



## **Artistic Experience – the Ways of Experiencing and Thinking. A Short Analysis of First and Strongest Art Experiences by Students – Teachers**

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# ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE – THE WAYS OF EXPERIENCING AND THINKING. A SHORT ANALYSIS OF FIRST AND STRONGEST ART EXPERIENCES BY STUDENTS – TEACHERS

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## Anotacija

Straipsnyje nagrinėjami pirmieji ir stipriausi meno srities išpūdžiai, kuriuos patyrė Helsinkio ir Joensuu universiteto studentai – būsimieji mokytojai ir darželių auklėtojai (N = 70). Rezultatai rodo, kad ryškiausia meninė patirtis įgyjama vaikų darželyje aktyvios veiklos metu: dainuojant, piešiant ar užsiimant kita menine veikla. Ši patirtis stipriai susijusi su tolesnėmis nuostatomis į meno dalykus. Rezultatai leidžia teigti, kad meno sampratos suvokimas turi būti praplėstas įtraukiant pop kultūros patirtį.

**Raktažodžiai:** meninė patirtis, patirtis mene, estetinė patirtis, studentai-darželių auklėtojai.

## Abstract

The article focuses on first and strongest art experiences of Finnish students-classroom teachers and students-kindergarten teachers from the University of Helsinki and the University of Joensuu (N = 70). Results show that most of the experiences come from the child's kindergarten time and are based on activities, singing, painting or making art. Both receiving and creative elements are present in the data. These experiences are strong by linked two the person's later attitudes towards art subjects. Results show that the definition of art should be broadened to include experiences from popular culture.

**Keywords:** artistic experience, art experiences, aesthetic experiences, kindergarten teacher students.

## 1. Introduction

This article describes different art experiences of university students in two cities in Finland: future kindergarten teachers (Helsinki) and future classroom teachers (Joensuu). The number of participants finally was 70 persons (35 in Joensuu and 35 in Helsinki). Their answers (stories, writings) were e-mailed. At the lectures the students were asked to describe the strongest and first art experiences of their life.

In the first part of our article we determine our starting point and some basic lines of aesthetic approach in order to understand experiences in the empiric data collected. Art experience is a very important element in arts teaching at school as well as in preschool institutions. The way future teachers experience can be essential in the way they teach art. Experimental learning of art includes art experiences as a natural part of teaching. It also has close connection with constructivist learning theories in general education. The schemes of art subjects can be built on spontaneous artistic and other experiences during preschool and the first years of elementary school. The elements of experimental learning can be much more easily seen and applied in teaching and learning art subjects than mathematics or natural sciences.

### 1.1. The target group and the aim of the research

The questions were targeted at students – kindergarten teachers at the University of Helsinki and at classroom teachers – students at the University of Joensuu (N = 70). All participants were from the same starting group at each university. The age of the group was between 19 and 25. It places them in so the called “floor ball” generation, which is the latest generation division originally made by J. P. Roos (Roos 1985a; 1985b; 1986; 1988; 1990). The other Finnish generations defined by Roos are (starting from the oldest): (1) the generation of the nation building, (2) the generation of war and depression; (3) the generation of fundamental changes; (4) the “rock and roll” generation. After the “rock and roll” generation the “floor ball” generation is mentioned in some articles and gives the idea of important values and focuses of that generation.

The questionnaire was presented to the students at the end of lectures by Professor Ruismäki and Docent Juvonen at each university in the autumn of 2004. The target group totaled 83 persons, but the final number of answers was 70, 65 girls and 5 boys. It shows the gender gap especially among students – kindergarten teachers but somehow also among students-classroom teachers in Finland. (At Joensuu University the gender distribution is 75–83% of girls and 17–25% of boys depending on the year the studies) (Vihermäki 2004).

The aim of the research was to collect information on the nature and the meaning of artistic experiences among the target group members. Information on their thoughts about art and artistic experience shows even more widely thoughts of this generation, at least of university students. The way the students write and describe their experiences is directly connected with their conception of art. Experiences show both in quality and quantity their conception of the origin of artistic experiences: do they mostly concentrate on fine art objects or do they also include popular culture elements? If the research shows that students also clearly consider popular culture as a real source of art experiences we have to reconsider the definition of art. If reality differs from the former definitions art must be redefined to include the real world in the definition. Lately the same kind of viewpoint has been often present in the discussion on music research. (Stålhammar 2003; Aguirre 2004; Girod & al 2003; Matravers 2004; Shusterman 2003; Goble 2003; Lim 2004; Juvonen 2000; 2002a; 2002b; 2003).

Information of this research can be used in planning a rapidly changing teacher education. We will also collect information on the modern society art origin, here meaning sources of artistic experiences. In this sense artistic experience is defined as students' understanding. Of course, artistic experience was discussed in the lectures connected with this research, but it was not strictly defined so that the respondents could decide themselves what experiences they would like to write about. The questions asked were based on many sources (Reimer 1989; Dickie 1990; Puurula & Väyrynen 1992; Langer 1976; Koroscik 1992), and also on practical themes of discussions. The students wrote their answers independently and intuitively reflecting their viewpoints. The answers presented their own version of reality and in that sense their personal and subjective interpretation. This article is more a brief vision of their thoughts than a systematic description of the way of thinking. A wider study is needed to present and generalize all the results of this research project. In our article we will present only a few of many themes of the answers. Although every answer could be treated as a piece of art itself, an essay, almost poetry, there are still common themes in them. All answers and stories are different, subjective and individual conceptions about the questions asked. The respondents used different kind of language; they are multi-stories and multi-interpretative.

### ***1.2. Aesthetics in different art forms***

New trends are present in the latest discussions on aesthetics. Active research in music education has given new knowledge about philosophical and

practical tasks of teaching. A basic approach in this dialogue is difference between a pragmatic music education philosophy and an aesthetic music education philosophy (Elliott 1995; 1996; Regelsky 1996; Swanwick 1988; 1996; Anttila & Juvonen 2002, Juvonen & Anttila 2003). The same dialogue also took place on aesthetic approach to art teaching more widely. Shusterman (1995; 1997; 2003) wrote about the mentioned approaches to art education. He widened the definition of art including elements of everyday life and popular culture. Shusterman's point of view is important in modern societies ruled more and more by different types of media. These ideas form the basis of this article too.

In this article we will not concentrate on a philosophic dialogue on good and bad sides of aesthetic or pragmatic approach or the definitions of hermeneutics, interpretation, unity or identity. Our ideas are based on pragmatic aesthetics of Dewey, the approach which was earlier neglected and almost forgotten by analytical aesthetics. One focusing point in our article is popular culture and experiences coming from it. In analytical aesthetics popular culture represents a degenerate, aesthetically worthless and vulgar phenomenon, which should absolutely be kept outside real art, artistic world and aesthetic experiences too. One of our thesis is that popular culture can be and often is popular without indicating the previously mentioned bad qualities. Our leading idea is that works of art in all meanings are mere instruments, means or tools of getting enjoyment and experiences; they are not and should not be targets of adoration. The multiplicity of contexts, popular forms of philosophical expression and everyday life experiences are to be concerned strongly in the pragmatic approach. (Peirce 2001).

Aesthetics is a part of philosophy which tries to show what beauty really means: it concentrates on problems trying to find out what basically art is, or what difference there is between aesthetic values and values of observed or empirically verifiable knowledge. It is often stated that an aesthetic experience is close to or even includes some kind of "flow-experience", which is a dynamic state, holistically or comprehensively stimulating experience that does not cause anxiety about what is happening or what might not happen (Csikszentmihalyi 1990a, 4; 1990b; 1997). In any case emotions and feelings are usually present in all kinds of experiences and that is why these activities are often remembered very long. Intensity of emotions and feelings is dependent on the personality structure. Enjoyment (pleasure) is one of the basic feelings connected with aesthetic experience, though both concepts (experience and enjoyment) cannot easily be specified. The intensity of experience is consequently hard to measure.

Experience can be enjoyable if it has a positive charge. Enjoyment usually lasts only a little while, while experience can change the whole life of a person by bringing new sensations and feelings to his/her emotional spectrum (Ruismäki 1995, 2). The joy of success in doing something challenging brings enjoyable experience. It is one important point linking arts experiences and aesthetic experiences with education. In art subjects at school it is possible to create an atmosphere where a pupil is able to produce an artistic work which both challenges and gives joy of success. The genuine (*bona fide*) values are truth, beauty and goodness (Turunen 1990; 1992). Ideals, objects of appreciation and humanly valuable experiences can also be named as elements of human growth. In this article we focus only on the last one mentioned here (humanly valuable experiences).

Aesthetics has been widely researched. In arts aesthetics is thought to be subjective like ethics. Aesthetics often focuses on individual elements or effects of artistic experience or ways of expression and beauty in it. In art such elements are symmetry, heart of the object, rhythm, movement, dimensions, perspective and relationships. There are two basic lines, which specify art which focuses on different use of it. They are art including picturing elements and one with values of appreciation. In this article we do not focus on this difference.

Music as well as other forms of art surround us almost all the time, it is difficult to live without hearing music, seeing pictures, movies, architecture or other forms of art. They are used as means of marketing and involve emotions and feelings, which individuals connect with particular pieces of music, works of art. This is also one of important reasons for the development of art education: new generations must be able to evaluate all forms of art so that marketing forces could not control their behaviour.

Aesthetic elements can also be easily found in many other activities – sports, science, love, food, animals, etc. but in this article we will not focus on them. The link between ethics and aesthetics is a very common ground for argumentations in literature comprehending ideas of epistemology, the ethics of good and the aesthetics of beauty. In this article we do not try to give an answer to these questions even though it seems evident that aesthetics cannot appear without ethical and moral viewpoint.

### ***1.3. Art and objects of art***

You can approach art in many ways; it has been researched, interpreted and expressed relying on many traditions and many theories. Although enjoyment is based on the knowledge of art it may

not be genuine or authentic as it is instantly and experimentally (phenomenally) experienced, knowledge and awareness can increase our ability to enjoy art. Also a known fact is that, for example, knowing a piece of music by heart may cause sensitivity noticing all mistakes in performance and therefore we might not be able to enjoy music as much as before (Ruismäki 1995). Many artists and craftsmen are quite impatient and even suspicious about theorizing of art. From their viewpoint what is important is making art not talking and theorizing. Some researchers even come to the conclusion that art can only be described through different signs, which change depending on one piece of art or another (Kennick 1958; Weitz 1956). Sepänmaa (1978; 1991, 142) also points that art is an open concept, which is impossible to be exhaustively described.

Art and aesthetics are both multidimensional and complicated conceptions. In literature this phenomenon is also called aesthetic attitude or aesthetic approach (Krohn 1965, 72). Research has defined two kinds of knowledge: intuitive knowledge and logic knowledge. The first comes from our imagination and concerns private, personal matters. The other comes through our intelligence and concerns universal matters. The link of these two can be a source of infinitive contemplation if so wished (Tarasti 2004, 120–122, also Kinnunen 1969; 2000, also mentioned in writings of Sesemann), but it is not the aim of this project.

Our most important aim is to describe multiplicity of the phenomenon, which is considered as art experience by the surveyed. Aesthetic experience is always connected with a cultural background, which is continuously renewable and transforming. This is the reason for researching aesthetic experiences of future teachers: in an ever-changing world it is most necessary to renew education in order to meet the demands of changes. Experiencing art is one of important values, which must be transferred from one generation to another. It can only be done in the ways, which are familiar to new generations and to which they have already been acculturated. In this project we let the target group define what they consider to be art. It makes the data interesting; it also shows many sides of the concept “art” among future teachers.

The method used in this research is quite similar to the one of the most important semioticians of our time, Prof. Tarasti, used in his latest book (“Values and meanings”, 2004), except that our data is collected from other persons (students), while Tarasti uses his own experiences as examples for his reasoning (Tarasti 2004, 122–123). After analyzing, categorizing and classifying the collected data we compare elements of experiences with the

theoretical background. Methods used in this research were mainly qualitative, the result of the essence of the subject. Still, some quantitative elements are included while considering their necessity and usefulness.

## 2. Results

First of all the answers were classified by the fields of art as the basis of categorization. The sources of artistic experiences by the respondents could be divided into the following nine sectors:

1. Music	40 descriptions
2. Theatre	21 descriptions
3. Visual arts (Fine arts)	17 descriptions
4. Nature	
(every day experiences)	7 descriptions
5. Literature	3 descriptions
6. Architecture	3 descriptions
7. Ballet	2 descriptions
8. Museum	2 descriptions
9. Handicrafts	1 description

Finally we got over 90 responses as many of the respondents described more than one experience. So saving the space, both first artistic experiences and the most powerful experiences are put into the same classification.

Two basic sources of experiences could be singled out: (1) making art, creative process (being an artist, performer, musician, actress, etc.) and (2) experiences from art made by others, receiving process (being part of the audience, a spectator, listener, watcher, etc.). Many of the respondents considered all or majority of their experiences in performing music or in the theatre or on the other hand creating and constructing something with their hands as an artistic experience. This shows the great meaning and significance of achieving to do something demanding, and enjoyment from attaining the aim. In this aspect there must be some creativity in the process. Reception of art demands an element of sensitivity to be possible. Also there must be some kind of knowledge about the art subject to be able to enjoy the experience.

Majority of experiences in this data concentrates on music. It may be because music is around us all the time: music is used as an instrument of marketing, especially when adolescents are in the target. Use of popular music, which is close to the experimental life of young people, can be a very effective marketing policy. Music is also easy to reach. Theatre was second among experiences. It seems that especially many first artistic experiences have come from theatre performances. Many of the respondents say that they still often visit theatre

because of pleasant experiences they had in their childhood.

Visual art came third among experiences. It seems to be quite a strong source of artistic experiences in a modern society. Nature, literature and architecture were mentioned several times. It is quite interesting that experiences from nature were mentioned so many times. Museums, handicrafts and ballet were mentioned only once or twice by 70 students. It can be said that these forms of art are not important for the respondents.

### 2.1. Music as a source of artistic experience

According to the nature of answers music as a source of experiences can be of two types – productive or receptive. 28 respondents wrote about a receptive and 12 about a creative nature of experiences. *Receptive experiences* could be divided into:

1. Classical music concerts
2. Musicals or theatre pieces with music
3. Opera and operetta
4. Pop / Rock / Jazz concerts
5. Situations of teaching and learning
6. Experiences via media (radio, TV, movies, records)

#### 2.1.1. Receptive experiences in music Classical music concerts

Classical music concerts were the source of artistic experiences for quite many respondents. They mentioned some composers: Vivaldi, Bach, Sibelius and some concerts by the name of performers: Joensuu City Orchestra; Leipzig Boy's Choir; Lahti Philharmonic Orchestra. The first memories are usually from years 4–6. Many respondents described how music made many children totally enchanted and they were carried away by their imagination. Experiences described were something unprecedented and totally new for them. In one story a child did not even make a move while listening. It can be named as an aesthetic experience. The respondent wrote that she wanted to play the violin later because of this experience what proves that even one single experience may, in some cases, change one's life.

In many cases the respondents analyzed some performance and music they heard. Their own earlier experiences in some cases gave a solid good basic knowledge about the skills of an artist. Some respondents also recognized music and evaluated it depending on their musical taste. In cases like this musical taste was developed naturally in the person who became positive towards classical music atmosphere. It is the best way to get an understanding in music (Bourdieu 1984; 1985; 1986).

There are quite many young people in Finland who have never been to a classical music concert. Not every little town has an orchestra of its own though in most towns there is a music school arranging concerts. In the countryside it is not usual to go to concerts, that is why it is important to give a possibility to get experience in concerts during studies. Some respondents noted an importance of positive attitudes towards art subjects for them as future classroom teachers. Many respondents obviously had a good musical ear because they could hear false notes in orchestra or some members' performance. There were many respondents who had developed an understanding of classical music. Parents of some of them were musicians; in one case both parents were cantors. With this kind of background it is easy to understand deep meaningfulness of their experiences. Reminiscences from childhood together with love to music form many emotional links, memories and may be even dreams fulfilled in experiences. Also religious feelings can sometimes be very close to aesthetic experiences.

*Musicals or theatre plays with music.* Theatre plays can have extremely strong influence on little children. Lights, the scenery, costumes, make up, the changing faces of actors and, of course, the effect of music and songs make experiences powerful and fill with emotions, affects and feelings. The words of songs in the play are often remembered later. Almost all theatres have one or two performing children each year. It seems to be a good possibility of giving art experiences to children.

One respondent was totally astonished at the thought that something like a musical show she had seen could exist. Spell, charm and glamour of the performance was something she could never forget. She felt it was an extraordinary experience never had before and very rarely after. Her attitude to and opinion about the Swedish language changed totally as the actors spoke Swedish. The respondent later thought: *What have I been missing?* This shows a new attitude towards a musical as a form of art and also a new attitude towards the Swedish language. Changes in attitudes seem to be quite big and permanent as she wrote at the age of 21. A performance with wonderful actors and emotionally effective music can form new ideas in imagination and give strength a long time afterwards. It seems that some of the respondents could rely on art as a source of relaxation and even as a source of new ideas for their work.

*Pop, rock and jazz concerts.* Pop, rock and jazz music concerts can give very effective experiences to a person brought up by them. The effects of these genres are quite similar to the effects of music. Power and intensity of experiences always depend

on the personality and the meanings that music has formed in the person's life. Aesthetic value of pop music is totally different from classical music but its strength and meaning can be similar.

A feeling of skilfulness was one important point in the answers. The listener can easily sense musical talent and an inborn instinct and his feelings transfer emotions from the performer to the listener's mind. Individual style of singing connected with professional attitude makes pop music experiences very strong for many respondents. They also have much previous knowledge about the performing artists and it gives extra thrill to what is happening. In concerts the respondents' minds seem to be filled with emotions, which they are not always able to analyze separately. In many cases they tried to describe their aesthetic experiences explaining emotions, which could not be described. The respondents probably often do not recognize the aesthetic nature of their experience.

In big concerts the light system and amplifiers make a big part of experience, music comes out loud and the lights make everything seem unreal. Dancers and musicians also play an important role but the most important thing is still music: the listeners know every singer's songs so that they can sing together. When a big group is singing the feeling of congruity arouses very strong emotions and feelings. A live performance given by a star made one respondent feel as if his whole life has gone the right way. The respondent described her experience saying that music made everything seem right, her feelings were positive, and no worries bothered her.

In many cases the respondents evaluated their experiences as almost religious. They felt that this experience made them a little better. The idea of forgetting about himself, the time and the place is very close to aesthetic experience. Loosing the sense of time was often mentioned and it was also common to aesthetic experience. Knowing the artist and his music also gave meaning to experience. Seeing your idol alive is always a strong experience. A big audience also has its effect when the listeners are packed in front of the stage closely together. The feeling of unity strengthens experience even more and the emotions of tension and relief are evident. The feeling of power and an illusion of being able to do anything seemed quite strong and important in many writings. Many respondents were visually thinking persons as they saw lights, colours and pictures (or paintings) when music was playing.

*Situations of teaching and learning.* Many answers were linked with learning situations, music lessons, playing the instruments, etc., also music playing at home – father, mother or sister playing or singing had a strong effect on many respondents. The wonder of learning or creating music can shock

you while hearing your friend playing, sister composing or teacher teaching. The teacher's response had a very valuable meaning in these answers. Only one respondent wrote about negative experiences in the music learning process.

Hearing and seeing an important person who does something nice – plays music or sings often has a very sensitive and touching effect although his artistic level may not be too high. Music played by a friend is sometimes a good motivation to learn to play an instrument as these skills may reveal a person's own ambitions. Quite often girls were made to learn to play the piano but had no interest in it. Some examples also showed the importance of challenge: when the activity is challenging satisfaction from learning the activity is enormous. A wise teacher can put the right challenge into the right place so that the pupil will be in front of the right piece of music at the right level of studies.

*Experiences through media (radio, TV, movies, records).* Many new pieces of pop music are first heard on the radio. The respondents often got an idea of buying a new record. The Internet has become an endless source of music today.

Obviously movies can also be a source of artistic experience. A film and effective sounds may cause a feeling of being in the centre of the story. For the watcher the mixture of reality and imagination can cause effective experiences. Many movies' soundtracks as CD-records have a life of their own. Experience in a movie in one case was so impressive that the respondent wrote that it changed her totally. It must have been a religious awakening. Surely, aesthetic elements of a movie have a strengthening effect for experiences.

### 2.1.2. Creative experiences in music

Creativity causes artistic experiences quite often. Many respondents considered their strongest art experiences to be their own performance. It also shows that future kindergarten and elementary classroom teachers have quite active hobbies. The respondents' answers could be divided into the following types:

1. Creating music
2. Performing
3. Learning experiences

*Making own music.* Many respondents wrote about their feelings when they created music. Performing own songs was also important for many respondents. These feelings are connected with success in doing something when you really can make music and create something yourself. Little children often compose songs (Sundin 1977; Fredriksson 1994), but very seldom they remember

them afterwards. This experience was important in many cases because the respondents could still describe their feelings in childhood. Some respondents could even today sing a self-made song, what was quite extraordinary. Song writing was something new and the process clearly caused strong enjoyment and excitement.

One respondent described the beauty of an artistic process with creative elements and visual elements. The respondent had a really artistic attitude when she described the interaction of the artist and the audience. The process described was obviously aesthetic by nature.

*Performing.* Early childhood performing was a source of joy for many respondents. They still remembered their feelings they had as children. Although every one noted they did not sing well, they were not laughed at or made fun of. It gave a positive effect to those experiences in their attitude to music and other forms of art. Their attitude towards singing very much depended on first experiences: if a child becomes embarrassed his positive attitude may change into negative.

For many public production was a source of enjoyment. Challenging performance brings very strong joy to success. Emotional tension deeply touched the respondents, and in some cases they wrote about the feeling of losing sense of time and place. It is directly connected with flow-experience as well as with aesthetic experience. These examples show meaningfulness of multi-artistic projects: participation in such projects unites the whole group strongly and gives new value to being together.

*Learning experiences.* Many respondents described peculiarities of their experiences in learning to play the instrument. University studies may cause artistic experiences when art is discussed: it may open new channels in art understanding and change attitudes towards art. Hard work is necessary to learn to play an instrument. Many tests and degree courses in piano (and other instruments) are one of negative aspects of studying in Finland. Students are forced to take course examinations every year and many stop playing. It is evident in the research data too. Piano lessons in teacher training may be difficult for a grown up person at the beginner's level. Still the teacher's response to the student seems to have been positive and successful. It was a positive learning experience and included artistic elements.

It happens occasionally that teaching art becomes art itself. It is the highest level of the teaching process – art of teaching art. In some cases there were elements of aesthetic nature and lessons opened new ways of thinking and even affected the respondents' attitudes.

## 2.2. Theatre as a source of experiences

21 respondent wrote about theatre. Their answers can be divided into receptive and creative experiences in the same way as in music. Some musical experiences could be discussed in this chapter too because of the difference between a music play and a musical.

### 2.2.1. Receptive experiences in theatre

Many respondents wrote about their first theatre experiences and what made them so valuable. It usually happened when the respondents were young. Little children live and empathize through the play they see, and that happened for many respondents. They described feeling enthusiastic in the theatre. The most important part was movements and sounds the actors made. It often happens that first experiences arouse hopes which cannot be realised. It happened to some respondents and it shows that individual experiences may have permanent effect on attitudes towards this form of art.

The respondents often connected their emotions and feelings with difficult to describe unconscious processes. They analyzed many elements, which caused these experiences and often marked an *ability to empathize* as the most important element in art experience. The respondents often described their feelings as “positively astounding”. Fascination from theatre may start quite early: at the age of 4–5, when a child can understand a play. These experiences may help forming positive attitudes to theatre. Scenes of fight or other frightening elements in the play add a little extra to experiences. In one case Peter Pan’s scene had an unforgettable effect on the watcher. This effect was used starting with the antique theatre (*deus ex machina*). Many respondents noted how theatre experiences made them start playing scenes with their friends. These experiences seem to have helped to develop deep interest in and love for theatre later. Another example is how theatre gave new perspective for thinking and arouse rich spectrum of emotions. First experiences from theatre are very important because they often shape attitudes and opinions to the theatre world. One respondent even wanted to become an actress. Real actors are different from those in movies. The magic of theatre is that everything happens in real time, the interaction between the actors and the audience is also important.

### 2.2.2. Creative experiences in theatre

Some respondents had art experiences in acting themselves. It is a big challenge and a great relief when the performance is staged. Artistic problems and their solutions are a part of the process. Music, set up and costumes are a big job requiring a lot of patience, work and great creativity. One respondent

described the beauty of the difficult project of staging a play by an amateur group. The great challenge made success even more valuable. The play was a success and the young theatre makers were awarded – the audience liked the play. The respondent wrote almost philosophically about his strong feelings and emotional state from noticing that the audience understood the ideas of the play and songs. Interactivity in the form of understanding may be very enjoyable and rewarding. Some respondents skilfully analyzed the process of acting, excitement for the changes in the body and the tension of relief. Interactivity in emotions and feelings are seen as important. The respondents often put emotions and feelings in the centre of theatre experiences. These answers go very deep into drama staging as a real artistic experience and try to explain it. Sometimes it is easier to perform for a strange audience than for well known people.

## 2.3. Art experiences in visual art (fine arts)

Visual art has been inspiring people for thousands of years but in modern days it has somehow been pushed aside by easier forms of art: music, theatre or movies. In this research 17 respondents wrote about visual art. Many more mentioned that they had no experiences in visual art (painting, sculpture, etc.). Not very often children are taken to an art exhibition, luckily, there are exceptions. Visual art experiences could be divided into the following types:

### Receptive experiences:

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Art exhibitions and painting | 5 |
| 2. Sculpture                    | 3 |

### Creative experiences:

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Painting, (sculpture etc.)  | 5 |
| 2. Important people making art | 3 |
| 3. Teacher drawing             | 2 |

### 2.3.1. Receptive experiences in visual art

*Art exhibitions and painting.* Some respondents were taken to art exhibitions in their childhood. It seems that just watching paintings was not as an important source of art experiences as something you could actually see being done. Visual art does not appeal to little children because there is no movement, sound or other stimulating effects. The understanding of paintings may differ a lot: a response to some painting is quite different depending on the age, gender, etc. In many cases the respondents described exhibitions as widening their artistic conceptions of art. In some cases it is difficult to talk about experiences because the respondents said nothing about emotions or feelings. It is important to get artistic experiences at an early age but the best way is not an art exhibition without some preparation. It may happen that a child gets enormous excitement and experiences just by



looking at an objects of art but it may happen that a visit arouses only wonder and embarrassment.

Some examples show the opposite side of an artistic experience: some end in confusion and others – in widening conceptions and attitudes. The reasons are the respondents' background: some families were not interested in art and others considered art interesting. The child from the latter family had something to base his experience upon.

Many respondents considered themselves as non-artistic persons. Some of them were at art exhibitions but they felt art did not touch them. Still, as they had experiences from art exhibitions, the basis for understanding art was laid. Maybe they would need experiences from other forms of art: drama, movies or even music. Their attitude to art may be negative and these respondents tried to explain their feelings in another way. Negative attitudes towards art alone may cause indifference to art experiences. It may also be because of the personality – some of us are more sensitive than others.

*Sculpture.* A child touches a sculpture, it sounds nice, but usually it is not possible. To avoid the destruction it is usually not allowed to touch this piece of art. Still, feelings you get through your own senses can be revolutionary. Senses connect us with the outside world, and knowledge we get is immense and reliable. It comes directly into our mind without any intermediaries. In some cases little children got a possibility to feel the statue surface and have an artistic experience from it. The effect of the difference of surfaces may be strong to a child. This example shows how bodily senses help to get information about art – this experience would be different not touching it. Sometimes studying opens new ideas and it can even change a student's attitude. Sometimes art may surprise and open your eyes to look at the world in a new way what the research showed. We often see art but seldom look at it with a thought.

### 2.3.2. Creative experiences in visual art

Many respondents recall pre-school years. They include activities in the kindergarten or at home. Challenge, and enjoyment of success and winning as well as difficulties were clearly seen in responses. Some respondents had a possibility to go to a visual art school. They often described successful art education and learning, one respondent found the sketching process and progress in outlining the painting most interesting: he learned a lot while doing it.

Preparations for different celebrations in kindergartens are careful and last long – for weeks children make gifts. For many children it is their first time to do something beautiful. It becomes most important

to do something using new materials. The process causes tension and excitement. Many respondents described experience of a child giving mom a self made gift. Is this experience of aesthetic nature? Surely, some elements belong to that category but enjoyment comes from doing something to somebody and giving. Many respondents marked successful art education in a kindergarten. Wise nurses often made children notice something important about the existence of art. Freedom of expression connected with the child's excitement brought good results from a doing-by-hand task. It gave a great deal of courage for the future. Doing something totally new is one way of getting experiences. Sometimes a particular event may influence the development of self-concept as one respondent noted. The role of the teacher was stressed by many respondents: the teacher as a real artist encouraging children in oil painting.

*Important people making art.* The importance of home, school and friends is clear in all developmental areas. An example of artistically oriented parents can be valuable for the child's development. It was seen in many responses. The wonder of finding out skills of a close person in doing something you didn't know earlier may be surprising. It gives more value to the painting you know it's your mom's or dad's. Of course, the picture of a horse, drawn by father, is the best in the world. The child learns best about art and creating it while watching. It was clearly seen in the responses about the child watching the whole artistic process from the beginning to the end. It is probably the best way of learning art. Watching an artistic work can be the most interesting experience. The gift for drawing may develop by doing it. An ability to appreciate also comes automatically in the same way. Children, who see the whole process, can value paintings and drawings.

The teacher has strong influence on his/her pupils, he/she is an example in everything. When the teacher gives good advice and example, pupils become interested in the same kind of things. School is a sensitive situation which we all remember. It can become an artistic experience if the teacher uses her/his own skills to create something in front of new pupils. That moment has a spelling emotional load.

### 2.4. Nature as a source of art experiences

Beauty is a part of nature as well as aesthetics. Beauty is everywhere in nature: plants, animals and there is nothing unnecessary. Nature is also an object of many of the best works of art, in literature, visual art, etc. The Stoic said that nature is the greatest artist of all, the only one who is completely perfect. When Plato said that a painting is imitation of nature

he meant that a picture is like a mirror (*ars imitator naturam*). Everything in nature is also seen as having its symbolic meaning set by God. To a modern student it may be strange to notice the wonders of nature. In one example a respondent had a quarrel with her father, and went to woods for a walk. Maybe her mind was sensitive, and in the peace of the woods she started noticing little things, which make nature wonderful. She wrote in her long story that even the snake and flies did not seem disgusting as usually because of the easy and peaceful feeling in the forest. The whole story looked like a fairytale with nature smiling at the princess. Elements of a good story are all there: the woods, the weather, something strange and a surprise. The surroundings were described beautifully and the atmosphere of the situation could be imagined. The feeling made the author wordless and filled her with joy and happiness. Some people can really sense a surrounding beauty of nature. Eino Krohn (1946) describes such people as aesthetes who can feel beauty in the singing of a bird and see beauty of nature in its many ways. The changing colours of nature in autumn can easily be understood as nature's playful game. Comprehensiveness of this experience and a change in mood of the author were evident. The way the stories were told was almost poetry. Undoubtedly, there are elements of aesthetic experience in this experience of urban nature described in the paper.

### ***2.5. Literature as a source of art experiences***

Earlier literature was one of the best sources of art experiences, and it still could be. What could be easier than playing a record while reading a book takes lot more time and trouble. Still, enjoyment from literature may offer unforgettable experiences and artistic enlightning. The services of libraries have decreased in the countries like Finland nowadays (Mutanen & Laitinen 2004) and a typical reader in a library is an elderly lady. Reading as a hobby has become unusual even among classroom teachers (Juvonen 2004).

Some responses showed that literature does not always easily open and often needs lot of work and thinking. In some cases the reader was too young to understand the idea of the book. There may also be a question of non-maturity.

A close person doing something surprising – the theme is the same as in painting or drawing. In one response her brother had just published a book. It was shown how a work of art gave new knowledge about the artist. Even his sister found new features in her brother through his art. It means that a piece of art could open new sides even if you didn't know the artist.

Some respondents had very strong experiences from reading books. Reading made them think about their philosophy and life, and even helped to find answers to some questions. They often described the language and the story beautifully and many students seemed to be diligent readers. In some cases this experience had a strong influence on the person's thinking and attitude to life and it shows the power of literature.

### ***2.6. Architecture as a source of art experience***

Although we are surrounded by architecture it seldom seems to be a source of aesthetic experience. Maybe urban man is so used to city surroundings that he needs a radical change in the environment before he notices architecture. It is a fact that the Finnish culture is quite modern and we do not have many beautiful old buildings, castles, etc. The beauty of old palaces may easily cause strong experiences. At the same time some elements of fairytales about princesses and knights, strange cultures and old times, also flamboyance and size of buildings may cause wonder. Contrast to buildings in one's own country may be one source of experience. Historic knowledge is evidently present in many responses.

The author's background explains quite well his/her interest in architecture. Some respondents described wonderfully elements and sources of experience from architecture: colours, shapes of buildings, size and the fairytale likeness are important things. Some respondents were able to explain the idea of building magnificent churches and other buildings from historical viewpoint: technological solutions of the time, wisdom of the architect caused wonder and admiration.

### ***2.7. Ballet as a source of artistic experience***

Ballet was mentioned only twice by the respondents. Even students in Helsinki do not go to ballet though it is the only city in Finland with a professional ballet group. Often art experiences were connected with nice memories and safe atmosphere. In one case the respondent wrote about his father in hospital when he went to ballet. He wrote that he remembered the ballet because of that, and probably he was right as negative aspects may be a part of art experiences.

Another respondent had an extreme experience in performing and watching the ballet. It included many elements of a previous description. Elements of hard work and careful preparation made this experience valuable and the feeling of success was wonderful. A possibility to perform with older girls whom the author admired made her feel good. Understanding of hard work gave extra enjoyment and emotional tension. This experience got into her

mind so deeply that the author as an adult went back to the atmosphere and emotional feelings of that day.

### **2.8. Museums as a source of artistic experience**

It is quite rare to go to a museum nowadays. Still two answers concentrated on experiences from a museum. In one case the respondent was in the Swedish national museum. Glory of the royal family was mythical and fantastic. To us, Finns, queens and kings are something strange; we have never had a king of our own. That is one reason the crown jewellery and dresses seem so fascinating. In her early childhood a little girl may often imagine about the life of the royal princesses and fairytales feed her imagination even more. In one story looking at the dresses the well-behaving child got excited and even ran in the museum to see more. Works of art in museums may sometimes take you by surprise. An everyday object may turn into a piece of art just when it is put on an exhibition. Something happened in another case where strong art experience rouse from beautiful tableware put on an exhibition. Dishes were displayed in the museum and it made a strong effect on the watcher. Of course, the surroundings, lighting and all other environment were important for this experience.

### **2.9. Handicrafts as a source of artistic experience**

It is very difficult to tell the difference between a well done handicraft and art. Both require skills, emotion, hard work, struggling, difficulties, devotion, etc. Art may be impossible to be achieved without skills and not everything what is well done may be art. The meaning of this article is not to define art, and that is why we concentrate on experiences. There was only one answer focusing on handicraft among 70 responses.

Once again it is easy to see that the presence of a close person makes experience more valuable. In one response a grandma taught a young girl to make a whisk out of a piece of tree. There were elements of learning, struggling and finally succeeding in doing something difficult. Also a link with history made this experience important: the respondent noted new ways of using natural materials in a way never seen before. Hand making is most important for children as it is one way of acquiring motoric skills. The respondent mentioned the atmosphere, which seems to be one of the most important elements in all experiences: nice weather, warmth, safety and relaxed feeling were important elements of this experience.

## **Conclusions**

Majority artistic experiences in this research came from music. It was almost a twice often

mentioned experience than any other (theatre – 21). Visual art and nature came next, and literature was mentioned only a few times. This classification shows the changing world of today: modern media has influence on sources of art experiences. Music may be the easiest art to reach, we hear it everywhere, it is not expensive and within anyone's reach. It is also interesting to notice that theatre comes after music on the list. It may be because of the target group: theatre as a hobby seems to be more common for the target group than for other people of the same age.

Two sources of the experiment were: receiving art and experiencing it, or performing or creative activity. The first way might be a traditional way of experiencing art: perceiving different works of art visually, acoustically, sensing smells or touching. Art experiences from one's own performance or a creative process are more than art. The respondents were not professional artists and their experiences were honest descriptions of feelings and emotions in different kinds of performances. Our main goal was to research future elementary school and kindergarten teachers, not professional artists. That is why we considered these (creative) experiences not as pure artistic manifestations but as artistic experiences, as receiving experiences. A work of a professional artist includes many more elements, skills, research and studies comparing with this study though some of our respondents one day may make their living from their own works of art.

Of all 56 respondents the mentioned experiences were received from nature and 27 – of creative nature. Learning was mentioned in 14 responses. Important people (mother, father, sister, brother) were included in many experiences (13 times). The data shows that a traditional reception of art is slowly but surely losing its position to experiencing art. One third of experiences was of creative nature. It shows the role of pragmatic approach towards art: learning art by doing seems to be working in the target group. Also learning elements are a part of pragmatic approach: the pupil starts doing and making artistic objects and constructing his own way of thinking about art. Experiences may be immense and strong and influence can be felt after years what was evident in responses. Many responses showed that art experiences strongly affected attitudes and self-conceptions.

First art experiences are theatre experiences (13) and own creativity (painting, drawing, making things, singing) (11). Opera, ballet or classical music concert are mentioned six times as first art experiences. Exhibitions of fine art, in churches etc. were mentioned seven times. Painting, drawing or playing musical instruments by an important person were sources of experiences for six respondents.

Learning and performing was mentioned three times and sculpture as a source of first art experiences was mentioned once. It seems that theatre was the most important for many respondents. The second was own creative activity and making something new.

The age mentioned in describing first art experiences varied from 2 years to 14 years, an average being 6,239 years. Most of the memories were from the age of 4–7. It shows the importance of pre-school activities: first art experiences influence all activities before school starts.

Multiple visual and auditory stimulants in the theatre seem to be very effective for little children. Music together with lights, beautiful costumes and actors' roles in the theatre make an effect on the mind of a little child. That is why an operetta, opera, musical were often mentioned in the answers. Also the importance of painting and singing in kindergarten is great: first experiments with colours, making masks etc. can often be remembered even in adulthood.

### **Aspects connecting art experiences**

In many cases strong experiences lead to trying and playing a musical instrument. Just the same effect was of other forms of art. A child can surprise his parents by unmovable listening in the concert. Flow-experiences cause the loss of the sense of time and place in the same way as art. In music as well as in other forms of art one important element is professionalism and skills of the performer, and it was often mentioned in responses.

In receiving experiences there is often some kind of knowledge, which forms the basis of art experiences. It gives depth and meaning to experiences; when you can link the ongoing with your own experiences it helps to understand. In many cases individual experiences opened the whole art to a person. Childhood experiences may lead to a deep understanding of art especially in cases of artists in the family. In that case socializing with art happens naturally, it gives the person an inbuilt mechanism of understanding it what is difficult to achieve later. Spiritual connection with art is quite common and it gives an extra load of passion to experiences. It was mentioned in some music experiences (Jesus Christ Superstar) and movie experiences (The Passion of Jesus) and also in paintings. Sometimes art even removes language barriers. It was mentioned in several answers (hype-musical sung in Swedish). Good experiences stimulate imagination and give new ideas about life and art. A relaxing and at the same time energizing power of art was often mentioned. Usually early

experiences influence attitudes easier than later experiences. Some examples show that an effective experience can take place at the age of 4–7.

In this research the strongest art experiences were sourced from jazz or pop concerts in adult age. Skills of the performer, the feeling of unity within the audience and knowing most of the songs performed make experiences strong. The glamour and atmosphere of a concert are important connections of the lights, music and the audience into one unit. Emotional feelings often described as flow-experiences could be described: loss of the sense of time and ability to do anything, disappearance of worries when the world seems to be smiling. Music with colours gives visual illusions to some persons and emotional experiences become long lasting. Meaningfulness of the moment is linked with emotions and real life situations at the time of the experience.

Performing in some way gave art experience to many respondents. Many experiences show success in doing something difficult. Relief from success in a performance is closely related to that in sports: after hard work of practising the skill you are exited and tensed. The feeling of success in that situation may be like aesthetic experience. Enjoyment is connected with experience, much practice and hard work is necessary to succeed in both of them.

A creative element is common for different forms of art. Often first art experiences are doing something artistic for the first time. In some cases different hobby activities in kindergarten brought art experiences for children. It happens especially when kindergarten teachers show appreciation of the product. The data show that children need some kind of artistic freedom in drawing, painting or other activities. It means that first contacts with artistic activities wherever they occur should be in a loving, affectionate and sensitive atmosphere. The child should not feel embarrassed or ashamed or ridiculed. If first experiences in art are positive they are a good starting point for later art education.

Most of flow-experiences seem to be originated from own performance, not from receiving art except pop concerts. These experiences come from singing in musical productions, playing with orchestras or acting on the stage. They all were quite professional and needed a lot of practice and really hard work. Interpretation or rendering of artistic expression was often mentioned in responses: a skilful and personal version of a piece of music or a personal viewpoint of the role in a play may cause admiration and aesthetic experience. On the other hand we must remember that hearing, seeing and overall sensing is interpreted in our minds.

## In the end

The responses of the students show an open and multi-meaningful nature of art. It is something the artist feels and it has to do with the emotions of the receiver of art experiences, sometimes it is an artistic expression (performance), in which a person takes part and which gives this experience, sometimes it is a passive receiving process, renewed thinking and requiring new conception of life. Creative and productive elements of life give birth to artistic expressions, which concentrate on art objects: songs, pieces of music, paintings, drawings, plays, musicals, sculptures or any other form of art. It shows that art unites the artist and the receiving person emotionally and affectively together. Art experiences raise the subjectivity of a person often giving the feeling of almightiness and meaninglessness of time (as it is seen in close connection with flow-experiences). Art teaches you something about yourself: who you are, what you want and what you are connected to. It is said that art shows you something you have always known to exist but have never noticed before. Perception, feeling, sensuousness and all other senses, which cause enjoyment and pleasure, are more closely connected with art than the conceptions of beauty and experiencing beauty, to which much attention was paid in aesthetics of the past decades and even centuries. Historically beauty and expression were to praise God. A continuously widening and expanding concept of art, a continuous search for something new, a constant processes, creation and an endless transformation process connected with culture makes it impossible to define art faithfully, finely or unambiguously. It is not difficult to widen the whole concept of art to the direction of liberality and popular culture. It can be justified by a new definition of art, artistic, and aesthetic experiences. Why isn't Tina Turner's concert experience an aesthetic experience? Why couldn't a Nightwish fan have aesthetic experience strong emotional and affective experience from the music and performance of the group? These experiences were described in this research in the same way as experiences, which came from "real" artistic sources – opera, classical music or art exhibitions. There cannot be any particular reasons to distinguish the two experiences from each other just by judging their sources, in a traditional way. The data show an increasing power of mass media and popular culture as one of the sources of art experience. It requires a new approach to and definition of art. We must be ready to reevaluate and redefine the substance and manifestation of art in music as well as in other forms of art. Only then it is possible to develop and

use education in order to meet the increasing demand of modern society.

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## Summary

### **ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE – THE WAYS OF EXPERIENCING AND THINKING. A SHORT ANALYSIS OF FIRST AND STRONGEST ART EXPERIENCES BY STUDENTS – TEACHERS**

**Antti Juvonen, Heikki Ruismäki**

This paper focuses on art experiences by students from two Finnish universities: the University of Joensuu and the University of Helsinki. The data was collected during the autumn of 2004 through e-mail. The target group consisted of students - kindergarten teachers and students-classroom teachers (N = 70). They described their first and strongest art experiences in their lives. The results show that first art experiences often sourced from kindergarten concerts or theatre visits or the children's own art making, painting, drawing, etc. Strongest art experiences originated from creative and receiving achievements. Both have strong influence on the attitudes towards and conceptions of art in general and especially on specific forms of both fine arts and popular culture, which are common sources of art experiences. The results clearly show a need to broaden the definition of art and to include different forms of popular culture. The paper gives new information about art experiences of university students and shows new ways of developing education in the right direction.

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