the world [4]. The goal of aesthetic education lies in the formation, practice, and differentiation of aesthetic behavior. Aesthetic

behavior is a fundamental way of symbolically visualizing one's world. It manifests itself, on the one hand, in aisthesis, sense-borne perception, insofar as it gives rise to sensations and feelings in us and, on the other hand, in poiesis, sense-borne shaping, creating, producing [5].

Aiesthesis and poiesis develop in practical action, which in children is fundamentally connected with movement and the body. Elementary aesthetic learning processes are therefore always related to movement and body. The basis for this must be created in primary school through pedagogical movement and physical education, which should be an integral part of teaching and school in general. Aiesthesis is the basis for a subjective form of world appropriation. The body has a special significance for aiesthesis, as it is the seat of the senses and the place of processing. Only through the body is aesthetic thinking possible. This also brings movement into play. Poiesis is the expressive realm of aesthetic behavior, that is, the ability of human beings to express, form, and shape themselves [4].

Fritsch [5] assumes that aesthetic education in school has a chance if the teacher starts with the children's elementary possibilities of experimenting, expressing and shaping and tries to constantly differentiate and further develop this. In addition, the children need time and space for this, which is why project weeks, for example, are particularly well suited for interdisciplinary projects. Otto and Otto [6] believe that aesthetic behavior happens in every lesson. Opening up the classroom also opens up the school children's experiential spaces.

## 2.2. Rationale for an aesthetic education

When one remembers or imagines something, this happens with inner images [2]. Schulze [7] sees aesthetic education as an opportunity to express this thinking in pictures. Here, it is especially about the inner images, ideas, and fantasies that are expressed in a work of art. This forming one's own image happens through experiencing, grasping and creating. The child has to form his or her own idea and be confident of his or her own point of view so that he or she can come to a judgment about an object [8]. Objects are felt, touched, smelled and grasped. Through this, images of the world emerge for the child. Since movement is the child's form of engagement with the world, the playful handling of physical movement possibilities forms a bridge on the way to reality. Here, being able to move and experiencing the body through movement are essential steps towards independence. The children gather aesthetic experiences that are necessary for the process of self-perception and world perception [4]. Experiencing is fundamental here. Children experience their environment in all its aspects with all their senses. Therefore, all possibilities must be

taken up in primary school so that the senses are not stunted or suppressed. Equally important is comprehension, because children literally grasp their environment. The child finds signs and symbols for his view of reality, but for this he needs support, encouragement and expertise. The child can be supported in forming an aesthetic picture through specific selection of materials, technical or representational aids [8].

## 2.3. Why are arts, music and physical education summarized into one learning area?

The subjects arts, music and physical education are characterized by the fact that they have a creative practice in common. Thus, in physical education, body movement and body expression are the subject and material, which is clearly shown in the curriculum in the pedagogical perspective "express oneself through movements and create movements" and can be implemented in the physical education field "performing, creating and dancing". On the other hand, arts and music cannot do without a certain amount of body shaping, which here concerns movement and expression. All sensory organs are used for perception and expression. Physicality is engaged and participation and expression of feelings also play a major role. Arts, music, and physical education are open to everyday aesthetic activity, such as doodling, humming, or skipping. What they have in common is spontaneity, motivation, motion, and movement. Even if subject-specific performance requirements are (have to be) set in school, the connectivity of subject orientations should be encouraged and used thematically. The main part of such an aesthetic education should be cross-cutting themes and combined or integrated aesthetic activities. Arts, music, and physical education occur in and from physical movement: In arts, something corporeal is created; in music, a sound structure is created; and in physical education, a formed bodily performance is created. In aesthetic education, learning must be developed especially with the inclusion of sensations and with the help of feelings. Sensations and feelings should lead to movement, representation, and expression. By combining the arts, more comprehensive experiences can be had than in the individually delineated activities. When arts, music, and physical education come together, a broad range of sensory and physical activities are engaged [9].

Connections between arts and music:

- Intense music can evoke pictorial ideas and bodily sensations, pictures can have a musical effect or give impetus to music
- Work with punctual elements, rulings and colorings

- Pre-experiences precede making, perceiving and understanding
- Material life, mental demands of abstraction and construction.

Connections between music and physical education:

- Especially dance
- Staging with body-related means of expression (body art with the whole body, music with the body's own instruments of expression, such as voice, hands, feet)
- Music is embodiment of designs of the mind, is realized with whole-body concentration and partial-body movement
- Structure of design in space and flow of time
- Striving for harmony
- Structure in movement and counter-movement, increase and decrease, silence, upbeat, rise, culmination, decay and end.

Connections between physical education and arts:

- Representation of sport in images, "monuments" that idealize the body, e.g. Greek sculptures or Roman paintings.
- What develops in sport in movement and representation is visual
- "Self-formation" of the living body
- Body movement/expression show linear progressions and pictorial views, progression and expression pictures serve as preparation
- Pictorial especially clear in Olympic games (effect of colorfulness, colorful change, group movements, body expression for the production of pictures)
- Kinesthetic and sensorimotor aspects in drawing and painting (expressive representation, body as a tool of painting) [9].

## 2.4. Interdisciplinary goals of aesthetic education

The curriculum of the state of Bremen formulates interdisciplinary goals for this learning area: Ability to improvise and to play spontaneously, ability to develop aesthetic sensitivity in the sense of differentiation and intensification of the perceptive faculty, ability to experiment with aesthetic effects and to be able to differentiate them linguistically, ability to communicate through different types of signs, ability to enjoy perception and ability to expand and critically question one's own aesthetic experiences [10].

## 2.5. Principles of learning with all the senses

The following describes principles that should apply to learning with all the senses:

- School of the senses: the whole body should again be systematically made the "first tool" of

self-experience and experience of others. Games for touching, forming, or listening, for example, in which the sensory-bodily processes of sensitization and cognition are broken down into elementary individual exercises, run the risk, however, of short-circuiting the complexity of sensory experience to the aesthetic dimension

- Meaningful learning: something that comes to the senses is perceived as meaningful if it is embedded in a meaningful context, because the process of perception is "an active activity directed toward acting engagement with reality"
- Holistic learning: learning with all the senses is holistic learning that aims at the complexity of the content of objects across subjects. In aesthetic education, learning with head, heart, and hand seems most feasible
- Sensory and conceptual learning: stimuli are always felt individually. In order for them to become a conscious experience, they must be talked about. Therefore, feeling, touching, and sensing give words a more accurate and vivid meaning
- Learning spaces: the classroom itself is the most important place for systematic aesthetic education in the elementary school. Not only the classroom as a learning space can make perceptual and creative opportunities possible, but also the hallways, the schoolyard, or the school garden. These must be laid out or redesigned in such a way that they can stimulate and develop sensory learning [11].

## 2.6. Fruitful moments in aesthetic education

Copei [12] sees the "fruitful moment" in artistic creation as a kind of "power center." It is a point of supreme concentration in which a work is created. One observes a process of tension, hard work, and dynamism in each work. The first characteristic of artistic creation is detachment from the real and logical world, a deep immersion of the artist and inner seclusion. Here he refers to the aesthetic dimensions of art and music. A fruitful moment has a lasting effect and prepares the way for all that effort which, with moments of the same kind, gradually creates aesthetic formation in us.

This detachment from the logical is of particular importance in the case of aesthetic school subjects, since it is precisely through this that aesthetic processes are made possible - thus also in physical education, hard work processes and tension are also detectable here [13].

### 3. Example

In the following, an example is given of how individual curriculum contents can be implemented across subjects, taking into account the principles described. In each case, references are given to the subjects of arts, music and physical education.

**Recycling performance:** In the physical education field of “performing, creating and dancing”, the imitation of locomotion, rhythmic movement and movement to music are addressed, as well as the testing of diverse movement possibilities with hand tools/objects [10], [14]. The goal is to create a performance with self-designed, “alternative” hand tools.

**Arts:** Together with the children, create “alternative” hand tools, e.g., cardboard rolls filled with some rice, PET bottles with a tail of crepe paper on the cap, etc. Let the children describe what they designed and why they chose to do it that way

**Music:** Consider together whether to choose a familiar piece of music as the “background rhythm” for the performance, or whether the children would like to design their own sounds. Conduct a hit parade where each child gets to play their favorite song. Can the children settle on a common favorite song to practice with?

**Physical education:** As a first step, let the children experiment freely with the hand tools they have created. Provide suggestions: How can you make different sounds with the equipment? What are the possible movements (shaking, throwing and catching, circling around the body, etc.)? In the next step, allow the children to develop and practice their own sequences (verses) for the choreography in small groups. Come up with a common refrain in which all small groups move together. Put all the sequences and the chorus together. Reflect afterwards on what worked well and what didn’t, as well as what the children heard and felt. Perhaps there will be an opportunity to perform the performance as part of a school festival?



Figure 1. “Alternative” hand tools, made of paper roll and softdrink can filled with rice and decorated with colorful paper and crepe paper

### 4. Conclusion

Arts, music and physical education are not summarized under the learning area of aesthetic education without reason. Because of its criteria and methods, this area of learning makes a special contribution to the educational mission of the primary school, namely the education of the whole person. Interdisciplinary work can be implemented with little effort within the framework of consecutive teaching projects or within a project week.

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